

Prejudiced Wall Street Editorial

By Mekonnen Kassa

The Wall Street Journal, one of the most respected business journals in the world, failed to live up to its reputation when it published a substandard and biased editorial on July 18, 2007 regarding the democratization process in Ethiopia.

The Street's "Ethiopia's Democracy is on paper only" editorial is so prejudicial that it looks like it was done as a favor for what Elizabeth Blunt of the BBC called "Addis Ababa's intelligentsia" roaming the streets of Washington DC. Otherwise how can the Editors explain their deliberate omission of AU and Carter Centers assessment of the 2005 election; the policemen that were murdered and wounded by the protesters; the sensational and irresponsible reporting by the jailed journalists that put the country on the verge of ethnic violence; and the most recent and important development of admission of guilt and begging for clemency by the convicted and sentenced Opposition leaders.

If there is any country whose commitment to support democracy can be considered "on paper only", it is the United States of America. Not that there is anything wrong with it, but protecting America's national interest is the Modus Operandi when it comes to making friends and crafting foreign policy. I am sure the Journal knows better how much business America does with China and most of the repressive Middle East countries despite their undemocratic system and despicable human right records. I am also sure the Editors remember America's refusal to engage and denial of budgetary aid for the democratically elected Palestinian and Algerian leaders because they are Islamic Extremists.

Sure "...Ethiopia wants to become a real ally of the U.S." but that is not why Ethiopia should "take seriously democracy and human rights." Ethiopia will democratize because that is the only system that will guarantee its continuous united survival and prosperity. It would serve the whole world better if Westerners were to shake-off their superiority complex and cease playing paternalistic roles. It is highly hypocritical of Americans who subjugated their black population in slavery and denied human rights for more than half of their citizen for centuries to tell countries like Ethiopia to democratize overnight. Ethiopia will implement a democratic system at its own applicable pace as the population gets acclimated with the tenets of democracy including respect for institutions and tolerance for differing opinion.

I think the damage done by this reckless editorial is significant as Wall Street Journal is widely read including by many leaders and decision makers around the world. To some extent, I fault the Ethiopian Ambassador in the US for this kind of erroneous and biased editorial. Mr. Assefa has not been engaged with the Ethiopian Diaspora nor with the American mass media. The embassy website still shows press releases by his predecessor Ambassador Kassahun Ayele. It is his duty and responsibility to proactively remain engaged to spare his employers from this kind of editorials. To be fair, though a belated response, he has done a good job recently responding to the Washington Post.

The Street's prejudiced editorial and the other recent erroneous reporting by some American newspapers are detrimental to Ethiopia's endeavor to create a just system. A fair and balanced editorial and reporting will go a long way to draw the governments' attention to correct any mistakes.