

NO “WHITE ELEPHANT” IN ETHIOPIA: ALEMAYEHU’S FOLLY

By Tecola W. Hagos

- **In General**

A week ago I read a stupefying long article by Professor Alemayehu G. Mariam titled “Dam! White Elephant in Ethiopia?” posted in several Ethiopian Websites. The article is about ten pages long, mostly of quoted material from an article titled “[A Proxy Campaign against Ethiopia?](#): a response by GERD National Panel of Experts (NPoE)” posted in several Ethiopian Websites. In his article, Alemayehu expressed his anger as follows:

“The regime’s nameless, faceless and conscienceless ‘experts,’ hiding behind the anonymity of ‘professional Ethiopians well versed with and advising on GERD Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam related issues,’ unloaded a torrent vituperative diatribe against International Rivers in the vintage style of their late hate master of name-calling, cheap shots and put-downs, Meles Zenawi. In a hatchet job polemic entitled, ‘[A Proxy Campaign against Ethiopia?](#)’ the “GERD national panel of experts” (“GERD experts”) jumped on International Rivers like a pack of hungry junkyard dogs on a squirrel”

First of all, the National Panel of Experts may not have listed their individual names but they are not without identity; they have a corporate presence as members of the Ethiopian International Professional Support for Abay (EIPSA) [<http://www.eipsa1.com/cms/news>] that was established on 22 June 2013 “in response to the timely need for an organized and independent professional Ethiopian voice surrounding the issue of the Nile River.” Writing as members of a group is not something unusual, and in no way should excuse any writer to unleash an avalanche of vulgarity, as can be observed in Alemayehu’s article quoted above. And ultimately Alemayehu did the unthinkable: he committed treason against Ethiopia by siding with Egypt. He had the temerity to call the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam a “White Elephant” and a “wasteful vanity” project. No matter who laid the first stone for the construction of the Dam, it is now our Dam, our national effort of the people of Ethiopia, our precious act of patriotic zeal and love of country. Above all else, it is both the moral and physical antidote to the Kilil ethnic fracturing of Ethiopia. In situations of this type, one must look beyond one’s own frustration and personal ambition.

The first unusual feature of Alemayehu’s response article is that it jumps out at any reader due to the extreme vulgar language Alemayehu used in his comments. Reading the whole article, both quoted material and the insertions, I am left scratching my head for the article does not make much sense despite the fact that I tried to find even some tangential merit that would help clear the fog that has descended on the legal and political regime surrounding international rivers in general and the Abay River (the Blue Nile) and the building of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in particular. To say Alemayehu quoted extensively in his article is a gross understatement; it is more like he reprinted the original article titled “A Proxy Campaign against Ethiopia?” reinforced with his own straw insertions here and there.

I do have my own criticism on the style as well as the content of the article by the Ethiopian experts who wrote the article titled “A Proxy Campaign against Ethiopia?” the same article that Alemayehu let loose his unlimited wrath against. If I were the Ethiopian Government, I would have used a more direct approach by going loggerhead using governmental lower level functionaries to go against the International River

Network (IRN) rather than relying on a private highly respected members of a professional association as defenders of the interest of Ethiopia. Moreover, I do not find the article by the Ethiopian panel of experts as objectionable as Alemayehu made it out to be. There are several stylistic approaches I would have avoided if I had written that response essay by the panel of Ethiopian experts, for example, I would have written the response less personal and more focused on legal, technical, and operational issues.

A thorough reading of the Final Report of the International Panel of Experts (IPoE) on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is the first duty of any one before making any kind of statement about the response of the Ethiopian panel of experts who wrote the response article on the GERD by the International River Network. However, the best source to read for a well-reasoned evaluation of the technical aspect of the Dam is the entire project literature of the GERD. In short of that one must read first, at the very least, all the available official documentations of the owner of the Dam, the Ethiopian Government representing Ethiopia and its Citizens. The IRN also did not seem to have read any of the original studies, the project evaluation documents, et cetera of the GERD. Its statements and articles by its members seem to have been based solely on scant statements of third party reports, tangential at best, contained in a forty eight page non-binding report, but not dispositive of any of the issues Alemayehu attempted to bring to our attention.

I do not want to be misunderstood here, for my criticism of the article by Alemayehu is not due to any personal problem I have with Alemayehu. In fact, I have never met Alemayehu even though I have read almost all of his essays posted in several Websites. I may not agree with his style of writing nor with the content of most of his articles, but I truly admire his dedication to his writing, even though of late he seems to be relying on filling up his articles with a series of quotations than laboring in his own.

- **The Final Report of the International Panel of Experts (IPoE)**

The Final Report of the International Panel of Experts (IPoE) on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, of May 31, 2013 is not a binding document on anybody, but it does have some moral imperative that the Ethiopian Government has paid great deal of attention. It is highly presumptuous of anyone that all the highly experienced and well established professionals involved in the Dam project could be making such horrendous errors as claimed by the IRN whose members did not have even a fraction of the professional experience of the Dam designers, the Dam construction engineers et cetera. Moreover, neither Alemayehu nor any of the members of the IRN have had any first-hand access to vital data and studies surrounding the origination of the Dam project. I remember in 1991 having an occasion to talk to an Ethiopian engineer (since then deceased) who was responsible for the record keeping of precipitation for the Nile Basin, and how he jealously guarded that record even against the demands of the New Transitional Government established by the EPRDF. One must respect professional men and women for what they do in their profession. If there is a question as to their efficiency, professional responsibilities et cetera it is best left to people who are in the same profession to discuss issues of a professional nature in the particular field.

The International Panel of Experts at no time and /or at any place in their report suggested to close down the Dam or stop the construction of the Dam. To the contrary they made a few recommendation in a couple of pages (pages 42-43). In summary, their recommendation mainly is in a form of enhancing existing planed for structures and on the issue of environmental impact studies on the riparian countries as the implementation of the project continues. It is commonsensical where the panel consisted of two professional Ethiopians, two Egyptians, two Sudanese, and four international experts that an adverse report would never have been issued. At any rate, one must read the objective and the mandate of the International

Panel of Experts before making any type of anti-Ethiopia and anti-GERD statements.

The objective and mandate of the International Panel of Experts is clearly summarized in Sec 1.2 on page six of the Report: “The general objective of the IPoE is to build confidence among the three riparian countries around the GERD. The specific objective of the IPoE is to provide sound review/assessment of the benefits to the three countries and impact of the GERD to the two downstream Countries, Egypt and Sudan.” The Report elaborated further the nature of the work of the International Panel of Experts in reviewing/assessing issues directly involving the design and construction of the Dam, and nowhere in that mandate there is any element of obligatory conditions on any of the countries to follow through the review/assessment of the IPoE. If that was the case such mandate would have contradicted the objective of the creation of the IPoE in the first place on the initiative taken by Ethiopia voluntarily on its own.

“The IPoE mandate is to review the design document of the GERD and provide transparent information sharing and to to solicit understanding of the benefits and costs accrued to the three countries and impact if any of the GERD on the two downstream countries so as to build trust and confidence among the parties. The role of the IPoE is mainly facilitative focused on promoting dialogue and understanding around GERD related issues of interest to the three countries and thus contribute to regional confidence and trust building.” (Emphasis mine)

There you have it! Simply put, the IPoE is a good-will mission “mainly facilitative” in its goals using its expertise. None of its review/assessment has any formal obligatory authority on Ethiopia. It is incredible that the IRN and Alemayehu could read into the Report of IPoE an authoritative body to dispense judgment and sanctions against Ethiopia.

- **The International River Network (INR)**

The International River Network is made up of Members, Board of Directors and two advisory Councils for the United States and for Asia. The IRN members of the Board seem to be crusaders for the poor and the disfranchised in an already struggling communities in developing countries around the world. The net effect of their effort seems to go against the development aspirations of communities and arrest their growth at a stage of primitive existence. The protection that the IRN advocates for indigenous communities around the world seems to freeze all such communities in a state of suspended animation, as is in the case with caged wild animals in zoos around the world. Western societies can afford to pontificate from the luxury of their well-appointed homes, their great industrialized communities, sending their children to great schools, advancing their social amenities even further et cetera about the protection of the ecology and keeping rivers pristine for their occasional visits as tourists.

The hypocrisy is obvious, I need not remained anyone the fact that the IRN was never involved in the welfare of indigenous people prior to the construction of dams at particular rivers. It seems while such indigenous people are frozen in time living out their miserable existence in utter deprivation pain and suffering, they were invisible to the IRN and its members, and they all come into focus when some dams are being built as a form of economic progress. If we just put aside all useless polemic and consider the claims of facts that IRN has stated in its own publication, we can see that the IRN is not a group to be trusted with anything. They distort facts, make premature conclusions from scanty information gathered from third party “reports.” Specifically, I would like to draw your attention to a statement in an article by IRN titled “The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Fact Sheet,” of January 24, 2014 posted in their own Website, an

article posted a couple of months earlier than their ultimate condemnation of the GERD project on insignificant points contained in a third party informal non-binding report. In that January article, the IRN opened its article, claimed as their “fact sheet” on the GERD, with a shameful lie aimed to discount and undermine the sovereign right of Ethiopia in its own Abay River. The IRN stated, “Ethiopia is building one of the largest dams in the world, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), on the River Nile near the Sudan border.” [Emphasis mine] The fact is that Ethiopia is not building any dam on “River Nile.” Ethiopia is building a dam on its own river, on the great Abay River, over thirty miles inland from the border with Sudan. . [Abay is known for English speakers as the Blue Nile so named by James Bruce.]

This form of writing by the IRN using a kind of misleading lexical substituting the “Nile River” for the “Abay River” is not some kind of clerical error but a clear evidence of a deliberate conspiratorial collusion with Egypt in support of Egypt’s nefarious claim of the whole of the water of the River Nile without due respect to riparian rights who have major rivers such as the Atbara and the Abay (Blue Nile) rivers that join up with the White Nile at different places all in the Sudan. This early article clearly established the bad-faith of IRN toward Ethiopia. Nowhere in any of their publications on the GERD they attempted to be objective and fair in their evaluation of the ecology and the water issue of the region. The IRN did not mention the fact that Egypt is sitting on the largest underground water resource. Scientists in 2012 had mapped out the huge underground water for the Continent of Africa and that “Egypt's immense underground water potential makes the nation one of the top three water rich countries in the continent!” The amount of Egypt’s ground water storage is estimated to be 55,200 km³, while Ethiopia has only 12,000 cubic km. It is truly tragic that how depraved and corrupted people can be in the name of helping the poor.

Alemayehu should have been a lot more careful before writing an article that applauds IRN and demonize the Ethiopian Government and devalue Ethiopia’s sovereignty on its own rivers. He never considered the great underground water reservoir Egypt has. Furthermore, the IRN protested by claiming fairness on its side, “We are not ‘taking sides’ – we are impartial when it comes to critiquing destructive river projects and poor river management around the globe, including in Egypt and Sudan.” This form of claim of objectivity by IRN does not fool anyone, for the campaign by IRN against Ethiopia is part of the coordinated campaign by Egypt against Ethiopia.

This form of criticism supporting a hostile group or foreign nation that undermines Ethiopia’s national interest cannot be taken lightly. The article Alemayehu wrote defending IRN and ridiculing the efforts of millions of Ethiopians who have sacrificed their time, effort, and savings in financing the project, and also insulting all those great Ethiopian Engineers, technicians, simple workers who moved mountains and sweated their blood building such a great national project must not be trivialized by Alemayehu calling their great effort “a white elephant.” I cannot find enough words to express my contempt for any man or woman taking up the causes of our mortal enemies against our Ethiopia and insulting our dreams and our blood sweat effort to beat poverty and be on our own. First of all, Alemayehu is not an engineer of any kind to make such categorical evaluation and derogatory statements and undermine a national project wherein seasoned engineers of dam design and construction, geologists/geophysicist, hydrologists, environmental experts spent tens of thousands of hours studying, designing, and setting up the construction of such a major public work such as the GERD.

I doubt whether Alemayehu has even read that significant Report of IPoE closely for him to make such allegations and insulting remarks. The Report of the IPoE is far from being categorical condemnation or

criticism of the GERD, but it suggests some understandable changes to be made on specific aspect of the construction of the Dam and/or suggested further studies to be made on some impacts on the ecology of the basin. These suggestions in their scope or magnitude are not in any way bases for the type of condemnations and negative evaluation of the Dam to a point where the IRN calls for stopping the project. The International Panel of Experts (IPoE) were gracious in acknowledging the positive role that the Ethiopian Government played in setting the Panel on Ethiopia's own initiative. To wit, they stated in their Forward of the Report, "The Government of Ethiopia invited in good faith the two downstream countries...The IPoE appreciates the initiative taken by the Government of Ethiopia to invite two downstream riparian countries..." As anyone can see that the formation of the Panel on the invitation of the Ethiopian Government that also bore a good portion of the financial burden of such sponsorship was an act of cooperation and concern by the Ethiopian Government for all riparian states and communities. Nowhere in their Report had the Panel of Experts suggested to stop the Dam construction.

It is also telling that Egyptian leaders always had threatened Ethiopia with violence anytime the issue of sharing the waters of the Nile is raised. I shrugged off such threat as nothing more than a school boy's tantrum not having his way; nevertheless, Ethiopia must arm herself to the teeth in case of some such stupidity on the part of Egypt (or any other fanatical Arab nation such as Saudi Arabia). Some Egyptian politicians seem to have a very bizarre idea of Ethiopia forgetting the historical fact that every time Egypt tried insurrection into Ethiopia in our past history, their military campaign resulted in disaster for them. It is tragic that I hear on the news and read reports all kind of belligerent statements by some prominent Egyptian politicians and some journalists/intellectuals advocating the use of force against Ethiopia to destroy the GERD.

I have to make an exception here, for the current Egyptian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Mohammed Idris is the most amicable Egyptian personality who seem to have genuine respect for the people of Ethiopia and the state of Ethiopia. I have watched and listened to his very many statements in interviews and formal addresses on ETV and YouTube postings, how he is always differential and genuinely respectful of the host nation of Ethiopia. He insist on "cooperation" between Egypt and Ethiopia discounting historical or colonial period rights. I could also mention here the former Director General of IAEA Mohamed El Baradie, one among many enlightened Egyptians who are against those who threaten Ethiopia and favor cooperation.

IV. Why I support the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

The greatest mistake the EPRDF committed against Ethiopia is not the introduction of the concept of "federalism" per se, but the fact that it forced the Ethiopian people to accept a federal structure based on ethnicity (language). Right now the country is fractured across ethnic lines. The current Government of Hailemariam Desalegn seems to be engaged in a subtle fight to reverse such disastrous course of national disintegration. It is obvious that a more unitary government structure must be pursued to preserve a sovereign Ethiopia. I believe national projects like the Renaissance Dam acts as antidote to the poisonous divisive Kilil system of national destruction. Such national project like the GERD tends to bring individuals from the many Kililized regions of Ethiopia, wherein given time such individuals would have drifted off to go their separate ways, back to the fold of *Ethiopiawinet* endowing them with a sense of oneness and a national identity. Another project I am enthusiastic about is the planned railway system projected to crisscross Ethiopia North-South, and East-West. It may be indeed the case that the forces that could hold

our fractured Ethiopia from falling apart might be such grandiose national projects such as the GERD and the planned national railway project, and the national grid work for the distribution of power.

If we consider the GERD project on its own, we can see its very many positive contributions to the people of Ethiopia already. According to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in his recent state address of the Ethiopian Parliament of 25 April 2014, already the project has generated through bond sales and donations over 27 billion Birr i.e., over thirty percent of the project cost, and over 20 billion Birr is also generated for the railway project. This in itself is a monumental achievement and cannot be scorned or degraded as “White Elephant” by anybody, even more so by Alemayehu. There was also an impressive detailed presentation in the form graphic simulation of the project prepared by one of the Ethiopian Corporations involved in the construction of the Dam.

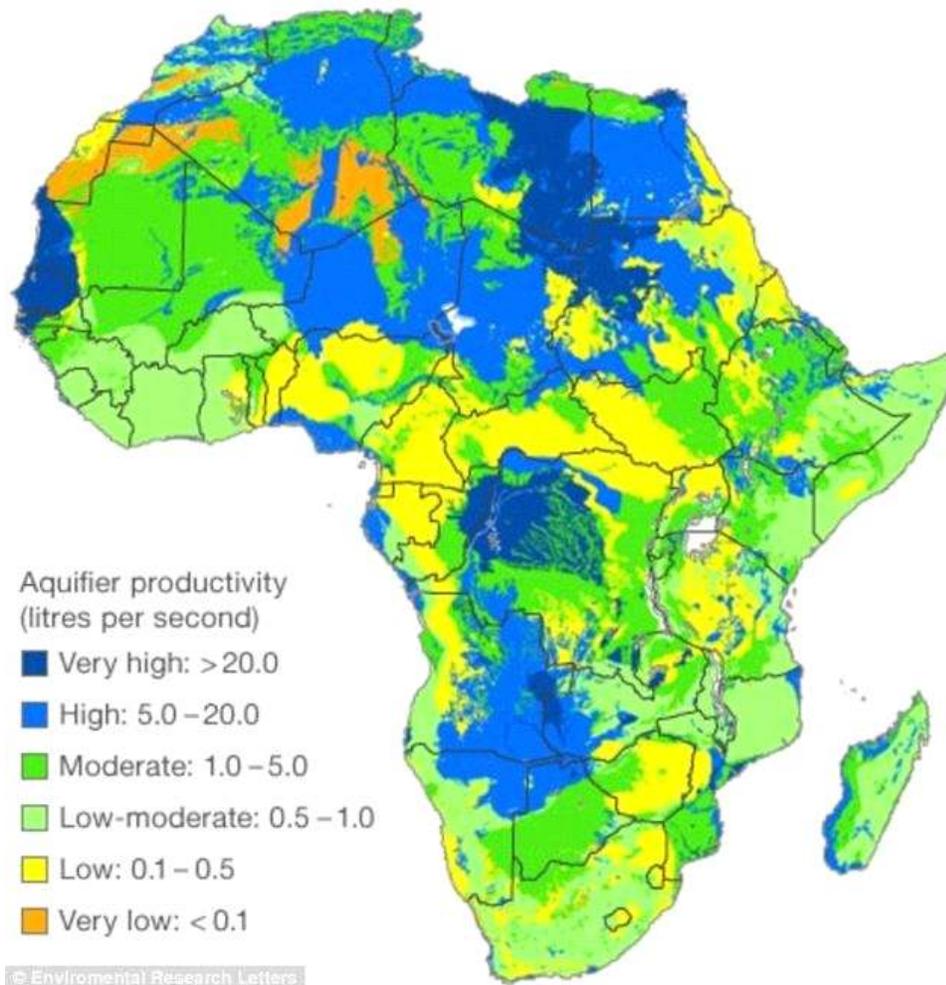
About a month ago, in “Africa Review” Zadig Abraha, deputy general director of GERD's National Coordination Office is quoted having stated, "Once GERD is finished and other hydropower projects including the 1,870 MW Gibe III are online, Ethiopia may earn US\$2bn a year from the exports” of electric power to neighbouring countries. This means in less than twenty years the GERD would have been fully paid up and generating net profit for the next couple of centuries. Hailemariam Desalegn in his address of Parliament stated also that several nations in the area are already entering into agreements or negotiating to enter into long term agreement to buy electric power from the GERD. The reality of the construction of the GERD and the economic benefit to Ethiopia and the region is not some figment of the imagination or as Alemayehu discounts it to be a White Elephant.

Should the identity of the person who initiated the construction of GERD be of great concern to us? Is that important that Alemayehu takes issue with the fact that the Dam project was started by Meles Zenawi? The idea of building Dams or diverting the Blue Nile is as ancient as Pharaohnic period. We have come a long way from such ancient ideas. We live now in the age of advanced technology—with advanced knowhow in controlling and harnessing the fury of nature to our benefit. Is it possible that Alemayehu is totally misreading the reality on the ground concerning our need for the use of our Abay River (Blue Nile) water?

“Researchers from the British Geological Survey and University College London have for the first time mapped the aquifers, or groundwater, across the continent and the amount they hold. ‘The largest groundwater volumes are found in the large sedimentary aquifers in the North African countries Libya, Algeria, Egypt and Sudan,’ the scientists said in their paper.” The experts have estimated in their pioneering and highly scientific research that the reserves “of groundwater across the continent are 100 times the amount found on its surface, or 0.66 million cubic kilometers.” There is no way Egypt would suffer from lack of fresh water. It is sitting right on top of one of the great reservoir of fresh water. All it needs to do to supplement any shortage of water if at all any from the GERD, is simple dig wells.

Alemayehu even wrote that the Dam is “Meles Zenawi Memorial Dam” insinuating that the Dam has no bearing on the lives of Ethiopians. As I stated earlier there are numerous articles and detailed feasibility studies/articles about the GERD enormous economic advantage to Ethiopia and to a number riparian countries too. There is even claims that even countries in the Middle East across the Red Sea such as Yemen are negotiating with the Ethiopian Government. I have read in a couple of articles by Egyptians about their concern being not of water shortage but the economic growth of Ethiopia that might undermine their businesses with the countries in the region and elsewhere.

AFRICA: UNDERGROUND WATER RESERVOIR DISTRIBUTION



Source: Environmental Research Letter

V. Alemayehu G. Mariam: “Ye Afe Wolemta Beqibè Eytashim”

It is unfortunate that a professional who is well trained both in philosophy and in the law, a person like Alemayehu resorts to vulgarity and name calling rather than presenting his ideas and criticism against the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and/or against the leadership of Ethiopia and the many professionals and political leaders involved in the planning and implementing of the project. It seems that his justification for such vitriolic response is the fact that an unnamed Ethiopian Panel of Experts denigrated the IRN. The IRN is a fringe organization with a confused sense of responsibility to the disfranchised and the downtrodden. I have no problem with the aspirations of the IRN, the problem is in the details of their activities. Being fanatical in their own righteousness, has lead the IRN members into direct conflict with the aspirations of the very people the IRN is aspiring to help. Good intention by itself is not something that one can consider as beneficial.

Alemayehu should have followed his own admonishment about proper discourse, in his article “Dam! White Elephant in Ethiopia?” of April 22, 2014, wherein he stated: “Temper tantrums and name calling are a poor substitute for a rigorous fact-based refutation of another expert’s opinions. Experts do not prove their

cases by moaning and groaning, bellyaching, griping, grouching and whining. Experts do not engage in teeth gnashing, mudslinging and finger wagging. Could it be that the ‘GERD experts’ are really ‘no experts’ but mindless apparatchiks and cadres who will say and do anything to earn their daily bread from their paymasters?” The rest of his comments are riddled with such vulgarity and ad hominem statements. Is there any gain from such form of statement denigrating and insulting individuals? It is truly a disappointment that individuals such as Alemayehu would stoop down to a gutter level and demonize individuals rather than addressing the ideas of such individuals. What are we going to learn about the issues by reading an avalanche of insults as stated in the above quotation from Alemayehu’s article?

There is no question that Alemayehu does not make much of a distinction between the personal life of a leader and his activities that might be beneficial to the people or the state he heads.

“Is GERD an Ethiopian white elephant? Dam right, it is! In my commentary, ‘Ethiopia: Rumors of Water War on the Nile?’ I argued that GERD/MZMD is the white elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about openly and earnestly. Meles, like all of his predecessor African dictators suffered from delusions of grandeur. Like his brethren African dictators, Meles wanted to have a big project that could immortalize him as the little “Big Man” of Africa. By undertaking white elephant projects, Meles sought to attain greatness and amass great fortunes in life and immortality in death. He only managed to amass mass contempt in life and in death. To be sure, he had a ‘dry run’ on immortality when he commissioned the construction of Gilgel Gibe III Dam on the Omo River in southern Ethiopia which has been dubbed the “largest hydroelectric plant in Africa with a power output of about 1870 Megawatt.” ...

“Like all of the African white elephants, the so-called GERD is a vanity make-believe project principally intended to glorify Meles posthumously, and magnify his international prestige while he was alive diverting attention from the endemic corruption that had consumed his regime as documented in the a 448-page World Bank report, “Diagnosing Corruption in Ethiopia”. Meles sought to cover his bloody hands and clothe his naked dictatorship with megaprojects and veneers of progress and development. Meles was the little “Big Man” of Africa with a Napoleonic [sic] complex. He sought to overcome his complex by making outrageously bogus claims of 11-15 percent annual economic growth and launching big dam and infrastructure projects”

Is this type of language in the above quoted material necessary to discuss issues of national import? Even if one is addressing an article that may not be as well written as desirable as was the case with the response prepared by unnamed Ethiopian experts, there is no need to be vulgar and belligerent oneself in responding to such writings. I have stated earlier that the Ethiopian experts should have written their response to the IRN’s decidedly biased and unprofessional writing promoting the interest of Egypt against that of Ethiopia, with a degree of decorum and propriety. In their writing I saw zeal in protecting our national interest, and if they are not eloquent in their criticism of the IRN it is quite understandable.

I do not have any special personal admiration for Meles Zenawi, except maybe as a family man. During the time I spent with the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, about a year and a half, I did observe Meles Zenawi at work. No one questions Meles’s dedication or stamina for work—he worked continuously through day and night. However, I am absolutely miffed that Alemayehu would stoop so low to write about the valuation of school credentials in regard to the academic credential of Meles Zenawi. Personally, almost everything Meles worked on irritated me then, for I always saw something divisive or cruel behind

most of the things he did, especially how he created dissonance within political Parties and effectively defanged the veteran commanders of the struggle into toothless individuals. But he had improved his policy toward the end of his life and carried out some landmark programs such as getting Sudan on board for the GERD, and gaining goodwill from European and Asian countries for Ethiopia. However, he is dead now. And talking about him has no value to our future development, except as a learning tool in order for us to learn from his excess and mistakes. Nevertheless, I will not dwell that much about his credentials that he attended an open university, for such form of evaluation is neither here or there. Who is going to say Meles was any less intelligent because he did not attend the University of Maryland like Alemayehu did. If I were Alemayehu I would not care to mention the University of Maryland especially when I am in the company of individuals who studied at Harvard, Yale, Oxford, or Georgetown.

One's association matters greatly especially to young Ethiopians who need to have role models to grow up with. I am always pained to watch Ethiopians who are public personalities such as Prof Berhanu Nega associating himself with Ethiopia's arch enemy Issayas Afeworki, and recently Alemayehu is sitting along Kassa Kebede on a platform organized by the Ethiopian National Transitional Council (ENTC). Kassa Kebede is the blood soaked close associate of the murderous Mengistu Hailemariam. Kassa Kebede who is currently residing in Washington DC is slowly ingratiating himself to the Ethiopian Diaspora community as if he is innocent of the 'Red Terror' and other crimes of seventeen years of absolute terror of Mengistu and his Regime, in which Kassa Kebede was the very soul of that Regime. The Ethiopian Diaspora's fragile psyche is very suitable to mood swings of extreme range. It is incredible that such criminals could rear their murderous heads and talk about "regime change" in Ethiopia. Those criminal officials of Mengistu—mass murderers, torturers, and detainers of innocent Ethiopians—should have been in prison except that some of the Leaders of the Ethiopian Government saw in them kindred spirit and freed them from punishment contrary to the provisions of EPRDF's 1995 Constitution Article 28. The irony and hypocrisy of some of the Ethiopian Diaspora is that I who never hurt anyone but was a victim of the terror of the Derg/Mengistu is denigrated by some of such individuals for having tried to channel a revolution in 1991-1992 into a humane and democratic matrix as adviser of the TPLF/EPRDF for a year or so, even after I left the EPRDF/organization over twenty years ago.

VI. Off Course Side Remark: Abebe Haregewoin

Since I have my readers' attention now, I need to clear the air. A few weeks back my distinguished younger contemporary Dr. Abebe Haregewoin wrote an article "Tecola Hagos' historical fabulism: truth is funnier than fiction," Ethiomedia, March 18, 2014, highly critical of my art work and my essay from some ten years ago dealing with the Ethiopian aristocracy from the time of King Sahle Selassie through Emperor Menilik II. The article by Abebe, is rather well written but seriously flawed, the tone and its assessment describing motives and attitudes is quite a difficult task and presumptuous. The reason that I did not write anything in response for so long was in the interest of maintaining harmony among the badly fractured Ethiopian community in the Diaspora. A number of my close friends who had read the article, and some of whom knew Abebe in person, reminded me that I might have met him in my last year at HSIU. Regrettably, I could not recall who Abebe was, not that my recall mattered but it would have eased my mind.

Some of my friends urged me not to respond to that article. On the other hand, there were also other friends and relations who were very upset with the tone of Abebe's criticism of my article of over a decade old and his criticism of my person and my art works. Those friends were relations from Menz area and a couple had

families that hailed from Ankober, the very birth place of Emperor Menilik II. Even Menilik himself is not that remote a person to me, for one branch of my ancestors were from Efrata, the home of Asfawossen, one of the founders of the Shoan dynasty. At any rate, a close friend who had read my article a few years back admonished me for being harsh in my criticism of Emperor Menilik II by reminding me that Paulos Gnogno in his book on Menilik had quoted a letter the Emperor wrote to my Grandfather Memher Akale Wold, the great Ethiopian scholar, who was very old and sick at that time, wherein the Emperor was writing that he was planning to visit my Grandfather by traveling from Addis Ababa to Boru, Wollo where my Grandfather resided. Certainly my heart has softened about the Emperor for some time now, for the Emperor's humility and kind words did touch my hardened heart of "revolutionary" zeal,

Keeping all that in mind, I decided to respond to Abebe Haregewoin very briefly here to let him know that I am sorry that I caused him much pain all these years since our college days. As to the content of my criticism of both Emperor Tewodros and Emperor Menilik II, I regret using insulting words; I could have been gracious in my criticism even if all of the facts I stated are true to the dote. I need not be mean or uncouth even when pointing out facts that can be easily substantiated. I should have also balanced my criticism with some of the meritorious activities those two Emperors are known for. As to my art works, I would love to fantasize that they are immortal and would stand the test of time. And time would tell how future generations would look at such works, for example, "The Ethiopian" is over half a century old.

One thing for sure, all of my art work were products of my great love for Ethiopia that I wanted to preserve from my boyhood's jaded enthusiasm for vignette/scenes from pages of captivating slices of Ethiopian life and history. As to Abebe's allegation of narcissism on my part, I am not so sure whether such tendency is unusual in any artist, for the great art historians, philosophers of aesthetics, and great painters down to our time all tell me such is the case with artists. For example, Afework Tekle, Gebrekristos Desta, Dali, Durer, Cezanne, Giotto, Michelangelo, Picasso, Raphael, Rembrandt, Renoir, Van Goh et cetera painted numerous self-portraits. May be we should not put much into that narcissism business, for the fact is that the artist himself is the cheapest model around to paint! However, I am not the model for "The Ethiopian" or for the "Grandfather."

In Conclusion

Bringing you back to the subject of the GERD from my side remarks, in my private skirmish with one of Ethiopia's distinguished physician and scientist Dr. Abebe Haregewoin, let me reemphasize that we do not lose sight of the most important matter in our ongoing discourse—the survival of Ethiopia. I understand Alemayehu's anger and frustration caused by the dictatorial government of Meles Zenawi, but the man is now dead for almost two years. And in a number of ways the current Government of Hailemariam Desalegn is different from the previous Government in being quietly engaged in correcting the excess and abuses of power of his predecessor. I am not trying to get favors from the current Ethiopian leaders, that will never happen, for my enemies who could harm me physically are still in power, almost all of the Members of the TPLF Central Committee, most of the Central Committee members of the ANDM, close advisors and fellow ethnic friends of Hailemariam Desalegn, such as the Ethiopian Ambassador to the United Nations et cetera. Such individuals who are still in power are individuals whom I despise and have the least respect, for they are all responsible for the type of predicament we are in now due to their sycophantic pampering of Meles Zenawi and allowing him to do whatever he wanted, wherein we end up being land-locked, our people fractured and on the brink of disintegration, and also having lost our territory and people to a vicious

leader and group. This is not the figment of my imagination but the reality of my life. I cannot even visit my aged Mother.

There is a world of difference between being overly enthusiastic about a cause thereby attacking all those who oppose such cause, and totally being derogatory discounting and degrading a national effort that is aimed at bringing about prosperity to its citizens no matter how clumsy the effort might be. It so happened the GERD is superbly designed, its feasibility much better than a gold or oil mining, and its symbolism eternal. In his response article, sadly, Alemayehu miserably failed to see the obvious; he not only betrayed Ethiopia but also committed economic treason that he could be prosecuted in an Ethiopian Court. I am absolutely offended by such an article by a learned Ethiopian thinking only of his ways more than the long term national interest of Ethiopia and Ethiopians.

I am tempted her to suggest to all who bear ill-will against Ethiopia that they learn from the reality of the last twenty years, for every Regime that tried to harm Ethiopia was either destroyed or is in critical turmoil as in the case of Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Syria, or Pakistan. I am starting to believe in what I had considered and arrogantly discounted as being mystical that a good friend of long standing always reminded me that there is a mysterious force that protected and continue to protect Ethiopia from all of its enemies—may be it is the spirit of all the great Ethiopian patriots. Long live Ethiopia. Ω

Tecola W. Hagos,

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Washington DC