

## CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME!

A Response to Girma Kassa's article "Let the 'Weyane' Bashing end."

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***"Talk is cheap—except when Congress does it." Cullen Hightower***

Indeed, talk is cheap and it is more so at a time when pragmatic solutions are greatly needed to help our people as they endure malicious starvation due to inadequate rain fall, compounded by the global food crisis, in some parts of our beloved country, Ethiopia. Yes, Ethiopia needs the support of her children during these trying times, and needs it now—only in deeds. No cheap shots please, for Ethiopia is tired of such empty promises. We have to talk the talk and walk the walk, if Ethiopia is ever to regain its past glories and join the league of developed nations.

Most of us know that the level of the current starvation is by far lower than any previous ones that visited our country—albeit uninvited--but it doesn't mean it should be taken lightly. Make no mistake: one child dying of preventable hunger is too many for a government that made poverty its number one enemy since it assumed power in 1991 with a promise to eradicate millennia-old problems, and great strides have been made in that regard. That is why the government is doing its level best to help the people in the drought areas by distributing food and other items. However, only governmental assistance cannot serve as a panacea for all the ills Ethiopia now faces. Problems of such magnitude require the participation of all stakeholders—citizens (within and outside of the country), donor organizations, religious organizations and, of course, the government.

It is quite encouraging seeing Mr. Girma Kassa, after posting many one-sided articles on the internet, calling for action rather than engaging ourselves in a tit-for-tat quagmire that benefits none of us. Welcome to the club of sensible opposition, Girma! As they say, better late than never. But I don't agree with your very extreme scenarios that Ethiopia, at the moment, has only two choices; being the best in Africa or else. Either heaven or hell preaching style ought to be limited to religious settings. When analyzing a particular country's socio-economic status, one should avoid seeing things as white or black; everything or nothing; and may I say that there is a gray area in between. A country passing through that gray area is called a developing nation. In economic terms, all countries that are neither a developed country nor a failed state are classified as developing countries, and Ethiopia, based on the consistent socio-economic progress we have seen over the years, fits this criterion.

For countries like Ethiopia that are emerging out of problems of nearly biblical proportion, even modest gains should be appreciated and, most importantly, the emphasis should be on the direction of the countries rather than expecting a life free of problems overnight. Sounds familiar? This kind of unrealistic expectation on the part of the defunct CUD party only expedited its demise. CUD demanded full and complete power without earning it, and declared "now or never," to the extent of boycotting entering Parliament, instead of fighting for more seats by accepting the results of the election.

We all know what happened to CUD—it became the victim of its own success because it ignored the rules of the country.



Prime Minister Meles Zenawi arriving in Japan for the G8 Summit

The direction of our country is very promising thanks to the current government's relentless effort in changing the image of the country. The presence of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi at the annual G8 Summit in Japan is one indication that all eyes are on Ethiopia's encouraging economic progress. Ethiopia was one of the few African Countries invited to this Year's G8 Summit.

Today's Ethiopia is by no means the “peripheries of peripheries”, and it takes time and concerted effort to make her the “bread-basket of Africa.” Dwelling on such extreme terms while a sizeable segment of our society is living below poverty line, however, will only exacerbate the problem at hand. Let's be realistic and rally behind a common purpose; making Ethiopia a developed nation in the 1<sup>st</sup> century of this millennium. That is an attainable goal considering the good signs with see on the ground.

Mr. Girma, we have been saying all along that the, “**Ene kemotkugn serdo aibkel endalechiw ensisa**” approach is not helpful at best and dangerous at worst; that we have only one country where all of us hail from and no one has the right to question the “Ethiopiawinet” in us; that the way out of the proverbial poverty is to rally behind the government's sound economic strategy that is shown to register unprecedented growth year after year; that democracy is a process that requires time and full participation of citizens to flourish; and that there is something called sensible opposition—being loyal and respectful to the constitution of the country rather than opposing everything the government does.

As to the unwarranted calls on “EPRDF officials”, esteemed writers before me have said it all; if only you have the readiness to open your eyes and accept constructive criticism. My only advice to you on that is to always remember the adage, “Easier said than done.” Please know that writing directives while sipping cappuccino at nearby Starbucks in Chicago is completely different from fighting poverty back home.

In closing, acknowledging one's problem is the first step to solving it. Now that Mr. Girma admitted that it is useless to dwell on ‘fighting against one another,’ he should extend his helping hands to the children in need. This can be done by calling upon all Diaspora Ethiopians to contribute in anyway they can. Local chapters can be organized for this purpose, and the money can be forwarded to Ethiopia through appropriate channels. I challenge you Mr. Girma to live up to your words, and since both of us reside in the same city, we can work together on this one. Remember, “Charity begins at home.”

I hope Mr. Girma takes constructive criticism in a positive way, as intended.