

Think federally and act locally

Federalism is a peace making tool

That doesn't kill a tribe to build a nation

Part I

Amen Teferi

A pent- up

Those utterly cynics, who contemptuously shrouded themselves with pretence and a gibberish quill of journalism are these days barking at the moon and bent on fomenting hatred and propagating mistrust amongst the Ethiopian people. Those cynics, *VOA Amharic Service* ruffians, who perched on the old federal building in Washington, are so cruel that they feast on crisis and run for “a blood money.”

They are so shrewd that they never-ever miss the slightest chance of sowing upheaval with the aim of instigating violence in Ethiopia. They are bad to the bone and obtrusively engaged themselves in spreading rumors. And are always working hard to incite, escalate and probe hostility. Bloody hell, what do they think they are doing?! And Oh, pardon me; this is just a pent-up, expressed off the record.

Coming back to my point, I must profess from the outset that this article is not addressed and/or not recommended to those who beat the drum on hearing bad news about Ethiopia. It is exclusively addressed to those who engaged in creating a new prosperous Ethiopia, a task that requires blood, sweat and tears – a dauntingly cumbersome job.

For those who pay dearly to see the new and promising Ethiopia we live in today and those who are standing today or yesterday in defense of the federal system we are having, may find it damnably rueful to experience sporadic religious or ethnic conflict in the federal Ethiopia. On

the contrary, it happened to be delightful good news for the likes of the thugs of *VOA Amharic Service* who considered the federal arrangement as a political assault on the unity of the country and its people.

On the other hand, I have observed that the sporadic ethnic or religious conflicts we have been experiencing in the last decades repeatedly invited heated debates among friends (a debate that includes both skeptics or critical assessors and staunch detractors whom one could legitimately referred them as 'ill-wishers' of the federal system as a blind proponents of the old paradigm), as to the effectiveness of the federal system in avoiding conflicts of any sort. This prompted me to look into and appraise the federal system we put in place since 1991.

The tale of by gone years

To begin with, it will be a truism to discuss and remark that it is erroneous to take the federal arrangement as a political assault, as some individuals assumed, on the unity of the Ethiopian people. It is rather a veritable solution to salvage the unity of the country and to bring to an end the protracted civil war. Hence, it dispelled the catastrophe that was ominously hovering after the down fall of the *Derge* regime.

The founding fathers of the federal system and the author of our constitution have set new and radical model that has induced a strong national unity among the people of Ethiopia. No doubt, the venture of our constitution radically differs from the past political paradigms. It was a paradigm that radically opposed to the old model of ensuring the unity of the country and its people.

The constitution did not focus and evoke an agenda that dismember the *nation-state* we call Ethiopia. The constitution rather was born out of the revolutionary political action that aimed at changing the perception and notion of a *nation-state* that had been promoted by the old regimes until 1991.

So, in my opinion, the political effort that has been undergoing since 1991 can be considered as a cultural revolution *within* the framework of the national unity agenda. And it corrodes the

undemocratic political ethos of the past regimes that practically led us to the verge of total collapse. The old model of ensuring the *national unity* ends up in utter topsy-turvy and Ethiopia had to recoup its stamina to reclaim a status of a nation in the world map and get going. Something must be done or Ethiopia will be out of the story for good.

Now, at that juncture, the beastly move that would botch the entire political venture was sticking to the previous model of national unity. Therefore, the federal disposition of our system is not a political assault on the national unity of Ethiopia. It was rather a move taken to refurbish the political system -not from without- but an attempt made to overhaul and refit the system that was disdainful for many ethnic groups. This endeavor, in my opinion, could be considered as a cultural revolution that aimed at creating and promoting a democratic political ethos that would unfold a new sense of national unity. And hence enliven the long established tradition of peace full coexistence of the people of Ethiopia.

The new paradigm was brought into play by revolutionary organizations that fought for freedom under an umbrella organization called EPRDF. In hindsight, we can rightfully say that EPRDF had fought the totalitarian and authoritarian regime with a slogan “let us think federally and act locally.” This slogan legitimately reflects the dawning of a new perception as the old nation- state and its policies fade away. In doing so, we experience not only what is closest to us (like a family, neighborhood, clan or ethnic group we belong,) but also what is farthest from us -the federal state. Put another way, “we care about both to our unique cultural identity and the encompassing federal polity.” This new slogan reflects a radical paradigm shift in the political life of the country.

It is true, each nation and nationality begins their struggle by identifying the old notion of national unity as the source of its alienation and impediment to its freedom and fulfillment. Hence they opted to establish a new political system based on the instruction of a new democratic constitution they themselves crafted, debated and endorsed. Free of the past alienation and oppression they looked forward to the coming of a golden age where no limiting conditions on the enjoyment and exercises of their right and freedom exists. All of them

envisaged a new era as a group or individual citizen of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

In the past they were unable to express their unique cultural identity. They, therefore, imperviously stood against a paradigm of national unity that was promoted by the old undemocratic and oppressive regimes. Thus, they fought and paid dearly to secure and exercise the freedom they sought after. Finally, they built a democratic system that ensured the expression of their particular identity and granted the unconditioned enjoyment of their sovereignty. Consciously believing that the shattering of the old predominant notion will open a door to promote their own particular identity; the nation, nationality and people of Ethiopia opted for a federal polity. They saw a nation-wide blossoming of greater freedom and happiness and hence avoid a conflicted situation that avidly consumed their energy and resources.

Here comes a point that requires our appraisal. We have now a federal political system. But, “does the federal system insulate us from ethnic or religious conflicts?” This is the question Tsegaye Regassa¹ has addressed in his paper titled as *“Learning to live with conflicts: Federalism as a tool of conflict management in Ethiopia- an overview”* (2009).

Tsegaye explored the potential of the Ethiopian federalism as a way of managing conflict. He addressed himself to the following questions: “Does federalism resolve or prevent conflicts or does it cause, multiply, and perpetuate them? Was the Ethiopian federalism a response to and a cause of conflicts? What conflicts did it respond to? How effectively did it do so? What conflicts has it caused? How did it prepare for them? How has it responded to conflicts that are its own creation? In other words, has it given solution to pre-constitutional conflicts? Has it faced post-constitutional conflicts? How did it respond to both? Is there any normative, institutional, and procedural capability to effectively respond to and learn to live with post-constitutional/federal conflicts? What were the old conflicts anyway? How effective was our federalism in its response to it? What are the new conflicts? How effective have we been in our

¹ (LL.B, LL.M, PhD Candidate), teaches at the Institute of Federalism and Legal Studies (IFLS) of the Ethiopian Civil Service College (ECSC) and at the Law Faculty and the Institute of Federal Studies (IFS) of the Addis Ababa University (AAU). Currently, he is also a Visiting Professor of African Law and Legal Pluralism at the Law Faculty of the University of Trento, Italy.

response to them? What challenges have been faced? How have they been overcome? Where did we fail? And why?"

These are the questions Tsegaye raised in his paper. I wouldn't reproduce -resisting the temptation- the whole content of his seminal work. But I simply pick up points that are relevant to my discussion. However, mention must be made that Tsegaye Regassa has written an enlightening research paper. At any rate, my question is: "is federalism a panacea?"

Is Federalism a Panacea?

The answer for above question is NO. It is absolutely far from being a magic option. The queering thing involved in the federal system of governance is that it can be taken both as a solution to and a 'cause' for conflict at the same time. It is very enigmatic (rather disturbing) to realize that a federal system is no guarantee for the sporadic eruption of conflicts of any kind in a country that adopted federal polity with an enthusiastic attitude of availing itself from such political arrangement. Scholars argue that, federalism is not a panacea to all political ailments and it is not an absolute guarantee against conflicts.

And therefore it is imperative that a society should learn to live with conflicts that might be triggered by the adoption and operation of a federal structure. Learning to live with conflict in and through a federation entails a preparation that requires institutional and procedural readiness. It is a readiness in terms of putting in place a systematic set of policies, strategies, and methods of handling conflicts.

Tsegaye Regassa of the Ethiopian Civil Service College bluntly advised us not to be naïve and imbecile by taking and perceiving the federal system as a cure for all societal ills. Rather, he alerts us to learn the ways and means of living with conflict in the federal system. And he instructed us ways and means that maximize the benefit of a federal political arrangement. He starkly told us that we only have the luxury of managing and controlling conflicts -not avoiding it. This is a saddening and awful truth for us who conceived federalism as a magic option to end up the political mayhem that ravaged our country for centuries.

Of course, federalism is conceived as the only effective, appropriate, and legitimate response to ethno-national conflicts. Tsegaye Regassa has discussed, among other things, the disposition of contending ethnic demands in the federal system and the response thereof. His effort focused on extensively discussing the federalism system and its place in Ethiopia's past and present. Moreover, he tried to identify issues related to the design and the practice of the federal dispensation. He also sketchily presented some of the challenges and the limits of the federal arrangement in the face of increasing tensions and competitions among groups at the local and sub-national levels by referring to examples that had emerged from the regional states.

Ethiopia is a land of diverse peoples with different religion and divergent interests. The demographic diversity is expressed in multiple ways such as ethno-national, cultural, religious, economic way of life etc. He also pointed that since 1991 ethno-cultural diversity has become salient in the public square. After the down fall of the *Derge* regime, ethnicity is taken seriously in the endeavor to reconstruct the state as a multi-national, multicultural federal polity. And this is the result of a history of uneven and conflicted relations among ethnic groups.

Took the bull by the horn

The political parties in the post 1991 chosen federalism to respond to the challenge of ethno-national conflicts that beleaguered the old Ethiopian state from the time it has been built into a multi-ethnic empire often seeking to build one nation out of many. This has been taken to mean that federalism is opted to serve as a panacea for all the conflicts in Ethiopia.

Needless to say, facts emerging from the federal experiment for the last two decades did not prove that it is a panacea. Indeed at times, it may even contribute to the emergence of new--or the accentuation and multiplication of old—conflicts.

Tsegaye, explored the potential of the Ethiopian federalism as a way of managing conflicts. He also argued that conflicts are “bound to be with us always. We won't *resolve* them. Nor can we eradicate them. But we can prevent them. We can handle or manage them when they do occur.

And we can transform them when we are lucky. Consequently, with all its limitations, federalism helps us in this venture.”

The political terrain of the 20th century Ethiopia has been pre-dominated by class and status conflicts. Economic conflict and ethno-national conflicts were singled out as the politically most important conflicts in Ethiopia’s political history. According to Tsegaye, “the 1974 revolution succeeded in making class conflicts (conflicts arising out of economic hierarchy) as the most salient and the most pressing ones and, indeed, tried to respond to the demands of the poor chiefly through land redistribution schemes. Conflict of ethno-national type (conflicts arising out of status hierarchy) were appreciated but subordinated to the economic conflicts.”

Edmond J. Keller (1995) also refers to the 1974-1991 revolution as one of the two social revolutions of Ethiopia, the second being the one that succeeded it since 1991 (“1991 onwards”). Following his track, one can thus describe the 1974 revolution chiefly as a class revolution and the 1991 revolution chiefly as a revolution for ethno-cultural justice.

One can say that this is the underlying value that shaped the making of the FDRE Constitution. Back in the transitional period the Charter negotiated among major ethno-nationalist liberation Fronts, was chiefly a truce document meant to confront ethno-nationalist clashes by responding to the quest for ethno-cultural justice (demand for the exercise and enjoyment of cultural, linguistic and religious rights, the demand for recognition of one’s identity, the demand for participation in public decision-making, the demand for autonomy, etc), equality, and self-determination (internal and external).

These responses, for example, with regard to the claim for autonomy, or linguistic justice, cultural rights, etc had cooling effect. In some cases, even the claim for self-determination (e.g. secession) has lost its sharp edge. The postponement of the Somali demand for secession temporarily and the vacillation of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) between the choice of secession or of asserting equality and autonomy in a democratic Ethiopia are examples of such blunted demands.

One can look to the provisions of the constitution to understand what measures the ethno-national political parties had taken to resolve the tension that has been build-up for years, e.g. the right to equality and non-discrimination (art 25), political participation through representation (arts 38 cum 54(2)), the right to use of language in education, courts, civil service, and media (at least within one's locality, with or without translation), the right to enjoyment of culture (art 39(2)), the right to self-government (art 39(3)), etc.

Moreover, Tesegaye said, "the secession clause in the now (in) famous art 39(1) of the constitution marks a bold move with few, if any, precedents. By inscribing secession in the constitution as a right, Ethiopia went beyond the 'kill the tribe to build the nation' motto of many an African country. It reduced Ethiopia to a destructible union of (perhaps indestructible) sovereign ethnic units ('nations, nationalities, and peoples'). This clause originally meant to remove the military solution from the political equation— to serve as the paradoxical case of the dividing that unites—served, rather strangely, the purpose of preserving the unity while threatening it. Whatever its advantage, by endorsing secession, Ethiopia took the bull by the horn and so far, the bull hasn't killed it. One can surmise—stretching the metaphor of the bull-- that perhaps through this clause, the bull finally might be domesticated."

Conflict - New and Old

In past two decades we have experienced intermittent ethnic or religious conflict. Hence, resolution, management, and transformation or responding to ethnic or religious conflicts has gained pre-eminence in the political realm.

In Ethiopia, the quest for ethno-cultural justice, equality, and self-determination was high on the priority agenda. Consequently, in the Ethiopian context, federalism was a response to old ethno-national conflicts. As such, it blunted and/or responded to ethno-national demands. It led them to looking at some questions squarely in the eye—taking the bull by the horn. As a result, one can say that federalism has helped to pacify "the big house" by devolving conflicts to sub-national levels.

Hence, we have observed numerous local cases that are vying for attention at the regional level and at the Federal level. It also reduced national ailments to sub-national and local levels. And that is the natural course of things.

In my thinking constructing a federal polity in a war torn and impoverished countries like Ethiopia can rightfully (metaphorically) be stated as “a bed of nails, not a bed of roses.” No surprise then to find that Ethiopian federalism has triggered new kinds of conflicts. Of course, no one gainsay that new conflicts have emerged. Therefore, according Tsegaye, the federalist project has two tasks to perform at a time: 1) that of responding to old conflicts, transforming them, answering old questions, satisfying old demands; and 2) that of managing new conflicts, coping with new challenges, investing in conflict transformative projects.

Nonetheless, federalism is not a universally accepted political proposition without any opposition. There are oppositions that come from two directions. According to Daniel Elazar, the forces that oppose federalism are two; that are, forces of *centralization* and forces of *fragmentation*.

Those who oppose federalism on behalf of *centralization* tend to be totalitarian with *consolidationist* trends, while those who oppose it on behalf of *fragmentation* are ethno-nationalist movements seeking secession. From among the two, "ethnic nationalism is probably the strongest force against federalism." Yet contemporary problems of ethnic conflict seem to have brought about a drift into ethnic federations. At any rate, can ethnic nationalism be handled through a federation?

Commentators who tried to give answer to this question are often skeptical. Tsegaye mentioned that Elazar has maintained the opinion that ethnic nationalism is at odds with the principle of federalism. Because, as Elazar observed, in federalism consent is the basis of division and sharing of power- not "language, religion, national myths" as is the case in ethnic nationalism. As the elements emphasized in ethnic nationalism are those which breed cleavages among people, a multiethnic federal system (Elazar seems to suggest), can succeed only if the basis of state formation is anything other than ethnicity. Thus, ethnic configurations and state borders should not be coterminous, if ethnic federalism is to succeed. Therefore

federalism, for Elazar, is "formulated through covenanting or consent of publics of individuals," and in contrast, "ethnic nationalism tends to subordinate all free government to its uncompromising position." Furthermore, federalism is "a democratic middle way requiring negotiation and compromise. Hence, he concludes that "all aspects of society that foster uncompromising positions [such as ethnic nationalism's] make federalism more difficult, if not impossible."

In 1991 Ethiopia had confronted with the toughest choice. One may state the immeasurable difficulty of the then political situation in Ethiopia as a question "to be or not to be." Parties in that situation had no choice but to take the bull by the horn. EPRDF, with grater assurance and conviction made a decision and a rightful evaluation when it invites all political parties to discuss and chart the way forward. When everybody was thinking that disintegration is the sole possibility, EPRDF devised a political solution that would appease the zealous ethno-national groups who saw nothing but freedom from "bondage." Hence, the federal arrangement aimed not only at ensuring the ethno-cultural and political rights of the cultural groups who fought for it, but also a system that would give them security from any encroachments whatsoever.

The Centralists ideology was rebuffed and defeated both in the battle fields and in the political venues. This is how the matter stands as to the choice of a federal polity that some would prefer to call *ethnic federalism*.

We have come a long way now and have an arduous path ahead of us. Through our journey in the past two decades, we have faced conflicts that have different nature, causes and magnitudes. Detractors of the Ethiopian federal system get upbeat and often take incidents as a sound ground to criticize our federalism. And they ask simple questions that suggest an oversimplification of the matter: *has the federal arrangement solved or exacerbated conflicts?*

Tsegaye Regassa reacted to this question saying "this must have come from the misunderstanding that federalism is a panacea. Federalism does not guarantee a 'perpetual peace,' or 'the peaceable kingdom.' *Federalism is a compromise, a negotiated settlement, a covenant, a human institution, an imperfect one at that, more a project than a reality.* Federalism is not a panacea. It does offer some solution. But it also solves problems by

diverting old conflicts, or creating (new), or transforming all, conflicts. To put it more bluntly and directly: just as much as it solves, it creates (and, at times, multiplies) conflict.” He made it clear that “out of the solutions for old problems, are born new conflicts: conflicts for **new power** (*New power spaces created as a consequence of devolution of power to local -State, Zone, and Woreda centers*), **new resources** (*New resources include those that local authorities are entitled to use e.g. economic facilities such as land, but mainly budgetary resources that come to them in the form of transfer be it as a grant, subsidy, etc from the federal government or revenue they are entitled to raise at the sub-national level*), and **new opportunities** (*Opportunities that create access to social capital such as network, education, health, and other economic facilities*).

As a result, he reiterated that there is now heightened awareness of the new self. There are now **new demands for a distinct identity** (*The case of the Silte, the Donga, the Zay, and a host of others exemplify this. The Silte case for self-definition and local self rule has long been decided by the House of Federation. However, the Donga and the Zay cases are yet to be decided*), **new demand for self-governance and autonomy** (*The case of the Gofa exemplifies this kind of claim. The Gofa quest for a Zone status separate from the Gamo-Gofa Zone has been presented to the HoF, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Legislative Council of SNNPRS, Council of Nationalities of SNNPRS*), **new quest for local economic justice, new quest for political empowerment and participation, new quest for statehood** (*E.g. the case of the Gamo and the Sidama in SNNPRS. The Gamo quest for a separate Statehood from SNNPRS has been formally presented to the Federal, State, and Zonal authorities in a letter dated 10 Hamle 1997 EC. The Sidama quest for statehood to separate from the SNNPRS has been presented to the Council of Nationalities (CON) of SNNPRS. The Sidama Zone has since dropped their request with a letter dated 26/8/98 EC apparently after a long series of political negotiation*), and finally **new quest for territory**, hence border disputes (*The case of the Yem, the case of Dale Woreda between the Sidama and Wolayta Zone of the SNNPRS, the case of the Guji Oromo in the Sidama Zone, the border dispute between the Somali and Oromia Regions, are only examples of these conflicts.*)

In the writer's opinion some of these conflicts have emerged out of the problem of design, while some others out of the problem of practice. Therefore he argued that rethinking, refining and fine-tuning etc of the federal system will resolve the problems related with design and practice.

Tsegaye Regassa VS Daniel Elazar

No doubt about it, federalism is often used as a tool of accommodating diversity. However, most scholars considered ethnic federalism with a degree of suspicion because to base a federal arrangement on such an inflexible trait such as ethnicity is to freeze the compromise and negotiation inherent and necessary for an operational federal system. Daniel Elazar, one of the leading proponents of the expansion of the federal idea in modern times, and who is otherwise very skeptical about the success of ethnic federalism, said that "Federalism has become a very popular 'solution'" for problems of ethnic conflict in public discourse."

But owing to the fact that the American model is often taken as the prototypical model of federalism, a federal type that takes ethnicity into account in the process of carving its constituent units is viewed as rather unconventional. They also observe that: [E]thnic federations are among the most difficult of all to sustain and are least likely to survive because constituent units based on ethnic nationalisms normally do not want to merge into the kind of tight-knit units necessary for federation. It may be that confederations of ethnic states have a better chance of success. Ethnic federations run the risk of civil war, while ethnic confederations run the risk of secession. *The management of ethnic nationalism is both the most common and the most difficult reasons for federalism today.*

Nonetheless, Tsegaye contends, trends in recent years suggest that perhaps ethnic federalism must be given a chance because it has two major advantages: a) it brings about peace and stability in conflicted societies; and b) it entrenches and institutionalizes ethno-cultural justice.

In light of this Tsegaye explained, "In countries such as that of the horn—which share common peoples, cultures, fears, and vulnerabilities— ethnic federalism with the secession clause might even help for regional integration. It is important, however, that for ethnic federalism to effectively respond to the challenge of diversity, it needs to be augmented by an electoral and

political system that provides for power-sharing, equal representation, veto power on select matters, etc.

“It should also be working under the provenance of a legitimate, supreme, and rigid constitution that can be interpreted impartially and neutrally (or evenly). It should also be supported by a robust minority rights regime that can protect new minorities or minorities within minorities.”

Thus it is evident that “federalism intensifies democracy by creating an atmosphere of popular participation at, at least, two levels. Further, federalism helps preserve the particularities of smaller republics in a big polity by first *protecting them from potential degeneration into non-existence and by, secondly, breaking the imperialistic hegemony of larger republics.* (Whether this value of federalism can still be maintained in a post-cold war era where there is a resurgence of politics of identity is extensively debated.)”

Most, characteristically, federalism is a system in which decisions are made after deliberate negotiation. It is this element of negotiation inherent in federalism that attracts societies (even those who "ail" from "natural" diversities such as culture religion, ethnicity, etc) to federalism. Such societies that are divided on "trans-generational religious, cultural, ethnic, or ideological" lines (also called *consociational* polities) venture to adopt non-territorial federations which are jointly governed by coalitions of the leaders of each group.

Tsegaye remarked that it is too obvious to argue that federalism is congenial to pluralism and that pluralism safeguards liberty is the basic federal argument. He also underlined that the manner of institutionalizing pluralism constitutionally determines the durability of a federal arrangements. Thus, pluralism rooted in individual liberty and choice is more convenient to sustain in federal arrangements than those rooted in primordial ties. The latter forms of pluralism sustain themselves by making it difficult for integration to happen. In the context of such rigid form of pluralism (such as the ones evoked by multi-ethnicity), federal principles are said to work if they can "combine kinship (the basis of ethnicity), and consent (the basis of democratic government) into politically viable, constitutionally protected, arrangements

involving territorial and non-territorial polities." In such circumstances, federalism both maintains and contains pluralism."

"The virtue of federalism," Elazar asserted, "not only lies in its utility in maintaining pluralism but also in simultaneously containing it." In sum, therefore, civil societies, broken sovereignty, territoriality, uniformity, supportive political culture, the will to federate, mass consent, balanced intergovernmental cooperation and competition, and a system of separation of powers can be viewed as factors that make management of federalism easy in a polity.

As has been hinted repeatedly in earlier discussion, federalism may serve as a tool of peace-making. Such is the case in conflicted and post-conflict societies. The fact that it is a mode of molding a polity through reflection and choice and the consequent fact that central to its formation is consent (agreement, or treaty) makes it a veritable tool of peace. If a polity has been beleaguered by tensions and wars that are fought for the sake of better recognition of diversity, accommodation of difference, equal or fair participation in the political life of a nation, or/and autonomy to govern oneself and one's resources in one's chosen way, federalism can be a way out of the political quagmire.

If the wars are fought for the sake of ensuring protection of particular identities within an encompassing bigger polity, then federalism can afford that protection, and it can attract groups to come to negotiation. If the wars are fought to preserve national unity in the face of fragmenting local nationalisms, then federal diversity in unity can offer a solution to the concern of both "national" and local nationalisms. (Often "national" patriotism/nationalism is haunted by fear of disintegration; particular/local nationalists are haunted by fear of oppression. But federalism offers that golden mean sought to keep both fears at bay.)

In such scenarios, federalism can be an incentive for peace. However, it can do so only if both/all groups are willing to compromise having realized that the military option is not viable any more. It is important that the warring groups, especially the "center", are all exhausted. The guarantee of self-rule at the sub-national level, the security that there will be a meaningful fair participation in decision-making at the "center" (shared rule), the preservation of the bigger encompassing polity, the guarantee against the danger of centralization, etc *appetize*

'stakeholders' to put their arms down and seek a political/diplomatic solution to their stalemates. Here is the significance of federalism as a peace making tool.

My message is, *comrades*, we have no point to be despaired or be haunted by self doubt when we see sporadic conflict in our federal Ethiopia. But we have all the reason to be encouraged as we have successfully halted the protracted civil war that ravaged our country and its people for years and have also reversed that eminent danger of disintegration. We have come a long way consolidating our federal system. And yet, "as a project, an unfinished one, it invites experimentation, trial and error, ups and downs, successes and setbacks." Therefore, we must tighten our belt and work hard mobilizing all our resources to create "a federal heaven on earth –Ethiopia." And as our intellectual, institutional, political, economical, cultural, legal capabilities get strengthened violent conflicts and confrontations give way to negotiations. Take the case of the Sidama Zone. After a long series of political negotiation the quest for statehood by the Sidama Zone was dropped and the case resolved (26/8/98 EC).

In conclusion, in post-conflict societies, where there is a rift and tension among centripetal and centrifugal forces, federalism might serve as a peace-keeping and peace-building tool. The terms of the federal covenant help regulate the relationship between/among the various groups that negotiated the federal dispensation. Old rivalries and competitions which used to have a violent (military) expression will now take a constitutional-legal mode. The legal battle—supported and reinforced by the political (.e.g., electoral) battle—replaces the military strife, and as such help to build and reinforce peace culture. In the case of Ethiopia, federalism is a peacemaking tool that doesn't kill a tribe to build a nation.