

A Response to Getachew Mequanent's Ethiopia in twenty years
By Eunetu Yineger, May 2006

Ethiopia in twenty years: A Positive Outlook (April 26, 2006, AigaForum and Ben's News Page) Getachew Mequanent echoes the prophecy of Sufian Ahmed, Minister of Finance and Economic Development in the EPRDF/TPLF government, that by year 2025 Ethiopia would be a middle income country. To justify the prophecy Getachew refers to Jeffrey Sachs' book entitled *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*, and underlines what he calls the main argument in the book – poverty could be overcome by 2025 provided that donor countries give developing countries between US\$ 135 billion to 195 billion annually. In his argument Getachew ignores the question of why donors should continue to give every year for twenty years, any amount of taxpayers' money to a government that does not respect the rule of law, fundamental human rights and democratic principles; and has failing grades in good governance, accountability and, more importantly, in winning the trust and respect of its own people.

A chronic and humiliating problem in Ethiopia, especially during the last fifteen years, has been an endless and ever increasing dependence on foreign aid, be it in the form of humanitarian or development assistance. If national resources are squandered and used for buying sophisticated arms, for waging senseless wars, for harassing and killing innocent citizens and for perpetuating tyranny, then no amount of foreign aid can pull the 71 million Ethiopians out of the crashing poverty in which they are condemned to live. Besides, aid money is only a small supplement, and cannot replace sustainable national investments in terms of capital, financial and human resources. To miss this critical point is to disregard the lessons learned by the people of Ethiopia and the donor community from the disproportionate and unconditional aid dependency during the last fifteen years.

While the current unhealthy trend continues unabated, and peace and security remain in serious jeopardy throughout the country, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to predict a positive outlook for sustainable socio-economic, political and technological development in Ethiopia even for the next five years, leave alone twenty years. Hence, Getachew's disjointed statements and conclusions lack objectivity, depth and an understanding of the grave situation in Ethiopia today. To say the least, the article can be misleading to the uninformed or even the trusting and well-intentioned.

What does the writer, who according to public information is a Canadian government employee, want to accomplish by posting on the two Websites, at this critical time, an article that is full of personal judgments and predictions that are not substantiated? Even Sufian Ahmed can be embarrassed to have the predictions publicized just before they are discussed by the rubberstamp EPRDF/TPLF parliament which is now considering a five-year plan. Getachew should come forward and explain why he could not wait for the plan to come out before engaging himself in wild prophesies. In the meantime, a few observations are warranted:

He praises the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and other top EPRDF officials for upgrading their academic qualifications while in office through distance learning, and for becoming among "the most enlightened group[s] of governing elites in the world". On the other hand he states: "There are many people in our Diaspora communities who did not [seize] the opportunity to get educated. They have instead continued to be engaged in unproductive politics including organizing mass demonstrations calling for a reduction of aid to Ethiopia".

While the Prime Minister and his immediate colleagues may be satisfied with their academic achievements, any real success must be measured by the effective application of their knowledge and skills to building genuine democracy, respecting human rights, abiding by the rule of law and practicing good governance.

Regarding the accusation of wasted educational opportunities by members of the Diaspora, Getachew has neither the moral authority nor the competence to pass personal judgment. The Ethiopian Diaspora are among the most industrious, dedicated and successful new settlers in the industrialized world. Ethiopia's great loss is the world's gain.

Even more disturbing is the charge against the Diaspora of "calling for aid reduction to Ethiopia" This is neither credible nor acceptable. The position of the Ethiopian Diaspora on this critical issue is not any different from that taken by prominent human rights advocates, religious leaders, humanitarian agencies, professional organizations, parliamentarians and donor countries, which are all deeply concerned about the endless violations by EPRDF/TPLF of democratic and human rights. They are urging the government repeatedly to stop the abuse of power, institute good governance, liberate the opposition leaders and the prisoners of conscience, free the independent media from suffocation, and ensure accountability to the people of Ethiopia and to the donor community.

Getachew is not ashamed to allege that the opposition party CUD "was influenced by Diaspora-based former government officials and a group of old-guard reactionary intellectuals who had a deep hatred towards EPRDF". This is a serious allegation which cannot pass unchallenged. First, it is a total disrespect and an insult to the millions of law-abiding citizens across Ethiopia who voted for CUD in the May 2005 national and regional elections. Second, it undermines the leadership qualities and outstanding achievements of CUD by giving the impression that the party is susceptible to undue influence from outside Ethiopia. Third, it is intended to weaken the thriving unity and solidarity among the Diaspora who have increasingly become a driving force in the fight against deep-rooted injustice, tyranny and poverty in their country of origin. Fourth, it is a malicious attempt to discredit the Diaspora in their countries of residence. The least Getachew must do is to apologize publicly for spreading misinformation and the seeds of hate.

Under the heading Political Development, Getachew makes an interesting prophesy. He predicts: "Meles Zenawi will retire from politics soon". This is too good to believe!

In a continued attempt to discredit the Diaspora, Getachew charges: "Our Diaspora communities are full of intrigues and contradictions ...". Out of thousands of Diaspora individuals and organizations that are making daily sacrifices to help Ethiopians in their struggle against poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance, he chose only two individuals, known personally to him, as examples of what he calls "positive aspects". Many people, both in Ethiopia and overseas, would appreciate to learn what they did to their impoverished Ethiopia. What makes these people different from other Diaspora?

At the end of his article Getachew advises: "Let us leave politics for the politicians and talk about what we can do to support the development efforts of the Ethiopian people". He would have been credible had he affirmed this at the beginning of his long and incoherent article, and practiced what he preached. Instead, he chose to play partisan politics and to make wild statements and accusations on vital issues which required in-depth analysis and a high degree of objectivity before giving advice to Ethiopians and the donor community.