

Bring the court proceedings to conclusion.

Mekonnen Kassa

The inherent bureaucracy of a legal proceeding, where close to none of it is automated in Ethiopia, coupled with acute shortage of qualified Ethiopian professionals, makes justice in Ethiopia move slower than blood flows in a cholesterol clogged artery. This ineptitude of courts may develop to a stroke and end up arresting our effort to build an independent judiciary. Every effort has to be expended to avoid the “justice delayed justice denied” situation by increasing use of automation in courts and by opening more law schools.

Under such operating circumstances, and given the grave nature of the alleged crime committed by the accused, the court has to invest ample time to thoroughly examine the evidence presented to it and determine if there is enough evidence to issue indictment and proceed to trial. This is a necessary step to avoid a miscarriage of justice. In less than two years time, the court is now getting ready to indict or set free the accused on case by case basis. The opposition, however, an utter failure in many regards, is pointing to this as yet another evidence of a kangaroo court controlled by the government bent on delaying justice.

As if that was not enough, the opposition sympathizers, most notably the ones living abroad, have made use of their omniscient power, by way of their spiritual nature, to make a foregone conclusion that the court will find all the accused guilty as charged. True to their character, it did not matter that they have been wrong predicting the future nor did it matter that the case has not gone to trial yet. How is this helping to foster democracy or bring about an independent judiciary?

We all want a competent judicial system in Ethiopia capable of operating without interference from the legislative and executive branch of the government. But bringing about such a system should not be the responsibility of the government alone; it is also a duty of the opposition Party leaders and the Ethiopian population at large. One way to that end is to directly plea the judges for a fair trial, a just verdict and respect to the constitution. I believe that is why Dr. Yacob addressed his letter to the Judges and the people of Ethiopia, and not to Prime Minister Meles.

Pleading with Prime Minister to unconditionally release the accused individuals is tantamount to a call for a criminal violation of the constitution, and it is a twisted attempt by the Opposition to gain evidence for their allegation that the government usually meddles in judicial matters.

Therefore, it is now high time for us reasonable individuals to ask the courts to bring this phase of the legal proceeding to a conclusion. We should get assurances from the court that a decision will be delivered the next time the court is in session. We need also to request, if need be, that the government should make resources available including appropriating additional funds to pay for people who may work overtime to complete necessary work.

At the same time, we Ethiopians have to pledge to respect law enforcement institutions and abide by their judgment regardless of whether it serves our cause or not. That is what we learn from countries like America that have managed to build one of the most successful democracies in the world.

Judges are not born in black robes. They are humans who came to their position either through elections or through appointment by incumbent politicians. They mostly do right but, at times, they are prone to err just like the rest of us. But we are always required to abide by their verdict not because they are always right, fair, and just, but because the system guarantees a civil, stable, peaceful, and continuous co-existence.

Opposition sympathizers have to keep in mind that no one party governs and no one judge presides forever. For the system to work as intended and for the sake of the long term benefit to the society, the minority opposition has to do the right thing and wait for its turn patiently until it becomes a majority, manages to form a government and appoints judges that are sympathetic to its own cause.

All said, I think I speak for all of us when I say we need closure to this as it has become an all consuming issue at the expense of other equally important issues. I am ready to move on and see what 2010 brings. Let us get it over with!!