



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

AJC asks who are these people Meles is “using” to fight his war? Are they not the same people he has been terrorizing for years? Are they not the same people whom he has silenced by bullets?

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The current news in Ethiopia is that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia is declaring war on Somalia. He warns that war with Somalia is imminent—that the terrorists are coming to Ethiopia and are providing arms to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and to the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Meles says Ethiopia must respond with military force against all three groups: the Council of Islamic Courts, the OLF and the ONLF. He speaks as if he is attacking Islamic terrorists or those who supply guns to “Islamic terrorists” in the OLF and ONLF, but many question his motives.

Instead, many Ethiopians strongly oppose this war and suspect the prime minister of using our young Ethiopian men and women to fight in a war, not for Ethiopia, but for his own political survival. They question the facts.

For instance, if Meles is actually fighting against Islamic terrorist strongholds, why does he partner with Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan, a country where terrorists have been known to seek safe harbor and where the Constitution of the country is based on **Sharia law**? If Meles is fighting against those who supply guns to the OLF and the ONLF, why is he not fighting against Eritrea, a known supplier of arms to Ethiopian resistance groups? If he is fighting against terrorism, why does he not change from being a terrorist of his own people?

This leads to the question, who are these people Meles is “using” to fight his war? Are they not the same people he has been terrorizing for years? Are they not the same people whom he has silenced by bullets? After turning Ethiopia into a police state, how can he ask young people to give up their lives for such a brutal regime? Perhaps these young people are those outside his own group of EPRDF loyalists, making them expendable, merely instruments of his own purposes.

Just look at Ethiopian websites to see how prevalent is the opinion amongst Ethiopians that this is not a war for Ethiopia, but another attempt by Meles to divert attention from his own political crisis. It is a demonstration of how desperate he is to save himself from the death of his own failing regime. This is not a government elected by the people, but yet Meles now wants to “use” these very same people. He denied the people of Ethiopia their rights to a fair election in 2005 when without basis, he self-proclaimed the EPRDF as the winners. He is now using their young people to fight a war where they may lose their lives.

Why should they fight “his fight for survival” when his survival means more of the same oppression and brutality to the people of Ethiopia? How outrageous! It testifies to the moral vacuum that exists within the government! There is great reason to question fighting against those “on the outside” when we Ethiopians are suffering so much because of the “EPRDF terrorists in our midst.”

How many in our larger Ethiopian family are now locked up in prison? How many have been massacred, tortured or have starved to death when it could have been prevented? Do we have freedom, liberty or the rule of law? Do our children have the benefit of an education? Are Ethiopians better off than when the Derg was in power—or than we were five years ago?

A second essential question to ask is, do we have a legitimate right to enter Somalia and attack them? How would most countries react if thousands of troops were sent across an international border? Yet, this is allegedly what Meles has done in Somalia. Meles admitted to sending some military advisors, but denied sending thousands of Ethiopian troops into Somalia. However, who can trust Meles? A later UN report indicated there were 8000 Ethiopian defense troops in Somalia. No wonder Somalis are angry! What he is doing is provoking a war with our neighbors that could have long-lasting and devastating results to all of us.

To ever justify a war, the reasons must be very strong. What are we fighting for?

In Canada, the United States and other free societies, people are willing to defend the maintenance of the freedoms and liberties they find so precious, but will fighting this war prevent our own family members from being detained, tortured or killed with the end resulting on freedom for Ethiopia?

Instead, Ethiopia has deteriorating politically, economically and socially. Development and the infrastructure have regressed or have been destroyed by EPRDF defense troops in many areas like much the case in Gambella. Meager attempts in the past towards democracy building have degenerated even further and Ethiopia has become a totalitarian state.

We are dying of HIV, malaria, dysentery and starvation. We are at the bottom of almost every index, including amongst our African brothers and sisters, yet this regime advances an elitist and proud attitude over other Africans-- for what reason?

Meles sounds the alarm that the terrorists are coming, but why do we think we can believe this government? If there were a real threat to Ethiopia, why should we trust that the EPRDF will really address it and actually stop terrorism from coming to Ethiopia (that is, terrorism from outsiders)?

Muslims, Christians and Jews in Ethiopia have enjoyed amicable relations for years, but Meles appears to want to create the threat of religious division as a legitimate basis for this new war. But, he has had to again put his blood-stained gloves on to try to make his case. There are new allegations that Meles has “fomented and staged” religious conflict to do it¹ and then called on his “religious” pro-government loyalists to support him even against the people of faith in their own community of believers!

This occurred in September and October of this year in the Oromia region where reports to the Anuak Justice Council (AJC) from witnesses on the ground testified that EPRDF defense troops, accompanied by militia groups, were secretly involved in the slaughter of Christians, instead of the new emergence of “radical Muslims” in Ethiopia as reported in the international press. We have heard that Muslims in other areas were killed, but we have no current information as to whether EPRDF troops were involved; however, we do have reports from witnesses that EPRDF defense troops were encouraging Christians to retaliate against Muslims.

¹ Please see the Anuak Justice Council’s website (www.anuakjustice.org) for a previous article, “The Anuak Justice Council Warns All Ethiopians: Beware of the Hate Plan to Divide Muslims and Christians,” released November 1, 2006.

The AJC put out a press release warning Ethiopians to avoid falling into this potential trap meant to establish a reason for keeping Meles in power. Now this “staged and EPRDF fomented violence” is being used as a basis for declaring war on Somalia! To further this outrageous deceit, Elias Redman, the vice president of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) was quoted in a recent article² where he blamed 500 extremists who he said had been trained in Somalia. He reports to Agence France-Presse in an interview in Addis Ababa, “There is a small minority [of Islamic fundamentalists] in Ethiopia, not more than 500 fanatics, but trained in Somalia and very active.” The author of the article indicates that Mr. Elias and his organization support the war with Somalia.

Who is Elias Redman? He is Sheik Elias Redman who was one of the two judges out of eight on the Commission of Inquiry who voted no—essentially supporting that the EPRDF government of Meles did not use excessive violence during the peaceful student rally protesting the outcome of the national election of 2005 where 193 unarmed Ethiopians were shot dead by EPRDF security forces. Others on the Commission, like Judge Woldemichael Meshesha, Judge Frehiwot Samuel and Ato Mituku Teshome, had to flee for their lives into exile for following their consciences and voting for truth. Sheik Redman and Dr. Mekonnen Disasa were the only two who supported Meles.

Why should he be believed now as he has turned his back on the Ethiopian people? How can a religious leader lead when he is allegedly under the control of the government? This can happen in any faith and with any leaders willing to compromise their beliefs out of fear or for other unknown reasons. Yet, he is right when by default, he talks about the overwhelming religious tolerance of others in Ethiopia towards each other.

The following is an example of such good relations as recently told to the AJC. One Ethiopian man recently told us about his experience with religious tolerance in the North part of Ethiopia in 1981. When he visited, he wanted to attend the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but was told that a key was needed to open the church. Because the head of the church was out of the area, they would have to go to Muhammad, the head of the local mosque, for the key. The two leaders had so much trust and respect for each other that despite their differences of belief, one could help out the other when the other was away. This is the history of religious tolerance in Ethiopia.

In addition, Meles claims that Ethiopia is a Christian nation, but its people are at least half Muslim. It appears as if he is manipulating the facts and circumstances for his own self-interests, ultimately attempting to divide the two religious and betraying both as a result. With one hand, Meles is said to be promoting Islamic Wahabism throughout Ethiopia through his close association with people like Sheik Al-Moudi while with the other hand, he allegedly is willing to fight for a “less radical” Islamic government in Somalia.

It is understandable if this is all very confusing. To simplify, it appears that Meles is on the side that will most help him hang onto power. Due to the cycle of famine and political mismanagement, corruption Ethiopia has become a “donee,” country, to influence with huge amounts of world resources from donor countries enabling it to play the bloody and victim-filled game of how to destroy or be destroyed. This is opportunism at its worst.

² Ethiopian Muslims condemn 'radical views' of neighbors”, WORLD BRIEFINGS, By Emmanuel Goujon, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, December 7, 2006 , ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia

It is a dangerous war of trickery and if it is successful, the ongoing issues of the widespread human rights abuses, the sabotage of the democratic process and the imprisonment of the opposition leaders and thousands of other political prisoners throughout the country will disappear. None of these issues were given hardly any importance in the international news media, but now, as the crisis between Ethiopia and Somalia is gathering much interest, it will be sure to overpower these other important issues directly affecting Ethiopians.

Meles, and others supporting him, should be aware that once a war is started with Somalia, it will ignite the tensions in the Horn of Africa and be difficult to control. It may set off equally tense problems within Ethiopia because fewer and fewer Ethiopians are willing to sit by and do anything as their “un-elected leader” forces them into a war that is unjustifiable. Many Ethiopians and Somalis will be killed needlessly.

Negotiation and other less invasive alternatives should be tried, tried and tried again. Ethiopia is in such a mess themselves, how can they help another country improve that is also struggling with the desire for freedom, liberty and the rule of law? It is the blind leading the blind. If one looks historically at the background of Meles and his loyal EPRDF supporters, one will see a pattern of immoral acts committed to gain and maintain power and control. Many lives of human beings were lost in the process with little apparent regard for their worth, but with much calculation as to how to avoid responsibility for it.

For example, when the EPRDF government troops killed the Anuak in Gambella in December of 2003, they blamed others for it, as they did not want to ruin their image. For such heartless perpetrators of human rights crimes, the EPRDF is extremely sensitive to how they appear to others; after all, it could threaten the affections of those handing out the money.

Another more recent example of such government perpetrated violence, followed by a subsequent cover-up, is that of the killing of 193 protestors following the election by the EPRDF government in June and November. After agreeing to an investigation into the killings due to international pressure, a board of commission was appointed to investigate the killings.

According to recent testimony from the above-mentioned judges, who sought asylum due to threats against them, they exposed that Meles had instructed the commission that they should use the example of the Anuak massacred, Gambella investigative report (a white-washed report) as the model of how they should complete their own investigation into whether the government used excessive force.

When the report was leaked that the government used excessive force and that government security forces had killed 193 people, almost simultaneously, as previously referred to, there were reports in the news regarding the religious conflict in Oromia. The timing appeared to be used as a way to divert attention away from the report and to secure new support from the west for the War on Terror.

After the judges testified before the US Congress and exposed the facts that Meles had indeed used excessive violence, Meles almost immediately announced that a war with Somalia was imminent. It appears he was highly embarrassed because he had appointed the board himself and eight out of ten of them had opposed him, refusing to adopt his “spin” on the violence, despite high levels of pressure. This kind of attitude of self-protection by any means, even to the extent of taking others’ lives, not only has to change for Meles, but for all Ethiopians who are seeking real change for their country and for Africans wanting the same for the continent. Our leaders get into power and refuse to leave. In their attempts to hang on to power, they forget about the dignity and worth of other human beings and trample on the rights and lives of others.

In every society there are people who are willing to take a stand for truth and right and those eight on the Commission of Inquiry, who stood up against the pressure, are some of those. They are heroes—champions of humanity. The government harassed, threatened and attempted to bribe them out of their moral convictions, but they did not succeed. They chose to follow their consciences. It is so encouraging and inspiring seeing such people who love the truth to the point they are willing to sacrifice so much.

If Meles really understood that some day he will ultimately be held accountable before God, he might not have insisted on a false report like given by the Gambella Commission of Inquiry, or cited it to be used by the Inquiry Commission as a “good” example to emulate. If he knew that life is given by God and could be taken by God at any time; that we have only a short time here on earth to accomplish what God wants us to do and then to face judgment for an eternity, he may not have been so quick to hide the injustice, oppression and suffering he is inflicting on the weak and powerless.

Each of us must choose how to use our lives and if we miss God’s real purposes for us, which always include loving, caring, nurturing others as ourselves, we can end up inflicting hatred, pain and suffering on others. We must consider that the luxury we seek, should not come at the expense of others who want to feed and care for their loved ones and themselves. We should live as if we could face such judgment tomorrow. Yet we need good examples and leadership, but where is it?

Our souls are exploding with eagerness for guidance from our political leaders, but nothing is coming out from them except for infighting within and between groups. Instead it is a time to join together to fight against the evil system that Meles leads, but as we fight, he is laughing at our dilemma.

We are constantly responding to some new action by the EPRDF government, like the declaration of war against Somalia. We are on the defensive instead of being pro-active with our own agenda that has unified backing. While the Kinijit is fighting like two elephants against each other, we are the grass that is being pushed down upon in-between the two of them.

Ninety-five percent of the Ethiopians involved in the Diaspora were jolted to involvement because of the millions coming out for the rally, election and post-election protests. They saw that the people of Ethiopia were ready for change. When the protestors were shot in June and November their passion to help deepened. However, when the opposition leaders were imprisoned, the movement lost its direction and some of its fire, but now that the leaders are divided, many are losing their hope. As this continues, those unwilling to pick sides may go back to their apartments and disappear again. This would be a tremendous loss for all of us and a victory for our adversary.

Yes, some of the fighting may ultimately refine each side and give more integrity to the organization, but it is taking precious time and we are losing casualties along the way. We must stop giving Meles reason to celebrate. Keep in mind, if our leaders are not leading in the direction you believe is right, speak up and sound the alarm so we do not go down together. We are at the side of the river and must cross, but we have to get in the right canoe. The river is full of crocodiles so be sure the one who is to give you a ride to the other side knows how to paddle or you both might drown. We can hold our leaders accountable, making sure they “know how to paddle” until we can all find our way to the other side of the river without being eaten by the crocodiles. But, it is very important—do not give up on the wrong side of the river. We must keep working.

For the sake of the country, we must put aside some of our differences and start caring about people in different groups outside our own such as the people of Ogaden who are under much difficulty now that the focus is on Somalia. It will have a tremendous impact on the region. Right now, less is going on with the Anuak in Gambella, partly because so many troops are in Ogaden, but now the EPRDF is looking for 1400 young Anuak men who survived the massacre to go fight for Meles! Meles will kill the Anuak either way.

At the same time that we should be caring more about some of the groups in most jeopardy, we should also be doing more ourselves to correct the situation rather than expecting the US, Canada, UK or other western countries to solve our problems. We must take ownership of the problems facing Ethiopians, as we are the primary stakeholders in our own country. However, we cannot be so focused on our fear, especially in the Diaspora. Those outside Ethiopia frequently say that are afraid to speak up here in the west, fearing that they will not be allowed to go back to Ethiopia. But we should ask, what country will we have to go back to if this oppression and injustice continues to go on and we do nothing to stop it?

Those in the Diaspora must do as much as they can, but the real work of pursuing freedom must come from those actually living in Ethiopia. Remember the millions who came out to rally for change and the many more millions that came out to vote. Remember those who died protesting the hijacking of the election. The challenges are great, but not unattainable.

We have examples in our history. When the Italians invaded Ethiopia, Ethiopians did not wait for outsiders to come to help. They used whatever tools they had available and eventually succeeded. A major obstacle to us now is the loss of unity and a sense of powerlessness that predominates our thinking.

Remember the Biblical verse where Jesus says, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.”³ We are called to persist boldly in prayer and to “not give up.”⁴ Recently, a parliamentarian from South Africa shared with members of the AJC that before apartheid fell in South Africa, 70,000 people had come out to a stadium and had prayed for change. She was convinced that it created a miracle for South Africa where truth and reconciliation hearings replaced violence and killing. It enabled a wounded people and society to join together through confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. It made it possible for South Africa to move on and flourish in a way that probably would never have happened otherwise.

Right now, we urgently need people who will not give up despite the odds. We must be pro-active rather than defensive or passive. What we have seen is this: Meles does something and Ethiopians react. It is about time that we do something and put Meles in the position of reacting. We must join together, not only against a system that needs a major change, but also for the change of our thinking that must take place to ensure that it promotes more than just a superficial political change.

We must be rid of the thinking that supports an uncaring attitude about others outside our groups. Until we can care enough about others—until we are willing to protect them from harm and until we grieve for them during their losses, we will remain stuck in a social system built to fail.

³ Luke 18:27

⁴ Luke 18:1

For instance, our precious Tigrayan children of today and tomorrow should not suffer because of Meles. Their Tigrayan families may be holding back their support of ousting Meles because they are afraid that should he fall, other Ethiopians, with hate-filled hearts against Meles, would recklessly seek revenge on any Tigrayan without regard to guilt or innocence. That would be evil! It would be an outrage against God and humanity and a horrible shame to our nation. We would become the new Meles' of the future! May God forbid that we would take on the role of the destroyers of our own people and nation—the Hitlers of Ethiopia!

We must seek justice and accountability for the guilty instead of seeking ethnic vengeance. Ethnically based vengeance or privilege to the harm of others is the kind of tribalistic thinking that is cursing us and so many others in Africa. If we call ourselves members of a civil society, we must reject this thinking and stop it in whatever way is possible. Instead, we must love the rule of law and establish justice that is fair and equitable for all people in Ethiopia. Because we know we are imperfect people, we must protect ourselves from ourselves. That protection must have truth as its foundations so that our laws are based on that truth. For example, until our government develops laws to protect the weak from the strong and implements such laws fairly, we will continue to use and abuse fellow human beings.

Yet, a strong legal foundation cannot compensate for a lack of moral conviction and discipline in a society. Societies that are most free and flourishing are those where its individual members are ruled first by his or her conscience, affecting their daily relationships around them. As this becomes a widespread value throughout the society, a society is transformed.

Without such a moral, Ethiopia can have the best Constitution in the world, but still miserably fail unless the Ethiopian people grasp how important it is to examine one's own life with God's view of it in mind rather than our own limited view. This view allows the same freedoms to anyone, regardless of their values, beliefs and individual attributes.

If Meles really understood that he is not here forever would he do the same? Would his desperate search for self-importance and self-fulfillment at the expense of others be worth it once on his deathbed? Would he have really accomplished anything? Does he have a transforming faith in God? He will have to answer those questions himself, but so must we for ourselves.

We must ask ourselves why we have been given the gift of life and how can we use it in a way that is honoring to our Creator? The life you have is not yours, but has been handed to you by God. Would our families who brought us into this world, believe we accomplished anything if we used our life to kill, torture and oppress the children of other people?

We must apply these principles to people outside our families, clans, villages and ethnic and religious groups. God created them also and we should not look down on His creation but instead show love, care and respect towards others no matter what their race, religion, ethnic background, gender, age or educational background.

We must give up thinking that “my tribe is best” or that light skinned is better than dark-skinned or that women can be mistreated and abused because they are physically weaker. We are not as good of people as we think. We must destroy the thinking that is destroying us individually, as families, ethnic groups and as Ethiopians, as Africans and as human beings.

We should consider what our purposes might be and pursue them even if they do not bring fame, power or riches. The rewards of the simple life, lived well, may be far greater than the life lived in the public eye, with much public attention, esteem and wealth. It may be the life lived caring for others around each of us, in simple ways that may be most honoring to God as long as we seek His purposes first.

In our culture, oftentimes we have taken “tribal” positions where once we disagree with someone, we make it into a disagreement with another human being rather than with the idea or philosophy of that person. What has frequently resulted is the stirring up of anger between the other person’s “tribe” and your own. Rather than debate the idea, the person and the person’s “tribe” is rejected or attacked—sometimes in revenge with the loss of lives. Each “tribe” covers up for its own members and applies the law inequitably towards those outside their groups. Some of our political leaders think democracy should only apply to them and not outsiders from their group.

This is why the opposition leaders are locked up. Meles liked democracy for himself and “his tribe only.” We must also learn how to lose. Knowing how to accept losing is an extremely important part of getting along in this world.

All of this thinking must change if we are to become a civil society, respecting each other and learning from each other. The way we think is the way we are. Unless we re-examine our ideas and discard the bad ones, we will not succeed and will continue to traumatize other human beings. We will be held accountable some day for that.

People need to ask themselves these questions early in life and regularly thereafter, especially people in powerful positions who can make life better or worse for others. We Ethiopians are in a position where we are balancing on a dangerous precipice of war. We should evaluate whether the factual basis for this war is propaganda meant to prolong a brutal regime or whether there is actual danger facing Ethiopia.

Right now the “Meles tribe” is in power rather than Ethiopians. This does not include most Tigrayans, but a favored few—the rest are intimidated, controlled or in secret opposition. By lies, cover-up, harassment, threats and oppression, this small favored group has maintained their position and benefits, which are many. Until we Ethiopians refuse to replace the “Meles tribe” with another “tribe”, we are dangerous to each other! Unless we replace our tribal thinking with broader acceptance of Ethiopians as human beings, not emphasizing our ethnicity, we will never be free and ready for liberation. We need someone who is a human being first and then an Ethiopian.

A Meles “look alike,” with simply another face, is not freedom. It is not what we need. We need a moral transformation. We need to value human life outside our groups as we do in our own groups. Until then, let our suffering and pain become our teachers until we learn well the lessons of being human from God’s perspective.

In the meantime, let us try to solve our problems in our own country without inflicting harm on others. The Somali people must also rise up to take action for what they want as a people. If they desire freedom, liberty and the rule of law, it cannot be based on tribalistic thinking like we have in Ethiopia or it is doomed to fail.

May Ethiopians, Somalis, Eritreans, Sudanese, and others in the Horn and throughout Africa, be freed from the bondage and destruction caused by our own thinking. God has a long history of releasing people from bondage and slavery. May God show us how to do it without killing each other!

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