



AigaForum versus Obang Metho: Is there Racism in Ethiopia?

| February 12, 2009

On the morning of February 4, an Ethiopian friend called me and asked, “Did you know you were on AigaForum?” (For those readers not familiar with AigaForum, it is well known to Ethiopians as being the EPRDF government controlled website.) I asked him, “What am I doing on AigaForum?”

I then learned that my picture was posted alongside the picture of Michael Steele, the new chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC) with the header over our pictures: “Window Dressing,” accompanied by a short article where it was claimed that *we were both being “used” by our respective groups to falsely present the impression that minorities had a meaningful role within their power structures when in fact, such roles were only reserved for “insiders.”*

This is the picture as it appeared on AigaForum on 2/4/2009)



My phone has not stopped ringing ever since, with calls from diverse Ethiopians who are outraged, embarrassed and ashamed! In less than 24 hours, the pictures and article were removed, but it is too late. I have already saved the article. I think an “Ethiopian can of worms” has been opened!

First of all, I want to apologize to Michael Steele on behalf of the countless numbers of Ethiopians who do not support the demeaning statements made about him on AigaForum. For those who do not know, Chairman Steele comes to the Republican National Committee (RNC) with excellent credentials including being the first elected African American to public office in Maryland when he became the lieutenant governor there in 2002.

He is recognized by his party to be an outstanding communicator, recently attaining his position as head of the RNC through wide grass roots support and due to the respect of his colleagues, being picked over four other candidates, including former President Bush's own choice for that position. *Part of his platform was to better reach out to "friend and foe alike." He said, "This is the dawn of a new party moving in a new direction with strength and conviction."*

Chairman Steele might be mistaken for **Habesha**, (አበሻ) or an Ethiopian from the highlands of our country, yet those behind the AigaForum article, are known to be closely aligned with the TPLF, which is made up of people who look very much like him. What must he think of this? In fact, what would Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the greatest promoters of equal opportunity for people of all skin colors, think of this? How about Mandela, Obama or the RNC?

Some very reliable sources, who do not want to be identified, indicate that the source of this AigaForum article came from some in the Ethiopian Diaspora who are very connected with the Meles government and the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington D.C., even identifying more specifically who is behind this—with their names and their pictures.

We believe that the editor of AigaForum, Mr. Zeru Hagos, the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington D.C and the EPRDF should take responsibility for this and publicly apologize to Chairman Steele, the Republican National Committee who are being insulted for disingenuously electing him as well as apologizing to me and the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia.

I have already contacted Chairman Steele's office and shared with them the entire AigaForum article with our side-by-side picture. They were very interested and I will be following up with them, possibly meeting together with him face-to-face within the next two weeks, so that respect and civility can return to our political debates.

My hope is to help restore broken relationships

Despite the intentions of the EPRDF to point fingers at others in order to divide us, *we must use this very negative action in a way that will prevent hatred from overcoming our struggle for "the dawn of a New Ethiopia." What man intends for evil, God can use as an opportunity for good and that is what I intend to do, but to do so, I must bring up a topic that no one has wanted to talk about—racism in Ethiopia. My hope is to help restore broken relationships, stop the dehumanization of some in our society by others, to bring greater opportunity for reconciliation, to help us move ahead together and to embrace all in the family of Ethiopia.*

Let me review the major quote from the AigaForum article by first explaining that this one is in response to a previous article written in Amharic by Tekla Michael, an Ethiopian from Vancouver. The following is an English translation of his chosen title: *"It used to be "O" for Obama and Obama has accomplished his mission but now "O" is for Obang--Ethiopian Obama has been born,"* In his Amharic article, http://www.ecadforum.com/files/Editorial_About_Obang.pdf, Tekla compares my ideas and the fact that I am a minority speaking a message that could unify diverse Ethiopians, with Obama, who was also a minority who was unifying Americans with his own message.

In response to Tekla's article, the author of the AigaForum article writes:

"So the buzz word "Paradigm Shift" is being heard by the high priests. The recent "Obangiye" (the same Obang who recently found out the Diaspora politician in all the meeting he canvassed are all over 50) is as transparently phony as the selection of Michael Steel for the RNC. Michael Steel has as much chance to rustle the party form the Rush Limbaugh as any third party winning the presidency in the USA. The pain of coming to terms with reality!" (As it appeared on AigaForum on 2/4/2009)

Meles regime has made an art of using minorities for their own “window dressing,”

The author of this article, whose position was obviously supported by AigaForum where it appeared, was accusing the Ethiopian opposition in the Diaspora and the RNC, for what was claimed to be a “pretense of inclusion,” but it is not difficult to see through the motives of the EPRDF. They would like to divide the opposition into at least two camps:

- 1) those who would react in defense of me and the basic principles of the Solidarity Movement, which includes not only minorities, but also many wonderful Ethiopians from “the dominant” culture who recognize the evil of our “apartheid-like” system, and**
- 2) those who are part of the old entrenched power system that holds tightly to the historic entitlement of dominant cultural groups, one at a time, controlling everyone else even while sometimes preaching the gospel of unity and democracy.**

In an overused practice of divide and conquer, the TPLF leaders want to both outrage the first group against the second and then embarrass and disempower the second by suggesting they are talking about inclusion only for their own self-interests. In this way, they may have thought they could defeat both at the same time. The hypocrisy of it is almost a joke because the Meles regime has made an art of using minorities for their own “window dressing,” using them when convenient and discarding them for that same reason.

Even this AigaForum article is “using my skin color” to discredit others for doing the same thing, but we can see through it. *Yet, it is not only the TPLF who have smiled, flattered and “strategically” included minorities as a cover up for an attempt to sabotage, exploit, destroy or hijack something or someone else; in fact, many from both minority and dominant groups, have even personally warned me of the potential for this happening because some are threatened by “a new paradigm” that led to the formation of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE).*

However, I want to calm those fears, *for this movement is not a movement of a tribe, an individual or a political group, but a movement initiated by diverse people on behalf of the people because of our past failure as a society to uphold the rights of all our people.* That is why the core principles of the Solidarity Movement are summarized in these two statements: **“humanity before ethnicity”** and **“no one is free until we all are free.”** Anyone agreeing with these principles is invited to come and be part of this movement because it is a movement for all people. *It is not a movement to run the country, but to empower the people, to educate the people and to free the country so we can live in a healthier society.* We will work with existing organizations and ones still to be formed if we have goals in common.

We must find ways stop the racism and dehumanization of millions

In order to pave the way to better work together, we must find ways stop the racism and dehumanization of millions of Ethiopians. Many have told me that they are very nervous about addressing this topic because they are ashamed and embarrassed by its presence in our society; however, where has this approach gotten us?

An African American friend told me that during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, some of his family members had been willing to go to Africa and to fight on the side of Ethiopia, but later on were told that Ethiopians did not consider themselves as African and black so they did not go. That was nearly 70 years ago and what progress has been made through our silence? It is a pervasive part of our society that must be uncovered if it is to be corrected.

Some excuse it by saying such racism is only ignorance. That may be true, but it is also more than that because the consequences of this thinking have inflicted pain, suffering and even death. It is based on falsely measuring the worth of a human being on their skin color, rather than on the fact that every one of us equally reflects the image of God.

Therefore, black is not better than white or vice versa; nor are the shades in-between less or more valuable than the next; nor is a poor child less valuable than a wealthy man; nor is a well educated person more valuable than one who has been born with less ability to learn. If others can only feel better about themselves by pushing you, me or someone else down, why should we accept this as valid?

We now have an opportunity to face this issue that has never really been openly discussed. I believe *Ethiopians are fully capable of hearing the truth and responding in ways that will build, not destroy, a society that must learn how to put humanity before ethnicity and to care for their neighbors because none of us will be free until we all are free.*

I had the option to become angry and bitter, but instead chose to reach out to others

I would not be part of this struggle except for the December 13, 2003 massacre of 424 Anuak, followed by many more, perpetrated by Ethiopian troops who have still not been held accountable. What attitudes towards this minority group caused other Ethiopians, especially those from the dominant cultural groups, to ignore this horrific event as if it never happened or at least, was not important?

I had the option to become angry and bitter, but instead chose to reach out to others, believing that otherwise, this cycle of violence towards each other would never stop. What I have discovered is that despite the elitist attitudes and narrow-mindedness of some, *I have met countless Ethiopians throughout the world from different tribes, regions, religions and backgrounds who are truly good and wonderful human beings. These are people who are not infected with this racist and tribal mentality that is tearing Ethiopia apart like wild animals attacking their prey.*

This decision to reach out to Ethiopians was opposed by some within my own ethnic group because many of these “other” Ethiopians came from the same dominant ethnic groups who were held responsible for oppressing us in the past. *I knew it would not be easy, but I knew it was what God wanted me to do, and that for me, it was the right and moral thing to do.*

When I met with these Ethiopians from previously alienated groups, we discovered our mutual humanity and that the bonds of friendship and love can replace the chains of hatred and division. Hate, greed and the devaluation of other human beings have taken away the precious lives of many Anuak, but God can see that their lives are not lost in vain if *it opens up new possibilities for major societal reconciliation and transformation in Ethiopia.*

Our society can move ahead, not just one or two select groups—but all of us

I love my fellow Ethiopians and now I want diverse Ethiopians to love and value each other. This is the purpose of speaking frankly to you about life in Ethiopia from the perspective of those who have been left out for years. Some of the things I am going to say, you may not like, but it has to be said so all within *our society can move ahead, not just one or two select groups—but all of us!* Are we Ethiopians ready to break our “no talk” rule and begin our own Civil Rights Movement? *We all are socialized to keep the truth about our systemic racism a secret from outsiders, but ask any minority or darker-skinned Ethiopian about its reality and they will say that it is a major factor affecting them in daily life and limiting opportunity for them and their children.*

With the election of Obama, it becomes all the more confusing for some Ethiopians to know with whom to identify. If one identifies with Obama as being a minority who has finally “found a voice,” how does that translate into Ethiopian society? It has become an embarrassing predicament, but repressing the discussion will not make it go away.

Let us approach this issue with honesty, respect, civility and the expectation that change is not only possible, but is part of becoming a healthy and well-functioning society. However, this discussion cannot stop at skin-color, but it is also time for us to rethink our attitudes that use superficial distinctions such as ethnicity, gender, education, culture, language, religion and disability as the reason to dehumanize, marginalize, exclude, exploit or oppress others.

May I first clarify my belief that there are usually not clear and easy lines between *people as being all good or all bad or as being only victims or only perpetrators for a victim can turn around and degrade others just like Meles has done. He went into to the bush to fight against human rights abuses only later to become what he fought against.* However, in the case of Ethiopia, most would admit that the minorities of every type have remained at the bottom of our power structure. In fact, there are so many of them, that they could be the majority of the population of the country.

This entire issue of race, ethnicity, privilege and exclusion must be faced head on

If we are to build a “new Ethiopia”, this entire issue of race, ethnicity, privilege and exclusion must be faced head on. This is an invitation to all Ethiopian politicians, human rights activists, scholars, religious leaders, policymakers, community leaders and people at the grassroots level to come forward to participate in this discussion. There must be a unity of the people—not based on tribe—if there is to be a unity of the society. Let it start by acknowledging what has been going on.

To begin with, in the not so distant past, many of our fellow Ethiopians—especially those dark-skinned people from the southwest or south—were taken as slaves, frequently with the help of others from different tribes and ethnicities. Reminders of this sordid past are still around us and we cannot simply sweep them under the carpet.

For instance, the name of the river that runs through Gambella Town is the Openo River, but the river is still most frequently called the “Baros River” or “slave river.” from the Ge'ez ባሪያ or Baria’ for an individual and Barios for many (Baros river). There is also a little river east of Gambella town on the way to the highlands that is called “Baroskala.” In English it means “slave check point” or “slave border.”

Our dark-skinned people are still called “ባሪያ or Baria” or “Shanqella (Ge'ez ሻንቅላ)” throughout the country. This is not unusual, but instead, it is extremely common and we are talking about millions of people being included in these degrading categories. The whole of the ethnic groups in the Benishangul-Gumuz region are called “Shanqella” which is another word for slave in Amharic. The name of the region up until 1991 was always called “Shankalla.” When the Benishangul Liberation Movement was formed, they changed the name of the region to its current name of Benishangul-Gumuz, which means “land of gold.”

My job, in addition to defending human rights, has also evolved into defending Ethiopians to outsiders as not all being racist

Because of some of these things, *my job, in addition to defending human rights, has also evolved into defending Ethiopians to outsiders as not all being racist, while at the same time informing them that all Ethiopians are not light-skinned, but that there are millions of Ethiopians within the country who are dark like me.*

An African American from Washington D.C. who used to work for the US Embassy in Ethiopia told me, *“Some of your fellow countrymen have to come to Washington D.C. to discover that they are black.”* He said when he had worked in Ethiopia it was sometimes like being a black in the South during the sixties. I told him that this may be true, but I told him that this was not true of many Ethiopians because there were many wonderful Ethiopians who were rejecting this way of thinking. Unfortunately, this issue has repeatedly come up.

Another influential African policy decision-maker of African American descent told me he had gone to school *“with some of Ethiopian in the fifties” who similarly denied being black. At the time, he said he told them that if they did not think they were black, they should go to the South in Alabama and try to vote.* Do we Ethiopians condemn this kind of exclusion as wrong for whites in the South, pre-Civil Rights, while not confronting it in our own society as wrong in 2009?

While I was giving a lecture to students at Columbia University in 2007, a white human rights law professor asked a question in front of the group. He said, *“I’ve been in Ethiopia and working with your people, but your people are racist against the dark-skinned people. How do you cope with them? If true human rights are to prevail, you are someday going to have to address racism.”* Again, I said that it is not all Ethiopians, but only some.

In 2007, I was at a professional office with several other Ethiopian friends of light skin color. While there, a young African American woman, serving as an intern, walked in and another Ethiopian who just joined us turned to my friends and asked, *“Where did this ባሪያ or baria come from?” No one responded because they knew I was there. The man who made the comment then looked at me and said, “Oh, I’m sorry.”* Because the girl was still there, I tried to respectfully confront him in Amharic on this statement, but said nothing to the girl because I wondered what she would think of us.

At another time, I was with four Anuak in Calgary, Canada, when we went out to an Ethiopian restaurant. As we entered, the waitress spoke in Amharic to others, asking them whether Sudanese barias ate injera. One of the Anuak in our group was very upset and responded to the waitress in Amharic before walking out of the restaurant.

We dark-skinned minorities have been dealing with this for years and even though we can say it comes from one’s own ignorance, lack of education or need to feel superior to someone else, we cannot say it is not a big deal because it is a big deal to people who are repeatedly treated this way. The word in America for baria is the “n” word, which is not ever said; however, this is not the case in Ethiopia where it is widely accepted, regularly used to insult minorities and even “affectionately” used at times with darker skinned people within one’s own family or ethnic group.

For example, when I was in California, an Ethiopian invited me to dinner at the home of someone else and a comment was made about how calling someone a baria was a way they teased people in their own family about their darker skin color. One of two sisters present remarked how her sister never minded being called a baria, but her sister immediately challenged her, responding with some frustration and anger as she asked, ***“What makes you think I don’t mind, I just don’t want to deal with it!”***

In July of 2008, during the Ethiopian soccer tournament in Washington D.C., while walking along, an older Ethiopian man stopped me and asked if I was Obang. I told him yes and he told me that he liked the work I was doing and asked if we could talk some time so I agreed to meet with him right then. He then pulled me aside and told me that he had been born in the north and was a darker-skinned Amhara.

He said that the ***“darkness issues” have never been addressed in Ethiopia and that he hoped that one day, I would speak to the public openly about it.*** He told me this was an issue ignored by even Mengistu who some people called him baria at the time he was a leader of the country because of his own dark skin. This man said that since ***he was a young man, he had been looking for a sense of belonging within his own country. He described how every time he had been called a baria, he had felt unloved and unaccepted. He explained how love was the reason we were all alive. He said that as a child, he used to ask himself after hearing these comments, “Where do I go then since this is my country?”*** Now and then, we still talk with each other. Other Ethiopians need to know what they are doing when they make these comments or exclude dark-skinned Ethiopians from being “fully Ethiopian.”

Another example was in London when I went to a hotel with my Ethiopian hosts who had picked me up from the train station. They were present as the woman checking me in the hotel commented that she did not know we were Ethiopians until we started speaking Amharic “because the guy with us (me) did not look Ethiopian.” My friend then said, “He is Ethiopia.” She then responded, ***Well, he doesn’t look true Ethiopian.*** My friend was visibly upset with her comment and kept apologizing for it.

Another friend from Toronto told me how painful it was being a darker-skinned Ethiopian from a light-skinned dominant ethnic group, similar to the man’s story above. He gave an example. He said he recently walked into a coffee shop and some unknown Ethiopians sitting down commented, ***“Who is this baria?”*** He said he replied, ***“No, no, no, I’m not a baria, I’m Ethiopian.”*** He said as someone from the north that he was “one of them,” making it all the more difficult to confront these insults that always seemed be accompanied with a certain sense of arrogance and superiority.

One man from the Southern Nations attended school in Bulgaria during the communist era and when he went to renew his visa status to continue his studies there, ***the Ethiopian Embassy Councilor called Ato Ayele Mekonin, did not believe him that he was Ethiopian despite the ID card he had and so they demanded that he return to Ethiopia.*** Some of his Bulgarian friends then helped him obtain authorization to remain to no credit of the Ethiopian Embassy. When he told me this two months ago in London, he questioned if people like this ambassador were in positions of hiring people, would they give a dark-skinned Ethiopian a job?

I personally have also experienced and witnessed some of this many times as have most every person who is a dark-skinned Ethiopian; however, one particularly outrageous experience occurred in July of 2003 I was in Addis Ababa and there was a soccer tournament between Ethiopia and Uganda, but ***every time the Ugandese team scored, the crowd started shouting and screaming “barios” and I knew the only reason that these insults were not directed at me was because I was not out on the field.*** After coming from Canada, this was a jolting experience to hear the widespread acceptance of such racial insults to guests in your own country. If I had spoken up, I was certain I would have provoked violence. It was an extremely painful experience.

Here is another example. After the Ethiopian and Eritrean war of 1998, the BBC went to cover what had happened and found exposed corpses of dead soldiers who had died defending Ethiopia. *The reporters asked why they were never buried and were told that it was because they were the dark ones (from the south or Gambella) and no one wanted to bother burying them. When I read this, I cried. Can you imagine how the families of these dead soldiers would feel about this if they knew? These soldiers were being used to die for this country, but were not considered worthy enough for a burial. This is so sad.* That article is still available on line for anyone who wants to check it out.

No wonder so many within the borders of Ethiopia want to break away from the country

This is an issue that has never come out and been dealt with openly for the last 3000 years. No wonder so many within the borders of Ethiopia want to break away from the country—the Afar, the Ogadeni, the people from South Nations, the Benishangul-Gumuz, the Oromo, the Gambellan. If you have people from six out of nine regions saying that they are not proud of being a citizen of this country and want to separate from Ethiopia, something must be wrong.

Not only have our current and past government leaders failed, so have the intellectuals, the political and civic leaders, the religious organizations, NGO's and the public. But there is a light at the end of the tunnel if we: 1) genuinely acknowledge it as wrong and that change is needed and 2) individually and collectively work to bring acceptance, equality and opportunity to all Ethiopians.

I do not see many political and non political leaders speaking about this. *We cannot simply focus on getting rid of Meles, but not offer something better. An Ethiopian from South Africa said this racism is the reason why many South Africans and others on the continent do not like Ethiopians; but he told me that if we deal with our racism and marginalization, other Africans would more likely embrace us.*

The TPLF already are pretending to include minorities, but only on the surface. For instance, they have frequently assigned dark-skinned minorities to positions representing Ethiopia within the African continent or in places like the UN in Geneva in order to appear as if “African-looking” Ethiopians had a more meaningful role in Ethiopian society than they do. If we are to genuinely change, this cannot just be “faked”, because people know the truth.

In July of 2007, I met the Ethiopian Ambassador to the EU when I was in Germany. He pulled me aside and told me that I should be careful and stop what I was doing because the Amhara were using me. I asked him, “How are they using me?” He said that I should know they consider me a baria. *My response was for him not to worry about me because if he thought they were using me, this is what his government had been doing for 17 years, otherwise a tiny minority ethnic group like his would not be ruling the country for that long.* I also told him, *“If your own government was not using others, why is it that the Ogadeni, the Gambellan, the Oromo and other ethnic groups in the liberation fronts that fought and died side by side with you are not included in your current government?”*

I concluded by telling the ambassador how *ashamed and embarrassed I was to have someone representing Ethiopia to the European Union when he was there for the sake of his own tribe rather than for the sake of his nation.* I also warned him that *this kind of dehumanization of others, coupled with this manipulation, could lead to a bloodbath or the disintegration of this country.*

We must now publicly act as I am convinced that Ethiopia has reached a tipping point.

In truth, we know that oppressed groups have repeatedly been manipulated by the TPLF through the TPLF's pretense of sympathizing with them. They have a history of approaching individual groups separately, telling these marginalized groups—like the Anuak, the Oromo and others—that they have not been treated fairly by another ethnic group. But, *their motive has not been justice, but a desire to stir up disunity, hatred and anger against “a common enemy.”*

The problem is that many have fallen for this as there is always some truth mixed in with the lie and frequently, some bitterness towards past grievances on the part of the listener. At the time, I could see that the ambassador was trying to use the same tactic with me. This is also the motive of this current AigaForum article, but *what he and others like him do not realize is that I am a totally free man. I can see that it is they who have the problem within themselves, not me.*

I want to expose this for what it is in order to help rebuild our country because I see how many Ethiopians are now privately, but vehemently rejecting this racist point of view; however, we must now publicly act as I am convinced that Ethiopia has reached a tipping point. If we continue to push aside those who have been forever marginalized, we may not have a country. If Ethiopia is to move forward to a “New Ethiopia,” it is going to require new leadership and new thinking rather than the primitive thinking from a bygone feudal or imperialistic colonial age.

I also hear the disappointment of other Africans regarding the attitude of some Ethiopians towards the dark-skinned people. This rejection is more hurtful to Africans as a whole because much more has been expected from “Ethiopians” and our leaders have not met those expectations. For example, *originally, most African slaves in America were seen as “Ethiopians” even in the early 1900's, after their emancipation, when a great African American boxer emerged, Joe Louis, who overcame all his opponents until his first loss when people said, “The Ethiopian was finally defeated.” The word Ethiopia means, “black face,” and was seen by African Americans as their mother country; yet, some Ethiopians have never accepted or embraced them or other Africans.*

Within Africa, Ethiopia has been highly esteemed for being the only African country to successfully defeat the colonialists. As a result of looking up to Ethiopians because of this, *Ghana and many other African countries, when they achieved their own independence, took one color from the Ethiopian flag for their own flag. They also chose Ethiopia as the mother country of Africa and put the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa. However, by rejecting our dark-skinned people, we are also rejecting our own African-ness. When are we going to de-colonize our Ethiopian minds?*

When someone says “Ethiopia,” what does this mean?

For example, when someone says “Ethiopia,” what does this mean? Amhara? Tigrayan? Oromo? Is there an invisible list that one is required to go by? If so, who put this list in place anyway—not the “publicly spoken” list but the “real” list? Sadly, when minorities are in the room, their name and issues will be included, but if the minorities are not present, their name and their issues are not a priority or our inclusion as Ethiopians is forgotten.

For instance, my Ogadeni friend, who has always lived in Ethiopia is fully Ethiopian, but when he is with Ethiopian friends, he is frequently introduced as friend from Somalia. This is a common oversight because the question of my Ogadeni friend, or my own “Ethiopian-ness” has been mostly questioned over the years and even well meaning friends can slip into this. This is why *change must be more deliberate and led by the countless open-minded Ethiopians, many of whom I have met.*

For years, who is included or excluded for Ethiopian citizenship seems to shift according to what is advantageous to those in power at the time and this filters down to other levels. *We must expose the double talk of our chameleon society that has repeatedly betrayed the trust between Ethiopians, especially between those in the entrenched systems of power and those who have been intentionally locked out.*

Yet, not surprisingly, all the previous governments make sure these latter groups are not “locked out” during times of war when they are again needed for fighting while at the same time, the elite in power send their children abroad for a quality education in the western Countries. *This smiling, praising and pretending that you care about someone, but then turning around and exploiting the person because they were trusting enough to believe you is too common in our dysfunctional society.*

It is truly one of the most despicable things that anyone can do to a fellow human being. The sneakiness of it—preying on the trusting—makes it worse than being openly disrespectful. This devious part of our culture must be eradicated by good Ethiopians from every ethnicity, gender, political view and religion.

A nation that does not teach its truthful history will not go anywhere.

It is only through a genuine transformation of the present—replacing the past attitudes and actions with new experiences of respect and appreciation of each other—that the power of the memories of pain, hostility and alienation will fade away enough so we are able to move on. They will not fade though if they are not dealt with. A nation that does not teach its truthful history will not go anywhere. *Look* at America where people are taught about slavery. It has better enabled African Americans to rise to the top through their hard work, skill and creativity rather than to be regularly pushed aside.

We are also seeing hope for Ethiopia through wonderful Ethiopian people like our great singers, Gossaye Tesfaye and Teddy Afro *who has brought inclusiveness and the message of true love for humanity through the lyrics of his songs. His music has brought more people together than some of our leaders who have led the country for years towards destruction rather than towards harmony, reconciliation, forgiveness, justice, peace and prosperity.* It is these powerful truths about embracing of other people that led Teddy Afro to be targeted as an enemy of this government.

Some people may wonder why I am doing this human rights work. *The reason is that I want justice, peace and the free pursuit of happiness to come to all people. Because of this, I feel compelled to confront any issues that devalue human life and that stand as obstacles to these goals, not just for me, but also for you, my fellow Ethiopian. In doing this, I also condemn ethnic politics because it marginalizes a whole society with the exception of the one tribe that is in power.* Some people may disagree with my remarks, but *the dialogue must begin if we are to survive as a people and as an Ethiopian family. This is why I always advocate for the unity of Ethiopia and even potentially, the unity of Africa.*

Some may also ask how I deal with these issues myself and I will tell you. *For me, my upbringing and my personal faith in Jesus Christ, who created me the way he wanted me, who gave his life for me, who loves me despite my flaws, who heals all my wounds and who can turn what is meant to destroy me into what can liberate me, has defeated all the arguments of those who devalue me based on superficial reasons that are grounded on lies. The same is true about my Ethiopian-ness.*

No one within the geographical boundaries of Ethiopia is more Ethiopian than another. It is based on fact. In other words, I should not need to ask anyone else for the key to open the door to my own “home”—Ethiopia! It is already mine.

This allows me to wipe off this contaminated thinking like undesirable dust on my clothes or skin. Let me help you, my dear African brother or sister, to wipe the dust off your back and than you can pass it on and do the same to the next person until we are all clean of this destructive thinking.

I hope that more and more Ethiopians—including Meles, his supporters and others who think like them—will begin to notice the dust accumulating on their own clothes and skin so that *as a nation we can once and for all embrace our African-ness and the full image of God reflected in every human being in this world. Let us be grateful for our full, rich, unique and beautiful humanity that comes down as a precious gift from our loving Almighty God.*

Action Steps:

AigaForum’s endorsement of this article is an example of what has been happening for years to the disenfranchised people of Ethiopia; yet, it is their devaluation of other people that I am condemning and asking them to condemn, not them, for they are our fellow Ethiopians and our fellow human beings. *For if some are convicted and recognize the wrong they have done, we must offer hope for the possibility of restored relationships if we are to ever have a New Ethiopia.*

No other Ethiopia can provide a true home for us and give us the unity of which we speak. This unity is not a “nationalistic fervor about our flag or our language, but a unity of the people based on deep respect for human life. The unity we must embrace for the future must be the unity of the heart that is based on mutual trust, genuine acceptance and the God-given truth of our worth.

I will make several suggestions for action steps that different parties might take to positively resolve this issue and bring healing to Ethiopia.

1. We ask AigaForum to publicly condemn their article and apologize to Chairman Michael Steele, the Republican National Committee, the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia and myself for the racially-based insults.
2. We ask the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington D.C to also condemn the article, condemn AigaForum’s posting of it and to condemn racism in Ethiopia due to what is believed to be their complicity with AigaForum in being a EPRDF propaganda machine in the Diaspora. Even if any relationship or complicity is denied, we ask that a formal statement be made condemning this type of degrading racial commentary.
3. We ask that the many Ethiopians who oppose such degradation of others, publicly condemn this by any means possible so that Ethiopians become known as people who uphold the rights, value and worth of all its citizens so that a few do not destroy the reputation of good Ethiopians who are ashamed and embarrassed by such attitudes and actions.
4. We ask that those Ethiopians who have contributed to the devaluation and demeaning of others based on skin color, culture, gender, religion, minority status or other superficial differences, cease from doing so; and instead, seek to mend broken relationships and to uphold and maintain the respect and dignity of all people.

Should not you and I treasure every one of our people as God equally treasures both them and us?

This article has been CC to: Michael Steele, the Chairman of the Republican National Committee, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (NAACP) and many more influential civil rights organizations in the United States.

Please do not hesitate to email me if you have comments to: Obang@anuakjustice.org
Obang Metho, Executive Member of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia