

MAY 28: SAVED ETHIOPIA FROM DISINTEGRATION AND LAID FOUNDATION FOR RENAISSANCE

By: Dr. Koang Tutlam Dung

The 24th Anniversary of the demise of the Derg military dictatorship has continued to be celebrated throughout the Country and missions abroad. We in Harare (Zimbabwe) Embassy celebrated the day with a well attended colorful cocktail reception on Tuesday 9 June 2015. The following is an excerpt from a speech I made during the occasion.

Ethiopia is the oldest African State which has managed to maintain continued sovereignty for more than 2000 Years. This long independence has enabled the Country to build a civilization comparable to those of great Western and Eastern civilizations. Remains of Palaces, Churches, Mosques, Monuments and Mysterious steles, dotting all corners of the Country stand witness to such great civilization. Five of those remains are among the nine registered as world heritages by UNESCO.

Ethiopia is also considered the cradle of humankind because of the discovery of the 3.2 million years old humanoid fossil, popularly known as Lucy. Lucy is considered the ancestor of modern humans. Thus, irrespective of race, color or the continent we come from, we all originate from Ethiopia. Ethiopia is your home; welcome to your home. Come and visit Ethiopia to pay homage to your ancestor Lucy, who is resting peacefully in the Ethiopian National Museum in Addis Ababa.

Despite this glorious past, recent history of Ethiopia was marred with tragedies and chaos. Ethiopia found itself in a deadly cycle of war and famine which killed millions of people and made many more refugees. The reason for this was bad governance, mismanagement and the inability of the past regimes to accommodate diversity in a Country of 96 million people and more than 80 ethnic groups. Repressions by the past regimes led to rebellion which resulted in the toppling of the Military Regime on May 28, 1991, by a coalition of rebel forces led by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). At the fall of the military regime however, the Eritrean rebels opted to form a separate state and there were 17 other ethnic based armed rebel groups whose objectives were largely secession from the rest of the Country. So many people thought it was a matter of time before the Country broke up and follow the way of

Yugoslavia. Obviously the threat of disintegration was real and only averted due to the farsightedness of the EPRDF which opted to form an all inclusive transitional Government and eventually adopted a Federal Constitution based on principle of unity in diversity. Today the Country has not only ensured peace and unity within, but also developed capacity to support Countries in the sub-region and beyond to insure peace. In this regard it's worth mentioning Ethiopia's involvement in search for peace in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, as well as peacekeeping throughout the Continent.

May 28 has also brought unprecedented economic gains for the entire Country. Ethiopia economy has been growing at a double digit in the last 12 years, with significant dividends to the common man. The Country has met ahead of times three of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including reducing extreme poverty and hunger by half, and is expected to be among the few African Countries that will meet most of the MDGs. The Country has also achieved significant gains in food security, Education, Health and power generation.

So Every year we celebrate this day we take stock of all these achievements and challenges, and map out the way forward. But this Year's celebration is different from the previous ones because it comes following the successful completion of the 5th National General Election and the First Growth and Transformation Plan, well known by its abbreviation as GTP I. While the 5th National election, which was given clean bill of health by the AU observer team led by the former Namibian President, H.E. Hifikepunye Pohamba, has helped entrenched the democratic process, GTP I has laid down the foundation for the Country's renaissance and regional integration through infrastructure connection to the neighboring Countries.

The bilateral relation between Ethiopia and Zimbabwe is a long and historic one. It dates back to the time when the people of Zimbabwe were fighting against the white minority rules of Rhodesia. My Country, Ethiopia, is proud to have made modest contributions by providing training and logistics to the then freedom fighters of this great country- Zimbabwe. The two Countries have maintained a close and cordial relations following Zimbabwe independence in 1980. Our late Prime Minister, Melese Zenawi was a great admirer of President Mugabe and both used to exchange notes on issues affecting Africa and the World at large. This cordial and close relation has continued up to date and the relation is being cemented by the Ethiopian Airlines which has continued to link the two Countries since the birth of Zimbabwe. Even during

the hard times of hyper inflation in Zimbabwe, Ethiopian Airlines did not close doors when many of its peers were running away. It stayed put because it could not abandoned a valuable friend as Zimbabwe due to a temporary problem. Thus, a friend in need is a friend in deeds. But we have to admit that besides the operations of Ethiopian Airlines, there have been very limited commercial and business connections over the years, despite huge potential. There are many commodities and products that we can trade among us. We can also benefit from each other's experience since the ZimASSET (Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation) has many commonalities with Ethiopia's GTP I. To this effect the Embassy is doing its outmost to bridge this gap by linking the businesses of the two Countries through participating in the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) and Sangana/Hlanginani, as well as, Harare International Carnival in the last two years. Some Zimbabwe Leather producers have also participated in Leather Exhibitions in Ethiopia and concluded business deals. So we will continue to encourage such linkages. On experience sharing I am glad to note that Hon. Patrick Chinamasa, Minister of Finance and Economic Development recently paid a visit to Ethiopia to share experience with his counterpart. Ethiopia is also seeking to share Zimbabwe experience in Tourism and a MOU is in the pipeline. We are hoping such experience sharing will continue to grow stronger. But I cannot wind down my speech without congratulating the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe Crd. Robert Gabriel Mugabe on his election as Africa Union Chairman. President Mugabe is one of the well respected statesmen in our continent and I believe he will steer the continent to peace and prosperity during his tenure.

As a way of conclusion, May 28 which we are celebrating for the 24th time today is a day of great importance to the contemporary Ethiopians and the future generations. It's a day which has saved our Country from disintegration, changed economic despair to hope and empowers the Country to support Countries of the sub-region and beyond in search for peace, peace building and peace keeping. Also May 28 has given the Country the capacity to support regional integration as stipulated in the AU charter. In short May 28 is a day when Ethiopia was born again and started a long, but sure way to reclaim its rightful place in the ladder of the World Civilization. It's the day which will continue to be cherished by the current generation and the generations to come.

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