

President Mursi & Co., Be Careful What You Wish for Ethiopia and the Renaissance Dam [GERD]

“With nine million Ethiopians in need of food aid [every year] and rains in the country becoming ever more unreliable, the talking [over the use of the Nile waters] should not go on too long.”

---United Nations World Food Programme, as quoted by Mike Thomson, 2005.

By Tesfaye Habisso, 13/06/2013

Introduction

In light of the above words by the World Food Programme of the United Nations and the ongoing hostile rhetoric against Ethiopia and its mega hydro-power generation dam on the Blue Nile River trumpeted by President Mursi and his allies in the Islamic parties that have dominated the nation's political marketplace for the time being, nobody in his/her right mind would fail to understand that the time for talking and diplomatic niceties with Egypt over the construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam [GERD] in particular and the common utilization of the Nile waters among the ten riparian nations equitably and reasonably without any substantial harm to any member of this bloc is long gone. The Egyptian regime does not seem to wake up from its long slumber and realize that the Nile River and its waters belong to the ten riparian nations, namely Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, the Sudan, the DRC, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda, and not to Egypt and the Sudan as the latter naively and hypocritically seek to believe and thus control the waters of the Nile watercourse for perpetuity. These two countries should realize, whether they like it or not, that times have changed fundamentally in the Sub-Saharan Africa region and across the globe, and that no earthly force can frighten the current rulers of the upper riparian countries to submission and allow Egypt and the Sudan to continue monopolizing the use and control of the Nile waters now or in the future. Under these unhealthy circumstances, the futility of securing an agreement from the current Egyptian regime of President Mursi concerning the construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam [GERD] or any other irrigation projects on the Blue Nile River and its tributaries now or in the future is quite self-evident. Ethiopia's launch of a mega dam on the Blue Nile River, known as the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam [GERD], is aimed at overcoming the energy poverty of the country (currently only 3% of Ethiopians have access to electricity whereas 70% of South Africans enjoy access to such energy) and the sub-region including Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, etc. without any substantial reductions in the flow of the Nile waters to both the Sudan and Egypt as authoritatively confirmed through thorough and reliable studies and investigations undertaken by high level experts from the three countries concerned, viz. Ethiopia, the Sudan and Egypt, in collaboration with neutral and well known international experts. If these research-based studies and confirmations by knowledgeable water sector experts are not palatable and acceptable to the current Egyptian regime and its cohorts, what better proofs and guarantees do they want? Therefore, the construction of the GERD by the Ethiopian government must continue with patriotic zeal and utmost diligence. For Ethiopians, the time now is for action and not for useless and endless talks and negotiations with Egypt. Under the prevailing circumstances, there is nothing to talk about with Egypt or

any other regional or sub-regional nation regarding this great project that will undoubtedly benefit Ethiopia and many countries of the sub-region in the area of overcoming energy poverty.

Certainly, in view of Egypt's adamant position not to agree to accept and abide by the terms of the Cooperation Framework Agreement (CFA) crafted by the Nile Basin Initiative [NBI] and also its current hostile and arrogant saber-rattling and threats of using any options to stop the construction of the GERD, there is no use in continuing the decade long talks and negotiations for eternity. The marathon talks and negotiations dubbed the Nile Basin Initiative based at Entebbe, Uganda, have already produced an internationally admired and commended framework agreement for cooperation, known as the Cooperation Framework Agreement (CFA), after more than a decade or so, and the CFA has been approved, signed and ratified by the majority of the stakeholders except Egypt, the Sudan and the DRC, the latter being coerced and manipulated by Egyptian authorities, I suppose. These three countries, more so Egypt, are holding the CFA hostage and impeding the full and timely implementation of this fair, just and legal document of cooperation based on customary international law and the evolving United Nations Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. The latter convention was approved by the UN General Assembly on May 21, 1997, by a vote of 104 to 3. This convention and customary international law require the ten riparian nations to "utilize the Nile watercourse in an equitable and reasonable manner with a view to attaining optimal and sustainable utilization and benefits consistent with adequate protection in the watercourse"; it also provides that "watercourse nations shall participate as well as cooperate in the use, development, and protection of the watercourse in an equitable and reasonable manner". [Art. 5] Egypt and the Sudan still seek to perpetuate the defunct colonial treaty of 1959 that unjustly and illegally apportioned the lion's share of the Nile waters to them only without any considerations for customary international law and the interests of the rest of the upper riparian countries. Strangely, Egypt is bent on continuing the NBI talks and negotiations for eternity until the other upper riparian countries, willingly or forcefully, accept the conditions of the 1959 Treaty that is not binding upon them or not applicable to them at all as they were not signatories of that treaty, and allow the status quo that allocates the lion's share of the Nile waters to Egypt and the Sudan continue forever at the expense of all the others. For the upper riparian nations, this scenario of a zero-sum-game is not only unacceptable, unjust, unreasonable and illegal but absolutely unsustainable as it negates the primary principle of equitable, reasonable and sustainable utilization as well as protection of the watercourse and the secondary principle of "taking appropriate measures to prevent the causing of significant harm to the other watercourse nations." [Art 7, UN Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses....]. Whether or not the latter Convention is ratified by sufficient number of UN Member countries, the above principles are already enshrined in Customary International Law and binding on all nations, as different treaties on the use of trans-boundary watercourses have amply proved. The present treaty on the equitable and reasonable utilization of the Danube River in Europe that is shared by 18 riparian nations is an illustrative example in this regard.

Significance or Implications of Current Egyptian Threats

Throughout the long history of Egypt and Ethiopia regarding the use of the Nile waters, the former's stance has always been that of waging wars and threatening wars, sponsoring rebel groups and secessionists/separatists against the latter, and not the civilized culture of peaceful dialogue, give-and-

take, cooperation, and reaching at a win-win situation that would/could have been mutually beneficial to both nations and for the sustained utilization, management, protection and development of the Nile river basin as an integral watercourse. Even though these campaigns of wars and threats of war against Ethiopia as well as instigating rebellions and sponsoring rebel movements in Ethiopia have only succeeded in wreaking tremendous losses—diplomatic, economic and social costs—on both nations, Egyptian regimes still do not seem to graduate from this bizarre and barbaric stage of human development. The saber-rattling that was echoed for the last two weeks by President Mursi and his Islamic extremists in Cairo and the other cities in Egypt is undoubtedly in footsteps with what they have inherited from their forebears and nothing new. From Mohammed Ali and Khediv Ismail in the 19th century, from Nasser to Sadat in the 20th century, and from Mubarrak to Mursi in the 21st century, successive Egyptian regimes have consistently pursued hostile policies and threats of war against Ethiopia if ‘any single drop of water of the Nile River’ were to be utilized by the very country which produces the Blue Nile waters (that contribute 85% of water to the Aswan Dam in Egypt) and which could have invoked international law’s principle of absolute territorial sovereignty and opted for the right to do whatever it chose with the water regardless of its effect on Egypt. Ethiopia, unlike Egypt, however has not chosen to become an irresponsible and selfish state and thus has never, ever taken any measures on the Nile waters that would/could have harmed the Sudanese or the Egyptian people. This was Ethiopia’s unwavering position yesterday, and it is the same position held today, and will remain so for eternity. Unfortunately and regrettably, it has been Egypt which contributes no drop of water to the Nile waters that has been utilizing a lion’s share of the Nile waters for the past several centuries, and ‘doing whatever it chose with the waters of the Nile’, denying any rights to Ethiopia and the other upper riparian countries to make use of these waters. The heretofore Egyptian position is likened to the so-called arrogant posturing of a lion vis-a-vis the majority of the timid wild animals, as told in folktales, that goes: *‘What is mine is mine but what is yours is negotiable’*. Such absurd and ridiculous position is no longer acceptable to all the upper riparian countries which have the ultimate legal and economic right to the equitable utilization of the waters of the Nile in order to overcome food insecurity and energy poverty in the face of rapidly growing populations and ever rising needs and expectations of these peoples. Sooner or later, these countries will have no other viable alternative or option but to start utilizing the waters of the Nile for irrigation, hydropower generation and for other purposes to cope with the ever growing food and energy needs of their populations. Neither Egypt nor any other regional or global body can stop these nations from using the Nile waters which flow across their sovereign territories. It is in fact absurd to think that communities in the upper riparian nations of the Nile sub- region would simply sit and starve to death and not touch a ‘single drop of the Nile waters’, lest Egypt would send its imperial forces and annihilate them mercilessly. What difference would it make for these helpless and hopeless people, ‘Oh mighty Egyptians’, if they succumbed to the perils of death by starvation and thirst or at the hands of your ‘jungle troops’, if this was ever possible for you to accomplish in the first place? It is sad that you suffer from short memories as you do not seem to remember the several misadventures and futile attempts of your forefathers in fretting to control the source of the Nile River and how they were completely annihilated by Ethiopians in the northern mountains of Ethiopia and today’s Eritrea, and how your age-long dream of occupying Ethiopia in order to gain full control of the Nile River and its waters had been shattered once and for all. For heavens sake, do you present-day Egyptian rulers think you would ever achieve that objective now or in the

future? Why trade in illusions, President Mursi and Co.? Instead, why not genuinely and meaningfully cooperate, morally, financially and technically, in Ethiopia's commendable efforts to build a mega hydro-power dam on the Blue Nile River that will benefit Ethiopia and its neighbors?

If truth be told, the only feasible and sustainable *modus vivendi* for all the upper and lower riparian countries legally entitled to the use of the Nile waters is meticulously and carefully worked out in the Cooperation Framework Agreement (CFA) by the Nile Basin Initiative over the last decade, endorsed, signed and ratified by the majority of the countries except DRC, Sudan and Egypt so far. So, the ball remains in the courts of these three countries and they better hasten to sign and ratify the CFA. There is no other viable and feasible option. There is no time for procrastination. "Time and tide wait for no man", goes the old adage.

Concluding Remarks

Threats of war against Ethiopia or any other nation(s) and any other shallow propaganda aimed at frightening the hungry populations of the sub-region do not seem to work at all; these are not feasible options in today's world. As the late Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, bluntly put it: "While Egypt is taking the Nile water to transform the Sahara Desert into something green, we in Ethiopia—who are the source of 85% of that water—are denied the possibility of using it to feed ourselves. And we are being forced to beg for food every year...The current regime cannot be sustained. It's being sustained because of the diplomatic clout of Egypt. Now, there will come a time when the people of East Africa and Ethiopia will become too desperate to care about these diplomatic niceties. Then, they are going to act." [As quoted by Mike Thomson, BBC News, Thursday, 3 February 2005]

Yes, today, the governing elites and peoples of the sub-region have become too desperate and have vowed unto themselves to change their hopeless and helpless situation through their own tireless and persistent efforts and by mobilizing their scarce finance capital, abundant land and labor resource and other meager material resources toward improving the well-being and living standards of their communities. Many countries of the sub-region such as Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya have begun building irrigation and hydro-power dams on the Nile River to meet the growing needs and expectations of their restive populations, especially in the areas of agricultural production and hydro-power generation. These economic activities are bound to increase in quantity and quality over the coming years and there is nothing Egypt can do to stop them. Ethiopia has also launched the construction of the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam [GERD] to overcome energy poverty and economic deprivation of its people. In addition, it has spearheaded many other mega projects in the areas of textile, leather, steel and sugar industries as well as massive infrastructural projects across the country. Again, there is nothing Egypt can do to stop the ongoing economic and developmental activities in Ethiopia, including the renaissance dam. Rather, we appeal to all patriotic citizens of Ethiopia residing at home and abroad and who love their country to stand on the side of the current rulers of Ethiopia to support these noble efforts in meaningful and tangible ways, and be part of the solution and surely not part of the problem, in resolving the formidable challenges the country and its people face in their attempts to extricate themselves from the scourges of backward development, poverty, economic deprivation and helplessness. For God and our country!

