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Mandela's legacy as South Africa goes to the poles (Part II)

How do I compare him with the grand African leader, Meles

On the other hand, Ethiopia in particular and Africans and the world have been proud over the late Meles Zenawi, prime minister of Ethiopia. He has achieved so much in his short life and had surely much to give to the world had he lived longer. He, together with his comrades, at the outset of the revolution had to think deep. The question they had at that time, it seems to me, was where and how to wage the struggle. Mandela and his comrades looked for a quick fix and chose to start their fight from a township and were in no time apprehended and sent to prison at the initial stage of their struggle. Meles and his comrades understood that their struggle would be long and protracted so they were determined to pay the ultimate sacrifice. I am talking here about young people with beautiful minds and great potentials. They didn't choose to be lawyers, engineers and doctors. They never aspired to live comfortable life in New York, London or Paris knowing the sufferings of the Ethiopian people at the hands of the remnants of a handful elite feudal lords and a brutal military junta. So they started their struggle from remote mountains with empty hands and with no support from anybody. The only commodity they had was confidence and courage, and they had them in abundance. This was the confidence that moulded Meles a fighter, a leader and world statesman serious.

Again there were no resources at hand when he as a leader of the ruling party resumed government in Addis. He received empty coffers and had, therefore, to start from zero. In fact for lack of resources and knowing that he lived in a turbulent region, he had to dissolve the armed forces including the police (the police was brought back soon after) without giving any form of compensation. He even dissolved a significant number of his fighters. This was really a bold decision that mesmerised the world and was done by none other than Meles. This is what I mean by a quality and confident leadership. Evidently, there were some hiccups at the initial stage before development started in earnest. It then started on massive infrastructure developments. Roads, schools, health centres, clinics, and hospitals were built throughout the country. Telecommunication network, clean water and electrification also started to reach the remote areas. Agricultural development became the central tenet of the government policies and, as such, it boosted production and productivity. Moreover, it improved food security and the livelihood of farmers. Recognising the future labour market demand being skilled and trained labour force, investment in higher education became the mantra and, therefore, many new universities throughout the country were opened.

School attendance grew significantly. Even the gap between male and female school attendance almost closed up. Health coverage has significantly improved. As we know, Meles was an ardent advocate of gender equality since he was 19 and even earlier. As such, women's participation in all walks of life grew very fast. They haven't achieved equal shares in government and parliament yet but they are definitely on the right track and will be there soon. Women's right and children's right are all enshrined in the constitution. Mandela had significant deficit in most of the aforementioned achievements.

Speaking of women, Meles was a loving, affectionate and stable family man with deep belief in the value of a nucleus family. Unlike some of us, he believed in one man one woman principle. He did not need to change women like shirts. What this tells me is that he had good character and reasonable manners that are expected of spouses. According to the enormous media coverage that appeared during the weeks following his death, Mandela, however, did not have a good name in this front. He was known to have abused women. It is said that his first wife, Evelyn, had reported him to the police alleging that she feared he would kill her with an axe. Winnie herself was abused by him repeatedly. Besides, he did not have a good relationship with his children in general and with his late son in particular. Even after his release, he couldn't understand what Winnie went through in the 27 years he was in prison. Yes, he was in prison but that is it. As I mentioned above, she was the one exposed to all abuses and what not. Sadly, he unashamedly abandoned her to take another woman soon after he ascended to the presidency. The woman he chose is not any woman either. She happens to be the wife

of an ex president of a foreign country. Love is blind, of course. But he is a president as well. This tells it all. That the man had less regard for family values to say the least. I don't even understand how women adorn him.

At the sub-regional level, Meles helped recreate and galvanise the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) so that it played a more prominent role especially in peace and security issues among the Eastern and Horn of African countries. At the continental level, he realised that the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had already achieved what it was designed to do. He then proposed to reform the organisation from OAU to African Union (AU) with new mandates that reflected the current and future needs of the continent. This was achieved together with South Africa's Mbeki and Nigeria's Obasanjo. As Mr Gordon Brown the ex Prime Minister of the United Kingdom once said, Meles almost single handedly established the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) that aimed at bringing African countries together through various forms of integration including trade, energy, telecommunications and transport networks. Meles underscored the importance of Africans to speak in one voice in their dealings with the powerful in issues of common concern. He subsequently represented Africa in various important world forums such as G8 and G20 that showed results. What did Mandela do? I have no answer to this million dollar question except to say that he was not there for Africa in matters of important continental issues.

The Western media tried to tell us that peacemaking with the enemy (in this case with the apartheid government) was unique in Africa only attributed to Mandela's leadership. They even went further to give credit to Mandela as the originator of "**peacemaking**" concept itself. To me that is non-sense. Peaceful change can have been adopted from great leaders such as Mahatma Ghandi and Dr. Martin Luther King and nothing else. But what Mandela did was not peacemaking. The so called "**peace and reconciliation**" scheme was meant not to embarrass the white SAns. It was meant to break the rule of law and free the murderers, torturers and culprits of innocent SAns. Those white South Africans who were murdering, torturing and raping black South Africans are still in high offices and on the streets. So I for one see his "**peacemaking**" deal nothing other than "**legitimising the tools of apartheid**".

On the other hand, it has been revealed that Meles and his comrades were peace makers even while he led the revolution. As a leader he always opted for a peaceful negotiated solutions to differences with the enemies (they were many). He used force to wipe them out only in retaliation to their attacks on him. Once in Addis, he called all opposition and interest groups to a conference to make peace and reconciliation. He tried hard to bring a peaceful resolution with various armed groups in the country and has markedly succeeded. He tried to settle the border conflict in the north of the country peacefully before it escalated to an all out war. But a negotiated peaceful solution required two to agree. One man couldn't do it alone. Out in the continent, he helped bring peace in Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda and Sieraleone. He played a significant role in the 2005 peace agreement between the South Sudanese SPLA and Sudanese government that gave way to the 2011 referendum. He worked tirelessly to help the Somalia people to have a stable government so that the Somalia people can lead peaceful day today life. He has remarkably achieved in this most complicated front.

All these achievements were worth a Nobel Peace Prize (NPP) and much more. We have seen Bishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela get it, never mind the others including Kissinger, etc. The NPP Committee went out of its way to award Ms Tawakkol Karman for taking part and shouting slogans in anti-government demonstration in Yemen that lasted few weeks. I don't even understand why President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was busy making money in Washington during those difficult times in the history of Liberia, was a candidate leave alone win the prize. She returned home only after the dust had almost settled. The Committee even awarded Obama not suspecting that he would turn out to be a warrior emperor. If the Economist magazine in connection to the current South Sudan conflict reflected that "**the world misses Meles**", why is it then the NPP Committee did not award him the prize when he has accomplished a long list of items that are within the framework of the committee? It seems to me that it lacks objectivity and I, therefore, have reason to believe that its decision is random and most often swayed by opinions and false allegations. The lack of recognition for Ethiopia's outstanding services in promoting peace and security in Africa is not new though. The late Emperor Haileselassie was also deprived of the prize in spite of his success in bringing peace to the then conflict spots in Africa such as Algeria-Morocco, Sudan's internal strife, etc.

Most importantly, Meles saw how the world at large and the African continent in particular were being hit by climate changes on a daily basis. He did not need a witness for he was there himself seeing it happening. In order to reverse the vagaries of climatic change, he vigorously advocated a change of course and gave ideas on how to tackle the problem at global forums. He urged Africans to follow on a green economy path and also advised them to opt for a green renewable energy alternative. He contributed significant inputs on world food security at world economic forums. Meles was very much concerned about the world poor, children and women. That was, perhaps, why Prime Minister David Cameron said "*the world poor have lost their advocate*" (paraphrased) on the day he heard of the formers passing away.

On the economic sphere, Meles had a clear vision and he knew very well what he was talking about. He much earlier saw the doom and gloom that was coming before any other economist dead or alive did. As confident as he was, he never shied away to tell the proponents of capitalism that the neo-liberal approach to economic growth had problems. More so, it posed harm than benefits on poor developing countries and, therefore, the Washington consensus was not for him. That challenge against the powerful was unseen and unheard off before, never ever. As is customary, Washington always got what it wanted in one way or the other. So somebody confident had to go to Addis to get the papers signed. The man to do the job was none other than Professor Joseph Stiglitz, the chief economist of the World Bank at the time. Nobel Prize Laureate Stiglitz is highly respected economist globally and is considered by some to be one of the very few authorities in macroeconomics and growth theory, among others. He went confidently to lecture Meles and make him sign there and then. As we all know, that was not what happened. Instead, Meles was at the giving end and Stiglitz was at the receiving end. In other words, Meles lectured Stiglitz on the "*developmental economic democracy*" as an alternative to neo-liberal economic approach. So the latter returned home short of what he went for. Miserably unsuccessful this time around but much wiser than when he left Washington to Addis. I understand Stiglitz has written a book, probably basing extensively on the valuable lectures he received from Meles. I haven't read it myself but if he hasn't given tribute to Meles in his acknowledgement for the latter's original ideas, then shame on him.

We heard Meles saying that he wanted to retire. We also heard him that he had a lot of ideas to write about. It seems to me that he most probably wanted to write on his new economic theory he developed. As we remember, John M. Keynes lived during the economic depression period following World War II. He understood that the then existing tools had no power to explain the war-time economic problems and, therefore, devised theories and models that became major contributions to economic thought. Similarly, Meles may have wanted to do his contribution to the current economic turmoil as Keynes did in those difficult times. Had that taken place, then the world would have been forced to accept a major change in economic thoughts as Keynes did. But would the powerful who are benefiting out of the current system abandon the status quo? Definitely not. Remember what Professor Akbar Noman of Columbia University said in the speech he made at Meles' memorial ceremony. He said "*Meles' knowledge of economics was so profound that the world would have been saved from its current economic problems had the international community listened to him*". The professor also mentioned that Meles was the only leader of a country that published an academic paper while in office. I, for one, see him both as a theoretician and practitioner. I believe economists and students of economics will start studying his contribution to the new economic theory. They will look into the man and his thoughts and once they get sufficient understanding, they will elevate his name and his work to great heights. Not only that. His work could also be fertile ground for scholars who would look it from the perspective of history of economic thought to the likes of Karl Popper, Mark Blaug, etc..

People had high expectations and hope of Mandela. I had mine too. Then looked back and asked myself, how do I remember Mandela? Unfortunately, I could not find anything of substance that originated from him. Neither from his leadership nor his speeches. As I mentioned above, I can only remember his dances, smiles and what appears to be Mandela-signature shirts. Sadly, unlike Meles, he left the people he fought for still in unmitigated misery. Few selected blacks within the ANC ranks have made great wealth though. So I don't see any reason for African media in general and ERTA in particular to misinform their population and tell them fairy tales about Mandela. They need to be truthful and instead tell the world about the great visionary African leader, Meles, however cocksure prime minister may have been. He was there when Africa needed him and

gave his service with distinction, not only to his beloved country Ethiopia but also to the sub-region, Africa and the world. Most importantly, he emancipated not only his country but also Africa at large. And Mandela never had ideas of this sort in his mind. So as South Africans go to the poles soon, they need to think hard and elect not just a president but the president that will bring social and economic justice to all South Africans.