

Transition Prime Minister with Preconditions!

By Mekonnen Kassa

"If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world." King George III.

The above words were uttered in 1783 by King George III of England when he heard that George Washington announced his intention to return to private life and retire to his plantation at Mount Vernon.

For almost three years now Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has been announcing his strong desire to vacate the Prime Minister office and transfer out of EPRDF Chairmanship. I am for transitioning our Prime Minister now as I did in Dec 2006 when he first announced his intention.

I have read others advocating persuasively, rightfully so, with valid points to keep Mr. Zenawi as a Prime Minister for additional five years. I have found their arguments to be valid and tempting and, in my personal opinion, worth setting three preconditions to alleviate their concerns.

By the way, all this discussion presupposes that EPRDF will win the majority in May 2010. I have no doubt it would in a land slide.

My first precondition is for EPRDF to immediately identify a future replacement during one of the Ordinary Executive Committee meeting that is held every three months. Then a firm deadline should be set for the replacement to take over. The replacement - either in the form of a Vice Chairperson or otherwise - and the deadline should be publicly announced. I believe EPRDF's bylaws permit the Executive Committee members to elect a Vice Chairperson during Ordinary meetings.

Identifying and announcing a replacement is critical, and let me illustrate by way of an example. CEOs of most successful publicly traded companies that have a huge market capital usually announce their replacement a year or two early and go through a transition period. This ensures uninterrupted business operation, builds investor confidence, and eliminates speculation of impending bad news. This also affords time to the new future CEO to get trained and coached by the previous CEO. This is a guarantee to orderly transition and continuity.

The second precondition is to delay the transition of other "old guard" leaders. The wisdom and experience of all is needed during transition period. It has to be done but gradually.

The third precondition is to start the transformation of EPRDF. There may be some transformations that EPRDF has planned as its strategic goal. EPRDF should get started on transformations while Mr. Zenawi is Chairman.

Having listed the preconditions, I present here forth, in no particular order of significance, my personal reasons as to why Mr. Zenawi deserves to be granted his wishes.

Mr. Zenawi:

1. He is repeatedly and strongly asking to be relieved. He is trying to go out while still on top and with his own terms considered. No one is forcing him out.
2. He has minimized the shocking impact that may have surrounded his departure by discussing it for a long time.
3. He deserves a reward for his 34 years of dedicated service: leaving a lasting legacy for generation to come by setting precedence. He will be remembered as the first ever

leader of modern day Ethiopia (or old Abyssinia for that matter) to peacefully transfer power. Artists will sing his praises and future leaders will follow his example. Much like the first American President George Washington.

4. He is a respected and a renowned world figure. If he wants it, there is a very good chance that he can become a World Leader and can play a larger role to help Ethiopia and other African countries.
5. He will have time to write a memoir, a biography, and publish other research papers.
6. He can focus on identifying and growing other future EPRDF leaders.
7. He deserves a vacation.

EPRDF

1. Mr. Zenawi is asking to keep his EPRDF membership and continue to serve its political leadership. This is like having your cake and eating it too. We do not see this often as former Presidents and Prime Ministers do not like to take lower level positions.
2. No matter how good a committed soldier and a dedicated servant, when one says "had enough" we have to listen and take action. There are chances it may adversely affect his performance and others with similar intention.
3. If EPRDF has become dependent on a single person's leadership then it will mostly likely to go the way other Opposition Parties have gone.
4. This is a tremendous opportunity for EPRDF to show in practice that it can withstand the transition of its iconic leader. Much like a publicly traded business who's CEO has retired without shrinking the company's market capital and crashing the Stock Market.
5. We are mortal creatures. God forbid, if something were to happen to Mr. Zenawi while he is still in office, EPRDF will regret not granting him his wishes.

Ethiopia

1. All the current government policies will continue uninterrupted. EPRDF as a Party makes decision through discussion. No single person has the power. The 36 EPRDF executives (Nine representatives from each of the four members) make the decisions. With all due respect and admiration of Mr. Zenawi's razor sharp intelligence, it is the committee that drafts policy and will continue to do so.
2. The new future Prime Minister will gain from mentor and council of the future former Prime Minister.
3. Bestows hope in all politicians and quells ambition to take power through violence.

Oppositions

1. Sexagenarian, Septuagenarian and Octogenarian opposition leaders will learn a valuable lesson when they see a 54 year young leader transitions leadership.
2. New and young Opposition leaders will emerge who can transform the political process to be driven by making compromises and building consensus.

We are fortunate to have a smart and hard working leader who took us through the most difficult period in our history. It is even better when he is asking us to replace him out of his own volition. This is a momentous opportunity for Ethiopia to join the community of nations that have peacefully and successively changed leaders. I hope EPRDF members will help us cease this opportunity by granting Mr. Zenawi his wishes.

May God Bless Ethiopia with Peace and Prosperity!