

Meles Zenawi - A world-class leader

(Hana Kibebew 08-20-14)

It was on August 21, 2014, at dawn, the Ethiopian people learned that the Great Leader Meles Zenawi has passed away.

The public media read the statement issued by the Council of Ministers which stated:

“it is with deep sorrow and grief, regrets [we inform] the Peoples of Ethiopia that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who has led our country for the last 21 years with great wisdom and far-sightedness, passed away on August 20th at 11:40 pm at the hospital where he was under medical treatment”.

The Council elaborated the circumstances of the tragedy as the late Prime Minister Meles had been showing remarkable improvement, after undergoing medical treatment in the previous two months.

However, the Council said, Meles had had to be re-admitted back to hospital two days earlier due to a sudden infection, which led to his death, despite efforts by his physicians.

The statement was shocking to every Ethiopian. From the news-anchors, who read the statement, to the ordinary citizen, at home and workplace, the news was upsetting, their grief was visible.

Some burst into tears blocking traffic on streets in Addis Ababa and elsewhere.

Others stared on their TV and radio in disbelief, listening to the same statement again and again, as if they were expecting a correction.

It was even more saddening revelation that Meles dedicated his time to the successful implementation of the 5 year Growth and Transformation Plan, despite nursing a serious medical condition for the past two years.

The statement was not wholly depressing, however. It noted the comforting fact that:

“Meles has left behind a solid democratic and developmental constitutional system. Today, his ideas and vision of change have become the ideas of change for 80 million Ethiopians.”

“The constitutional developmental democratic system that has been left to us by a great leader is built on a firm foundation. We will always be proud of his achievements, remain confident in ourselves and nurture the unshakable belief that the efforts at making Ethiopia's renaissance a reality have indeed become irreversible.”

The Council of Ministers has also assured Ethiopians and well-wishers that the nation's policies will remain in place and there is no power vacuum.

It noted that “His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn will, in accordance with the FDRE Constitution, continue to carry out the responsibilities of heading the Council of Ministers”.

Since then, in the past two years, we learnt more about Meles Zenawi than we knew before.

Leaders of various countries eulogized Meles illustrating his unique place in history.

Barack Obama President of the USA said:

“When I recall, the speech Premier Meles delivered at G8 conference about guaranteeing his country’s food supply and how to pull the people out of poverty, I have developed a high regard for him.”

Raila Odinga, Kenyan Prime Minister said:

“Prime Minister Meles Zenawi possessed bright-mind and was a wise leader, His struggle for Pan African Movement and attempt to develop the Ethiopian Economy are unforgettable.”

Ex-Prime Minister of England – Gordon Brown noted:

"During the prime Minister’s leadership, an unprecedented stride has been taken in education health and economic development."

President of S. Africa, Jacob Zuma attested:

"Melese Zenawi was not only Ethiopian but also African great leader. Representing African in general and the Horn in particular, he had participated in a number of regional and international conferences, contributing to the well-being of the continent."

Liberian President, Elen Johnson observed:

“Making use of his bright mind, Meles Zenawi was one of the great African leaders who came to the forefront of leadership against all odds. Domestically, he brought about surprising economic development. To the questions forwarded in the number of conferences on presenting Africa, he gave sharp and precise responses. He struggled to his level best for the good of Africa."

The English Prime Minister David Cameron expressed his admiration as follows:

"Meles Zenawi was an eloquent politician who represented Africa in a number of International conferences and contributed a great deal to the good of Africa.

To restore peace and order in Somalia and the Sudan, he had done all possible things.

To implement the vision of the country, he left no stone unturned.

To pull millions of his people out of poverty and develop Ethiopia, he toiled to his best. His unreserved attempt for betterment has made him a role model African leader.”

President of Nigeria, Good Luck Johnatan exclaimed:

"Meles Zenawi was an African leader who unreservedly and honestly worked to create a strong and united Africa. He had been acclaimed for his ardent support of African Renaissance throughout the continent.”

Olisengo Obasanjo, Ex-President of Nigeria underlined:

"Meles had struggled to extricate his country out of the hold of tyranny military rule. To make his country a fore-running developed African state, he had done all his best. I, personally, have witnessed his capacity to discharge any responsibility shouldered on him. In addition, his bright conscience taken into consideration had qualified him to lead NEPAD.”

Uweri Museveni, President of Uganda, said:

"The struggle of Meles Zenawi to maintain national integrity of the great Ethiopian Peoples and further economic development of the country is unforgettable.”

Dr. Arnest Bei coroma, President of Sierra Leone noted:

“Among the African countries, Meles had made Ethiopia the state that achieved rapid economic development.”

Jose Manuel Baroso, President of European Commission confirmed:

“The late Meles Zanawi was a revered great African leader. He worked on the change of the lives of not only his people but also that of Africans as a whole. He pinned importance to Enhancing strength of the African union.”

Sussan Rice, Ambassador of the USA to the UN, expressed Meles as:

“Prime minister Meles Zanawi had been the advocate of stronger Africa, gallantly struggled against terrorism, perseveared from Uganda through Liberia, from the Sudan through Somalia to maintain peace and reconcile disputes. He had tried to accomplish the millennium strategy, toiled to work on climatic change. He had dispatched a peace keeping force to Abie. He, thus, had practically proved his determination to secure peace”

The American Billionaire and Philanthropist Bil Gate said:

“Prime Minister Meles Zanawi had prepared a fertile situation of drawing maximum advantage to his people in diversified fields of life”

In similar fashion, Meles's arm-struggle companions, compatriots and colleagues spared no works to praise his commitment and achievements.

Dr. Debre-Tsion Gebre-michael said that: “The goal of Meles had been addressing the problems of the people. Potentially, he had been well – off, supported others and buttressed up the organization and he had succeeded in life.

The international media lined-up to pay tribute to the great leader of the century.

The Sudan Tribune said:

“Meles Zenawi had pulled his country out of rubble of a civil war and made it one of the fast developing nations”

Anita Paul – Johannesburg-VOA reporter attested that:

“Beyond boundary of his country, on international arena, Meles fought about climatic change and the other related affairs. He had been a great leader who advocated for the cause of Africa.”

One important aspect of Meles's legacy is his commitment to peaceful-resolution of conflicts. In this regard we shall mention, a less known story of Meles that the prominent local elder Professor Ephrem Yishak revealed a week after his untimely and tragic death of H.E. Meles Zenawi.

According to Professor Ephrem Yishak in 1989 when a group of Ethiopian scholars and elders sent a request for all Ethiopian parties to take part in a peace talk, it was Meles who responded first without preconditions.

At the time, TPLF fighters - guided by Meles's military doctrine and effective commanders - had overtaken Guna mountains and became virtually unstoppable.

However, that didn't turn Meles into a military adventurer. He consistently perused negotiations and peace talks both with the Dergue and other armed groups regardless of TPLF's fast growing military strength.

It was at this time that a group of elders and scholars led by Professor Ephrem Yishak sent letters to Ethiopian armed as well as the Dergue regime requesting their willingness for peace talks. Meles was the first to respond and affirm his party's willingness, while Dergue never sent a reply letter except oral responses.

Meles's confirmation was not a lip service. In fact he sent a second letter urging them to hold the peace talks at the earliest time possible to save lives.

Proffessor Ephrem described the situation as follows(in Amharic):

<< የደርግን ደብዳቤ በመጠባበቅ ላይ እያለን ከጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር መለስ ዜናዊ በድጋሚ ሌላ ደብዳቤ መጣልን። በወቅቱ እነሱ እያሸነፉ ነበር። ይኼም ቢሆን ግን «አሸናፊ ነኝና ዕርቅ አልፎልግም» አላሉም። እኛ ሁሉንም የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች ስዊስ ላይ ለመሰብሰብ ያሰብነው እ.ኤ.አ በሰኔ ወር 1989 ላይ ነበር። በደብዳቤያቸው «ስብሰባችሁን ሰኔ ከማድረግ ይልቅ ወደ ግንቦት ቀረብ አድርጉት» ብለው ጻፏልን። ቆም ብዬ ስለሁለተኛው ደብዳቤያቸው ሳስብ፣ ሁሉም ነገር በሰላም እንዲያልቅ የነበራቸው ፍላጎትን ያሳየኛል። ጦርነት ከቀጠለ ብዙ ሰው እንደሚያልቅ ገብቷቸዋል። >>

However, due to Dergue's reluctance the elders effort didn't bore fruit and the Americans had to intervene as negotiators.

The story was a new one for the general public.

Nonetheless, it was consistent with Meles's image as a peace maker. All who observed his leading role in the efforts to resolve conflicts across Africa, disagreements among leaders in the African Union and the olive branch he repeatedly extended for trouble makers at home and the region would agree that he was a man of peace.

Meles's commitment to go half the way for the sake of peace and, when that fails, to guide the military option in the most scientific and less costly manner continued at a larger scale after EPRDF assumed governmental power in Ethiopia.

Meles' leadership capacity, contribution to world peace, environmental protection and his vision to enhance economic development had enabled him to win a number of international awards. To mention but a few:

Meles Zenawi won the 2005 International Merit Leadership award of Afro-American Entrepreneur Organization.

On the basis of Environmental protection and his country's economic development, the Yara Organization (Norway) awarded Prime minister Meles Zenawi 200,000 dollars.

In 2002 Times Newspaper bestowed on Ato Meles the African Political Leadership Award.

In realization of the support and encouragement Meles made for the development of African football, he was awarded a medal in 2007.

Despite his death, his achievements and vision are immortal. The achievements, vision and legacy of PM Meles are tremendous that could set role model for the young generation. We, therefore, would like to call for the attention of novel Prize Award organization and similar ones to consider the case of the late Prime minister Meles Znawi. Of the star leaders who deserve the 21st international award following their indispensable contribution to their respective countries in particular and the whole world in general, Barrack Hussien Obama (USA), Angela Merkel (Germany), Hu Jentao (Ex president of China), Rudd Kevin Michael (Ex-Prime mister Australia), Meles Zenawi (the late Ethiopian Prime Minister) is the one to be awarded. And the two countries namely Canada and Australia accepted the idea well, signed and made responsible. As they are exemplary for the rest of the world in all aspects, the two countries will also be awarded. We would like to propose his birth day celebration in work and green campaign.

More can be said about Meles, but papers and inks are insufficient to describe the extent of his wisdom and farsighted leadership.

The remarks made by Dr. Mohammed Bedru and Dr. Elena Vorontsoba sums it up well. The two scholars said:

"Despite his death, his achievements and vision are immortal.

The achievements, vision and legacy of PM Meles are tremendous that could set role model for the young generation.

We, therefore, would like to call for the attention of novel Prize Award organization and similar ones to consider the case of the late Prime minister Meles Znawi.

Of the star leaders who deserve the 21st international award following their indispensable contribution to their respective countries in particular and the whole world in general, Barrack Hussien Obama (USA), Angela Merkel (Germany), Hu Jentao (Ex president of China), Rudd Kevin Michael (Ex-Prime mister Australia), Meles Zenawi (the late Ethiopian Prime Minister) is the one to be awarded.

And the two countries namely Canada and Australia accepted the idea well, signed and made responsible.

As they are exemplary for the rest of the world in all aspects, the two countries will also be awarded. We would like to propose his birth day celebration in work and green campaign."