

ON GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTS

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A seemingly endless series of complaints, decrying abridgements of basic political freedoms and reversion of human rights continue to be lodged against Ethiopia, albeit on the flimsiest of foundations in fact. The jarring cry of lamentation over Ethiopia's putative curtailment of space for dissent is most pronounced among the dwindling, but vocal minority of political relics of the discredited past. Destined, to be sure, to oblivion, like all hangers-on in history, as the rapid transformative changes taking place up and down the country enters the next higher stage. In the meantime, much will be made of Ethiopia's shortcomings, drawbacks and even failures, though each pales in comparison to its impressive achievements that have earned it international accolades. Indeed, Ethiopia is roundly praised as one of Africa's promising emergent democracies, and will continue to retain its lead insofar as the principle of unity in diversity continues to sustain the ties that bound its distinct peoples, each autonomous in its own jurisdiction. This is the secret why, despite countless forecasts of its inevitable breakup, the country is held as Africa's bastion of peace and stability. In consequence, Ethiopia today is a frontrunner in the race to catch up with the world's mid-income countries, on the back, no doubt, of its accelerated growth, second to none in its ranks, save the few fastest growing national economies of the planet.

As a democratic development federal state of multiple nationalities, Ethiopia is, by all post-conflict global standards, a multi-party democracy, governed by an elected coalition of quadruple parties that reflect the ethno-linguistic diversity of the country's population. Cynicism aside, each these parties eagerly embrace constructive criticism in the shared belief that genuine feedback redounds to greater compliance with the human rights laws of the Ethiopian federal constitution. It is in this spirit of openness, then, that a competent panel of high policymakers examined the 2013 State Department Human Right Report, but

found the content wanting for any measure of inspiration. A small wonder, that in its March 14 written response, the government expressed its dismay at the lack of even a modicum of improvement in this year's human right write-ups, albeit the voluminous publication was launched, as often, with pomp and funfair. Much hype certainly preceded the release of the voluminous global survey of human rights, in which the US Secretary of State himself gave the keynote speech at the auspicious launch. But, on the EPRDF - government's reading, at least the Report on Ethiopia turned out to be "a rehash of previous allegations, sprinkled with newly-added indictments" that can barely survive cross examination.

Indeed with a quick scan, it becomes apparent that the 2013 Report is, from the outset, severely fraught with skewed selection of sources and self-serving informants on which those who commissioned the writing base their truth claims. Naturally, the State Department has to vouch for the credibility of its nameless stool-pigeons whose words no one with even a fleeting familiarity with the facts on the ground can take seriously. Yet the Report is said to be grounded in eye-witness accounts that, for safety reason, must remain anonymous. Leaving aside the validity of this concern, from a modern-day perspective, shielding the identity of the accuser from the accused, is rather a throwback to medieval justice that had been long discarded: Largely for innocence of any notion of what modern jurists refer to as law of evidence. In any event, the self-referentiality of these informant's accounts betrays their true identities and secret political agendas, divergent though their ultimate ideological vision for Ethiopia might be. But, judging by the tone and language of the accusatory statements contained in this year's Report, the unnamed sources cannot be any other than the same fugitives from the law with vested interest in hiding their identities and true political goals. Obviously these so-called witnesses are adept at concealing their vertical liaison with either the centrist or separatist subversive organizations, banned in Ethiopia for grave transgression of the supreme law. Thus, it comes as no surprise if every one of them tries to pass themselves off as bonifide whistleblowers with much to expose that the Ethiopian government is desperate to hide from the world.

The shrewdest among these self-described whistleblowers, in fact, claim to be privy to secret skeletons in the government's closet, before they fled to the USA, leaving behind only traces of the consequences of their populist politics of reckless havoc. With no qualms, today these political adventurers openly vow to continue, albeit, from safe distance, with their unfinished business of upending the lawful government of Ethiopia by any means they deem necessary. Yet in an eyebrow raising judgment, these hawks cloaked as doves to mislead the gullible, are presumed to be a disinterested lot with useful testimonies that merit congressional hearing. If for nothing else than the information that these well-placed informants can provide on which of the parties in Ethiopia the US must rely on to rid the country of tyranny. Obviously, given the publicity that comes with the rare chance of being called on to provide testimony in the presence of US legislators, the limelight-seeking elements in the State Department's witness list openly go by their given names. Unlike their counterparts who prefer to remain anonymous, the latter see no reason to assume pseudonyms when they appear before US congressional sub-committees to lodge their complaints with tears in their eyes. Nor do these star testifiers, not at least at this level, openly condone violence as a legitimate means of attaining a political end. But, when addressing an all Ethiopian fund-raising rallies, the chameleons are unafraid to show their true color.

This is to say that, though they hide their true intention from Congress, they broadcast in fervent language, no less, their plan to launch an armed rebellion against the EPRDF government. They reconcile the contradiction in their double-stance, at least to their own satisfaction, by rehashing the much publicized narrative of closure of political space in Ethiopia, believed to have followed in the wake the 2005 post-election crisis. The irony is it is these double-dealers themselves who, under a smokescreen of election fraud, instigated the 2005 street turbulence, but lacking the courage of their conviction shirked from taking responsibility for the consequences. Today, far from where neither their courage nor their conviction cannot be tested, they are often heard quoting Patrick Henry's famous quote, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" Whilst, at same time, pleading with the most powerful

country in the world to grant them protection against what they describe as the most tyrannical regime in Africa. Knowing what sails and where, they claim that, if forced to return to their country of origin, they would be condemned to life without liberty in “the land of the unfree”, where as freedom-lovers, they can’t bear to stay even for a two-night stand. But clever as they are, if only by half, they sense that the gap between their either-death/or--liberty rhetoric and safety-first approach could be interpreted as wanting to have their cake and eat it too.

But no dummies, the double-faced political aspirants figure that the way out of this embarrassing dilemma is to pretend that their stay abroad is only temporary, pending completion of a preparatory task in the led-up to setting in motion the much vaunted armed rebellion: The only rout left, so we are told, if Ethiopia is to be delivered from EPRDF’s repressive system of divide and rule. This clever self-positioning, no doubt affords them the best of all possible worlds where they can, at no risk to their personal safety, raise funds for liberty, leaving the dying to others in the remote-controlled liberation war, promised to be launched at the first ripe subjective and objective moment. Theirs is apparently a risk-free world wherein they enjoy the liberty to play a double role at a time and place of their choosing. The most visible of their dual functions appears to be shuttling between America, Europe, Egypt, and Eritrea, providing testimonies and updated lectures on the latest human rights violation in Ethiopia, and promising secrete offers in exchange for sizable financial deals. In-between lectures, their other herculean task involves managing the satellite television command-post, from which they direct the virtual armed insurgency to wrest power from ostensibly a crumbling regime.

Now this is intense activity even for a prize fighter of immense energy. Energy aside, the question is, whence comes the courage to engage in such tasking multiple risky business for comfort all year round? Well, in large measure their boldness stems from knowledge that the State Department prefers to turn a blind eye to even their most glaringly illicit activity. Why the host country tolerates these naturalized émigrés to engage in activities prohibited by its emigration laws, is an unexplained puzzle. Perhaps, one explanation might

lie in shrewd calculation that these pretenders for power, on a fading cheap popularity at that, could potentially play a useful role for Uncle Sam when, and if the time comes. For this reason alone, the home of the brave and land of the free could not deny these self-styled freedom fighters political asylum. Lest, so we are told, these former 'prisoners of conscious' again fall prey to vindictive reprisal at the hands of a paranoid state, whose ruling party, in their words, is terrified of even its own shadow.

By any stretch, it is hard to imagine that anyone familiar with the all-round positive transformative changes taking place in Ethiopia would second this wild characterization of the EPRDF government. Save those who stand to gain by taking this twisted designation of the governing party as a starting point to draw an even more contorted pre-conceived conclusion about the dire human rights situation in Ethiopia. We are referring here to armchair research centers that the State Department outsource to compile and submit human rights reports on every country in the world except its own. No wonder that the so-called impartial research findings of the Ethiopian human rights landscape is invariably flawed by wild speculations, groundless conjunctures, and duplication of previous allegations with no supporting evidence much less proof. Most of it in fact is little more than compilations of the secret deposition of faceless informants, believed to be 'corroborated' by the indicting disclosure of those who are willing to be identified as the face of the extremist opposition. Thus, it is on such dubious sources that the Ethiopian government is maligned and its commitment to human rights is written off as farce. No doubt this speaks to the devilish cleverness of the slick operatives of subversive outfits assigned abroad to bash Ethiopia on every conceivable occasion imaginable.

The deftness with which these Ethiopia-bashers operate can be gauged from the cunning way they play the human rights card each time their sleeper-cells inside Ethiopia are caught red-handed in criminal acts of sabotage. Obviously the cry of human rights violation is loudest whenever the accused are brought before an impartial court of law to defend themselves against well-founded charges of grave offense, including acts of terror against innocent civilians. If--God forbid, as elsewhere in countries of due process, the accused

defendants are found guilty and sentenced according to the laws in Ethiopia, the trial is instantly dismissed as a miscarriage of justice. No sooner, the court's decision is flagged as yet another instance which graphically shows the degree to which human rights is trampled underfoot in Ethiopia.

How can one respond to such manifestly circuitous contrivance of criticism by double-standards which leaves the Ethiopian government in an inevitable situation of “dam if you do, dam if you don't. Except perhaps to say that by some misfortune, as it were, it is this kind of adversity that the Ethiopian government has been contending with ever since rule of law prevailed in this country after countless years of unlimited exercise of power by the few over the many. This is emphatically no longer the case in federal democratic Ethiopia where no one, regardless of ethnic origin, gender, social status or academic credential is above the law. The same applies to civic organizations and political parties no matter high-sounding the cause which the leaderships may claim to promote in the interest of national unity. Yet, as much as no one in this country is more equal than others in front of the law, it is useful to reemphasize that, like democracies everywhere, all legally registered parties in Ethiopia bear a constitutional right to peacefully compete for public office in a level playing field. But, as no right comes without a corresponding duty, each party is legally bound to abide by the laws of the land, without which neither due process nor multiparty democracy can be imagined.

However, lacking anything positive to offer by which they could attract public following, the extremist bands know that they stand no chance in a free and fair multiparty electoral bout. Foreign to the notion of loyal opposition, as they are, the extra-legal parties remain confined to the political underworld and the Diaspora where they can disseminate hate speech without accountability. But, hoping against hope, these hate mongers reckon that they would one day return and reclaim their rightful place on the back of pressure brought to bear on the Ethiopian government, on the prompting their agents abroad. The sad irony is that not a few of among the fringe groupings at the far end of the political spectrum take their own rhetoric too seriously. If proof need be, witness how, in concert with their

Diaspora funs and funders, this desperate lot cheer and celebrate each time a negative human rights report is issued against Ethiopia. The gullible even believe that inconsequence some foreign power would come to their aid as they scurry to the summit of power on the ruins of the EPRDF government. Recall the excitement with which they sought, with Western funding no doubt, to duplicate first the color-coded revolution of Eastern Europe. And, later the Arab revolt, which unfortunately quickly lost its appeal, no sooner than the much talked about spring-time romance with freedom gave way to a bone-chilling winter of sectarian infighting of unprecedented human toll. In the meantime, much to the chagrin of ill-wishers in the Diaspora, all was quiet on the Ethiopian front. To their despair, time and events proved that neither the East European nor the Mid-Eastern type of regime-changing mass convulsion was never in the cards where Ethiopia is concerned. In frustration, those who thought otherwise, gave up on Western goodwill and pinned their hopes on the only country that, save the means, has the motive and the political ambition to destabilize Ethiopia. Nonetheless, tempting as it is, assistance from a rouge government that conspires against its neighbors always comes with a political price. That is why those who only recently denounced the independence of the very country on which their fait now lies are currently heard singing its praise. Witness how, with a straight-face, as it were, they press on their compatriots at home to emulate the leadership model of their host and sponsoring country, despite the menace this state has been to the entire East African region. In a way there is nothing new here, since the wretchedly desperate of the earth have no choice but bank on covert external backing, regardless of what they might have to eventually repay in return.

In the Ethiopian case, however, there is a strange twist to this sorry pattern. This is to say that, reliance on foreign quid is more pronounced among the chauvinistic groups whose claim to fame is leveling charges of treason against the EPRDF government. Indeed these parties excel in two things. In brave rhetoric, often promising to teach those they brand as national traitors a lasting lesson. And in exalting themselves as the truest and purest of all Ethiopians, to whom alone is given the right to rule this country. On both counts, despite years of bold talk, these retrograde parties have little to show for it, except foreign funding,

which by no means can buy them the one thing they crave for most, state power. Apparently, reliance on a hostile pariah regime is what the increasing consolidation of democratic rule in Ethiopia has in store for saber-rattling relics, who seek to drag this country back to the pre-federal system of national inequality. For, none among them can justify their seditious oscillation between legal and illegal means of politicking in this stable multinational country, where the legal regime provides for broad latitude for peaceful dissent. And, even opportunity to rise to the level of a parliamentary majority, if only through proper channels. Nor can these violent-prone parties expect any public sympathy so long as the constitution provides, as it does, for peaceful democratic transfer of power. But, let it be underlined, the supreme law permits orderly change of government through, and only through, periodically held fair and free elections. Such, then, is the route to the apex of power, as there is no other way of ascertaining the consent of the governed.

The problem is these foreign-backed extremists are averse to any constitutional process, the only guarantee of peace and stability. But none are loathe to employing a cunning stratagem with operational tactics set to inflict maximum damage on the Ethiopian government in a spirally ascending stages. On a quick probe, however, for all its elaborateness, this stratagem bears an uncanny resemblance with the now-defunct money laundering scheme by which the crime- family used to “rinse” and recycle its ill-gotten piles of dirty cash as legal tender. Let us explain. First the masters of deception deftly concoct a seemingly credible secrete brief which is quickly brought to the attention of an elite foreign intelligence community and human rights activists. An inside scoop, as it were, that ostensibly lay bear the secrete doings of the EPRDF government beneath the gaze of the international diplomatic community and NGOs, on the lookout as ever for any state misconduct to report to their superiors. Second, the well-crafted forgery is superficially processed through a US information filtering-mechanism only to pop-up bearing the State Department’s stamp of approval. No sooner the brief is rushed through this interim sanitization phase, than it is recast as irrefutable evidence of Ethiopia’s wanton behavior beyond the threshold level of international human rights conventions. Subsequently, with

the aid of a licensed human rights advocate with global name-recognition, the shameless defamation brief is papered to appear respectable in the eyes of the target audience.

Enter Human Rights Watch! The modern-day grand inquisitor whose high priests readily endorse, embellish and disseminate such anti-Ethiopian disinformation with its own remarks and punishment recommendations. In no time, regardless of the integrity of the sources on which Human Rights Watch bases its damning report, excerpts quickly appear in all major corporate-owned global media outlets. Each adding its own commentary, decrying human rights abuse in Ethiopia in sentimentalist language which betrays disingenuous concern for the supposed helpless victims. Hence, with incredible media blitz of human rights atrocity in Ethiopia, the whole capricious process of denigrating the country's profile comes to a full circle. Culminating, as it has on occasions, in shrill clamor for punitive action against the EPRDF government.

Viewed in this light, the whole orchestration of breast-beating over the human rights plight of the Ethiopian people smacks as insincere as it is counterproductive. By no reckoning can constant reliance on dubious sources as an alibi for cascading condemnatory reports serve to advance the cause of human rights in Ethiopia. Especially, if the planned end-game is, as it seems on its face, eroding the legitimacy of the Ethiopian government – though the primary domestic partner of all bonafide human-rights promoting external actors. It is a pity, then, that the likes of Human Rights Watch believe that their openly stated, much less, hidden agenda, can be best served through non-state-actors as if Ethiopia is a failed state where NGOs, donor-dependent civic societies, and rug-tag armed gangs ran the show. All the same, Human Rights Watch, sad to say, seems to think that it can make headway in Ethiopia only in the guise of a militant mouthpiece of the extremist opposition who, ironically are themselves notorious human rights offenders. Yet contrary to well-established international norms, Human Rights Watch prefers to bypass the Ethiopian government in favor of working hand-in glove with the foreign agents of the proscribed fanatical outfits, as much alien as they are hostile to any notion of human rights. These subversive parties are obviously elated to have Human Rights Watch on board. For who

else would lend credence to their campaign of demonizing the EPRDF government as the world's worst violator of human rights, except Human Rights Watch, AL Shabab and the leadership in Eritrea. Given the position they are in, no one can blame these parties for being cheerful, even ecstatic, at having Human Rights Watch by their side. All the more so, since these desperate clandestine movements need every help they can get, if they are to have even half a chance at unseating the entrenched incumbent. An incumbent unlike any, which they know they can't beat in the open even level domestic political arena, where only a party with a sound political program prevails.

On their part, it seems that from the very outset the puritanical crusaders of Human Rights Watch too, have realized one thing. Namely that they cannot isolate Ethiopia from the rest of the world by the prescribed conventional means delimited in their terms of reference as syndicated overseers of human rights. That is why its managing directors had from the start aligned Human Rights Watch's mission in Ethiopia with the openly stated agenda of the subversive groups whose violent behavior in part stems from belief in the cynical adage --- the end justifies the means. This is, then, how an unholy alliance was formed between two unlikely sides, Human Rights Watch and the Ethiopian extremist opposition who are now bound the confluence of their ultimate interests vis-à-vis Ethiopia. Not least of their common concerns, at least as far as one can tell, is shattering the ties that bound Ethiopia and the West: Particularly, with the United States, which they self-deceivingly believe calls the shots in Ethiopia.

Initially many Ethiopians were confused by the parallels between Human Rights Watch's ceaseless negative reporting and the torrent of defamatory statements that the banned opposition churns out regularly. Up until recently, few Ethiopians were unaware that the undisclosed overriding motive behind Human Rights Watch's unrelenting hostile campaign against Ethiopia had always been eroding the legitimacy of its elected government. The public was only disabused of its confusion after it became clear that the managing directors of Human Rights Watch are not exactly paragons of what they preach, often with an air of superiority as if they the fate mankind lies in their hands. The condescending manner in

which they pontificate about the need to bring light to the pitch-dark human rights environment in Ethiopia, in fact, tells it all. At the very least, it speaks more to their own foible than those they claim to impugn on fabricated grounds of human rights abuse. Speaking of foible, perhaps it behooves Human Rights Watch to remind itself of one of the most sobering and insightful saying Jesus' is reported to have uttered in defense his earliest female followers that were about to be stoned to death by a self-righteous mob on charges of adultery. If not verbatim, the evil stopping power of the redeemer's saying goes something very close to, "let the sinless among you cast the first stone." A timeless instruction of enduring moral weight if any, one must add, that Human Rights Watch ought to heed before cascading tons of bricks on Ethiopia on spurious charges based on hearsay. In truth, Human Rights Watch would do well to rethink its holier-than-thou attitude towards Ethiopia, particularly with the likes Marc Garlasco and who knows who else on its research staff. Granted, under pressure from the Jewish lobby, Garlasco was fired no sooner than it came to light that he had a warped secret habit of collecting Nazi memorabilia. But not for working for the Pentagon, where he proudly served as "chief of high-value targeting" during US air raids and missile attack on Baghdad. In which, according to a John Hopkins University research team, one hundred thousand civilians, mostly women and children died, as a direct result of saturated bombing on Iraq's most dense population center. Referring to what he encountered in his brief visit in bombed-shelled Bagdad, Garlasco relates:

I'm standing with in a crater with this a 70-year -old man who's got tears in his eyes and he's telling me how 17 members of his family, including his grandchildren, were killed. I still have very mixed emotions about the whole situation, the whole experience. Well, on the one side, I feel like I took part in this wholesale slaughter of this guy's family which is very difficult to swallow. But on the other side, I know that we truly, truly did what we could do. We were going after some very bad people.

According to Alex Blumberg of *This American Life Newsletter*, Mr. Garlasco "doesn't see moving from the Pentagon to a human rights nonprofit, as a 180 degree flip most people might. He says all he's ever wanted to do was fight bad guys, and both organizations do that, just in different ways." There you have it! A small wonder, then, that Human Rights

Watch's project in countries like Ethiopia is targeting 'bad' governments ran by very "bad people." But, badness, like beauty, as they say, is in the eyes of the beholder. Ergo, Ethiopia is singled out for a bad rap for choosing a state-directed development path —a path apparently destined to a bad end in the eyes of the big moneyed benefactors of Human Rights Watch and neo-liberal promoters of color-coded revolutions. Recall, if you will, Human Right Watch's 2010 pre-scripted statement on the fourth national election, issued barely before the polls closed. Understandably, as it was a thinly veiled pre-planned move aimed at tarnishing the integrity of both the process and outcome of the 2010 election, the statement triggered intense anger among the voting population of Ethiopia. The fury that reverberated across the nation was compounded by gut-feeling that second-guessing a country's electioneering process might not even fall under whatever mandate Human Rights Watch claims to have. But in advance of clarity on this issue, its high-paid mangers had long abrogated to themselves the right to act as the world's judge and jury of not only acceptable and unacceptable human rights behavior, but also of legitimate and illegitimate election outcomes.

Another case in point which bears out Human Rights Watch's congenital negative disposition towards Ethiopia is its 2009 report of an exceedingly high rate of human right violations, even by its own standards. Initially the government had serious misgivings that Human Rights Watch would be so daring enough to issue a report of massive allegations without some tangible supporting evidence to go by. To get to the bottom of the puzzle, the government quickly established an internal inquiry committee, charged with the task of conducting an on-site probe into each Human Rights Watch's allegations. As a signal that the government meant business, the inquiry team was given full mandate to interrogate local law-enforcement officers and heads of institutions, implicated in Human Rights Watch's report of grave human rights abuse. After a painstaking investigative work, which included private interviews with groups of persons cited as surviving victims of human right violations, as well as family members of those presumed to have died of extra-judicial killing, the inquiry committee uncovered a huge discrepancy between Human Rights indicting report and the reality on the ground. In its final summation, the committee

laid bare its grounds for rejecting the 2009 report, by listing the gaps, inconsistencies, hearsays, rumors and downright fabrications contained in it. As a common curtesy, and partly in the hope that it would serve notice to Human Rights Watch that fictitious reporting serves no one, Ethiopia availed the committee's findings in the form of a declassified public document. Nonetheless, to the government's dismay, its plea for objectivity fell on deaf ears. Perhaps in this regard, there is no more a vivid illustration of Human Rights Watch's disregard to Ethiopia's than its most recent release, denouncing in strident language to boot, the Extractive Industries Transparency International. EITI's only sin, as it were, seems to be its unconditional acceptance of Ethiopia's membership application over the hostile protestations of Human Rights Watch, whose executive directors saw the decision as yet another setback to their anti- Ethiopian crusade.

Alas, a blessing in disguise as they say, the March 19 vile protest letter against EITI will hopefully dispel any lingering doubt about the adversarial nature of Human Rights Watch's stance towards Ethiopia. In actual fact, a cursory glance at any of the statements that the self-declared guardian angels of human rights regularly churn out in rapid succession lay bare that the true intention is to turn the donor community against Ethiopia. Worse still, every time Human Rights Watch's mendacious call for hitting Ethiopia with sanctions goes unheeded, its mangers lashes out against those they hold responsible. As we saw in the most recent case of EITI, the planetary human rights Marshall rails against donor inaction when, in its considered view, the situation cried out for stern measures against an offending state-party. Top in the list of repeated offenders is, needless to say, Ethiopia. A country which, according to Human Rights Watch, not only gets away with murder, but seems to be somehow rewarded for in the form of more development assistance.

On a more serious note, on the government's interpretation, the current barrage of negative human rights publication is largely aimed at scuttling the US-Ethiopia Bilateral Dialogue Mechanism. A consultation platform, if you will, through which the two countries exchange ideas of mutual interest, including on the need for improving the existing human

rights assessment mechanism in Ethiopia. One would have thought that the State Department would at least welcome a better human rights monitoring system. Or even encourage the current effort of exploring ways of how the US could avail a capacity-building package to upgrade Ethiopia's human rights practices to a higher level of international standards. Nonetheless, despite noticeable improvements towards reaching this lofty goal, as there is no higher goal than improving the quality of human rights protection, the 2013 State Department Report paints a bleak picture. Though, the background research to such a dismal picture is based on a selective set of second-hand information supplied by dubious informants with an ax to grind. The Report, in fact, dismisses the Ethio American Dialogue Mechanism as unsatisfactory, if not, as a needless waste of time and energy. Again, like its bleak human rights write-ups, the Report makes this sweeping conclusion about the bilateral Dialogue Mechanism on a flawed analysis, short on hard-evidence and long in preconceived certitude akin to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Ethiopian government is, therefore, in characterizing the final summation of the Report as yet another instance of willful denial of the progress it is making on the democratization front: Particularly the gains made by the efforts it exerted to meet its human rights obligations to its own people and fulfill Ethiopia's international commitments to all right-promoting declarations.

However, in this connection there is a common fallacy which runs like a red thread across the core assumptions of both domestic and external refusenics who view Ethiopia's human rights performance with jaundiced eye. This stems first and foremost from failure to appreciate that for the Ethiopian government, fidelity to principles of human rights is not a donor-driven commitment, which can be switched on and off depending on external funding. Few, if any, realize that it is rather out of deep conviction that, cynical incredulity aside, the government tries its level-best to uphold human rights as it does the whole array of democratic liberties enshrined in the Ethiopian constitution. Similarly, none of its detractors seem to understand that the government is determined to spare no effort to create the ground for the possibility of a robust human rights environment. Such an environment, in its view, cannot prevail under conditions of recurrent famine, cyclical

epidemic, constant bloodletting and permanent disfranchisement. Unfortunately such were the conditions of in which Ethiopian people were tapped in before the advent of the present government, that brought about drastic improvement in the lives of the people at all levels. And that is also why the government believes that commitment to human rights is inadequate unless paralleled by a firm resolve to first safeguard the safety of ordinary citizens, especially those most at risk both under weak governments with limited reach, and strong arbitrary states of ubiquities presence. Safeguarding public safety, for the government, is tied to commitment to ensuring food security, universal coverage of basic healthcare, primary education, in a word, to providing for the fundamentals of life-sustaining necessities, which in its own right counts as basic human rights. This is not just rhetoric or red herring by invoking the not so uncommon assertion of the inherent tradeoff between human rights and development. But, a firm conviction attested by the unprecedented expansion of basic social and hard infrastructures without which implementations of human rights is bound to be limited, if not, impossible. Nor can violation of human rights be properly monitored in a logistically and politically closed environment, where citizens lack basic civic education to protect their rights and where there is no access to their physical location. This was the case in Ethiopia before the construction of massive communication networks, which unfortunately means nothing to ivory tower human rights activists.

This is, then, the kind public goods that the government promised and delivered beyond the expectations of the donor community, in partial fulfillment of its human rights obligation. However, blinkered by a narrow neoliberal scope of vision, the present armies of human rights advocates fail to capture the bigger picture of the global human rights agenda. Most have no appreciation of the important role that construction of social and physical infrastructure play in promoting human rights. Neither do they seem to be willing to understand that such public provisions, which opens up greater possibility for effective implementation of human rights, is only possible through state intervention. To the contrary, the current captains of the burgeoning industry of advocacy are wedded to a fixed monist view of which collective agency de-promotes or promotes human rights. For

instance, they see all developmental states as ontologically antithetical to human rights and basic freedoms in general. This indiscriminate and a priori negative categorization obviously overlooks that there is at least one notable variation to this typology of state organization. This is what scholars and practitioners alike rightly refer to as a democratic development state.

Though, it might sound as an overstatement, the Ethiopian government can be described as the closest approximation of the archetypal democratic development state. For, unlike the development state in the Asian Tigers, democratic liberties not only predate Ethiopia's right-based rapid development trajectory, but also undergird its federal democratic political order. Objection to this claim will no doubt be raised as there is still a visible lag in external perceptions between, on the one hand, Ethiopia's pre-federal condition of abject destitution and autocratic rule. And, on the other, the present constitutional system of governance hallmarked by accelerated social and economic development, which forms the condition of its increased capacity to implement human rights. A word of caution is apt here, since it is not purely due to lack of information that Ethiopia is still cast at times a virtual failed state, and, at other times, as a country ran by an overambitious neo-totalitarian ruling party. One determined to entrench and insulate itself from public scrutiny, by reckless state expenditure on unsustainable white- elephant projects at the expense of the needs and rights of the people. Surely this flies in face of the of the government's impressive record in the areas of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and successive implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) that qualifies a nation for debt cancelation. It bears to keep in mind that while meeting the MGDs has a spin-off effect of enhancing human rights, successful implementation of the PRSPs compounds the effect, as the program is designed with built-in provision of popular participation both at the level of planning and practical application. It is not by accident, then, that in none of its publications has Human Rights Watch anything positive to say about Ethiopia's effort to build an enabling human rights environment. As its government has, by launching rapid infrastructural development paralleled by a steady

pace of institution-building, geared to enhance greater popular participation at all levels of the decision-making structure.

Nor is there any mention in Human Rights Watch's reports of the initiative taken to mainstream the values human rights across all relevant state institutions. For instance, under the auspices of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, all law-enforcement officers and prison administrators are required to attend periodic training sessions on human rights values, legislations, declaration and codes of conduct. Attendance is mandatory, since each trainee is held accountable for failure to abide by the laws and instruction manuals framed to guide their activities. Equally important, though invariably ignored by Human Rights Watch, is that it is compulsory in Ethiopia that all relevant state agencies include a human rights component in their annual action plans. Against which success and failures during implantation phase is subject to independent evaluation where, depending on the outcome, appropriate measures are taken by the next higher authority in the chain of government hierarchy. Furthermore, to ensure an even and combined development, every one of these institutions are required to align their annual action plan with the human rights goals envisioned in the present (2010-15) and subsequent national Growth and Transformation Plans. No doubt this integrated plan is less likely to make any positive impression on Human Rights Watch and International Rivers Network as an innovative and sustainable approach of fostering and deepening the culture of human rights. In a way, it is naive to expect otherwise since, by virtue of their ideological orientation, the policy elites of the human rights watchers' and protectors of dam-construction victims are averse to any human rights implementation package that is tied to a government-led socio-economic transformation. Witness the crocodile tears being shed over a non-existent mass population displacement, presumed to be caused by Ethiopia's hydroelectric projects. The wailing has become even louder in anticipation of an even more frightening scale of population resettlement with the completion of the Great Renaissance Dam, the jewel of the five-year Growth and Transformation Plan.

Alas, after everything is said and done, all the noise and claptrap about mass uprooting only masks an ideological stance that denies the nexus between human rights and state-driven development. In the Ethiopian context equitable development is unthinkable without effective utilization of the country's only resources, land, water and labor. Nor can such building an environment where the overwhelming majority of the country's low-income population can access the goods and services produced by harnessing Ethiopia's natural and human resources. Whereas, while Ethiopia has been reproached for failing to provide its citizens the bare minimum, often in human rights language, it is treated in the same vein for mobilizing its resources to meet the basic needs of the people. Granted, this tension-filled criticism, which cancels itself out, leaves Ethiopia in a difficult catch-22 situation. Be that as it may, from the vantage point of the organizing principles of the Ethiopian government, development and human rights are mutually interdependent as one is a precondition of the other. In fact, the validity of this thinking was upheld at the 1968 first World Conference on Human Rights, convened in Teheran. The final statement of the conference asserts that "the achievement of lasting progress in the implementation of human rights is dependent upon sound and effective national and international policies of economic and social development."

Human Rights Watch notwithstanding, the EPRDF government believes that without taking a good stock of Ethiopia's sound policies and the gains made so far, lamenting the lack of international standards of human rights is at best hollow, and at worst self-righteous, if not, downright cynical. It is indeed disingenuous to suggest that in the Ethiopian context of constitutional government, the people could access these public goods in the absence of measurable respect to human rights. Human Rights Watch aside, at least in Ethiopia, sustained access to the means of dignified livelihood is only a function of mass political empowerment free from coercion, much less, systematic violation of human rights.

Paradoxically, accusatory fingers are pointed at the very government that made it all possible through accelerated development marked by popular participation. On second thought, there may not be a paradox here. Since at bottom it appears that the real issue at

stake is not government failure of compliance with human rights conventions *per se*. Rather, what seems to be on trial is Ethiopia's approach to human rights which apparently is not to the liking of those who abrogates to themselves the last say on the matter. Obviously there is a discernable distinction between Ethiopia's development approach to human rights and the dominant paradigm, though in recent years key tenets of the latter have come under fire. This is partly because the mainstream institutionalized human rights thinking starts from first principle of universal value and, argues for its uniform application, regardless of the specific variables of each country. Granted, in the present understanding, it is European Enlightenment thinkers who first deeply reflected on, and theorized about, human rights. It is indeed the galaxy of 18th and early 19th century trailblazing Western thinkers who 'discovered' that a human being, regardless of nationality, citizenship, gender or creed has a natural right that all European states must respect to qualify as a civilized nation. Never mind that not all Enlightenment thinkers had the courage of their conviction to include Africans in their definition of a human being, but credit goes to the continental Philosophes for elevating human right to public morality and insisted that the right merits legal protection.

Yet, if it is to be a universally shared morality, human rights must not be used as an instrument of leverage on poor states like Ethiopia. This is to say that every country must be allowed to align and mediate modern principles of human rights through its own historical experience and cultural values by which every society gives meaning to life. To repeat, in its present full-fledged configuration human rights is eminently a European construct, but its substrate foundation *i.e.* considerate empathy with fellow human beings is not the exclusive preserve of the Western tradition. All non-Western societies, let alone those famed for their gift to world civilization, possess rich legacies of human decency, albeit less theorized as a separate domain in its own right. If so, then, each country outside the orbit of the Western tradition can rearticulate its indigenous humane values to match modern concepts and practices of human rights. Arguably such a reflective and nuanced approach is bound to go a long way in terms of mainstreaming human rights across the public spheres and governing institutions of the entire non-Western world, deemed to fall

far behind Western counterpart where human rights is believed to be embedded in its modern legal, political, ideological and social fabric.

The all-knowing Human Rights Watch might not be aware of it, but Ethiopia is one such society with lofty moral tradition whose peoples deeply value rule of law. Tragically Ethiopia's legacy of popular respect to the innate worth and dignity of human life was stretched to the limit during the 1974-1991 post-revolutionary reign of terror, unleashed by a power-mongering regime of mass murder. Horrendous as it has been, the seventeen-year long abandonment of legality and abdication of the virtues of human decency must, from the point of view of Ethiopia's millennial history, be taken as a short-lived aberration. Though abominable, the experience has, nonetheless, imparted one enduring lesson to the surviving generation and hopefully to posterity. Namely, that henceforth Ethiopia cannot rely on its inherited culture of grassroots civility alone, if it is to avoid another slippage into the abyss of state-directed human rights violation, much less, of genocidal proportion.

It is against this backdrop, then, that the post-military ruling party played a leading role in Ethiopia's incorporation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights into its constitution. And subsequently established an independent commission charged with oversight to ensure all-round compliance with the country's human rights laws. As a party, therefore, which led the struggle to close the chapter arbitrary rule and Ethiopia's recent history of nightmarish state terror, the EPRDF government needs no lecture or any lesson on what it already knows and knows too well. Who, in god's name, can instruct the governing coalition that in an environment of gross human rights violation, neither political stability, nor development is possible? For to do so is no more redundant than preaching to the convert since, for the Ethiopian governing party, respect to human rights is an integral part of its commitment to the wellbeing of its people on whose aggregate consent rests its legitimacy to govern. However, lest there be any misunderstanding, perhaps a disclaimer here is in order since the Ethiopian government itself does not lay claim to a flawless human rights record. Yes, there are incidents of human rights violation. Yes, these incidents are cause for concern. But the question is, is human right violation in Ethiopia systemic? The answer is emphatic

no, regardless of who says what to the contrary. Apropos, the point that cannot be overstated is that the government does not believe that compliance with human rights conventions can be ensured through punitive external pressure. Nor is blackmailing Ethiopia, Human Rights Watch's favorite strategy, is likely to yield any positive result. Such heavy-handed approach is, in fact, self-defeating, particularly given the well known fact that the EPRDF government neither responds to arm-twisting tactics, nor shirks from following its own mode of human rights practice.

This is not to suggest that the government is unappreciative of the assistance it is receiving from its partners. To the contrary! Provided no crippling strings are attached, the government is grateful to every bit of help it receives as it strives to deliver on its promises and live up to the ideals of the Ethiopian constitution. From which the government in turn derives the inspiration to transform Ethiopia into a stable democracy on a solid political-economy of rapid wealth generation and equitable wealth distribution. By the same token, senior policy-makers are open to legitimate criticism of Ethiopia's "admittedly less than perfect human rights practices". What the country's leading decision-makers resent most, and with good reason one might add, is contrived reports of condemnation that unintentionally or otherwise tarnish Ethiopia's image under the guise of holding the country accountable to its own international human rights obligations. Again there is another paradox here, since it is the same forces who, on the one hand, claim to exert appropriate pressure on Ethiopia to be mindful of its duties as a signatory state to global human rights conventions: And, on the other hand, work tirelessly to have Ethiopia expelled from multilateral organizations charged with promoting best practices at all levels of governance. Including from international commissions mandated to monitor state compliance with human rights declarations. Such a contradictory intervention, which is often expressed in accusatory human rights reports with no warrant in reality, can hardly produce whatever the intended result might be.

Besides, it boggles the mind how those who claim to expand the frontiers of human rights across the length and breadth of the globe can at the same time seek to curtail Ethiopia's

participation in world forums. Surely such a severe design on the oldest African state is uncalled for. Especially when it is widely known that Ethiopia readily avails itself to human rights monitoring missions, and, when conditions permit, submits reports on the progress and challenges it is facing in the process of implementing human rights. Besides, Ethiopia is a founding member of the United Nations and the first to be called on by the Security Council for peacekeeping missions in many war-torn countries of the African continent. This is not to mention that it was in Ethiopia where the founding fathers of African independence, after intense disagreement, agreed to hold the founding conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and chose Addis Ababa as its headquarters. Fittingly, the OAU's successor, the African Union, ruled by an overwhelming majority vote to retain the now expanded AU office in Ethiopia. This goes to show (if any illustration need be) that Ethiopia is a respected AU member state whose late prime minister, Meles Zenawi, who help shape the Union's new direction urged its member states to speak in one voice. Meles also served admirably so, let it be underlined, the African Union as its elected spokesman on almost all international forums. These are just recent examples that highlight Ethiopia's long pedigree as a responsible player in regional and international affairs whose voice carries weight throughout Africa. More so today than ever since, alone in the region, Ethiopia enjoys solid peace and stability hallmarked by an inclusive constitutional state arrangement and a dynamic political-economy that, among other things, explains its present high standing in the international community. It is, then, fair to conclude from the foregoing that Ethiopia's current place in the world is bound to mitigate the adverse effects of the negative campaign which high-profile international NGOs in cahoots with runaway fugitives are waging against its government in the name of human rights.

Nonetheless, there can be no illusion that, coming from the State Department, damning rendition of the state of Human Rights in Ethiopia is likelier to give comfort, if not, encouragement to the fanatical fringe opposition outfits, whose external sponsors openly disdain human rights. For adherence to the principles of human rights means placing limits to the means they can employ in pursuit of their political end. Whereas, their willing domestic pawns, each bent as it is on destabilizing the Ethiopian constitutional order,

invoke human rights as a convenient cover to hide their unlawful design. Unfortunately, every one of this year's human rights reports on Ethiopia is largely based on the testimonies of these hired guns whose main preoccupation is planning for their next terrorist attack on the softest target possible. In any event, none of the human right reports on Ethiopia promise much that the EPRDF government needs to take seriously. As none of it is worth considering as input to the kind corrective measures that policy-makers intend to implement through the National Human Right Action Plan. For what use is there in giving serious thought to blanket indictments that no impartial tribunal would dignify with deliberation. If anything, the countless allegations contend in these reports either make the job of the hired anti-Ethiopian lobby in Washington easier, or play into the hands of Ethiopia's sworn enemies who are determined to leave no stone unturned to wreck havoc in this country. Who, then, can blame the Ethiopian government for characterizing these so-called research-based reports as "contrary to the spirit of good faith that animates true advocacy for human rights?" Hence, one can only hope that future human right reports on Ethiopia would be accurate, constructively critical, and forward-looking. For anything less is downright bunk, and of use to no one with deep concern to the cause of human rights.

April 28, 2014