

The Case for stable Ethiopia

Mohamed Olad 08-25-16

The recent demonstrations across the country especially in Oromia and most recently in the Amhara region are deeply disturbing and unnerving. Though there are some legitimate grievances and need for reform to address the legitimate concerns for income and wealth inequalities, unemployment and equal access to opportunities to reverse some unwarranted socioeconomic patterns in the short term as well as in the long term.



But when these demands and criticisms are put forward, they should be in the proper historical and current context. What I mean by that is, we need to look back how far and where the country was when the current regime came to power.

It's is also imperative to do justice to the progress that has been made in the last twenty five years or so and the fact that some of the works done during this time has started to show off in terms of high economic growth, expanded economic opportunities, higher employment levels, higher living standards, developments in infrastructure and the overall national mood though a lot works has to be done to make sure all the resulting economic benefit trickles down equitably to the ordinary folks.



One also should look at the current geopolitical environment across the Horn of Africa to really understand the alternative and have a clear understanding of what is at stake. Look

around the countries that surround us to really grasp how much stability and continuity is needed. Look at Somalia to the east, South Sudan to the west and Eritrea to the north.

The current demonstrations and other trends jeopardize all the decent progress that has been gained on the last quarter century. As someone who has seen and suffered first hand from chaos and the ugly reality of subjugation and war, I can say, I now a thing or two about violence and social strife.

To give a little background to the reader, I was born in a refugee camp in Somalia when my family fled to Somalia from the repression of the Derg regime like many countless Ethiopians across this vast land. Then, if things were not already bad enough, my family again caught in between the Somali Civil War and fled back to Ethiopia after the collapse of the Derg regime and the coming on to power by the EPRDF.

Its only under this regime that most people like me got the opportunity for education and other economic opportunities for the first time not to mention the peace and stability that we all took for granted these days.



The other hard cold truth is that there are many problems that need to be addressed in terms of wealth and income inequality, unemployment, entrenched bureaucracy, opening up of the political space so that there will be a legitimate venues for people to register their grievances and dissatisfaction big or small rather than people resorting to social and civil strife and worse; violence for only them to be heard.

What is equally true is that, it is only through dialogue and civil engagements and, of course time, plenty of time that all these complex political, social and economic issues will be addressed. Any other means whether its massive civic disobedience or force will result in unintended social and political strife that can swirl out of hand in to something so dangerous like that of the Arab Spring. You can't change a government overnight by mass demonstrations with out having an alternative system to replace it, that is just common sense. Sorry to disappoint!

Does anybody think the EPRDF will just disappear in to the dark of the night? If that happens what is the alternative? What system and institutions will replace it? The fact of the matter is that there are so many other institutional and cultural reforms that need to take place to realize full democratic society. Simply put, the people are not ready yet in every aspect and meaning of the word. Any attempt to accelerate that process other than its natural course will just create unnecessary social and political frictions that can only lead to darker places.

It makes me sad when I hear and read those who are inciting violence and demonstrations out of their comfort zone from their comfortable life in the diaspora. Specially those opposition forces that are not practicing what they are preaching to the choir by running away in the face of perceived threat while they argue innocent, helpless civilians to take to the streets and clash with the security forces and sacrifice their lives while they are not willing to held their end of the bargain by not willing to sacrifice theirs if need be.

The other thing that is really disturbing is the hypocrisy of accusing the EPRDF of ethnic politics so that they can extend their grip on power while they themselves resort to ethnic politics by wedging knives between say; Amharas and Oromos and between Oromos and Tigrayans.

One good example is when they call only to one ethnic group to go out and protest while they are claiming that they are fighting for freedoms and equality. But the reality is you can't just rally one ethnic group against the other and throw around accusations of ethnic politics when what you are doing is just that.

But the universal truth should be this; the freedom and justice for Oromo people is freedom and justice for all Ethiopians and freedom and justice for all Ethiopians is a freedom justice for the Oromo people. You cannot separate the two so that it fits your own political narrative. That is called opportunism, pure and simple.

So as far as those so-called opposition are calling civil disobedience, social and political strive by one ethnic group against all others, like Merera Gudina of the Oromo Federalist Congress did during an interview with the Washington Post, ironically from Washington DC, and called for an Intifada, by using an Arabic word for uprising. Like that is a good thing!

To most people, that is just another veiled attempt for power grab and the same ethnic politics they supposedly complain so much about.

Ed's Note: *Mohamed Olad is a Somali Commentator and Writer whose works have appeared on different media publications. He was a former Academic Staff and Faculty Fellow at Jig-Jiga University. Now he is an entrepreneur and member of the Northern American Diaspora Community. He can be reached at mohamedolad88@gmail.com.
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