

ADDIS DIGEST

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Editorial

ARE WE CRYING WOLF ?

Two apparently isolated incidents in the past weeks, although they have gone largely unnoticed and not many people have cared to assess their political implications, have shown the degree of exacerbation reached in interethnic relations under TPLF.

The first was the resignation of an Ethiopian diplomat, Ato Segu Demissie, from the Ethiopian embassy in

Washington. In his letter of resignation, he noted that the Ethiopian embassy there was «being reduced to a TPLF branch office swarmed by narrow ethnocentrists» and that non-Tigrean diplomats and embassy staff were «most disgracefully» forced to take leave of absence during Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's visit to the US» for «alleged security reasons».

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The other incident came in late January during the German President's visit to our country. In the national capital, which has an estimated population of over 3 million people, the German guests were treated to what the German paper, General Anzeiger, called a «ghost city». People were forcibly cleared off the streets and forced to close doors and windows wherever the German president and his delegation drove. In sharp contrast to this «reception» in the national capital, the German guests were greeted by cheering and «enthusiastic» crowds waving Ethiopian and TPLF flags when they visited Tigray.

The frightening lessons to be drawn from these two incidents are clear: TPLF's leaders, who have been trying to maintain power by initiating and aggravating ethnic hatred, are now fast dragging the country to the next «logical» phase in Ethiopia's steady drift to disaster: ethnic fear.

The forced and humiliating exclusion of non-Tigreans

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RAGPEHA

from the «Ethiopian» embassy in Washington shows that the «narrow ethnocentrists» have now reached a point where they look upon all non-Tigrean Ethiopians - including those given government posts «as token representatives» of other ethnic groups (as was noted by Ato Segu) - as hostile elements who cannot possibly be trusted when it comes to the security of TPLF's leaders.

The incident in the «ghost city» is nothing new. It should be recalled that in May 1991, as TPLF forces entered Addis Abeba, the «freedom fighters» were not received with open arms. Perhaps for the first time in the history of a victorious guerilla force toppling a brutal dictatorship, the «liberators» were received with mass hostile demonstrations which left at least 12 dead and several people injured! It is clear that from that time on, TPLF leaders have been living with the uncomfortable feeling of being besieged in an «ethnically hostile» territory. Over the past five years, on the extremely rare occasions when Meles Zenawi ventured out of his palace he has driven through «ghost streets» cleared of the people some two hours before his moving fortress passed.

Since we began publication of ADDIS DIGEST about one year ago, we have been trying to draw the attention of our readers to the dangers facing the country as a result of the manipulation of the ethnic problem by TPLF leaders. Have we been crying wolf? Unfortunately no. The risk of chaos and of seeing the country sink into conditions of intractable ethnic civil wars is unprecedented in the country's history. Although the struggle for democracy and against tyranny is no new phenomenon, for the first time, ethnicity is being manipulated as an instrument to secure and maintain power, and this has completely changed the context of the struggle for democratization.

For the first time in the history of our country, an extremist clique, openly claiming to represent a minority ethnic group, has gained complete control of the country's state apparatus, its army, police and security forces and of all positions of command of the country's economy. For the first time in our country's

history, society is being led to believe that the emerging dictatorship is «by one ethnic group and for one ethnic group». For the first time in the history of ethnic relations in Ethiopia, the incumbent regime is trying to «associate» an entire ethnic group with its crimes against the people.

TPLF's leaders, who have deliberately allowed animosity among the peoples of Ethiopia and «anti-Tigrean passions» to develop unchecked, are clearly showing that they are fearful of all other Ethiopians. As they have been doing with everything else, what remains for them to do is to persuade the Tigrean people to share this fear of others and believe that its «security» as a people is being threatened by all other Ethiopians. The other «logical» step would be for extremists like the TPLF leaders - but from other ethnic groups - to convince «their» respective peoples to look upon all Tigreans as a threat to their survival.

If and when this happens, we fear that passions will be let loose and the stage set for a Rwanda- or Bosnia-type situation in Ethiopia. The vicious circle of hatred and fear that can lead to such tragedies is already in place in our country. We live with the deep apprehension that time is running out. But we also believe that country's democratic forces remain clear-headed and determined in their search for a democratic solution based on the respect of the rights of all Ethiopians to live in a multi-ethnic and pluralist Ethiopia of brotherly peoples.

It is this strong faith in the peoples of Ethiopia which leads us to endorse Ato Segu Demissie, who, before he resigned from a post where he was «kept to serve as a token representative of the Oromo ethnic group», wrote in his letter to the Ambassador: «I pray that God help my country survive the systematic ethnic division to which it is subjected by a political fiat engineered and guided by your party (TPLF). It is my hope and belief that Ethiopians of all ethnic groups will soon rise up and stand together to create a democratic nation where all children of Ethiopia will live together under the rule of law that recognizes every citizen as equal, and none above the law.»

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