

## **PART SIX MELES ZENAWI HAS PASSED AWAY --WAS HE A CREDIBLE LEADER WHEN IT COMES TO THE REALATIONSHIP BETWEEN ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA?**

**My personal view.** By Tesfahannes Beyene,

**THE DEATH OF MELES ZENAWI:** Meles Zenawi's life was cut short by his sudden death caused by a mystery illness at the age of 57 years old. As a darling of the Western World, he was the Chief Engineer on War on Terror in the Horn of Africa. He was the main operator on the two UN sanctions against the government and people of Eritrea. For these reasons, I assumed the Western World would give him the best treatment available, at least to prolong his life. It did not happen, because in life there are two unavoidable and inevitable eventualities -**death and taxes**. Whether you are in America, Europe or Eritrea, death and taxes will always follow you at all times. That being the case, there are two types of death, the first is a sudden death which can be caused by car crashes, helicopter crashes, plane crashes, accidental death, cancer, heart attack etc.. In this type of death, the deceased takes all of their secrets to the grave. The second type of death is a gradual death which gives you breathing space to say goodbye to your loved ones and to record or forward your wishes which can be carried out after you have passed away.

Death is the ultimate destiny of any human being. Its meaning is expressed clearly by our forefathers in a simple and powerful Eritrean proverb that says, "Himam Seleste Mealti Aytklaana" To me this proverb is a masterpiece, its interpretation is very simple: God /Allah, allow us to have few days of sickness/pain/agony, before you take our life away, so that our wishes, and desires can be relayed to our children, relatives, priest, Imam etc. If you are the head of a government, all you want is a continuation of your policy which is achieved by grooming a chosen successor to complete the work that you began.

For instance Hugo Chavez of Venezuela knew he was dying of cancer, so he groomed a chosen successor, Nicolas Maduro who contested the 2013 election in Venezuela and won by a slim majority of about 1%. Maduro is now expected to carry out the reforms that were started by his predecessor. Meles Zenawi knew he was dying, so he groomed a chosen successor, Haile-mariam Desalegne to carry out the policies he started. Meleses decision was deliberate, he did not want to select another Tigrayan (like himself) to take over power from him. If he had done so, it would have led his country to mayhem as the Tigrayans are an ethnic minority and other bigger ethnicities would be angry if power stayed in the hands of a minority. However Meles struck the right cord by choosing a successor from other ethnic majority, thereby appeasing the majority of the country and saving his country from chaos.

Whether you are young, old, king, queen, soldier, brick layer, rich or poor, one cannot escape death, in fact this is the only way in which we are all equal. Premier Meles died at a relatively young age and like any Eritreans, I would like to pay my condolence to his immediate family and to the people of Ethiopia. Meles has been in power since 1991 and has done more good than bad to his country. He ruled Ethiopia with an iron fist and made sure that everything is done in line with the EPRDF philosophy. His relationship with Eritrea has been marred by a "no war no peace" strategy. Initially the relationship was based on constructive cooperation between the two countries but then it was followed by a destructive war and hostile policies after the war. One policy in particular was the border dispute, both countries claimed a piece of land on the border between the two countries and the matter was referred by the UN to the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) The Commission decided that the disputed land (Badme)was found to belong to Eritrea and the Algiers Agreement was meant to make that decision official. But Meles refused to respect the decision of the Commission even though he signed in black and white to abide by its decision and his government is still occupying illegally sovereign Eritrean territory of Badme.

As far as I am concerned, I have mixed feeling about his credibility. Obviously he has achieved a plausible record to an extent, but failed to go full circle for peace and tranquillity of the two countries. Leaving the border dispute in a state of limbo, with the deliberate intention to strangle Eritrea economically and to isolate her diplomatically. In a short period of time Ethiopia's cynical move against Eritrea may have worked, but in the long term it will fail like its past scorched earth policy that Ethiopian leaders have carried out from the 1950s up to the present day against the government and people of Eritrea. Yes, Meles Zenawi has achieved a lot for his country, he received billions dollars from Western Countries for his country and his trusted allies, but was he a credible leader?

What is credibility? According to the Oxford dictionary, credibility is simply believability, integrity, plausibility, authority, trustworthiness etc. In politics credibility is a big issue and if you are not credible enough, you would not be believed as a politician, you would have lost the trust of your supporters and more importantly, the public that you ought to serve. You would not be taken seriously and people may lose hope for the future and you are no longer an aspiring figure. Therefore I expect leaders, politicians and individuals to be believable and reliable in their daily lives and in their work (especially if it is politics). To be a credible leader, you must never undermine any human being, never to underestimate your enemies and most important of all, be a good listener and to respect any point of view, even if it is a different view from that of yours. When credibility between colleagues, leaders, individuals or citizen is lost or broken then everything would be heading for the rocks.

So, let's first critically look into the credible work that the deceased Ethiopian leader has accomplished between the Government of Eritrea and Ethiopia or the people of the Horn of Africa. When it comes to Eritrea, the Ethiopian Premier has done his fair share of work before and after Eritrean independence up to 1998. During the armed struggle against Mengistu Haile-Mariam, especially between 1990-1991 Meles' Tigrayan Liberation Front fought at times on their own from Tigray and at times side by side with Eritreans coordinating their military to fight the common enemy -the Derg. Their fighters died in our trenches and Eritrean fighters died in their trenches. When the whole of Eritrea was liberated in May 1991 by the military genus of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, the whole of Eritrea celebrated. Few weeks later, the Eritrean mechanized brigade crossed the Eritrea-Ethiopia border to chase the common enemy, they entered Addis Ababa in 1991 to help Meles and his Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front to topple the Ethiopian dictator. Everything worked perfectly well and the war against the Ethiopian dictator was executed with mathematical precision.

For the first time Eritrea became an independent country in 1991 thanks to its heroic people who fought a protracted war and won it with pride and dignity for the people of Eritrea. Ethiopia was also liberated from the cruel rule of the Derg. This historic moment was followed by a great celebration by the people of both countries. Following this, Arab countries and Ethiopia became the first to recognize independent Eritrea while other nations followed suit, so far, so good. Even after Eritrea became an independent country, a few warmongering Ethiopian parliamentarians, who could not stomach the defeat of the mighty Ethiopian army, gave the impression that they want to keep on fighting against the Eritrean fighting force. At the time, I can vividly remember when Meles mocked and told them to accept his decision in recognizing Eritrea as a free independent country. For the hesitants he bluntly told them, if they are so willing to fight, he wished them the best of luck. The war mongers never carried out their threat. Moreover even after the border dispute between the two countries erupted, his views on Assab has never changed. In fact it is well known that he said he does not need the Port of Assab and told us (Eritreans) to let our camels swim in our Ports. The time between the day Eritrea was liberated to the border dispute can be considered as the golden moments, that- relationship between the two countries was at its strongest. Meles' views on Eritrean sovereignty never changed and the two countries shared positive mutual understanding and these period can be defined as the most constructive relations that the two

countries had. Thus we can confidently say, that Meles contributed to the Eritrean cause and his credibility was intact up to the border dispute.

From my personal perspective the above mentioned points make him credible and this is how I like to remember him up to that period. However after the border dispute between the two countries flare up his reputation as a credible leader began to evaporate when he started to plot against the government of Eritrea -by expelling about 100.000 Eritreans who lived and worked for decades in Ethiopia. They- were uprooted from their daily life, all their properties were confiscated, even Eritrean professionals who were working with Non Governmental Organizations were expelled and their passport stamped -not to return. To me these Eritreans were contributing to the national growth of the Ethiopian economy. But Meles expelled them in their pyjamas, forcing them to abandon their property, their livelihood, he separated children from their parents and caused pregnant women enormous pain and agony when he forced them to walk on foot from the Ethiopian border towards Eritrea. The reason was simply, because they were Eritreans, and he even stated the following when talking to journalists: "If we don't like the colour of their eyes, we have the right to chase them away!".

More over in his attempt to discredit Eritrea, he used International Institutions to blame Eritrea as a source of trouble in the region. For instance, he took Eritrea to the U.N. Security Council alleging that Eritrea is helping Al Shebab and the Security Council passed its first UN Security Council resolution 1907 in December 2009 against Eritrea, even though the allegation was completely baseless. He tried to associate Eritrea, for no apparent reason, with terrorist activities in Sudan, Central Africa, the Horn of Africa and Kenya. He pushed IGAD (Inter Governmental Agency For Development) leaders to gang up against Eritrea for no apparent reason at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, he pushed IGAD and other African leaders to falsely accuse Eritrea at the Security council for a second time to testify against Eritrea via video link from Addis to New York and the UN Security Council passed a second Resolution 2023 in December 2011 against Eritrea. The whole concept of Melese's strategy was to cripple or overthrow the government of Eritrea. The man left no stone unturned in his attempts to discredit Eritrea at every step of his move. When Meles failed to overthrow the Eritrean government militarily or diplomatically, he bribed and sold his land to countries to get them to support sanctions against Eritrea in order to hang Eritrea out to dry. Thus Meles' blatant and perpetual accusation of Eritrea, day in and day out was, perhaps an indication that the deceased Ethiopian leaders obsession with Eritrea was becoming more of a drama than Eritrea becoming of a threat to his nation.

What was intriguing about the guy was that he was completely obsessed with Eritrea, he abandoned other politics to focus on undermining Eritrea which he did during his encounter with journalists at any conferences and when having breakfast, lunch and dinner. To him, Eritrea was the trouble maker in the region and had sleepless nights inventing unbelievable stories to attack her. Even after the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border dispute was agreed at the Alger's conference in 2000, Meles said he would abide by the agreement. When the ruling was given and Badme reconfirmed as Eritrean, the man changed his mind and refused to vacate Badme in violation of the Alger's Agreement.

Thus instead of abiding by international law and resolving the issue in line with the Algiers Agreement, the regime in Ethiopia used the border dispute to bash Eritrea at every step and to advance his political goal using the tired eight letter word "DIALOGUE" which he requested must take place before demarcation happens. To him dialogue was seen as a solution to the boundary problem, To majority of Eritreans however it was a con -trick to extracted endless concession from Eritrea, and to confuse few Eritreans and the friends of Eritrea. At the end of the day it was rightly rejected by the Government of Eritrea. The interesting point that need to be remembered here is that he could have solved the boundary dispute with a stroke of a pen which would have been in the

interest of the two countries, but refused to do so. Thus despite his violation of the Alger's Agreement, despite of his violation of International Law, no action was taken against the Government of Ethiopia. The US which is part to the Alger's agreement could have imposed sanctions on Ethiopia as they have done so against Eritrea, but the Americans choosed not to do so, as Ethiopia is their main ally in the Horn of Africa. The US view Ethiopia as a Christian country and also as an anchor state (a country used by the US to control other countries in the same region). Ethiopia now, before and in the future will remain a foot soldier for the United States, it will always fight any proxy war on behalf of the United States even if it is at the expense of its own people. Because Ethiopia is dependent on the USA and other Western countries for financial, political and diplomatic support. As a result Meles was confident that he can receive diplomatic cover even when he violates international law or accuse Eritrea at the UN with out any proven evidence in imposing sanctions against her and he achieved his short term political ambitions twice.

In fact, had he been alive, more allegation against Eritrea would have been continued in order to bring a third sanction against Eritrea at the security council which would happen like this: Meles would call an African Union Summit in Addis Ababa and the agenda item was going to be "Eritrea interfering in the internal affairs of Ethiopia" Meles would have said that the Eritrean government has been meddling in Ethiopia's war in Somalia and in internal Ethiopian affairs (funding rebel groups against the Ethiopian government) and go so far as to accuse Eritrea of plotting to bring the sky down over the African Union Head Quarters in Addis Ababa and urged fellow African leaders to take swift action against Eritrea. Initially the African Union would not be convinced by this allegation, nonetheless he would press them into believing the alleged plot. They would cave in -to agree to his request to pass strong resolution against Eritrea for such a plot. The resolution would order Eritrea not to bring the sky down on the Ethiopia capital and if this did not work they would refer the case to the UN Security Council to pass a third resolution against Eritrea. IGAD members would ask for more time to consider Meleses request. Meles would not be happy for the members to delay the issue of Eritrean interference in Ethiopia.

Frustrated by their delay Meles would call another emergency meeting of IGAD members and repeatedly urge them to take urgent action against Eritrea as she was not listening. At the end of their emergency meeting, the IGAD leaders would pass the buck to the Security Council instead. However at the Security Council, when they analyse the issue, common sense prevailed and the latter (the UN) will dismiss the scenario which cannot be substantiated as they cannot find any hard evidence that Eritrea was bringing down the sky over Addis Abbaba. As an alternative the UN would urge the two countries to reconcile their difference and to resolve the border dispute in line with Algiers agreement. Meles' accusation would fall flat leaving him with a credibility deficit. At the time when the UN showed restrain God has also sided with Eritrea in discrediting the allegation.

There are also other reasons for Meles losing his credibility in my eyes, one is mentioned an article in the Sunday Times (UK newspaper) on the 2nd December 2012 by Flora Bagenal entitled "Ethiopia: rape and brutality but UK aid continues". The article states that many aid agencies and anthropologist have voiced their concern and informed Justine Greening MP, the International Development Minister for the UK government, about the human right abuses, atrocities, rapes, beatings and forced eviction carried out by the Ethiopian government in the south of Ethiopia. As usual the Ethiopian government denied the allegation, instead it accused the aid agencies of interfering in the domestic affairs of Ethiopia. The UK Foreign Office ignored the atrocities that Ethiopia was carrying out and when asked at the House of Commons (UK Parliament) the minister for overseas aid said there was no any substantive evidence to prove that Ethiopia was violating human rights. In so doing, the minister was accused in covering up the atrocities carried out by the Ethiopian Government to avoid angering the Ethiopian authorities while the latter was discredited

by international human rights institutions such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Genocide Watch which repeatedly reported tangible evidence on the human rights violations committed under his watch.

Also unconfirmed reports from Israel may also implicate and discredit the deceased Ethiopian leader, one written by Phoebe Greenwood from Tel Aviv (Israel) printed in the Guardian on Friday 1st March 2013, reported that Ethiopian female immigrants in Israel are repeatedly given contraceptive (Depro-Provera) without their knowledge so that they do not have children. The intriguing thing about this scandal is that the contraceptive jabs started while the immigrants were still in transit camps in Ethiopia and the process continued when they arrive in Israel. The women did not have any clue what the injection was and if they refused to participate their immigration to Israel would have been blocked. The important question that needs to be answered here is who instigated this policy? Neither the Israeli Government nor the Ethiopia Government are willing to say anything about this criminal act. However a young Ethiopian immigrant researcher with the name Sava Reube has taken up the lead to find out the truth. The young researcher discovered a letter from the health ministry to a clinic in Ethiopia written in the year 2000 thanking doctors for the many women they have treated with the fertility drug. What is happening to these women is crime against humanity, but it does not surprise me, could it be a deliberate Israeli Government policy to stop Young Ethiopian women from having children so to keep a lead on newly born Ethiopian Falashas? Or was the Meles Government involved in this crime against humanity. It remains to be seen and the truth will come out eventually to credit or discredit the former Ethiopian leader.

Finally, we only live once and no matter how much we may run and run, we can never hide from death. Meles is dead now and the only thing that I can say about him is I hope he rests in peace. But as they say in English, it does not matter how you start, it does not matter when you start, it only matters how you end up. To me the fact that Meles has ended up abandoning the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute unresolved, when he could have done it for the interest of the two countries is simply travesty of justice. For the above mentioned reasons my personal view on Meles is that he is credible to an extent but when it comes to the Eritrea-Ethiopia relationship, he has lost his credibility and my admiration for him vanished after he failed to uphold the Algiers Agreement. To me that is credibility deficit.

Part Seven to follow and the title will be as follows:

## **WHAT GOES UP WILL HAVE TO COME DOWN -COULD THE NEXT ELECTION IN ETHIOPIA BE THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE MINORITY GOVERNMENT?**

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