

From Decent Debates To Ugly Riots: A Brief Reflection On The C.U.D.P.

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February 24, 2006

Any adventurous person would certainly say that the best way to see a country, unless someone is pressed for time, is to travel on foot. By the same token, it can be said that the best way to know and judge a political party is to wait and see its progress towards fulfilling the promises it has made to its constituency in particular and to the public in general. Political parties can utter a host of promises—even the unrealistic ones—to the public, but whether they will deliver or not is always uncertain: only time will tell.

In Ethiopia, that time has arrived and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) has revealed its true identity. CUD, completely counter to a 21st century political party, ordered its supporters not to associate with people who exercise different opinions from the CUD Party members. According to the official CUD's press releases circulated to the public, talking, eating in the same restaurant, gathering in the same place, handshaking, worshipping in the same church and even using the same public transportation with suspected supporters of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was and still is unacceptable. To our complete dismay, all these divisive and venomous actions have been taken in the name of "U" as it is depicted in the middle of "CUD."

The increasing resentment towards certain ethnic groups, the extraordinary words of belittling the constitution and the law of the land, the pattern of unlawful demonstrations—all the evidences of CUDP drifting into the lifestyle of demagoguery were clear each day. On the other hand, the government was patient hoping that the CUDP would come to its senses and be a strong partner in eradicating the country's number one enemy--poverty. However, the governments' hoped outcome didn't materialize due to the opposition's arrogant and unrealistic demands.

Unrealistic demands, called the "Eight Preconditions to Enter Parliament," were put forward for discussion by the opposition. One of the Preconditions was a demand for the formation of a National government with its members drawn from all parties. Mind you, this was all after the national elections that consumed a lot of resources, in terms of money and energy, were successfully conducted and their results clearly showed the party with the majority seats both at the Federal and the state levels. The results of the elections were in and have been generally true to the spirit of democracy, except few irregularities, of course. As we all know, a re-run of elections had been conducted in areas where there were irregularities and the results have been included in the final report. The next logical question would be, "Why did we waste all of our scarce resources to conduct the elections, if, in fact, we were to form our government by consensus?" Forming a coagulation of government by picking from different party members after successful elections were conducted is not only wastage of sources but also a disservice to the democratization process. It would be unfair to the people whose party has won, to say the least.

As the Amharic saying goes, "**Awko Yetegnan Bekeseksut Aisemam,**" the opposition continued its demand for the so-called "Eight Preconditions" to be fulfilled in their entirety even

after the reruns and other remedial actions were taken in accordance with the country's constitution and other pertinent international election laws. The opposition undermined the law of the land and ordered its supporters to flood into the streets of Addis-Ababa bearing modern and conventional arms, thereby confronting the police and blocking public roads. They virtually created havoc in Addis-Ababa which is home to more than 3.5 million people and many international organizations and vowed to spread the violence to other party of the country. Innocent people were attacked and their property was destroyed by CUD supporters, buses were completely crushed, banks were robbed and university students were targeted.

Obviously, the government which is entrusted to protect the public from any danger had the responsibility to restrain the lawlessness created by CUD supporters with the full backing of the party. As is the case in all major cities in the world, the police have been sent to deal with the violence in the city. However, the police were unable to control the violence due to the demonstrators' hostile nature and their determination to break the law. Therefore, the police had no choice but to disperse the violent crowd by force in which some lives were lost, both from the police and the demonstrators. That was a tragic moment which put a black mark on the good image of our country and the government felt sorry for the losses of lives of citizens even though it didn't have any alternative to protecting innocent people's lives and restoring order in the city.

Conversely, the opposition, especially CUD, lauded the destructive actions of the demonstrators and called on them to continue the status quo. Flyers bearing CUD's official seal were distributed to the public calling for nation wide disobedience followed by a series of violent acts. Attempts were made to halt public services. Shops were closed. Addis Ababa literally looked like a ghost city for a while. Unfortunately, this was considered a huge success by the opposition and it continued to encourage its supporters to carryout heinous crimes. The Ethiopian law or any other law for that matter, demands that people who are charged with criminal activities, regardless of their social status, be brought to justice and have their day in court. Hence, the government arrested some members of CUDP for their alleged participation in criminal behavior and as we all know court proceedings are under way in Ethiopia.

In summary, the C.U.D. party started with decent debate towards the national elections. However, its decency has turned into violence after the party learned that it lost the election. Needless to say, CUD has been and is mostly financed by the Diaspora Ethiopians who reside mainly in Europe and the United States of America. As the saying goes, "money talks," these financiers were putting pressure on the CUD party leadership not to deal with the incumbent government regardless of the outcomes of the national elections. That means, in their world, they have pre-determined that E.P.R.D.F has to go even if it is re-elected by the majority of the people. As a result, the elected CUDP members refused to join parliament which they vied for and resorted to violence and riots in Addis and other relatively big cities around the country. Due to their alleged involvement in crimes against the country and its people, some opposition members were arrested and now are in prison waiting their day in court. Since then, public order has been restored in the capital city and around the country. The two Houses of government are functioning well by passing legislation and endorsing important bills. The process of democratization is getting momentum and the country's condition of economic activities is encouraging--showing sustainable growth.

May God bless our country, Ethiopia, and its wonderful people!