

To Whom Much is Given, Much is Expected
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To begin with, let's play a guessing game. She was a legendary female warrior who abandoned a luxurious city life style for a harsher but rewarding one in the countryside. She was a pioneer female combatant who joined the Tigray People's Liberation Front during the 1970s. She wore no mini-skirts; applied neither lipstick nor any form of manicure. She used her AK-47 to defend her rights and that of her people. If you guess *Tegadalit* Martha, you are absolutely right.

Reliable sources indicate that during the years of military struggle against the defunct dictatorial government, roughly a third of the T.P.L.F was composed of female fighters. By the same token, the participation of female fighters in core missions of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was crucial for the success of the people's struggle against the military junta. They bravely fought alongside their men comrades through thick and thin so that we could realize the freedom we abundantly enjoy without any intimidation and fear of being visited by the Derg henchmen in the middle of the night to do us unimaginable harm.

Female fighters were not limited to fighting against the brutal treatment by the Derg cadres and its accomplices, but also were determined to eliminate the then deep-rooted paternalistic system that favored male dominance, and undeserved honor in society by severely curtailing women's rights. Hence, it can be said that women waged "a struggle within a struggle" to liberate themselves once and for all; against the Derg, and the society's ills toward them. As a result, they were able to own land and other property; achieve equal protection under the law during divorce and other legal matters; become leaders in the society; and contribute tremendously to free themselves from becoming victims of early marriage which was a common practice throughout Ethiopia. All these great accomplishments wouldn't have been materialized without the vital participation of women in the strenuous struggle.

Continuing the democratic tradition that was garnered during the military struggle, women are playing a central role in improving the socio-economic conditions in today's Ethiopia. For instance, among the 529 total seats in the House of People's Representatives, 116 (22%) are occupied by women representatives. In light of the roughly one to one male to female ratio in Ethiopia, a 22 percent female participation in the legislation process may leave a lot to be desired; however, it is an unprecedented success in the history of Ethiopia, and dwarfs the participation of women in many developed countries such as the U.S. and Canada. As of 2007, the 110th United States Congress is comprised of 84 percent male, and a mere 16 percent female. In this case, it can be said that Ethiopia is 'more Catholic than the Pope'--knock on wood!

However, there still is one area that is shockingly devoid of female representation—the E.P.R.D.F executive branch. According to the report posted on AIGAFORM, http://aigaforum.com/news/eprdf_executive_2008.pdf, almost all members elected to the E.P.R.D.F Executive body during the Front's recent 7th convention in Hawassa are men. Only one female member is listed in the document. We could do better than that.

In conclusion, increasing female representation in the Executive body is in the interest of the Front, and it may well be one of future goals of the organization; however, this author believes that it is a matter of urgency, and the organization must treat it as such. It should aim at adding quality leadership through women participation to the Executive body. This could be achieved by identifying women that have proven leadership qualities. The party of *Tegadalit* Martha and others should be mindful of the old adage, "To whom much is given, much is expected." For now, those of us who live in the U.S. could be inspired by Governor Sarah Palin, John McCain's running mate, who energized the base by infusing fresh blood to the U.S. presidential campaign.