

Ato Seye and his politics. By yilma bekele

Mr. Charles Krauthammer is an American syndicated columnist, political commentator and is considered a highly influential conservative voice. He is critical of President Obama's policies and supports the election of Mr. Romney to be President. As a tradition if a candidate for the presidency does not have a thick resume when it comes to foreign policy issues they normally travel to friendly European countries to shake hands with the leaders for what is called a 'photo opportunity'.

It is with this in mind that Mr. Romney flew over to Great Britain to rub shoulders with British Conservative Party leaders and attend the opening of the Summer Olympic Games. Unfortunately the trip did not go as intended. Mr. Romney got the British all pissed off by doubting their security plans and furthermore questioning if they were enthusiastic about the games being held there. It is fair to say all of Britain wanted nothing more than for Mr. Romney to pack and leave.

His ill manners in Britain were a source of unbearable anguish to his friends and supporters in the conservative camp. I very much enjoyed Mr. Krauthammer's analysis of the unfortunate situation. He wrote "What Romney answered in that question, it's unbelievable, it's beyond human understanding, it's incomprehensible. I'm out of adjectives," Krauthammer said. 'All Romney has to do is say nothing. It's like a guy in the 100-meter dash. All he has to do is to finish, he doesn't have to win. And instead, he tackles the guy in the lane next to him and ends up disqualified. I don't get it."

I brought this up because that is how his friends and supporters must have felt when they heard Ato Seye Abraha's speech in Seattle a few days back. Fresh from his two years course at Harvard all Ato Seye got to do was utter a few smart sounding phrases and reintroduce himself into our politics. Just like Mr. Romney Ato Seye ended up putting his foot in his mouth. Mistakes like this occur not because the individuals are uninformed but rather they just happen to be clueless about their surroundings and lack common sense to fully understand what is expected of them to achieve the goal they set for themselves.

Mr. Romney goes to Britain and undermines his hosts and Ato Seye traveled to Seattle to insult the sensibilities of his fellow Ethiopian citizens in exile. Their action is what is called self inflicted wound. The fact that Ato Seye was invited by the same poor immigrants that left their homeland due to the policies put in place while he was part of the leadership is what makes the situation a little difficult to comprehend. I always say we Ethiopians are a marvel to watch and Seattle is the epicenter of that phenomenon. I do not know how to put it in English but in Amharic we say 'teteketo asteki'.

Ato Seye is not an ordinary Ethiopian. He is one of the founders of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and was member of the Central Committee or Politburo of that infamous organization. Upon the defeat of the Derg and TPLF takeover of power Ato Seye has served his party as Defense Minister, Chairman of the Board and CEO of Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT) and Chairman of Ethiopian Airlines.

After the war between Shabia and Woyane in 19998-2000 Ato Seye was accused by his friend Meles Zenawi of leaning towards Bonapartism and extreme corruption. He was expelled from the TPLF, tried by Ato Meles's kangaroo court and spent six years in prison. One can say he is lucky because normally in the TPLF dissent can cost you your life. It is also good to note that unlike other prisoners taken by TPLF he did not have to ask for pardon to get his freedom.

Upon his release Ato Seye formed Forum for Democratic Dialogue (FDD) with the aim of bringing opposition activists together. Around this time Judge Bertukan Mideksa Chairman of Andenet Party was again accused of fabricated charges by Ato Meles and taken to Kalit prison. In her absence Dr. Negasso Gidada another former member of EPRDPF assumed the Chairmanship. Ato Seye joined Andenet Party. Please note his admission to the party caused such an upheaval that a few of the founding members such as Professor Mesfin and Ato Debebe Eshetu including quite a few young activists were driven away from the party.

This was also the time Ato Meles and his TPLF Party were holding elections. This was also the main reason Chairman Bertukan was removed from the scene. Our beloved leader was held in solitary confinement and subjected to psychological abuse and inhuman treatment with the knowledge of Meles Zenawi and his security department.

Despite the fact that their Chairman was in jail for no crime other than being highly popular and a proven leader, despite the fact that the so called 'Election Board' was still under the TPLF, despite the fact that foreign observers were put on short leash and despite the fact that plenty Ethiopians advocated boycotting this election charade Andenet choose to give Meles Zenawi a cover of legitimacy by showing up to be humiliated. While the TPLF was holding election circus Andenet candidates were in North America holding 'Town Hall' meetings with the Diaspora that cannot vote.

It was not long after the 99% Meles victory Ato Seye came to the US to go to school. For two years he stayed out of Ethiopian politics. He did not involve himself in Diaspora politics either. Seattle is the first instance we hear from Ato Seye. He was representing Medrek with fellow politician Dr. Merera Gudina.

As far as I am concerned the timing is a little difficult to comprehend. Our country is on the verge of change after over twenty years of TPLF dictatorship. The Woyane kingpin has died unexpectedly and his Party is moving heaven and earth to find a formula to continue the misrule. Why in the world would an Ethiopian opposition leader hold a meeting in faraway USA is a good question to ask? On the other hand it fits the pattern. When there is vital burning issue at home the leaders travel outside to hold discussion with the non stake holders. It is definitely not to explain the situation to us. We have more unfettered discussion in the Diaspora. We enjoy free press. We have more Radio and television service. Our Web sites are unblocked and independent. What in the world can they tell us that we don't know?

Ato Seye's short speech (<http://www.awrambatimes.com/wp-content/uploads/SEEYE-SEATTLE-SPEECH.pdf>) in Seattle was a little short on facts and completely void of vision and historical accuracy. It can also be said that Ato Seye has Chutzpah or Cojones or in simple English balls to show up among the Diaspora and read eulogy for the person that caused so much hurt and agony to our people. Dr. Merera as usual served as a sidekick the role he has played the last eight years or so.

I am hundred percent sure he(Seye) is aware of the fact that our people were ordered to line up in the rain and forced to show grief but choose to tell us it was a voluntary action why? He is knowledgeable of the workings of the Woyane system he helped set up that practiced the art of control and coercion starting in Tigrai, why is he pretending otherwise?

I am one hundred percent sure he did not chastise his American friends when they celebrated the death of Osama Bin Laden whereas we are lectured to be ashamed of showing pleasure at the death of the tyrant why is that? Don't we feel pain? Don't we grieve for the many thousands that were killed by TPLF army and security?

I am really surprised by his lecture regarding our lack of 'diplomatic skills'. He brought the example of Armenians in the US that play a strong and vital role lobbying to steer American foreign policy to help their homeland. He also thinks our vehement opposition to Ambassador Susan Rice's speech at the dictator's funeral to be misguided and false. I beg to disagree on both points.

The first analogy is way off mark. Armenians migrated to the US a long time ago. About three generations back. In fact about twenty years ago the Governor of California was of Armenian descent. Ethiopians are still on the first generation. The fact of the matter is we are the most successful and vibrant group among the new immigrants. Our New Year events are attended by Governors, Congressmen and Mayors all across America. We have managed to schedule hearings in the US Congress regarding our country and even managed to present a bill to help assure Human Rights in dear old Ethiopia. No new immigrant has scaled such heights. We got work to do but we have not been idle. I do not recall Ato Seye giving us a hand the last two years he has resided in the US.

As for Ambassador Rice she was wrong. She made mockery of our people's quest for freedom and dignity. She insulted us. We will not trade our honor to curry favor from no one. We vented our frustrations. Sometimes it is necessary to stand for what we believe to be right and she has to be told in no uncertain words that heaping praise to a human right abuser, denier of democracy and murder of our family and friends is never acceptable.

The Seattle speech was geared to lay a conciliatory tone to a certain wing of TPLF and also advise the rest of us not to look back. I don't care about the TPLF part but I do agree it is a good idea to move forward. On the other hand there is this little thing called history. We learn from the past so we avoid certain mistakes. South Africans have managed to do that. They just did not gloss over past mistakes but brought it up in the open and dealt with it. That is what 'Truth and Reconciliation' is about. Air your dirty laundry for all to see and punish those that crossed the line and reform those that show remorse. Moving forward without doing that is like putting dirty cloth after a shower. The murder of Assefa Maru, the death of Professor Asrat the shooting of Shibre and others have to be laid to rest in a proper way.

I am not being uncharitable towards Ato Seye. As I said before he is not an ordinary Ethiopian. He was invited to Seattle because he is a political figure. He was one of the leaders of TPLF Party. He was present when Eritrea gained its independence a decision made behind closed doors, he was there when the current constitution was imposed on us, he facilitated the formation of Kilil Bantustans, he was aware that the so called EPDRF was nothing but a cover up for TPLF domination, he was the CEO of EFFORT which got its start by using the law to steal important businesses and properties that belonged to all Ethiopians to be controlled by a party and a family and today he is one of the leaders of the biggest and important legally recognized opposition party. This is the reason we should hold him to a higher standard.

Leadership is not an easy matter. That is why all the advanced democracies hold competition on a level playing field to pick the best among many. The leader can make or break the country. For every Nelson Mandela there is an Adolf Hitler. It is obvious we do not have the skills to choose a good leader. We haven't had the experience. Our people have not yet chosen a leader thru the ballot. We must be among the very few in the world that have not enjoyed the luxury of deciding who the leader should be. Throughout our history leadership has been usurped by the strong and cunning.

Why is it so? Is it because we don't question authority? Do we differ to other due to wealth, education, age or lineage? Why are we so meek? When is this behavior going to stop? When are we going to stop being cheer leaders and start the real work of leading by example? The Diaspora has to stop serving as an ATM machine to those that use our kind heart to further their failed policies. The Diaspora has to stop being a door mat and learn how to say no. There is nothing wrong with that. Ato Seye has to stop treating us like imbeciles and go join his old party if that is what he wants since his nemesis is gone. One cannot be a supporter of a narrow ethnic based party while at the same time sitting as a leader of a multi-national organization. This idea of telling us there has been twenty years of peace and progress in Ethiopia should be laid to rest. It might have been so for certain groups but the majority cannot say that. This idea of lecturing us on how to mind our business sitting on top or the sideline is not acceptable. We got plenty of that what we are lacking is bold leadership that listens to our heart beat.