

## **Do Words Used Reflect Realities: The Case of Berhanu**

Disclaimer. The dignity and humanity of Dr. Berhanu Nega should be respected by all Ethiopians. Not to do so demeans all of us. However, that does not mean that we cannot try to comprehend his role in politics surrounding the Kinijit nonviolent movement. We should do the study by citing verifiable examples including testimonials provided by person of integrity so that we can separate his political work from his Ethiopianess as a human being.

Berhanu's politics has attained notoriety after Professor Mesfin in an October 16<sup>th</sup> VOA interview described Berhanu as an individual among others who suffers from self aggrandizement more so leading up to and in the wake of the May 15, 2005 elections. Dignified Ethiopians who wished to exercise their democratic rights rallied behind the Kinijit movement. At meetings of 10,000 to 20,000 participated, Ethiopian's provided love and respect to Kinijit leaders, whom they thought represented their interests. Unfortunately, some of the leaders, Berahnu included, took the support of the people as an adulation that they derived for who they are instead of what they should do for the movement. In a VOA interview Professor Mesfin mentions problems derived from such self aggrandizement as a reason for a power struggle between Dr. Berhanu Nega with Chairman Hailu Shawel.

Serious question to ask here include the following: Why do we talk about Berhanu at all? Why don't we focus on Kinijit and the problems of Ethiopia it should be engaged to resolve? When dealing with Berhanu, is the listening audience justified in providing an interpretation of the sort that is developed above after listening to the Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> VOA interview of Professor Mesfin? Is the audience justified, based on that brief interview made by Professor Mesfin, to come up with another type of interpretation? Should we not inquire if Professor Mesfin has provided supporting evidence to augment the interpretation made above? Yet, would not such an inquiry make us lose sight of comprehending an even greater role taken by Berhanu? Would not blaming Berhanu's actions as self-aggrandizement, that likely developed from perceived adulation by Kinijit supporters in the wake of the May 15, 2005 elections, totally mischaracterize Berhanu's mission (s)?

In his VOA interview Professor Mesfin has said that the emphasis of the Laleay Miker Bet (LMB) and that of the released members (R-LMB) ought to have been to work for Ethiopia and strengthen Kinijit, and that the R-LMB ought not to have engaged in a division between itself and the non-imprisoned members of the LMB. Berhanu is a significant member of the R-LMB delegation that is visiting the USA. This delegation is strengthening division among Diaspora Kinijit supporters and LMB members alike, as I write, which it apparently started while the members were in prison (<http://www.kinijit.com/content.asp?ContentType=Opinion&contentid=2764>) . The R-LMB delegation is engaged in performance that the chairman of Kinijit, Hailu Shawel does not condone.

Several questions derive from this observation. Is the R-LMB used by Berhanu as a venue for a power struggle between him and Chairman Hailu? Do we know what exactly Berhanu's mission is in this power struggle? Is Berhanu's struggle to take power and advance the mission-vision sequence of the Kinijit Party, or does he have a different agenda?

In the Oct, 16<sup>th</sup> VOA interview, Professor Mesfin stated that Berhanu had asked him what he thought of his book while in jail and that he had told him that the book was about Berhanu and not Kinijit and what Kinijit is about. This testimony further amplifies Berhanu's engagement in self-aggrandizement. Even before Professor Mesfin's VOA interview of October 16<sup>th</sup> I had commented on the testimony given by Berhanu to the US Congress in connection with the HR 2003 Bill.

**The following is an excerpt of observations made on Berhanu's Tuesday, October 2, 2007 testimony to the US House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health.**

After Wo. Bertukan Mideksa gave her testimony in which she declared that there are about 100 political prisoners in Ethiopia, Berhanu in a written presentation said:

"Since my colleague Judge Bertukan have [sic] spoken on the current state of democracy in Ethiopia in great detail, it would be more fruitful to concentrate my remarks on where we are going as a country in terms of political stability and democratization."

Having stated that, he began his testimonial by showing the hardships brought to Ethiopia by the ambient regime as follows.

"When I met Congressman Smith in Addis Ababa ..., I told him the story of the continuous open surveillance by security forces that I and other CUD leaders were subjected to .... I told him the behavior of the security forces ... I told him about the insult... I remember him telling us that this cannot happen. .. I asked him if he wants to see it with his own eyes... He agreed and he sent one of his aides with me....The minute we left the US embassy grounds, there they were. Two cars full of plainclothes men, without any fear of being seen tailgating me wherever I go. The rudeness of the security guys was quite amazing to my guest in the car. But for me that was the life I lived for six months till I was finally sent to prison in November. I heard later that the congressman, as promised, raised the issue with the Prime Minister and got the usual response. Complete denial. That is the arrogance of dictatorships that we have to live with on a daily basis."

Many observers were amazed at the spectacle. One wondered why neither Bertukan nor Berhanu mentioned the name of the Kinijit President who was in the US undergoing medical treatment during their testimonials. Most also wondered why Berhanu did not correct the untruthful statement made by

Wo. Bertuken that there were about 100 political prisoners in Ethiopia at present. Even more astounding was that Berhanu would not even state that he, though an elected mayor of Addis Ababa, was denied from performing the task for which he was elected. He would not mention for example the plight of the family of Ato Teshome, whose wife was shot in her yard in front of her children as she pleaded for decent treatment of her husband's who was yanked by security force. Ato Teshome was a member of Kinijit and an elected city council man and colleague. Instead Berhanu spoke at length of how he was tailgated by security forces, and shared hearsay on how a US congressman addressed PM Zenawi, and denied the existence of any problems. He spoke of his training in economics and shared a piece from an American journal about tyranny not allowing economic progress. Ethiopians have known that all along. If foreigners have to be quoted, to make the point for Ethiopians, James Bruce in 1769 had indicated how the hard working farmer was impoverished due to among many factors poor governance.

**Dr. Brehanu in his Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> interview on VOA with Alula Kebede permits us to know more about him.**

Berhanu admitted that he has heard the interviews of Professor Mesfin and Chairman Hailu. However, he dismissed outright the contents of their interview that criticized Berhanu or to the R-LMB delegation to the USA in which Brehanu is a member.

He denied that he is engaged in power struggle. He did not mention the differences between the Laleay Miker Bet (LMB of 60 members) and a subset formed by the released members (R-LMB of about 20 members). He makes the point that Chairman Hailu had signed a document that announced the formation of a delegation from R-LMB to visit the USA, for such would legitimize the group Berhanu is in. However, Berhanu fails to mention that Chairman Hailu authorized the trip by utilizing his power as chairman and when he realized that the delegation that would visit the USA would not bring unison among Kinijit supporters Chairman Hailu had withdrawn his support of the R-LMB's visit to the USA. The Chairman had repeatedly stated that only the rule of 60-member LMB could have value compared to the R-LMB which does not even constitute a quorum. However, Berhanu is engaged in selectively picking out those aspects of events that suit him attain his mission. We learn more about the tactics employed by Brehanu as he tries to speak to his followers in the interview.

In the Oct.19th interview Berhanu has underscored that there is a serious disagreement between his views of democracy and how he thinks democracy works versus what others may know about democracy. Apparently, making a distinction between a 60 member LMB and a 19 member R-LMB is an irrelevancy that would confuse a simple message that he wishes to share with his followers, and be dammed with the truth. Moreover, reference to

LMB without making distinctions perhaps provided him the means by which to speak of laws ("kitab").

Another deliberate effort of Berhanu is to define democracy in a manner convenient to his story. His interview can be better appreciated by recasting it as follows. Essentially, Dr. Berhanu envisages "democracy" as that which would be crystallized when the participants voted to pursue a desirable condition, or a moving target. Thus, when the R-LMB determine to perform a certain task, to the extent that the R-LMB does it by a majority vote ("democracy") what it has determined is a law ("kitab") that all have to abide by. Based on such a formulation, Dr. Berhanu cannot see how any one can justifiably and logically speak of a difference between his view and that of others who oppose him, for the views of others simply and automatically will be illogical as they are not reasoning though and within his formulation of the R-LMB as the source of justifiable law.

Berhanu's assertion goes beyond showing his willingness to talk and to try to make his followers feel that some thing worthwhile was said or transacted. Try to use your "ayen hilina" and listen to him speak. On one level, he affirms that he does not comprehend where the disagreements that people talk about lies. At another level, he asserts that the differences between him and others are fundamental, and he cannot comprehend how such difference could be glossed over. Don't focus on dismissing his assertions as internally contradictory. That misses an important point you would extract from his interview. The issues with which Berhanu confronts us are not to be ferreted out that easily. Berhanu is content in saying anything to his followers which would enable them to tie up the Kinijit movement in an internal feud and disable Kinijit from opposing the ambient tyranny.

Let no one make a mistaken inference from what I have stated; I am not accusing Berhanu of doing the bidding of the TPLF. I am fully aware of a photograph of the triumvirates: Berhanu Nega, Tamrat Layne and Meles Zenawi laughing happily over something, which was circulated in September 2007. Indeed a picture speaks volumes. However, I am not accusing Berhanu, who is willing to state that begging for forgiveness from the TPLF is not imprudent, nor negotiating with the ambient regime a bad thing to do. Indeed, while we may argue on who should do the negotiation on behalf of Kinijit as the popular party of the people of Ethiopia, there is no objection to negotiations per say. Thus, I am not faulting Berhanu for speaking in favor of negotiation, nor am I accusing Berhanu for taking uncompromising objections to the Kinijit Chairman while he is reconciliatory to the TPLF chairman; not at all. What I am trying to say is that Berhanu will not permit the Kinijit movement to move forward for he is going to be engaged in his style of "democracy" of selecting a subset of a group to agree on something. Then he affirms that the agreement reached by that subset ("selectocracy") as the law ("Kitab") of the land, or he seeks approbation from mobs in what Mahatma Gandhi would have called "mobocracy" as the rule to impose on all.

Ultimately, he requires that people follow a "kitab" that he extracts from his "selectocratic" or "mobocratic" activities as opposed to those justifiable laws that will derive from a properly constituted Kinijit organization.

Since Dr. Berhanu Nega is not a member of the Kinijit Executive Committee, he wishes, remarkably, to make the LMB the legislative and deliberative body of Kinijit, as though it is an executive branch. In Berhanu's democracy, coequal branches of an organization such as the executive, legislative and judiciary branches will be merged into one collectively governing body. Presumably, Berhanu feels he can use such a socialist superstructure to rubber stamp his views. At any rate, collective governance is the mantra by means of which Berhanu and his pseudo-democrat colleagues recapitulate their socialist thinking. Even within their "collective governance" superstructure, problems arise when the R-LMB, as Professor Mesfin Woldemariam in his Oct. 16th VOA interview underscored, has antagonized non-imprisoned LMB because the R-LMB have not included them in some important determinations. Clearly, the so-called collective governance or leadership is an expression used to mean anything that suits Dr. Berhanu. The story does not end here. Should it be necessary to show the presence of an executive leader, Berhanu has stated in his VOA interview that Vice Chairman Bertukan Mideksa is the acting leader of the R-LMB delegation. Of course Berhanu will not explain the meaning of what he says, for the truth will not support his story, and also because the truth will confuse his followers. The truth is that when Chairman Hailu was under the impression that R-LMB delegation to USA will bring unison he had written in the letter that authorized the delegation with Chairman Hailu as the chairman of the delegation. However, when Chairman Hailu discovered that the intention of the R-LMB delegation was unsupportable, he disallowed the trip and branded it unsupportable by Kinijit laws and practices. However, Dr. Berhanu does not care for the truth, the law, or whatever if such will not permit him to ascend to power. That is why he will appoint Bertukan as the acting head of the unlawful R-LMB delegation to the USA as he stated in his Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> interview.

In listening to the Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> VOA interview, and Berhanu's propensity to engage in internally contradictory assertions, I am reminded of similarities between him and PM Meles Zenawi. Similar to Meles, Berhanu says stuff and wants others to believe it. Remember that we are not angry at Meles because of the structure of his nose. We detest Meles' policies and ideas that are internally contradictory and which resulted in dividing Ethiopia into two separate nations, by making the larger part landlocked and by further dividing the country into language-based regions. During his visit to the USA as a member of the R-LMB delegation, Berhanu has exhibited no restraints in his manner of speech, nor consistency in his support of Kinijit as an organization, its principles and the elected officers. No fair minded observer can fathom what Berhanu is capable of doing and convince another of that understanding. The harm that befell Ethiopia through Meles' contradictory assertions are sufficient to warn any one to be wary of those that say stuff

and then propose that others have to abide by the law ("Kitab") while they themselves do not. As if the divisions implemented by Meles are not sufficient, Berhanu's followers work diligently to further divide Ethiopians by their age and their perceived level of education. All Ethiopians, young and old, male and female should be weary of the followers of Berhanu.

Some have observed that Kinijit is engaged in internal feud precisely at a time when the ambient regime does not even recognize the Kinijit as a party. Others have asked why the Kinijit folks should not work together to reestablish their identity in Ethiopia and struggle for Ethiopian freedom? Mistakes have been made. Humans have erred. The challenge is for Kinijit to withstand the problems and to excell. Our hope is that it will.

**Ethiopia shall survive.**

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