

Unity of Purpose: changing mindsets to sustain Ethiopia's democratization

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“There are two kinds of fools: Those who can't change their opinions and those who won't.” Josh Billings

More than a year and half after the May 15, 2005 Elections, Ethiopian opposition parties, civic organizations, media outlets, professional associations, intellectuals and others have been unable to create a structured, coordinated and sustainable foundation to support the aspirations and hopes of the Ethiopian people. They have failed to mobilize and sustain a well organized, unified, purpose driven, energized, inclusive and global mass organization to support those in jail and to ensure that the democratization process remains dynamic.

At the heart of this failure in political leadership that prevents the Ethiopian people and their worldwide supporters from realizing the full potential of material and intellectual support in the Diaspora is a **debilitating character flaw** among political actors, media personalities, civic and other leaders, intellectuals and others. For example, differences of opinion are rarely perceived as healthy. They are always personalized and attacked with sweeping judgments made about individuals and their motives. Fundamental political positions that affect the Ethiopian people are taken without critical analysis using the best of Ethiopian minds with credible authority. There is rarely a modicum of civic culture that represents the best in our heritage. Views are expressed in hostile and irreconcilable terms. The art of compromise is rarely entertained.

While the magnitude of the problems in Ethiopian society suggest the **vital role of unity of purpose and partnership with others to achieve a common goal**, political actors and opinion makers expend unbelievable amount of time, resources and energy defending positions and very little time promoting dialogue, collaboration with others and team work. We have seen this phenomenon over the past few months in connection with the developments within the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party in the Diaspora.

While heroic leaders of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP), and others are languishing in jail, and while the Ethiopian people are crying for a unified and consistent leadership and voice on their behalf, time and energy is spent splitting hair; posturing and making sweeping judgments about others. **The assault on reason and truth is, at times, beyond belief.** The irony is that we accuse the leadership of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRDF) of dishonesty, lack of integrity and accountability, transparency, fair play and so on while we have yet to demonstrate and practice these virtues ourselves. This is hypocritical. The Ethiopian people, especially the young generation, and our leaders who are being tormented by a brutal regime, deserve the best from each and every one of us.

Parochial tendencies and practices within and outside political and other groups makes it almost impossible to conduct meaningful dialogue and exchange of views to pursue and

sustain the more important goal of supporting the Ethiopian people in a coordinated and collaborative way. The tradition of giving prominence to group or parochial interests at the cost of the bigger picture---leaders in jail and a stalled democratization process---is anathema to the search for freedom and democracy, ie, the cause the Ethiopian people want us to carry forward. The phenomenon shatters public confidence, and disillusion this generation of Ethiopians. How do we explain to a young Ethiopian girl/boy that we are incapable of getting our act together when it comes to a national agenda? How do we explain to the international community that the vibrant and purposeful demonstrations in Western capitals following the May 15, 2005 Elections have evaporated?

Conflicts---natural occurrences within families, groups and political parties---are perceived as sources of permanent war. Rarely is there an appetite to consider conflicts as opportunities for change; for innovation and renewal. Often times, conflicts arising from tactics and approaches are **personalized as if they are family feuds**. On the one hand we judge the leadership of the EPRDF for its failure to conduct and resolve conflicts peacefully and through the use of reason. On the other hand, we are unable to sit around a conference table, discuss the pros and cons of issues and agree to resolve them in a smart and strategic manner. As a consequence, people are forced to take sides; if they do not, they are labeled as threats if not as enemies.

The art of leadership requires that we open up and listen to each other in order to **achieve the greater goal of supporting the Ethiopian people at a critical time**. Yet, openness and honest dialogue no matter what the issue is are in short supply. For example, it is indefensible that the leaders in the Diaspora of the CUDP and that of the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) are still unable to sit around a conference table to discuss and hammer out differences in a constructive and strategic manner. Such a move would do wonders for the moral of the Ethiopian people and those in jail. In fact, some political actors find it easier to deal with outsiders than with their fellow Ethiopians with whom they have a great deal in common.

The tragedy is that the inability to resolve conflicts amicably and in a civil manner sends the unintended message to the Ethiopian people, the international community and to supporters that we have failed to produce mature adults that can reason and lead. We have failed to produce leaders that are capable, competent, farsighted and inclusive. The other consequence is that the current status quo only helps the regime that political actors purportedly oppose. Either way, the impact of the behavior is the same; it **is corrosive**.

Let us make the issue even starker and sharper. The EPRDF leadership is a well organized, determined, well armed and well financed political and economic machine. Its leadership speaks with a single voice even when there are differences within its ranks. Therefore, political actors and opinion makers within the opposition camp have the lead responsibility to challenge this machine with a level of maturity, sophistication,

intelligence and skills that is required. When such actors are unable to resolve differences in a quiet, civilized and smart manner, one wonders about readiness to deliver.

This article is therefore about character: mindsets, attitudes and behaviors that continue to affect the capacity and ability of political actors, opinion makers and others in the Diaspora to focus on a **unity of purpose: the common goal of mobilizing national and international public opinion for the release of our leaders and sustaining** the democratization process for which many Ethiopians have sacrificed their lives. This is the “Big Elephant in the Room” about which we---as Ethiopians...have failed to recognize and deal with. If we don’t deal with it now, we will perpetuate a tradition of factionalism, parochialism, arrogance without content. We have no one to blame but our individual egos; our selfishness; our parochialism.

Objective realities: why change is not an option:

At the same time, the situation in our Ethiopia gets worse. The leaders of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP), independent media, civic and human rights organizations, professional associations and others continue to languish in jail. The country is on the brink of war for reasons that have little or nothing to do with Ethiopia’s long term national interests.

The cost of living that is growing by at least 15% a year has made life worse for the poor. A recent United Nations Development human development index ranked Ethiopia “170th out of 177 countries in the world, the worst to live in.” Life expectancy, education, income, health services, sanitation, safe drinking water, employment, etc are among the lowest in the world. The gap between rich and poor is growing. Nepotism and graft continue unabated.

UNESCO, another United Nations specialized agency, informed in its Global Monitoring Report that over 4 million Ethiopian children do not attend school. Same time, the current Government in Ethiopia is ready and willing to embark on a war that will not only engulf our country and Somalia, but the entire region. Such adventurism will have incalculable consequence on the economy & on the social and political system.

Reporters without Borders informed the international community recently that Ethiopia ranks among the worst violators of press freedom and by extension, of fundamental human rights in the world, ranking the country 160th out of 168 countries surveyed. Crack down against journalists, opposition supporters, activists and others challenging the regime continue with no end in sight.

In an editorial comment last week, the Ethiopian periodical Fortune reported that the Ethiopian Government had made it virtually impossible for the private sector to flourish and to develop unhampered by State monopoly. The editorial noted that, among other things, the Government pressured the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) to borrow foreign exchange from China on behalf of the state---an unprecedented practice that contradicts any commitment to a market economy. According to the International

Monetary Fund (IMF), Ethiopia's recent massive investment (using donor generated grants and loans) in infrastructure---hydroelectric dams, telecommunications network, cement factories and roads in favored regions---would affect the balance of payments and the country's capacity to pay its loans. In addition, such massive investment in selective infrastructure will have impact on investment in education, health services, employment generation, sanitation, rural roads, agriculture and other critical sectors that would benefit the poorest of the poor. It is not entirely clear who benefits from the huge investment—not the poor.

In another rebuke to the current regime, Transparency International identified Ethiopia 130th out of 163 countries on its index of corruption ridden states. Yet, the donor community continues to shore up the regime because it serves the national interests of a few countries. Very little regard has been given by the donor community to the plight of the Ethiopian people for peace, national reconciliation, democracy and freedom. Further, there has not been a vigorous push on the Government to release political prisoners; to begin dialogue with the opposition; and to restore human rights.

Such political and diplomatic realities suggest that only Ethiopians have the primary responsibility to change the course of events. This presents to us a compelling reason why we cannot afford to continue with the current mind set of factionalism and fractured political entities and personalities. It is time that we change in profound and fundamental ways.

Recognizing the misguided macro economic and monetary policies of the Ethiopian regime, Fortune noted that “For a development state, as perceived by Melese, there seems to be nothing wrong with the means (using a state Corporation and not the Ministry of Finance) **justified by the end**. This appears to be a kind of thinking that gives less to the fairness of process as long as the result is what is required.” We can draw parallel to the jailing of CUDP leaders under false premises and justifying and supporting the end through manufactured logic, witnesses, processes and evidence as the means. In the process, honesty, integrity, morality, fair play and accountability have become totally meaningless.

Since the May 15, 2005 Elections, prominent Ethiopians---generals, colonels, soldiers, judges, diplomats have left their posts in droves; some have joined Opposition parties and liberation movements. The Ethiopian Air force is the most recent target of the Government's reign of terror. Needless to say, these and other examples suggest that the Ethiopian people continue to defy the regime; and the regime continues to practice fundamental human rights violations at will.

Against this background in the objective conditions of our country, a group of concerned Ethiopians in North America, Europe and Ethiopia have been discussing and raising fundamental questions concerning the **dismal performance** of Opposition Parties, professional and civic associations, the media, intellectuals and others in the Diaspora. I believe that the concerns and questions raised by these individuals and by thousands of Ethiopians who are genuine supporters of opposition parties and organizations deserve

honest assessment and rapid response. The status quo and silence are recipes for slow but sure defeat.

Therefore, it is no longer sufficient to discuss and condemn the current Government. It is not rocket science that the Ethiopian people, especially the poorest of the poor, women and youth continue to suffer. It is not rocket science that CUDP and other leaders and their families continue to suffer under the cruel and inhuman leadership of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Diagnosing the ill deeds of the EPRDF is, to repeat, not rocket science any more. **Our short coming is the lack of willingness and readiness in diagnosing and assessing ourselves critically----especially our behaviors and mindsets towards one another.**

This article is therefore an effort to provide a think piece on the subject; and to provoke each of us to examine the retarding and dysfunctional role of behaviors, attitudes and mindsets in sustaining the democratization process in Ethiopia.

First, let us acknowledge that we have collectively failed to respond to those in jail. Let us acknowledge that we have failed to sustain the democratization process at the same pace that was evident from May to November, 2005. **Let us admit that Ethiopian youth has begun to wonder why we---those of us who live in Western democracies with access to state of the art knowledge on democracy, conflict resolution, dialogue and leadership---have failed to respond to them and to the Ethiopian people. Let us accept the fact that we have failed to create a coordinated, sustained, vigorous, worldwide and unified mechanism with a unity of purpose that will enable us to speak with one voice in support of those in jail and ultimately in support of the Ethiopian people who are crying for leadership?**

Lessons of experience:

“Some of us let dreams die; but others nourish and protect them, nurse them through bad days till they bring them to the sunshine and light which comes always to those who sincerely hope that their dreams will come true.”

Woodrow Wilson, President, USA

In preparation for an All Party Conference in the Spring/Summer and Fall of 2003, a representative group of Ethiopians spent considerable time reviewing the preconditions that will enable Opposition parties and leaders to compete in the May 2005 Elections by crafting a cohesive vision; by laying the ground work for a unified struggle; and by agreeing on a **Code of Conduct to** govern behaviors and attitudes. The group was aware that Ethiopia is replete with a history of parties emerging and then gradually evaporating without a trace. From the World-Wide Union of Ethiopian Students (WWUES), the emergence and demise of numerous leftist political parties during the Dergue to the formation of the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF), Ethiopian political leaders have been successful in creating parties but not in **innovating, changing, shaping** and **sustaining** them. In this regard, they can learn a great deal from the EPRDF; and

from other parties around the globe that have renewed themselves and sustained power despite the odds against them. They had visions; they had purposes. They persisted and maintained their direction regardless of the formidable obstacles they faced. A unity of purpose is not magic; it takes leadership that is dedicated to a cause. It takes unwavering belief in people.....not a small circle of family and friends, but a diversity of talent.

What we discovered in the course of these deliberations was one simple fact. Often times, Ethiopian political actors were unable to distinguish between the primary purpose of the struggle---which is to serve a national purpose---and the roles of individuals; between agreeing and endorsing concepts, perspectives and ideologies and sustaining them; and the supporting roles of individuals, groups and parties. **Perhaps, the concept of “My way or the highway” best describes this mental model that does not distinguish between standing for a principle no matter which group or individual is involved.**

Typically, what surfaces is partisanship instead of statesmanship; individualism instead of collective interest for a common good; this creates havoc and dysfunction in sustaining a unified purpose. Strangely enough, the ideology appears to be the same, for example, removing the feudal regime under Emperor Haile Selassie; creating a socialist state under Mengistu; and creating the foundations for a democratic, multi-party and pluralist state in place of the EPRDF today. Then what gives? Why do purposeful and visionary parties or unions emerge and then collapse? What are the possible explanations or barriers to this tragic phenomenon in Ethiopian politics?

Recognizing the fundamentals of change: attitudes, mindsets and behaviors

Almost four years ago, there was a consensus that in order for political change to take root, political actors must recognize the vital roles of changes in attitudes, mindsets and behaviors –a cultural paradigm shift, so to speak. The following were identified as critical. Adhering to and internalizing these principles and values will go a long way in “creating the foundation for a more inclusive, pluralist and democratic culture on which new governance” could be built in our country. The wisdom of leadership lies in its capacity to harness core values that go beyond individual and group interest. It is dedication to a national purpose.

a) The critical role of mutual trust (metemamen):

In daily life—within the family, among friends and in groups—we discuss and exchange ideas. Different perspectives and views surface as a result. These different perspectives and views enrich our world view as long as we are open to the values that emerge. Enrichment does not, however, ensue unless we are willing to open up to new ideas that we may not want or may not be willing to endorse. Widening perspectives cannot and will not take place without the willingness to understand and respect the views of other people that we may not even know. This is true in informal settings as well in political discourse. By listening to and understanding other views, we enrich ourselves and we enrich a bigger cause.

Mutual understanding and mutual respect help families, groups, political parties and societies to build participatory and inclusive processes. Mutual respect means acknowledging the principle that others should have the same rights and freedom as each of us to express them and to be heard without vilification or without their motives being questioned. In order for us to claim the higher moral ground of accusing the current Government of being arrogant and exclusive, we must practice inclusion ourselves.

It is hard to imagine mutual understanding and mutual respect without the willingness and capacity to listen, dialogue and accept others. Ethiopia's destiny affects each and every one of us. Most often than not, Ethiopian political actors give one the impression that they are "anointed by some divine right," as some one put it, to inform us that only their voices and the voices who side with them matter. Sad, is that not the same world view that the EPRDF represents today?

Ethiopian society has paid dearly from the tendency and practices of leaders and others who felt they needed to be understood, respected and trusted without understanding and respecting the views of others who have the same stake in the future of their country. Talking more and listening less; judging others before establishing elementary facts; lecturing others instead of conversing with them, etc do not contribute to mutual trust and understanding. Such tendencies do in fact arrest the development of new and better ideas; they arrest the creativity that comes from the diversity of thinking to which our society is entitled. In a multinational society such as ours, diversity of views is a requirement for democracy and freedom to thrive.

Experts tell us that the purpose of effective communication is to connect and to establish mutual understanding concerning a common purpose. Some experts inform us that 85% of learning comes from active listening. Unfortunately, political and other Ethiopian meetings are full of dysfunction in part because they do not contribute to mutual learning, understanding and respect. **When we spend considerable time and attention sharpening our tongue to respond to what some one said rather to internalize** and reflect, it prevents us from growing and changing for the better. When we spend more time and attention suspecting the motives of others instead of reaching out to them, we sow the seeds of distrust instead of cooperation and collaboration. When we spend more time and creativity maligning the good names of others instead of examining ourselves, we destroy the essence of honesty and integrity. When we spend more time and creativity suspecting individuals or groups because of our core fear that there is---as some one recently put it that.... "a potential threat out there" we destroy meaningful dialogue and collaboration with others.

The bottom line is that the inability to listen to each other has become a major barrier in creating a sense of common purpose and sustaining it through a coordinated and unified mechanism. The inability to listen to differing views arrests collaboration and team work. The inability to be open-minded rather than suspicious strengthens mutual trust without which effective groups, parties or unions cannot emerge. To be trusted, one needs to have integrity and honesty. Leaders without integrity have no value to their society; in fact they demean society.

Trust, defined as “the reliance on character, ability, strength of some one or some thing or one on which confidence is placed” cannot therefore occur in politics without commitment to truth, integrity, the capacity to listen and understand others and the ability to learn from others. Trust requires transparency; openness; predictability and consistency of action. Trust requires that we do not peddle fiction as fact. Trust requires dedication to core and fundamental principles consistently.

Recent events suggest that there is a dearth of trust----a precious commodity. The sooner we realize this, the better for the democratization process that has been stalled and that cannot be pursued vigorously without collaboration, team work, a concerted effort by all that have a stake in our country.

b) The values of integrity and honesty:

Political change cannot possibly be meaningful to the Ethiopian people without political actors and parties with high and unquestioned integrity and honesty that place the interests of the country above personal, parochial, family or group interests. Nepotism, corruption, favoritism, tribalism, arrogance & chauvinism whether practiced by the Government in power or by political actors that purport to stand for the Ethiopian do not advance the cause of democracy and freedom.

These norms are in fact manifestations of corruption that the Ethiopian people reject. These manifestations arrest the development of public confidence in those who lead, cooperation/collaboration, transparency, democratic participation by all, national reconciliation and unity.

When political actors distort the truth in support of an intended end, integrity is dead. When political actors stretch the truth or create and accuse others without merit; or destroy each other through name calling; or squander resources that they are entrusted with, integrity is dead. The long term impact of lack of integrity and honesty is huge. The public---those who support political actors---lose confidence. People, especially the young become cynical and suspicious of others. Disillusionment becomes routine. More important, those in jail and the Ethiopian people lose hope. Those who have lead responsibility for mobilizing international public opinion failed them. This is indeed the most distressing aspect of lack of integrity and honesty in the political process that we cannot afford to miss.

The other sad and inescapable manifestation of lack of integrity is the damage on the reputation of our collective culture. When political actors fabricate and convey innuendos and lies about others, including their colleagues, a fundamental value is broken, namely the truth. In breaking it, the person not only devalues himself/herself, but also our society as a society. Reputational risk is hard to restore.

In short, we cannot serve with the high national purpose ---democratization---if we are preoccupied with personal glory; fame, selfish and hidden motives and parochial or group

interests at the sacrifice of those in jail and the Ethiopian people. We cannot dedicate ourselves to serve a common purpose if our preoccupation is personal glory; the gratification to be on the talk shows; and the thirst for power and influence. We cannot serve a common purpose if we do not live by principles that do not change conveniently, for example, concerning Ethiopia's long term national interest of peace, reconciliation, unity and democracy. We cannot serve a common person if we make it a habit to lie.

A hallmark of personal and party or group integrity is the capacity and readiness to dedicate intellectual and creative talent for a larger and noble purpose---service to the Ethiopian people, and today to those who are paying a huge price serving jail sentences because they stood for a just cause. The philosophy of “My political group, my village, my home grown boys and girls, my team, my ethnic or religious group or my way or the highway” does not promote a national purpose. It does not promote a democratic culture or national reconciliation, cooperation, collaboration or team work.

c) Team work and collaboration as foundations to win:

In today's rapidly changing world, nothing happens without team work and collaboration. Different folks have different talents and perspectives that will contribute to a common purpose. The art of leadership in changing societies starts with the premise that one needs to reach out to and embrace and harness the knowledge, perspectives and wisdom of talent where ever it resides. Equally important is the fact that teams perform well when there is an understanding of and commitment to a shared purpose. That understanding does not come by chance; it takes communication; it takes listening to one another; it takes mutual trust; it takes integrity and honesty; it takes mutual respect.

One of the tragic manifestations of today's political actors is the fact that they assume that teams are limited to those we know and have confidence in. This is a limited and shallow perspective of team work and collaboration. Closed groups and teams do not generate creativity; they simply reinforce what they know--- to each other. They shelter themselves from challenges; they do not in fact see challenges as opportunities. Fear and suspicion of others govern their behaviors and attitudes. Inclusion does not appeal to them. They ignore the fact that the Ethiopian people wanted political change because of the fact that group think, narrow and ethnic based politics did not serve the purpose of democracy and freedom. They forget and ignore the fact the CUDP and UEDF were built on the basis of diversity of talent; on the basis of harnessing all talent that could be harnessed; on the basis of inclusion rather than exclusion. Team work and collaboration require a culture of inclusion and reaching out to those willing to participate and support a common purpose. Team work and collaboration involves a vast array of human capital with which our country is fortunately blessed and endowed.

Competition for personal glory and fame are the worst enemies of team work and collaboration. On the other hand, placing a premium on a national purpose and allowing and encouraging others to collaborate and give their best to the cause take selfless and confident actors who have no ulterior motive but to serve a collective cause for its own

sake. With the right leadership the legions of Ethiopian intellectuals, artists, business men and women, youth and others are ready to serve for the asking.

Another stumbling bloc is the perception on the part of political actors and others that they know it all. In this regard, such a view is not any different from the views of Mengistu Haile Mariam who claimed to be an expert on every subject. Today, Melese Zenawi practices the same virtues of all knowing. Today, political actors and others in the opposition camp are unable to reach out to the many talented Ethiopians who have superior and credible knowledge and talent than these actors. Team work and collaboration does not work if we cannot break this vicious cycle of poverty of ideas.

The inability to appreciate and accept those outside the circle of friendship, group, family and familiarity” prevents our society from the benefit that comes in reaching out to a broader and richer talent pool of Ethiopians. Team work and collaboration cannot occur without a commitment to competency, fair play and merit.

d) Saying adios (good by) to political or personal revenge:

We cannot underestimate the huge human, psychological, social and economic costs personal and political revenge in our society. Following the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie’s regime, political revenge became common in the struggle to claim and establish political power and to maintain it at all costs. Extra-judicial killings of officials, assassinations in the name of advancing this or that cause, mutual slanders and character assassinations and smear campaigns within the intelligentsia and outside became common attributes. The current Government has raised the bar to the point that such practices have become state ideology with no end in sight.

The tendency to promote combativeness instead of civil and courteous discourse; to arrogance instead of humility; to spread rumors about others instead of open and honest dialogue with them; to perpetuate the past instead of moving forward etc are part and parcel of this feudal tradition of political revenge and moral superiority that comes from total ignorance. If people change, they should be given the benefit of the doubt and embraced. We should embrace them. The reason we condemn the leaders of the EPRDF is because they are unwilling to change. We can be a model of reconciliation and forgiveness in order to serve a common and larger purpose.

Many observers today say that we have begun to lose sight a big part of our cultural heritage that teaches us about **forgiveness and reconciliation**. We continue a culture of elevating leaders to a higher level one day; and condemning them or deflating them the next day when they do not fit our mental picture or when they fail to serve our individual purposes. We have a proclivity to comment on the mistakes and crimes of others, but rarely of examining our own values and behaviors. We rarely appreciate the success of others. On the contrary we create stories and lies about their success, especially if we do not know them. Every thing we say is stated in black and white. We leave no room for reflection. We can give a thousand and one examples of this national tragedy of vilification, story telling and lack of commitment to the truth.

Recent Ethiopian political history is full of stories of fault finding. Continuing this mean spirited and backward looking mental model retards change and progress. In this regard, we can learn a great deal both from the most recent elections in the United States and from China's transformation as a modern state. It said that during the Cultural Revolution many people died. Yet, the Chinese leadership did not dwell on fault finding and the blame game. The society remained loyal to Chinese history, tradition, culture and its heroes blending what is useful from the West with the best that China has inherited from its past. We can do the same, drawing from the best of our heritage, for example, forgiving and moving on, to build a better society for generations to come.

After the recent Congressional Elections in the United States, we saw democracy in action. The winning Democrats and the losing Republicans were able to set differences aside and embark on a new course to serve their country. There are practical and real lessons we can draw, at least at the basic and elementary level, on how democracy works. Political leaders listen to the people; they listen to their constituency.

Therefore, going forward, it is worthwhile to note and internalize the wise saying that **"The way you treat the person with whom you disagree most vehemently is the measure of your ability to shape the future."** Differences of opinion must never be personalized if we are going to make a break from the past. On the contrary, differences are healthy and should be accepted as norms.

e) Tackling the mind-set of character assassination and fault finding:

In the leftist culture of the 1970s, a national culture of character assassination and fault finding in others took root in our society; and we have yet to recover from it. Depending on the subject in hand, persons and groups are accused of being unpatriotic, sale-outs, agents of this and that organization, sympathizers and plants of the current regime, chauvinists, opportunists and the like. Typically, these are done without establishing facts.

Today, it is not uncommon to read articles on the Internet, in blogs, radio broadcasts or public forums that polarize our community in ways that are inexplicable. Such polarization is not limited to political actors. Even spiritual leaders who should know better; scholars who should be devoted to informing the truth and others show a level of intellectual dishonesty that is unprecedented in our history. Sides are taken freely and liberally; and the truth is distorted to fit intended ends. Such polarization does a huge disservice to the Ethiopian people. It alienates the vast majority and makes well intentioned supporters cynical and disinterested in politics and social engineering.

Fault finding and blaming others is not the monopoly of a single nationality or political circle; it is permeates our society in the Diaspora. It is not uncommon for some to simply manufacture stories about their perceived enemies; smearing their names and parading the smear campaign as if it is true. There is one key principle on which trust is built: the

truth. At times, one wonders whether folks who purposely and intentionally assassinate the characters of others have what is called conscience and decency.

These and other dysfunctional and corrosive behaviors must be checked and changed through public scrutiny in order for team work and collaboration to work and in order for all of us to focus on the most important goal of supporting the aspirations of the Ethiopian people.

One of the manifestations of this fault finding and blame some one culture is that it promotes conflict and tension. Individuals or groups that intentionally or unintentionally induce this behavior contribute to lack of confidence in collaboration and peaceful resolution of conflicts. For example, individuals or groups that assume that they are more committed to Ethiopia's national interest than other groups and support their thesis through faults in others fail to realize that others may be even more committed to the larger cause than they are. The only way to test who is right is to reach out; try to collaborate and let history and the Ethiopian people judge. To do otherwise undermines the possibility of collaboration and coordinated struggle to achieve a common purpose.

The assumption that those who oppose our world view concerning this or that tactic are "enemies" does not promote collaboration and genuine alliances with potential friends let alone national reconciliation, peace, democracy and freedom at the national level. The mindset of questioning the motives of others; of judging and name calling or characterizing others without foundation does not promote mutual confidence and trust among groups, political parties or even individuals. The preoccupation with the past does equally deter our ability to harness social forces with the breadth and depth that will sustain change and create confidence. What matters the most is today and more important the society we wish to build tomorrow. It is time to let go of the past baggage and move on.

f) Learning and practicing the art of leadership:

Experts tell us that leadership is the "capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose; and the character which inspires confidence in others to follow." Leadership is essentially about guiding people to do the right thing for their organization, group or country. Leadership is about responsibility and accountability.

Equally important, leadership is about "creating space for other people to grow" and contribute to a common cause. Modern leadership is not about self interest; not about commanding and authority alone. In the political arena, leadership concerns social justice, freedom, democracy and human rights. Those who understand leadership in all its dimensions exercise it with humility, modesty and tenacity in service of others. They have no hesitation to leave power and authority when they no longer are able; or when the public demands that they do so.

Political leadership entails a huge responsibility to achieve bigger and longer term goals. In a richly endowed and diverse society such as ours, the art of leadership requires the

capacity, confidence and readiness to listen to the views of others; the capacity and willingness to understand and appreciate the interests of others; the capacity and willingness to subordinate ones ego and self interest to the benefit of the larger community; the readiness to learn from others; the willingness to be led. Good leadership entails the modesty to follow others; the tireless ability to reach out to and influence others who differ from ones views; the unfailing respect to others; the readiness to ask and seek inputs and advise from others. As Hilary Clinton noted in her famous book, “It Takes a Village,” it takes thousands of others---- ultimately million--- for leaders to achieve their stated objectives. Those who fail to appreciate this have, obviously, failed to learn from history.

Ultimately, leadership entails the values and behaviors we have mentioned above: to be trusted; to have integrity and honesty; to work with teams and to collaborate with others; to respect and listen to others; to refrain from blaming others; to refrain from using authority for personal revenge; to refrain from finding faults in others; and to subordinate self-interest to the ultimate and common purpose of freeing the jailed political leaders and to sustain the democratization process with vigor and determination.

g) Using dialogue as a vehicle to resolve differences and strengthen unity of purpose:

Experts tell us that societies with dominant negative attitudes such as ours cannot transform themselves easily towards inclusion, team work, collaboration, solidarity, democratic participation and equity. The same applies to groups and political parties because much energy and creativity is expended plotting to destroy the other side rather than to build and collaborate with others. Much energy is wasted minimizing the importance and value of others outside the group instead of creating bridges with others.

We have wasted generations from a culture of negativism about others: nationality, groups and individuals. What we have in common is given less prominence than our differences.

There is therefore a need for a positive passion to serve a common good. The culture of perpetuating negativism about others, whether religion, nationality, political groups or individuals must give way to a new culture of mutual exploration, mutual learning and mutual understanding through dialogue and conversation without judgment. The formidable social, economic and political challenges that face our country require that we reach out to, mobilize and use constructive ideas from all that are willing and ready to participate for a common cause of social and political change for a better tomorrow.

Political parties and groups have yet to agree and develop a mechanism for conflict resolution through dialogue and discussion. So far, they have failed to use the state of the art knowledge that is available in the USA and other countries in resolving conflicts within and among groups through dialogue & discussion.

Serving the genuine needs of those suffering in Kaliti and serving the collective interests of the Ethiopian people requires a commitment to listen to each other and to compromise. To do anything different benefits the regime we purportedly want to change. To be challenged to change our mindsets, behaviors and attitudes for the greater and common good should not be perceived as an affront to any person's ego. It is a gift from folks who have a vested interest in the future of their country.

Recently, someone wrote an interesting piece entitled "Time to declare war on dysfunctional behaviors." The author noted that "Over the past few decades, we have seen countless political organizations created, only to be shortly disbanded, abandoned, or rendered ineffective, often because of intra-group conflict...conflict among the membership, and inability to resolve conflict." The author continued to say "I believe that these conflicts are a fundamental reason for the absence of democracy in Ethiopia today."

Before we contemplate a democratic, pluralist and inclusive Ethiopia, let us begin to use the art of dialogue and practice and lay the foundation of democracy in the Diaspora. To do this does not require more than a willingness to have an open mind; a willingness to learn from and listen to the views of others; and a willingness to compromise in order to serve the bigger cause of democratization, the release of our jailed leaders and energize hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians abroad who are willing and ready to channel their money and talent in support of such a noble cause.

Concluding remarks:

The struggle to overcome retarding and entrenched mindsets, attitudes and behaviors is not easy. It takes each and every one of us; in fact it starts with each of us. Unfortunately, we do not have the luxury of time when lives of heroic leaders are at stake; when young men and women are suffering daily and crying for leadership to emerge.

We cannot and should not create and craft excuses to reignite the momentum that the Ethiopian people begun on May 15, 2005 and the euphoria that engulfed those in the Diaspora to support the noble cause for democracy, peace, freedom and national reconciliation. This author and those who were generous with their ideas and views for this article believe that nothing is impossible if there is a willingness to change for the common good.

We have a golden opportunity to close ranks; to sit around conference tables to discuss and resolve what ever conflicts may exist or emerge in a civil and smart manner. The Ethiopian people deserve that much from us; and we can do it if there is a willingness to make fundamental changes in our mindsets, behaviors and attitudes.

As was suggested in preparation for the All Party Conference about four years ago, and as recommended to the CUDP leadership in the Diaspora more than a year ago, Ethiopian Opposition political parties, civic groups and others need to begin discussions and dialogue to craft and agree on a meaningful **Code of Conduct to** govern behaviors and

attitudes. This will be a first step in ushering in a new political culture of mutual trust, integrity, honesty, mutual respect, team work and collaboration, dialogue and conflict management. Such a move will go a long way in demonstrating to the Ethiopia people and to those languishing in jail our collective commitment and resolve to support them in a consistent, coordinated, strategic and unified manner. The Ethiopian people deserve this and it is time political actors and others stop creating excuses for dysfunction and incompetence.

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