

# a way forward to a post-woyane democratic and just Ethiopia

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*Disclaimer: The objective of this article is to provoke discussion among Ethiopians, especially those who have been opposing the monarchy, the derg and now the woyane regimes over the last 70 years of our political history. The article starts with the small letter 'a' to pacify the reader that it is just one possible solution to a multitude of psycho-social and political problems that we are facing now. Others could have solutions in mind or in practice. And to those that are knit pickers about my qualifications to write such "as a matter of fact" point of view, I say to you that I have listed my qualifications as an Ethiopian whose academic and professional background is in the science and engineering fields, not to brag, but as a hint that I am not a political scientist, a psychologist nor a philosopher.*

*What I am writing about is a result of my involvement in the anti-woyane movement over the last two decades. I see a deficiency in "the opposition camp". I must speak of these deficiencies so that the sacrifices made, and still being made, by millions of Ethiopians to bring about a democratic and just society were not in vain. I must also speak of these deficiencies because I want an end for the persistent anti-regime mentality and help change our thinking to a "pro-values" psychological make up.*

## We have come to another cross road

It is often said that driving with the use of a rear view mirror will eventually lead to a crash. One's journey will be safer if the driver has a view of the panorama forward and be able to negotiate all the bends and turns on the way to his or her destination. Any **VISION**, irrespective of its complexity, also requires forward looking pragmatism in order to skilfully coordinate the **VALUES** required to accomplish the objectives of such a vision with the **ACTIONS** needed to implement such values in a practical sense for the satisfactory completion of the vision.

I have been opposing the woyane regime for almost twenty years now. I have spent most of my adult life in Australia and never set foot in Ethiopia since I left my beloved homeland. I have observed, but never been a party to, the formation of united coalitions and the consequent fragmentation of several political movements such as Hibret and Kinijit. I am still an "activist" and contribute what I can as a member of political and civic organisations that are fighting to bring about the end of woyane rule and establish a democratic Ethiopia in which all citizens are equal and free from oppression, suppression and want.

*"If there is dissatisfaction with the status quo, good. If there is ferment, so much the better.  
If there is restlessness, I am pleased. Then let there be ideas, and hard thought,  
and hard work. If man feels small, let man make himself bigger."*

— Herbert H. Humphrey

A quarter of a century has now passed since our people have been subjected to a brutal and racist dictatorship. We are no closer to the success we desire than we were 20 years ago. Are we crystal clear on what we VALUE most—those things that are most important, rewarding, and meaningful to us personally and to our brothers and sisters at large? Are we clear on a series of visions that provide us with the opportunity to actually experience, create or contribute that which we value most? Are we clear on the roles that each of us must play in making these visions move from our heart and head through our hands to make a woyane-free Ethiopia a reality? Are we defining our vision with absolute clarity and support it with absolute conviction, believing what we are doing is right and born from a strong sense of mission and purpose.

We are still in the opposing mode, and except for a few ad hoc agreements between the different political players, I have not seen a comprehensive roadmap for achieving our vision. This short article raises several questions and tries to provide a solution from the point of view of understanding and analysing the **VISION/s**, **VALUES** and **ACTIONS** that we have been and are implementing as political parties or civic / human rights organisations. It tries to pinpoint where our deficiencies are and how to remedy the shortcomings of an otherwise doggedly determined and selfless population, both inside and outside the country that is fighting an equally doggedly determined enemy hell bent on destroying the very fabric of our society. So, does our unrelenting sloganeering and all the hard work possess the necessary clarity and conviction to guide the people of Ethiopia to the promised land of freedom, equality and justice?

## What are our **VISION/s** for a post-woyane Ethiopia?

*A Vision is a desired end state that describes the clear and inspirational long-term desired change resulting from an organisational mission, objective, strategy or a program.* In addition to having a common enemy called the woyane, there is generally an agreement by the different political and civic players that their vision statement does singularly enshrine the birth of a democratic system. By definition, a democratic system is expected to be a just system based on the rule of law and render all citizens free and equal. Albeit this being the common currency of the struggle against the woyane regime, it can not define a national vision because the vision of nationhood itself hasn't been agreed upon by the stakeholders. It is suffice to turn up at any anti-woyane demonstration to observe the fragmented vision displayed by the diaspora from Oromo, Ogaden, Gambella etc regions now residing in the west, not to mention the cessation aspirations of their respective political parties/leaders.

A national vision should unequivocally define the “**Ethiopia**” one minute after the fall of the woyane regime, for the fall of the woyane is as sure as the sun rising in the east....hopefully sooner than later. All competing values must be sorted now and be honestly and clearly articulated by the different players and presented to all Ethiopians, not just their constituents alone. Organisational aspirations must not remain hidden in secret vaults and surprise the population in the future. Honesty and clarity of values is the only weapon we have to avoid a bumpy road ahead.

What are these competing values? Here are some pertinent issues.

Do we want a **Sovereign Ethiopia** with recognised international borders that all citizens are loyal to and prepared to defend every square centimeter with their blood? Or is our individual or collective struggle to ascertain the title deed of the different ethnic groups over their ancestral land?

Do we want a **Unitary** state? A state governed as a single power in which the central government is ultimately supreme and smaller administrative divisions exercise powers that the central government chooses to delegate to them by decree and statute. The fourteen provinces under the Imperial system and the Derg is an example of a Unitary system. Other examples include The united Kingdom whose parliament delegates limited powers to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Do we want a **Symmetric Federal System** in which each constituent state possess equal powers. Or is it an **Asymmetric system** where a distinction is made between constituent states and power apportioned as per such a distinction.

### **What values do we possess?**

The second most important asset is What **VALUES** we possess. Values can be defined as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes. Values tend to influence attitudes and behaviour. As such, values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong or what ought to be. Types of values include moral (*respect, honesty, fairness...*), doctrinal or ideological (*religious or political*), social (*cooperation, shared pride, inclusiveness, optimism etc.*). “Free all political prisoners” “Free, fair and transparent elections”, “Ethiopianism”, “All men are equal” ..... are representatives of values that are common in the language of the opposition.

*An optimist expects his dreams to come true. A pessimist expects his nightmares to come true.*

Our response to adverse situations is a reflection of the values we uphold. We shed tears for our fallen heroes, we cry out for the likes of Andargachew, Iskinder and Andualem. we sympathise with grieving mothers and we show pride when a defiant athlete raises the protest sign up in the air and speaks for millions of others. Yet, we have among us in the proverbial kibe gebya (butter market) who use foul language to demean another human being, to make them less than us and demonise or belittle them as individuals or groups of people. The response from one Yodit Wolderufael, a hooligan in Arizona who almost initiated a race war between the Tigre and Amhara & Oromo. Surely Yodit's statements deserve no response let alone be taken as representing the Tigrean people. Where in lies the logic of an Ethiopia of justice and equality if we do not respect the equality of her citizens in every aspect, social and cultural?

We need to be inclusive of all political and civic organisations. We need to acknowledge that Ethiopia is mother to many and varied nations and nationalities and that **ONE** political/ideological entity or **ONE** ethnic political/cultural group will never be able to govern her by force....Never! We must also understand the exclusion of one ethnic or political group will simply be a source of dissatisfaction and destabilisation. That is why all the horse trading must be done now in a transparent way so that we can start to write the future of Ethiopia on a blank page that gives access to all stakeholders. I am not suggesting to bury or deny our past psycho-social, cultural and political history. We should recognise and accept it so that it can facilitate the truth and reconciliation that we so desperately need.

The current woyane implemented **constitution** as a set of fundamental principles according to which Ethiopia and Ethiopians are governed is null and void. We need to seriously gather the momentum to create a **Foundation Document** that reflects not only the new vision for a post-woyane Ethiopia but also reflect the values for our future such as **civil and political rights** to protect individual freedom from infringement by governments as witnessed in the political history of Ethiopia in the last century. We must ensure such a **Foundation Document** ensures one's ability to participate in the civil and political life of the society and state without discrimination, intimidation or repression. We must ensure physical and mental integrity of sacrosanct life, protection from discrimination on grounds such as ethnicity, religion, gender and age. Above all we must protect individual rights such as freedoms of assembly, movement, press, speech, thought and faith. We need to enshrine political rights such as natural justice (procedural fairness) in law such as the rights of the accused including fair trial and due process, the right to appeal or seek redress and rights of participation in politics and civil society of one's own volition; the right to vote, assemble, petition etc. in accordance with international covenants and declarations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is also imperative that an organisation whose vision statement is the establishment and practice of democratic governance, that itself **must** practice those values internally. If leadership positions are not filled through a democratic process, then that organisation should not be preaching democracy to any audience. If we are to succeed in our endeavour, then we must practice what we preach. If we want justice...then we must act as a just person. If we want

equality then we should treat all equal to us ....and if we want freedom to “be” then we should also respect the freedom of others to “be”.

### **Do our actions reflect our vision and values?**

Last but not least, the third requirement of our movement/s is the actions we have been taking to bring about our objective to a successful conclusion. But, do these actions reflect our vision and our values. There is plenty of goodwill from individuals, albeit misguided, in the form of wholly or partially donating one's time, money and experience to the cause. There are even patriotic individuals who have forsaken their comfortable middle class life and gone bush to fight this evil regime. They are my heroes.

*"Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare." - Japanese Proverb*

What I earnestly expect from all of us individuals involved as activists and freedom fighters is to hold the leadership of our respective organisations accountable and develop the value to take true ownership of our organisation, to internally democratise and hold accountable the leadership to achieving measurable and well defined goals. Even pregnancies come to the end of the gestation period.

Members must involve themselves in shaping the vision of their organisation, nurture and develop the intrinsic values to bring their vision to a qualified and successful end, and continue to modernise the management to prepare it for future challenges. We must stop making demi-gods out of our political and civic leaders. We must render our loyalty to our vision and values alone while acknowledging and giving credit to those who are sacrificing their time and money for their cause.

I hope this article will initiate a wider discussion on the struggle, the participants (members and leaders included for there can not exist one without the other), their visions and values. I hope we have a detailed knowledge of the visions and values of all aspiring and current leaders and the manifesto of their respective political organisations.

We must ask all organisations, political or civic, about their membership, where the organisations' headquarters are located, its financial assets and main source of income. We need to know what the organisation stands for and what its strategy and policy contributions are for a post-woyane governance. We need to demand a declaration of intent that every organisation must be judged against in the future. We must inquire and research what ideological or theocratic influences motivate the leaders/members.

If we fail to do our homework, we will be opposing *something* in perpetuity, as we did with the monarchy, the derg, the woyane and, God forbid, the post-woyane regime.

There is an old Amharic proverb that goes like “*That which we put up sitting down, we could not get it down sitting up*” or .....ተቀምጠን ይሰቀልነውን ቆመን ማውረድ አቃተን

Long live the dream of a democratic Ethiopia.  
Freedom, equality and justice to all!

Post Script        This article was deliberately written English so that those Ethiopians who comprehend English better could participate in the discussion. An Amharic version will be available soon. All comments can be sent to mareshetmeshesha@gmail.com.

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