

## **A message to the participants of the Oromo Leadership Convention in Atlanta**

By Berhanu Gutema Balcha (PhD)

We follow very closely your vigorous and enduring efforts to advance the Oromo people's struggle. There is always less costly and less time consuming road to victory. On the contrary, very huge sacrifices and terrible losses can make the victory pointless. "A Pyrrhic victory is a victory that inflicts such a devastating toll on the victor that it is tantamount to defeat". Great leaders are willing to compromise to save the people, and we hope that the 12. November 2016 the Oromo Leadership Convention in Atlanta will aim to suggest a better and less costly road to victory for all in Ethiopia. "The means by which we achieve victory are as important as the victory itself."

Many people hope that it is possible to formulate a mainstream political agenda for the Oromo people that can help to build trustworthy and effective cooperation with other non-Oromo political groups in Ethiopia. Trustworthy and effective cooperation will create synergy in the anti-TPLF struggle. However, it is very difficult to accommodate extreme objectives in a mainstream political agenda. Accommodating an extreme goal in the mainstream political agenda can create a risk to make a vague and ambiguous political agenda such as "self-determination", "up to secession", "referendum" etc., which could not attract any meaningful and trustworthy cooperation with other non-Oromo political groups. People under subjugations have unconditional rights to struggle in whatever way possible, whether it is agreed or not. So it is not essential now to have an agreement with other horizontal non-Oromo political groups about how to solve probable subjugations in the future. No one is forced to live under subjugation that whether there is an agreement or not.

As a matter of fact, normative and pragmatic considerations indicate that the Oromo people's struggle can achieve victory less costly and very quickly, if the objective of the struggle is to create a democratic and self-governing Oromia in genuine federalism in Ethiopia. In 2000s, I had done a thorough investigation and fieldwork in towns and rural areas in three regions, and wrote a dissertation regarding federalism in Ethiopia. The conclusion is that genuine federalism in Ethiopian can only work, if there is a good and workable consensus at least among the major national and political groupings concerning the future of Ethiopia. "My way or the high way" position of any group is destructive for all in Ethiopia. I wrote a provocative article on it in 2007 titled: Minority rule brings neither democracy nor stability: Stability and Democracy in Ethiopian greatly rely upon Amharic speaking and Oromiffa-speaking people of Ethiopia.

[http://www.ethiomeia.com/articles/minority\\_rule\\_risks.html](http://www.ethiomeia.com/articles/minority_rule_risks.html)).

Realistically, the struggle to create a democratic and self-governing Oromia in a genuine federal arrangement in Ethiopia could be better for the Oromo people and the rest of Ethiopia. Because:

**One**, it could give great energy for the anti-TPLF struggle in creating a common agenda and reducing suspicions and mistrusts. It can shorten the time and minimize sacrifices, and can create an incentive for many to join the struggle, because they can foresee that post-TPLF Ethiopia will not slide toward chaos.

**Two**, it could reduce the influences of extreme ideas on both sides of the political spectrum. Extreme ideas have become very prominent and highly influential, because the mainstream and conciliatory voices are very low and ambiguous.

**Three**, it could deny the TPLF the pretext in abusing, imprisoning and killing of thousands of Oromos by labeling them as agents of secession. The TPLF's domination has survived by pitting the Oromo and Amhara against one another: by labeling Oromos as "secessionists" and Amharas as "unionists".

**Four**, it could help to get the supports of the international community. Nowadays it is very difficult to get as much as necessary and good-intentioned international sympathy and support, - politically, materially and academically – to tear a country apart. Especially in the case of the Oromos, independence for the Oromo people means the disintegration of Ethiopia and total chaos in the region. No benignant and rational international power and actor can support and accept such a disastrous possibility for the region. For example, it was easier to support and accept the separation of S. Sudan, because it was less complicated geographically and ethnically. But even such seemingly less complicated case of S. Sudan, it has become very difficult and the situation looks very bleak for the people of South Sudan. As a matter of fact, global priorities are security, ecology and refugees. The Oromo people's struggle could get great supports internationally and in Ethiopia, if the aim is to create democratic, prosperous and stable Ethiopia for all.

More importantly, it will be a very good idea to make clear those double-meaning and ambiguous phrases and concepts like "up to secession", "self-determination," "freedom" "referendum for the Oromo people", "the choice of the Oromo people in the future" etc., all these concepts and phrases can be considered as options for independence. They are very ambiguous and even a layman in politics can foresee secession can be an option in these concepts and phrases. Communication is also about what the people hear, not only what one says.

Many Oromo political elites and activists often question why there have been widespread suspicions about the Oromo movements, but the answer is very clear; let one reads the programmes of prominent Oromo movements. The concepts they use about the objectives in their programmes are intentionally ambiguous and can mean different things to

different people. It is illogical to expect trusts and genuine cooperation while using ambiguous concepts in the objectives. There is a saying that goes, "You're not only responsible for what you say, but also for what you don't." In politics one can have a responsibility for what the people hear. It is therefore essential to put clear objectives and clear concepts to minimize suspicions and mistrusts.

Please be very clear, constructive and brave to make compromises, and you will get good reactions. Of course, there will always be criticisms, and you can get clear supports or oppositions. Because there are "unitarists," "territorial federalists," "ethno-linguistic federalists," "unionists," "secessionists," and "sham federalists," in Ethiopia's political landscape. It can also be easier for the people who support or oppose your objectives, and it will be very crucial to add clarity in the struggle. The great hurdles are not the flags, boundary, languages, histories, narratives or self-administration. Genuine federal structures are designed to address these differences through the principles of self-rule and shared rule. Federal arrangements are outcomes of continuous negotiations. However, the great problems are goals, such as, "independence", "up to secession", "referendum" or "self-determination"; they are non-starter positions for negotiation, cooperation and trust building initiatives. If the outcomes of the convention are ambiguous and divisive, it could be the road to hell for the anti-TPLF struggle, but an advantage for the TPLF. Not any good intentioned and well-organized political group in Ethiopia can make a genuine cooperation with any group that have a long term objective or potential plan to dismember Ethiopia. It is not complicated to understand. It is not chauvinism, but it is survival. The possibilities of disintegration and turmoil are serious issues. If there is no genuine cooperation, there will be no humane and good victory.

It is therefore better to use our energy and resources to create more wealth and equity rather than to waste them to fight and kill each other regarding how to divide the resources. Let us not forget the young people in Adama, Shashemene, Ambo, Gonder, Bahir Dar and Debremarkos, and let us not forget their expressions of solidarity: "We are all Oromos", "I stand with my Oromo brothers", "Amhara is ours, Oromo is ours", "The blood flowing in Oromia is our blood too," etc. We believe that these young people did not die in vain. It is a great responsibility and very high moral value to respect the wishes of these fearless young people. Great leaders are willing to compromise to save the people.

Best wishes for a good outcome.

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The writer can be contacted at: [berhanugbalcha@gmail.com](mailto:berhanugbalcha@gmail.com)