

The EPRDF Reign Of Terror in Sidama, Ethiopia.

By Gabisso Kada, July 28, 2006.

Awassa, Sidama, Ethiopia

Ever since EPRDF took power in 1991, the Sidama people never enjoyed sustained peace. Political turmoil deliberately orchestrated by the incumbent regime by fabricating “peoples’ democratic organizations” (PDOs) which the regime trained and equipped as enemies of the existing liberation organizations took a heavy toll on the Sidama people during the early 90s. The irony is that while TPLF, the powerhouse of EPRDF, is the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front, liberation organizations of other peoples such as Sidama, Oromo and the like were branded as “anti peace”, “anti democracy” and “anti unity” elements immediately after EPRDF assumed power in 1991.

This deceptive classification of political organizations by EPRDF gave it ammunition to carry out massive abuse of human and democratic rights in Sidama and other parts of the country for the past 15 years. What amazes the Ethiopian peoples at present is the reuse of the same deceptive terminologies against the official opposition political parties that won the May 2005 elections with landslide. The implication of this is clear. Political pluralism is dead and buried under EPRDF Ethiopia and the country is under a dictatorship. The main question then is: why does the international community continue to turn a blind eye against the situations in the country and continue to endorse dictatorship in the 21st century? The international community failed the peoples of Ethiopia as it did the peoples of Rwanda during the 1994 genocide only to regret later.

This is the general feeling of the people of Sidama who have been under siege by EPRDF since 1991. The Sidama people witnessed the worst forms of abuses of human and political rights under the EPRDF regime. This is not a lamentation of the diehard nationalists as EPRDF often tries to portray. The Sidama people were not only denied basic rights enshrined in the constitution ratified by the incumbent government itself but were subjected to various forms of abuses. Among others these include: denial of the right for regional self administration; lack of administrative stability and good governance; lack of freedom of organization; abuse of human resources and deliberate capacity underdevelopment; lack of access to basic services such as education, health and economic infrastructure; deliberate blockade of foreign grants and assistances; continued massacre and torture of civilians opposed to government actions that are against their interests. Let us briefly look at each of these in turn.

Regional self-administration: the constitution of the country guarantees each nation and nationality to exercise the right to self-administration. However, the

Sidama people, with a total population of over 5 million, are forced by EPRDF to be subjected to a fictitious regional arrangement under the so-called south Ethiopia peoples region that includes 45 different nations and nationalities and over 15 million people. The Sidama people have rejected this arrangement imposed on them since 1993 but have been forced to accept it. This arrangement is not only against the constitutional right of self-administration but is clearly inimical to socioeconomic development of the peoples of the region. The struggle for regional self-administration continues today and is one of main reasons for continued massacre and torture of Sidama civilians by the EPRDF regime.

Lack of administrative stability and good governance: this is linked to the violations of the constitutional right of the Sidama people. One cannot talk about administrative stability and good governance where people have no say about their own lives. During the past 15 years of EPRDF rule, over 11 presidents of the Sidama zone have been appointed and removed by EPRDF. Sidama has been the most politically instable area in the country since EPRDF took power in 1991. The effects of such level of political instability on socioeconomic development in the area are far reaching.

Lack of freedom of organization: freedom of association and speech are basic rights of human kind and are respected in many countries of the world. In Ethiopia while the constitution grants these freedoms, in practice it is difficult to exercise them. EPRDF interferes with these basic rights and dictates how the Ethiopian peoples can exercise them. For instance, while the Tigray people can be organized in the form of Tigray Peoples Liberation Front as a “peaceful and democratic organization” the Sidamas and Oromos cannot have an organization under the name of liberation because it is “anti peace” and “anti democracy”. The Sidama people cannot establish a Sidama development association because it is against the “unity of the southern peoples”. The Sidama people cannot be organized in any way that rivals the EPRDF arrangement. The Sidama Development Association and the Sidama Development Corporation, the two purely social development organizations in Sidama, were dismantled because of this.

Currently the regime is putting a heavy pressure on the only remaining three institutions owned by the Sidama people. These are: The Sidama micro finance, the Furra College of Business and Development Studies and the Sidama community radio station. EPRDF accuses them of being threat to the “southern unity” simply because they are owned by the Sidama people. This is intolerable.

Abuse of human resources and deliberate capacity underdevelopment: One of the most serious crimes being committed by the EPRDF regime in Sidama is systematic removal of well-educated Sidama individuals from any positions in Sidama and forcing them to flee the country. Already about 1/3 of high-level Sidama professionals have left the country since EPRDF took power. Those who

remain in the country are permanently tortured both physically and mentally. Several professionals were imprisoned in March and April 2006 for their support for Sidama regional status which the Prime Minister himself agreed to grant after a referendum in June 2006 but later reversed. For instance, while Abera Doba was removed from his position and forced to flee the country, Dukale Lamiso was removed from his position and left unemployed for 6 months.

On the other hand, EPRDF promotes those Sidama surrogates who have no capacity for political administration or economic management. EPRDF rewards people who are ignorant and cruel but loyal to its policies. The recent appointment of Shiferaw Shigute as the president of Southern Region and Melese Marimo as the Ethiopian Ambassador to South Africa are the best examples of how EPRDF promotes the deliberate policy of human resources abuses and of capacity underdevelopment in addition to the more sinister objective of exonerating people involved in May 24, 2002 massacre of the innocent Sidama civilians.

Lack of access to basic services and deliberate blockade of foreign grants and assistances: the Sidama region is among the least developed areas in the poorest country in the world. Access to health, basic education, clean water and other social and economic infrastructure is severely curtailed. A reasonable progress has been made in this area since 1994 due to assistance from Ireland Aid. However, in 2002 the EPRDF government officially requested Ireland Aid to suspend its grants to development programs in Sidama because it was considered to be a threat to the “unity of southern peoples”. Accordingly, Ireland Aid stopped funding development activities in Sidama. Thus with a rapidly growing population and limited land for tilling, coupled with the suspension of any meaningful development activities, the Sidama people have become unable to sustain themselves. Already in 2004 and 2005 alone thousands of elderly and children died of starvation in many lowland districts of Sidama. EPRDF is carrying out not only political genocide but also economic genocide in Sidama.

Continued massacre and torture of civilians: whenever the Sidama people voice their concern about any of the above abuses of their basic rights the EPRDF regime responds by killing, imprisonment and torture. Killings have never stopped in Sidama since Mulugeta Bekele Boroje was shot died by EPRDF soldiers in Leku in 1991 for supporting the Sidama Liberation Movement instead a PDO Sidama civilians have been shot died every year. But no killings matched the May 24, 2002 massacre where over 70 innocent civilians were murdered and over 300 wounded in one day in Loqqe, a suburb of Awassa.

At present EPRDF is carrying out overt anti-Sidama propaganda by the Ethiopian public mass media. In mid July 2006 the Ethiopian TV broadcasted statements that stressed that there are some elements in the south creating anti-Southern unity sentiments that indirectly implicates the Sidama people.

The Ethiopian security is preparing and distributing pamphlets to create false charges on innocent Sidamas. For example, they prepared a list of people who were supposedly listed out to be murdered and started accusing Sidama Scholars to have selected and organizing the killing lists. The purpose is to justify the continued imprisonment and torture of the Sidama civilians.

Sidama is under the reign of terror. But its people will never stop their struggle for regional self-governance, justice and democracy.

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