

The Heroes and the Villains in the Sidama Liberation Struggle: Undoing the Misinformation.

Part II.

By Halale Xawissa, January 4, 2005.

III. The Current State of the Sidama Liberation Struggle.

3.1 The Liberation Organizations and their Leadership.

In the last decade of the 20th century the Sidama liberation struggle became extremely weak mainly for two reasons. First, the TPLF/EPRDF regime which monopolized the political power in the country after 1991 systematically fabricated its own surrogate political parties in the name of PDOs in all regions in the country with the aim of eliminating the genuine liberation organizations that represented the oppressed peoples. Accordingly, the TPLF used the Sidama PDO to weaken and eliminate an age-old Sidama liberation struggle. The second and the most important factor, however, was the betrayal of the Sidama people by some individuals who claimed to have represented the society. These individuals weakened the Sidama liberation struggle by their blatant nepotism, corruption, attempt to exercise a single family hegemony with undue contempt and disregard to the gallant Sidama society and with open declaration of their alliances with the Abyssinians including a wide range of intermarriages. This group openly proclaimed an end to the Sidama national liberation struggle stating shamelessly that the Sidama people had got what they wanted under the TPLF leadership!!

Another group which tried to rectify this problem in the recent past lacked a clear political direction and was busy with internal feuding for control of power and what ever resources the group possessed.

This left the concerned Sidama intellectuals and the society at large with no option other than reinstating the ‘Sidama National Liberation Struggle’ pioneered by Baalichcha Worawo and strengthened by Yetera Bole, Amare Gunsu and many others. That is how the Sidama National Liberation Organization (SNLO) came about. As opposed to what those who misinform gossip, the SNLO is not the organization of the few “destructive” elements. Far from that SNLO is the reconstruction of the century old national liberation struggle of the gallant Sidama people. And its current leadership is the cleanest of all who claim to represent this society. The goal of the current leadership is one and only one: to ensure that the Sidama people decide on all aspects of their lives. We have no intention of using the Sidama society as an income-generating project to advance our private and family interests. Neither do we tolerate any such act by any individual or a group of individuals. The leadership of SNLO is working with all sections of the Sidama society to bring an end to the agonizing suffering of our people brought about by the continued Abyssinian domination with the assistance of a few Sidama bandits.

Thus, like-minded organizations should not be misled by the blatant lies and misinformation about SNLO by certain rent seeking individuals and family groups that have already abandoned the Sidama national liberation struggle but are trying to come back only to blackmail the genuine liberation organization and its leadership.

3.2 The Awassa Peaceful Protest and the Massacre of Innocent Civilians.

After a decade of continued political domination and economic plunder, the TPLF regime finally decided to dismantle the donor supported Sidama development activities and evict the people from their ancestral home land of the Awassa town using the Sidama PDO bandits. As always the heroic Sidama people rejected the decision of Meles Zenawi's regime to dismantle the only viable development activity they had for centuries and remove them from their land. Consequently, on May 24, 2002, over 7000 Sidamas marched peacefully towards the middle of their town, Awassa, peacefully to express their anger and opposition to these illegal decisions. However, the response they received from the brutal regime was not a civilized one. The savagery soldiers of Meles Zenawi rained bullets using automatic machine guns and heavy weaponry on these civilians. Over one hundred people were killed and over 300 wounded.

The victims of the Awassa massacre range from innocent businessmen and a high school and elementary school children to elderly farmers from the surroundings of Awassa. These people are the real heroes of today's liberation struggle. My SNLO colleague told me that a Sidama living in Diaspora and who claim that he supports a family group that claims to own a certain liberation organization told him that the Awassa massacre does not matter!! It does not matter for him because his "liberation struggle's" primary concern is not the Sidama people. This was clearly shown by the failure of that organization to even condemn the brutal massacre of the innocent Sidama civilians in Awassa on May 24, 2002, a massacre that was strongly and unequivocally condemned by so many domestic political and civil rights organizations and a wide range of international community. How can such an organization claim to be a liberation organization and how can its leaders claim to be liberators? The reader can judge for him/her self. Time is over for the Diaspora lies and misinformation. Today our people both at home and abroad are conscious enough to decide for themselves as to who is making sacrifices for them and who is benefiting out of their sufferings. We want the like-minded organizations of sisterly peoples to appreciate this fact about the current liberation struggle of the Sidama society.

For us for the members of SNLO, the real heroes in today's liberation struggler are people like the victims of the Awassa massacre. The author of this article wept bitterly when he heard that a 10 year old boy who was shoot in the head and the chest by the brutal TPLF soldiers on the day of the massacre said in Yirgalem (Dalle) hospital while he was dying: "I know I am going to die. But please never leave Hawassa (Awassa), never please". I am proud to be born a Sidama, a Sidama who belong to the family of such child, a hero but never ever a villain!! SNLO works hard to ensure that a memorial monument is built engraved in the names of all who fell in Awassa on that date in the immediate future.

3.3 The Sidama Resistance Continues.

The heroic people of Sidama have never given up their struggle for freedom from the occupiers. Today with the leadership of SNLO, they are shaking the foundation of the TPLF regime in various ways. The recent anti- TPLF demonstration during the celebration of Fichche, the Sidama New Year, in Awassa town, in November 2004 was a clear example of how the regime cannot rest in peace in Sidama. Hundreds of the gallant Sidama youth have taken to the streets of Awassa with banners that demanded the return of the Sidama land to its legitimate owners, demanded the regime to stop further eviction of the Sidamas from Awassa, their land, demanded to stop deliberate policy of underdevelopment and promotion of hunger and famine in the region to subdue the people and demanded to stop similar other atrocities.

The regime responded with its brutal method of imprisonment and torture of the people involved in the demonstration. However, this can in no way kill the spirit of this heroic people and deter them from fighting for their freedom.

3.4 The Call for Bringing the Killers to Justice.

Along side with such stiff resistance the Sidama people are also demanding the bringing of the perpetrators of the May 24,2002 massacre to justice. Although Meles Zenawi's regime have acknowledged the involvement of its forces in the Gambella massacre and apologized to the people of Gambella, it did nothing regarding the same massacre it forces carried out in Sidama. This shows the contempt this regime has on the Sidama people. The Sidamas both home and abroad are furious about this double standard both by the TPLF regime and the international community that failed to put the same level of pressure on Meles Zenawi's regime regarding the Sidama massacre. They failed to mention that the people who have massacred were purely Sidamas let alone denouncing the massacre. Therefore, the SNLO calls upon the international community to bring the key perpetrators of the May 24, 2002 Awassa massacre of the Sidama people to justice with immediate effect. These perpetrators are: (1) Meles Zenawi, (2) Bereket Simon (3) Harka Haroye, (4) Abay Tsehaye (5) Haile Mariam Desalegne (6) Melesse Marimo, (7) Galalcha Janje (8) Adane Dingama, (9) Dr Kebede Kanchula (10) Petros WoldeSenbet, and (11) Shiferaw Shuguxe.

The May 24, 2002 massacre of the Sidama people in Awassa was a genocide and ethnic cleansing which is a pre-meditated and aimed at eliminating a specific ethnic group, purely the Sidamas, to take their land, Awassa. At present, the remaining Sidamas are being evicted from Awassa town and their land is being distributed to the other ethnic groups as was pre-planned. Therefore, we call up on the international community to intervene to stop this unlawful eviction of the Sidama people from their land and to bring the perpetrators of the genocide and ethnic cleansing to justice.

IV. Ethnic Cleansing and Other TPLF Atrocities Continue.

As stated in the preceding section the ethnic cleansing of the Sidama people is continuing at unprecedented rate at present. The president of the so-called Southern region, Haile Maraim Desalegn, is effectively implementing the ethnic cleansing policy of the TPLF regime by evicting the Sidamas and settling his own nation, the Wolayitas, on the Sidama land in various parts of the Sidama region. This was opposed by the current TPLF appointed Sidama administrator. However, Harka Haroye, Melesse Marimo and Galalcha Janje have agreed and endorsed the ethnic cleansing of the Sidama people and the settlement of the Wolayitas on the Sidama land. History has already judged them and will judge them more severely for betraying several times the people that brought them up.

On top of losing their lands, the Sidama people are also being deliberately sidelined from getting access to social services like education. The quality of education at both primary and secondary level is made to fall deliberately so that pass rates in all levels are made to ensured to be low. The Sidama children when they complete secondary school with grades that qualify them to join the tertiary educational institutions, they are allocated only to the newly established colleges in Awassa and other southern areas. Well-established institutions in Addis Ababa and other regions are kept for few dominant ethnic groups particularly the Tigreans. The institutions in the south are not well equipped and do not yet offer education in key disciplines such as engineering and medicine that are required for rapid development of key human resources and hence rapid socio-economic development of the area.

Farmers and development agents are deliberately summoned for meetings through out the year so that they are not effectively engaged in the development processes. All the development activities supported by the donors have long been dismantled. The Sidama society is being effectively turned in to a society of Stone Age. That is why this society needs a political organization that is capable of identifying and addressing this unprecedented challenges the society has faced in the history of its existence. What SNLO is doing is exactly this.

V. The Call for Like-minded Organizations to Forge an Effective Coalition.

Therefore, the SNLO calls up on all the likeminded organizations that represent neighbouring and other sisterly oppressed peoples to investigate the truth about the Sidama Liberations organizations and create a conducive atmosphere for realistic and effective coalition building to annihilate the invaders who have caused such agonizing suffering to our respective societies. The truth shall triumph!!

Victory to the oppressed peoples!!

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