

# **Sidama's Peaceful Quest for Freedom Versus Ethiopia's Violent**

**Response: Further Consequences of Looqe Massacre,**

**Seminar on Second year Remembrance of "Sidama victims of atrocity**

**By M. B. Daye.**

**May 23 2004, UK**

## **Introduction,**

It is known fact that the human history proceeds through continued process of conflicts. This happens in the systems of thought; socio-economic and political system's collide and disintegrate by their own internal contradiction. Their replacement by less contradictory, peaceful and cohesive that entertains rational interest of human being is inevitable. Kant suggested that there was an end point to the process of history, which is the realization of freedom here in our globe. In his words "The history of world is none other than the progress of consciousness of freedom." In the words of Hegel "The eastern nations knew that one is free; the Greek and Roman world only that some are free, while we know that all men [and women] absolutely are free." Hegel (1956:19) what Hegel was uttering appears to me was nothing other than human beings progressive rise to full rationality and to a self-conscious awareness of how truth express itself in self government. His thought can be both foundation and reflection of liberal democracy, where by people governed by agreed upon contract, constitution, law and order.

In this article I attempt to substantiate or else challenge what Hegel and Kant forwarded about continuous conflict to attain top layer of freedom and self government. If conflict is inevitable based on diversity of thought, I would argue accepting conflict as natural phenomenon which is unavoidable; the focus should be on conflict management. However, it needs capable and good governance that entertains rational and fare interests of conflicting parties that bring their conflict around the table to heal old wounds. My thought stems from my strong belief that the victory or defeat at the battle field will fuel future conflict and battle.

In order to bring conflicting interest around the table, however it needs great mind that recognizes knowingly or unknowingly one party caused physical or mental damage on others or vice -versa in its attempt to achieve its obvious or hidden goals.

It is difficult, however, to place Hegelian thought in the context of Sidama and Ethiopia. For simple reason, while Hegelian thought is about homogeneous society, the conflict between Sidama and Ethiopia is the conflict that is arising between two different societies; two different cultures and two different socio-economic settings. While the former has a tendency to be peaceful society the latter inclined to be warlike, aggressive and lacks wisdom of peaceful conflict management, non-tolerant, violent. Ethiopia excluding Sidama in itself is an empire in which diverse cultures, languages, socio-economic and political systems suppressed by single ethnic domination thanks weapons given by Europeans. This single ethnic domination alternates between two Arab migrant communities namely Amhara and Tigre who regard themselves as 'Power House' of 'Horn of Africa'. While other Cushitic nations of Horn of Africa had their relative freedom after civilized colonialists recognised unfairness of colonialism; uncivilized colonialists lag behind the time to recognize the damage they caused for other nations.

Among those Physically and mentally damaged nations, Sidama, Hadiya, Kambata, Alaba Tambaro, Gedeo, Burgi, Oromo, Ogaden, Afar, Saho, Agew, etc... (Cushitic Nations); Wolita, Gamo, Gofa, Dawuro Kafa Yem etc..., (Omotic Nations); Agnuwak, Surma, Mursi, Nuer, (Nilotic Nations). All these nations and nationalities with distinctive culture and identity are imprisoned in Ethiopian Empire. Therefore, it needs the attention of international community to liberate such nations to the extent of freedom suggested by Kant and Hegel.

### **I. Civilized Sidama's Peaceful Approach to address their concern.**

Non- violence approach is one of the strategies to conflict Management system among the Sidama Nation of Horn of Africa. This strategy is usually observed being applied in everyday lives of individuals to resolve conflict that may arise from misunderstanding in the processes of interaction. Violating accepted norms, codes of conduct and individual offence shall be brought to *Chimeeye* (elderly leaders) of Community by the process of *Qaxxaro* (appeal). No matter how serious the offence

committed against individuals, the Sidama's patience and tolerance is too unthinkably high. That is why non-Sidamas living in and around them admiringly say "*Sidaamu Reesha Diwe Wore Di'afinni Yaanno*" rough meaning "the Sidamas people keeping the victimised dead body of their relatives or beloved ones aside; goes for appeal for justice." instead of retaliation or revenge. This indicates of the level of their tolerance. However, they never accept implicitly or explicitly injustice and unfairness.

## **II. Uncivilized Abyssinian aggressors and culture of violence**

Violating the right of other individual is criminal act. But for Abyssinians it is virtue of bravery. They were fighting among themselves for centuries. There is no culture of trust and tolerance even between son and father. When father come to power, he send his capable sons to prison to distance them from competing his power. There was no common code of conduct through which one evaluate whether some one guilty or not. After they were given European weapon and fire arms, they became advantageous over unarmed nations. Equipped with European weapons they enlarged the magnitude of their violence and further started crime against humanity.

Thus, since the conquest and colonization of the Sidama-land, in 1890s by Amharas led by Menelik the II; Emperor Haile Sellasie, Mengistu H/Mariam and at present Meles, Ethiopian regimes have never ceased from committing genocide on Sidama people. Therefore, the combined forces of Amahra and Tigres have been committing genocide on Sidama simply for their refusal and resistance against Abyssinians robbery. To mention few the; massacre of Bottoola in Haweela, Ottlichho in Daara in 1890, the destruction of Adaare (also known as 'Awassa') in 1960s', the massacre of Borricha in 1978, Bansa and Harbagoona in 1980s. That is why Keller said "The Ethiopian state as we know it was constructed as a result of a unique case of African Imperialism" Keler (1991:45)

## **III, Sidama's Non- Violent Struggle**

Unsympathetic successive Ethiopian regimes have robbed Sidama's freedom and self governance. Thus, the Sidamas started their struggle adhering their own religion; by rejecting Amhara's way of life based on non-violent and as well as non-assimilationist strategy shaped by the Sidama religion led by the founders of various clans by stopping any kind of contact and communication with their colonial masters.

Alito Hewano was one of great souls who have conducted non-violent struggle against Abyssinian colonialists.

#### **IV. Sidama's First Armed Struggle;**

Sidama peaceful society is being forced to make a war against its aggressors. The first violent struggle against Amhara colonizers have been started by individuals such as Lanqamo Naare, and Taklu Yota, in 1960s. The latter had formed group of followers without naming their Political Organization. He was the first Sidama man to form popular violent struggle against Amhara colonial settlers. More consolidated struggle shaped by Amare Gunsa, Yetera Boolle, Rooda Utaala, Gawiiwa Sirriqa in 1970s. They named their struggle 'Sidama Liberation Movement' (SLM) which latter has been spilt into two by power conflict. The later faction called themselves SLF, (Sidama Liberation Front). While the later has got disintegrated; the former became weaker and weaker in the face of continues suffering and agony of Sidama nation.

SLM was the co-author of the Charter of transitional government that replaced Mengistu's regime in 1991. TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) has played a political game to deceive international community. Thus on one hand it invited main opposition groups who had been fighting against the Mengistu's regime to participate in the process of establishing transitional government. On other hand, it prevented the activities of those political organizations among the people whom they claim to represent. In addition to this TPLF created puppet political organizations commonly known as 'PDO's in every nations and nationalities of the empire, to inculcate the political programmes and policies rather than representing the interest and the concern of the nations they are supposed to represent.

Therefore, genuine political organizations that were fighting against the successive Ethiopian regimes were forced to leave transitional Ethiopian Government, after TPLF's threat to kill the leaders of various political organizations. Just like other political organizations SLM left Transitional Government of Ethiopia. Thus, the Sidamas were forced to be left without representatives. SLM was replaced by 'Sidama Peoples Democratic Organization' (SPDO) which was the rubber stamp of TPLF. In TPLF's regime, the Sidamas were suffered from continues deterioration of political, economic and socio-cultural life which resulted in famine, diseases which

was hidden genocide. Finally this hidden genocide converted in to open genocide like that of Looqe massacre.

## V. The Looqe massacre of May 24, 2002; cause and consequences

TPLF announced on Ethiopian television on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2002 through its puppet vice president of the southern region Mr Melese Mriwo saying that the government will not be responsible for any incident that would happen during a demonstration. The government commanded three battalions of soldiers to hide behind the tops of hills 'Tabor' before the commencement of the Sidama peaceful demonstration.

On May 24, 2002 at about mid day local time, Ethiopian soldiers conducted the operation of brutal killings against peaceful Sidama demonstrators who have been carrying green leaves of the trees and Ethiopian flag symbolising peace. A cruellest mass massacre took place when peaceful Sidama elders accompanied by about seven thousands people of all age groups, high school and college students, peasants and civil servants marched towards 'Awassa' city from Looqe village which is located about four kilometres South West of Awassa to protest against TPLF's undemocratic measures; particularly the decision of TPLF that denies the administrative and ownership right of their own city and land. All of a sudden, the people heard roaring sounds of heavy guns along all road sides which slaughtered the elders and young people causing bloodshed of which the TPLF wanted as sacrifice for the celebration of its oppressive anniversary.

## VI) Consequences of the Looqe Massacre

### 6.1 Death of Helpless, armless and Voiceless Civilians

'Seife nebelbal' an Addis Ababa based news paper reported on its June 21 publication reported personal details of 39, who were killed. The Ethiopian Human Right Council (EHRC) reported 23 names on the same list. The lists are as follows;

Names of the Victims	Age	Their Job/business	Address
SattoSaqeecha Maticha	35	Business man/ farmer.	Awassa Hogoba Higher 2 07.
Atoote Aleto, Weliso	45	Farmer	Tula

Belay Guta,	13	student	Alamura, Awassa.
Labalo Dukamo	25	“	Finchewa Awassa
Nausha Rabbasa Gacheno	42	Business man/farmer	Alamura Awassa.
Taddese Ki’a	45	policeman	Bansa
Sayed Tungamo Tura	16	Student	Alamura
Yosef Isayas	40	Policeman	Awassa
Marqos Mangasha	16	Farmer	Chafasine.
Daniel Ibsa Qanasa	15	student	Alamura Awassa.
Hameso kayeso	16	“	Awassa
Buna Buleno	22	Businessman	Habela Lida
Irjato Giddessa Shabe	20	Student	Shabadino
Kadie Abdulqadir	25	Student farmer	Habela Lida
Tulamo Tumato	16	Student	Awassa
Bunara Gonama	15	Student	Alawo Arke.
Rekisa Boshola	30	farmer	Abela Lida.
Tesfaye Yeba	16	Student	Bonoya miride
Kefyalewu Doyamo	15	Student	Chafasine
Yosef Didamo Sufa	16	student	Alawo Arke
Buzuneh Lanqamo Dume	-	Businessman/farmer	Awassa
Manisa Kiyessa Barassa	15	student	Nora Dulacha
Silesh Chakamo	15	Student	Nura Dulacha
Yosef seyom	-	-	Alamura Awassa
Misiru Beyene	-	-	Alamura Awassa
Matwos Ergamo	-	farmer	Alamura
Haniso Bekele	-	farmer	Awassa
Shame Dabana	-	farmer	Awassa
Elias Tekame	-	farmer	Awassa
Marufa Mangasha	-	farmer	Bushulo
Surafel Matwos	-	Policman	Alamura

Abreham Bekkele	-	Farmer	Bushulo
Yonas Arjamo	-	Student	Finchewa
Labalo Dukamo	-	farmer	Shabadino
Machale woyessa Riqiba	-	Student	Nuro Dulacha
Mato Mekuria Surafel	-	farmer	Alawo Arke
Bekele Hariso Kawiso	-	farmer	Alawo arke
Belay Paulos Doyamo	-	farmer	Alawo Arke
Abreham Kiyesa	-	student	Alamura Awassa
Ayele Chekamo	16	student	Awassa.
Bandira Bayana	-	-	Aawassa
Mirsu Guto	-	-	Awassa
Lata Jana	45	Farmer/business man	Awassa Jara Galacha.

The total of 45 death named, of which from 1-25 named by Ethiopian Human Right Council (EHRC). From 25 – 42 named by Seife nebelbal. The same news paper noted that five others had been partly devoured by hyenas. Local informants via Sidama concern reported more than hundred fatalities. Ethiopian Human Right Council reported that 12 of the dead were children. They named 24 victims of the gun shot wounds who were admitted to hospital and 36 among the immediate detainees. They also reported that special armed forces continued after the massacre “to persecute local civilians” arresting, intimidating, torturing and treating inhumanely. Two were killed and many were beaten in the mouth following the killing.

## 6.2 An Arrest of Innocent

One hundred fifty were arrested initially. A second wave of detentions in late July 2002 was reported by Amnesty international local sources more than 1,300 Sidamas were imprisoned. ‘Grima Chuluqe’ the then president of the Sidama Zone, Dr Million Tumato, HIV prevention campaigner in Sidama Zone Health Department, Mengistu Gonsamo, acting head of the Sidama Development Corporation, Tekle Dulo, health professional, were among the many hundreds reported to be held in comunicado and at the risk of torture by Amnesty international on 15 August (AFR 25/22/2002). Chuluqe and Gonsamo were reported by local informants via the Sidama Concern, to be on Hunger strike and being held in the toilet for three months. Chuluqe is known to have opposed the

control by central government of Awassa and surrounding Sidama land prior the May 24, 2002 massacre of the Sidamas.

### **6.3 Exile and Internal Displacement**

Thousands of the Sidamas left their home, and fled the country, among them; the former President of the Sidama, Birru Balle, the former head of the Sidama Development Corporation, (SDC), Wolassa Lawisso, Branch manger Mindaye Shalamo, and health professional ‘Tekle Dulo’ who has been in prison’ are some of those who fled the country. More than 5000 internally displaced now a days left their homes and leading measurable life in unknown addresses. In addition, hundreds at present are forcibly made to leave their homes and lands by the government officials under the pretext of investment in and around Awassa city. As a result many are left destitute.

### **6.4 Dismantling Business and Non Governmental Institutions,**

Ethiopian Government dismantled the Sidama Development Corporation (SDC), the only NGO in Sidamas history supported by Irish Aid had been dismantled. Many Sidama staffs who have been working for the Corporation were sacked. The directing manager made to flee the country. The acting director imprisoned and finally made to leave the region. Most of the government the Sidamas civil servants have been sacked from their government jobs. Businessmen systematically have been avoided from their competitiveness and being replaced by the TPLF’s business companies or their loyalists. Elderly community leaders were imprisoned, intimidated and or tortured.

### **6.5 Using ‘Famine’ as Weapon to Weaken the Sidama Resistances**

‘Famine aid’ donated by western, governmental and non-governmental organizations used by the TPLF’s government as means to obtain support from famine victims. Those who were not supporting what the government is doing were excluded from their entitlement to access food aid. More than physical elimination, TPLF government used famine as weapon of genocide.

Massacre and genocide is not new event for the Sidama people. What makes the Looqe Massacre different is that, it happened in the time that Ethiopia is said to

have constitutions that grants the right to any nations, nationalities, and peoples self determination including secession let alone peaceful demonstration. The second point that makes the Looqe massacre quite different from serious of atrocities that happened within twenties century is that its publicity. While previous atrocities kept as top secret for the people living in the region, let alone international community. The international community pressurise the TPLF regime for public enquires for what TPLF regime has done. The irony is that the international communities' representative did nothing when TPLF resisted the pressure as if the regime has done nothing.

## **VII. Further Consequences of Looqe Massacre,**

### **7.1 Politics in Sidama; The establishment of Sidama National Liberation Organization, SNLO.**

The Looqe massacre moved not only Sidama nationals, but also others who are fighting for justice and basic human and democratic rights. Accordingly, some Sidama scholars paid series attention to save Sidamas. This involves, informing international communities, and studying the strengths and weaknesses of Sidama struggles so far. The research uncovered that existing political organizations that claim to represent Sidama national interests fall apart due to internal power struggle on one hand, mystification of the leadership on the other.

Instead of fighting for the freedom of the people, they claimed to represent. They started to fight with each other to the extent of irreconcilable conflict for their sole interest by the name of the Sidamas. This happened in the face of strong demand of the entire Sidama nation to have political organization that saves them from tyranny of TPLF regime. The research recommended establishing cohesive Political organization that represents the interest of Sidama. The findings were circulated among the Sidamas. Finally, by the quest and consensus interested Sidamas, back home and in exiles, the 'Sidama National Liberation Organization' SNLO was established on 25th of August, 2003.

## **7.2 On Ethiopian Politics**

Although, the massacre of Looqe widely had been reported thanks to committed Sidamas' to inform the international community; political and diplomatic pressure of western government on TPLF regime was very weak. This is due to international terrorism that diverted the attention of democratic governments in the west. In addition to this, the leader of TPLF, Prime Minister of Ethiopia manoeuvred and cheated western government by false appearance to America and Great Britain to the extent of making alliance. This alliance covered the appeal of Sidama for justice. TPLF's regime regarded weak pressure as encouragement to commit further genocide on other nations. Accordingly TPLF enhanced its arrogance and violence. An example of such cruelty includes; the Anguak genocide in Gambela region in past four months which claimed the lives of more than 1200 so far; unspeakable harassment and arrest of Oromos and Ogadense. Therefore, TPLF's leadership appears as spoiled child of western donors.

Dear participants, I think you are here to be the voice of voiceless. Let's cry loud enough, to make our voice heard by Super power to bring to justice those cruel criminals of the Ethiopian government leaders whose lives are overwhelmed by hypocrisy and deception.

Honour and eternal peace for the martyrs of the massacre of Looqe!!

M.B. Daye,

May 23, 2004, UK