

Sidamas are Pressed to abandon their Quest for Regional Autonomy.

By Kambata Xoola,

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Sidama people once again are under tremendous suppression associated with intimidation and harassment because of their relentless quest for regional autonomy. All round problems started to unfold in a stylish manner by using its own children who lost their values. The suffering of Sidamas is increasingly becoming intolerable as they are being crushed on daily bases without representation. In the past 14 years of the Sidama history, no one stood for their rights from federal, regional and Zone levels. All so called MPs who are supposed to be a voice for the voiceless Sidamas and help for the weakest don't raise the issues of Sidamas' deprivation. This leaves the Sidama nation in serious deprivation.

A pre-planned agenda to exploit Sidama resources and impoverish its people; by doing so eroding their nationalism and national identity is already becoming a reality. The Sidamas are obliged to lead a life of uncertainty from their capital Awassa to the entire farmer's associations at large because of strategically stretched systems to intimidate and harass them. In terms of economic subjugation, during entire Meles's reign alone the Sidama people didn't receive at least about 1.5 billion Ethiopian birr that is supposed to be their shares from central government. This is simply because they are deliberately incapacitating Sidamas socio-economic, political lives and nation's pride.

The Sidama is still contributing about 60% of quality export coffee every year in addition to other resources central regime relies on the region. The paradox here is that Sidama's remaining without any encouraging development activities for the past decade and a half apart from the only NGO (Sidama Development Corporation and Programme supported by Irish Aid, SDC/SDP), that itself is dismantled three years ago by Meles's regime. The founders of the said organisation have been chased after like Cheetah does to Impala and made to flee the country.

Meanwhile, the Sidama bandits are working round the clock for their own interest and their federal ruler's hidden agendas. Such traitors, however, will be thrown away, as their predecessors once they have fully served Meles's program of terrorising Sidama nation. Meles's regime on the other hand, believed that Sidama didn't receive 50% of its budget every year since they came to power in 1991 without justifying why. This means the region is deliberately made to keep losing more than 100 million birr every budget year.

Acknowledging such deliberate strategic marginalisation, Meles's regime is bribing so called Sidama PDO's to help it to disseminate its well orchestrated propaganda among the Sidama nation about the recognition gestured by his government. They are emphasising about the building of infrastructures such as roads, schools, electrification of the towns and cities and so on and so forth for neglected Sidama region in the past as a reward; if they leave aside their quest for regional autonomy. But as citizens, according to Meles's strategy; the Sidamas can't share any development activities run by central government unless they surrender their quest. Out of a half budget that reaches Sidama region from federal government in the past decades and a half, more

than 50% again goes to the pockets of regional and Zone politicians. Due to such socio-economic injustice and countless imposed burdens, the Sidama people are made to remain docile, voiceless and helpless.

To implement 'the agenda of dismantling of the Sidamas', the regime has recruited Sidama bandits who are at the moment working day and night to facilitate this aim contrary to the needs and quests of wider Sidama people. Millions of birr have been allocated for Bandits from federal safe box to enable them to run this mission according to confidential source from inside the government. Meles Zenawi also is planning to hold secret meeting at the capital with all so called Sidama MP's from federal, regional and Zone level puppet representatives to order them to pass over hard message to Sidamas to intimidate them on their regional quest. It's yet not known when the meeting is going to take place although the preparation has undergone well. Some sources are saying that they have already arrived to the capital to listen to the Meles's sermon without breathing a word.

The other programme the regime is working on is that the plan of establishing a new city by uniting one town 'Yirgalem' with another town called 'Abosto' about 40kms from Awassa city. By merging two towns into one without the consent of owner Sidamas it's organising places for northern settlers so that they can play a role of diluting Sidama's nationalism and national identity that has been malignant headache for the rulers since 1890s conquest. They have already incapacitated the economic power of the Sidama people and therefore, if they establish new city as per their hidden plan the people don't have purchasing power. Thus, the rulers already have pre-planned by the name of favouring Sidamas to settle their people from the north. If they continue to oust Sidamas from their land where they have lived for thousands of years under this pretext; the intent tantamount an act of socio-cultural and politico-economic genocide that is already underway.

Another crucial plan of TPLF/EPRDF's regime is that to replace all Sidama towns by alien people in the future to take all advantages of its fruits including long term election vote in Sidama region. All towns and cities of Sidama region are already under the control of alien since the conquest by denigrating native Sidamas to avoid them from sharing the fruit of their land. Thirdly, I think it is to implement the agenda of uprooting the Sidama people from all cash crop producing and potentially business flourishing areas so that the Sidama can be kept out of all business games. The people who are planned to be uprooted from and around Yirgalem and Abosto towns rely on coffee, other cash crops such as sugar-cane, Khat, banana and false banana that are a staple food for the Sidama. Uprooting the Sidama people from that area without their consent will be some of usual inhuman and criminal acts of successive regimes.

Such strategic marginalisation of the Sidama people is taking place in such a way that it doesn't draw the attention of the West that is turned a blind eye. As the Sidamas in Diaspora, including myself, on various occasions have tried to raise the awareness of international community in this matter, the Sidama people are deprived of their basic rights in Ethiopian level let alone thinking about western democracy. The Sidama people, nevertheless continued their quest for regional autonomy by defying such unjust acts of Meles's regime.

The people are asking for the rights of regional autonomy since Meles's regime is enthroned on power in early 1990s. They tirelessly demanded on various occasions to decide on their issues as per the Ethiopian constitution that continued to be denied. They peacefully showed their resistance over any decision that affects their future and interest by peaceful demonstration while the regime

responding them with live ammunition. They are paying precious sacrifices of lives under this cruel authoritarian regime that claims to be democratic while slaughtering peaceful and armless citizens that sought protection and democracy from its government.

Meles's regime that advertises to be a champion of democracy and human rights is making the lives of Ethiopians miserable by stifling democratic movements and arresting opponents and journalists. It criminalises innocents for their views; whereas exonerating criminal assassins and heinous politicians from federal to regional levels in the lights of inhuman acts towards their own peoples supposedly they represented. The law of Ethiopia is pretty versatile and changes every time in such a way that helps the regime to justify the imprisonment of the innocents if they are national and international figures such as CUD leaders. One can imagine how terrible would it be to criminalise innocent people for their views on the other hand by freeing murderers.

In this scenario we can see the hidden face of democracy galvanised Meles's regime and its ability of playing poker at the expense of helpless and voiceless citizens pretending to be democrat to its donors. The Sidama people continued to follow peaceful root regarding their regional autonomy despite torture, intimidation killings and arrestment since 1990s. The tension at the moment is mounting on Sidama people in all angles. As the People are adamant with their quest, the regime also keeps changing the tactics on how to strategically intimidate and stifle such movements. That is why the dictator is gathering Sidama politicians in his office by tomorrow.

Awassa city became a hot cake for its politico-economic importance for the rulers. Thus, it is becoming grave concern for the regime should the Sidama people allowed to decide on their issues. Therefore, they are devising all possible measures to stifle such quests through their bandits. Under whatever the cost, the Sidama people are determined to follow peaceful resistance until they get positive response that is enshrined in the Constitution. In this process, the Sidama people are gravely seeking international democracy loving individuals, States and human rights activists' support in this peaceful resistance that aimed at bringing about measurable Socio-Economic, human rights respect and Politico-Cultural recognition of the nation. The need for the western donors to reassess their alliance with the killer regime is today, before every thing goes wrong. Because the money that has been granted to reach helpless people; most of the times goes to slaughter and torture the very people who are sought to be supported.

Kambata Xoola, January 18, 2006

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