

Facts why Ethiopia does not fit “The Failed State” Status
Response to Major Dawit Woldegiorgis:
(Part 2)

By Tibebe Samuel Ferenji

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"There is always a struggle between hope and fear, between the world as it is and how we'd like it to be... **The good news is that fear is typically the province of the old. And hope is the province of the young.**" (Emphasis added). Barack Obama

In Part 1 of my response to Major Dawit's article titled "Ethiopia: A Country on the Brinks", I pointed out that his assertions are not only baseless but also factually wrong. I am not a graduate of the prestigious Columbia Law School; however, my law school, like all other law schools teach law students what is known as "Discovery". Discovery is a process where facts are gathered to argue a case before a judge or a jury. Major Dawit, a graduate of Columbia University School of Law, failed to complete "his Discovery" and argued his case in public with half-baked truth using as a source a Blogger who spew opinions without any facts, and a reference from an organization that has no track record. Major Dawit failed to do his due diligence and suggest a pragmatic solution to a serious challenge that our nation is facing. The close reading of his article indicates, Major Dawit turned the objective metric that is designed to determine the status of "failed States" on its head and used it for propaganda to please some who are vehemently opposed to our current political discourse.

I am not using the word "propaganda" here lightly; the fact that Dawit claims Jawar and Abiy are colleagues, the fact that he only focused on the lawlessness of some "Qerros" and the OLF without mentioning the lawlessness of some "Fanos", Ijjetos, armed groups in Amhara and Afar regions is an indication that the objective of his article was purely for propaganda consumption. Nothing speaks louder than his unrealistic proposed solutions about Dawit's motive. Although I am hard pressed to suggest Major Dawit is part of a political group that is willing to risk everything to distract us from our journey hoping to push our politics to the extremists' agenda; I have no doubt that he has become a megaphone to the loudest voice in the extremists quarter of the political spectrum.

We shall see point by point what motivated Major Dawit to determine that Ethiopia is a "failed State". At the risk of boring the readers, I will present facts to point out Major Dawit omitted material facts and presented false assertions with the intention of ushering a political change that will pave a way to make Oromo political organizations powerless in Ethiopia. Dawit has made it clear to his readers his intention is to remove an Oromo Prime Minister under the guise of "saving Ethiopia". He threw the idea of not selecting an Amhara as a PM once Abiy is removed as a caveat to mask his anti-Oromo agenda. Such an idea is strongly supported by extremist elements who are spreading their hateful propaganda beneath the "Ethiopian Unity" mantra.

In part 1, I have addressed some of the criteria used by Major Dawit to indicate "Ethiopia is a failed State". I will address some of them on this second part. One of the criteria mentioned in the article is "Lack of free participation in politics". Because I found this point to be

nonsensical and felt responding to this issue in detail would be a waste of time, I chose not to respond to it in part 1. However, I have become aware the examples cited are similar to some of the extremist elements point of views. Ironically, most of the false claims in the article are also used as a rallying cry by those espousing Oromo Phobia and those who have a vested interest to disrupt the path towards establishing a democratic Ethiopia. Therefore, it is worse exposing it for what it really is. These points also have been “hot button” issues for the “digital army” that is “duty bound” to spread “Oromo-phobia” in the cyber world. For this reason, I will address each of them point by point.

Major Dawit, cited “unknown” Addis Ababa based Human Right Organization report to claim “lack of free political participation” in Ethiopia. According to him, “the irregular appointment of a mayor in Addis Ababa and its fallout; the Burayu Massacre and its fallouts; the imprisonment of individuals seeking to establish a civic advocacy group in Addis Ababa; the Addis Ababa resident identity card scandal; the Legetafo displacement of people by the government; the Addis Ababa question; and demographic engineering” constitutes lack of free political participation. I believe he has made a grave error and failed to properly assess the condition using the objective metric.

1. The irregular appointment of a mayor in Addis Ababa and its fallout:

It would have been helpful if the term “the irregular appointment” of a mayor in Addis Ababa was well defined in the Ethiopian context and what comparison was used to indicate the current [deputy] mayor appointment as irregular. The article omitted fundamental facts that led the author to reach a wrong conclusion. The author’s judgment was clouded by his partisan politics and he failed to tell us Addis Ababa residents never had any opportunities to be served by a mayor elected by them. This is not the first time that unelected official became a deputy mayor or a mayor of Addis Ababa. There is no record that indicates where Addis Ababa had a mayor that was legitimately elected by its residents. Tefera Wallwa, Ali Abdo, Arkebe Ekubay, Kuma Demekssa, Berhane Deressa, and Diriba Kuma became mayors of Addis Ababa in an “irregular” appointment. Let alone the mayor of Addis Ababa, all the people in power in today’s Ethiopia came to power in “irregular appointment”. The naked truth is the party in power rules the country without the consent of the people; so why is the appointment of Takele Uma such a headache to his detractors at this juncture? Or is there an underlining agenda designed to delegitimize his appointment? Takele Uma became a rallying cry for the extremist elements because of his ethnicity at the time of ethnic Oromos are controlling power in the federal government. Nothing more, nothing less.

Reasonable people can debate whether the rise of “Oromos” to power is proper or not. As far as I am concerned, because what we have is ethnic politics and power is held by ODP at this time, the current political system gives way for the ODP to appoint its officials to various positions in the executive branch. It is customary in any country for the party in power to appoint its members in powerful positions. If this is how politics is practiced in every country, why should it be different in Ethiopia? If we want to change this political system, we must work towards “citizen-based politics”. If we don’t change our current backward political system, ethnic-based political organizations will dominate power. It will be up to the people to decide to continue with this dangerous and backward political system or the system of “citizen-based” politics where our leaders are judged by the quality of their leadership instead of by the ethnic-based party they join.

If we closely examined the appointment of Takele, his appointment is not irregular by any stretch of the imagination. We need to go back to our recent history and ask how Arkebe became the mayor of Addis Ababa from his position as a Deputy President of Tigray. How was this a “regular appointment”? Kuma was a Defense Minister before he was “appointed” as a mayor of Addis Ababa. How was this “a regular appointment”? In fact, the close examination of Takele Uma’s appointment as a deputy mayor of Addis Ababa clearly shows his appointment is more regular than the rest because the Ethiopian parliament enacted a law that allowed Takele to “legally” become deputy mayor of Addis Ababa. Therefore, the argument made by Major Dawit is not only baseless but also factually wrong. I am not sure what the “fallout” is in the appointment of Takele Uma. If the opposition of few individuals to the appointment of Takele is considered a “fallout”, then, a term “fallout” needs to be redefined. As far as I am concerned, Engineer Takele has been one of the most productive deputy mayors in the city of Addis Ababa. Sadly, those who are opposing him are not judging him by his action but by his ethnicity. The irony is, these are the same people who preach about the unity of Ethiopia and yet judge the deputy mayor by his ethnicity not by the work he has done so far. The notion that Takele is appointed irregularly is another smoke screen deliberately used to confuse the general public.

2. The Burayu Massacre and its fallouts:

I am not sure how this is related to “Lack of free participation in politics”. In fact, the Burayu Massacre occurred as a result of “free participation in politics”. Those who are responsible for the Burayu Massacre are those who felt empowered by the “newly found political freedom”. These murderers committed such heinous crime as they when they were returning from the OLF rally in Addis Ababa. These criminal elements misused their political freedom and engaged in brutal acts. These barbarians did not commit such barbaric act because of their lack of free participation in politics; and their victims were not targeted because of their political views or their lack of free participation in politics. Therefore, to claim that the Burayu Massacre is an indication of a lack of free political participation is absurd and Major Dawit is throwing sand into our eyes to blind us from the facts on the ground.

Again, I am not sure what the Burayu Massacre fallout is. One thing is for certain, the killing of Addis Ababa youngsters during the Addis Ababa protest in opposition to the Burayu massacre, and the arrest of Addis Ababa Youth a day after the protest took place was a senseless and illegal act. Such an act should not be supported by anyone and the government should have taken action against officials who are responsible for this gross human rights violations. Such violations of human rights in a specific part of the country, however, does not constitute a lack of free participation in politics in the entire country. Ethiopia will not be the first and the last to engage in such violations. Even in America, individuals and groups rights are violated every day. The remedy is taking action against government officials and the government itself when it is necessary. I think people like Major Dawit should advise and train, particularly, young Ethiopians to use and test the institutions we have to protect their rights. With all due respect to Major Dawit’s assertion, none of the examples he mentioned in his article constitutes a lack of free participation in politics in today’s Ethiopia.

3. The imprisonment of individuals seeking to establish a civic advocacy group in Addis Ababa:

This is one of the points which I find laughable and amusing. Of course, Major Dawit did not mention any names of prisoners or the organization that he alluded to. Is there anyone, in today’s Ethiopia, imprisoned for seeking to establish a civic advocacy group in Addis Ababa? This is a

fabricated story by the so-called newly established Addis Ababa Human rights group that Major Dawit referred to make his point. For Major Dawit to sink to this level is simply tragic. It is my wish for Major Dawit to share his wealth of experience and knowledge to make Ethiopia a better country. I wish him to act like an “elder Statesman” who works to bring people together instead of being used by those who have ill-conceived agenda and engaged in hateful baseless propaganda. At the time of his article was published, Ethiopia climbed to 110 from 150 in the World Press Freedom Index. This is a significant achievement by any measure and quite the opposite of the picture that Major Dawit painted.

Freedom House, in its 2019 country report stated: “In 2018, the space for NGOs to operate opened significantly. NGOs can now more freely organize public events, renew registration, and make public statements that are critical of the government without facing harassment or intimidation by authorities.” This is the fact on the ground. However, Major Dawit and the human right organization he mentioned are trying to tell us a different story. Because there is nothing that supports his assertion, Major Dawit used “A Human Right Organization” report that has no track record and has no credibility. I don’t think this was out of the purview of Major Dawit, he simply wanted to use a fabricated “problem” that does not exist to fit his narratives.

4. The Addis Ababa resident identity card scandal:

Let us examine what the issue is with the Addis Ababa resident identity card scandal. I am not sure if this incident can be characterized as a “scandal”. It is unfortunate that some Addis Ababa based media outlets have become part of “the propaganda machine” instead of objective news providers. As a matter of fact, there is no “Addis Ababa resident identity card scandal” other than the digital army exaggeration and campaign against Takele Uma. The so-called identity scandal reportedly took place only on one District in Bole Sub City. Although a “whistleblower” has indicated that some none residents are illegally getting identity cards without proper process, so far, no one has presented any factual evidence. Our journalists failed to dig deep and get to the bottom of this issue. To its credit, Addis Ababa based Sheger Radio reached out by phone to Bole Sub City District 1 head and asked questions if the District is issuing residents ID inappropriately. The head of the district 1 angrily responded by saying ‘why don’t you come to our office and look at what we are doing’ and hung up the phone. Clearly, the administrator did not handle the question properly but invited the journalist to come to his office and see for himself what is happening.

The right thing to do for the journalist was to go to the District 1 office and investigate what was happening; instead, the journalist called the head of the vital statistics office in Addis Ababa and informed the official about the report he received regarding the alleged inappropriate issuing of ID cards. The official made it clear that the Addis Ababa City Administration has strict guidelines regarding issuing IDs to none residents and anyone violating the guidelines would be persecuted to the full extent of the law. No one went further and investigated this alleged scandal. No one asked the Attorney General if he is aware of this alleged scandal and if he is investigating this matter. However, the Digital Army was ready to spread the word and multiply the numbers of IDs issued by hundreds of thousands to sow mistrust among the city residents and its administrators. This was part of the campaign against the “Oromo officials” and relentless effort to undermine the current administration. Next thing we know, social media began discussing conspiracy and some began claiming that half a million ID cards were

distributed for Oromos who are not bona fide residents of Addis Ababa. This well-orchestrated “the invading Oromos are coming” Oromo phobia campaign has worked so far and will continue to work as long as there are people who believe whatever they hear on its face value. It is for this reason the term “demographic engineering” has become part of the political vocabulary of extremist elements.

The evidence clearly shows that there are 167 Districts in Addis Ababa, so far the alleged inappropriate issuance of identification took place in one District. We don’t know how true this is. Even if it is true, we don’t know who is responsible and its magnitude. Our media failed to do its job in separating facts from fiction. No one seems to bother to ask the Attorney General to investigate this “scandal”, no one went to court to stop it if it is true, and no one came forward other than one individual to tell a similar story. In the absence of any evidence, the true scandal is for Major Dawit to use this unsubstantiated allegation as fact and make it part of his argument to convince us that Ethiopia is a failed State. This is a shameful real scandal.

5. The Legetafo displacement of people by the government; the Addis Ababa question; and demographic engineering”:

For the sake of time and at the risk of wasting the readers’ time, I will respond to these three issues as one part. Since Abiy’s rise to power, what we have witnessed is the shattering of the façade of those who masked themselves under “the United Ethiopia flag”. These ethnocentric elements waited in the wing masking their hatred and “fear” of the Oromos. These individuals wholeheartedly believe that they have the right to decide who is fit to be an Ethiopian and who is not. The Ethiopia they envisioned is not the Ethiopia that is led by any other ethnic group that they deem not to be a patriot. Their mentality is not any different than the “White Nationalists” who believe “America only belongs to them”. Like the White Nationalists who displayed their bigotry and contempt to the first African American President, our “White Nationalists” can’t bear the thought of an Ethiopia led by ethnic Oromo. These individuals weaponize every tragedy in the country for their own political end. These individuals don’t care if the country is burned to the ground. They feel that they will come out as winners from the ashes and believe they will be at the helm of the “throne”. I can tell you with certainty they will not succeed.

Although many people have expressed their anger and frustrations for the displacement of the Legetafo residents, no one wants to understand the problem and no one tried to provide a solution to those who are displaced. Moreover, this is not the first time that such action was taken by a city administration or other regional governments. The Legetafo City Administration should have handled its “law enforcement” action better and with great care. This egregious error was made by the city administration and the Oromia Regional State. This has nothing to do with the federal government. The constitution limits Ethiopia’s federal government power and prohibits it from interfering in the regional matters. For this reason, Abiy could not get involved in the city administration’s action. As tragic as the Legetafo incident is, why is it a political football? Why is it considered as part of “the demographic engineering” narrative when in fact some of the displaced residents are ethnic Oromos. Most of all why is this part of Major Dawit’s “failed State” assertion? This is all connected and its purpose is to undermine Abiy’s and Takele Uma’s Administrations and induce the public with the Oromo Phobia campaign. I want to be clear here; I am not accusing Major Dawit as being part of this group; but certainly, he is reflecting their views and promoting their agenda. Some of the people who have been screaming “genocide” in Legetafo incident have done nothing to alleviate the challenges that these residents

continued to face. They simply want the problem to continue so they can “profit” from its politics.

Major Dawit uses another irrelevant and absurd point to tell us that Ethiopia is a “failed State”. He indicated that “the Addis Ababa Question” is part of the lack of free participation in politics. I disagree. The Addis Ababa Question should not have been an issue at all. We all should be ashamed for making “Addis Ababa’s question” a focal point while we are facing enormous challenges in our nation. What is the Addis Ababa issue? For any reasonable person, the so-called “the Addis Ababa question” should not be an issue at all. The fate of Addis Ababa is already determined by law. The constitution makes it clear that Addis Ababa is the Capital city of Ethiopia and the residents are endowed with the right of self-governance. Unfortunately, the residents of Addis Ababa has been denied their rights for self-governance; however, one must not forget that the people of Ethiopia, in general, have been denied their rights to be governed by their consent. The purpose of the transition is to take the entire country to that end. So why is Addis Ababa any different from the rest of the country? The Abiy led government is working relentlessly to establish democratic institutions that will pave the way for a democratic system of government. I know Article 49 of the constitution is an issue for those who use “the Addis Ababa Question” as a smokescreen for their hateful propaganda. The issue of Article 49 is not any different from Article 39 and the constitution that has made the central government weak and regional governments strong. I am all for opening up the discussion to amend many of the articles in the constitution. However, this is not the time. We must have an elected government in order to deal with the constitution. In my humble opinion, we need an independent Commission that is capable of examining the current constitution and bring it to the public for civilized discussion. Only then, we can debate Article 49 which granted Oromia Special Interest in Addis Ababa.

Among many, one of the most disappointing points raised by Major Dawit is the so-called “Demographic engineering”. This fabricated narrative is already debunked by Ato Lemma Megerssa. Many of the Digital Army members are still telling us that half million Oromos have settled in Addis Ababa under the leadership of Lemma Megerssa. This is absolutely false. Without listening to Ato Lemma Mgeressa’s explanations, any reasonable person can understand the statement made by Ato Lemma Megerssa in the video released as part of this evil campaign. Yes, Ato Lemma Megerssa has clearly stated that he has settled about half a million Oromos in various cities in the State of Oromia not in Addis Ababa. In fact, he clearly stated in that video clip his administration has settled 6,000 Oromos to Addis Ababa. Can anyone tell me how the “settlement” of 6,000 Oromos change Addis Ababa’s demographic? What is sad in this unfortunate saga is the belief that “all Oromos think alike”. This is what the ethnocentrists who wrap themselves in the Ethiopia flag and cry about unity want us to believe. Can there be a united Ethiopia without Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, etc.? Should we be happy that Our Oromo brothers and sisters, who were displaced from their homes in Somalia, now have a place to stay? Or should we have watched their agonies from afar? When Lemma Megerssa was the President of Oromia, his primary responsibility was to solve Oromia’s problem. He used his authority to settle many of the displaced Oromos to cities and towns in Oromia region not in Addis Ababa as falsely narrated by hate mongers and those who are immersed with Oromo Phobia campaign.

None of the points raised under the “Lack of free participation in politics” criteria by Major Dawit satisfies its meaning. None of his points on this issue carry any credible facts. There may be “alternative facts” in the cyber-sphere that are designed to paint a dark picture of

Ethiopia. The fact on the ground clearly shows Abiy's leadership is providing solutions without resorting to unnecessary force. I strongly believe his approach to our centuries-old problems will change Ethiopia for the generations to come and his method will be used to solve other problems that the world is grappling with. I am reminded of the resistance that Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi faced when they promoted the nonviolence doctrine. It is hard to make people change their old habits. We got used to strong men using force "to solve our problems", we seem to forget that it is because force did not work we are where we are. We must try a new approach, we can't keep doing what we have been doing. As Einstein said, "Insanity Is Doing the Same Thing Over and Over Again and Expecting Different Results". The advice we are getting from Major Dawit is to return to insanity.

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