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July 3, 2017

Shengo's Press Statement on TPLF's Divisive Proclamation Why the TPLF Ploy Won't Work This Time

The Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle (SHENGO) rejects the latest ploy by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its cronies to grant “preferential treatment and special privileges” to the Oromo people. This latest policy is intended to strengthen ethnic, social and political division and prolong TPLF hegemony.

For 27 years, the TPLF has managed to pit one ethnic group against another, all for its own narrow benefits. It has managed to persuade the global community that, without its political and economic hegemony, Ethiopia will balkanize and genocide would ensue. This ploy to crush freedom, justice, the rule of law and inclusive governance has enabled this group to survive, extract rent and amass wealth beyond imagination. The glitz that is Addis Ababa mirrors this wanton robbery by a small clique at the expense of the vast majority of Ethiopians.

Central to this ploy of divide and rule is the deliberate and systematic animosity, lack of mutual confidence and suspicion the TPLF and its ethnic elite allies continue to create between the two largest ethnic groups, the Amhara and Oromo. Since early 2015, millions of Oromo and Amhara nationals showed fierce and bold determination to free themselves from the ill-conceived ethnic “tumor,” to use Professor Paulos Milkias's term, conceived, developed and propagated by the TPLF. These political machinations and the constant assessment (ግምገማ) carried out by the ruling party squandering enormous amounts of public resources have done little to nothing in alleviating the root causes of abject poverty, hunger, disease, disempowerment, displacement, institutional corruption, human capital flight, massive illicit outflow of funds and the worst form of repressive governance. The Amhara, especially youth in Gondar and Oromia reciprocated a spirit of brotherhood, sisterhood and commonality and challenged the TPLF-grip to its core.

Shengo contends that 27 years later, the TPLF is still a “front.” This “front” is still wedded to an anti-Ethiopia strategy of diminishing national unity with diversity. This “front” is used to governing and extracting wealth and riches without any form of competition. In response to the 2015-2016 uprising, the TPLF saw no other option but to come up with a new instrument of divide and rule by reverting to constitutional provisions that have made the entire federal government inept and dysfunctional. In the northern part of the country, it amassed a huge army supported by tanks, helicopter gunships and other heavy weapons with the sole purpose of “disarming” and crushing the indigenous population and forcing it into submission.

The core problem is not the evolution and identity of Addis Ababa where close to 5 million Ethiopians from all ethnic and religious groups live side by side. To our knowledge, the Oromo people who sacrificed their lives in defense of Ethiopia never asked for special preferential treatment. Addis Ababa is their city too. Addis Ababa belongs to all Ethiopians. The 5 million people who live in this city have enormous stake in its future. Sadly, no one asked them to have a say in the policy and decision-making that affect their lives.

We conclude from this that the decision is political.

Shengo believes that, in the same manner as all other Ethiopian citizens, the Oromo people demand and deserve justice, fair treatment and unfettered equality of opportunity under the law and genuine democracy. It goes without saying that respect of Oromo ethnic identity, history, traditions, cultures, socioeconomic and political rights and the use of their language is in the interest of all Ethiopians. These fundamental human and civil rights of the Oromo people should never be subject to negotiation. The TPLF and its narrow band of beneficiaries do not have the moral authority to grant or to deny these rights.

The sinister and cunning proclamation of “preferential treatment and special zones” for the Oromo population that is being propagated and imposed by the TPLF is simply a ploy to placate and to appease the population, defuse the popular outrage and resistance against the regime. In offering “preferential treatment and special zones” to the Oromo people, the TPLF schemes to create antagonism against the very people it purports to support. This is why this latest move is sinister (ተንኮል) that all Ethiopians must reject and condemn.

The deconstruction of Addis Ababa

In Shengo’s view, the deconstruction of Addis Ababa is a recipe for disaster for all ethnic groups and for Ethiopia. All capital cities in the world are a mosaic of people. Common attributes of such cities include “the right to private property” enshrined in Article 40 (1) of the 1994 Constitution. “Every Ethiopian citizen has the right to the ownership of private property. Unless prescribed otherwise by law on account of public interest, this right shall include the right to acquire, to use and, in a manner compatible with the rights of other citizens, to dispose of such property by sale or bequest or to transfer it otherwise.

Shengo wishes to draw the reader’s attention to the fundamental principle that urbanization is a powerful and unstoppable trend. It breaks barriers and creates greater commonality and solidarity among citizens. Addis Ababa is such a mosaic and diverse. Its future prosperity depends on mobility and innovation. Article 49 (1) recognizes that “Addis Ababa shall be the capital city of the Federal State.” As such, it belongs to all Ethiopians. Article 49 (2) recognizes the city’s autonomy. “The residents of Addis Ababa shall have a full measure of self-government. Particulars shall be determined by law.” This provision is however circumscribed by Article 49 (3). “The Administration of Addis Ababa shall be responsible to the Federal Government.” It is the TPLF-dominated federal government that dictates policy and decision-making including the allocation of lands.

In theory, the TPLF reverts to Article 49 (5) and argues that its proclamation is consistent with the Constitution that specifies the special interests of the Oromia region with regard to Addis Ababa and its environs. “The special interest of the State of Oromia in Addis Ababa, regarding the provision of social services or the utilization of natural resources and other similar matters, as well as joint administrative matters arising from the location of Addis Ababa within the State of Oromia, shall be respected....Particulars shall be determined by law.”

From the start, this constitutional provision is flawed and has been abused and misused by the TPLF to grab lands anywhere in the country. History tells us that Addis Ababa is located in the old province of Shoa. The ethnicization of the city was strengthened deliberately after the TPLF dominated EPRDF took power in 1991. The policy and structural problems that emerged are therefore a consequence ethnic-federalism that alienates citizens and bestows special rights and privileges on ethnic elites. It therefore behooves all Ethiopians to ask the fundamental question of whether or not any special consideration and privilege granted by the ruling party aggravates ethnic hatred and division, establishes precedents that the regime cannot control, diminishes cohesion and synergy that are vital for a modern metropolis; and undermines socioeconomic, political and environmental sustainability for all? Ethiopians should challenge the TPLF and its ethnic allies and hold them accountable for the dire consequences.

In Shengo’s view, the unintended consequences of this sinister proclamation by the TPLF and its ethnic elite cronies are immense and consequential. The TPLF has utilized different tools for different occasions. Ethiopians would recall what the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said in ensuring his party’s longevity and perpetuity. “It is possible to reduce your population as well as your land.” TPLF commandeered security forces murdered more than 1,000 innocent Oromo and Amhara nationals and imprisoned tens of thousands. The TPLF grabbed lands from Gondar and Wollo and incorporated them into Tigray. The TPLF transferred huge tracts of land to the Sudan. The TPLF made Ethiopia land locked. The TPLF is waging war against its own people in Gondar, Wollo, Gojjam and other localities. No one knows the number of civilians killed or being killed each day.

All told, the TPLF is determined to prolong its rule by eliminating others and by placating and appeasing Oromo citizens without addressing the root causes of defiance and protest, instability and massive human displacement. Repressive measures undermine mutual tolerance, peaceful coexistence, diversity and the evolution of a multiethnic and multi-religious democratic society that Ethiopia and Ethiopians deserve.

Shengo is enormously gratified that members of civil society, political organizations and prominent persons within the Oromo community have rejected the TPLF proclamation as “divisive,” evil and sinister. We share the views expressed that the proclamation fails to address the legitimate demands and grievances of the Oromo and other Ethiopians who continue to suffer under a brutal dictatorship. The proclamation ignores and fails to address the root and systemic causes that led to the popular revolt. Our response should be greater solidarity and unity; not submission.

A regime in panic

Shengo believes that the timing of the proclamation is self-serving and is intended to detract the Ethiopian people from the hard work of mobilizing themselves against one of the most repressive and cruel regimes on the planet today. Ethiopia is now ruled by the discredited TPLF security, special units and defense establishment. The emergency proclamation has failed to enforce submission. On the contrary, Ethiopians express their anger, frustration, rejection and revulsion openly and without fear. The new proclamation is therefore a camouflage to divide the Oromo people from other Ethiopians. We

Shengo therefore calls on Oromo and other Ethiopian opposition groups, civil society as well as prominent individuals that have been consistent in their condemnation of extrajudicial killings to unify their resources and advance the change and democratization process in our country. We are convinced that, together, we can save Ethiopia from balkanization and civil conflict.

Shengo notes with dismay that, having brought the country under a state of emergency, the regime is “relaunching” state terrorism in two fronts: one against the Amhara, most notably the people of Gondar and the other against the Oromo people. It does the later through a cunning scheme modernization and empowerment. The proclamation provides policy guidance for the expansion of “transportation and health services, rapid economic development, and proper compensation” for those whose lands have been grabbed or annexed. Despite this appeasement both ethnic groups and the rest of Ethiopia share a common cause, a brutal and inhumane regime that will continue to kill and jail. The way out is not division but greater solidarity.

Shengo notes that, time and time again, the TPLF-led regime responds with cunning and manipulative tools whenever popular will threatens its existence. Since the Oromo uprising in 2015 followed by a similar resistance by the Amhara population, the vast majority of Ethiopians have demanded and continue to demand fundamental and not cosmetic change. We are gratified this outcry for change is widely shared by the world community, by individuals within the EPRDF and by several think tanks such as the Carnegie Endowment for Peace and the Fund for Peace.

Shengo concludes from this that the TPLF tactic of divide and rule has outlived its utility function.

Last but not least, Shengo genuinely believes that fundamental democratic change is inevitable in Ethiopia.

We therefore call on all Ethiopian civic, religious, political and professional groups as well as prominent individuals within and outside the country to set aside minor differences and collaborate to dislodge the repressive and divisive regime.

Long Live Ethiopia!