

Not in My Name, Mr. Tewolde Gebreslassie

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In this new age of international relations where policies and actions are heavily scrutinized by the public and different actors, the practice of good diplomacy is far important than anything else. At the same time, playing amateur diplomacy can result in the alienation of your friends: countries, agencies, and influential personalities in the world.

Last week, EEPA an independent institution in Europe, organized a conference in Brussels to align the policies of US and EU towards Eritrea and the Horn African region at large. The agency drew a list of participants to the conference. The list included a diverse background of Scholars, horn experts, Eritreans ...etc. The list did not include the EDA. In reaction, Mr. Tewolde Gebreslassie, the Chief Executive Officer of the EDA, responded to the EEPA decision in a form of an open letter. I read the open letter. And as a member of EDA, my reaction was a total dismay, shock, and anger. I felt betrayed by Mr. Tewolde because the open letter flies in the face of the very mission of EDA. Here are the basis of my disappointment and anger.

Mr. Tewolde's letter was devoid of wit, civility, diplomatic acumen, and full of outbursts that can potentially undermine and ignore the unprecedented engagement being taken by EEPA in order to assist Eritrean people. The letter of Mr. Tewolde also impairs both the efforts of EDA to rally Eritrean people and the efforts to act as a face of the opposition in the international stage.

Mr. Tewolde's letter could be the worst letter ever written in the annals of diplomatic history: badly structured, incoherent, not concise and clear, cold ...etc. It was more than embarrassing. Mr. Tewolde did not deliver his message; Mr. Tewolde just blew off steam. I hope nobody takes him seriously.

Now, allow me to illustrate briefly some of the embarrassing statements contained in Mr. Tewolde's open letter.

“Sidelineing the wide main stream opposition and embracing divisive and destructive isolated approaches is a sad episode that will yield disruption.”

How is such a conference 'divisive and destructive' while it was about exploring ways and means of coordinating policies that could possibly help alleviate the condition of Eritrean people. Destructive, divisive – who, Don Connell? Dr. Gaim Kibreab? Dr. Daniel Rezene? Elsa Chyrum? Selame Kidane, and Abdurrahman Sayed...etc? We know these individuals have produced volumes of materials that exposed the repressive practices of the regime in our country. They have worked relentlessly to draw the attention of the international community to the plight of Eritrean refugees, gross human rights abuses in Eritrea, arrests and tortures of Eritrean prisoners, religious persecution. I could go on and on. But this deliberate sabotaging of what could become Eritrea's most promising International focus is consistent with the shortsightedness and lack of vision of Mr. Tewolde and his geniuses who aided him in writing this shameful and disappointing letter.

“We are here to remind that this exclusive conference with all its form and content is disruptive, creating mistrust and exclusionist divisive mentality and behavior. It disarrays the overall capacities of the member organizations in particular and the opposition camp in general. In fact it's a step to intervene in our internal affairs.”

What form and content is Mr. Tewolde talking about? The objective of the meeting was to discuss policies that the EU and US should project and adapt towards the dictatorial

regime. What part of the plan or goal of the meeting was 'disruptive creating mistrust and exclusionist, divisive mentality and behavior' among Eritrean opposition and other entities? Where do you see the 'exclusionist, divisive mentality and behavior' that Mr. Tewolde is talking about? Not in Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar's presentation or in the Conference's Concluding Statement or in other materials presented in the conference. (Visit www.eepa.be)

The proof of the matter is that Mr. Tewolde, Awate, and the likes capitulated to their low level politics as usual and led this unholy and destructive campaign against EEPA, a body that has always stood with the Eritrean opposition to tackle the unfolding tragedy in our country. Why this hostile, incoherent, and low-level letter? Why all these threat & intimidation? Does Mr. Tewolde understand the ramification of labeling such accusations against a reputable and upright organization in the diplomatic world?

"We utterly reject and disregard the ongoing conference, be it knowingly or unknowingly done, its outcome is not for the benefit of our people or our unity and organized common action. In this regard we humbly remind the European Union to clarify its stand about organizing such a conference and how its participation in it would be."

Does Mr. Tewolde understand how democracy operates? Does he know that EEPA is not accountable to him, but to its constituents? Does Mr. Tewolde know that the EEPA operates independent of the EU and that it has every right not to include him or EDA? How could you throw things left and right by invoking aggressive and intimidating tone? What possible explanation one could give to this indefensible and unwarranted outburst of Mr. Tewolde and his associates? I think Mr. Tewolde needed to rescue and lift EDA out of its despair, and give it some hope so that people will continue to believe that there is a strong and functional EDA under his leadership. The intention of Mr. Tewolde's letter is also to make us feel that something serious is really happening, if not such important people would not be devoting so much time to engage in organizing such a big meeting. But this is an illusion of an event created by Tewolde and his backers to exploit the situation to their end. The fact is this time around their move was disaster and a kiss of death for Mr. Tewolde, his backers, and possibly for EDA.

Those who are cheering themselves with the letter, those who are exploiting it to promote their own small station, those who are becoming devotedly addicted to it to make themselves good, and those who are complaining under the guise of fairness should remember that it is easy to create illusion but the price to pay will be high.

The destructive route that Mr. Tewolde followed in his letter reminds me the diplomatic practices of the PFDJ leaders: the lack of skills to deal with others, ignorance of the diplomatic language, not knowing the subject at hand, offensive provocations, and the absence of a refined phraseology is all manifestation of Mr. Tewold's provocative, ineffective and unskilled leadership qualities. This is one of the many reasons why EDA cannot grow. Leaders like Mr. Tewolde are there to thwart every possible step and progress of the EDA. Mr. Tewolde cannot lead – his fruitless and badly crafted letter is case in point. Mr. Tewolde failed to uphold the responsibility entrusted to him; and he shattered the confidence EDA members put on him. He must be accountable for his actions. Mr. Tewolde must resign, and the EDA leadership must investigate him. I call on all members of EDA to demand the same.

Allowing Mr. Tewolde to continue as a Chief Executive Officer of EDA is more damaging. Mr. Tewolde has damaged EDA, with deep lacerations to its credibility and image in the international stage that may take years to reverse it.