

THE OLF CONTROVERSY: VETERAN OLF HARDLINER IBSA GUTEMA BACKS DAUD IBSA AGAINST “MODERATE” OROMOS

Ibsa Gutema is no novice to hate politics. Back then in the 1960s he did write a poem called “Manew Ethiopiawi” (who is the Ethiopian) that was positive and far from the hatred and poisoned words that characterize him these days. A critic puts the mentioned poem as “a caustic critique, in one sense, of ethnicism, which the system used for its divide-and-rule scheme.” Ibsa does not want to be reminded of that time. As one of the founding members of the Oromo Liberation Front he has always been on the far side of the political spectrum, attacking the “Habeshas”, claiming the non existence of a country called Ethiopia, denying the Oromo people have ever been Ethiopians. While most of the OLF leaders worked with and for the Mengistu regime (which was of course Ethiopian!)—forgetting their “we are not Ethiopian” position—the alliance did not last long. Both Daoud Ibsa (the present OLF chairman and Ibsa Gutema landed in prison along with the revolutionaries they had helped suppress in the service of the ruthless colonel Mengistu.

When the TPLF took over power, Ibsa and his friends again forgot their political program and joined Meles Zenawi in a programmed transition that assured Meles full control of the process. It was none other than Lencho Letta (the then strongman of the OLF) who raised his hand in the conference to support that the TPLF (Tigrean) army become the army of the transitional government in Ethiopia. Ibsa Gutema became the minister of education of the Meles government and is one of those responsible for the mess that the Ethiopian educational system finds itself in. Ibsa played a prominent role in the abandonment of the Geez Alphabet and the adoption of the so called Qubbi and he is so blinded by his hatred for things Ethiopian that (as you can read in the following article) he writes even Amharic words like Neftegna and Teklai Gizat in his Qubbi at the risk of being misunderstood by many. Ibsa Gutema, from his exile in New York, also penned a forgotten book that argued that Oromos would have been better off had they been colonized by Italians (Ibsa never met Eritreans who lived under Italian rule!). When the TPLF turned against the OLF Ibsa Gutema and other OLF leaders were given an exit visa by Meles and sent packing into exile at the same time as thousands of their members and supporters went to the prisons and labor camps. The first in Ethiopian history!

It is no secret that despite massacres of Amharas (from Assossa to Beddeno), the OLF has not achieved its separatist objectives and does not also enjoy the support of most Oromos. Its secessionist and extremist position do not sit well with most Oromos who want a democratic deal within the Ethiopian polity. This has led to several splits within the organization. Gaalaasa Dilbo was the first one to split. The old guard (Lencho, Dimmaa, etc) were laid to pasture. Daoud Ibsa flirted with working with Ethiopian organizations for a while (early 90s and in the AFD flop) but failed to engage seriously with others. Presently, there are at least two prominent OLF factions—one led by Daoud Ibsa and the other by General Kemal Gelchu and Hassan (Daoud’s previous right hand man and secretary at the Utrecht meeting which formed the ill fated AFD). Attempts to bring various OLF factions together have failed and this could perhaps be because some of the elders are the likes of the hardliner Ibsa Gutema. Recent reports indicate that attempts by Ethiopian opposition delegations that are in or have gone to Asmara to engage the Daoud faction

in a positive unified struggle have failed despite Shabiya call on Daoud to opt for this path. Is Shabiya serious? Can Daoud say no to Isayas if the latter puts real pressure on him? Isn't Shabiya itself behind the attempt to marginalize genuine Ethiopian organizations that it considers "nationalist" and "independent"? Valid questions to pursue.

Recently, the two factions of the OLF met in Boston (USA) to work out their differences under the chairmanship of Ibsa Gutema. They failed. Ibsa walked out in anger and wrote the article below in anger and backing the hardliner Daoud faction. We post his article here to show that

- (1) Those who claimed the factions have reconciled were spreading false information
- (2) those who claim that they, in their wisdom, have pulled the Daoud OLF onto Ethiopian rails, are spreading falsehood, and
- (3) the ongoing unnecessary argument and squabble over whether the Daoud OLF should be embraced or not is irrelevant and a smoke screen by those who do not want us to focus on the real and vital question of uniting pan Ethiopian forces.

The reality that we observe indicates that the claims made and the assertions propagated by certain circles be it on the mellowing of the Daoud OLF or the reconciliation of the OLF factions are baseless. This said it is important for Ethiopians to observe that the reported preparation by Americans for an eventuality (both Meles and the Americans estimate that an uprising in Ethiopia is inevitable) of replacing Meles with another Tigrean general in this case Tsadkan Gebre Tensai. With the dim witted Seye Abrha duped and sent o Harvard for a year Tsadkan will face little competition to win over the loyalty of the Tigrean (TPLF) army. In such an eventuality, the OLF of Daoud Ibsa will once again abandon its " we are not Ethiopians " or "the Empire has to be dismantled" stances and rush to Addis to take part in a power sharing Made in America 1991 type fiasco. And Ibsa, old as he is, may go for another ministerial position.

Can we leave all this diversion and irrelevancy aside and focus on forging the cooperation of real and genuine Ethiopian forces?

Here below is Ibsa Gutema's article presenting the real stand of the Daoud Ibsa OLF. ([Click the following link and read his article](#))