

Fetsum Abraham: Liberia's Scientific journey to Democracy

Testimony: Human experience and concept of existence are as diversified as our finger prints and subjective rationale, only a minute element of reality that has no purpose for society unless it aligns with objective reality. Whatever I think as a person may dictate my life individually but it has no place in the cosmos and cannot help being destructive should it want to exclusively dictate society based on ego's amplification of my personal standards beyond their universal values. Because knowledge and humility blend individual perceptions with the objective, while ignorance and arrogance diminish their spiritual value like in the life of that miserable loner in Adi Hallo. My thought of transition to democracy should then remain elusive unless it learns from other similar experiences before applied in the collective challenge on the ground. Please welcome Liberia's transition to democracy in brief and involve to make a difference in Eritrea.

Background: The Liberian Civil war in the nineties was going on between the government of Liberia under dictator Charles Taylor (GOL) and two armed forces from the people; Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). The people won the war and changed the situation upside down.

"On August 18, 2003, GOL, LURD, MODEL and the Political Parties, met in Akosombo and Accra, Ghana, from 4 June, 2003 to 18th August 2003, to seek a negotiated settlement of the crisis in Liberia, within the framework of the ECOWAS (Economic Communities of West African Societies) Peace Process for Liberia." They signed a peace agreement called the ACCRA ACCORD with international supervision (ECOWAS, the UN, AU, and the ICGL (The International Contact Group on Liberia)).

Comment: All this does not directly apply to our situation because we have no civil war in the country but the result was total cessation of hostilities between GOL, MODEL and LURD. They agreed restructuring the Armed Forces of Liberia under a new command structure with the help of the United States. Charles Taylor who ruled Liberia from August 2, 1997 till the time of the agreement was to resign from presidency on August 11, 2003.

Clearly, democratic process is universal in concept, although its application may slightly differ from society to society based on their realities. It starts by suppressing personal interests and desires in favor of sitting together, discussing, arguing and finally cutting a common political deal between the parties in question. Here, GOL, MODEL, LURD and the political parties democratically found common grounds with their differences intact.

THE ACCRA ACCORD

1a. With the exit of the President Charles Taylor of the Republic of Liberia, the GOL shall be headed by the Vice President for an interim period.

b. The Vice President shall assume the duties of the current President for a period not beyond 14th October 2003, whereupon the Transitional Government provided for in this Agreement shall be immediately installed.

Comment: Please pay attention that the Vice President of the time was given presidency power in singularity for **only two months** following Taylor's resignation on 11 August 2003 until 14 October 2003. This is very important for us to compare and contrast with how they did it in Sudan which will be the next topic in line.

ARTICLE XXI

ESTABLISHMENT OF A TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT (NTGL): October 14th 2003 – January 6th, 2006.

3. Immediately upon the installation of the NTGL in Liberia, all cabinet Ministers, Deputy and Assistant Ministers, heads of autonomous agencies, commissions, heads of public corporations and State-owned enterprises of the current GOL shall be deemed to have resigned. This does not preclude re-appointment according to the appropriate provisions of this Agreement.

5. The LURD, MODEL, and all irregular forces of the GOL shall cease to exist as military forces, upon completion of disarmament.

6. There shall be no restriction on members of the LURD and MODEL to engage in national politics through the formation of political parties or otherwise, save and accept those restrictions imposed on all parties and associations by the relevant laws of Liberia.

Comment on (5): Our situation is not as complex since we only have one Army that should continue its duties with few adjustments. But this should apply to the few armed forces in my opinion.

As for (6), GOL (national armed forces), MODEL and LURD (collective armed resistance of the people), were representatives of the people from broader sense of the view. This was the reason they were allowed to involve in national politics like all other citizens of Liberia. But notice that there were restrictions for the political parties that also applied to the two groups in case they wanted to form political parties in the long run.

HEAD OF NTGL

1) The National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) shall be headed by a person to be called the Transitional Chairman. The Transitional Chairman shall be assisted by a Transitional Vice-Chairman.

2. Selection of the Transitional Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall be by consensus arising from a process of consultations undertaken by the accredited delegates and observers to the Peace Talks.

The selection procedure is defined in Annex 2 to this Agreement. Candidates for the positions of Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Transitional Government of Liberia must meet the following criteria:

(e) Persons who possess demonstrated leadership skills and a record of achievement in the private or public sector.

(g) Nominees for the post of Speaker and Deputy Speaker must be endorsed by a minimum of six (6) members of the Assembly.

(h) No member of the Assembly shall endorse more than one candidate for any of the two offices.

Comment: You can google and see the qualifications (a-d) but qualification in (e) suggests that the position was available for any private/public figure in the life of the society while (g and h) indicating the democratic procedure of that specific process in question.

4. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman, as well as all principal Cabinet Ministers within the NTGL shall not contest for any elective office during the 2005 elections to be held in Liberia.

Comment: None of the NTGL members was allowed to run for political office in the democratic election scheduled for 2005 to avoid conflict of interest by the political parties vis-à-vis the people. This clause guaranteed the NEUTRALITY of the government whose sole purpose was to run the country during the transitional period and move on after democratic election.

ARTICLE XXIII: STRUCTURE OF THE NTGL

The NTGL shall consist of three branches, namely:

(i) The National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA);(ii) The Executive; (iii) The Judiciary.

ARTICLE XXIV: THE NATIONAL TRANSITIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NTLA)

3. The NTLA shall have a maximum of seventy-six (76) members who shall come from the following entities:

(a) Each of the fifteen (15) Counties;

(b) The present Government of Liberia, the LURD, MODEL, the Political Parties, Civil Society and Interest Groups including the National Bar Association, the Liberian Business Organizations, Women Organizations, Trade Unions, Teachers Union, Refugees, the Liberians in the Diaspora/America and the Youth.

The formula for the composition of the NTLA shall be as follows: GOL 12 seats; LURD 12 seats; MODEL 12 seats; Political Parties 18 seats; Civil Society and Special Interest Groups 7 seats; Counties 15 seats.

Comment: This means the people had 58 or 76% of the seats in the house compared to 18 or 24% of the seats occupied by the political parties. The People's power was assured in the legislative assembly as a result of this universal model of power distribution.

POWER TRANSFER

Moses Blah, the old Vice President of Liberia was ultimately replaced by the elected Chairman of the NTGL. ***"He served as President for two months, until 14 October 2003, when a United Nations-backed transitional government, headed by Gyude Bryant, was sworn in."*** The question is why?

ANSWER: ***"Charles Gyude Bryant was previously a businessman and was chosen as chairman because he was seen as politically neutral and therefore acceptable to each of the warring factions, which included LURD, (MODEL), and loyalists of former President Taylor."***

In this process, the Liberian people were able to achieve a neutral politician leading the transitional government (executive) using their majority leverage in the Assembly (legislative), meaning they secured a NEUTRAL TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT that was to transform the society to genuine democracy. This experience teaches us that the people's Assembly was the axis of people's democracy; a prerequisite for the neutral government in question.

ARTICLE XXII: MANDATE OF THE NATIONAL TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA

2. In addition to normal State functions, its mandate shall include the following:

(d) Contribution to the preparation and conduct of internationally supervised elections in October 2005, for the inauguration of an elected Government for Liberia in January 2006.

Comment: (d) implies that the INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL COMMISSION had to work hand in hand with international observers and conduct its duty based on international rules. The other important aspect of the democratic process was the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the following rules applied to its performance overall.

POWER AND DUTIES [of NEC]

The law "states that the Commission, as an autonomous agency of Government, independent of any branch of the Government, shall have the following powers and duties [I have avoided few of the rights here for space and time]:

To administer and enforce all laws relative to the conduct of elections throughout the Republic of Liberia.

To give accreditation to, and register all political parties and independent candidates who meet the minimum registration requirement laid down by the Commission, by which authority they may exercise political franchise under relevant provision of the Constitution."

Comment: Here, NEC had the authority to draft the minimum requirements for eligibility as a political party. This should apply in our situation because Eritrea cannot accommodate more than 10 political parties needless to say we cannot afford to have religiously and ethnically polarized political parties to run the heterogeneous country.

Upon objections made by any person or group of persons, the Commission may reject, and if already registered, revoke the certificate of accreditation of said party or independent candidate, subject to appeal to the Supreme Court of Liberia.

To revoke the registration and accreditation of an already legal party only upon the judicial determination of a court of competent jurisdiction, in accordance with due process.

Conduct all elections for elective public offices including the chieftaincy election and all referenda and declare the results thereof.

Formulate and enforce guidelines controlling the conduct of all elections.

Comment: NEC had the authority to completely manage the issues of political parties, their rights and obligations vis-à-vis the democratic elections ahead, to define legal and illegal political parties and accept or reject them based on the law and approval of the Supreme Court of Liberia, the classification being subject to the objective realities of the then Liberia.

In consultation with the appropriate local officials, appoint elections officers in the political sub-divisions of the country who shall perform their duties under the direction and supervision of the Commission and in accordance with the provisions of this little.

Prescribe the kinds of records to be kept by all political parties and independent candidates and their organizations and the manner in which they shall be kept.

Examine into and audit, or cause to be audited, the financial transactions of all political parties and independent candidates and their organizations by a chartered public accountant who shall not be member of any political party or the organization of any independent candidate.

To revoke the Certificate of Accreditation of any political party, alliance or coalition, or to impose a fine with respect to election offences committed by a natural person, according to the gravity or the offences committed.

Comment: This was a standard procedure in any transitional process. The political parties and independent candidates were required to keep their records (whether the leaders were democratically elected, number of their supporters, etc.) based on NEC's specifications. NEC also had the power to only use NEUTRAL public accountants to acquire financial disclosures of all candidates in order to avoid corruption on top of its power to neutralize any political party that may break the laws imposed upon.

OUR VISION: The NEC will be a credible electoral authority managing public elections for the Liberian People in line with the laws of Liberia and international best practices.

Comment: NEC was structured to work in line with the country's laws and international practices to fairly and transparently perform its duties (this is standard).

In conclusion, the Liberian people had to control the executive and legislative bodies to democratize their country through an independent electoral commission that sets the rule for the political parties who had to completely abide by for eligibility. The entire process was under the control of the people and surveillance of the world and it worked well. As a result, the people of Liberia today enjoy sustained democracy since Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf won the 2005 elections and took office in January 2006, succeeding Bryant. She won a second term through fair election in 2011 and George Weah was elected in 2017 as the second democratically president of the country. **This type of smooth democratic process is not only important in Eritrea but a must within our reach.** Everything is in our hands now and we can do it together to achieve genuine democracy forever. The people must understand their power through knowledge to own it in the transitional stage behind full support of international law and our extremely, extremely peaceful and obedient people.

Yeakil et al as a neutral organization of the people must understand the following issues to make sure the people own the ultimate power of the transitional government for us to succeed once and for all:

- 1) The Transitional Assembly of Eritrea must occupy 2/3 or 67% of the sits at minimum to produce sustainable democracy in the country.
- 2) The people must have a NEUTRAL executive body in the transitional government to succeed in this regard.
- 3) That (1) and (2) are the minimum requirements for the society to achieve an independent Electoral Commission that works hand in hand with the government bodies and international elements under local and international laws.
- 4) That the Electoral Commission has to have full power to manage the political parties from registration and qualification to suspending and disqualifying them based on its specifications. They will have to be **legal** based on the commission's specifications and **obey** the rules to run for office during the democratic election.
- 5) That the entire transitional government officials cannot compete for political power in the democratic election to avoid conflict of interest with the people and stay NEUTRAL throughout the process.
- 6) The electoral commission must have the power to request financial exposure of the political parties through neutral public accountants only from the people.

Remember that Democracy is today very popular and practical in many third world countries. It has actually become the norm of modern political societies. Full Democracy is being experienced today in Liberia, Mauritius, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia,

Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia while many others are following the trend including Kenya, Somalia, Gambia, Nigeria and the soon to be democratic Sudan and even probably Ethiopia as well. We have to claim full democracy by the book or death! No political groups should take us for a ride anymore and no fear and SIKIFTA to control the process by any means necessary, I mean any means necessary!! Every political group should be conditioned to respect the people and abide by its law and objective reality in this do or die situation. **The people should exclusively set the clock for the political parties not the vise versa.**

Stay strong and have the confidence and tenacity to make Eritrea one of the best democracies by simply staying NEUTRAL, aware, vigilant, succumbing to universal means of doing it and rejecting any other alternative by egoistic and greedy politicians in the camp. This is not the time to accommodate egos and political games but to assert the people's power by snatching the podium and controlling the show by any means necessary. Please stay tuned to the Sudanese scientific style of transition to democracy and I shall complete my thesis probably with one more article and take a long break to manage my life with full concentration. Peace!