

**THE UNMISTAKBLE MESSAGE OF THE FUNERAL MARCH OF HAJI MUSA
MOHAMMED NUR MAKES THE RULING GANG PANIC:**

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“Don't count the tyrants out. They've still got plenty of tricks up their sleeves.”
(*The Dictators Are Smarter Than You Think*, an article by Christian Caryl,
Foreign Policy, May 30, 2012)

A ruling gang like the one in Eritrea, that has built one of the most terrorizing dictatorships in the world, requires the people to fear it in order to control them. But as the Eritrean people are no more willing to accept a gang that scares them, as a legitimate government, it has definitely become a profound source of concern for the self-imposed lawless gang to see the people proving to it, time and again, that they neither fear nor respect it. In this connection, it is logical to ask: ***How can the ruling gang hope to control the people who tell it, “We do not fear you”?*** That has been the message the ruling gang in Eritrea repeatedly received loud and clear from the Eritrean people since a while ago. The mourning marchers who attended the funeral of Haji Musa on Saturday, March 3, 2018 constituted the loudest voice unmistakably conveying that message. Even though he was an elderly person, Haji Musa, who seemed to contain in himself so much of the Eritrean past, has radically changed the struggle against the oppressive regime to an active one, giving new life to the ideals and aspirations of the Eritrean people.

As one major event of great national significance reminds us of other significant ones, in addition to the death of Haji Mussa, it was also particularly painful this month to learn the leaking news about the death of Martyr Haile Woldetensaie (Durue). Martyr Haile Woldetensaie (Durue) was one of the most prominent EPLF leaders, the first Eritrean Minister of Foreign Affairs and a member of the G-15,

who died after languishing in prison since 2001. He was physically liquidated, through a well-calculated slow death, for no other reason but because he courageously stood for the immediate implementation of the constitution that dignifies basic dignity, the rule of law, democracy, and social justice. The martyr was also a man of dignity, considered a role model for honesty and dedication, and a time-tested hero who should be honoured and vindicated. To sum up the tragedy our people had to go through this month, we can say that the whole country is sad and angry, and the feelings, emotions and responses of the people are aroused by the death of these two dignified popular leaders, who symbolize the forces of goodwill and justice in our nation.

To resume our pursuit of the funeral march of Haji Mussa, it is worthy of mention that the escalating police intimidation against the peaceful mourners culminated in the rounding up of the youth (about 200 in number), including under-aged children, who are said to have been kept in Alla Concentration Camp and are subject to investigation, which nobody doubts includes torture and other serious human rights abuses. The fig leaf (something to conceal a difficulty or an embarrassment) designed by the decaying regime to cover the real motive behind the arrest of the youth, as reported, was the issue of Identification Cards; sadly the same cover the Ethiopian army used to round up the youth whenever the government felt insecure. To concretize the issue, one would ask: ***Is it possible for the details about the detention of the youth to remain secret from the public and press? If so, why?***

The details of the circumstances under which the youth have been kept in Alla Concentration Camp may stay secret for the time being only, but before long, everything will slip out. This will happen because the momentum of the downward spiral of the regime is greatly building. It means that the iron grip of the regime on the people is becoming ineffective and loose, defections from the regime are going at full swing, and the forces standing for freedom, justice, and the rule of law are multiplying in number, and their devotion and methods of struggle are witnessing tremendous consolidation and diversification daily, even inside the government institutions and offices.

Further, according to eyewitnesses, the funeral attendance was not limited only to the Muslims. Rather, it swelled to include Christians from the city of Asmara and its surrounding too; a matter that scared the regime to death, taking that as a prelude for something worse to come and a cloud hanging over the brutal

dictatorship. There is nothing obscure, but to bring all on the same page, it is important to ask: ***Why did the regime micro-target Haji Mussa as an enemy?***

The crime of Haji Mussa was that he spoke the undisputed truth, standing for the right of citizens to teach their kids, what they think is dear to them, and bring them up the way they chose for them as parents. That noble stand and heroic act of challenging a brutal dictator has placed him alongside the proud citizens who hold their heads high. Of course, defiance of authority is a great threat for the regime that always sees the coming danger: defiance by individuals could turn into civil disobedience, if it is not nipped in the bud or prevented at an early stage before it becomes too difficult or unmanageable. Simply put, as a consequence of the funeral march, panic is written on the face of the extremely worried monster, Atse Isias, who has deviated from any normal and acceptable human and Eritrean behavior and character, and consequently has no love lost between him and the people (the phrase here should not be literally interpreted to mean there is plenty of love. It just means the opposite).

It is obvious that we would be compelled to ask the questions: ***Did Haji Mussa die a natural death or he was killed? If he was killed, who is responsible for the crime?*** The answers to both questions are very simple and limited too. Haji Mussa did not die a natural death but was killed by the prison conditions created by the regime to kill its opponents. The prison conditions are notoriously precarious by any standard, to any age, let alone to a 93-year elderly person. These conditions include the absence of basic medical treatment, unhygienic confines, failure to provide urgent health care or life-saving treatment, hidden cruelties of prison authorities and possibly guards, malnutrition, and policies that prohibit family visits even for those with chronic diseases and whose families are willing to bring them medications. In fact, Scorpion (“Sejen Al-Aqrab”), Egypt’s most notorious jail, should be a five-star hotel, as compared to the Eritrean prisons and detention camps. This is true because the Atse’s establishments of coercion are particularly designed to lock up political opponents or prisoners of conscience, with the intention of revenge until they die.

Nevertheless, with regard to the question: ***If he was killed, who is responsible for the crime?***, partially answered above, the blame is wider and the responsibility grows to include all of us who are indifferent, coward or tacitly accept the evil gang, by standing on the sidelines in the midst of a struggle for justice, or remain silent on the injustice committed on those who had become our voice and confronted the brutalities of the regime. To put it candidly, silence in the Eritrean

situation means taking side, and some even go as far as saying that it makes one a partner in a crime. ***Doesn't this opportunism make silence a serious obstacle for the process of building a free and open society?***

Another important question to be raised in this connection is: ***What message does the death or murder of Haji Musa and others before him convey to us?*** The message urges us to work passionately and unrelentingly, continuing the work he and others so nobly had started to make the Eritrean dream a reality but could not finish because of the end of their life. The message also conveys that they did not die in vain. To make this last point clearer, we would ask: ***Why do we think that they did not die in vain?***

As it is always said, "Every cloud has a silver lining", or we should not be hopeless because it is possible for something good to come out of a bad thing. In other words, the unmerited death or the innocent blood of Haji Mussa, Haile Woldetensaie (Durue), and others would serve us as a redemptive force that would bring new light or a bright future to this dark state, saving it from the peril planned by the evil gang to cause. It means that it will contribute, among other factors, to the speedy and humiliating end of the desperate ruling gang, which is diving fast, head first, and committing suicide. The most interesting part here is that the process of the suicide of the brutal regime is coming faster and is becoming easier to see than we have observed in any African dictatorship.

This will lead us to the question: ***Was the death of Haji Mussa a victory or a defeat for the ruling gang?*** The peaking crimes of injustice and violence committed by the ruling gang daily against the Eritrean people, the absence of the rule of law, and the destructive political and socio-economic policies, have touched the very foundation of the living of the average Eritrean (including government employees and army, except the fat cats), making it impossible for the people to survive in all aspects of life. In such a situation, every additional crime, notably the murder of a well-reputed nationalist like Haji Mussa by the ruling gang, will undoubtedly push the situation by far closer to the point of explosion. We view it so because the Eritrean people, who are aware that they lack the power to change things through political means, have already reached the conclusion that regime change is the only alternative, even if that means violent confrontation, though there is enough realization that violent confrontation should be the last resort.

In a nutshell, the murder of Haji Mussa could give the ruling gang a breathing space for the time being, and the Atse could pretend as if it was good for his ego. Nonetheless, it is an incident that acts as a catalyst in bringing the end of the regime closer. The Atse knows this and is mentally troubled by it. In few words, it is hoped that the crime of murder would turn the table upside down on him and be the final nail in the coffin for the regime. That is to say that there is no other way to interpret this incident or it cannot be more clearly laid out. As shown above, it is undoubtedly a devastating defeat for the ruling gang.

To sum up the answer to the question raised above, it could be said that the incident shows that Haji Mussa challenged selflessly and with an extraordinary devotion and honour, the policy of the Atse, "Either kneel down to my rule, or I will kill you or put you in jail so that you die a slow death." Contrary to the title of Christian Carly's article ("**The Dictators Are Smarter Than You think**") quote at the top of this piece, the Atse is not smart enough to realize that the more people are harshly and inhumanly treated, the more solid and united they become to face the danger and defeat it. To nobody's surprise, our people have a long memory to remember that Gaddafi's "Zanga Zanga" statement of threat, to the tragic detriment of the Libyan people, had turned into his farewell speech, heralding and assuring all oppressed peoples of the world that a humiliating end of a dictatorship is a historical inevitability. It should be noted here that such crimes could give the forces of change a golden opportunity to harness all energy to face the wicked regime in the final battle.

Before we wind up this piece, it is appropriate to raise the question: ***Could the incident make the Atse wise-up and make his learning curve rise steeply?*** In the past, we used to take the expression "Power corrupts", as a cliché or a stereotyped phrase that lost originality, ingenuity and impact by long overuse. However, it was the ruling gang in Eritrea, turning the country into the hell on earth for the 26-year post-independence period that has proved us wrong and forced us to reconsider our views. Accordingly, it is not possible to expect Dictator Isias, who has been irreversibly molded by the 26 years (if we do not raise the bar to include the period of the war of liberation) of naked corruption, blackmail, abuse, and conspiracy against the people and human dignity, and whose hands are stained with thick blood, including those of his own comrades-in-arms, to come to terms with his conscience and wise-up. Put differently, it is impossible for the Atse to come out of his almost half-a-century comfort zone that combined: malice,

physical liquidation, lack of discipline, and hostility against anything good, positive and decent. Nonetheless, it is helpful to visit some sources of different perspective concerning dictators, and see if they help us read Atse Isias differently.

According to Will Dobson, the author of the book, *The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy*, concludes that dictators are not idiots and that they learn from their predecessors, adding that Putin is not Stalin and Hu Jintao is not Mao Zedong. Here Dobson is talking about modern dictators like Chavez of Venezuela, Putin of Russia and the different Chinese leaders who know that it is in their best interest to give their rule a democratic appearance, yet the content of their rule is anti-democratic. In particular, they have constitutions, elections, parliaments, media, formal justice system and bureaucracy that they carefully manipulate and bend in their favour, including the laws. Even African dictators including Al-Beshier of the Sudan and Al SiSi of Egypt do the same thing and they do it "intelligently". When it comes to Eritrea's dictator, who has lost touch even with the popular sentiment, the picture is totally different. The Atse is nothing but a carbon copy of Stalin, Mao Zedong and Ceausescu, and plays by their game book, following everything, including the comma and full stop.

I wish Dobson would write the second edition of his book and Atse Isias would be one of the dictators he would focus on. That would hopefully change some of Dobson's conclusions and generalizations and make his book more sharp-edged. Dobson was totally mechanical in defining modern dictators in terms of the time they live, rather than their mentality. In fact, Atse Isias is a contemporary of Putin and others, but he does not belong to that category of dictators Dobson argues "are not idiots" and that their learning curve is steep.

The argument above should not be taken as an attempt to pursue a foregone conclusion, but Atse Isias, as we know him through all possible sources, is not in the category of the savvy autocrats, who learn from their own mistakes and those of others because nothing is enlightening for him. Specifically, he will be the last to know that the tide in our world is in favour of the strengthening of freedom and pluralistic societies. Similarly, he will also be the last to know that the rapid spread of information is making it harder for his dictatorship to survive and continue. I really wonder: ***Does he realize how long it took Eritreans around the globe to know about the death of Haji Musa and the details of the funeral***

march, including pictures? This is the way information spreads these days and efforts to bring down dictatorial regimes are synchronized and interconnected.

From our discussions above, we conclude that Atse Isais's Eritrea constitutes a very interesting case to study, in terms of the uniqueness of the dictatorship and the pattern of thinking and behavior of the gang leader, who dreams in a way unknown in political science, ravaging the country for over quarter of a century. The two-fold question here is: ***What does that study help and whom?***

The study of the cultural and behavioral legacies of the dictatorship of Atse Isias will be of great help for the new Eritrean generations, leading them to the process of political learning and the reevaluation of this part of our history on the relative merits of democracy. That is to say that the study of all crimes and abuses committed, including the murder of Haji Musa and Haile Woldetensaie (Durue), wrong political and socio-economic policies and methods followed to run the country, the interactions of the dictatorship with the exiled communities in general, and the opposition groups in exile in particular, will be a key source in the political learning. It is that political learning that will be the basis for the reconstruction of the country in all spheres and along democratic lines. That is why we emphasize that the blood of our martyrs will not go in vain.

We have strong faith in the strong desire of our people for freedom, socio-economic justice, equality, and democracy, and we strongly believe that the head of the dictatorship, who has never paid enough price to change his behavior and stop his Hitler-like and Stalin-like levels of cruelty, will be forced to face his final destiny, no matter when. Likewise, the fact that the dictator and his cronies did not sleep well the night Haji Mussa died shows that they knew that their humiliating end is fast approaching.

In a caption under cartoons related to African leaders scared by the downfall of the Burkina Faso leader, Victor Ndula, the cartoonist of the website called Cartoon Movement, wrote a comment entitled "Dictators Panic". I will quote that comment to end up this piece, and it reads:

"Africa still 'boasts' of autocratic leaders who have been in power for over two decades; the [fall of Blaise Compaore](#) in Burkina Faso is a stark reminder that its

[it's] just a matter of time before they share the same fate.”
(<https://www.cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/17766>) =====