



Ethiopia builds a nation

An exclusive interview with Foreign Affairs Minister Feleke Gedle-Giorgis

During the United Nations Assembly session earlier this month, H.E. Col. Dr. Feleke Gedle-Giorgis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia kindly granted this interview to the Executive Intelligence Review.

The foreign minister and his aide were particularly concerned with the coverage in the international media that Ethiopia has received. In the first four years of the Ethiopian revolution, the foreign minister explained, when Ethiopia faced aggression from both within and without, events there were constant news in the international press. The press at that time decried Ethiopia as an agent of Soviet influence in Africa. Now that Ethiopia has won those military battles and embarked on the more difficult fight for agricultural and industrial development, events in Ethiopia are no longer deemed newsworthy.

In this nation of over 30 million peoples—the second largest nation in all Africa—development is the most important battle, and the one on which the vast majority of government officials—most prominently President Haile Mengistu Miriam—are focused. A National Revolutionary Development Campaign has been launched and Mengistu personally tours this vast country to ensure that development programs are implemented.

The Foreign Minister strongly expressed a sense of national pride. Ethiopia, unlike many other African nations, claims a culture that goes back 1000 years and a long history of independence.

As many observers of the Africa scene are aware, Ethiopia is emerging as a leader of all Africa, as

General Mengistu is recognized as a leader of all Africans, not only Ethiopians. The struggle to raise Ethiopia from feudal backwardness, is not only a story of Ethiopia but the watchword for the development of the entire African continent.

—Daniel Sneider and Douglas de Groot

Q : You have recently celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Ethiopian Revolution. What are the goals and objectives of the government now?

A: To understand the objective of our revolution and its process, one has to understand the state of affairs that existed before the revolution. Everybody knows that there was an absolute monarch, a monarchical order, the feudal system, in which a few families owned the entire arable land in the country. The Ethiopian people, the masses, were denied their rights, and even political rights, because we didn't have any political party in the country, even if we had claim for thousands of years of independence.

The people of Ethiopia have struggled against colonialism, against the Ottoman Turks, against the Egyptian Pharaohs, against all other Arab expansionist aggressions against Ethiopia. We fought against the British colonialists, against the Italian and French, all these colonialist powers dividing all of Africa. ... We were able to reject all this aggression.

Now the state of affairs after all this is not very much differentiated from the colonial situation in other

African countries. The Ethiopian people were subjected to various exploitations, internal and external. Apart from the fact that the Haile Selassie regime exploited the country, Haile Selassie didn't even regard himself as an African. He opened the door to imperialist exploitation of the country. Many interests—outside interests were involved—who usually did not invest in the country, but were collaborating with the feudal system. There were Americans who were feudalists also, who owned ranches and so forth.

This situation of course precipitated a number of upheavals against the system. Many coup d'états, massive protests have taken place since the Mussolini aggression up to 1974. What happened in 1974 was the climax of all those public reactions that had taken place for a number of years.

Now in 1974 the Ethiopian masses, spearheaded of course by the armed forces which was the only organized force in the country, overthrew the feudal system and came out with their program of nationalizing urban land, rural land, and providing land to the peasants. For the first time in the history of Ethiopian independence, the peasants owned their piece of land.

In this process, internal reactions, which we knew in advance of course, and feudal elements, worked to overthrow the revolution to bring about the sense of the past. We, the people of Ethiopia, organized ourselves with arms for armed struggle against the internal reaction with the full support of various powers. Those who are interested in overthrowing the Ethiopian revolution support the reaction, the feudalist reaction, and other separatist elements in the north. The main purpose of this reaction was to overthrow the revolution. The heroic stand against these reactions, besides the internal reactions, prevented these dangers from occurring.

At the time when we were fighting against this internal reaction we faced another external aggression from outside. We have fought against some 13 countries which were supporting Somalia in its expansionist efforts against Ethiopia. Many countries who were against the revolution, supported Somalia's expansionist policy, armed Somalia, supported Somalia. The Ethiopian people, again supported by some socialist countries and democratic peace-loving countries of Africa, struggled for the salvation of their nation, and started the war against the secessionist elements in the north.

At this particular time I would like only to inform you that we have rejected also this secessionist control of Eritrea, of most of Eritrea. Remaining in the zones controlled by the secessionists are the people who have been organized by the revolutionary army of Ethiopia, and except certain pockets of resistance by these secessionist elements, they are under control.

We have organized the people on a communal basis. The fruits of the revolution—nationalization of rural land has taken place. The army is participating in the

process of organizing the masses, culminating in farmers associations being established there as well as in other parts of Ethiopia.

Now, having ensured our revolution, with the territorial integrity and unity of Ethiopia, we turned to the development process of Ethiopia. Last year, the fourth anniversary of the revolution, an economic campaign was launched. The objective of the current campaign is, on a short-term basis, the development of agriculture. We concentrated on agriculture.

Infrastructure for industry

So we have short-term, medium-term, and long-term objectives. The long-term objective is the attempt to create the necessary infrastructure for industrialization of Ethiopia. Ethiopia as you know has little infrastructure. The main immediate need is food, with disease, hunger, and illiteracy being the main impediments to development. These are the areas which we concentrate on for the time being.

Right now the people have mobilized themselves for this program, and in each and every administrative region the program is going very well. Our chairman [General Mengistu] is visiting each of the regions to see that this program is properly implemented, is being implemented. We have had successes in many fields already. We believe that in a very short period of time we shall eradicate hunger without expecting other countries to supply us with food.

As for illiteracy, in the campaign against illiteracy the people are again being organized where it is possible to carry out the process of education, but we need the support of many other countries.

In the economic campaign we have approached the socialist countries whose assistance was welcome by way of assisting Ethiopia in our agricultural mobilization and other assistance to Ethiopia. We have signed a number of joint economic commissions with Eastern European countries and other African countries like Kenya. So we believe that we are doing the right thing at the right time. The propaganda of all those countries who have opposed the Ethiopian revolution was that the Ethiopian revolution was very bad, abusing human rights, etc., etc., etc. It was during the Emperor's time that hundreds of thousands were being killed, and at that time various circles never mentioned this situation.

Now at the time when we are struggling to bring enough food to the people to eradicate hunger, illiteracy, and backwardness, certain countries are offering aid to Ethiopia, in fact are carrying out international campaigns able to assist Ethiopia in this humanitarian act. These are the main problems, and the process of blackening of the revolution is being carried out in international media.

Americans would understand

But in many cases, there are people everywhere, and we know that the American people will understand our problem; our only problem is that we don't have access to reach the American people to explain our revolution. We are deeply grateful to you to carry out this humanitarian act, this assistance, to explain to the American people the nature of the revolution. Any American is free to come to Ethiopia to see for himself; what he will learn is that we appreciate the assistance of a number of American citizens, who are helping to combat certain diseases, and in other areas. Many of our educated Ethiopians have studied here in the United States, studied with American experts, and I think there is a common understanding. We are not against the American people. We are against exploitation, we are against imperialism, we are against neocolonialism.

These are our problems. Otherwise we will cooperate with all other democratic, peace-loving people.

Our main objective at this particular time is to reconstruct our war-damaged country, educate our illiterate population, eradicate hunger. This is our task and objective.

I said earlier that we didn't have a political party. We shall soon establish a workers' party in Ethiopia. Very soon we will establish a commission which will study and be exposed to the process of the creation of such a party. We are certain that the revolution will advance with such a party, a workers' party.

Mode of organization

Q: *In terms of the problems of development, and the legacy of backwardness which you were left with when the revolution took place, how do you take on the question of mobilizing the population to participate in the development process? What kind of organizations, what kind of campaigns, what kind of education do you carry out to do that?*

A: The first thing we did after the 1974 revolution was to organize the people. How difficult is this state of affairs in this situation is clear. The fact that we didn't have a political party, the fact that the people were disorganized, the fact that the people were illiterate, they were diseased and backward.

All this of course made it extremely difficult. It was the program of the revolution and the achievements of the revolution that ultimately organized the population in the first place.

So we first of course organized the peasants, the rural areas of the country who must benefit from the revolution, the nationalization process of the rural lands.

It was there in the first place where the feudal elements, runaway feudalists, tried to organize them-

selves. That was the area where they thought they could organize the masses up against the revolution. But instead the peasants who were themselves for many years exploited and regarded as second-class citizens, and who knew in advance of the benefits of the revolution, organized themselves. Various cells and communes established farmers associations. We organized the farmers associations on the local, what we call *kebele*, communal level, on what is called the Soviet *kebele*, and on up to regional and national associations. We have now established a national organization.

Then we have the urban *kebele* also, organized in the cities. So these are the organizations which we have, and the army is also organized on much the same basis.

These are the various elements formed for the future, the future political party. As for the criteria for this we consider that the revolutionary leader is the person who in the last five years has participated in the revolution that follows the Marxist-Leninist principles, has accepted the programs, the party, for integrating all those communists, soldiers, revolutionaries who have sacrificed themselves, working to eradicate feudalism in the country, working with the revolution and workers against aggression, and secession, for a policy. All these individuals are revolutionary elements in that sense. These are the organizations which organized the farmers associations, and *kebele* in the urban centers.

We know the American people will understand the problem: our only difficulty is we don't have access to the American people.

Q: *What do you think is the significance of the Ethiopian revolution for Africa as a whole for the development problems which Africa faces?*

A: Well, one of the accusations of these various circles is that we are prepared to export our revolution to other countries. Our revolution is not for export, nor did we import the Ethiopian revolution, which takes into account the Ethiopian tradition. We are grateful of course for aid and support we received, and we will play our historical part in the anti-imperialist struggle in general. We do not pretend that we should impose the Ethiopian revolution elsewhere, or that others should accept the Ethiopian revolution for their countries.

We support and are supporting all those brothers

and sisters who are struggling against apartheid, against colonialism, against racists. We in Ethiopia for reasons necessary to protect the revolution cannot be independent of this fight. Unless the rest of Africa is free, it will be difficult to give the necessary support to our African brothers in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

We of course are not against other countries taking what is good from the Ethiopian Revolution. We neither import nor export revolution.

In Africa, we could have really eradicated hunger by this time instead of using our meager resources for buying arms.

Q: *Can you explain the policies and objectives of Ethiopia's foreign policy?*

A: As far as our policy is concerned, Ethiopia's foreign policy as it is stated in our national democratic coalition program, is based on the principles of nonalignment in the sense that we follow the principles of peaceful coexistence, in the principle of absolute integrity of boundaries, respect of independence of countries, of not interfering in internal affairs of other countries, cooperation with all neighboring countries including Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, and Kenya. With Kenya we have an excellent relationship without any contradiction, even though we have different social formations, social systems.

We have an excellent relationship, we cooperate economically, politically, diplomatically. With the Sudan of course since the revolution, we have contradictions: the support they have given to the secessionist elements, interference in the internal affairs of Ethiopia, moves being dictated to them by outside forces. This situation didn't make, didn't create the necessary atmosphere for cooperation.

There was a commission of mediation established by the Organization of African Unity. Last year Ethiopia and Sudan met in Freetown, Sierre Leone. For the first time its two leaders met to acquaint each other with the problems. The main objective of this meeting was to normalize relations between Sudan and Ethiopia. But after these two leaders met, delegations met, and seriously discussed problems that faced both countries, this as far as we are concerned, was successful. Sudan's decision of course was dictated by the notions of others who didn't come or want to come to a clear understand-

ing or normalize relations with Ethiopia. But still we believe that in the future, since the mediation committee will work, we are still there to see to it that these relations are still there between the two countries, and we believe that there might possibly be some positive atmosphere created between the two countries.

As far as our relations therefore are concerned we want to cooperate with all countries nearby.

We have very close relations with socialist countries who have assisted Ethiopia politically and militarily when Ethiopia was attacked and the support they have given to the Ethiopian revolution. This means the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

As far as we are concerned, our involvement in southern Africa against colonialism, apartheid, and racism is clear. We support our brothers and sisters of southern Africa within the context of the charter of the Organization of African Unity. We have excellent relations with the liberation movements. We train their cadre and give military assistance.

Ethiopia will continue to support the legitimate liberation movements in southern Africa until independence is achieved. That independence will be genuine independence.

British are responsible

Q: *How do you view the London conference in that context?*

A: As far as we are concerned we are not against early peaceful settlement. All Ethiopia, all Africa, wants is that there exists genuine independence in Zimbabwe. We believe that if the various desires, conditions, advanced by the Patriotic Front are accepted, there is a chance for peaceful settlement. The British, who are responsible for Rhodesia's independence, Zimbabwe's independence, are the last ones to welcome the forthcoming independence of Zimbabwe.

If this London conference fails, then the only resort for getting independence in Zimbabwe is armed struggle. We don't believe in the direct responsibility being given to the British government. We don't believe also that Britain alone can supervise the elections there. We believe that if any other organization has to be involved in this election process it must either by the OAU or the United Nations.

But the reasons that although we support all peaceful attempts to resolve the problem in Rhodesian struggle, we think that the genuine independence can come only through armed struggle, is because the British, who are the responsible colonial countries which is responsible for independence, has not delivered that independence.

If this London constitutional conference attempts to

dilute the militant stand taken in Monrovia at the 16th summit of the OAU, then the question will have to be settled in the battlefield.

Tractors not tanks

Q: *You mentioned Sudan and the problem of the relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia. Has Ethiopia given any thought to regional kinds of development programs, projects such as the development of the Nile basin, an idea Nasser espoused, which could be a basis for cooperation, could alleviate some of the problems from the Sudan side?*

A: We do not have any concrete arrangement as far as development on a regional basis is concerned with the Sudan. But taking into account the cooperation, the arrangement Ethiopia has with Kenya, and the project we have already presented to the European Community for regional cooperation between Ethiopia and Djibouti, we are also for such regional cooperation with the Sudan.

If concrete proposals have not been yet advanced, we are going in this direction. As our chairman has mentioned on numerous occasions, we are ready also even to have regional cooperation arrangements with Somalia, with even Somalia.

When we say that our foreign policy is peaceful coexistence with neighboring countries we mean even in this question the economic development of neighboring countries on a regional basis and asking the cooperation and assistance of the various international organizations. Instead of attacking each other, instead of fighting each other, instead of spending their money for armaments, what we need really is tractors not tanks.

We could have done it as a normal thing in Africa, we could have cooperated for all our people. We could have really eradicated hunger by this time instead of using our meager resources for buying arms.

Q: *There were two pictures on the wall in the entrance which were very striking. One showed farming with an ox, which is unfortunately a situation forced on developing countries. The other showed several tractors plowing a big flat field. It looked like the Midwest in the United States. What I want to ask you about is drive on agriculture. You mentioned something earlier about being forced to take two different approaches with respect to agricultural technology, the short term being that of operating within the constraints placed on you, maintaining in part the traditional approach. How are you trying to organize this aspect of your agricultural production, and also what are Ethiopia's longer term industrialization goals?*

A: This (industry) is our long-term objective. Our primary objective is to really bring food to the people,

eradicate hunger. Hundreds of thousands of people are dying of hunger and disease. Particularly at the time we are talking now, people are dying. We don't know how long this process will take. The main objective in the economic area is on agriculture.

That's why we have approached a number of countries directly by the visit of the Ethiopian head of state, and through other contacts and delegations, and various statements. A number of countries we have approached have been very forthcoming. It is the socialist countries which have given us hundreds of these tractors which are now working. These are the tractors given by the assistance of the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, all these countries.

The main objective therefore is food for the people. This is our motto. When we eradicate feudalism, we create the necessary infrastructure for the industrialization of Ethiopia. We need cement. We need various dams, iron, and the mechanization of agriculture. The peasants are still using oxen, as they have been doing for thousands of years using this method of plowing. We slowly want to change this process.

We are getting assistance, we are making proposals for assistance to international organizations, for example, the EC, to help us in this process.

Q: *On the regional question, how do you view the implications of the Camp David agreement, in particular as we understand it the secret provision of the Camp David agreement in which Egypt is projected as a military force to be utilized by the Anglo-American axis within Africa itself, as occurred in Zaire?*

A: Ethiopia has made its position clear. In the first place we don't believe that separate agreements or treaties serve the interests of progress. Any agreement which does not take into account the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people cannot resolve the problem.

As for the Camp David agreement, the main purpose we believe is to destabilize progressive developments in the region, including Ethiopia, the Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen, and other progressive revolutionary governments and peoples. President Sadat has said that he has a mission. By this he means that he can intervene everywhere, wherever there are revolutions, wherever there are progressive movements, as in Ethiopia or wherever they are in Africa, in Angola, Namibia, Mozambique. Sadat wants to be gendarme of the area.

Ethiopia has condemned Camp David because it is working not only against the people of Palestine but working against the interests of the neighboring parties of this area. It is a pact against the Arab people, against the African people.