

# Interview with Ato Temesgen Tilahun, EPRDF Foreign Relations Sector

## Head

**Question:** How did EPRDF take the outcome of the election?

**Ato Temesgen:** Ethiopians are perceptive and proud people. They have given the mandate to administer the country for five years to EPRDF. Believing in the necessity of accepting the outcome of the election and engaging in development to serve the people, EPRDF has accepted the result to fulfill the responsibility the people have entrusted upon it.

Earlier indications have indeed forecasted that EPRDF would take up 50-75 percent seats due to the overall good performance of the party during the past five years and the effective election campaign it conducted. But it unexpectedly won 99 percent of the vote. This overwhelming victory as noted by the Chairman of EPRDF is a heavy burden, huge responsibility and immense trust. The party accepted the result with the determination to serve the people. That means it has gracefully accepted the result and is set to fulfill the responsibilities bestowed on it in the coming five years.

**Question:** Local and foreign teams have observed the election. How do you assess their roles and the reports they submitted?

**Ato Temesgen:** The foreign observer teams comprised of the European Union and African Union missions. Locally, the Coalition of Civic Associations, Human Rights Commission and the Ethiopian people were the observers. The entire Ethiopian people have observed the election through their representative observers which monitored all the polling centers. In this respect, the views expressed by the EU mission have indicated that the voting process was better organized. So I personally feel that the failure of this mission to underscore the

election as fair is strange. EPRDF has worked diligently to make the election free, peaceful, fair, democratic and credible in the eyes of our people. All members and supporters of the party were well equipped with the strategy designed to realize this goal. Not only that, the over five million members of EPRDF had received training on the electoral code of political parties so as to prevent problems during the election. This has helped a lot in holding the election peacefully, democratically, freely, fairly and successfully. In light of this the justifications of the EU mission are mere pretexts for not accepting the fairness of the election. The mission on the one hand has witnessed that the voting process was good and even congratulated the Ethiopian people for exercising their democratic rights. Thus trying to smear the election as rigged or unfair after issuing congratulatory statement on the other hand is unacceptable on my part. We have worked in cooperation with opposition political parties before the election. We conducted investigations in all places where there were alleged problems. Joint investigations were accordingly carried out with the AEUC in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, Oromia and Amhara regional states. Most of the complaints were, however, found to be baseless. Yet we have rectified even the few mistakes committed. The fewness of the mistakes did not satisfy us as we were trying to rectify problems promptly wherever they occurred and ensure the holding of a free, peaceful and democratic election. We have similarly conducted joint investigation with EVP and all the complaints were found to be unfounded. So did we work with another opposition party called EJDF. All these investigations indicated that there were not many problems with EPRDF members but the allegations were concocted by the opposition in order to discredit the election from its inception. With this background and the concrete facts we have at hand in which the joint national council of political parties discussed and gave direction to even laud the activities of EPRDF this time around, it would be impossible to share the assessment of the EU mission that speaks of unfairness. Besides the EU

mission has been observing the discussions at the joint national council. So it is not clear as to how it could reach such a conclusion.

Beyond that, voters' registration was properly conducted to enable the people exercise their democratic rights. In response to the request of the joint national council of political parties the deadline for voters' registration was extended by NEBE. The number of voters has subsequently exceeded that of Election 2005 by five million. This by itself is an indication of fairness. Besides, the deadline for the registration of candidates was extended by 15 days to enable opposition parties get all their candidates registered as they had repeatedly appealed to the joint council that their candidates had been withdrawing and EPRDF believes in solving problems. Therefore NEBE allowed third round of registration of candidates to replace candidates that have withdrawn. Accordingly Medrek was able to replace over 76 candidates and AEUO more than 40 candidates. All parties have actually replaced the candidates which withdrew. With all this work done I do not believe in the correctness of the EU mission which claims that the election was unfair. As I was personally involved and engaged in solving all these problems, and realizing the immense effort exerted, even if the raw facts it raised in cooperation with the NEBE were good its report which focused on insignificant issues is in my view not correct and appropriate.

The report of AU mission, however, notes that the election in Ethiopia was exemplary to Africa. This is the truth. The election held in our country this year shall indeed be sustained and be a model for Africa. In the initial report the mission has congratulated the people of Ethiopia and correctly assessed the process beginning from voting to counting. I believe they have made the right assessment.

The next report released by the Coalition of Ethiopian Civic Associations was similarly comprehensive and EPRDF accepts and agrees with it. The recent

report was that of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. It shows that the election was held peacefully, democratically and fairly. Certain technical issues which can be improved in the future by NEBE were however suggested. The suggestion forwarded by the AU mission, for instance, to use transparent plastic ballot boxes like the developed countries is useful. Similarly the suggestions made by the Human Rights Commission are all acceptable and can be implemented in the future.

In general the reports of both foreign and local observers indicate the significance of making the election peaceful and democratic. In light of this the elections goals of EPRDF were fully realized in this year's election. We are of course waiting for the second and final report of the EU mission. In a nut shell, however, the reports submitted by the observer teams infer that the election was free and fair.

**Question:** What do you deduce from the views of foreign forces which did not observe the election directly?

**Ato Temesgen:** The Ethiopian people are essentially the judges that determine the fairness of an Ethiopian election. I do not think it is appropriate for anyone outside to just intrude and comment on the election of this country. The fairness and free conduct of the election was verified and ascertained by the people. Not only by the public, but by various representatives of the people who have observed the election and proved that it was conducted without any problem. In brief the best judges of Ethiopia's election are the Ethiopian people. I cannot accept as correct the comments of Ethiopians residing abroad as they have no information on the objective reality in the country and are dependent on the destructive media. They are baseless and unacceptable. The deliberate smearing campaigns on our country and our democratic progress cannot represent the current state the country and the people are in.

Under no circumstances can forces which did not directly observe the election undermine, criticize and brand it. Thus they must refrain from such acts. I am advising them to refrain from such acts for they are colliding with the Ethiopian people. As the attempt to disparage the vote of Ethiopian electorates will lead them into conflict with the people it would be better for these forces, foreigners or persons of Ethiopian origin, to gracefully accept the verdict of the people and take their hands-off Ethiopia. The judges are the Ethiopian people, and we have accepted their verdict.

**Question:** How do you describe the significance of the massive demonstrations held in different towns of the country demanding respect for their votes?

**Ato Temesgen:** The public did not come out to participate massively in the concluding phase of the election alone, but has also been actively engaged in the process since voters' registration. As stated earlier the number of voters has this year jumped to 32 million from the previous 27 million in 2005.

This shows how our democratic system building is succeeding and taking roots among the public. The public had genuine desire for the conduct of the election in a peaceful, democratic and fair manner from the very beginning of the election. As a result, the election was properly conducted throughout the country without problem. The people have freely selected the party they want to lead and administer the country.

I do not understand what more could have been done to demonstrate the democratic growth in Ethiopia. The public in big towns and woreda towns as well as farmers' associations have come out in droves to demand respect for their votes. This in a way shows the consolidation of democracy. The people have warned all intervening forces that do not respect their votes to refrain from their acts as they outrightly reject them. The other indicator of the flourishing of our democracy is the peaceful conduct of the election and the quiet that followed the election across the country unlike in the past election. No security

problem has been witnessed. From this we can assess that the public has started countering erroneous views at their localities as they have exercised their rights democratically. This, think, is a tremendous achievement in democratic thinking. They have done whatever they wanted prior to voting and later demanded respect for their votes after casting their ballots. This contributes a lot to the development of democracy. Besides it shows that the people have become observant and knowledgeable. The activities of the youth in Election 2010 in particular show how deep our democracy has been taking roots. The role they played in making the election democratic in both towns and rural areas cannot be taken lightly. The activities undertaken by women and the youth, in particular, were very huge. Similarly, the support and activities of the private sector were immense. So the democratic growth has more than ever shown significant benefits and is moving beyond the past history.

**Question:** EPRDF has won the election with huge margins in almost all localities. This means that the people have entrusted huge responsibility on the organization. What plans has the party to fulfill the expectations?

**Ato Temesgen:** In his speech to the demonstrators who demanded respect to their votes in Addis Ababa the Chairman of EPRDF said the party had expected to get 50-75 percent of the vote. The additional vote is a burden, he added. He has described the conspicuous triumph an expression of great faith/trust in the party. Hence the plans which were prepared earlier would be revised to fulfill the huge expectations of the people, the chairman stated.

As one of the leaders of EPRDF I also think that we should revise our plans and fill the gaps in good governance and development in both rural and urban areas. We were also given assignments by the public during the election campaigns. We have already identified those problems in good governance in detail and are working on those. As the public has again expressed their wishes

to work hand in glove with our party by electing us with 99 percent vote, EPRDF will recognize this and work hand in hand with the people in development. In our agricultural works we will mobilize and work with all the people to boost production and productivity. We also have plans for towns. We will focus on these goals and try to address the thirst for development and the desires of the public in other areas as well. Preparations are therefore underway to mobilize EPRDF members so as to work on all these areas with the people and meet our responsibilities. Our party is therefore undertaking activities which will enable us to involve the people in development and democracy to fully meet our responsibilities.

**Question:** Do you have any other message?

**Ato Temesgen:** I would like to call on EPRDF members and supporters to repeat the active commitment they demonstrated during the election in the development activities we will be engaging soon by agitating and involving the public, and working in collaboration with them.

In addition, I urge the Ethiopian people who entrusted on us this huge responsibility to stand along our side in all the development activities and good governance works we undertake at all levels by advising us when we err.