

“How do you like that?”

Teweldeberhan Gebre

“Ethiopia to EU: Give us \$500 million to build two industrial parks that gives employment rights for 30,000 asylum seekers from Eritrea, South Sudan and Somalia. The rest of the 70,000 jobs will be reserved to Ethiopians which are also facing their own unemployment crisis. How do you like that?”

[TesfaNews](#)

Dear Editor:

I thank you very much for asking a timely question. I preferred to use your question as a title in this piece hoping that you will not disagree with me. Because you asked your readers: whether or not we like the [BBC News](#) “Refugee crisis: Plan to create 100,000 jobs in Ethiopia” posted on 21st September, 2016? I will not try to separately treat your question from the Eritrean government’s policy on migration. To be specific, I will treat it from the Eritrean government’s statement by Mr. Yemane Ghebreab and his delegation during the High Level Meeting on Large Movement of Migrants and Refugees held on the 19th of September 2016 in New York. Whether we like it or not, today and yesterday the aspects of our people’s predicaments are the result of mistaken economic policy.

To remind the readers, the BBC has broadcasted that “Britain, the European Union and the World Bank have announced a plan to create 100,000 jobs in Ethiopia to help tackle the migrant crisis.” In order to implement the plan, the same donors have pledged \$500m to build two industrial parks in Ethiopia. Leaving aside the backdoor politics, Ethiopia ‘approached’ the donors pledging to grant 30% of the employments created by the plan for refugees from South Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia hosted in its soil.

It is also important to mention that both South Sudan and Somalia are in crisis due to the ongoing civil wars in both countries. In that regard, we should not be surprised at all if Britain, the European Union and the World Bank choose to work with Ethiopia and help refugees from these two countries through providing education, skills, training and jobs. Of course, the donors main interest is curving migrations towards Europe. Guess what! Ethiopia has to pledge jobs for Eritreans and has to be compensated for that pledge. Ethiopia has come with a proposal and donors pledged hundreds of millions of USDs. If the editor is suggesting as another plot against Eritrea I would strongly disagree. If Eritrea fails to come with fundable projects or plans that directly create jobs for its youth in their homeland, why should I blame the donors and or Ethiopia?

In fact, I was disgusted by the statement of the presidential advisor, [Mr. Yemane Ghebreab](#), to the High Level Meeting on Large Movement of Migrants and Refugees held on the 19th of September 2016 in New York. Anyone can read the statement by our respected official. But, I want to highlight the three key messages has made to the High Level Meeting. Here are they:

1. *To agree on the need and importance of, and provide meaningful avenues for, legal, safe and regular migration. It really is incongruous that in an increasingly globalized world, where much is done to advance the movement of goods and finance, human mobility is stridently opposed and essentially blocked. This needs to change as much of the current crisis and suffering could be significantly reduced by means of safe and orderly migration.*
2. *To protect and promote the rights and dignity of all migrants and to provide them with opportunities for education, skills training and jobs, without which they cannot lead a life of dignity.*
3. *To address the main perennial drivers of migration, including forced migration, which are growing global inequality, poverty and lack of development, violation of fundamental freedoms, as well as wars and conflict; and to take cognizance of other significant drivers such as demographic and climate change.*

Mr. Yemane is telling the world that human mobility should be treated the same way the world treats movements of goods and finance (see #1). He is also advocating that host countries and governments should provide migrants with opportunities in "...education, skills training and jobs" because according to Mr. Yemane migrants "...cannot lead a life of dignity" without "education, skills, training and jobs" (see #2). Interestingly, as in his third point, he is suggesting that Eritrean youth should wait for decent jobs in their own country until the global inequalities are eradicated or otherwise our young people should leave the country to wherever the grass is greener. Isn't he is advocating for migration? From the statement made by Mr. Yemane I do not see any intent of curbing migration by the government. Mr. Yemane is actually advocating for improved pull factors of migrants. It is horrendous to say the least!

He did not come with a hard solution for his own country and its working people. Instead, he was essentially telling other countries and governments to help his own children whenever they enter their territories. So, a sensible Eritrean including the respected Editor should make a connection between Mr. Yemane's statement and the actionable and fundable plan proposed by Ethiopia for which donors have endorsed. In other words, Mr. Yemane advocates for education, skills, training and jobs for migrants or refugees by host countries and governments, and Ethiopia and its partners responded positively to the call by our respected presidential advisor. The Eritrean government should be thankful to Ethiopia and its donors for preparing to educate and create jobs for its citizens in Ethiopia.

Respected Editor, tell me where I lost the connections between our government's advocacy work for promoting migration and the affirmative responses of the host countries including Ethiopia? My and your government is essentially asking host countries like Ethiopia and EU's member states to provide migrants opportunities with education, skills, training and jobs so that they can lead a dignified life. A dignified life that my and your government does not want it to happen in our country.

However, Mr. Yemane did not completely fail to mention that the primary responsibility for a dignified life rests on Eritrea while he still advocates for a dignified life outside Eritrea. In his own words "*Eritrea believes that every nation has primary responsibility to provide a safe, secure and dignified life for its citizens in their country and to enable them to pursue opportunities in other countries [italics mine].*" Well, let me ignore the

last part of his statement "...to enable them to pursue opportunities in other countries" and focus on the first part "Eritrea believes that every nation has primary responsibility to provide a safe, secure and dignified life for its citizens in their country". For sure, we all believe it is Eritrea's primary responsibility to provide economic security to its citizens. The question is how and when? In history Eritrea used to host Ethiopian economic migrants, particularly migrants from the province of Tigray. Where do we stand now? Our youth should wait until Ethiopia builds its industrial parks and create manufacturing jobs for them.

So far Eritrea is able to produce creative and talented young people. But, the country is not exploiting the talents and creativity of its youthful population. In fact, Mr. Yemane has acknowledge openly in his recent interviews that Eritrea is losing its talented and creative youth due to migration and that he wants them not to leave their country. However, he did not tell his listeners how he and his government are prepared to keep them home and contribute to Eritrea's development. Therefore, it will not be too long before we witness our innovators and inventors together with their talent works are crossing the southern border to join the 'industrial park' in Ethiopia. If that is all we want let us 'wait and see', a rampant and endemic disease across our society and government.

With all due respect, I want to remind you and the readers to restrain from politicizing everything Ethiopia and its donors have to say and plan to do. After all, we do not have control over the policies and plans of Ethiopia and its donors. We do not even have an ounce of control over our own government. As a host of a respected website, I urge you to enlighten your fellow Eritreans on the real issues and challenges our country is facing today. We need to ask how Eritrea should break the current economic standoff by trying to influence our policy makers to change their wrong economic policy. We need to pressure the government to change its failed economic policy and ask the government to come with concrete schemes to help the people of Eritrea.

Ethiopia has come with a proposed plan to curve migration beyond its borders and get funded by its traditional donors. I do not care the motives that Ethiopia and its sponsors may or may not have. My and your government has no misgiving to advocate for migration and migrants wellbeing wherever they find themselves. This policy of the government leaves Europe with no option but to go to Ethiopia and create jobs for Eritreans as a means of curving migration into their soils. You may disagree with my judgements on both the Eritrean government's policy stated above and EU's action stated on the BBC News. I wish I could be wrong.

Can we pressure the government to change its erroneous policy? Are there other alternatives to change the situation back home? Of course, there are many alternatives. One immediate alternative is encouraging self-employment opportunities by our talented youth to invest in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). I offered my idea how it can be done in practice under "[Eritrea: What Is That 'No Forced Returns' of Migrants?](#)" posted on [meskerem.net](#). it is the responsibility of your and my government to provide economic opportunities for our youth in their own country, not in Ethiopia or anywhere else. On the contrary, my and your government is advocating for migration and dignified life for our youth outside their country. Let us be honest and loyal to our people and country. If we are not truthful for our people and country, we cannot be loyal for the government of Eritrea.

As in the statements of Mr. Yemane, Eritrea did not have concrete plans and proposals to address the challenges of migration but a mere advocacy for unrestricted global migration in the same way goods and finance are traded. We all know that even goods and finance are not free to move as we like it to be. The statement by Mr. Yemane seems to suggest, of course it does, trading people like any other commodities in the commodity market should be allowed. It is true that countries can enter into bilateral agreements on labour mobility.

Interestingly, free labour mobility does not exist within Eritrea. Labour is not free within and between industries in Eritrea. How is it possible for us to be able to trust a government that does not allow free labour movement within its own territory and yet loudly advocates for international free labour mobility? Isn't it strange? For any genuine follower of the state of affairs in Eritrea it is not a strange stuff to hear contradictory statements and speeches by our officials. All statements after statements by our respected officials are just like the statement made by Mr. Yemane. Sometimes, I fail to make distinctions between our officials and NGOs like director. I said this because our officials sound NGOs directors who advocate for the global 'good' whenever and wherever they are provided with such opportunities to speak.

To conclude, there is a clear connection between the advocacy works of Eritrea for the wellbeing of all nations' migrants and the promises by Ethiopia and its stakeholders. Ethiopia has appealed for financial assistance to create 100,000 jobs of which 30% will be granted for Eritrean, Somalis, and South Sudanese asylum seekers in its soil. Eritrea is calling for the international community to offer assistance for all migrants in education, skills, training, and jobs so that they can lead 'dignified life'.

Ethiopia and the international community promises Eritrea exactly to do that. In fact, this is the second time for both Eritrea and Ethiopia to agree in principle on issues since the Border War broke in 1998. The first agreement was the signing of the Algiers Peace Treaty in December 2000. Hence, the Eritrean government should be thankful for Ethiopia, Britain, the EU, and the World Bank for their agreement to the call by Mr. Yemane to offer education, skills, training and jobs not only for Eritrean refugees but also for the South Sudanese, and Somali refugees in Ethiopia.

I can only say good job Eritrea for the advocacy works for the wellbeing of migrants outside your territory and good job Ethiopia, Britain, EU and World Bank for considering Eritrea's call for 'dignified life' for all refugees in Ethiopia.

End...