



# HARARI ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & EQUALITY (H.A.J.E)

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November 20, 2019

A Press Release by Harari Alliance for Justice & Equality (HAJE)

## Respect Others If You Want To Be Respected

The political change in the recent past that has engulfed Ethiopia has brought to the surface unresolved conflicts among different groups of people. Political, religious and ethnic issues that were suppressed for hundreds of years are coming to the foreground, and sometimes discussion and resolution of these issues are not conducted in a manner that can bring peace, understanding and stability among the general population. Millions of people from different ethnic groups were displaced from their land by their own fellow countrymen and were forced to flee and live in fear and destitution. Innocent lives were lost for many number of reasons because there is no stable environment for all concerned citizens to discuss and resolve their differences in a civilized manner befitting the nation's heritage and history. Everyone shares the blame, but importantly, the state and the security apparatus of the nation were caught off guard to adequately challenge the crisis. Right now, some political groups, media personalities and religious leaders are not in the service of bringing peace and stability, but sometimes they are, indeed the cause of the problems.

One such recent incident that is inflaming the current political crisis in the country is the false propaganda campaign of a recently formed on-line media entity named Ethio-360. The entity was formed from of group disgruntled people who used to work for the Ethiopian Satellite TV (ESAT), at one time a popular opposition media which has lost its shine nowadays. And one of the individuals working for Ethio-360 media, Habtamu Ayalew, took it upon himself to disparage and undermine the history and struggles of other Ethiopian ethnic groups in defense of the broken feudal system of bygone days in hopes of bringing it back as an optional government system for the nation.

The unfolding of the political crisis in Ethiopia has pitted one ethnic group against another and resulted in a situation that made it very difficult to solve issues in an amicable and mutually beneficial ways for all. And self-anointed media personalities such as Habtamu Ayalew is in the thick of this ongoing problem inflaming the environment by supposedly advocating the hegemony of the historically dominant ethnic group and intentionally undermining the dreams and aspiration of the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian people. In his daily program, Habtamu has made it his job to disparage and debase the history of different ethnic groups in the country. Habtamu's choice of ethnic attack this time centered on the Harari people, an ethnic minority who are calling Ethiopia home for more than a millennia. In fact, Hararis have lived in their present day homeland before anyone settled in what is known as Ethiopia.

The Harari people lived independently through successive kingdoms for centuries utilizing Arabic to write in their own language. Since Harar was the main trading center of not only Ethiopia but the whole of eastern Africa, its kingdom was the most advanced throughout the region. Here is how Richard Burton, the English



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*Hararis working together towards a common goal!*



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explorer who was not fond of the Harari people, but the first European to enter the city described his experience.

"The ancient metropolis of a once mighty race, the only permanent settlement in Eastern Africa, the reported seat of Muslim learning - a walled city of stoned houses, possessing its independent chief, its peculiar population and its own coinage - the emporium of the coffee trade, the headquarters of slavery, the birthplace of the Kat plant and the great manufactory of the cotton cloth." First Footsteps in East Africa, Richard Burton, 1855

Several books have been written based on this short quotation of Burton since his visit to Harar. We wished that Habtamu read so many of the books written by distinguished scholars on Harar and its people before disparaging them willy nilly for no apparent reason. He directed his ire on two specific Harari heritage targets, namely the unique currency of the Harari people before the Harari kingdom fell to Menelik II and the ultimate sacrifice the Harari people paid with their lives during the loss of the Chellenqo Battle of 1887 . Suffice it to mention that the Hararis used both indigenous as well as Egyptian coins at different times during the rule of the Amirs (kings). The use of Harari coins for trade lasted centuries while the use of the Egyptian coins lasted only a decade until the end of their rule. It is really puzzling why Habtamu chose to undermine this aspect of Harari history because Ethiopia, as an independent nation was using the Maria Theresa coins (called thaler, gold and silver) for all forms of trade after the second World War during the reign of Haile Sellasie.

His second point of disparagement is the number of casualties during the battle of Chellenqo. Generations of Hararis believe that more than seven hundred newly weds lost their lives during the battle with Menelik. Hararis have memorialized this unique incident by including a red line in their commonly used garments named after the martyrs. Arguing against this history, Habtamu claims that the casualty numbers are highly exaggerated. He asked his audience how could so many Hararis who wed during the week fell during the battle unless this was a made up story. Again, to briefly address his question, these are not Hararis who have wed within a week; it is so common in Harari culture to congratulate new weds throughout the year and beyond. Therefore, the number of martyrs refer to the newly wed who started the journey of a married life within the year and beyond. It behooves the mind why Habtamu chose to undermine the history of Hararis they hold dear and to their heart without any provocations. There is a saying that is attributed to Maurice Switzer who wrote " Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt". Switzer wrote that in 1907 and the quote still applies to individuals like Habtamu.

Hararis are the first ethnic group in East Africa who established a settled city life for more than a millennia. They had established a system of governance and self-rule way before the Europeans came to colonize Africa. Hararis had a well-developed written language, advanced farming methods, the first center of learning, a city-state that was a center of trade that extended as far as the port of Zeila in the south and Massawa to the north. Harar is believed by many to be the fourth holiest site of Islam. In 2006, it was recognized by UNESCO as a world heritage site, one of only nine in Ethiopia. The website Everything/Everywhere described Harar in a deservedly flattering term writing , " But above all, this town is culturally significant in Ethiopia as it showcases the fusion of Islamic and African traditions in a single town – both in terms of urban development, layout, and overall character of this town."



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Many books and articles have been written about Harar by distinguished scholars and we strongly advise people like Habtamu should take note and be students before they speak and make a fool of themselves. Scholars and teachers such as Shehab Deen, (Futuh al Habash) 1894, Wolf Leslau (Etymological Dictionary of Harari - 1963) R.S. Whiteway (The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543 - 2017), Richard Alan Caulk & Berhanu Zewde (Between the Jaws of Hyenas; The Diplomatic History of Ethiopia 1876-1896 - 2017), Ahmedin Jebel (The Three Rulers (Atses) - Amharic - 2016), Ralph Sydney (Social Organization and Social Control in the Walled City of Harar 1974), Afendi Muteqi, (Harar Gey: Ethnographic Tales of the Mystic City 2017) are a good start for anyone interested in the rich history of Hararis and their land.

And, more importantly, HAJE strongly advises Ethio-360 or for that matter any media outlets to refrain from undermining and insulting Hararis and other Ethiopian ethnic groups and stop their hateful propaganda since this is totally counter-productive and harmful for a future of our nation. The history of Harar and its people belong to all Ethiopians and it should be a mark of pride for all of us if we start by respecting other cultures as we want to be respected by others



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