

Eulogy for Dr. Beyene Kidane

By: Ismail Ali Ahmad

Eritrea had lost again one of its brightest sons. At the age of 68, at 9:20 p.m. on Friday 5 April 2013, Dr. Beyene Kidane had peacefully passed away at his home in Cologne, Germany, after fighting an illness with high spirit and great will to live on but nevertheless rendered him bedridden for some months. Dr. Beyene was one of the selfless and gallant patriots Eritrea possessed, who never hesitated to sacrifice their lives and brilliant professional careers for the sake of their people's cause.

Born on 27 September 1945 in Adi-Keih, Eritrea, Dr. Beyene grew up in a humble and respected family environment with several siblings. His much liked and soft-spoken father made a living as a veterinarian in the veterinary service of the province of Akkele-Guzai – a status it had at the time in accordance with the administrative divisions the Italian colonial rulers introduced and the British upheld after the defeat and departure of the former in 1942.

As a child, Dr. Beyene enrolled in the elementary school of Adi-Keih, which opened the initial years of the British Military Administration. Thus, he belonged to one of the first generations of students that attended that primary school.

He began his school years as high achiever. The grades he scored and the top ranks he ended up with in the first successive school years had quickly mirrored his stature as a sharp, talented and diligent child among the residents of the town. Parents of his peers saw him as a model pupil they wished, and advised, their sons and daughters to emulate.

Through all levels of his education, up to and including his candidacy for his doctorate in Veterinary Medicine (DVM) program at the University of Pennsylvania, USA, Dr. Beyene finished at the top of his class. He earned his Ph.D. with great distinction, and the grade point average he had obtained remained for many years a record score at his university. It is worth mentioning in passing, moreover, that his choice of veterinary medicine as profession was greatly influenced by his love of, and attachment to, his late father who preceded him as veterinarian.

Upon his return back to Ethiopia from the USA with Ph.D. in 1971, he began his professional career as chief manager of the veterinary service of the province of Hararge, Ethiopia. Later on, he shifted to Eritrea and continued his job in the same capacity and with the same title. His wish to be transferred to Eritrea had to do with his commitment to the struggle, and need to do more for his people by being closer to home and the Eritrean Liberation Front in the country side.

Dr. Beyene was born when WW II had just come to a close. His childhood years and adolescence passed by as the question of post-colonial future of his country was debated, and became a bone of contention on the national and the international stage of post WW II politics. His own town, Adi-Keih, as Keren and several others in the country became hotbed of patriotic activism in which antagonistic political stakeholders pitted against one another, and among which, domestically, the major ones were pro-Ethiopia unionists and nationalists who demanded independence. This led him to be involved from an early age, as many youth of his generation did, on the side of the latter. From that time up to the day when he succumbed to death,

he never showed any fatigue to engage in his pursuit of freedom, liberation and happiness of his people.

Thus, with the launching and expansion of the organized political campaign under the banner of the Eritrean Liberation Movement, he took part in one of the many underground seven-member cells that were active in his home town. Later on, when the political agitation gained momentum and transformed to an armed struggle phase, Dr. Beyene joined the Eritrean Liberation Front as an urban clandestine activist both as a student and later as a professional. When the Ethiopian Military Council (Derg) that toppled the imperial order in Ethiopia began to uncover ELF cells, Dr. Beyene left town for the liberated zone and enlisted as full time fighter in the ranks of the organization.

Having done the required military training, he set up the veterinary service department of the ELF. He trained and oriented personnel who were deployed as mobile teams to enlighten and help peasants in the liberated zones. This service rapidly made an impact on the inhabitants, and became one of the successful service programs that the ELF introduced and which citizens who benefited from them still nostalgically recall when they reflect on the harsh conditions they are suffering under the current regime.

On the political side, Dr. Beyene also assumed various leadership functions in his organization at different periods. In 1989 he was elected to the highest decision-making body of the then ELF-RC, and thereafter, he headed several executive departments, including in the capacity of chairmanship of his organization. The last responsibility he held before he fell sick was leadership of the economic and social services office of the Eritrean National Salvation Front, which he had also led before as its chairman. When due to his illness he was not able to attend the congress of his organization in November of last year, his colleagues could not miss his competence and knowledge and had to consult with him to be nominated as candidate for the leadership. But he selflessly declined the offer thinking that he was sick and may not be able to shoulder responsibility as he used to do when he enjoyed full health.

Thus, the painful loss of Dr. Beyene is deeply felt beyond his immediate family members and close friends. He will be missed for his knowledge, diligence, humility and commitment, and many of us who had closely worked with him for so many years will be missing his gift for clear thinking and imagination in both good and bad times.

Beloved Dr. Beyene, may your soul rest in peace, and your beloved family and friends be blessed with the power to deal with the deep grief.

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