

## The Role of Ethiopian Parliament in the Inclusive National Dialogue Process

Solomon Tefera

Ambo University, Ambo, Ethiopia. Email: [solomont572@gmail.com](mailto:solomont572@gmail.com), Phone Number: 0919306089

### Abstract

*Ethiopian political history is associated with political polarizations and contention linked to flaws in the nation-building and state-building processes. To end this, the Ethiopian parliament adopted a law establishing a National Dialogue Commission. As such, the successes of the intended Ethiopian National Dialogue by large depends on inclusive cooperation of different political and democratic institutions. Indeed, parliament is one of the pivotal institutions to achieve the ultimate goal of National dialogue. This paper analyses the role of the Ethiopian parliament in on going inclusive national dialogue. The data were collected from the secondary sources such as articles, books, media (Television) and websites. Then the collected data were qualitatively analyzed to evaluate the role of the Ethiopian parliament to achieve the Inclusive national dialogue. After analyzing, the finding of the study illustrated that Ethiopian parliament has crucial roles in ensuring the National Dialogue such as : enacting legislation that would govern the National Dialogue during preparation, process and implementation phases, over sighting the intervention of the executive and ruling party, providing financial support to Inclusive National Dialogue Commission (NDC), helping citizens to develop sense of ownership to ensure successful National Dialogue, and creating public awareness that National Dialogue is beyond the life of government and political parties. Therefore, Ethiopian parliament should work towards ensuring the Inclusive National Dialogue through discharging its full responsibilities bestowed by the FDRE constitution.*

**Keywords:** Dialogue, Institution, National, Parliament

### 1.Introduction

In a democratic system, institutions can play a key role in resolving political crisis and bring sustainable peace. The parliament represents different people that have different interest and questions. Hence the parliament is one of the democratic institutions that help as bridge to bring together the people that have different interest and questions. The 1995 FDRE constitution is also granted this right to the Ethiopian parliament. However, in some countries, these institutions are strongly fused. For instance, in most African countries including Ethiopia, there are no independent democratic institutions as there is a tendency of interference of one institution in the affairs of the other. In Ethiopia, for more than four decades democratic institutions had been dominated by the king (Haile Selassie 1931-1974), and under the military government as well as under the rule of EPRDF it was dominated through executive organ. Underneath this condition it is difficult for parliament function their constitutional responsibility.

The imperial regime adopted the first written constitution in the 1931, later revised in 1955, with Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), and during the imperial regime, the emperor was the sole remaining sovereign body (Fiseha, 2015). While the bulk of the provisions of both constitutions reiterated about an uncontested power of the Emperor, both constitutions provided for a bicameral House: The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (Fiseha, 2015). These two houses were important instruments for curbing the power of the king. But what happened, in reality was that the role of the parliament was reduced to providing an advisory role to the king. According to Article 31 of the 1931 constitution, members of the Senate were appointed by the emperor from among the nobility and the local chiefs. As for the chamber of Deputies, they were chosen by the nobility and the local chiefs. The presence of the nobility while providing some semblance of legitimacy at the center

became part of a toothless legislative body and in a way remained the instrument of the centralizing and modernizing process launched by the regime.

The Revised Constitution of 1955 continued to reinforce further the powers of the Emperor. The sketchy provisions regarding the powers and prerogatives of the Emperor were extensively elaborated in the new Constitution. In theory, the Constitution was the supreme law of the land governing even the Emperor. It contemplated even an independent ministerial government responsible to the monarch and parliament, an elected chamber, and an independent judiciary but these liberal provisions were overshadowed by executive prerogatives reserved to the Emperor who exercised them expansively (Fiseha, 2015). Despite the apparent inclusion of the notion of separation of powers, little change was introduced regarding the position of the Emperor. He was both the head of state and of the government and he continued to oversee the judiciary through his Zufan Chilot (Crown Court). A basic change made in development of the revised constitution compared to its predecessor was the introduction of the representative principle for the chamber of Deputies whose members were elected based on universal adult suffrage. But parliament was granted no control over the ministers, who remained responsible to the Emperor. Under Imperial regime the parliament had no any power to decide on political and economic issues, all power let down in the hand of king (Teshome, 2009).

The military government took political power in 1974 by over through Imperial Haile Selassie. Then, after 17 years the Military governments adopted a new constitution and declare a new parliament called National Shengo or General Assembly. The 1987 constitution give a lot of power to the national Shengo. The powers of National Shengo were amending the constitution; determining foreign, defense, and security policy; establishing the boundaries, status, and accountability of administrative regions; and approving economic plans. The National Shengo was also responsible for establishment of the Council of State; the Council of Ministers, ministries, state committees, commissions, and state authorities; the Supreme Court; the Office of the Prosecutor General; the National Workers' Control Committee; and the Office of the Auditor-General. Besides, the National Shengo elected the president and officials of the Council of State and approved the appointment of other high-ranking authorities. However, in practice, these powers are handed to the hand of the president (Teshome, 2009).

Following the downfall of the military government in 1991, the Ethiopian political landscape changed from unitary to the federal system with the establishment of a parliamentary democracy system (Merera, 2003). The newly inaugurated parliamentary democracy provided for the establishment of various democratic institutions including the parliament, though their performances have been proved ineffective and weak (Lyons, 2010). Like other democratic constitutions, the 1995 constitution also included the principle of the separation of power (Amhed, 2011). Under this principle, each government organ has its legal authority that is enshrined in the constitution. In Ethiopian context, the separation of power explicitly put in the FDRE constitution. From the three consecutive regime the Imperial regime and Military regime did not give real power to the parliament just they were served as the guard of imperial interest and Military regime. But after the 1995 the FDRE constitution gave highest political power to the parliament. Accordingly, the FDRE constitution article 50(3) stated as:

*The House of Peoples' Representatives is the highest authority of the Federal Government. The House is responsible to the People. The State Council is the highest organ of State authority. It is responsible to the People of the State (FDRE constitution Art.50(3)).*

The Ethiopian parliament adopted a law for establishment of the national Dialogue commission to end the Ethiopian political crisis and polarization. In order to resolve political problems and ending the ongoing conflict in the country, the national dialogue commission must involve broad range of the stakeholder in the three phases, i.e., preparation, process and

implementation. However, these three faces need a serious oversight of the House of Peoples 'Representative. Hence, this paper analyzes the role of Ethiopian parliament in the inclusive national dialogue. This research is purely qualitative as it employed qualitative data. The data concerning the role of Ethiopian Parliament in the Inclusive national dialogue were collected from the secondary sources such as articles, books, newspapers, websites and social media. Then the collected data were analyzed in terms of internationally accepted national dialogue principles to evaluate the process of Ethiopian national dialogue and the role of parliament.

## **2. Ethiopian Parliament and Legal Considerations.**

According to the FDRE constitution that was adopted in 1995, The Ethiopian parliament, officially known as the Federal Parliamentary Assembly (FDRE constitution, 1995). It is responsible for making laws, overseeing the executive branch, and representing the interests of the Ethiopian people (Solomon, 2021). Based on this, Legal considerations play a crucial role in the functioning of the Ethiopian parliament. However, the Ethiopian parliament has been weak from the past to present (Solomon, 2021).

### **2.1. Ethiopian Parliament and Imperial Constitutions**

The imperial regime adopted the first written constitution in the 1931, later revised in 1955, with Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), and during the imperial regime, the emperor was the sole remaining sovereign body (Fiseha, 2015). While the bulk of the provisions of both constitutions reiterated about an uncontested power of the Emperor, both constitutions provided for a bicameral House: the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (Fiseha, 2015). These two houses were important instruments for curbing the power of the king. But what happened, in reality was that the role of the parliament was reduced to providing an advisory role to the king. According to Article 31 of the 1931 constitution, members of the Senate were appointed by the emperor from among the nobility and the local chiefs. As for the chamber of Deputies, they were chosen by the nobility and the local chiefs. The presence of the nobility while providing some semblance of legitimacy at the center became part of a toothless legislative body and in a way remained the instrument of the centralizing and modernizing process launched by the regime.

The Revised Constitution of 1955 continued to reinforce further the powers of the Emperor. The sketchy provisions regarding the powers and prerogatives of the Emperor were extensively elaborated in the new Constitution. In theory, the Constitution was the supreme law of the land governing even the Emperor. It contemplated even an independent ministerial government responsible to the monarch and parliament, an elected chamber, and an independent judiciary but these liberal provisions were overshadowed by executive prerogatives reserved to the Emperor who exercised them expansively (Fiseha, 2015). Despite the apparent inclusion of the notion of separation of powers, little change was introduced regarding the position of the Emperor. He was both the head of state and of the government and he continued to oversee the judiciary through his Zulfan Chilot (Crown Court). A basic change made in development in the revised constitution compared to its predecessor was the introduction of the representative principle for the chamber of Deputies whose members were elected based on universal adult suffrage. But parliament was granted no control over the ministers, who remained responsible to the Emperor. Under Imperial regime the parliament had no any power to decide on political and economic issues, all power letdown in the hand of king (Teshome, 2009).

### **2.3. Ethiopian Parliament and 1987 constitution**

The military government took political power in 1974 by over through Imperial Haile Selassie. Then, after 13 years the Military governments adopted a new constitution and declare a new parliament

called National Shengo or General Assembly (Solomon, 2021). The 1987 constitution give a lot of power to the national Shengo. The powers of National Shengo were amending the constitution; determining foreign, defense, and security policy; establishing the boundaries, status, and accountability of administrative regions; and approving economic plans (Constitution, 1987). Teshome, 2009).

#### **2.4. Ethiopian Parliament and 1995 Constitution**

Following the downfall of the military government in 1991, the Ethiopian political landscape changed from unitary to the federal system with the establishment of a parliamentary democracy system (Merera, 2003). The newly inaugurated parliamentary democracy provided for the establishment of various democratic institutions including the parliament, though their performances have been proved ineffective and weak (Lyons, 2010). Like other democratic constitutions, the 1995 constitution also included the principle of the separation of power (Amhed, 2011). Under this principle, each government organ has its legal authority that is enshrined in the constitution. In Ethiopian context, the separation of power explicitly put in the FDRE constitution But as has been observed for some quiet time, these organ are said to have failed practically deliver on their constitutionally guaranteed powers according to FDRE Constitution article 55(16): It shall, on its initiative, request a joint session of the House of the Federation and the House of Peoples' Representatives to take appropriate measures when State authorities are unable to arrest violations of human rights within their Jurisdiction(Solomon, 2021) . The members of the Executive organs include the prime minister appointed by the parliament, and if they fail to undertake their job effectively as per the constitution, then the parliament can also remove them from their post. However, the Ethiopian parliament has never been lived up to its constitutional responsibilities under the EPRDF (Ahmed, 2011).

#### **3. Ethiopian Inclusive National Dialogue**

Ethiopian political history is associated with political polarizations and contention linked to flaws in the nation-building and state-building processes. To end this, the Ethiopian parliament adopted a law establishing a National Dialogue commission. The proclamation to establish the Ethiopian National Dialogue commission under the preamble stated as” *there are difference of opinions and disagreements among various political and opinion leaders and segments of society in Ethiopia on the most fundamental national issues and it is a necessity to resolve the differences and disagreements through national dialogue that engenders national consensus (Proclamation No.1265/2021)*. Currently, National dialogues are common tools to reform political, social, and economic structures where parties or group are underrepresented or marginalized (Harlander, 2016). Specifically, for the countries have entered into blood civil war because they failed to solve their problems through dialogues. For instance, Ethiopia have entered into civil war before two years ago. To end this war, the Ethiopian Prime minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) was announced to end the Ethiopian Political crisis through national Dialogue.

#### **4. The Role of Ethiopian Parliament in the National Dialogue**

*The House of Peoples' Representatives is the highest authority of the Federal Government. The House is responsible to the People. The State Council is the highest organ of State authority. It is responsible to the People of the State (FDRE Constitution Art. 50(3).*

According to the FDRE constitution article 50(3) the House of People Representative has legal different responsibilities to manage the Ethiopian political crisis that linked with the Nation and state-building. The parliament has the legal responsibilities from facilitate space for national dialogue up to oversight each stage of national dialogue (Preparation, process and Implementation) (Universal

right group, 2018). Currently, in Ethiopia due to political crisis different human right violation ensued. According to IFSS (2020) in human right violation in huge political crisis solved through national dialogue, especially the country their problems linked with nation-building and state-building as well as ethnic tension (Dehinasew, 2022). The ultimate goal of national dialogue is to warrant the sustainable peace as the whole of the country and achieve the human right violation as well as grip the effect of the political crisis in the country.

The success of national dialogue is judged by inclusivity, credible, transparency, neutrality and agreed on the mechanism of implementation (IFSS, 2022, Haider, 2019). By understanding this principle, the Ethiopian parliament approved the proclamation to establish the Ethiopian National Dialogue commission. This proclamation states in the article three the Ethiopian National Dialogue guided by the principle of inclusivity, transparency, credibility, rationality and impartiality (Proclamation No.1265/2021). All most all countries, they attempt to handle their disagreement on the Nation-building, state building, history and legal issues they incorporate the above principle in the national dialogue proclamation. For instance, the Sudan National Dialogue dominated by the ruling party and executive on the contrary of proclamation (Kraezchmer, 2015).

Therefore, Ethiopia should have lesson from Sudan and other failed countries. To achieve the ultimate goal of national dialogue in Ethiopia every process of the national dialogue needs the monitor of the Ethiopian parliament (Rahel, 2022). The key role of Ethiopian parliament, helping citizens to develop sense of ownership to ensure successful National Dialogue, and creating public awareness that National Dialogue is beyond the life of government. According to USIOP, (2015) national dialogue cannot be successful if it does not facilitate and give opportunity for the public to be informed and participate (USIOP, 2015). This a legal responsibility of the Ethiopian Parliament. In most countries the national dialogue is failed because of the intervention of executive and ruling party (IFSS, 2020) so the parliament should have oversight and take serious measure if there is intervention. According to the FDRE constitution the Ethiopian parliament has legal ground to manage and take measure on the executive organ and ruling party. For instance, the FDRE constitution article 55(18) states that: *It shall, at the request of one-third of its members, discuss any matter pertaining to the powers of the executive. It has, in such cases, the power to take decisions or measures it deems necessary (FDRE Constitution Art.55(18).*

To conduct national dialogue the that can be fruitful for it is purpose the parliament should be provide financial and technical support for the Commission (Haider, 2017). Another key issue, the Ethiopian parliament should be providing legal framework how the out come of the national dialogue is implemented. Especially, this phase is needing a serious attention because the success of national dialogue has not been undergone yet, one cannot definitely conclude about the mechanism of outcome implementation, except stating that the commission facilitate to implement the recommendation, the draft Ethiopian National Dialogue commission establishing proclamation does not state any mechanism that show the recommendation are implemented on the ground. The scholar named Dehinasew (2022) ensured this argument.

## **5. Conclusion**

Ethiopia has been starting national dialogue preparation since 2021 but, it does not mean that all countries which conduct national dialogue can succeed, some countries have solved their political problems through national dialogue but others did not. According to Dehinasew (2022) argues that the success or failure of the national dialogue is determined by the three stages such as preparation, process and implementation. Some countries which properly implemented three phases become succeed and others failed. For instance, South Africa, Rwanda, Canada and Tunisia has undergone national dialogue and solved its political crisis and saved the country from collapse. Sudan, Afghanistan and others, on the contrary had held national dialogue but they failed because the ruling



- Lyon, T. P., & Yin, H. (2010). Why do states adopt renewable portfolio standards? An empirical investigation. *The Energy Journal*, 31(3).
- Berghof Foundation. (2017). *National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners*. Burlin: Berghof Foundation Operations GmbH press.
- Berghof Foundation, 2022. Working towards an Ethiopian national dialogue. (Accessed on March 10, 2022). (<https://berghof-foundation.org/impact/working-towards-an-ethiopian-national-dialogue>).
- Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment [Draft] Proclamation. (2021).** (Accessed on March 9, 2022). (<https://chilot.me/2021/12/20/ethiopian-national-dialogue-commission-establishment-draft-proclamation/>)
- Haider, H. (2019). National Dialogues: Lessons Learned and Success Factors, Helpdesk report. (Accessed on March 15, 2022). (<https://gsdrc.org/publications/national-dialogues-lessons-learned-and-success-factors/>).
- Harlander, J. (2016). Supporting a national dialogue: Dilemmas & options for third parties. Mediation practice series. Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
- IFSS (Institute for Security studies). (2020). Ethiopia can learn from its neighbours about national dialogue. (Accessed on March 15, 2022). (<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ethiopia-can-learn-from-its-neighbours-about-national-dialogue>).
- Inclusive Peace.(nd). National Dialogues. (Accessed on March 20, 2022). (<https://www.inclusivepeace.org/theme-posts/national-dialogues/>)
- Kraetzschmar, H. ( 2015, October 9). How the Tunisian national dialogue saved a country from collapse. Reuters, p.1. (Accessed on March 15, 2022 (<https://theconversation.com/how-the-tunisian-national-dialogue-saved-a-country-from-collapse-48921>))