



## **Mr. Obang Metho speech at the 124th Anniversary of Ethiopia's Victory at the Battle of Adwa at the Debre Berhan University.**

What Kind of Victory is Needed Today? Is Victory for All Possible in Ethiopia Today?  
What would it look like today?

February 29, 2020



Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today at this 124th anniversary of *one of the most shaping events in our shared history as Ethiopians, the victory at Adwa in 1896, where Ethiopians worked together to defend our sovereignty from the invasion of foreign forces who were seeking to subjugate our people.* The deciding battle against the colonization of this country was fought at Adwa. It is an honor to be with you to reflect on our history and what we might learn from it today.

I want to especially thank the president of Debre Berhan University and Dean of College of Social Science and Humanities, Ms. Tsedale Gebretsadik for organized this event meant to commemorate the significance of this day. Those of us present here are not the only ones who will be celebrating. *Many of our fellow Ethiopians and friends throughout the country and world will also remember this day, honoring the courage and sacrifices made by those who came before us to fight this battle.*

It is great to be back at Debre Berhan University for the second time; the first being when I had the privilege of addressing many of your students last year. Since then, our journey as people of this country, has had highs and lows. ***We still have many challenges ahead as we recognize the tensions within our country that continue to birth ethnic violence and conflict in some places. We also are looking to an election in August of 2020. What will make a difference in the outcome? What led to that victory in 1896 that could help us better navigate the future?***

***Every generation has choices to be made. What lessons can be learned from the choices made by our ancestors, both at Adwa and beyond, which could bring greater clarity to us today? What choices will be most important for our shared future?***

First, I will highlight some of the many components leading to the victory at Adwa. I will not be speaking as a historian, I will leave that to others; however, ***I will speak as a simple citizen who greatly loves the people of this country and the land God has given to us. I am committed to contribute to the betterment of the people of our Ethiopian society in any way I can. I trust that many of you may have a similar calling to serve the interests of others in some capacity.***

It is good to be in the land that gave birth to a hero, Emperor Menilek II, who played a major role in the preparation of the strategy that led to the victory of Adwa. This is his birthplace. ***This land was a significant factor in the Adwa victory for without the knowledge of the area as well as other components, the outcome would have been different. The citizens of that time were called to stand up to defend and protect the country. Likewise, we also are now being called in this generation to defend and protect this country so that we can pass it on to the next generation, like has been done for generations.***

***My talk today will highlight the Adwa of yesterday, the Adwa of today and the Adwa of tomorrow. I will speak as someone who is guided by faith, conscience, principles and values and as someone who strongly believes in valuing the humanity of each and every one of us, especially those who are citizens of this country.***

God has created human beings with great worth, dignity and purpose, which means they should never be “dehumanized.” That means not abused, exploited or devalued. It means not violating another person’s basic human rights; however, because being human also means being free to make choices; we all have failed at certain points. It makes it all the more important for others to rigorously, and even sacrificially, defend the worth and rights of their fellow human beings when others attempt to devalue or exploit them.

### **ADWA OF YESTERDAY**

This struggle for liberty for the people of Ethiopia is what undergirded the battle for Adwa over a century ago. ***It was a reaction to the invasion of foreign forces, who so devalued the lives and liberty of the Ethiopian people of that time that they used threats, deceit and force in their attempt to subjugate and dominate them to serve their own interests. The response of these Ethiopians was, “No, we will not allow it!”***

***When negotiations did not work, Ethiopians used the meager resources they possessed to resist, taking up arms to defend and protect the people and their dignity, their national interest and territorial integrity. They may not have had the sophisticated weapons like those of their adversaries; however, they did have the strongest weapon within them: their convictions that what was being done against them was wrong and a belief in their dignity. They said, “We are worthy of freedom and will not settle for less.” They gave all they could to the effort. Menelik even warned them, saying, “Anyone who doesn’t defend our country will be punish.”***

Below is the Emperor Menilek’s II declaration of the Adwa battle:

***“Up until now, through the grace of God, who permitted me to live by destroying my enemies and expanding the territorial boundaries of our country. It is also through the grace of God that I am ruling. Therefore, I have***

*no fear of death. More importantly, God has never let me down and I am confident that he will let me be victorious again.”*

*“At this time, another enemy has entered our territory by crossing our God given sea. His objective is to destroy the country and to change the religion. As a result of a major cattle disease that devastated a large number of our livestock and brought great sufferings to our farmers and pastoralists in the last few years, I remained quiet and patient to numerous hostile provocations. And yet the enemy continued to dig dipper in the ground like a hog.”*

*“Now God willing or with God’s help, I will not surrender my country. My fellow country folks, I do not believe that I disappointed you in the past. You have not also disappointed me. If you are strong, then help me with your strength to fight the enemy. If you are not strong, I seek your moral support for the sake of your children, wife and religion. If, on the other hand, you seek lame excuse not to join the national campaign against our enemy, I will be upset and I will not have mercy on you, I will punish you. My campaign begins in October, and I expect volunteers from Shoa to gather in Woreilu by mid October.”*

According to historian Ayele Nekerie, Menelik’s war declaration was widely heeded and welcomed throughout Ethiopia, a clear affirmation of his popularity. Menelik’s declaration is an important literary document in the context of preparation, the will to fight and become victorious at the Battle of Adwa. Menelik appealed to love of family, religion and country. He reminded Ethiopians that the intention of the enemy is to take away the core values and traditions cherished by the people.

It has been written that Menelik won the loyalty of all the bickering factions in Ethiopia, who in the face of a common enemy, put aside their differences and contributed 100,000 strong Ethiopian troops from all over the country. Unity of the Ethiopian people was crucial in the face of a superior force on paper.

The Chiefs or Ras in Amharic put aside personal animosities and fiefdoms to march in unison to Adwa. Amongst them were Ras Makonnen, Ras Tekle Haymonot, Ras Mengesha Yohannes, Ras Sibhat of Tigray, Ras Mikael of Wollo, Ras Wole of Yeju Oromo, and Ras Gebeyehu, who died fighting at Adwa.

It has also been said Menilek II, enjoyed the unqualified support of his wife, the Empress Taytu Betul, who personally went to the battlefield in full combat gear as a cavalry commander. She turned out to be a formidable leader, and outperformed some of the male commanders. In a declaration to the Italian envoy Antonelli, prior to marching to war, she drew a line in the sand: *“We have also made it known to the powers that the said article, as it is written in our language, has another meaning. Like you, we also ought to respect our dignity. You wish Ethiopia to be represented before the other powers as your protectorate, but this shall never be.”*

***The people of Ethiopia of that time resisted the invading forces. Menilek leadership and the Ethiopian troops stop Italy’s attempt to build an empire in Africa. The victory had further significance for being the first crushing defeat of a European power by African forces during the colonial era. The Ethiopians did not want to be colonized. They did not want to be exploited and abused in their own country. What brought that victory, in addition to conscience, was a collective unity. It became a collective victory of dignity, self respect, love of country and the ideas at its foundation. This was not only an Ethiopian victory or an African victory or a victory for black people; but instead, it was a victory of humanity against evil. The military leaders and soldiers came from all over the country and stood together as one body, to defend the one and only body they had, which was the country of Ethiopia, their home from ancient times.***

After the war was won and the remaining members of the opposing forces captured, tens of thousands bodies of the fallen soldiers, from both sides of the battle and more than three thousands Italian soldiers laid lifeless on the ground. At this time, the Ethiopian survivors tried to celebrate the victory by starting to dance a warriors and victory dance; however, the Commanders of the Ethiopian army stopped them, saying no to any celebration. The Commanders told their soldiers, *“We all must respect the dead; not only our own, but also we*

*must respect the dead among our enemies; because, they too, are human.” They asserted, “Our Ethiopian culture demands that we respect humans not only when they are alive, but also when they are dead. If there is to be a celebration with dancing, let that come later, after all have been laid to rest.”*

*This respect was extended even to the captured soldiers who were to be treated with dignity. This was who we were back then. This is why we are celebrating today and is why Adwa still has significance, not only for Ethiopians or Africans, but for the inherent worth and dignity of all human kind.*

### **ADWA OF TODAY**

It has been 124 years since Adwa. Since then, *what other significant victories have we Ethiopian had that transcend us the way Adwa has done? What other collective achievements have moved our society toward a similar highpoint of national character? How about in the areas of advancing education, technology, healthcare, economic prosperity, development, agriculture, infrastructure, the environment, stronger institutions, or a more inclusive Constitution? The answer is none. Instead, we have engaged in vicious cycle’s politics of ethnicity that is hurting or destroying each other; and in the process, we have deepened the divide between competing interest ethnic groups instead of building the social cohesion necessary to bring advancement that will more broadly benefit our people. Instead of strengthening our country, we have used short-sighted, victim-based or ego-based, tribal politics that have torn us apart.*



*Ethiopia was once respected and viewed as a leader in the world, admired by other Africans leading to the choice for the colors of our flag of Green, Yellow and Red, the symbol of freedom and pride to be adopted by more than fourteen African countries. Our pure Ethiopian flag was looked up to with respect as the only nation of black people that had their own written script and numbering system. Ethiopia as a country, was known for being one of the first Christian nations in Africa and in the world. It has also been known for religious freedom, accepting Muslims to come to Ethiopia to live in harmony with Christians.*

What has brought us to the point where our country is now split in two and land-locked? The remaining country of Ethiopia is more fragile today than ever before. *Ethnic federalism, ethnic-based politics and ethnic extremism are threatening our existence as a once united people and proud nation.*

*In the last three decades, we have adopted an ideology that has almost destroyed what the foreign invaders failed to do. The number one enemy seeking to destroy Ethiopia this time is not coming from the outside, but it is coming from Ethiopians, ourselves, when we fail to recognize and value the humanity of others.*

***Above all, we have failed in our defense and protection of all Ethiopians and our national interest and territorial integrity; instead, defending and protecting one's tribe (ethnic) or one's own self interests at a great loss to others, the country and humanity.***

This ethnic based system has become an obstacle to moving forward as a people and nation. Instead of uniting around principles of truth, morality, virtue and equality, Ethiopians are failing to use their human capacities and other resources to move ahead.

As a result, we have been left behind, while many others in the world are moving forward.

- Instead of building our own roads, the Chinese are building our roads and infrastructures.
- Instead of developing our free market economy, others are capitalizing on our lack of cohesion.
- Instead of offering education to all our Ethiopian children—a 21st century education—the elite leaders send their children abroad, leaving the majority of the children unequipped and unprepared for the future.
- Instead of creating a health care system that meets the needs of our people, the leaders go abroad while the majority die or suffer health problems due to the lack of services.
- Instead of having a good land policy with private ownership, opening up investment and empowering the people to develop the land, those in power create laws that give land ownership to the government; however, the ethnic group in power claims control of the land, leaving out the majority of people.
- Instead of investing in agriculture that could feed the country, the elite and their cronies use the land to enrich themselves or they give away the right to the land to outsiders where it advances their interests, making the poor depend on foreign aid for food supplementation. Within the agricultural system, we use ancient tools to work our land, tilling with two cows rather than with more efficient machinery like combines, tractors, and harvesters. The modern tools we use are tools used to destroy each other, like AK-47s.
- Instead of creating a peaceful environment, necessary for any society to thrive, we use ethnicity, ethnic favoritism and ethnic cronyism to divide our Ethiopian children and society.
- Instead of having a shared national interest, people push tribal interests.

***Ethiopia national unity has been seen as a threat by the ethno-nationalists, creating an identity based on division against others unlike us. Nearly everything is organized based on ethnicity, further emphasizing and dividing the people. The Constitution is based on ethnicity and group rights. The regions, political parties, banks, institutions, sport clubs, and the media are all consumed with ethnicity in the 21st century. It has become the fast lane for getting something before someone else where there is power attached to it; at the same time, the less powerful have been robbed of power, dignity and rights from others.***

A society where morality disappears is one where unity is also a victim. ***What the ethno-nationalist and ethnic extremists do not realize is that ethnicity can destroy a society and country from within. It tastes like candy in your mouth, but once in your system, it eats away at you like a poison. In this kind of environment, victory becomes impossible, let alone a victory like we shared in Adwa. The result instead is mutual destruction and defeat. It is the way, not to victory, but to a declining culture; and eventually, to self-defeat, poverty and mutual destruction.***

***Our grandfathers gave their lives at the Battle of Adwa so they could be free and so their descendants could inherit the land; but, if the ethnic federalism's generation of today continues as it is, there will be no ownership of our land, our Nile water and Ethiopia will be taken over by others. The Ethiopia that one generation chose to sacrifice for so we could have a better future, is what this generation of ethnic federalism is now choosing to give away, free of charge.***

Look at failed or failing states in the world and those opportunists waiting to step in to take their resources or already doing so. Who benefits from their resources? It is not the citizens, but outsiders. ***In Ethiopia, instead of sacrificing one's life for the collective good of a nation and to defend and protect our people, our***

*national interest and territorial integrity, we are killing each other. At the end, there will be no winner except some forces that will enter in to take advantage of the vacuum of leadership.*

### **ADWA IN THE FUTURE**

*How can we get out from the pit that has been dug as a result of ethnic federalism and ethno-based politics? Making ethnicity into an idol to worship is taking a toll on us as a society and as a nation. It is a deception based on ignoring the truth about the value of all human beings. So, how do we recover from this as a nation after so many have fallen victim to its deception, that it would protect us; rather than the truth, that it endangers us?*

It will require self-examination, truth-seeking, moral strength, righteous living and moral leadership. This country needs God-fearing leadership like the Emperor Menilek II who will boldly speak the truth, even if it is sometimes unwelcome. *It was that kind of leadership and the unity of the people around common values and goals that brought the victory at Adwa. Anything less than genuine fear and respect for the truth, will fail us as people and nation.* Those Ethiopians who may be feeling a call to take a stand for this, I ask you to step out and serve in this effort. The founding fathers of America consisted of these kinds of leaders who are now needed for Ethiopia. America had strong leadership at the right time who shaped the country into becoming a beacon for freedom, leading many to go there.

*Ethiopia needs visionary and highly principled leaders to bring the people together with common values that will lead to a real and sustainable victory for all. What Ethiopia needs is not a social contract, like we now have, between government and the people; but instead, it must start with a social covenant among our diverse people that brings social cohesion around values and principles. This will provide a life rope to pull us out of the pit of ethnic idolization to build a stronger and more united society where we value the humanity of others before any other identity characteristics and where we care for each other, not only because it is right, but because no one will be sustainably free until all are free.*

*What Ethiopia needs now is to value the humanity of others, our strongest common bond. If you want another victory, join the I'm Human Movement and be part of this call. We must create a social covenant among all our people to morally commit to valuing each other and their rights. This is a battle of ideas and principles where our Creator has given us truth and a conscience so we might better know the way forward. It not a struggle for "me or my ethnic group only," but it is a struggle for "we the people of Ethiopia"*

*A new and united Ethiopia will only rise up by committing to a new social covenant among us. That covenantal agreement must include a commitment to uphold the rights of all our people and to live lives of truth, justice and virtue towards each other. This would be a victory for the soul of our nation. This would be a victory that surpasses Adwa. Will you be part of it?*

May God help us to see the deception and danger we face when we use our lesser identities like the ethnicity to destroy ourselves instead of our common identity as human beings to unite us.

Once again, Happy 124<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ethiopia's Victory at the Battle of Adwa.

Long Live Ethiopia.

Thank You!