

IN MEMORIAM

Dereje Zeleke Mekonnen (1970-2024)

Dejen Yemane Messele *

Dereje Zeleke Mekonnen (PhD) passed away (at the age of 54) on August 21, 2024. He was born (in 1970) in Addis Ababa. He earned his Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from Addis Ababa University (1993), Master of Laws (LLM) from KU Leuven University (1996), and Doctorate in Law (Dr. iur. *Mit Auszeichnung Bestanden*) from the University of Vienna (2005). Dereje devoted most of his life to teaching, researching, and supervising graduate and LLB Program students. He was mostly affiliated with Addis Ababa University and the Ethiopian Civil Service University (ECSU) for about a quarter of a century (1997-2024).

Dr. Dereje was Associate Professor at Addis Ababa University School of law. The courses he taught include International Watercourses Law and Law of Treaties. He also taught, supervised, and examined graduate students from other law schools in Ethiopia and beyond as a guest professor and external examiner.

He held deanship and leadership positions and played a key role in the 2014 Ethiopian National Law School's Moot Court Competition, organized as part of the Golden Jubilee of the Addis Ababa University's Law School, on the utilization of international water resources. He also presided over and participated as moot court judge in international law moot court competitions, including the Ethiopian National Rounds of Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition.

Dereje has made significant scholarly intervention and contribution to the law of transboundary watercourses. His engagement in this area began with his doctoral dissertation titled "*Equitable Utilisation of Transboundary Watercourses and Ethiopia's Rights under International Law*" at the University of Vienna, Institute of International, European Law, and International Relations. Since then, he primarily researched and published on international law issues and disputes pertaining to the utilisation and governance of the River Nile, the world's longest river (6,650 kms). His major publications include:

- "The Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement Negotiations and the Adoption of a 'Water Security' Paradigm: Flight into Obscurity or a Logical Cul-de-sac?" *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2010), 421-440;

* This author was Dr. Dereje Zeleke Makonnen's LLM student in the Public International Law Stream at the School of Law of Addis Ababa University (2017/2018). Moreover my LLM Thesis (*The Normative Status of Precautionary Principle under International Law*) has benefitted from Dr. Dereje Z Makonnen's supervision and guidance.

- “The Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement – Failed or Just Teetering on the Brink?” *Gottingen Journal of International Law* Vol. 3, No. (2011), 345-372;
- “From Tenuous Legal Arguments to Securitization and Benefit Sharing: Hegemonic Obstinance –The Stumbling Block Against Resolution of the Nile Waters Question”, *Mizan Law Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2010), 232-257;
- The Quest for Equitable Resolution of the Nile Waters Dispute: Wandering in the Wilderness?” *The International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 & 2 (2013), 77-99;
- “Declaration of Principles on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: Some Issues of Concern”, *Mizan Law Review*, Vol. 11, No.2 (2017), 255-274.

His latest work, “The Ethio-Eritrean Boundary Dispute: Anomalies and Imperatives for Peaceful Relations,” published in the Addis Ababa University Law School’s *International Law Series* (Volume III, 2019), can also be added to this list. The Law School’s statement of acknowledgment states Dr. Dereje’s pivotal role in ‘framing and developing the concept note’ for the Series edition “*Revisiting Ethio-Eritrean Relations: From Separation to Conflict and Beyond*”.

Dereje Zeleke was candid and fearless who rather viewed death as ‘a transition from being temporal to eternity’. Dereje was indeed free from the fear-ridden world by his brave heart. A consoling message that he had composed six years ago borrows a verse from the Greek Philosopher, Epicurus. The message was presented (on Wednesday, 9 January 2019) at the 90th Tobia: Poetic Jazz Night. It was entitled “How could I be afraid of death?”¹:

“እኔ ስኖር ሞት ከሌለ፣
 ሞት ሲኖር እኔ ከሌለሁ፣
 ስለምን እፈራዋለሁ?”
 “በዚህ ጥልቅ ዕውነት የተመሩ፣
 ጥቂት ከዋክብት ያልፈሩ፣
 በሞታቸው ሞትን ሻሩ።”

“How could I be Afraid of death?
 If when I am, death is not.
 And when death is; If I’m not”.
 “A very few, but fearless stars,
 Led by this profound truth,
 Nullified death through [their] death.”

Condolences to Dr. Dereje’s family, friends and colleagues

¹ ደረጀ ዘለቀ መኮንን (ዶ/ር), የሆነው፣ የሆነው፣ ዛሬ እና ነገ፣ በጣቢያ ግጥምን በጃዝ 90ኛ ምሽት የቀረበ ዲስኮር (ጥር 1 ቀን 2011 ዓ.ም)