

NATIONAL DIALOGUE AS A MEANS OF BUILDING PEACE IN ETHIOPIA: LESSONS FROM TUNISIA'S NATIONAL DIALOGUE

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Abstract

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopian government has made National Dialogue on table with the objectives of, inter alia, solving the disagreement among politicians and segment of society on most fundamental national issues, enabling the creation of new political dispensation marked by mutual trust and ensuring lasting peace. And as there is no all-size-fit standard for implementation of successful national dialogue, it is wise to explore the experience of the States that have gone through successful national dialogue. Accordingly, Tunisia's national dialogue that was convened at the end of 2013 by Quartet, the winner of 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, is found the most relevant experience to be explored. This article closely examines the historical development of Tunisia's national dialogue and extracts the pillars behind this successful dialogue so that Ethiopia takes the possible lessons amid making of its national dialogue. Accordingly, it is found that political commitment in cementing the legitimacy of the convener, avoidance of polarization among stakeholders, compromise of interests, by side negotiations and mediations among or/and between stakeholders, managing the effect of external actors, balancing of the inclusiveness and efficiency of the dialogue, balancing of the mandate and efficiency of the dialogue, change oriented discourse, and public buy-in are the pillars behind the successfulness of Tunisia's national dialogue. Thus, it is sound enough to recommend that Ethiopian national dialogue's stakeholders: the commission, the sitting government, the opposition parties and other groups to domesticate and utilize these pillars of successful national dialogue amid entertaining the ongoing national dialogue so that it will become remarkably successful.

Key words: Tunisia's National Dialogue, Ethiopian National Dialogue, Quartet, National dialogue, Lessons, Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission

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1. Introduction

Following the sparking of the so called political reform in the State up on early 2018, with the aim of bringing an end to the aged political instability revolving in the whole part of the State, Ethiopia promulgated two legislations that had potentially intended to solve a crisis rooted in boundary issue, identity issue and historical injustice. These legislations were Reconciliation Commission Establishment Proclamation No.1102/2018 and Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission Establishment Proclamation No.1101/2019.

The former proclamation had recognized the gross human right violation and historical injustice had been endured in the state since long time, and accordingly established a reconciliation commission charged with a responsibility of making an examination to identify the basic reasons of disputes and violations of human rights by taking into consideration of political, social and economic circumstances and the view of victims and offenders; and making Reconciliation among peoples to narrow the difference created and to create consensus.¹

And the later proclamation also underlined that the disagreement on administrative boundary are a source of conflict among nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia; and accordingly, it established administrative boundary and identity commission to come up with a recommendation that could bring an end to this conflict.² However, both Reconciliation Commission and Administrative Boundary and Identity Issue Commission got dissolved without realizing their birth objectives.

As another phase of an effort to solve the acute political instability enduring in the every corner of the State, by the end of 2021, Ethiopia embraced national dialogue as a way to maintain national consensus. Consequently, the Ethiopian National Dialogue Proclamation (Proc. No. 1265/2021) was promulgated. The proclamation explicitly admits that there is acute difference not only among opinion and political leaders, but also among

¹ Reconciliation Commission Establishment Proclamation No.1102 /2018, Art.6.

² Administrative Boundary and Identity Commission Establishment Proclamation No.1101 /2019, Art 5.

segment of society on fundamental national issue of the State.³ The commission established by this proclamation has the responsibility of implementing an effective national dialogue process led by competent and impartial body, with a clear focus on the cause if disagreements, guided by transparent system, and have a plan to implement the results of the consultation.⁴

As the ongoing national dialogue is a young political arrangement to solve the old political crisis in Ethiopia, it seems wise if specifically the stakeholders and the State as a general are provided with epistemology of the pillars behind most successful and effective national dialogue held in other States of the world. And in line with this determination, Tunisia's National Dialogue, which was able to win 2015 novel peace prize, is found by the author as the most successful and operative national dialogue to be entertained. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to closely examine and critically analyze historical development of Tunisia's national dialogue; and extract the pillars behind this successful dialogue so that Ethiopia takes the possible lessons amid making of its national dialogue.

Recognizing that Ethiopia and Tunisia have different political history, socio-cultural diversity and political interest, it is equally important to notice that it is not the aim of this article to entertain the cause of the political instability in Tunisia so that it is possible to suggest any feasible political solution for the political instability in Ethiopia. In other words, methodologically as it is only a desk review, the article is strictly limited to identifying the pillars that lead the Tunisia's national dialogue towards becoming successful in solving the political crisis irrespective of the detail facts embodied in their political history, socio-cultural diversity and political questions so that Ethiopian National Dialogue Stakeholders can take a lesson for its ongoing national dialogue.

³ Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation No 1265/ 2021, Preamble.

⁴ Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation No 1265/ 2021, Art. 6.

2. National Dialogue: A Concept Exploration

National Dialogues are nationally owned political processes aimed at generating consensus among a broad range of national stakeholders in times of deep political crisis, in post-war situations or during far-reaching political transitions.⁵ It may not be recommended for every political conflict emerged here and there or for the disagreement among few stakeholders on specific issue. It is typically convened when the fundamental nature or survival of a government is in question. In such cases it helps to resolve political crises, improve the legitimacy of institutions, and lead countries into political transitions.⁶

The World Bank and IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Alliance) regard national dialogue as a fundamental instrument for putting the most basic principles of democracy into practice; resolving disputes; building consensus; and strengthening and improving participatory governance and development.⁷

Though there are different ranges of objectives that necessitates national dialogue, these objectives could be distinguished as crisis prevention and management in specific realm, and for fundamental change in general realm. The specific realm might be manifested by security arrangements and constitutional amendments while the broader one could entail (re)building a (new) political system and developing a (new) social contract.⁸

National dialogue is process oriented political discourse and need to pass through three remarkable phases: preparation, process and implementation phases.⁹In all national dialogues, the decisions made during the preparatory phase set the tone for the process and affect its ultimate legitimacy in the

⁵ Marike Blunck & et al., National Dialogue Handbook, A Guide for Practitioners, Bergh of Foundation Operations GmbH, May 2017, P21. Available at: [https:// peacemaker. un. org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BF-NationalDialogue-Handbook.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/BF-NationalDialogue-Handbook.pdf) visited up on 10/12/2022

⁶ Haider H., National dialogues: lessons learned and success factors. K4D Helpdesk Report Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 2019, P2. Available at: <https:// issafrica .s3. amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear-32><visited 08/10/2022>.

⁷ World Bank and IDEA, Experiences with National Dialogue in Latin America, Main lessons from a roundtable discussion, El Salvador, 2000, P1. Available at web.worldbank.org/archive/website/web/images/elsalvae.pdf; visited 22/11/2022.

⁸Marike Blunck & et al., *supra* note 5.

⁹Marike Blunck & et al., *ibid*, P23.

eyes of political forces and the public. The selection of a convener—whether an individual, group, or organization also affects public perceptions of the dialogue. Although national conveners can increase ownership and buy-in to a process, bias is a risk, particularly when a dialogue is convened by a sitting leader.¹⁰ Once all parameters have been negotiated – and, ideally, a consensus on the proceedings has been established – the process phase begins. Once an outcome has been reached, the implementation phase commences.¹¹ Means to follow through on agreed outcomes have to be put in place and equipped with powers to hold parties accountable. And the international community has to support the implementation process with the necessary funds, expertise and smart sanction if necessary.¹²

Unlike mediation or negotiation, national dialogue is a wide political platform that pulls together different stakeholders: the incumbent government, opposition parties, civil societies, elites, intellectuals and public representatives of different classes and even armed group. Besides, it could embrace international and regional actors, diplomats and donors at a fair distance away from the nucleus of the dialogue with a care to protect its inherent domestic nature against unwanted meddling of these external organs.

3. Basic Principles of National Dialogue

Even though there are no internationally accepted principles and/or parameters governing national dialogue, researchers have tried to come up with principles and/or parameters that help to potentially determine the viability of national dialogue. These include the following.

Inclusivity: it is a principle that really and significantly determines the legitimacy of national dialogue. Inclusivity relates to ‘process inclusivity’ in the preparatory and actual dialogue phases; and to ‘outcome inclusivity’ in the post-national dialogue/implementation phase.¹³ While inclusion of all

¹⁰ Elizabet M and Susay S, National dialogues in peace building and transitions: creative and adoptive thinking, United State Institute of Peace Press, 2021, P77; available at www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pwnational/dialogues visited up on 2/12/2022

¹¹ Haider, H., *supra* note 6, P23.

¹² Haider, H., *id.*, P 16.

¹³ Haider, H., P 9

stakeholders can build trust and public buy-in, the exclusion of any stakeholder, even armed group, could render the dialogue only a forum of pretty discussion with no change. In other words, it has to be underlined that inclusivity of national dialogue has to be pragmatically reflected not by a mere presence but active participation in making and breaking of decisions. To maximize the dialogue's potential to address the real drivers of conflict; all key interest groups should be invited to participate, including women, youth, and other traditionally excluded groups.¹⁴

However, there is a time when national dialogue face challenges due to boycott by some prominent stakeholders. *Al Wefaq* boycotted the Bahrain National Dialogue in September 2014, and many political parties and armed groups boycotted the National Dialogue Conference organized in Khartoum in October 2015.¹⁵ However, boycotts sometimes last for only part of the dialogue, and do not necessarily prevent the process from taking place, or agreements from being reached.¹⁶ Notwithstanding these facts, the maximum possible effort has to be exerted to realize that none of the prominent stakeholder make boycott. The inclusiveness of the dialogue shall not be for a matter of political correctness, rather it shall be for addressing the real cause of political crisis corned in the state.

Transparency and Public Participation: When it is said that national dialogue is nationally owned political process it means that at the center of its making and processing there is transparency and public participation. This principle may seem overlapping with the former principle, but not in reality. The former, advocates the inclusion of all groups with distinctive political interest while the later presses for communication and participation of the public at large. Even a dialogue that includes all major interest groups risks losing legitimacy if there are not sufficient opportunities for the public to remain informed about and feed into the dialogue.¹⁷

¹⁴ Susan S & Elizabeth M, Peace Brief United State Institute of Peace, Oct, 2015, P2 available at: www.usip.org/publications/2015/10/national-dialogues-tool-conflict-transformation< visited 11/12/2022>.

¹⁵ Jonathan Harlander, Practice Series Supporting National Dialogues: Dilemmas and Options for third parties, Center for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2015, P36.

¹⁶ Jonathan H.,*ibid*.

¹⁷ Stignat and Murray, *supra* note 14, P2.

Every progress and content of the dialogue has to be tailored towards the public through possible mechanism like media brief, public consultation, forum and other means. The communication shall not be one direction, rather the real interest of the people have to be traced through. As the final decision maker is the public at large it must not be strange with the process and outcome of the dialogue. Thus, transparency and public participation shall be maintained in all phases of the dialogue.

It shall address the root causes of conflict: As mentioned above the cause for national dialogue is not a mere political difference among different groups. Nor it is the occurrence of public deviance of a specific governmental decision. Rather, it is only fundamental political crisis that could not be managed through formal ways that can make national dialogue to happen. And it must be this fundamental point of disagreement that needs to be addressed during the dialogue.

Thus, the selection of agenda of the dialogue matters a lot. It is said that national dialogue's agenda should provide for substantive conversation around the major grievances of all key interest groups but not get mired in details, which are often better resolved by technical bodies or future governments.¹⁸ In other words, though it is impracticable to address all point of disagreement, the major point of grievances shall not be left unaddressed.

Nonetheless, limiting the type of agendas of the dialogue shall be only to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the dialogue itself. It shall not serve the interest of any specific stakeholder, but the dialogue itself. The discussion up on major grievances can potentially bring change in the next political discourse while discussion on minor issue would render the dialogue illusive. Thus, there shall be a consensus that minor issues shall be addressed through other possible means, other than the national dialogue underway.

Credible convener: The experience of different states show the convener of the dialogue could be either from domestic constituents or external actors. The domestic constituents could be civil society or other institutions or commission mandated by law or agreements. The external conveners also could be regional or international institutions that have large sphere of

¹⁸*Ibid.*

influence in the region or in international community. Thus, the matter is not where the convener is from, but its credibility. And it is said that to secure the participation of a wide variety of stakeholder groups and to avoid perceptions of bias, a credible convener is of the utmost importance.¹⁹

The formation or selection of convener can potentially determine the credibility of the convener. Thus, it must be participatory to win trust of stakeholders at its very formation time. Exclusion of stakeholders during formation or selection of the convener can erode the confidence of the participants on the credibility of the convener and finally, it could endanger the very objectives of the dialogue. At the same time, it shall be noted that trust and confidence on convener could not be built over night. The stakeholders have to be patient enough not to rush into unwanted scenario that may endanger the continuation of dialogue. The convener has to be given time to show its credibleness and the stakeholders, especially, the incumbent also shall not violate the independence of the convener as it could risk its credibility.

Fair distance of external actors: National dialogue is one of a critical political process that could scrap the very interest of external actors, regional and international. These actors could tailor their interest in the ongoing national dialogue by supporting or resisting it. The support (political, financial and technical) or resistance of external actors can influence the degree of the success of national dialogues.²⁰ It is the sole responsibility of the hosting state to limit the involvement of the external actors in its national dialogue. The viability of any involvement has to be tested against the very nature of national dialogue, i.e. nationally owned political discourse. The involvement of these actors shall be managed to be only for goodness of the national dialogue. Financial and technical support could by large benefit the dialogue while involvements based on political interests could endanger the dialogue. Thus, it is important to strike a balance between external support and national ownership. The latter can increase the likelihood of public buy-in, perceptions of legitimacy – and chances of implementation.²¹

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰ Haider, H., *supra* note 6.

²¹*Ibid.*

Security guarantee: National dialogue is a platform of continuation of disagreement. It is not at the end of disagreement, but it is only to bring an end to the disagreement caused happening of deep crisis that national dialogue is initiated. It is in presence of acute difference and hostility the national dialogue is started. However, once a consensus is made to hold national dialogue the sitting government and the stakeholders have to be committed to bring their difference from the estate of violence to estate dialogue. Especially, the sitting government has double responsibility of abstaining from persecution and maintains peace. Ongoing violence, banning of opposition groups, curtailing media freedom and political killings all undermine the credibility of National Dialogues.²² In other words, there must be freedom of expression and no threat of security to properly manage the national dialogue towards achieving its objectives.

4. Historical overview of Tunisia's National Dialogue

This topic is not meant to assess history of Tunisia from its formation to today. Rather, strictly limited to the scope and the objectives of the article, the discussion will be only towards examining and presenting the remarkable events and facts of Tunisian national dialogue back-and-forth throughout its development to its successful end. Historically, it was on 7 November 1987 that Ben Ali took over power from President Habib Bourguiba, who had also ruled the country for three decades since its independence in 1956.²³

In the beginning, Ben Ali's regime enacted reforms to coalesce the divided nation. He wanted a multiparty system, free elections, equal rights for women, individual rights and liberties, freedom of speech and the rule of law.²⁴ However, Ben Ali was not building a democratic nation. These acts and sentiments were simply to establish citizen consent toward a 'consensual democracy'- a political order that allowed a bit more freedom to express opinions and to organize within the boundaries drawn and defended by

²²Marike Blunck & *et al.*, *supra* note 5, p.176.

²³Rikke Hostrup & *et al.*, Tunisia's 2013 National Dialogue Political Crisis Management, Bergh of Foundation, 2017, P11.; Available <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/tunisias-2013-national-dialogue-political-crisis-management><visited 04/11/2022>.

²⁴Hanna S Kassab, The Power of Emotion: Examining the Self-Immolation of Mohamad Bouazizi, the Arab Revolution and International Politics, Perspectives Internationals, Colombia, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012, P12.

thestate.²⁵Through time, the regime had started to face resistance and opposition from different parts of society. Not surprisingly, the regime had chosen non democratic approach to solve the cause of the early opposition. And the promise for reform had soon been shifted into political discourse of prosecuting rivals and prominent oppositions under pretext of ensuring peace and order.²⁶

As part of its authoritarian project, the regime kicked off its approach of eliminating all its rivals. The prominent opposition party, Ennahda had immediately failed under the attack of the regime. Its leaders and members were jailed in large numbers, and the party was ultimately banned in 1991.²⁷ This lasted only until the repression of the Ben Ali regime started to become a systematic practice against all opponents whether from political parties, NGOs, among LTDH (Tunisian Human Right League) and the Bar Association, or individuals.²⁸ The unreserved oppression against political party, civil society and media outlet under pretext of painted greedy political interest had finally dragged the state down to hell for democratic ambition and movement. In 2002, Reporters Without Borders ranked Tunisia 128th in its Press Freedom Index, and by 2010, the country's ranking dropped to 164 (out of 178), narrowly outranking the likes of North Korea, Cuba, Syria, and Turkmenistan.²⁹

Thought it was believed that the revolution was primarily driven by political exclusion, socio-economic discontent was also important in creating a fertile ground for uprisings. Youths were terrible victims of unemployment and corruption surfaced in the state. Some scholars made an argument that international financial institutions persistently ignored signs of structural weakness and corruption in the Tunisian economy and enabled predatory economic practices by the elite via their loan and privatization schemes.³⁰The World Bank and IMF failed to register the extent of the corruption because they relied on the Tunisian government's own data,

²⁵Hanna S Kassab,*Ibid*.

²⁶Rikke Hostrup & *et al.*, *supra* note 23, P11.

²⁷*Ibid*.

²⁸*Id.*,P12.

²⁹Fadhel Kaboub, the Making of the Tunisian Revolution, Middle East Development Journal (2013), Vol.5, No.1, P2.

³⁰ Evan Whiteside Burt, the Jasmine Revolution: Causes in Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2018, P13 available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/.pdf><visited on 9/11/2022>.

which reflected the seizure of state assets by family members as part of an overall positive indicator of the privatization of state assets.³¹

The popular grievance against the authoritarian regime of the state stepped up into new level by extreme and public measure of self-immolation by Mohamed Bouazizi up on 17 December 2010. This figure of resistance become a triggering spot for popular protest that had been spontaneously rocked into uprising that demanded change of regime in the state. Few months after the eruption of protest, 23 years serving President, Zein El Abedin Ben Ali, was forced to exile to Saudi Arabia up on 14, January 2011.³² This unexpected measure of exile by the sitting President had marked the development of inevitable change in politics of Tunisia.

The protest erupted in 17 December 2011, and that forced Zein El Abedin Ben Ali to exile up on 14 January 2011 did not meet popular demand as daily street protests continued demanding the resignation of the post-Ali government and the adoption of a new constitution. On the political level, Mohamed Ghannouchi was appointed prime minister while Fouad Mbaza took up the post as president. Although Ghannouchi formed a new national unity government which included members of former opposition parties, and civil society representatives, it was widely felt among the Tunisians that the old regime was still in power.³³

At the end, the sitting government planned to hold election. After several postponements, the elections were finally held in October 2011 with much support, attention and observation from the international society and were seen as the cornerstone of a nascent democracy.³⁴ The October 2011 elections for a new body, the National Constituent Assembly, radically reshaped the domestic balance of power. The Islamist-oriented Ennahda party, which had suffered repression under Ben Ali's regime, won 37 percent of the vote and eighty-nine seats in the 217-member assembly. Together with the nationalist-oriented Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the left-of-center Ettakol, Ennahda formed a coalition government known as the Troika.³⁵

³¹Evan W.Burt, *ibid*,P14.

³² Hanna S. Kassab, *supra* note 24, P75.

³³Rikke Hostrup & *et al.*, *supra* note 23, P17.

³⁴*Ibid.*,P18

³⁵Elizabet M and Susay S, *supra* note 10, P75.

Unfortunately, the transition to democracy following the first election was not smooth and progressive. Immediately after the formation of government led by Troika, the state started to be stormed by political tensions. The basic factors that driven the tensions was highly connected with drafting process of the constitution, identity conflict: secular or sharia and rise of radical Islam.³⁶ The oppositions and some civil societies made the sitting government the entrepreneur of all these factors citing that Ennahda was basically Islamic party. This tension climbed to its highest nature following sequenced assassination of Chokri Belaïd and Mohammed Brahmin-the left wing leaders in February and July respectively. It was believed by secular and leftist that the assassination was orchestrated by the incumbent government, primary by members of Ennahda party.³⁷

Especially, the second assassination of political leader from the leftist wing had ignited the tension to its highest level. While oppositions demanded the resignation of the government and the dissolution of the NAC, the government and especially Ennahda was claiming their electoral legitimacy and refused to hand over power.³⁸ The economy was blocked, unemployment rate skyrocketed, emerging armed group threatened security, and drafting of the constitution was faced with slow down process. Then, the obsolete stands of political blocks corned the political crisis into an absolute deadlock.

In October 2013, given the critical situation, the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) took the first step in forming an alliance of civil societies by approaching the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA), and two other groups; The Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) and the Tunisian Order of Lawyers who later joined to form what is known as the “National Dialogue Quartet”.³⁹

The Quartet devoted to prepare road map of the dialogue. The roadmap was negotiated between 17 September and 5 October where it was signed by 23 parties. It called for forming a new Higher Electoral Commission in one week, passing a new electoral law in two weeks, defining an electoral

³⁶ Otto Turtonen & Joel Linnainmäki, Non Formal Dialogue Process and National Dialogue: Experience from Countries in Transition (2015), P13. Available at: [um.fi/ documents //second_conference_on_non_formal_dialogue_process](http://um.fi/documents/second_conference_on_non_formal_dialogue_process); <visited on 29/11/2022>.

³⁷Rikke Hostrup & *et al.*, *supra* note 23, Pp.25-26.

³⁸*Ibid*, P28.

³⁹Otto T & Joel L, *supra* note 36, P14.

calendar within three weeks, replacing the Troika government by the end of the third week, finalizing a new constitution within four weeks and gaining the NCA's vote of confidence for a new cabinet by the fourth week and before the final vote for the new constitution.⁴⁰ Each of the milestones laid out in the roadmap was reached, though the time taken to travel the route was longer than anticipated. Finally, the national dialogue achieved its objectives, and the convener, Quartet, abled to win Nobel Peace Prize by 2015. And this remarkable success become arena of exploration and experience sharing for the then after national dialogue set to be undertaken by different states of the world.

5. The Development of National Dialogue of Ethiopia

As mentioned in previous topic, national dialogue is picked whenever it becomes impossible for the incumbent government to resolve the political crisis sustained with its formal institution and ways or when the incumbent government lost the very value of its legitimacy to handle the crisis. In other words, the crisis that required national dialogue as way out is not simple, but deep and critical. Thus, it seems logical to depict at the very outset of the discussion that it becomes so difficult for sitting government of Ethiopia to solve the crisis that national dialogue is put on the table as a way out. Thus, this sub topic is going to explore basic events that compel the sitting government to see national dialogue as alternative to way out.

It was at the beginning of 2018 that Ethiopia started to embrace new political environment with appointment of a new Prime minister. The appointment of new prime minister was an extension of reform of the governing party. This reform was not deliberate but a response to the ignited popular protest in the country. The so called reform which was started by the appointment of new prime minister immediately soared into dissolution of the ruling party, Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that dominantly governed the state for about a quarter of century, and consequently the formation of new ruling party called Prosperity Party. The new ruling party was formed by merging together the governing parties of all regional states of the federation except Tigran People Liberation Front (TPLF) that rejected the formation of the new party. Immediately after formation, the new ruling

⁴⁰Elizabet M and Susay S, *supra* note 10, P79.

party started to dominate domestic political sphere by branding itself with indigenous political ideology called ‘Medemer’, and it promised for transition to democracy and development.

Accordingly, especially at its early age, the sitting government was making unexpected measure that sparked glimpse of hope in political sphere of the state. In line with promissory words of the incumbent party, repressive laws governing civil society, election laws, media laws, anti-terrorism law and others were either repealed or amended to live up the standards set by international community. Exiled politicians and political parties designated as terrorist group began to be hosted at the capital city by their fans and members. Political prisoners serving long times in prisons began to be pardoned. The prolonged quest of nations and nationalities to be organized as independent regional state of the federation won political will of the government, and accordingly Sidama national regional state, Central Ethiopia national regional state, and South West Ethiopian national regional state emerged as the 10th, 11th and 12th member states of the Federation. Besides, as far as diplomatic arena is concerned the same dramatic progress was scored. Accordingly, the longtime hostile relationship with Eretria is normalized.

Nevertheless, alongside all reform and transition measures implemented to ensure sustainable democracy, peace and development, there was unwanted political environment surfacing through-out the state. It was vividly clear that the reform was tormented by rampant insecurity. Violent popular protests aligned with mass killing, looting and destruction of private and public property was the usual event raiding in the towns of the country. Meanwhile, the government and its supportive elites were reluctant in denouncing these unlawful activities to the highest possible degree. Government aligned elites and cadres had tried to justify such unlawfulness as it was the very effect of transition to democracy from authoritative governance during its early time.

To resolve the cause of crisis in the country from its roots the government had introduced two legislations: Reconciliation commission establishment Proclamation No. 1102/2018 and Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission Establishment Proclamation No.1101/2019. The objective of the former commission was to maintain peace justice, national

unity and consensus and also Reconciliation among Ethiopian Peoples⁴¹ while the objective of the latter commission was to submit recommendation to the public, the House of Federation, the House Of People's Representatives and the Executive Organ through analysis of causes and conflicts arises in relation to Administrative Boundaries, self-government and identity issues in participatory, explicit, inclusive and scientific manner.⁴²The objectives of these legislations were sensational as it intended to end conflict and crisis by one or other means. Unfortunately, the crisis continued and scaled up to a bigger scope and effects.

Amid unresolved crisis in the country, the arrival of periodic national election by 2020 coincided with emerging of COVID_19, redirected Ethiopian into new level of crisis. Citing the worst spreading level of the virus, the National Election board of Ethiopia notified that as it could not handle the planned national election by 2020. This notification of national board of election introduced new political adventure aligned with constitutional deadlock which finally demanded the intervention of Ethiopian House of Federation. The response of the opposition parties and the incumbent government towards non-implementation of the scheduled national election was extremely different. While some parties called for formation of transitional government⁴³, the incumbent government called for constitutional interpretation. On the contrary, Tigray Peoples Liberation Front publically opposed both alternatives raised by some prominent opposition party and the incumbent government, and boldly insisted on stand of holding the scheduled election at regional level even in presence of threat of Covid-19.

Finally, the constitutional deadlock derived for non-implementation of 2020 national election necessitated the intervention of House of Federation for constitutional interpretation. Accordingly, the House of Federation introduced constitutional interpretation that elongated the governing period of the incumbent government to one additional year and directed the national

⁴¹ Reconciliation Commission Establishment Proclamation, *supra* note 1, Art. 5.

⁴²Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission Establishment Proclamation, *supra* note 2, Art. 4.

⁴³The prominent parties from the largest region of the federation, OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) and OFC (Oromo Federalist Congress) called for formation of transitional government following the end of the serving period of the sitting government as per FDRE constitution.

election to be carried on 2021 G.C. The ruling party and few prominent opposition parties agreed for postponement of the election while others terribly opposed the decision by mentioning unconstitutionality of the interpretation and postponement of the national election.

The postponement of national election had ignited the already existing difference between the ruling party and oppositions into the sense of hostility. The prominent party governing Tigray region, TPLF, planned to carry out election at regional level by rebelling the decision of House of Federation. By mid of 2021, TPLF had hold election, and finally proclaimed that it had won 98% of seat in regional council. Accordingly, TPLF had continued to govern the region by forming new cabinet while the federal government, the two city councils and all regional state council had continued being governed by the old cabinet. The difference between the federal government and TPLF geared on, and finally ended up with eruption of catastrophic war up on 4 November, 2021. The immediate cause for the eruption of the war on this specific date was the sudden attack on Ethiopian national defense force of northern regiment by TPLF's militant who was later on renamed as Tigray defense force. This war continued for about two years with catastrophic loss of life, and unprecedented failure in security, economy and diplomacy of the state.

Amid a war between the Federal government and TPLF, as per the recommendation by House of Federation, general national election was planned to be held up on 2021 G.C. However, the prominent opposition parties like Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Oromo Federal Congress (OFC) rejected the planned election. The election was carried on 21 June 2021, and the final result of poll marked land slide victory of the ruling party. Side by side, the war had not been concluded, and the displacement, loss of life and violation of rights miserably hit the society in war zone.

Meanwhile, after the ruling party secured a landslide victory from this election the Prime Minister of the state and president of the ruling Prosperity Party, Abiy Ahmed, during inauguration ceremony held up on 4 October 2021, announced that the government had a plan to carry out National dialogue to end political crisis the state had been embedded with. In line with his remark, the House of People Representatives promulgated National Dialogue Commission proclamation no. 1265/2021. The proclamation, under

its preamble, narrated the prevalence of difference of opinions and disagreements among various political leaders and also segments of society in Ethiopia on the most fundamental national issues.⁴⁴ As per the provisions of the same proclamation, creation of new political dispensation that marked by mutual trust, building a democratic system of trust between citizens and government, and people at national level, ensuring lasting peace, lay a firm foundation for national consensus and building of a state with strong legitimacy are exhausted as the objective of the dialogue.⁴⁵

Pursuant to this proclamation, the convener of the dialogue is a commission which constitutes eleven commissioners appointed by House of People's Representative.⁴⁶ And now they are already appointed and in charge of their duty despite the complaints by opposition as far as its inclusiveness is concerned. Identifying difference on national issues through studies, public discussions and other modalities, craft agenda for dialogue based on the issues identified accordingly, convene national dialogue forum at different level, setting criteria for selection of participants, provide support for the government in preparation of plan to implement the recommendation arising out of dialogue and devise a system to monitor the implementation of recommendation are some of the duties and responsibility of the commission as contemplated under art.9 of the proclamation. The term of office of the commission is three years provided that it could be extended by House of People representatives.⁴⁷ In the succeeding sub-topic, the pillars that drives the Tunisia National Dialogue towards its success are going to be discussed so that Ethiopian National dialogue stakeholders could take a lesson from it in handling the kicked off national dialogue in the state.

⁴⁴ Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation, *supra* note 3, Art. 6(1).

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, Art. 6(2-7).

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, Art. 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Art. 8.

6. Lessons from the Success of National Dialogue of Tunisia

Since the early times of twenty first century, different States have launched national dialogue to solve their political turmoil that had sparked instability throughout their respective society. Yemen (2013-2014), Bahrain (2011), Nepal(2008-2012) and Tunisia (2013) are among the countries worth mentioning. Unfortunately, these all States, except Tunisia, did not succeed in their respective national dialogue. Even though it is hardly impossible to draw a lesson from the pitfall of unsuccessful national dialogue like that held in Yemen and Bahrain, the author opt to explore the pillars behind globally cherished national dialogue of Tunisia. Unnecessary to say, the record of its success as a winner of 2015 Nobel Peace Prize, and the tangible changes it brought around, makes Tunisian National dialogue the most relevant to be explored by this article.

Incidentally, before hosting national dialogue, both Tunisian and Ethiopian shared some similar phase of political instability. Both States were hit by immense popular protest, the popular protest in both States forced their respective head of government to step down, both States held national election that failed to solve their respective political conflict, both States had no well-established culture of political dialogue, and finally both States hosted national dialogue as a solution for their ignited political difference among stakeholders and society at large. Likewise, there are some remarkable dissimilaritybetween these two States. The religious compositions of their respective society, the nature of their respective fundamental political questions that ignited difference among stakeholders, the strength and the sphere of influence of their respective domestic institutions like civil society, the presence and absence of armed group, and their respective reflection towards their formation as a nation are some of their respective features that could be raised as dissimilarity.

Recognizing that Ethiopia and Tunisia have different political history, socio-cultural diversity and political interest, it is equally important to notice that it is not the aim of this article to entertain the cause of the political instability in Tunisia and the feasibility of the political consensus they arrived at through their national dialogue. In other words, methodologically as it is only desk review, the article is strictly limited to entertaining the pillars that

lead the Tunisia's national dialogue towards becoming the most successful and effective in solving the then political crisis irrespective of the detail facts embodied in their political history, socio-cultural diversity and political questions. Thus, the pillars behind the success of Tunisian national dialogue are discussed in the following manner so that the Ethiopian national dialogue stakeholders could draw a lesson in mid of making its national dialogue.

Cementing the legitimacy of the convener: Legitimacy of the convener is not only one basic principle of national dialogue. Rather, it is everything of national dialogue. The convener derived its legitimacy not only from the saying of the laws, but dominantly the political will and recognition by stakeholders on one hand, and the degree of neutrality and competency of the convener itself, on the other hand, significantly determine its legitimacy.

As mentioned before, the convener could be mandated either by the agreement among stakeholders like Quartet of Tunisia or by law like national dialogue commission of Ethiopia. Thus, in principle, the source of mandate of the convener and the nature of the convener has nothing to do with legitimacy of the convener or has minimum effect on the legitimacy of the convener. Rather, the way the convener is formed or selected has direct effect on the legitimacy of the convener. In other words, the participation and inclusiveness of the stakeholders during formation of the convener is of paramount importance in determining the legitimacy of the convener. Besides, the background and the actual political position of the convener are the other factors that could cast a doubt on legitimacy of the convener. However, beyond all these facts, the political will and commitment of stakeholders are the most important elements in maintaining the legitimacy of the convener.

In case of Tunisia, Quartet was self-appointed convener though later on mandated by agreement of stakeholders. And not surprisingly, Quartet had never been neutral entity in politics of Tunisia. Rather, it was portrayed as the third leg in politics of Tunisia next to the incumbent government and the oppositions.⁴⁸ It was not unusual to see the UGTT, one of the prominent civil society in formation of Quartet, opposing the political stand of one of the prominent party forming the then sitting government, Ennahda party. As an Islamist party, Ennahda was fighting for inclusion of sharia law in the

⁴⁸Elizabet M and Susay S, *supra note 10, P77*

Constitution while UGTT had been mercilessly committed for establishment of secular states. Besides, UGTT had a record of alignment with the regime of Ben Ali which had been fully devoted to make the extinction of Ennahda from politics of Tunisia. Thus, especially for Ennahda, all these facts were logical and convincing to defy the legitimacy of the Quartet as convener at the very early stage. Fortunately, Ennahda and the stakeholders had preferred not to do so and rather committed to cement the legitimacy of the Quartet against its historical profile of lacking neutrality. Political non-neutrality of Quartet and non-inclusiveness of its formation could have never been rectified without unreserved political will and commitments of stakeholders to the dialogue. And this was what is done by Tunisia's national dialogue stakeholders, especially Ennahda party.

In case of Ethiopia, it is Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission that is mandated by law to be the convener of the dialogue. However, at the very early stage of its formation, some of prominent stakeholders of the dialogue from Oromia and Somalia regional states defied the legitimacy of the convener by mentioning the non-inclusiveness of its formation and non-neutrality of the members of the commission.⁴⁹ The questions of non-inclusiveness and non-neutrality raised by these stakeholders of Ethiopian National Dialogue were the possible questions that could have been convincingly raised by prominent stakeholders in Tunisia National Dialogue. The choice was clear enough, i.e. either to reject the convener at early time of its birth or accept it by abstaining from defying its legitimacy up on the same early time. And Tunisian national dialogue stakeholders, for that critical early time, had preferred to accept the legitimacy of the convener with a sense of great responsibility to bring the country back to peace and security. And the convener, Quartet, properly utilized the early critical time to show and cement its neutrality and competency in handling the national dialogue of Tunisia. This unreserved political will of Tunisian's national dialogue stakeholders not to defy the legitimacy of the convener at its early critical time of formation, and the commitment of the convener at very early time to show back its neutrality and competency in handling its responsibility are big lessons for stakeholders in Ethiopian national dialogue.

⁴⁹ Ethiopian Stillborn National Dialogue, Buli Edjeta, 12 March 2022, Ethiopian Insight, available at: www.ethiopia-insight.com/2022/03/12/ethiopias-stillborn-national-dialogue

*Balancing of the mandate and efficiency of the dialogue:*As mentioned before, the objective of national dialogue could be either specific or general. The specific objectives could be security arrangements, constitutional amendments, and truth commissions while the broader one could entail (re)building a (new) political system and developing a (new) social contract.⁵⁰ Whatever the objective of the dialogue is, it is impracticable to solve every disagreement or/and conflict among the stakeholders under the discourse of one time national dialogue. Thus, the mandate of the national dialogue shall be specific and manageable. The more the mandate is clear and manageable, the more the dialogue becomes successful and vice versa.

Yet, it could be challenging to strike a balance between the range of the mandate and efficiency. But, it is important to avoid overburdening mandates and agendas caring that a narrower mandate can be more manageable and efficient, it can limit the room for change.⁵¹ At the same time, it must be noted that the engagement is only national dialogue; it is not mediation, nor negotiation. Thus, it shall not be narrowed to the level of being negotiation or mediation among few groups, and at the same time it shall not be widened to a level of being a forum of discussion with illusion of chasing all good scenarios.

One of the key factors behind the success of Tunisian national dialogue was the balance between the mandate and the efficiency of the dialogue. The mandate of the dialogue was limited to the key issues in order to break through the political deadlock incapacitating the transition. Though other topics remain important for the transition, these topics were set aside to be attended in a separate and adequate process.⁵² And the dialogue was held by limiting itself only to four core agendas: formation of technocrat government, drafting and way of voting of constitution, establishment of electoral body to hold national election and preparing electoral bill governing election.⁵³ The agendas that deserve discussion might not be only these four agendas. But these four agendas were believed as the cause of political crisis of Tunisia, and therefore put for dialogue.

⁵⁰ Haider H., *supra* note 6, P4.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, P3.

⁵² Marike Blunck & *et al.*, *supra* note 5, P53.

⁵³ Rikke Hostrup & *et al.*, *supra* note 23, P35.

In case of Ethiopia, the commission is mandated to craft agendas of national dialogue by identifying the difference among political and opinion leaders, and among the societies up on national issues after conducting studies, public discussions or other appropriate modalities.⁵⁴ Besides, the preamble and the provisions of the legislation set the standard of the discussion to be a fundamental national issue. Thus, identifying these fundamental national issues will be the basic assignment of the commission. Amid discharging its duty of crafting agenda, the commission has to carefully strike the equilibrium point between the size of the agendas and the efficiency of the dialogue. The commission shall mind that narrowed agendas would bring the continuation of the status quo of the current situation while overburdened agendas could lead to frustration. Thus, the prominent stakeholders and intellectuals, to save the efficiency of the dialogue, have to support the commission in identifying fundamental issues need to be entertained by ongoing national dialogue. And at the same time, the commission has to seriously manage the efficiency of the dialogue by setting aside some shallow agendas that could be entertained by other platforms in future.

Balancing the inclusivity and efficiency of the dialogue: As mentioned before, inclusivity is the basic principle of national dialogue that can independently determine the legitimacy of the engagement. However, this does not mean that national dialogue must be open public forum that everybody can visit and leave randomly. There must be a mechanism and criteria of identifying the number and kinds of participants to national dialogue depending on its objectives. The appropriate size of the process and participation in national dialogue depends on the objectives it seeks to achieve. If the aim is to establish a viable security framework or to overcome election violence, only those concerned should be invited. If the aim is to re-establish a new social contract, this requires the participation of a broader section of the society.⁵⁵

As there is no scientific size or number balancing efficiency and inclusiveness of national dialogue, the convener shall be pragmatic. The principle is neither less inclusive nor broader inclusive, it is only inclusive. But, as the number of participants is too large it may be difficult to discuss the details of key issues; and as the same time if participants are too small it

⁵⁴ Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation, *supra* note 3, Art 9.

⁵⁵Marike Blunck & et al., *supra* note 5, P81.

may ensure detail discussion with limited elites at the cost of inclusivity of the dialogue.

In case of Tunisia, almost the whole stakeholders, namely the 27 parties of the ANC with exception of the CPR and Moncef Marzouki, and the party Tayar Al mahabba (former Aridha party) of Hachemi Hamdi, participated in the dialogue.⁵⁶ There was less public discussion during the dialogue. Thus, the experience of Tunisia was appreciated for its efficiency except its dearth on inclusivity.

In case of Ethiopian national dialogue, it is the commission that is authorized to identify participants based on clear criteria.⁵⁷ As one of the objectives of this dialogue is creation of new political dispensation that is marked by mutual trust⁵⁸, it is predictable that the size of participants could be broader. However, the commission should equally bother for efficiency and inclusiveness of the dialogue. The public might be communicated in large to set the agenda for the national dialogue, but detail discussion shall be held with the main stakeholders going to be identified. For that matter, the commission needs to go further to identify the prominent stakeholders legitimate to engage in detail discussion. Any ignorance as to the efficiency of the dialogue compared to inclusiveness would make the dialogue only public ceremony. Thus, the commission and the stakeholders have to be committed to balance the efficiency and inclusiveness of the dialogue.

Making informal and separate negotiations or/and mediations: National dialogue is employed to address nationwide crisis which might not be solved by negotiation or mediation. However, this does not mean that national dialogue is always exclusive of any mediation or negotiation. Especially when there is competitive and/or rival power of politics among/between prominent stakeholders of the dialogue, there could be a boycott against national dialogue. And such challenges need to be addressed through series of negotiations or mediations alongside the large national dialogue.

Behind the success of Tunisia national dialogue, there were series of negotiations held alongside the large national dialogue. Especially, the most

⁵⁶Rikke Hostrup & *et al.*, *supra* note 23, P36.

⁵⁷Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation, *supra* note 3, Art. 9 (6).

⁵⁸*Ibid*, Art. 6(3).

prominent delegates in the national dialogue: the Islamist-Ennahda and the secularist-Nidaa Tune had series of negotiations to narrow their difference. Even it was believed that the dialogue process was based on formal sessions than on informal talks, not only among the formal delegates but also by actors behind the scenes. On many occasions, it was the ‘corridor talks’ that ensured the success of the national dialogue.⁵⁹ For the convener, there was a time to bring the whole stakeholders under the same room, and equally there was a time to deal with few stakeholders in an informal manner just for the goodness of the big national dialogue. Even, there was a time when some stakeholders sit for negotiation in absence of the convener.

In case of Ethiopia, there is now, and there will probably be a boycott against the national dialogue at any stage of it. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) are some of the legally registered prominent political parties that already defied the national dialogue at its early stage. However, to save the national dialogue and to lead it towards achieving its objective there must be a negotiation or mediation alongside the dialogue. Such negotiation or mediation shall be to pull back influential parties that boycotted the national dialogue at any stage of it. However, the possible mediation or negotiation between or among such parties and sitting government shall not be taken as a despising act against the convener or the big dialogue. Nor, shall it be a competing peace engagement or platform alongside national dialogue. Like that of Tunisia, it shall have the objectives of smoothing the environment for the best accomplishment of the dialogue.

The peace agreement between TPLF and FDRE government is good example of the idea under discussion. The peace agreement mediated by African Union shall further go beyond bringing an end to the war under went for two years. And, it shall be claimed to bring TPLF into national dialogue. Similar mediation and/or negotiation approach have to be used alongside the national dialogue regarding parties that already boycotted or may boycott the national dialogue, whether armed or not. Prominent party, like OLA (Oromo Liberation Army), has to be approached by the sitting government either by negotiation or mediation. Besides, nationally registered political parties that boycotted the national dialogue at this early stage need to be approached

⁵⁹Rikke Hostrup & *et al.*, *supra* note 23, P40.

genuinely to pull them back into national dialogue. However, as noted before, any undeserved rejection after genuine approach shall be mitigated by the fact that boycotts sometimes last for only part of the dialogue, and do not necessarily prevent the process from taking place, or agreements from being reached.

Fair distance of international actors: When it is said that national dialogue is nationally owned political process it does not mean that there is no involvement of international actors in any form and kind. There could be involvement of international actors in national dialogue of any state, especially the developing one, with different form, kind and degree. Their involvement could be for good or bad based on their distance from the heart of the dialogue. Thus, managing the involvement of international actor only to good effect is more about the responsibility of the all stakeholders, predominantly the incumbent government and the convener.

Sometimes, the involvement of external actors could be with the objectives of seeking to influence the outcome of the process; building support for the process and encouraging parties to engage; providing technical expertise; observing the process, which may help to build confidence among parties; providing facilitation and expertise to overcome deadlocks; providing funding for various aspects of the national dialogue process; assisting in monitoring and implementing the outcomes of the dialogue process.⁶⁰ Their involvement shall be embraced only so long as it does not challenge the national ownership of the process. Especially, financial and technical assistance of relevant actors is of paramount importance for the success of the dialogue.

In case of Tunisia, the national dialogue was initiated and led by domestic stakeholders, but international and regional involvement in the country's transition made a significant and positive contribution. International actors came in at the right time, sought to support rather than redirect or undercut the Tunisian protagonists.⁶¹ The involvement of international actors like United States, Europe and Algeria was highly limited to offering encouragement and advice to arrive at agreements.

⁶⁰ Haider H., *supra* note 6, P8.

⁶¹ Elizabet M and Susay S, *supra* note 10, P79.

As far as Ethiopian National Dialogue is concerned, the commission has not been explicitly empowered by laws to make any kind of relationship with regional and international actors. However, this does not mean that the door of national dialogue is totally close for any kind of involvement of international and regional actors. And since recent time, it is common to see and witness when diplomats and ambassadors of different states of the world and representatives of international organizations pledged their support for the success of the dialogue through state owned media corporates. In addition to a promise to support the national dialogue, since recent time it is common to see when some regional and international organizations make a bold and assertive statement for a real implementation of this national dialogue though it needs further exploration to properly extract their interest in the coming dialogue.

However, it will be the assignment of the commission to determine the degree and kind of support these international and regional actors shall be allowed to contribute to the success of the dialogue. This assignment of the commission shall be governed by the national interest principle described in art.3 of the proclamation. Like Tunisia, it is possible to limit the involvement of these actors only for goodness and success of the dialogue. Technical support by professionals and finance of external actors can surely benefit the dialogue. Thus, the approach followed by the commission shall not close doors for such opportunity; and at the same time it shall not be open for unnecessary intervention.

Avoid polarization among one another: When it is said that national dialogue is hosted during acute crisis it means that the stakeholders are with big difference that may seem irreconcilable. The measure of sitting together to solve the cause of conflict may need good culture of dialogue. This good culture of dialogue may depend on previous experience of stakeholders in holding dialogue or negotiation. Beyond the experience of the stakeholders, the political culture in that specific state contributes for the development of culture of dialogue. In state of authoritarian regime, the culture of dialogue may be far from development. In contrast, in a democratic state there could be good culture of democracy.

The Tunisian National Dialogue took place among actors that have been used to a non-dialogue culture – especially in a political context because of

the repressive, authoritarian regimes. Hence, the actors in the National Dialogue had weak dialogue competences; the core dialogue instruments of listening, and understanding and accepting others' views had to be learned while the dialogue process was unfolding.⁶² The historical relation of the prominent stakeholders was highly hostile. Especially, the Ennahda members had been repressed by Nidaa Tune's members as many of them were member of the former regime. Such hostile relationship could be enough to trigger polarization among stakeholders. However, once joined the national dialogue, the stakeholders committed themselves towards ensuring peace and protecting transition to democracy by avoiding polarization.

In case of Ethiopian, the current political space is dominated by different actors holding extremely different interest; some are in armed struggle against the central government. Besides, there are detained political party leaders while few are pardoned recently after spending long time behind the bar. This shows the prevalence of hostile relationship between the incumbent government and other prominent stakeholder. Besides, like that of Tunisia, there is no culture of dialogue in Ethiopian politics. Despite these, the stakeholders have to be committed by avoiding polarization for the success of national dialogue. Measures that could mitigate polarized environment have to be taken by the incumbent government. The measure could be pardoning those behind the bar, and as the same time other stakeholders have to limit themselves from any polarizing propagandas.

Compromise of interests: national dialogue is not initiated just to bring absolute agreement on all topics of difference. However, to produce remarkable change, the fundamental cause of the crisis shall be addressed; and at least the most prominent stakeholders with wide influence in sphere of public politics must arrive up on agreement through art of compromise.

In case of Tunisia, at the formation phase of the dialogue there were highly contradictory interest from the incumbent party and the oppositions. The oppositions requested for dissolution of the incumbent government lead by Ennahda and replacement with technocrat leader. However, Ennahda on their side insisted on the legitimacy of the polls.⁶³ Nevertheless, after weeks of

⁶²Rikke Hostrup &et al., *supra* note 23, P20

⁶³*Ibid*, P33.

meetings, corridor talks and negotiations 23 political parties agreed to enter into a process of National Dialogue.⁶⁴ Ennahda party and the wing of oppositions arrived at agreement of the replacing the sitting government with other Technocrat leader but continuation of NCA until finalization of draft of constitution and the next election. This agreement showed compromise of interest from both sides.

In case of Tunisia, what oppositions requested the sitting government was for dissolution of the whole government. However, the sitting government had rejected such question by oppositions citing that it was prestigious political treasure given by the free and fair vote of Tunisia before two years. During the dialogue, the opposition continued their question for the dissolution of NCA dominated by Ennahda party, and the replacement of the incumbent government with another technocrat leader. In the early stage of dialogue, Ennahda party firmly rejected the idea presented by wing of oppositions lead by Nidaa Tune. However, after series of negotiation, Ennahda party and the wing of oppositions arrived at agreement of replacing the sitting government with other Technocrat leader but continuation of NCA until finalization of draft of constitution and the next election. This agreement showed compromise of interest from both sides. The incumbent party accepted replacement of head of state by technocrat leader while the opposition abandoned their question of dissolution of NCA.

In case of Ethiopian, it is clearly put in the legislation that the dialogue will address the fundamental cause of disagreements. And it is expected that on such fundamental issues the stakeholders may hold different stands that seems extremely contradictory. Thus, there is a high possibility for occurrence of a deadlock situation amid the dialogue. And such deadlock shall be solved by arts of compromise. Among the stakeholders, there must be culture of compromising initial interests for the sake of leading the dialogue towards its big success. Especially, the prominent stakeholders have to be bound by principle of give and take. And the commission also needs to be smart enough in presenting the middle way whenever the dialogue confronted deadlocked conditions.

Change oriented commitments of stakeholders: If people participate in a dialogue that subsequently produces no results, then dialogue will begin to

⁶⁴Ibid, P35.

abuse its limits as a method, and people will become disillusioned, with the consequent risk not only to the dialogue process itself but to the system as a whole.⁶⁵To the worst scenario, it could be exploited by the incumbent government just to persist its political power misleadingly asserting that all political actors are inside the political process of ensuring peace.

In case of Tunisia, the national dialogue was really remarkably change oriented. The nature of government, the constitution and the national election was at the center of the dialogue, and all stakeholders were committed for an extraordinary change in all these three agendas.

The Ethiopian national dialogue stakeholders, the incumbent government, the opposition parties and the public in general, have to be committed to nurture the dialogue for remarkable and unprecedented change. It shall not be only a public forum hosting free speech. It shall meet the expectation of the people and international community of sustaining and ensuring everlasting peace. The level of commitment of the commission and the stakeholders shall be for a remarkable change. The importance and success of any negotiation or discussion shall be measured against the degree of its contribution to introduce some fundamental changes in Ethiopian politics. Beyond scoring good track record of culture of discussion and negotiation in domestic politics, the prominent stakeholders in ongoing national dialogue have to be committed to change oriented discourse.

Public buy-in: Public buy-in is a means to give public protection for the dialogue under way. Not only the elite classes shall own the dialogue but different class of society, the youths, the women and minority have to be concerned. Thus, there must be a modality to reach and entertain the interest of various class of society during all phase of the dialogue.

In case of Tunisia, different expertise put their assessment of the level of public buy-in in national dialogue of Tunisia. Some appreciate its level by citing the public forum tailored at local level while others tend criticize by mentioning youths and women out of towns are not properly addressed. The undeniable fact is that behind Quartet, as a union of four prominent civil societies in Tunisia, there was significant number of the members who represented different classes of society. Among these civil societies, UGTT

⁶⁵World Bank and IDEA, *supra* note 7, P4.

only holds about 4% of the total population of Tunisia⁶⁶. Even there was a time when the convener made a call for the people to protest the rigid position of the party in the dialogue.⁶⁷ This shows that public in large were not only observer of the dialogue but participants and protector of the dialogue.

Taking the lesson from Quartet, the Ethiopian national dialogue commission has to sell itself in exchange of public buy-in. It may not be achieved overnight; but the commission has to deliberately work up on securing public buy-in.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

National dialogue is nationally owned political process to solve deep political crisis evolving in a State. The golden feature of such approach of solving political difference is that it gears up on non-violent wheels that finally enable the state to win battle of its difference without bloodshed and damages.

Like other social and political events, national dialogues launched in different states of the world have embraced experience of failure or/and success. Fortunately, the national dialogue held by Tunisian up on 2013 marked one of the most successful national dialogues which finally enabled the convener of the dialogue, i.e. Quartet, to win Nobel Peace Prize by 2015. Consequently, the clandestine behind the success of Tunisian national dialogue become arenas of exploration that attracted expertise of different fields.

Likewise, the author is committed to examine and critically analyze the historical development of Tunisia's national dialogue; and extract the pillars behind this successful dialogue so that Ethiopia takes the possible lessons amid making of its national dialogue. Consequently, it is found that the political commitment in cementing the legitimacy of the convener, art of compromising interests, avoidance of polarization among stakeholders, by side negotiations and mediations among or/and between stakeholders, managing the effect of external actors, balancing of the inclusiveness and

⁶⁶ Elizabet M and Susay S, *supra* note 10, P77.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, P79.

efficiency of the dialogue, balancing of the mandate and efficiency of the dialogue, commitment to change oriented discourse, and public by-in are the pillars behind the success of Tunisia's national dialogue.

Accordingly, as the pillars behind the success of Tunisian national dialogue are feasible to be domesticated and utilized, the author suggest Ethiopian national dialogue's stakeholders: the commission, the sitting government, the opposition parties and other groups to consider the following recommendations amid making the ongoing national dialogue.

- All political parties, including those which boycotted the dialogue, have to go extra miles to appreciate the legitimacy of the convener with an objective of giving the dialogue a chance, and at the same time the convener should be highly committed to show back its neutrality and competency in handling the ongoing national dialogue.
- The commission and other stakeholders, with objective of avoiding overburdening mandates and agendas that can hurt the efficiency of the dialogue, have to focus only on solving fundamental issues that sparked acute political difference among stakeholders. Non-fundamental issues, even if they seem important, have to be managed only for future discourse.
- The commission and other stakeholders, with objective of not hurting the efficiency of the dialogue at blessing of its inclusivity, have to carefully identify and limit the type and number of participants in the dialogue. Meanwhile, the dialogue shall not be narrowed to a discussion of a few politicians, and at the same time it shall not become extensive public forum with no efficiency.
- The commission and other stakeholders, with objectives of narrowing the difference between or among stakeholders on specific agenda, and additionally to bring back any party that boycotted the national dialogue at any stage, have to appreciate and facilitate separate mediation and negotiation alongside the national dialogue.
- The commission and other stakeholders have to manage the involvement of external actors only for goodness and success of the dialogue. The door shall be open only for technical support of professionals.

- The stakeholders in the national dialogue have to be committed for discussion and dialogue by avoiding polarization that scale up insecurity and intolerance.
- The stakeholders have to develop political willingness and commitment to compromise some of their interest whenever the dialogue corned to deadlock situation. And the commission has to be committed to design the way to overcome such deadlock situation along with stakeholders.
- The commission and other stakeholders have to be committed to make the dialogue a change oriented. The maximum care have to be taken not to make the dialogue only a forum of expressing one’s own political stand and interests.
- The commission has to work to secure the public buy-in by producing a modality that enables it to reach and entertain the interest of various class of society during all phase of the dialogue.
