



How to Break the Silence on Genocide, Tyranny and Dictatorship in Ethiopia: Summary of SMNE Forum

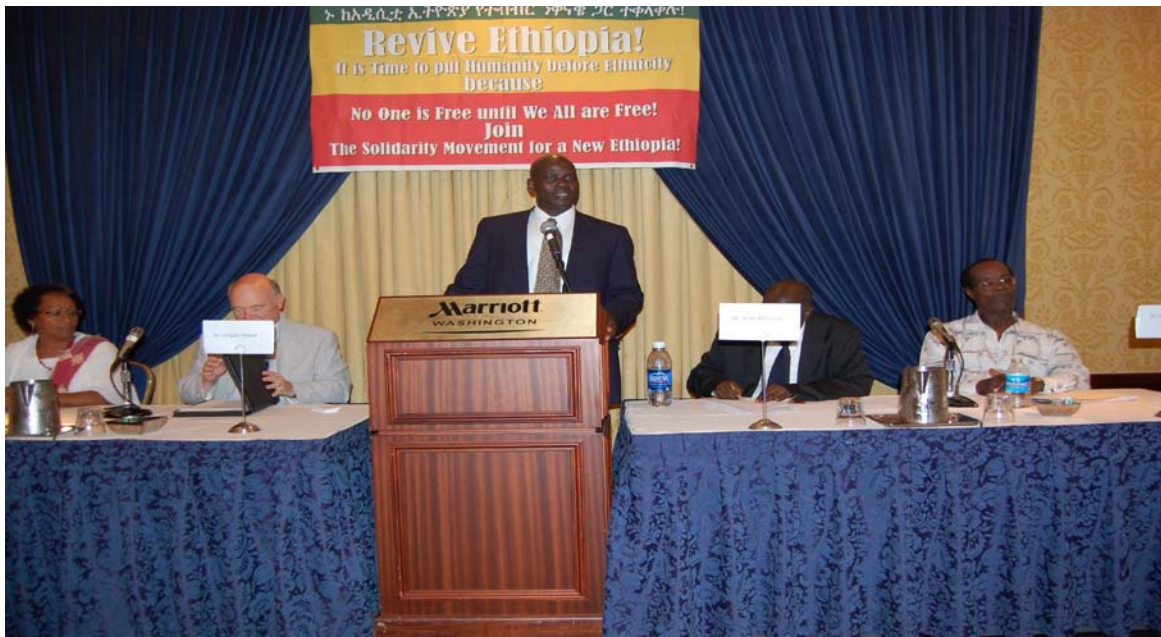
August 1, 2009

On July 26, 2009 the SMNE held a forum in Washington D.C. on the topic: Breaking the Silence on Genocide, Tyranny and Dictatorship in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia today, the people have been silenced by the government, but the atrocities, the repression and the harsh authoritarian rule continue despite the many efforts of Ethiopians in the Diaspora.

Admittedly, we Ethiopians in the Diaspora have not been as effective as we could be in collaborating with each other, but the problem is worsened due to the foreign policies of some western countries who have aligned themselves with “our” dictator rather than with “our” people. Additionally, the media has not covered this story as closely as similar cases in other countries who are “out of favor” like Zimbabwe, Iran and Venezuela.

The question that was at the heart of the presentation by each speaker was:

“How can we expose the true nature of the Meles regime to such excruciating public scrutiny that the public and our government becomes outraged enough to demand that any previous support for this regime transfers to the people?”



Ethiopia can be compared to a patient from the past who is going through surgery with just enough anesthetic to make them unable to communicate, but not enough to stop the pain. Those who are in a position to help, do not, because they are unaware of the acute pain of the patient.

Just like the patient, the people in Ethiopia have no voice; yet, they are in acute distress and no one seems to recognize the severity of their pain. If they speak up, they end up in jail, so many will not take the risk. The purpose of this forum was to bring some experts together to guide us in finding more effective ways to “break the silence!”

On the other hand, the Meles regime understands the power of information and is doing all they can think of to suppress information. A video was shown regarding such efforts by the current government. We know that they bribe, threaten and intimidate people to remain silent. They underhandedly attempt to divide groups; infiltrating organizations, ethnic communities, political parties and religious groups in order to stir up inner conflicts resulting in limiting the effectiveness of these groups.

Unfortunately this tactic has found far too fertile ground in which to plant the seeds of destruction—a serious problem of ours. They have also blocked the media and communication system; even cell phone usage and the Internet. They repeatedly produce propaganda; lying, deceiving and purposefully misleading the people and outsiders as well. They have denied committing genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, but at the forum, a video clip of the Anuak genocide gave visual evidence.

Dr. Stanton: Perpetrators of Genocide are Serial Killers Who Will Kill More if Not Stopped

Dr. Greg Stanton spoke on why the massacre of the Anuak met the definition of genocide. Along with a number of other reasons, he explained that in the case of the Anuak genocide, only one ethnic group, the Anuak, were targeted. He elaborated by saying that there are those who commit genocide and also incite others to do so; leading these others to believe they can get away with it. These instigators are serial killers who will go on to kill again because they basically have no remorse or respect for human life. He explained that the characteristics of these genocidal perpetrators are the same whether you look at those implicated in the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, in Yugoslavia, Cambodia or in Rwanda.

In the case of the Anuak, they were killed by the same Ethiopian government that had repeatedly been killing since 1991. If you look at the list of incidents, it shows a pattern of serial killing, not only in Gambella, which may be one of the best documented cases, but also in the Ogaden, in Awassa, Oromia, Tepi, Addis Ababa and a series of other locales and people. When looked at as a whole, it is easy to see the pattern emerge of incidents that fit the definition of genocide and crimes against humanity.



What needs to be done now is to expose them and to continue to gather the evidence of what was done. Once documented, we should expose the evidence; identifying who was involved, who gave the orders, who was behind it and who committed the crimes because once you have the information, it is only a matter of time before the perpetrator will be brought to justice. They might be brought to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or if the government changes, to an Ethiopian tribunal, but Stanton said, these people will someday stand before a court of law and find themselves accountable for these people they killed, as long as others document it and know who the perpetrators are that were involved. For example, if Meles is proven to be one of them who ordered these killings, he will be prosecuted along with the rest of them within his regime.

Video Clip: The Unchanging Harvest of Dictatorship

A video clip of starving Ethiopians, including children, was shown. The children in the short film could hardly move due to being so weak and emaciated from obvious starvation. It was heart-breaking to watch. When the video ended, I asked the audience about these suffering children before revealing to them that this was a clip from 1985 of starving Tigrayan children. At the time, Meles had accused Mengistu of starving his Tigrayan ethnic group; but now, Meles is accused of intentionally starving the Ogadenis and other Ethiopians! Who will be next? How can this cycle be broken? Yesterday it was the Tigrayans; but today, the Meles loyalists from the TPLF are in power and doing the same to others. This clip came from Bob Geldorf's website and can be viewed there. http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xhmcv_live8-bob-geldorf-speech_life See what you think!

Ahmed Hussein: The SMNE was Formed to Stop This Cycle!

Ato Hussein, a member of the SMNE, explained what the SMNE was and why it was formed; elaborating that if we are to break this cycle of abuse and killing of each other, we have to start by changing ourselves.



He talked about the importance of living by the principles of putting humanity before ethnicity or any other difference and of realizing that no one will be free until all are free. He said that if there was an institution or government that put humanity first in 1985, the Tigrayans would never have starved like they did, preparing them to do the same today to Ethiopians within other ethnic groups. If these principles would have been carried out over the years of the last regimes, there would never have been a TPLF, an EPLF, an OLF, an ONLF, a GPLF, an BPLF, ALF or any other liberation front that emerged out of the injustices perpetrated against them. They were all created as a result of a broken, feudal-based system that devalued and abused others.

In other words, we have been living under a belief that leads to our own mutual destruction and it is this belief that is threatening our survival. When we say that only “I” and my ethnic group or region can be free, we are in trouble. Liberation fronts were formed because no one else cared about “others,” but can only an Oromo free another Oromo? Can only an Amhara free other Amhara or an Anuak free an Anuak? Can’t a Tigrayan help free an Afar and the people of Benishangul-Gumuz free a Southerner?

This broken system is why the SMNE was created to say: “Until all of us are free, none of us are free!” This is why Ato Hussein said he joined the SMNE—because he believed if these principles were lived out in the lives of our leaders and citizenry, Ethiopia could become a healthy society and find a lasting solution to breaking this cycle. To him, as an Oromo, he said he felt that until all Ethiopians are free, none will be free; until justice come to all Ethiopian, justice will never come to the Oromo or anyone else. The survival of everybody depends on all of us, like the way it is basically done in America. He explained that this was why he believes in this movement and felt it was his duty to share these principles with others.

Lemlem Tsegaw: Corruption is just as bad as human rights abuses!

Ms Lemlem Tsegaw stimulated much thought when she said, “Corruption is just as bad as human rights abuse. It is killing the country.” She went on to explain that when a few dominate over everyone else through corruption, it is about survival! She analyzed this statement based on the MO Ibrahim Index.



She said, “If you don’t have food to eat, you won’t have energy to fight for your rights—good governance does not even come into your mind. Corruption leads the people to struggle for food, clean water, shelter and basic ways to live. Corruption shows a lack of sympathy for other people and a lack of morality. It allows a few to take all they want, robbing the country of its resources; thriving and living high, while the rest of the people are dying at the bottom. In order to save peoples’ lives, it is ‘a must’ to fight this battle against corruption. A few take everything and most get nothing. Without having any resources and struggling for daily survival, there is no way to fight back.

“Corruption in Ethiopia is a microcosm of what it is going on all over Africa. If there were good governance, the rule of law, safety and security, sustainable development, transparency and accountability in Ethiopia instead of pervasive corruption, the Ethiopian people would be able to feed themselves. The reason why Africa is not moving forward is corruption!

Following her talk, a PowerPoint presentation with four different pictures was shown. The first picture was of a young woman, Neda Soltani, killed in Iran during the election protests.



She was born in 1982 and died in 2009. The story was all over the media, who were all outraged over the incident. Even the president talked about her death and coverage continued for the next 24 hours. Almost all in the audience had seen her picture.

The next slide was of a young Ethiopian woman, Shibire Desalegne, born in 1984 and was killed in 2005 in Addis Ababa during the election protests.



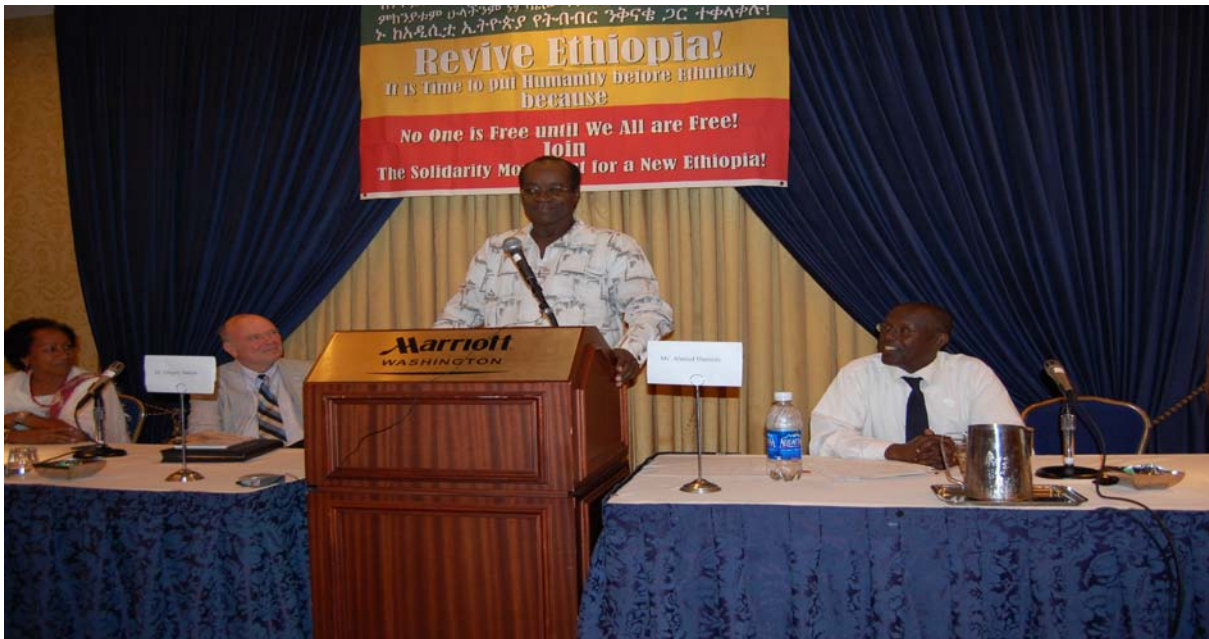
I asked how many present had seen her picture in the western media. No one in the room raised their hand even though the cause of her death was the same—a repressive government who killed someone for peacefully protesting.

The next person shown was *imprisoned Burmese democracy leader* Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition leader who has been imprisoned for years. Many in the audience had seen her picture in the media a number of times. Then a picture of Birtukan Mideksa was shown and I asked the same question as to how many had seen her picture in the western media, but none in the audience had.

These women all had something in common, but the way they have been covered in the world is totally different. We Ethiopians have to take some responsibility for this because in order to free us and our people, we have to break silence. Africa must want to break the silence and take action for we have had enough of genocide, tyranny and dictatorship!

Dr. George Ayittey: Freeing Ethiopia and Africa!

Dr. Ayittey gave a stimulating and inspiring talk on how Africa can be freed, emphasizing that Ethiopians must free Ethiopia and Africans must free Africa! Ayittey gave reasons for our “chains.” He said the reason was “failed leadership.” He explained that it was the leaders of Africa who were killing the continent. He spoke of the corruption and the way that western governments have sided with the dictators instead of with the people.



He stated that Ethiopians can learn from what worked in Ghana. He emphasized that the problem of Ethiopia cannot be solved by the political parties or the political leaders. Instead, he said, Ethiopians have to create a non-political alliance; explaining that it had to be non-political because when organizations were political in their intent, they would start to fight over becoming popular and being the next to lead the country. This infighting falls right in the open hands of a dictator who only stands to benefit from it.

Ayittey then advised that in the case of Ethiopia, the tribal issues must be dealt with as a priority, saying, “It’s not about one group, but it must be about all of the people standing together for the joint survival of their country. This is the supreme task.” He went on to say that right now, what is happening in Ethiopia is a tribal apartheid system. He warned, “If thee tribal problems are not dealt with effectively and some seek revenge for the past 18 years, the outcome could be terrible.”

He gave a famous and sobering quote regarding the Holocaust referring to a similar time when many did not stand up for their fellow humans. He adapted it to Ethiopia saying, “When ‘they’ came for the Anuak, I did not do anything because they were Anuak. When they came for the Oromo, I did nothing because I was not Oromo. When they came for the Ogadeni, I did nothing because I was not an Ogadeni. When they came for me, there was no one left.”

He concluded by saying, “Right now, Ethiopians have to work in solidarity, not for a political party, but instead should create an alliance, in the Diaspora as well as within Ethiopia. This is how the Ghanaians did it and Ethiopians can learn from this model.” He then said he would help in any way he could and re-emphasized that there must be unity for the sake of the country and to find a lasting peace. People have to put their nation above their ethnic group or political party. It must be something like this that can break the silence, expose the truth and revive the country through a peaceful transition to a new and healthier system for everybody.

Next Steps:

In conclusion, from what we learned from this meeting, there is more work to be done and this is the beginning. Some of those steps include:

Finding experts who will work in five different areas:

1. Safety and security
2. Transparency and accountability
3. Reconciliation
4. Human Rights
5. Economy
6. Human Development

The SMNE is urging Ethiopians to send us a proposal or your CV (resume') indicating in which areas you would like to get involved.

September 13th March to Stop Genocide and Dictatorship in Ethiopia/Africa in Washington DC:

Also, we urge every Ethiopian to join and contribute to this September 13th March so it is more than successful.

Overall Lesson to Learn:

If we want real change in Ethiopia, every Ethiopian must not look for others to do it for them, but instead, it comes to the need for every person to commit and sacrifice. You do not need an invitation, you have to step up and do your share. **Can we count on you?**

=====

Please do not hesitate to email Mr. Obang Metho,
Executive Director of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia
If you have comments email it to: Obang@solidaritymovement.org