



**An Open Letter to Prime Minister of Canada;
Calling on the Canadian government to rescind the invitation of Meles Zenawi
to the upcoming G-20 Summit meeting in Toronto.**

June 20, 2010

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A3

VIA FACSIMILE

Dear Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

We, in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, (SMNE)¹ a social justice movement of diverse Ethiopians, working to bring freedom, justice, democracy, the rule of law, equality and the respect for human and civil rights to Ethiopia, are calling on the Canadian government to rescind the invitation of Meles Zenawi to the upcoming G-20 Summit meeting in Toronto.

His inclusion is an affront to not only Ethiopians, but also to Canadians, including those of Ethiopian background, who believe a free country like Canada should not be welcoming a brutal dictator, who under other circumstances, could be held accountable under the new Canadian *Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act* for his alleged complicity in an ongoing series of acts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity directed against civilians in Ethiopia and Somalia.

Canada took a leading role in drafting the Rome Statute; followed by the enactment of complementary national legislation to implement the statute within Canada that now makes it possible to deny entry visas to war criminals and to pursue alleged perpetrators, conducting investigations and prosecutions of suspected criminal actions committed outside of Canada; particularly where the relevant State—like Ethiopia—is unwilling or unable to investigate and prosecute cases of these crimes itself. Why is Canada ignoring the case of Meles Zenawi?

Over seven investigations by groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Genocide Watch have produced strong and abundant evidence alleging Meles Zenawi's involvement, as a head of state who exerts nearly complete control over all branches of this one-party government, in an ongoing pattern of human rights atrocities. That evidence also points to his responsibility for creating a government-backed system of injustice that ensures impunity to perpetrators while at the same time, ensures punitive measures towards political dissidents and opponents.

¹ ¹ The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, (SMNE), has main branches in Canada and the United States and chapters throughout the world. Our driving principles are "putting humanity before ethnicity or any other distinctions" because, in any healthy, well-functioning society—whether national or international—we must care about the rights of all our members for "no one will be free until all are free!" For more information, see: www.solidaritymovement.org.

This includes arbitrary imprisonment of countless numbers of Ethiopian political prisoners such as Canadian citizen, Bashir Mahktal, and popular opposition leader, Birtukan Mideksa—both on false or whimsical charges.

As you certainly already know, the entire Ethiopian electoral process, both in 2005 and even more so in 2010, was controlled by Meles and his party, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Their success in closing any political space can be seen in the absurd 99.6% victory where only one parliamentary seat out of 547 seats went to the opposition.

Significant documentation was gathered by Human Rights Watch, the US State Department in the 2009 Human Rights Report and by numerous investigative journalists and other groups; giving evidence that the Meles regime used an array of bribes (such as food aid, fertilizer, government jobs, educational and other opportunities), threats, beatings, torture, imprisonments and strong armed tactics—including alleged politically-motivated murders to suppress any and all opposition—all carried out through a complex system of informants and enforcers down to the household level. The election results are now being challenged by the coalition opposition party, MEDREK, but there is no hope for a meaningful response from the Meles government to this falsely claimed victory.

Why then is Meles Zenawi, who could be compared to Omar al-Bashir of the Sudan or Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, not, being held similarly accountable by the Canadian government and the G-20 members? Are these not double standards that will undermine yours and their credibility?

France recently took a stand for international justice when the recent French-African Summit location was changed from Egypt to France because France objected to Egypt's intention to invite Omar al-Bashir—in defiance to his warrant for arrest issued by the International Criminal Court. Yet, France, who took this strong position, has not yet implemented the necessary laws to enforce the Rome Statute like has been done in Canada. ***Should Canada, who now is equipped with all the necessary legal "apparatus" to address such crimes, now ignore the evidence?***

How can Canada maintain its exemplary moral leadership in the world in its advancement of human rights and democracy when one arm of the Canadian government convicts Rwandan war criminal Désiré Munyaneza of the same crimes alleged to be committed by Meles, while another arm of the same government undermines the democratic movement of the Ethiopian people by giving this perpetrator of their tyranny, oppression and suffering, not only entry into the country, but also an honored place at the table of world leaders?

This is at odds with the billion or more of Canadian taxpayers' dollars spent to promote democracy and human rights in Ethiopia only to see the utter failure of these dollars—or any quiet diplomacy—to budge this one-party authoritarian regime towards loosening its increasingly tightening grip on every right and value that Ethiopians seek and Canadians cherish. ***Why should we now pretend we do not clearly know what is going on in this country and how Canadian dollars have been abused and exploited? Why should we now turn a blind eye and reward a dictator with our silence?***

Can the Canadian government and the Canadian media speak out and break this silence? Everyone now knows the truth! Continued alignment with an unelected and brutal regime will only become increasingly more difficult to justify; eventually backfiring if this course is not altered.

In testimony given before **the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health at the hearing of June 17, 2010**, Human Rights Watch representative, **Leslie Lefkow, testified, "... over the long term, if its current trajectory [of authoritarianism and repression] continues, the Ethiopian government is destined to become a serious liability rather than an asset to US interests in the region... so long as there is no accountability for human rights violations—whether at the hands of security forces, development officials or ruling party cadres—it will be impossible for Ethiopia to achieve the kind of governance and stability it needs to be a truly viable partner for the United States."**²

² http://www.ecadforum.com/files/Testimony_Leslie

Is it any different for Canada? While Meles calls on donor countries to be patient with the lack of democratic progress in Ethiopia—even after nearly two decades in power—the truth is that he and his party cadres have no intention of easing up on draconian measures used to stay in control, including new repressive legislation that severely clamps down on civil society, the independent media and the democratic rights of the people.

Mr. Prime Minister, Canada should not wait for other countries, like the US or the UK, to take the lead, but should follow the same leading role Canada took in drafting the Rome Statute and then in enacting it in Canada. ***This is an opportunity to show who Canada truly supports; not just with encouraging words of democracy or the passing of laws that are not uniformly enforced, but with meaningful action. Who will you choose—the victims of human rights atrocities or an authoritarian strongman?***

As Ethiopia cleverly reaches out to new economic partners in order to give them a vested financial interest in maintaining an illiberal government, we in the SMNE warn those with long-term interests in Ethiopia that this is an increasingly fragile government that will not last forever. The silence of the Ethiopian people following the rigged election does not mean that there is not increasing tension beneath the surface that could erupt into violence or massive resistance without notice.

Tyranny eventually implodes and the warning signs that always accompany it are now being clearly seen—from the increasing repression over every aspect of life in Ethiopia to the inability of the government to cover it up any longer. If allies confront such repression publicly—like the jamming of the Voice of America—expect attacks and the possibility that the partnership will falter; however, ***failure to address these concerns will also embolden the regime and give passive permission to continue the abuses of the people. How far is Canada willing to go before it becomes intolerable?*** It is a slippery slope. Being on the side of the people of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa at this time, may prevent far worse results later.

These are moral questions and must be answered by Canadians defining who they are and what part they want to play in one of the most troubled hotspots in the world—the Horn of Africa—where this regime is pivotal in undermining its stability and world peace. If Canada pursues self-interest at the cost of the freedom, human rights and security of Ethiopians, it will result in the increased resentment, alienation and radicalization of the people. This is already happening. On the other hand, if Canada stands strong in upholding the human rights and liberties of those outside their borders, they will build long-lasting global friendships. The Ethiopian people seek such a friendship with Canada.

In closing, we urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, and your administration to stand by the ***Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act*** and the principles you have established in Canada regarding supporting democracy and human rights globally, by withdrawing this invitation and by re-examining your alliance and financial support of the current Ethiopian regime.

May God give you and your administration the guidance, strength and courage needed at such difficult times as these to rise to the challenges of our day; making decisions that will enhance our shared future!

In anticipation,
Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia

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This letter has been cc or sent to:
Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Official Opposition,
Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois,

Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party

President Barack Obama

Vice President, Mr. Joseph Biden

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

Secretary Robert M. Gates, Department of Defense

General James L. Jones, National Security Advisor

Senator John F. Kerry, Chairman of the Senate. Foreign Relations

Senator Richard G. Lugar, Ranking Member of Committee on Foreign Relations

Senator Russell D. Feingold, Chairman of Subcommittee on African Affairs

Senator Patrick Leahy, Chairman of Subcommittee on Foreign Operations

Senator Robert Menendez, Chairman of Subcommittee on Foreign Relations

House of Representatives, Mr. Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa

House of Representatives, Mr. Chris Smith, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Africa

United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron

This letter has also been CC to G-20 members.

Other Organizations

* World Bank

* International Monetary Fund

* Financial Stability Board

* Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs,

UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,

German Minister of Foreign Affairs,

French Ministry of Foreign affairs,

Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs,

Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

European Union Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs,

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Ethiopian Embassies around the world and Donor Countries embassies in Addis Ababa

This letter has been cc or sent to major news media outlets such as The Globe and Mail, The National Post, BBC, the Guardian, New York Times, Washington Post etc,