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Electrical Blackout as US Secretary of State Clinton Addresses the African Union in Ethiopia!

Was it mere coincidence or purposeful sabotage that caused an electrical blackout to occur just as United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was addressing the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia this past Monday as part of her African tour? *As she began the topic of democracy, suddenly the lights went out and stayed out for nearly eight minutes before generators were turned on. Coincidence?* Maybe, but some politically savvy Ethiopians viewed it as a veiled attempt to undermine the Secretary's strong speech in support of democratic rights—a message that this regime would censor if they had the chance.

Ethiopians know that free speech does not exist in Ethiopia and even if their first response was to suspect that this blackout was no accident; they still wondered if Meles would really go this far. On the other hand, it would not be the first time. Many Ethiopians remember a similar incident on May 7, 2005 when two million Ethiopians came out to the streets in support of the popular Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party, which was seen as a vitally needed alternative to the repressive regime of Meles Zenawi. *Just as the leaders of the opposition party were about to speak, there was an electrical outage, cutting the sound system and making it impossible to address this vast crowd of peaceful, pro-democracy supporters! Coincidence? Doubtful!*

Mr. Meles also appears to have an aversion to journalists—as more Ethiopian journalists have been forced into exile following harassment, arrests, torture and imprisonment than in most any other country in the world. Last month Ghanaian journalists, representing the government of Ghana, experienced similar treatment. After arriving at the airport in Addis Ababa, they were arrested and detained even after showing documents verifying they were representing the government and had an official invitation. This is contrary to normal diplomatic protocol; causing the Ghanaian government to formally complain and ask the Ethiopian government for a formal apology. *This kind of behavior by one government to another was previously unheard of; yet, Mr. Meles seems to be willing to go to new lows in repressing the flow of information!*

Last year, radio broadcasts from Voice of America (VOA) and Deutsche Welle (DW), both coming from outside of Ethiopia, were so disturbed with excessive static that no one could understand what was being said; causing some to suspect government interference. *Initially, the regime absolutely denied such interference but later, Mr. Meles brazenly admitted to jamming the broadcasts and justified his regime's right to do so.* Most found it interesting that these attempts to jam programs came directly following some programs that exposed Meles and his regime to allegations and documentary evidence that linked them to the 2003 genocide of the Anuak in the southwestern region of Gambella and to plans that originated in his own offices!

Intermittent jamming of these programs continues as well as the regular jamming of the new and only independent satellite television program, ESAT, which is broadcast from Europe. The regime did the same around the time of the parliamentary elections in 2005 and again during the nationwide local elections in 2008.

No wonder why it is so easy to suspect Meles' complicity in the recent electrical outage; however, only a thorough investigation; which would never be allowed in Ethiopia, would reveal if this was a calculated plan intended to warn Secretary Clinton to better uphold Ethiopia's preferred—though false—image as a model of democracy.

According to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), *“Meles was once-considered a ‘new breed of African leader’ and knew better than most how to speak the language of democracy, rule of law, development and good governance to western donor countries; however, as he faces more rejection from Ethiopians, he is cracking down on the people. As he does, the true nature of his one-party tyrannical regime is being exposed to the world.”*

Ethiopians are encouraged by indications in Secretary Clinton’s speech that she too is aware that the thin “democratic” veneer covering Ethiopia’s strongman is starting to crack; revealing the true authoritarian nature of the TPLF/EPRDF regime. For example, *when she named ten countries which had made democratic progress, Ethiopia was noticeably left out.*

As she warned those African leaders who continued to believe in “one election; one time,” Meles surely flinched in unappreciated discomfort remembering how his security forces shot 194 peaceful election protestors of the 2005 rigged election and how he recently claimed a 99.6% victory in the Ethiopian National Election of 2010 after closing off all political space to any opposition groups through harassment, intimidation, arrests, beatings, imprisonment of opposition leaders and even killings.

Mr. Meles and his TPLF regime have cut off the country from access to information and blocked free speech and any independent media. The only media—such as TV, radio, newspapers and Internet sites—are all either blocked or censored. Ethiopia has the lowest Internet penetration in Africa. Somalia has higher use of telecommunications than Ethiopia as the Meles regime intensely fears the “dangerous ideas’ that can be promoted if people knew their rights and were able to communicate with each other and those in the larger global society.

Whether divine intervention brought a series of unusual events together simultaneously, whether Meles, in desperation, contributed to it himself or whether it was all simply “coincidence,” it quickly changed the course of this high-level diplomatic trip.

Following her speech, Secretary Clinton made a quick decision to cut back her planned three-day trip to Addis Ababa to one day as a series of earthquakes, occurring earlier that day, triggered a large volcanic eruption in the northeastern parts of Ethiopia and into Eritrea; spewing volcanic ash eight miles high and leaving large clouds that threatened flights within the country. *Such clouds may be seen as a symbol of the clouds of darkness and deception covering the truth about this regime, the electrical outage as the “blackout” of information in the country and the earthquakes as the stirrings of a democratic movement of the people, ready to shake themselves loose from the tight grip of this dictator.*

Ethiopians are seeking to build a **New Ethiopia** where truth, justice, freedom, prosperity and equality of people will lay the foundation for a better future; **where humanity comes before ethnicity** and where Ethiopian can work together to uphold the rights and liberty of all its people for **no one is free until all are free! May God bring light to Ethiopia!**

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Please do not hesitate to e-mail your comments to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE, at: obang@solidaritymovement.org.

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