



Obang Addresses Ethiopians in Las Vegas, Nevada: “The Ethiopian Holodomor—Death by Hunger—in the Ogaden and Beyond”

August 28, 2011

Today I am here to speak about hunger in Ethiopia; not hunger caused by the worst drought in sixty years, but manmade hunger or hunger that could have been avoided by a legitimate government that was accountable to the people. Worse yet, what we may be seeing is a famine-genocide; intentionally planned and carried out by Meles and his regime in order to punish, weaken and eliminate the people of the Ogaden and beyond in order to gain access to their natural resources. The drought has exacerbated an already desperate situation.

In 1933, Stalin perpetrated a manmade famine-genocide that took the lives of ten million Ukrainians, who at the time, lived under the domination of the Soviet Union. What is now called the Ukrainian **Holodomor**—meaning death by hunger—was a well-calculated plan by the Stalin regime to punish those resisting collectivization—the giving over of their land and livestock to the state. He also wanted to crush any nationalistic movement meant to claim Ukrainian independence from the increasingly authoritarian Marxist-Leninist regime. Although 80% of Ukrainians were peasant farmers, living in the breadbasket of Europe, they died of hunger while enough grain to feed the entire nation was exported to the Soviet Union.¹

Military blockades were erected that prevented aid from reaching the people and the people from leaving the cordoned off area. The government vehemently denied claims of the famine, hunger and starvation; even sometimes arresting those who used the words. Many in the west covered for the regime; reinforcing Stalin’s denial, welcoming him into the League of Nations and with it; causing many more to die.

Let us now look at Ethiopia and the similarities between these two Marxist-Leninist leaders; Stalin and now Meles. In the best light, after twenty years in office and billions of dollars of foreign aid, Meles and his regime have failed miserably to increase food security in the country. However, more disturbing yet is the abundant evidence that Meles and his regime are guilty of committing both active violations of human rights as well as “genocide by hunger” in the Ogaden region of southeastern Ethiopia as they block all humanitarian aid, relief organizations, human rights groups and journalists from entering the region. Most Ogadenis have also been blocked from leaving the area to seek food elsewhere.

Despite it all, reports have emerged alleging the regime’s complicity in egregious human rights atrocities, the destruction of livelihoods, the displacement of the people and the resulting extreme hunger; only deepened in severity by the drought. These reports are all denied by the Meles regime. Reporters and journalists are arrested and detained if caught entering the area; despite the fact that the TPLF/EPRDF regime is and has been signing contracts with foreign companies for rights to the abundant reserves of natural gas and petroleum in the region.

As this kleptocratic regime aggressively pursues control over the resources in the Ogaden, Ethiopians in other places are also being targeted as the TPLF/EPRDF brutally tramples on the rights of the people as they grab agricultural land, minerals and other natural resources.

The Ogaden may be the worst case; yet, the weak and silenced voices of the hungry and suffering come from all over Ethiopia and are pleading for help. In a country split by ethnic, religious and political divisions—much of it fomented by the minority Meles regime—too few have been willing to put their self-interests and sectarian prejudices aside to stand up for what is right.

This is changing and today I see evidence of that among Ethiopians here in Las Vegas and in the other countries and cities I have recently visited! **In Las Vegas, you who have been planning this event have made it even more clear that you care about your fellow Ethiopians as you wanted to focus on supporting your Ogadeni brothers and sisters! As you do, you are showing your commitment to all the people of Ethiopia—without ethnic, religious, political, regional or language bias.**

I see compassion. I see moral outrage over injustice. I see a thirst for truth. I see a willingness to sacrifice for others. I see the emergence of a New Ethiopia and I am more than happy to be here among you at such a time as this!

Thank you Ethiopian Vision Diaspora for inviting me to speak in Las Vegas—the home of many Ethiopians in the US! I want to especially thank those who conceived the idea that we must stand up together for the people of the Ogaden who are in serious jeopardy. Even five years ago this would not have happened. Ethiopians are changing and you are an example of this. This includes people like Dr. Mulugeta, Gezahgue, Yosef, Yonas, Tizazu, Berhanu; all of whom are committed to improving life in Ethiopia without regard to ethnicity or any other distinctions; putting humanity before ethnicity and caring about our neighbor for no one will be free until all are free.

The organizing group asked me to focus on the unacceptable levels of hunger in the Ogaden, its root causes and the relationship between starvation, human rights abuses and the grabbing of land and natural resources by this one-party government as they make secret deals with foreign investors and regime cronies.

A major problem and one of the root causes of the widespread hunger and crisis in the Ogaden is the purposeful information black-out of what is going on; both now and over the last several years and the closing off of any access to the area. It is hard to respond to a crisis if no one knows there is one or if those who do know; refuse to admit it or are prohibited from acting on it. The urgent issue before us today is to confront these obstacles before it is too late for many of our fellow Ethiopians.

Ethiopia, Somalia and the Horn of Africa are in a state of a food emergency as they face the worst drought in sixty years. **Why is it that the whole world is talking about starvation, drought and famine in Somalia, while only a few, like the BBC, are addressing the severe crisis in the Ogaden and other parts of Ethiopia? Why is the plight of our Ogadeni family being mostly ignored and why is it that Meles and the TPLF/EPRDF military under his control have not been held accountable for the widespread perpetration of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other egregious human rights violations against the people of the Ogaden—and Somalia—over the last five years; all of which has hugely exacerbated the vulnerability of the people?**

Why is it that this area continues to be forcibly blocked off from humanitarian groups and the media; as well as to the rest of the world, for several years now with little outcry? The drought can only be deepening the misery, suffering and life-threatening levels of hardship.

Why is it that the donor countries and members of the Development Assistance Group (DAG) have conducted “business as usual” after 42 non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) were kicked out of the Ogaden region over two years ago; including the International Red Cross and Medicins Sans Frontiers (Doctors without Borders)?

Why when villages are razed, civilians killed, women raped, livestock killed, wells poisoned and thousands displaced, is it met with silence? Why is it when reporters attempt to cover the story, they are detained or arrested like the two Swedish journalists now being held in detention?

Meles’ puppets, including the Ogadeni Ambassador to the UK, recently denied the seriousness of the hunger and drought in the Ogaden. He and many others have caved into their human responsibility to respect the worth and rights of others. Is it not the moral teachings of the Muslim, Jew or Christian to stand up for what is right, just and true; particularly in regards to the poor and vulnerable?

Why is it that USAID says there is no hunger in Ethiopia even though all of us have heard countless stories from those returning from Ethiopia as they speak with shock regarding the increasing numbers of starving people, even in Addis Ababa! Why the USAID Deputy Administrator Gregory Gotlied praised Ethiopia's effort for food security and there is no famine in Ethiopia during an interview with the Voice of America Amharic Program?

Why is it that remittances to Ethiopia have increased by 88% since last year if it is not due to the increasing food prices and with it, the increasing inability of Ethiopians to feed themselves without help from family members in western countries? Meles is getting a free pass on accountability; not only for his complicity in human rights crimes, but also for contributing to the death-toll caused by blocking off the Ogaden and undermining the ability of Ogadenis and other Ethiopians to sustain themselves after being displaced by military aggression or forced from their land under “villagization projects” that essentially give indigenous land to foreign investors.

In Gambella, promises of improved services to those forcibly evicted from their homes were never kept. Instead, after homes were destroyed and crops left behind or never planted, the people ended up living under trees with no shelter, food or supports. Some died and even more will face the same risk as many of the displaced have now been told to return home after all; however, their crops are already lost and the planting season has come and gone. People in the “breadbasket of Ethiopia,” where all the foreign investors are fixing their eyes, are now hungry.

Foreign aid was supposed to enhance sustainable, self-sufficiency in agriculture, but how much has actually made its way to the people? In the Gambella, well known for its great agricultural potential, has not benefited after twenty years of the TPLF/EPRDF. For example, after receiving millions or billions of dollars of agricultural aid and supports from donor countries and NGO’s, why is there no increased productivity of the land and little to no improvement in access to the markets?

Why is it that there have been no tractors, combines or other mechanized farm machinery in all of Gambella until recently when companies like the Indian company, Karuturi Global, or al Moudi’s, Saudi Star, brought them in themselves in order to grow food on indigenous land; destined mainly for export? Not one single indigenous person or community owns a tractor in the entire Gambella region! Why is it that Meles’ troops, during the genocide of the Anuak in 2003, destroyed granaries rather than helped to protect or to build them? Why is it that most farmers in Gambella still use antiquated methods of farming and cannot even own their own land? Where has all the money gone?

This screams of corruption! So, why is it that no one is holding this government accountable by talking to the local people; asking to see the results of the funding from USAID or the World Bank or the UK International Development Fund or many others?

Why are they not demanding to see the results with their own eyes and by asking non-EPRDF party members rather than government supporters and cronies? Why is no one complaining about this?

Why can we, the tax-payers of the donor countries or the citizens of Ethiopia, not see how these developmental dollars are used in local areas so citizens and non-government-controlled institutions and civic organizations can hold local and federal government officials accountable? Where is the purported transparency that everyone talks about? Let these organizations and donor groups post it on their websites with enough details so it can be checked out and whistles blown when TPLF/EPRDF purported development ends up to be simply an illusion?

Ethiopia's biggest problem is Meles. The BBC did an investigation and exposed the manmade nature of the crisis;<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/9556288.stm> **including the politicizing of aid; however, just like happened during the Holodomor, many foreign/donor countries, development organizations and some celebrities are choosing to defend Meles—covering the truth. For example, the Development Assistant Group (DAG), which claims to value human rights and transparency, condemned the 2010 report by Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/10/18/ethiopia-donor-aid-supports-repression>, a comprehensive in-country investigation that documented the widespread politicizing of humanitarian aid; including agricultural supports, seed and fertilizer!**

Many Ethiopians, living in fear of reprisals, risked their lives in giving information that was later discounted by DAG. DAG and others like them are essentially siding with Meles, a Marxist-Leninist regime, reminiscent of Stalin! USAID is even claimed there is no starvation or drought in Ethiopia and did not even mention the Ogaden; yet, we Ethiopians know what is going on from people on the ground whose voices are either being ignored or repressed.

On the other hand, famine-prone Tigray is doing remarkably well due to careful forethought and because of the abundant resources being poured into the area as Meles and his TPLF regime play favorites with their own region while other regions of Ethiopia receive little to no help. This plays well into Meles' hand as he seeks to entrench his power in Tigray by rewarding cronies and as he seeks to isolate non-supporting Tigrayans from other Ethiopians in order to secure his position as the only one to protect them from the disenfranchised others who are not happy with this injustice.

Certainly, NGO's and donor countries cannot be oblivious to this favoritism and must wonder about the many regions of the country, like the Ogaden, that are not included in the "safety-net" of the TPLF/EPRDF. Now, with this famine, those who have supported deception and a lack of accountability by this regime; must face the truth that they are contributing to the suffering, hunger and starvation of countless vulnerable people and children. Eventually, all of this will be revealed and Meles will go down like Mubarak and others.

On Wednesday, August 24th, the TPLF/EPRDF government representatives will be holding a meeting here in Las Vegas meant to garner support for the Renaissance Dam. They call it an anti-poverty project meant to feed the people, but by the time it is built and functioning, who knows how many Ethiopians will have died!

Preparing for the future is important, but why has it not been going on over the last years. Ethiopia has a history of drought and famine. This drought was anticipated and was an emerging problem a year ago; yet instead, the Meles regime showed its priorities as it spent one hundred million dollars to buy 200 army tanks, which many believe are intended to defend the regime against freedom-loving Ethiopians. Now, with the increasing hunger, the rise of freedom movements throughout the world, the deep discontent of the people and the internal divisions within the TPLF/EPRDF, this regime certainly lives in fear of a mass uprising and seeks to gain support from the people in any way it can. Meles is an experienced opportunist. Now that his cohort Mubarak is gone; Meles hopes to gain popular support among Ethiopians by promising to feed the people through this diversionary project—the Renaissance Dam—hoping it will counter the increasing likelihood of an Arab Spring in Ethiopia.

In 1998, Meles fomented a war with Eritrea as a tactic to gain public support against a common enemy and it seemed to work for awhile. Recently, he tried it again with less success. Several months ago, as he threatened to bring regime change in Eritrea, he found little appetite among Ethiopians for another war. **Anyone who analyzes that conflict might begin to question as to whether these cousins—Meles and Isaias—have an amicable agreement to maintain war banter between them as a means to control their respective citizens. Now, as this attempt to rally around an “enemy” failed; at the fall of Mubarak, suddenly Meles proposes the dam; not because he cares about the people, but for self-protection.**

We Ethiopians should be alert to the many survival tactics Meles has used over the years so they can be exposed. Making boogiemens out of others—especially terrorists—is one of his favorite defense mechanisms and now anyone can be so accused. He has used it with Isaias, with the OLF, the ONLF and with al-Shabaab as he claims their terroristic connections while denying his own terroristic acts. In actuality, Meles thrives on counter-terrorism and supposed threats of attack. Would al Shabaab, also guilty of crimes against humanity and other war crimes, be as radical as it is today without Meles? Doubtful! Reports have emerged since Meles was in the bush, indicating Meles/TPLF/EPRDF perpetrated attacks blamed on other groups in order to justify counter-insurgency. He loves the power and the money that comes from being both the arsonist and the fireman.

In late 2005, prior to the invasion of Somalia, I spoke to a young Christian girl who had been an eyewitness and target of alleged religiously-motivated killings of Christians at a church in Oromia by alleged radical Muslims trained in Somalia; but instead, she knew one of the attackers. He was a relative and was not Muslim at all, but instead, he was an avid member of the TPLF/EPRDF. The whole incident was used as a justification for the invasion of Somalia and possibly to divide Oromos based on religion after living together in peace for centuries.

Many people are beginning to understand the games Meles plays with the lives of others. As the whole world is seeing the images of the dying in Somalia, this Meles-created tragedy is going in the Ogaden and must be exposed. Meles is what strengthened al Shabaab by creating a “silent Darfur” that no one talked about. Now he is trying to drum up support by using them to create fear among others that they will take over the Horn. Yet, it was under Meles that his own TPLF-controlled military committed acts of terrorism in the Ogaden and into Somalia. In some ways, if the drought had not occurred, there would be no pressure to open up this region and the handiwork of Meles to the eyes of the world!

Ironically, these TPLF-controlled troops were moved from Gambella to Somalia in late 2005 and early 2006 where they committed similar crimes against humanity before doing the same in the Ogaden and Somalia; including war crimes in Somalia. Now they are peacekeepers on the border between Southern Sudan and Sudan! How can this be?

What can we do?

You have no idea what a significant message you are giving as you come together to stand up for the people of the Ogaden and beyond. Together we must call for an opening up of the Ogaden; giving humanitarian groups, reporters, human rights groups and other civic groups free and unfettered access to the area. Talks should be started with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) so there can be a ceasefire by all parties. However, all parties should be alerted to the potential false flag operations that could be committed by the Meles regime and blamed on the ONLF. No one should assume that Meles' troops will not attempt to pose as the ONLF in order to keep access closed and their own exploitation of the natural resources in full swing.

On August 17, 2011, the website Ezega reported that Somaliland, Ethiopia, and China will be signing a trilateral agreement on oil, gas and logistics and that PetroTrans Company of Hong Kong signed a 25 year agreement with Ethiopia for about \$4 billion to purchase the oil and gas on eight blocks in the Ogaden region that they soon will develop. This includes building gas and oil pipelines from the Ogaden Basin to the Somaliland port of Berbera; followed by processing plants. From Berbera, China has allegedly agreed to export the gas and oil and the article states that Ethiopian Shipping Lines has placed an order worth \$293 million for nine vessels and that the port of Berbera will be connected by roads, rail network and other infrastructure in Ethiopia. (<http://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails.aspx?Page=heads&NewsID=3015>)

Does this sound like an area that should be open for this kind of work but not to help the starving Ogadenis? Like the people of Gambella, the Southern Nations, Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Oromia, the Amhara region and also Tigray; the questions are many:

- **Why are all these decisions being made without input from the Ogadeni people?**
- **Why are the people not included in the benefits?**
- **Why is there no political space except for government supporters of these foreign investment deals?**
- **Why are the violations of the human rights of the people and widespread displacement of the people so closely linked with all of these deals?**

The biggest question for all of us, the peace and justice-loving people both here and throughout the world is this. Who are we waiting for to take action to free us and to feed our people? No one else will free us or continue to feed us! We must do it ourselves. We own the problem.

One of first tasks at hand is to expose what is happening in the Ogaden and to demand the opening up of this region in order to intervene on behalf of the people. We cannot wait for outsiders to expose it or to act on it if we do nothing. In 1984, there was an international outcry for the drought in the Tigray region. Celebrities responded with a song—“*We Are the World*” – and raised money through a Live Aid campaign. Today, there is no such organized effort even though it is considered the worst drought in sixty years.

We must do it. Those suffering are our own and we must be the organizing group to call the world's attention to not only the need; but also to the manmade components of it, which are key to the depth of its devastation. We are also the ones to free ourselves from the TPLF/EPRDF regime which is complicit with this catastrophe. Like was done in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and now in Libya and Syria; the people must do it. We must be committed to work from the bottom up approach and cannot wait for some major political party to do it because we are so divided into factions.

Why are we fighting while the people are dying? Why are we stalling for time while our land and resources are being robbed from us? We do not have to wait for leaders from all the organizations to come together for it will probably never happen. Start where you are! Look what Ethiopian Vision Diaspora has done in Las Vegas by calling this meeting and showing your willingness to take a stand for the Ogaden and other suffering and hungry people! Start organizing right here to raise money for the effort and to make people aware of the manmade dimensions of the famine and starvation going on in the Ogaden, in other parts of Ethiopia, Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

Those who believe in the SMNE principles should form an SMNE chapter and I can help link your chapter with other chapters in your region or internationally. For those who do not want to join, you can still do it independently or through your own organization if you are part of one. Last month I said the same thing in Geneva, Melbourne and Perth and guess what? **People in each of those cities are taking leadership and forming chapters of the SMNE! People are suffering while we wait for someone else to do it. If you put your heart into it; anyone can do something and it will contribute to the whole.**

You have shown that you do not have to be an Ogadeni to care about the people of the Ogaden for humanity comes before ethnicity as our Creator only created fully human beings, all equally worthy of value and rights. He also created us to love, to seek justice for all and to contribute to the well being of others as a means to a healthy society. This is the only way to bring lasting positive change to this country. If you like what the SMNE is doing; support it. Be part of it and advance it. Do not wait for someone else. This is one of our problems. Gaddafi has been brought down and it is only a matter of time before Meles will be down. Almost no one in the country wants him and his regime. He and those who support him are few. Those who are dying of starvation are the majority. People who are feeling the suffering are the majority.

His time is numbered and his days are numbered. If people rise up and he uses tanks against the people; he is done. He won't get away with it like in 2005. **Gaddafi is to be handed over to the ICC when captured; why would Meles be any different? Look at how the west abandoned Mubarak and now he has been brought before a court in a cage. The crimes of Meles and his henchmen are piling up as the soil of Ethiopia is drenched with the blood of its precious children. It does not have to be this way! May the change in Ethiopia begin with you and me!**

May God vindicate the blood of the slain. May God intervene and stop the Ethiopian Holodomor in the Ogaden, greater Ethiopia and in the Horn! May God protect us, strengthen us and be our guide as we try to bring freedom, justice, peace and healing to our beautiful family in the Horn of Africa. May He make streams in the desert that cause our land to produce His fruit in abundance so that all can partake and be satisfied!

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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

¹ <http://www.holodomorct.org/> HOLODOMOR : Extermination by Hunger: The famine-genocide of Ukraine, 1932-1933.

