



The Shocking Death of Yenesew Gebre Brings to Light the Extreme Desperation of Ethiopians

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We in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) are shocked to hear of the death of **Yenesew Gebre**, a **29-nine year old Ethiopian teacher from southwest Ethiopia who took his own life this week when he set himself on fire in the town of Dawro, Waka, Southern Ethiopia, after confronting government officials at a public meeting. It gives heartbreaking testimony to the unbearable pain he and others have suffered under the brutal and oppressive rule of the Meles Zenawi-controlled EPRDF regime.**

Life in Ethiopia has reached a point that it is unfit for human beings. Some flee the country, some risk their lives, careers and futures by standing up to the regime and another, Ato Yenesew, chose to protest this repressive rule by tragically killing himself in this way. According to ESAT and journalist, Abebe Gellaw,ⁱ Ato Yenesew was a bold activist for justice and right who was a respected and dedicated teacher. He was preparing our children for the future. Reportedly, Ato Yenesaw had been arrested earlier and more recently had lost his teaching job as the result of voicing his criticism of the government for its corruption, human rights abuses and injustice. We are tremendously saddened that he saw no alternative other than to sacrifice his own life in order to incite change.

We in the SMNE strongly believe every life is a God-given gift and one life lost is one too many. As a non-violent social justice movement which stands for upholding the human and civil rights of all people—regardless of ethnicity or other differences—when one Ethiopian is hurt, we are all hurt. Yenesew Gebre is not just some unknown Ethiopian; he is one of us and has a name. He is the son, brother, uncle, best friend, teacher or valued colleague of others who also have names. We are sure his absence in this world will be deeply grieved by all of them and our thoughts and prayers are with them at this time. He is part of our greater Ethiopian family and together, we mourn the loss of his life. He is one of the many Ethiopians who has been deprived of his life.

Other Ethiopians share Ato Yenesew's deep frustration, anger and desperation regarding the evil being perpetrated against the people of Ethiopia by a few power-holders at the top. This man died in a public display of outrage; however, many other Ethiopians quietly choose to leave the country to avoid persecution, arrest or hunger. Many die on the way. They take enormous, life-threatening risks as they pay human traffickers to bring them to safe havens, as they flee to hardship in refugee camps, seek asylum in other countries or as they take jobs in other countries. Many of our impoverished young women have sought new lives as domestic helpers in foreign countries where they frequently face abuse. Leaving Ethiopia has become the primary goal for countless Ethiopians.

Life for the majority of Ethiopians has become a boiling pot of desperation, leading people—especially the young—to take desperate steps that under a just and caring government would never even be considered. A government is supposed to enhance the well being of the people, but in Ethiopia, it is the opposite. The Meles regime’s propaganda machine brags that the state of the economy is improving when the inflation rate has been exceeding 40%. They use democratic rhetoric while at the same time anyone who disagrees with them is considered a terrorist or loses his or her job.

The recent 2011 Legatum Index of Prosperityⁱⁱ places Ethiopia 108th on the list of 110 countries studied throughout the world regarding the level of well being and prosperity. In terms of personal freedom, Ethiopia comes in dead last and as these pressures build up, this country is on the verge of explosion. We hope Ethiopia’s peace-loving people will prepare so that when it explodes, chaos does not result and along with it, the loss of more Ethiopian lives.

This regime has divided the people by ethnicity and has been willing to destroy the people and the country to remain in power. We oppose all they stand for—the ethnic division, the terrorization of the public and the giving of the wealth and resources to a small favored group and foreigners.

The image of Ethiopia and its people as being victims of every conceivable hardship would not be the case had there been a government that cared about its people. The tragedies that surround the daily lives of Ethiopians have become so routine and so strongly associated with Ethiopia that many have become hardened to the toll it takes on individual human beings. They give up any hope for change that seems impossible to be achieved in such a country; however, they are wrong. The change required to improve Ethiopia can and must be done by Ethiopians as they demand their God-given rights. Outsiders cannot do it. They cannot beg or wish for it to be delivered to them like food aid from some other country.

If we want to prevent these desperate, but real images of Ethiopia from being passed on to the next generation as their reality, we Ethiopians must realize that it is us who must demand this change. This act of self-immolation is horrible, but let it be a wake-up call. In order for the suffering and tragic sacrifices of our people to end, our struggle for freedom, justice and respect for human life must come from all over the country.

May we turn to God for strength that goes beyond ourselves. May Yenesew Gebre’s family and loved ones find comfort, hope and inner strength in this time of great pain and difficulty. May sustainable life return to our beloved country.

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ⁱ <http://addisvoice.com/2011/11/ethiopian-bouazizi-sets-himself-on-fire/>

ⁱⁱ The 2011 Legatum Prosperity Index <http://www.prosperity.com/rankings.aspx> . In this study, Ethiopia ranks 108 overall out of the 110 countries in the world which were included in this study. However, its cumulative score on all factors studied is just 2 points higher than the last ranking country, the Central African Republic. Ethiopia ranks 104 in regards to the economy, 108 in regards to entrepreneurship and opportunity and dead last in the world—110—in regards to personal freedom. View the website for further details.