August 2, 2012

An Open Letter to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton,
Regarding the possible death or serious incapacitation of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who has been
the darling of the west as well as the strongman behind the machinations of the TPLF/EPRDF.

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
The U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

"There are still too many places in the region and across the continent where democracy is threatened, where human
rights are abused, and the rule of law is undermined," Clinton said. "Too many Africans still live under autocratic rulers
who care more about preserving their grip on power than promoting the welfare of their citizens. Violent extremism,
transnational crime and rampant corruption all threaten democracy."

Dear Secretary Clinton

We in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), a non-political, non-violent grassroots social justice
movement, are writing this letter to you, not as an opposition party or as contenders for power, but as an organization,
representative of diverse Ethiopians, which has been working since 2008 for conditions conducive to the formation of
a just, free and open democratic society, which can undergird a robust economic climate based on inclusive capitalism,
offering opportunities to both Ethiopians and their partners.

The SMNE has brought together Ethiopians of diverse ethnicity, religion, gender, political view and regional
background under an umbrella organization to advance truth, justice, freedom, equality, reconciliation, accountability,
human rights and a healthy economic environment for the people of Ethiopia and beyond. The SMNE has branches
in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, with chapters in Ottawa, Washington D.C., Melbourne,
London, Geneva, Oslo, Stockholm, Tokyo, Brussels and other cities and countries throughout the world, including
Ethiopia. You can find us through our website at: www.solidaritymovement.org.

We believe that the future well being of Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, Africa and our global society rests in the hands
of those among us who can put "humanity before ethnicity," or any other distinctions that divide and dehumanize
other humans beings from ourselves; inspiring us to care about these "others;" not only because of the intrinsic God-
given value of each life, but also because "none of us will be free until all are free." In light of this, we heartily applaud
your above-quoted statement and others made by you this week during your fourth tour of Africa.

Dear Secretary Clinton:

Your words could not have more accurately described Ethiopia under the 21-year autocratic leadership of Prime
Minister Meles Zenawi and his one-party, crony and ethnic-based government of the Tigrayan Peoples’ Liberation
Front (TPLF), operating as the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which controls every
sector of Ethiopian society. To achieve this level of control, this regime has maintained an iron grip on the throats of
the people, creating widespread grievances, anger and the resulting simmering tensions that could suddenly erupt due
to its tyrannical rule.
Serial human rights violations, the purposeful incitement of ethnic hatred and division, the criminalization of dissent, the closure of all political space, the repression of the media and systems of communication, the use of vague anti-terrorism laws to imprison democratic voices, the use of force, fraud and collusion to seize land, minerals, water and national assets from the people, political control of the judiciary and the TPLF/EPRDF takeover of every institution within Ethiopian society, including religious institutions, have all created an intolerable life for its citizenry accompanied by the subsequent explosion in numbers of Ethiopian refugees seeking asylum throughout the world.

From December 2003 to 2008, as the executive director of the ethnic-based Anuak Justice Council, a human rights organization formed following the TPLF/EPRDF sponsored massacre of 424 Anuak leaders in Gambella, Ethiopia in less than three days—followed by over two more years of human rights violations—we in the AJC and later as part of the SMNE, contacted U.S. elected representatives and U.S. State Department officials regarding the increasing authoritarian nature of the Meles regime in open letters to Senator John Kerry, read... and Senator Joseph Biden, read... during the last Republican administration and to President Obama, read..., Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, read... and to you, Secretary Clinton, read... all under the current Democratic administration.

Most Ethiopians believed that the change President Obama spoke of during his campaign would change the status quo in Ethiopia, but as we all know, the U.S. foreign policy position on Ethiopia has continued to pump strength and longevity into a brutal regime which is terrorizing its citizenry. This can never be in the interests of the American or Ethiopian people and must be based on short-term convenience; for prolonging this dictatorial regime is clearly counter-productive. Aligning with this brutal regime under the rational of fighting terrorism has empowered the regime’s abuses; angering and radicalizing an otherwise peaceful population. Ethiopians’ concerns regarding an increasingly totalitarian regime were trumped as the TPLF/EPRDF promoted themselves as partners of the U.S. in countering terrorism, piracy and illicit trafficking.

At the same time, the TPLF regime used their increased control to exploit Ethiopia national assets and opportunities with foreign and crony business partners. The result has been to create an unmerited economic advantage to investment partners willing to “do business” the “Meles way.” In other words, that same support the U.S. gave to work with this regime on the War on Terror at the same time opened the path to non-U.S. foreign partners to take hold of the immense economic opportunities mostly closed to more risk-aversive American companies who operated under greater transparency and accountability.

Continuation of the same policies under the TPLF/EPRDF will only further entrench the advantages of those foreign partners who have fewer restrictions in their home nations, let alone in international business practices. How can American companies with ethics, high standards of compliance and a commitment to genuinely partner with Ethiopians in capitalistic ventures engage in the current business climate under the TPLF/EPRDF; particularly if the regime fails to address the root problems of regime-sponsored force, fraud and collusion in the extraction of Ethiopian land, resources and livelihoods from the people? Current claims of record economic growth are highly suspect, but not open for examination or debate under the TPLF/EPRDF.

Dear Secretary Clinton:

If Ethiopia is ever to rise out of poverty, there must be an atmosphere of inclusive capitalism—where the resources are not simply extracted without benefiting the people. This will require genuine democratic governance and new regulatory laws to even out the playing field—a field where American and other diverse global partners are welcome to form sustainable partnerships. The global war against terror and extremism can be fought most effectively through supporting the democratic and economic aspirations of the people. On the other hand, continued support to the status quo will only continue the current economic model requiring risky collusion with the TPLF/EPRDF.

Now that path has suddenly become more dangerous as highly credible rumors have emerged regarding the possible death or serious incapacitation of PM Meles, who has been the darling of the west as well as the strongman behind the machinations of the TPLF/EPRDF. Can the TPLF/EPRDF survive without the one man who has held the regime together by force of personality, the ubiquitous secret police and a vast repressive apparatus? Concerns about the lack of stability of Ethiopia, post-Meles, are causing great anxiety within the ruling TPLF and in western capitals. His absence has already unbalanced the power base of the ruling party, with dangerous implications for Ethiopia as divisions—ethnic, regional and ideological, will widen with unforeseen consequences. Interestingly enough, religious groups—Muslims and Christians—have found greater unity of purpose as leaders within each group support the religious freedom of each other and all Ethiopians, condemning extremism in any form.
The question is how Ethiopia can avert potential disaster during this vacuum of leadership. Ethiopia is of strategic geopolitical importance both globally and within Africa. If Ethiopia breaks into turmoil, it could be devastating beyond its borders. We do not expect the U.S. or any other nation to free Ethiopia. No other country frees another; that is the responsibility of Ethiopians who must free themselves. Neither do we expect the U.S. or other nations to operate outside of their own national interests as Ethiopians also seek to operate according to their national interests. However, we do ask free nations to not become a roadblock to the freedom and genuine democratic change sought after by Ethiopians.

In 1991, the U.S. played a strong role in bringing the TPLF/EPRDF into power and we believe the U.S. is again playing a role in the current crisis through people like General Carter F. Ham, Commander, Africom and General Ralph O. Baker, Commander, Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in order to prevent the explosion of ethnic-based violence; however, the Obama administration must understand that there are other viable alternatives to the TPLF/EPRDF—if allowed some political space—which could prove to be more reliable and to be better long-term partners in promoting peace and stability in the Horn of Africa than one of the most repressive regimes in Africa which has identified with the Chinese model of development without democracy.

This is a critical time of testing for not only the Ethiopian people, but also for the significant global partners. We are keenly aware of U.S. interests in Ethiopia—as it is the largest recipient of U.S. financial aid in Africa—and our shared concerns that it not become the next Syria; however, the U.S. should understand that the Ethiopian people—many of whom are now U.S. citizens—will not tolerate decisions made behind the scenes for the future of Ethiopia which support the continuation of the autocratic TPLF leadership.

Dear Secretary Clinton:

As you have witnessed in the Arab Spring, dictators go, but the people remain. The U.S. should support the democratization of a country of 90 million people rather than preserving the status quo. The status quo is not safer but could jeopardize long-term U.S. national interests in one of the most strategic and conflict-prone regions of the world, with great implications for the Middle East, Europe and Africa. As early as 2009, the International Crisis Group, Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents and Genocide Watch have issued warnings regarding the volatility of this region and the vulnerability of Ethiopia to exploding into ethnic-based violence, chaos and state failure. Ethiopians also understand how the widespread grievances could explode without carefully orchestrated change.

Dear Secretary Clinton:

The continuation of ethnic-based leadership within the TPLF, only with a new leader of the party, could trigger a dangerous reaction and the present TPLF will be far less capable of holding the country together over the next months and year should something happen. Instead, the U.S. should be on the right side of history by supporting African leaders who respect their people’s rights. In light of this, we call on you, Secretary Clinton, and Generals Ham, Baker and the U.S Intelligence community, to use this new opportunity presented by Meles’ departure to do the right thing: to stand by the people of Ethiopia.

As you tour Africa and challenge Africans to embrace democracy, will the U.S. support your vision for Africa of which you have been speaking? Will the U.S. make concrete policy changes towards Ethiopia? It is not the time to please Africans with words while obstructing democratic progress on the ground with U.S. endorsement of some other member of the TPLF/EPRDF. This will not work. It is unacceptable; yet, we are willing to work together with all Ethiopians in creating an inclusive Ethiopia for the future.

For years now, we in the SMNE have sought to lay the foundation for the transformation of Ethiopia by challenging the thinking of Ethiopians that has been based on self-defeating tribalism, feudalism, Marxism or colonialism. As we have called Ethiopians to put “humanity before ethnicity” or any other differences and to care about other Ethiopians because “none of us will be free until all are free,” we have seen significant healing of relationships and very real possibilities to avert disaster. However, if well-intentioned outsiders become an obstacle to inclusive freedom, opportunities, reconciliation and the restoration of justice in Ethiopia, our nation’s future will be hijacked once again.
Dear Secretary Clinton:

We respectfully ask you to do the same in Ethiopia as you promised to do in Mali early this week when you said, “We encourage all parties to set aside their differences and work to restore democracy, preserve the territorial integrity of the country, and reject the appeals of violent extremism [including ethnic-based violence].” You added that the U.S. would continue to withhold full development assistance, including security aid, [which could be used against the Ethiopian people] until a democratically elected government is in place.

A window of opportunity exists right now that was not available in 1991. The reformers of Ethiopia you are looking for are here. Right now, there are hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians in the Diaspora, many well educated in western schools that are available to give back to their homeland if there were a genuinely democratic country and if they were given the chance.

We in the SMNE and other Ethiopian stakeholders are here and ready, willing to do whatever we can to contribute to the building of a new Ethiopia that will look forward to all the mutual benefits of healthy and sustainable partnerships in the 21st century.

Respectfully yours,

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Cc: Designated Recipients
President Barack Obama
Vice President, Mr. Joseph Biden
U.S. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta
U.S. National Security Council Advisor, Thomas E. Donilon,
General Carter F. Ham, Commander, Africom,
General Ralph O. Baker, Commander, Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA)
Senator John F. Kerry, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Senator Richard G. Lugar, Ranking Member of Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Patrick Leahy, Chairman of Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Related Programs
Christopher A. Coons, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs
Johnny Isakson, Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs
House of Representatives, Chris Smith, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa
House of Representatives, Gary Ackerman, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Africa

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