



Testimony before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations

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Given by:

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“Ethiopia After Meles: The Future of Democracy and Human Rights”

I would like to thank the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Congressman Edward Royce, and all ranking members of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations for this important opportunity to examine the Ethiopian Government’s observance of democratic and human rights principles in post-Meles Ethiopia.

I want to especially thank Congressman Christopher Smith, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa for his extraordinary leadership in bringing the case of Ethiopia to the attention of this subcommittee once again; particularly in light of the many pressing global issues. In 2006, Congressman Smith worked hard to bring this issue all the way from subcommittee to the House, where it faced obstacles and died. I hope this time, something more concrete and productive can be accomplished for the betterment of both our countries.

In 2006, I gave testimony at that previous hearing in regards to the massacre of 424 members of my own ethnic group, the Anuak, in 2003, perpetrated by members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces. I also testified regarding the ongoing crimes against humanity and destruction of property and infrastructure in the Gambella region of Ethiopia; however, because similar abuses were being perpetrated in other places in the country, I also spoke of the 193 peaceful protestors who were shot and killed as they peacefully protested the results of the flawed 2005 national election and the repression in Oromia. This also included testimony regarding the imprisonment of opposition leaders, including Dr. Berhana Nega, who is sitting next to me today.

Now I am here once again to testify about these same kinds of issues because Ethiopians have only seen increasing restrictions to their freedom and a continuation of government-sponsored human rights violations in every region of the country. This includes the illegal eviction of great numbers of Ethiopians from their ancestral homes and land, causing great hardship to the people. It also includes egregious human rights atrocities in places like the Ogaden [Somali] region, which is blocked from the outside world by the regime. It has obstructed the media from reporting on the great suffering of the people being perpetrated by government forces, which has been described as a silent genocide. Two Swedish journalists were arrested, detained and charged as terrorists before being released last year. However, the Ogaden is not alone for every region of the country has become a victim to this regime.

Sadly, little, in terms of rights, has changed post-Meles. The only change is that he is no longer here. Although the rapid decline in freedom and rights was led by Meles, *he and his cabinet and ministers established an apparatus of strong-armed control that continues to reach from the top offices of the federal government to rural villages throughout Ethiopia. That infrastructure of repression, which carries out much of the day-to-day enforcement of EPRDF control and the perpetration of human rights violations, is still in place and marks the near achievement of a secretive and chilling plan put into motion in June 1993 under the name: [TPLF/EPRDF’s Strategies for Establishing its Hegemony & Perpetuating its Rule](#)ⁱ*, which was said to have been given to all their cadres for its execution. An abridged translation of the 68-page Amharic document is now available online.

This plan, based on Marxist ideology, was brought to our attention by one of the members of the TPLF who reported to us strict adherence to this plan by its cadres. The plan aligns closely with the nature of the TPLF when they were still fighting in the bush as well as the Ethiopia of today.

Prior to defeating the brutal Derg regime in 1991, Meles led the Marxist-Leninist based rebel group, the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), also so known for its brutality in the bush that the U.S. State Department had classified them as a terrorist group at the time. *When they took over power, they formed a new coalition party made up of separate ethnic-based parties. It was called the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and was meant to appear to be a multi-ethnic government but in fact, it has been controlled from the beginning by the TPLF who have never abandoned the goal of perpetual hegemony.*

The EPRDF's structure was based around ethnically defined regions and political parties, but at the grassroots level, all regions and parties, though appearing to be led by leaders of the same ethnicity as the region, were instead pro-TPLF/ERPFD puppets, who implemented their policies. By its nature, this division of Ethiopia by ethnicity was a guise meant to dupe the public and the west by its appearance of being democratic; however, in practice, it has contributed to the prolongation of ethnic-based divisions while strengthening the power of the TPLF, assuring its control of the EPRDF even though Tigrayans are a minority, making up only 6% of the total population. However, this does not mean the TPLF speaks for many Tigrayans who have become disillusioned with the TPLF/EPRDF.

In short, the TPLF's plan of revolutionary democracy, which is more closely aligned with the Chinese model than the liberalism of the west, was clearly designed to achieve perpetual hegemony over every aspect of Ethiopian life. In the above-stated plan, they warn that they can achieve their goals "only by winning the elections successively and holding power without let up." They warn, "If we lose in the elections even once, we will encounter a great danger... [so] we should win in the initial elections and then create a conducive situation that will ensure the establishment of this hegemony." In 2010, the TPLF/ERPFD successfully accomplished this goal and won their fourth election with an alleged 99.6% of the votes and all but one of the 547 seats in the Ethiopian Parliament.

This also was accomplished through gaining control every sector of society: the media, all aspects of government and civil service, all political space, elections, the judiciary, the passing and interpretation of laws to suit their goals, the financial sector, education, the military, the economic sector, religious groups, civic society, government ownership of all land and government control in the extraction of natural resources. The principles upon which America was founded are absent in Ethiopia despite all the democratic rhetoric.

The TPLF/EPRDF is more in control today than it was in 2006 and continues to hold that power despite the death of their central figure. *It has become near to impossible to find any political space for the development of a viable alternative to the TPLF/EPRDF because dissenters, activists or anyone speaking for change will be put in jail. It has become a full-blown autocracy. Anyone who attempts to speak up is silenced. All has been justified by saying that Ethiopia has double digit economic growth and that they have met their millennium goals and that the people are too ignorant to understand how they will eventually benefit; however, the people know that this is not balanced growth but instead has "filled the pockets and bellies" of government supporters as laid out in the 1993 plan.* Claims of economic gains also serve to minimize or cover up the reality on the ground of the increased poverty of

the majority. Supporters of the TPLF/EPRDF policies and tactics are rewarded while non-supporters are penalized in a variety of ways. The most marginalized masses are ignored unless they become an impediment to the TPLF/ERPFD plan of exploitation of land or natural resources. Here is an explanation of that strategy from the original TPLF/ERPFD plan:

The combined strength of the State and Revolutionary Democracy's economic institutions should be used either to attract the support or to neutralize the opposition of the intelligentsia. We should demonstrate to it that our economic strength could serve its interests, and, in the event of its opposition to us, its belly and pocket could be made empty.

Examples of the practice of the above strategy are rampant. According to a [Human Rights Watch](#)ⁱⁱ report, following the 2010 election, even humanitarian aid was linked to party membership.

Record numbers of refugees are leaving the country, regardless of the risks, because so little opportunity exists for the average person, let alone for more outspoken dissenters. Laws such as the [Charities and Societies Proclamation](#)ⁱⁱⁱ have literally closed down civil society, replacing institutions with TPLF/ERPFD controlled look-alike organizations. A vague [anti-terrorism law](#)^{iv} has been used to silence journalists, editors, democracy activists, religious leaders and opposition members by intimidating them, arresting them or charging and imprisoning them as terrorists. Examples are our heroes of freedom such as Eskinder Nega, Reeyot Alemu and Andualem Arage.

Into this highly controlled milieu, the new Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, has emerged. He is neither Tigrayan nor is he part of the old guard of TPLF loyalists but instead comes from the South, helping to counter accusations of TPLF domination of the EPRDF. Reportedly, his appointment was hotly contested; however, because he had held the position of Deputy Prime Minister it may have provided the least controversial transition. Insider information reports he has little power and that his actions are all closely monitored by the TPLF central committee. *As another means of control, three deputy prime ministers of different ethnicity were appointed and are said to hold more power than the prime minister. Reports have also surfaced that power struggles within the party leadership have split the top power holders and remain unresolved. These intraparty conflicts could deepen as the next election comes closer, with unpredictable, but possibly dangerous results. Hoping that this problem will resolve on its own is unrealistic and a recipe for disaster.*

The TPLF/ERPFD has so effectively constructed a system of repression in Ethiopia that it will likely carry on for awhile; however Meles, the driving force who charmed the west while terrorizing the people, remains their main visionary leader. Billboards around Addis Ababa show his picture and the TPLF/ERPFD continues to elevate his legacy, possibly because no one else within the party has been able to articulate another, more timely or urgently-needed vision. *This opens them up to new challenges from the dissatisfied majority that they may not be able to dodge. Intraparty conflicts may also further exacerbate the situation.* Add to that pressure from the outside, like from Egypt, neighboring countries or others and the situation may either explode or implode without reforms. *Although the TPLF/EPRDF has shown little openness to reforms, with enough pressure from the people and donors like the U.S., it might create a win-win situation to bring about such reforms without violence, chaos and a spillover effect in the Horn of Africa.*

The road to democracy and respect for human rights in Ethiopia must be solved by Ethiopians, but the U.S. has a role to play as well. I believe the current U.S. policy of quiet diplomacy will actually contribute to a worse outcome. We should learn from what happened in the Arab Spring, when forces of a frustrated public joined together to oust Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. It took many by surprise, especially those who had sided with an authoritarian regime rather than the people, thinking Mubarak was so powerful that he could not be brought down. This alliance with an authoritarian regime makes it much more difficult in the aftermath to reestablish a meaningful partnership with Egyptians that goes beyond giving large amounts of foreign aid.

Undoubtedly, many Ethiopians attribute U.S. support to Ethiopia, including partnership in the War on Terror, as a means that has prolonged the life of a repressive, undemocratic regime. Will the U.S. be proactive in aligning with the people; something that will help sustain a long-term relationship with Ethiopians? Unfortunately, *the tendency of most entrenched groups and their supporters, foreign or native, is to continue the status quo without any change; however, in Ethiopia, there is a window of opportunity before the next election in 2015 to set the stage for meaningful reforms. The U.S. and other donor countries should not simply stand by, using the rationale that there is no viable alternative to work with because the TPLF/ERPFD has been so effective in blocking access to political space and will not easily give up on this. This must be taken into consideration for how can you build an alternative in this kind of repressive environment?* You cannot put someone out in the middle of nowhere with no material and tell them to build something. It will not work.

With these limitations in mind, the Ethiopian public, both at home and in the Diaspora, are now working to bring the change. *Some of that change can be seen from what happened last week in Addis Ababa when Ethiopians came out in mass numbers to peacefully rally for freedom and justice in Ethiopia based on a call from the newly emerging Blue party. With minimal resources, the Blue party reached out to the public in an inclusive way and the groundswell of response from ethnically, politically and religiously diverse Ethiopians surprised even them.* They called on the people and the people answered. Yet, the TPLF/ERPFD warned that Muslims who joined together with Christians and others in the rally were extremists. This defies the reality on the ground.

For the last year, Ethiopian Muslims have been peacefully rallying in their compound, asking for freedom to practice religion without government interference into their internal affairs. In violation of the Ethiopian Constitution, the TPLF/ERPFD has been choosing their religious leaders, ensuring those leaders were pro-government. The TPLF/ERPFD has done the same within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church leading to the church breaking into two divisions—the government approved church in Ethiopia and the other in exile here in the U.S. – a divide and conquer strategy of gaining hegemony of religious groups addressed in the TPLF/ERPFD master plan of 1993. Within that plan, religious groups were to be “used to disseminate the views of Revolutionary Democracy...and if that is not possible we should try to curtail their obstructionist activities...Without denying them due respect, we should mold their views, curtail their propaganda against Revolutionary Democracy, and even use them to serve our end.”

The TPLF/ERPFD government will do anything to label the Muslims as extremists and radicals to be feared by the west; however, Ethiopian Muslims, Christians and Jews have lived together for thousands of years in harmony. We do not only share the land but we share blood. We are a family. We are brothers and sisters.

In twelve months of rallying, these peaceful Muslim protestors have never destroyed anything or hurt another person. They are not making a stand for Sharia law but instead for a secular state where all people will be free and where there is no government interference in the practice of any religion. Yet, the TPLF/EPRDF fears unity between diverse religious groups.

Reports have emerged of the TPLF/ERPFD's intentions to divide people of different religious faith and to alarm the west by staging events themselves while blaming others. For example, inside reports allege that when Ethiopian Muslims were going to rally in front of the U.S. Embassy, they found out that pro-government forces were going to burn the American flag so they called off the entire rally. An eyewitness to the killing of Christians in 2007, reported to be by Muslims in the Oromo region of the country, were recognized by a relative to not be Muslims at all but government supporters.

I personally spoke to that survivor. It preceded the invasion into Somalia and is seen as an attempt to dupe the west. It must be understood that it profits this regime to do violence in the name of their opponents. ***Here is another example reported in Wikileaks where the U.S. had knowledge that the TPLF/ERPFD government had set the bombs in Addis Ababa several years ago so as scapegoat government opponents. They used it to justify the arrest of Oromo leaders as terrorists and to show a rising incidence of terrorist acts in Ethiopia, even though it was phony. Duping the west into supporting the TPLF/ERPFD was part of their original strategy laid out in the 1993 plan and is part of the reason for becoming a pseudo-democracy.***

Division between ethnicities, regions, political parties and religious groups is the lifeblood of the TPLF/ERPFD. ***For the government to gain power and control, they are trying to alienate the people from each other and spread rumors regarding the makeup of those who are protesting. Just as they are calling Muslims extremists and terrorists, they are now trying to label the Blue party, to separate them from others, by accusing them of being funded by foreigners like Egypt. The fact that Christians and Muslims are rallying together for freedom and justice for all Ethiopians is a real threat to their existence.*** These kinds of tactics by the government are a sign that the status quo cannot continue and will be challenged in increasing unity among Ethiopians. ***The donor countries, including the US, should align with the people.*** This means supporting the people who are working from within and those who are trying to resolve the problem peacefully, without violence.

The proper sequence of reforms is critical to the success of the outcome.

- 1. Intellectual reform must come first, which means the people must have access to information and have the freedom to express it—the first freedom to be attacked by dictatorships and the first that needs to be restored to bring about change.**
- 2. The second must be political reform; opening up political space so the choice of the people is reinstated. Then they are free to choose political leaders and groups who represent their interests and the interests of the country.**
- 3. The third is constitutional reform which must rewrite, redefine or reinstate the most inclusive and beneficial relationship between the people and the state in the form of this “constitutional contract”; a contract which upholds the rights of the people and protects the people from the state, similar to African models where it is assumed anyone can become tyrannical so checks and balances must be established to control the power of the government, ensuring participatory democracy.**

4. **The fourth is institutional reform; meaning reforms of the judiciary, the parliament, the military, civil services, and other institutions where regime cronies are now in control. Institutions must be independent of the state or party for change to be accomplished and made sustainable.**
5. **Lastly, economic reforms are necessary but will not be inclusive until the other reforms are implemented, making the system more transparent, accountable, and just; unlike in places like Russia, Ivory Coast, Indonesia, Yugoslavia, Cameroon, Rwanda and the Philippines where economic advances were made; yet, regime cronies still controlled the institutions, the political system and the justice system, staging the conditions for a reversal of power and the re-emergence of repression and cronyism.**

Poverty and corruption in Ethiopia will also increase the pressure for explosion. Recently, Kofi Annan spoke about the cost of corruption to the African people. Ethiopia is a primary example. Although many quote statistics of economic growth in Ethiopia, most of it is in the hands of a few. Prior to the release of the report by the Global Financial Task Force in their report titled: [*Illicit Financial Outflows from Developing Countries Over the Decade Ending in 2009*](#), they stated on December 5, 2011 the following in regards to Ethiopia:

“The people of Ethiopia are being bled dry. No matter how hard they try to fight their way out of absolute destitution and poverty, they will be swimming upstream against the current of illicit capital leakage.”

Their report reveals that Ethiopia lost US11.7 billion in illegal capital flight from 2000-2009 and illicit financial outflows from Ethiopia nearly doubled in 2009 to US\$3.26 billion—double the amount in the two preceding years—with the vast majority of that increase coming from corruption, kickbacks and bribery. When it comes to transparency, it does not exist in Ethiopia.

Here is another example. Human Rights Watch found evidence that World Bank money, which was to be used for services, was instead used by the government to displace the people from their land, later given to foreign and crony investors. Five villages in the Gambella region, hard hit with land grabs, accompanied by human rights violations, made an appeal to the World Bank regarding the improper use of its funds. ***An independent inspection panel investigated the grounds for the appeal for the World Bank. After meeting with the local people who had been displaced to refugee camps in Kenya and South Sudan, they recommended a full investigation after finding substantial evidence of the misuse of World Bank funds. Now the Ethiopian government has refused to cooperate. All donors to the World Bank should look into this because this is your money. If they have nothing to hide, why would they not allow an investigation?***

People on the ground in Ethiopia live in fear of this regime, but many are coming to the point that they can no longer endure life without change and are willing to take a stand. Prior to the Blue party's recent rally, a 26-year-old recent graduate sent me his thoughts. He said:

Obang, it is now just four hours before we go out to rally. We don't know what will happen but this may be my last message because the last time I went out I went with three of my friends and I was the only one who came back. That was seven years ago after the 2005 election. I may be the one not come back this time but I am not afraid. I am looking at it like going into a war zone, but the only difference is the other side has a gun and we have nothing. If they shoot, I have nothing to deliver. This is the kind of country we live in. But, we have the moral high ground and this is what is making me go out. I want someone to know.

Ethiopia is a country which relies on the US as its number one supporter and here is one of their brave, but peace-loving heroes, going out not knowing what will happen to him and those with him. Most of you have met Ethiopians here in Washington D.C. as thousands of Ethiopians live and work in this city. They pay taxes to the same government that for too long has overlooked the serial violations of human rights and the emergence of a full-blown dictatorship.

Ethiopians have struggled under dictatorship for 40 years. With the death of Meles and the appointment of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn until the next election in 2015, *Ethiopians may have been given the most opportune moment in 21 years for change; however, if Ethiopians—or donor countries genuinely wanting to see democratic reforms—step back, waiting to see what will happen under this new arrangement of power, rather than actively creating a process of change that is owned and managed by the people of Ethiopia, this opportunity will most likely be hijacked and the “system” of repression will continue with the same or new “strongmen” at the helm. The only acceptable outcome for the Ethiopian people is nothing short of the transformation of Ethiopia to a new society and a New Ethiopia where humanity comes before ethnicity or any other distinctions for no one is free until all are free!*

This is a time when the U.S. should use their influence to put pressure on the Ethiopian government for reforms rather than waiting for simmering tensions to explode. Support for a people-driven process is the best alternative to bring lasting change to Ethiopia, more sustainable peace to the Horn and a better ongoing partnership with the US.

Thank you!

Please do not hesitate to email me if you have comments to: Mr. Obang Metho, the Executive Director of the SMNE at Obang@solidaritymovement.org

ⁱ http://www.enufforethiopia.net/pdf/Revolutionary_Democracy_EthRev_96.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2010/10/19/development-without-freedom-0> ; **Development Without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression**

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.civicus.org/csw_files/CIVICUSAnalysisEthiopiaCharitiesProc160908.pdf; A repressive 2009 law against civil society, the Charities and Societies Proclamation now prohibits any organization that receives more than 10% of its budget from foreign sources from (a) advancing human and democratic rights, (b) promoting equality of nations, nationalities, peoples, gender and religion, (c) promoting the rights of the disabled and children, (d) promoting conflict resolution or reconciliation and, (e) promoting the efficiency of justice and law enforcement services.ⁱⁱⁱ This has meant the closure of most every independent civic organization. In their place, the regime has created pseudo-organizations controlled by the regime. At the last tally this included over 2,600 organizations. The law carries harsh criminal penalties for violators. It is used for political purposes and has paralyzed civil society. In its place, look-alike pseudo-institutions have sprung up, all created and controlled by the government, oftentimes appearing legitimate to outsiders.

^{iv} <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Rights-Groups-Ethiopia-Using-Anti-Terror-Law-To-Stifle-Dissent-134274558.html>

^v <http://www.financialtaskforce.org/2011/12/05/illegal-financial-outflows-from-ethiopia-nearly-doubled-in-2009-to-us3-26-billion-reveals-new-global-financial-integrity-report/>