



We support the call by the UN Commissioner for Human Rights to send international observers to investigate the killing of peaceful protesters by the Ethiopian security forces.
We urge donor countries, International human rights groups and international organizations to play strategic roles in reinforcing this call for an investigation

PRESS RELEASE.

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The United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raad Al Hussein, has called on Ethiopia to allow UN international observers to investigate the excessive use of force by the government's security forces against peaceful protesters in the Oromo and Amhara regions of the country. This follows the recent killing of nearly 100 people in recent weeks, among whom were children as young as 8 years old.

We in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) *strongly support this request, believing it is long over-due and necessary because internal independent accountability mechanisms within Ethiopia are non-existent with one strong exception— the intensifying actions of the people.*

The government's emphatic resistance to this request is to be expected. *For years the regime have enjoyed impunity within the international community despite their long-standing record of repeated human rights violations against the people of Ethiopia. Now, the people have reached their limit, creating an unwelcome confrontation with the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the controlling partner in the ethnic-based Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).*

The regime efforts to quell the uprising with brutal force have back-fired; creating new alliances between previously divided diverse groups of Ethiopians. In doing so, it has forced the regime to scramble for ways to return to its domination of the majority, including the exploitation of Ethiopian resources, land and opportunities— and it is not working.

The problem is, these TPLF/EPRDF methods of repressing the opposition are being scrutinized by the people with increasing insight. *This is a regime, steeped in the history of using cunning manipulation to divide the people by ethnicity or other differences, furthering ethnic hatred, alienation and isolation. It has allowed them to repeatedly commit egregious human rights atrocities against these same isolated and alienated groups without fearing a united response. This is now changing.*

Ethiopians are waking up to this realization and challenging it. What the TPLF/EPRDF now faces is a shaking up of the current power structure of the country. *More killing, wounding and use of violence against unarmed civilians on the part of the regime's security forces are strengthening, not weakening, the movement of the people. We do not believe there is a way back to the previous status quo; yet, we fear that the TPLF/EPRDF, limited in their ability to see better mutually beneficial options, will use excessive force in an attempt to do so. This is what makes the timing of this intervention so critical.*

A LONG-STANDING RECORD OF EXCESSIVE VIOLENCE BY THE TPLF/EPRDF

It is encouraging that the UN has called for observers to come to Ethiopia to investigate these recent killings, but there is a long-standing record of the regime's use of excessive violence— including crimes against humanity— against the Ethiopian people, which have been overlooked in the past.

Here are some examples:

- In April of 2001, security forces killed forty Addis Ababa university students for simply demanding the academic freedom to publish a student newspaper.
- On March 10, 2002 in the town of Teppi, 200 protesters from the Mazenger and Shekicho ethnic groups were killed as they protested the regional boundary lines and for wanting to form a political party.
- On May 24, 2002, 25 Sidamo civilians were killed in Awassa who were peacefully protesting the federal government's involvement in the Sidamo regional affairs.
- On December 13, 2003, Ethiopian Defense Forces, accompanied by civilian militias they had armed, massacred 424 unarmed Anuak in Gambella in less than three days, continuing to commit crimes against humanity in the following two years and in the process; destroying homes, crops, schools, health clinics, wells and other limited infrastructure.
- In 2005, TPLF/EPRDF security forces killed nearly 200 peaceful protesters on the streets of Addis Ababa who were protesting the results of the 2005 national election, many more were wounded and thousands detained and abused while in detention.
- In 2007, Ethiopian forces committed mass crimes against humanity in the Somali region of Ethiopia, which included widespread killing of civilians, rape, destruction of homes, livestock, wells and led to the displacement of tens of thousands. Some in the international community called it a "silent Darfur."
- Widespread human rights abuses in the Afar and Benishangul-Gumuz regions
- Killing of 200 Oromo in 2014
- Killing of more than 600 Oromo protesters since November 2015, which have continued— the focus of the current UN request to allow independent observers to conduct an investigation.
- The more recent killing of more than 70 protesters in the Amhara region over land and other ongoing issues of contention; also a focus of the current request.

REGIME CLOSURE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACCESS BY INTERNATIONAL GROUPS

Knowing the long history of human rights violations by the current regime; it is not surprising that the TPLF/EPRDF have shut down independent human rights organizations as well as most every independent institution within the country that would have held this regime accountable for its misdeeds.

As a regime, very concerned about projecting a "forward thinking, democratic, and economically progressive image" to outsiders; it has used the law to promote such an appearance while achieving the polar opposite. For example, the Charities and Societies Proclamation law (CSO) has criminalized human rights and other kinds of advocacy work—which includes advocacy for children, women, the disabled and much more— if over 10% of support comes from outside Ethiopia. [By the way, 80% of the TPLF/EPRDF's budget comes from abroad.] Over 2,600 civic organizations closed as a result. In their place are government controlled "look-alike" organizations. Additionally, other international human rights institutions who have attempted in the past to create a presence in Ethiopia have not been allowed. In other words, civil society does not exist in Ethiopia, making the presence of an independent organization like the UN, all the more important.

In addition to the law affecting civil society, *the TPLF/EPRDF have also passed a law an anti-terrorism that has been used to criminalize dissent or anti-government rhetoric. It has led to the imprisonment of journalists, activists, democratic voices, religious leaders and others who challenge the TPLF/EPRDF as they are charged with "incitement" of the people to commit terrorism against their own citizens. Terrorism, as defined by the*

TPLF/EPRDF is considered to be any “anti-government” comment or position. Ethiopia is now the second greatest jailer of journalists in Africa.

TO THE UN, DONOR COUNTRIES, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The TPLF/EPRDF is a highly unpopular government, claiming to win the 2015 national election by 100% and controlling the judiciary, all institutions, economic opportunity and using its control to dominate every sector of society; yet, the majority of Ethiopians are saying their time is over.

The TPLF has largely operated as the chief strongman in an Ethnic apartheid government. *They have handed out perks, privileges and impunity to THEIR own cronies, particularly those of the same ethnicity as the TPLF who also must be loyal supporters of the TPLF party.* This has left out many other Tigrayans, who must remain poor to continue to draw aid to their region and to dupe outsiders into believing there are no disparities between regions. It is a matter of time before two of the three members of the EPRDF, the Oromo Peoples’ Democratic Organization (OPDM) and the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) desert them in their role as puppets. They hold little real power, but simply have been personally rewarded for going along with the TPLF under the name of their ethnicity.

Ethiopia, as a partner in the War on Terror, among other things, has been given a free pass to get away with its egregious human rights atrocities, lack of good governance and perversion of the rule of law; however, the people will no longer give them the same impunity. This is leading to the possibility of ethnic violence or even genocide, destruction and chaos that could lead to Ethiopia becoming the next failed state in the Horn of Africa.

OUR POSITION:

Knowing this potential, we support the call by the UN Commissioner for Human Rights to send international observers to investigate the killing of protesters by government forces. *We do not believe TPLF authorities will cooperate in this investigation without pressure from other donor countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Canada, Sweden, and Norway. International human rights organizations, like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Genocide Watch, the International Crisis Group, Enough, Committee for the Protection of Journalists, as well as other international groups who are concerned for human rights, stability and peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa can also play strategic roles in reinforcing this call for an investigation as well as encouraging a dialogue leading to genuine democratic reforms. It may help avoid a worse outcome.*

If Ethiopia is to escape the tragedies accompanying strife, chaos and disintegration now being carried out in other places like Syria, Yemen, Libya and South Sudan, the TPLF/EPRDF must explore a new option never tried before—meaningful democratic reforms, restorative justice, and reconciliation for all the people of Ethiopia, including the current ruling party.

Much is at stake. If there is a failure on the part of the TPLF/EPRDF to cooperate; key stakeholders should provide critical leverage to pressure them to make substantial changes that could bring about a safer, more prosperous and more harmonious Ethiopia for all.

The next days, weeks and months will show whether or not the TPLF/EPRDF is capable of making such a shift. It is hard to part ways with one’s familiar ways, even if those ways are self-destructive and lead to a human disaster. *Crisis can also be a facilitator to changes for good that otherwise would not be ventured. This call to accountability from the UN, donor countries, international organizations and the people of Ethiopia, may be that catalyst for change— for the common good of all.*

May God help all the people of Ethiopia to value the lives of others!

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