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## A Message to the International Criminal Court: “It’s Time to Hold Meles Zenawi Accountable for His Crimes!”

October 23, 2009

It is time for Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to be held accountable for his many crimes he has committed against the people of Ethiopia and Somalia! He and others in his government should be the next targets of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The “free pass” extended to this criminal administration, one that has allowed them to avoid having to face up to the consequences of their crimes, should have expired long ago.

The patience of Ethiopians is wearing down as our people face the looming food crisis that could break into a full-blown humanitarian disaster in the next coming months; something that when combined with the expected electoral fiasco resulting from the repression of all political space in the upcoming election, could break out into chaos and violence in Ethiopia and spill over into the greater Horn of Africa. Those holding up this regime would share responsibility should it happen. No one can claim ignorance to the risks at hand if nothing is done. Food aid and money alone will not be enough! Meaningful action must be taken before it is too late!

If the TPLF government collapses or if violence erupts in Ethiopia, the people who will be responsible will not only be Meles or the top people with him, but also **the many opportunistic Ethiopians who are deeply involved in sustaining this regime. These are the “puppets” and “lifeblood” of this regime from every ethnicity who carry out the dirty deeds of the regime in every region of the country. They have been given power and impunity to exploit and repress their own people, profiting from their misery. Every one of them will be held accountable as most names are already known by others within their ethnic groups. These people should not expect to escape to the west either, as the groundwork has already been put into place through new western laws, which deny entry to those complicit not only with human rights crimes, but with money laundering and corruption. If these people want to save themselves, now is the time to speak out and stand on the side of morality.**

This is the first of a three-part report on the recent trip I made to Europe. The topics I will be covering include the following: **Part One- ICC:** the meeting in the Hague with officials from the International Criminal Court (ICC), **Part Two- Sweden:** the meeting with the Ethiopian community in Stockholm, followed by meetings with government officials from the Swedish government, and **Part Three- Norway:** the meetings with members of the Ethiopian community in Oslo, followed by meetings with Norwegian government leaders as well as with other key leaders of various organizations. I will summarize what I learned from these meetings including how we might regroup or come up with new strategies that could re-ignite the struggle, in some cases by some shifts in direction.

### **The original Ethiopian flag—**

This is the third time in the last few months I have crossed the Atlantic Ocean to meet with Ethiopians in various countries in Europe—the UK, Germany, Sweden and Norway—as well as with their respective government officials. The invitation for my most recent trip came in August while I was in Germany. I received an email from sister. Mekades Worku, a wonderful Ethiopian from Stockholm who expressed her support for the SMNE. She told me she believed in the principles of “**humanity before ethnicity**” and that “**no one will be free until all are free;**” stating that following such principles could bring “a genuine change among our people.”

She invited me to come to Sweden to talk about the principles of the SMNE, to hold a rally and to meet with government officials there. She had already begun preparations to hold a protest rally focusing on the Meles government's reaction to those having the original Ethiopian flag—a plain green, yellow and red flag with no symbol on it—where possession of it in Ethiopia today could lead to being jailed.

Before agreeing to come, I shared with her a basic requirement—that this event would be open to people of every ethnicity, political belief, regional background, language and religion; something that was of critical importance to me. Because of this, I contacted the people I knew in Sweden to tell them that this sister invited me and explained that if they would help and all become part of it, I would come. They all talked and agreed to work together to organize an event where no one would be excluded. All of these arrangements were being made at the same time as the most intensive work for the March to Stop Genocide and Dictatorship was going on.

It was during this buildup to the march when we also became aware that Meles was coming to Pittsburgh for the G-20 meetings. Some tried to convince me to cancel my trip to Europe so I could participate, but I felt there were well-qualified people available who could organize a protest rally. A few days after the march finished, I left for Sweden, taking with me some of the printed slogans we had used for the march in order to use them for the rally in Sweden. A last-minute change to my flight created a ten-hour layover in Amsterdam; opening up the opportunity to meet with officials at the International Criminal Court in the Hague. Our lawyers in Washington, DC, who are working on the genocide case, helped arrange such a meeting.

During a layover in Minneapolis, I decided to contact Mr. Mesfin, an Ethiopian man who lives in Amsterdam with whom I have been in contact for over a year. He is 26 years old and was a freshman at Addis Ababa University during the 2005 election. He was very politically active during this time; ending up to become one of the thousands of Ethiopians who was arrested, beaten, tortured and held without trial until 2006. Sometime later, he was the recipient of a scholarship in the Netherlands, enabling him to go there to pursue his Masters' degree. It was from Amsterdam that he contacted me through an email. What he said really touched me.

He had written, *"I'm one of the Ethiopians who was very active during the last election. I wanted change, but the change I was seeking; for which I was beaten and tortured, has never come. Until it does, I will never stop struggling to bring true justice." He told me, "I read about the SMNE and would like to be part of it because the SMNE principles give me the only way I can truly define myself. I am of mixed ethnicity— Tigrayan, Oromo, Gurage and Amhara. I cannot belong to any one of these ethnicities, even though I am proud of every one of these groups. Instead, I am human first; that is my identity. Now, when people ask me my tribe, I am more likely to say I am a human and this falls exactly into the principle of putting humanity before ethnicity and that no one ethnic group is free until all are free."*

His email really touched me and I knew there were many more Ethiopians that could speak of the same confusing mixture of identities that makes one wonder where to fit in and belong in a culture like Ethiopia that is "fixated" on tribal identities, divisions and loyalties. For my friend Mesfin and others like him, being a human first and above all, is **very freeing**. Mingling with others, without regard to these "ethnic rules;" is even more freeing. Not only is it freeing to people of mixed ethnicity, but it tears down the walls between all of us.

I responded to his email and since that time, we have regularly talked on the phone and emailed. He became one of the many, many Ethiopians I have met through an email who has enriched my life. This ten-hour layover gave me the chance not only to meet him in person, but to take him along with me to the meeting at the ICC.

**Five years later I was still in The Hague searching for that same justice;  
but not just for the Anuak, but for all Ethiopians.**

When I arrived at Schipol Airport in the Netherlands, he was there and together we took a train to go to the Hague. It was my second meeting with the ICC because I had been there in July of 2004, seeking justice for the Anuak. Five years later I was still searching for that same justice; but not just for the Anuak, but for all Ethiopians.

Our meeting with officials at the ICC was very productive. I was given the opportunity to give a presentation, which included showing a video clip of the evidence pertaining to the Anuak case and a slide show of the human rights atrocities that showed the widespread perpetration of such crimes throughout Ethiopia. These are not isolated incidents; but together, show a continuing pattern of serial violations by the Meles regime.

We have no reason to believe they will stop until they are forced to do so. I really thank the Ethiopians from different places who provided this evidence. By the reaction of these officials, I could tell they were shocked that these kinds of atrocities had repeatedly taken place in Ethiopia and that essentially nothing had been done about it; especially when some of the evidence dated back to incidents perpetrated in the northern regions of Ethiopia in 1992.

After the presentation, they had questions, which I answered to the best of my knowledge. I also gave an opportunity to my fellow Ethiopian brother to give an eyewitness account of what had happened to him in Ethiopia during the post-election violence and his detention. I was very proud of him for the outstanding presentation he gave as he became a powerful and effective voice for those who gave their lives in the streets of their capital city and who can never again speak. It gave me much hope that with voices like his, justice would eventually be served for those who died.

As I listened, my mind was racing as I wondered about how many more Ethiopians were “out there,” just like Mesfin, waiting to emerge from the dark corners of Ethiopia to reveal the truth of what happened to them. These are the heroes of Ethiopia who will bring down the walls of deceit, denial, cover-up and impunity with their personal testimonies when they finally have “their day in court.”

After his testimony, I handed over the names of 193 Ethiopians who the Commission of Inquiry had determined to have died during the 2005 Ethiopian National Election shooting of civilian protestors. We only have this evidence due to the courage of some of those who sat on that Meles-appointed commission. Their sense of moral right and courage rose up against the dictates of this regime who expected them to cover-up any findings that faulted the government. These men refused to comply.

One of the truly remarkable men on that commission, who now lives in Amsterdam, had given this list to me. He had fled the country with the documented findings, believing the truth had to get out. Another remarkable man on the commission, who now lives in Washington DC, had provided me with numerous other documents, which gave many specific details about who did what. In addition to these documents, I also gave the ICC officials more evidentiary information on the Anuak massacre as well as documentation pertaining to the serious human rights violations in other regions such as the Amhara, Ogaden, Oromia, Awassa, Benishangul-Gumuz and Afar.

### **My closing statement**

I will summarize my closing statement to them:

*“With all this evidence that I am giving to you, we believe a thorough investigation would easily reveal that Meles and his government has committed crimes against humanity. I know some will say that the case cannot be investigated unless it is referred by the UN or a country, but the evidence itself should be the impetus to take the moral initiative to open up an investigation; bringing the guilty to accountability. The preliminary evidence clearly substantiates human rights crimes; yet with a full investigation, Meles would fit in with Charles Taylor, Slobodan Milosevic or Omar al- Bashir.*

*The Anuak case alone is very well documented and undeniably points to the fact that crimes against humanity have been committed. Even the charges of genocide cannot be denied because over 400 innocent people were killed in their homes. One ethnic group was targeted; something that fits the definition of genocide; whether it is in whole or in part. The same thing happened in Arba Gugu and Bedeno where Amhara were ethnically targeted. You can also consider the case of the innocent civilians killed in Awassa or the 193 protestors in Addis and cannot deny the evidence that crimes against humanity have been committed.*

*In February 2004, following the massacre of the Anuak, we sent a letter to the Chief Prosecutor of the ICC, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, asking for an investigation. I received a response which said that the investigation would not be done unless it was requested by the UN or by another government. This was five years ago. Today, I am in this room talking about the same thing. Since that time, many more people have been killed and the killing is continuing.*

*My question to you is: do we have a double standard? Are we truly seeking genuine justice against anyone who has committed a crime against humanity or are we not? By not delivering, African dictators are emboldened to defy and to condemn the courts because many of them are not innocent and want to undermine the authority of the ICC as white organization continuing to try to colonize Africa.*

*An example is how Meles recently gave Omar al-Bashir such a warm welcome in Addis Ababa because he knows by de-legitimizing the ICC he is less likely to be held accountable for the same kinds of crimes. It is the reason why the "gang of African dictators" who make up part of the Africa Union, join together not to condemn the human rights crimes in Darfur, Ethiopia or the Congo, but instead to condemn the ICC. They are reluctant to condemn the crimes against humanity but swift to condemn the court.*

*I am not just here to try to advance some political agenda, but I am here to call on the court to follow your important mission. People in remote areas of Africa, with little education, still have heard about this court and when great numbers of them are killed, they grasp onto the hope and expectation that this court will hold the perpetrators responsible. If the ICC is truly seeking genuine justice, Meles and those beneath him who were complicit in the killings, should be investigated and tried under the ICC.*

*Ethiopians cannot hope for justice in Ethiopia as the justice system cannot be separated from the political leader and his party. There is ample evidence that past investigations have been biased and reports whitewashed leaving no hope for a fair and impartial tribunal to be set up in Ethiopia. For example, in the Commission of Inquiry into the Anuak massacre, evidence exists of tampering with the evidence and intimidating witnesses, prosecutors and judges to suppress the truth.*

*Meles, himself, instructed the Commission of Inquiry into the Addis Ababa shooting of the protestors to follow the example of the Gambella investigation. In other words, the justice system in Ethiopia will never deliver because they are the ones who have committed the crimes. Asking them to investigate their own crimes is like asking a robber to investigate his own burglary or a serial killer to investigate one of their murders.*

*I have heard that the US government had sent a letter to the US Ambassador to Kenya recommending that a tribunal be set up in the country, but that Kenyan officials had missed the deadlines on more than one occasion. Reportedly, the Obama administration then called on the ICC to try these people under the ICC because of the failure of the Kenyan government to hold their own transparent and fair tribunal. I was told that within the letter, government officials were told that any of those who were found to have been involved with the killings, including government officials, would not be allowed to enter the US and that this would include their family members and children. This idea was supported by Canada and the EU. This is exactly what is needed in Ethiopia, but instead what is happening is that those who have committed crimes against humanity in Ethiopia (and their families) continue to travel or live in luxury in free western countries.*

*I was encouraged to hear that Chief Prosecutor Moreno-Ocampo and some twenty-two of his staff will now go to Nairobi to meet with the local human rights organizations so as to investigate the post-election killings. Additionally, I had heard that Kofi Annan handed over a letter with the names of twenty influential people who were key in making the decisions related to the killing of the people. Now, I hear that the ICC is not limiting this number to these twenty, but will be doing further investigation that may lead to others being added to this list. This is very encouraging, but it should not only be limited to Kenya, but for Ethiopia and anywhere else that crimes against humanity have been committed.*

*Now we hear that the ICC is considering opening up an investigation into the recent a military crackdown on demonstrators in the capital Conakry, Guinea that killed 157 people? What are Ethiopians supposed to think when the many egregious acts committed in Ethiopia are overlooked? The Ethiopian people want justice; justice that is long overdue.*

*I do acknowledge that the ICC is already working on issues in Ethiopia, going back to the submission of the Anuak case in 2004. This is excellent, but we hope you will take a stronger role by sending an investigation team to Ethiopia. If the ICC fails to do it, the Ethiopians will do it; it is just a matter of time.*

### **Why am I in this world and why am I doing what I am doing**

After this summary, there was further discussion before the meeting ended. On my way back to the airport, my Ethiopian brother and I reflected on what happened. He asked me some personal questions, like, “Why are you doing this?” I told him that I felt it was the right thing to do. I told him that Ethiopia was a country where there was no accountability; where its leaders could commit any crime and get away with it. I explained that we cannot wait for someone else to take the initiative, but at some point, we must do something ourselves to set some limits on Ethiopia’s oppressive and corrupt leaders.

**I explained my belief that in order for Ethiopians to be respected, they have to respect themselves and that “we” Ethiopians are in a mess because few of us really care enough to change the future for those who come after us. I told him that if Ethiopians before us had done more, we would not be where we are today.** After learning that I had been to the ICC five years ago and was now back, still not finding justice, he asked me why I had not quit the work, considering all the difficulties. He asked me where I found hope when things back in Ethiopia look so hopeless. I told him that people like him gave me hope and that another source of hope and strength was that God had given me life, breath and health

When he was seeing me off, he gave me a CD of some music. As my plane took off for Stockholm, I inserted the CD in my computer and listened. It was Teddy Afro. This man who went to jail under what most of us believe were trumped up charges for killing a homeless man, was singing passionately about caring about the homeless. He expressed his disappointment with a world that ignored those whose only covering was the sunlight. He spoke of life as an opportunity for some to become wealthy, while others remained poor; yet that we were all the same; we came into this world with nothing and leave with nothing but our souls.

His song reflected on some of the same topics we had just talked about and made me ask myself, “Why am I in this world and why am I doing what I am doing,” the same questions I was just asked by my friend. My questions were directed to God because I believe it was He who brought me to this world to do the work He wants me to do. Listening to this music was so emotional that it almost brought tears to my eyes. My mind was in Ethiopia and I was thinking of the 400 people I knew who were killed in Gambella nearly six years ago.

I was thinking of the many Ethiopians who have been killed by this government all over the country since they came into power. I then thought about the many heartbreaking images of malnourished Ethiopians. Many of these struggling Ethiopians are dying daily, with many more at great risk. Some will die because of the famine, but many will die because of the actions or lack of actions of their own government. It made me think that, maybe, if I do what God wants me to do—in twenty, forty or a hundred years from now-- another Ethiopian or African child will not feel this same kind of pain I am feeling.

### **Without a dance?, ሳንቸፍር? Sanchafer?**

When I arrived in Stockholm, it was after midnight, but my mind was still occupied with the pain of Africa mingled with the sadness Teddy had sung about regarding the indifference of the world to the suffering. As I was walking out from the baggage claim, there was a young African woman with a baby who was really struggling with her bags, so I asked her if I could help her carry them until she got to the taxi. She said, “Sure, thank you,” so I started lugging three of her bags. She walked right behind me, rolling a stroller with her baby in it.

As the door opened up to the outside, the first thing I faced was a group of Ethiopians standing there, ready to greet me. All of a sudden, I could only see flashes of light from their cameras as they took pictures; not just of me, but of the woman and the baby as well! When I could see again, I saw the surprise on the faces of my greeters as one Ethiopian said to another, "Oh, I did not know he was bringing his wife and his kid with him!" Another guy said, "I did not even know he had a wife!"

I began to laugh and explained in Amharic, "No, she is not my wife! I just met her in the baggage claim and said I would help carry some of her bags!" The African girl looked shocked, not understanding what was going on and why these people were taking our picture. Seeing that the African woman was still very puzzled, I had to explain it to her in English. When she understood, we all started laughing together.

I asked my Ethiopian brothers and sisters why they assumed she was my wife and they told me it was because she was tall, dark beautiful girl and looked like an Anuak woman! I told them no, she is not an Anuak. Her name is Achta Chassagne from Eastern Chad. Her and her ten months old son Matthew were coming from France to Sweden to visit her family. When in the car, one brother said: "I thought you got a wife, ~~ገገገገ~~ or **Sanchafer?** (Without Ethiopian wedding dance), we could not stop laughing about it.

### **"- If You Wait for Perfect Conditions, You Will Never Get Anything Done -"**

When we finally arrived at Samuel's house where I was going to stay, it was nearly 2:00 AM. Before I went to bed, I received an emailed I-report on my Blackberry of the Ethiopian rally in Pittsburgh. It was a short video clip of an older Ethiopian woman, walking and waving her Ethiopian flag. She was standing in the middle, with a very few Ethiopians in the background who were shouting, "Shame on the G20 or western governments."

In my mind, I started wondering about where the rest of the Ethiopians were and why there were so few who were active in this struggle. After a long and fatiguing day, with many ups and downs in my emotions, I felt disappointed that I did not see more Ethiopians protesting against the injustice and suffering of Ethiopians caused by the Meles regime. Later, I did learn that there were a number of other Ethiopians in Pittsburgh, but not many. I greatly appreciate all of those who participated. They did an outstanding job for Ethiopia despite the lack of involvement from many thousands more of Ethiopians who chose to stay home.

Although I felt very tired, as I often do before I go to sleep, I opened up my Bible to read some verses. In there I found the healing and uplifting words that matched my need. I read a verses that says, "*- If You Wait for Perfect Conditions, You Will Never Get Anything Done -* " " *-One Action is More Valuable Than a Thousand Good Intentions -* ". I read about how Jesus' disciples were not thousands or millions but were only a very few in number—twelve! I thought about how God's work; including His caring about the oppressed, the poor and the hungry, is not limited by numbers, as it was those twelve ordinary men who carried the message to others that changed the world.

I was so upset with what Teddy Afro said about the failure of the world to respond to the homeless, coupled with the image of one woman, nearly alone, waving her Ethiopian flag against a dictator with great resources; but, my perspective was changed and my spirit lifted with these few inspiring verses. It was the answer to the questions, challenges and frustrations of my day. God is the answer to all the formidable challenges and obstacles ahead. Let us not be fearful of any government, power or force as long as God is with us. With God, nothing is impossible!

**The next report will cover what happened in Sweden.**

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