

## **Ethiopian Dictator Meles Zenawi Dies 20 August 2012**

Meles Zenawi Asres (Ge'ez: Mäläs Zenawi Äsräs; 8 May 1955 – 20 August 2012) was the Prime Minister of Ethiopia from 1995 until his death on 20 August 2012. Since 1985, he was the chairman of the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), and the head of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). He was President of Ethiopia from 1991 to 1995 and became the Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 1995 following the general elections that year. While his government was credited with reforms such as those that lead a multi-party political system in Ethiopia, introduction of private press in Ethiopia and decreased child mortality rates, his government was also accused of political repression and brutal human rights abuses. Known as one of Africa's strongmen, he was a key ally of the United States in the war on terror.

Zenawi was born in Adwa, Tigray, in northern Ethiopia, to an Ethiopian father from Adwa, Ethiopia, and a mother from Adi Quala, Eritrea. He graduated from the General Wingate high school in Addis Ababa, then studied medicine at Addis Ababa University (at the time known as Haile Selassie University) for two years before interrupting his studies in 1975 to join the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). While a member of the TPLF, Zenawi founded the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray. His first name at birth was "Legesse" (thus Legesse Zenawi, Ge'ez: legesse zēnāwī). However, he eventually became better known by his nom de guerre Meles, which he later adopted in honor of a university student and a revolutionary radical who was executed by the previous government in 1975.

The TPLF was one of many armed groups struggling against Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam. Zenawi was elected Leader of the Leadership Committee in 1979 and Leader of the Executive Committee in 1983. He has been the chairperson of both the TPLF and the EPRDF since the EPRDF assumed power at the end of the Ethiopian Civil War in 1991. He was president of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), during which Eritrea seceded from the country and the experiment of ethnic federalism started.

### Education and personal life

Zenawi acquired an MBA (Master of Business Administration) from the Open University of the United Kingdom in 1995 and an MSc. (Masters of Science) in Economics from the Erasmus University of the Netherlands in 2004.[8] In July 2002 Meles received an honorary doctoral degree in political science from the Hannam University in South Korea.

Zenawi was married to Azeb Mesfin and was the father of three children. Azeb Mesfin is now the chair of the Social Affairs Standing Committee of Parliament, and in January 2007, she was given the "Legacy of a Dream" award for her leadership against HIV/AIDS during a ceremony held in memory of America's civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King. In addition, Azeb Mesfin and various government agencies have addressed child mortality issues in Ethiopia. According to UNICEF, the child mortality rate in Ethiopia has declined by 40% since the current ruling party took office.

### Prime Minister of Ethiopia

Zenawi stated that EPRDF's victory was a triumph for the thousands of TPLF-fighters who were killed, for the millions of Ethiopians who were victims of the country's biggest famine during the Derg regime, when some estimates put up to 1.5 million deaths of Ethiopians from famine and the Red Terror. Accordingly, he maintained that the big support it received from peasants and rural areas helped EPRDF maintain peace and stability. Foreign support was diverse; the Arab League, as well as Western nations, supported the EPRDF rebels against the communist Moscow-supported government (although the TPLF was at the time Marxist) at the height of the Cold War.

"What the implications of this will be in terms of relations between Ethiopia and the European Union, we will have to wait and see but I don't think you will be surprised if Ethiopia were to insist that it should not be patronised."

The United States helped the EPRDF rebels to get power in Ethiopia and many angry demonstrators in Addis Ababa protested against Herman Cohen, the U.S. State Department's chief of African affairs who attended a conference that demonstrators viewed as legitimizing the EPRDF. A New York Times editorial commented in 1991,

"Demonstrators cursing the Americans ignore two realities. The cold war is over in Africa, and Ethiopia is no longer a focus of superpower rivalry. Otherwise it would have been unthinkable for four contending Marxist groups to turn to Washington for help. The other reality is that Mr. Cohen cannot undo at the conference table what has happened on the battlefield."

Even though EPRDF's success was welcomed as a relief from DERG strong anti-EPRDF sentiments were present in many areas and strongly visible in Addis Ababa. These were just the beginning of the opposition to Zenawi's EPRDF party after it gained power and more strong opposition followed. Addis Ababa has since been the center of peaceful opposition to the EPRDF, while the eastern Somali Region has been the most active region for armed opposition.

Following the defeat and exile of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, the July Convention of Nationalities was held. It was the first Ethiopian multinational convention where delegates of various nations and organizations were given representation and observed by various international organizations including the United Nations, Organization for African Unity, European Economic Community, and the United States and the United Kingdom. Of the 24 groups, the ones with the largest delegations at the Convention were the EPRDF (32), the Oromo Liberation Front (12), Afar Liberation Front (3), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (3), and the Western Somali Liberation Front (3).

Near the end of the year, Zenawi became the President of the TGE, and following the first elections in 1995 Zenawi was elected as Prime Minister and Dr. Negasso Gidada as President. International election observers concluded that had opposition parties contested, they could have garnered seats.

In the 2000 general elections, Zenawi was reelected Prime Minister, and his ruling EPRDF party shared parliament seats with the opposition party United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF). According to observers organized by Ethiopian Human Rights Council, local U.N. staff, diplomatic missions, political parties, and domestic non-governmental organizations, serious election irregularities occurred in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), particularly in the Hadiya Zone.

Zenawi encountered his first real challenge in the 2005 elections. His party was declared the winner and Zenawi kept his seat as prime minister for another term, although the major opposition groups (the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), UEDF, and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement) gained a number of seats in the national parliament. More than 30 other political parties participated in the election. These elections were the most contested and the most controversial in Ethiopia's short democratic history, with some opposition parties arguing that the election was stolen by the ruling party. Allegations of fraud were especially strong in the rural areas, as the opposition parties won in most urban areas, whereas the EPRDF won mostly in rural districts.

The aftermath of the election led to riots and demonstrations against the results, particularly in the capital, which had to be stopped by peace officers. Some opposition parties blamed the government for the violence, even though they were tried and convicted in the court of the country's law. At the end of the demonstration, along with seven police officers 193 citizens were killed and 763 civilians wounded. Tens of thousands of Ethiopians were also jailed and tortured. Many protesters and around 75 police officers were severely injured. The opposition parties have continuously accused the government of a massacre. EU election observers concluded the election failed to meet international standards for free and fair elections. Meanwhile CUD opposition members continued to accuse the ruling party of fraud.

The former Supreme Court Judge of the Southern Ethiopian nations and nationalities, Judge Frehiwot Samuel, who was also Chairman of the Inquiry Commission, and his Deputy, Judge Wolde-Michael Meshesha, have fled Ethiopia with a video and final report of the Commission's findings that shows the

commission deciding, through an eight to two vote, that the government had used excessive force and that there were grave human rights violations.

The US government continued to support the Meles Zenawi regime with substantial military and aid assistance and Ethiopian troops intervened in Somalia at the behest of the United States. They were in effect fighting a proxy war on behalf of the US.

In early 2004, Zenawi received medical treatment in the UK for an unspecified condition. Flanked by numerous UK police officers and diplomatic protection officers he was observed at the Parkside Hospital in southwest London, a private hospital staffed by numerous specialist consultants. It was later determined that he had brain cancer and he was treated at the Centre Hospitalier de San Luc in Brussels, where he died today.

### Domestic policy

The Ethiopian economy is based on agriculture, which accounts for about 45% of GDP and 85% of employment. Agricultural commodities also dominate the export sector, mainly coffee, qat, and hides and skins. Ethiopian agriculture is predominantly rain-fed subsistence agriculture, troubled by recurrent droughts. After Meles came to power in 1991, there were three major droughts in 1999/2000, 2002/2003 and 2009/2010.

The most significant reform regarding land use after Meles took power was the dissolution of the collective farms and redistribution of land at local levels. The demand for land ownership, expressed in the slogan "Land to the tiller," was central in toppling the feudal monarchy. The demand, however, was not fully answered. The new constitution, in Article 40, section 3, states that, "The right to own rural and urban land as well as natural resources belongs only to the state and the people".[42] The farmers have land use rights, but uncertain transfer rights. Starting in 2008, this land policy was set back after the government announced that it would begin leasing large areas of "empty" farm lands to foreign investors. Derided internationally as "land grabs," because these operations threaten some smallholders with the loss of their plots. Reporting on this issue, the New York Times, quoting an expert, wrote, "One thing that is very clear, that seems to have escaped the attention of most investors, is that this is not simply empty land."

### Ethiopian politics

Many opposition politicians openly display deep anger for the ruling party's semblance of democracy, with some having labeled Meles a "dictator" and others having called for his resignation. After the disputed 2005 national elections, opposition party members, led by the CUD, UEDP-Medhin, UEDF and Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), filled almost one third of the Ethiopian parliament seats.[47] Despite the fact that the Ethiopian constitution dictates a multi-party system, Meles Zenawi's full control of the military forces has promoted the reality of a single-party state.

### Ethnic federalism

The Meles Zenawi government created an ethnic-based federalism, which came under attack by some Ethiopians. Meles Zenawi's TPLF party believed that there was no choice—this was the only solution to the centuries-old oppression by centralist governments, and to domination of culture, language, politics and economy by one ethnic group, namely the Amhara. On the other hand, some parties like the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front), which was a partner in drafting the constitution, see Amhara and Tigrayan domination of the country.

Meles Zenawi's policy of ethnic federalism has been attacked by two groups of opposition parties. Pan-Ethiopian opposition parties like AEUP, UEDP-medhin and Andenet accuse Meles Zenawi of harming the stability and unity of Ethiopia by dividing the country on language lines. They express their fear for the future unity of the country, pointing out a rise in ethnic conflicts after the ethnic federalism policy

introduced, whereas in the past Ethiopia's economic marginalization of groups or ethnicities was a cause of warfare in the country, as experts indicated.

On the other hand, ethnic-based opposition parties like the OFDM, Oromo National Congress (renamed OPC) as well as armed groups like the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) accuse Meles Zenawi's government that the powers given to the regions by the constitution are only on paper. Recently Dr Merara Gudina (from ONC) said, "The only thing EPRDF's federalism has achieved is that it helped the party hold a tight grip on the people through a divide-and-rule system." Most of the opposition on both sides want to change the existing ethnic-federal system if they gain power. Those who reject ethnic federalism propose that administrative regions should be carved out on consideration of more factors than language alone. On the other hand, armed groups who favor ethnic federalism want to apply Article 39 and declare full independence for their own ethnic regions like Eritrea did in 1993.

Even though Meles Zenawi's administration inherited one of the poorest economies in the world, the country's economy has been growing steadily since he took office. During the last seven years, Ethiopia's GDP has shown a rate of growth of about 9 percent a year. The country was also in the top category for "policies of social inclusion and equity," in the domain of "economic management," and Ethiopia did exceptionally well in the domain of "structural policies" and "public sector management and institutions." Gross primary enrollment rates, a standard indicator of investment in the poor, went up to 93 percent in 2004 from 72 percent in 1990, contributing to a rise in literacy rates from 50 percent in 1997 to 65 percent in 2002.[55] Still some opposition parties in the Ethiopian parliament doubted the economic growth. During the House's 31st regular session where the parliament reserved its monthly "Opposition Day," some opposition MPs condemned the ruling party, pointing to double-digit inflation as a sign of the government's economic failures. The African Development Bank and the Paris-based OECD Development Center stated that Ethiopia has become one of the fastest growing countries in Africa.

### Water

One of the most important resources of the country, water (the Nile), has also been a focus of Meles's administration. Due to the potential conflict that can occur between Egypt and Ethiopia, Meles's EPRDF-led government has chosen to initiate and support programs that would benefit all sides in the use of the Nile. So far many small scale dams have been constructed in Ethiopia but large dams have been rare because of limited financial capabilities. Two of the big projects include the Tekeze hydro-electric power project in Tigray and the largest hydroelectric plant in Ethiopia located in Achefer Woreda of the Amhara State[58][59] Yet the building of the Tekeze power project has dominated the media since it was built in the Tigray region, the home state of Meles. The country is planning to export electricity to Sudan and Djibouti by 2010, and has currently began the newest project in western Ethiopia to construct Africa's biggest hydroelectric dam which is located on the Ethiopia-Sudan border.

### Freedom of religion

Although Muslims and Orthodox Christians lived together in Ethiopia for many centuries, complete religious freedom was formalized only in 1991. Many of the pre-existing issues — dominance of the state religion to 1974, seizure of the church properties by the Mengistu regime, 1974–91, state-sponsored persecution of non-Orthodox Christians, second-class citizenship accorded to Ethiopian Muslims, landownership problems and similar issues for non-Orthodox believers — have subsided for the most part. There are currently between 12 and 15 million Protestant Christians, as well as other new non-Orthodox Christians. Clashes have been very rare with the domination of the Orthodox. Most analysts say that since such equality and full religious freedom didn't exist before, the infrequent clashes might occur until the culture of tolerance grows between all old and new religions and denominations.

### Private property of means of communication

Meles Zenawi's administration was the first to introduce private press in Ethiopia. However, he has been under fire often for imprisonment of journalists and for website censorship. The Meles government defends its action on the ground that the banned media outlets advocated "a certain population should be

quarantined" and incited "violence among different ethnic groups in the country," including using hate-filled text messages on mobile phones asking people to attack ethnic groups. Government critics say that the ruling party is not willing to be criticised. Many reports of international organizations support their claim. Strong criticism came from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). In its 2007 press freedom summary it wrote, "Ethiopia [is] the world's worst backslider on press freedom over the previous five years". At the start of 2010, the Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported that an Ethiopian journalist has been jailed for a year for criticising the prime minister Meles Zenawi. Jeffrey Gettleman of the New York Times was held incommunicado in the Ogaden desert for attempting to report on the conflict there. Because of pressure from the government, the number of private media outlets is significantly lower than before 2005. There are still no private broadcasters in the country.

### Language policy

Meles Zenawi's government introduced a diverse but controversial policy of decentralization of the language system in Ethiopia. Most Ethiopians are taught using their mother tongue in primary schools. Some critics have said that this policy harms the unity and national identity of the country. Currently, many regional states have their own official state language. For instance, Afaan Oromo is the official language of the Oromia regional state but Amharic is still the official language in the State of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples.

### School expansion

Since the 1990s Ethiopia has experienced an increase of schools and colleges. However, the government's focus on the agricultural sector has slowed the growth of jobs in the urban areas of Ethiopia, which is reflected in the anger of the urban population and its students as well as the landslide victory of opposition parties in these areas during the recent national election. Statistics showed that in 1991 only 27 percent of Ethiopian children attended school, but in 2004 gross enrollment rate was up to 77 percent and it reached 85 percent in November 2006. As of 2005, there were 13,500 elementary schools and 550 secondary schools. A majority of them are newly constructed and the secondary schools are connected by satellite in a new programme called School-Net.

More colleges and Universities have been constructed and/or expanded during the last twenty years than in whole prior history of Ethiopia. These colleges and Universities include Adama University (Oromia), an expansion of Nazreth technical college, Jimma University (started earlier), Mekelle University newly built under Meles, Debu University, an expansion of Awassa college, Bahir Dar (Amhara state) University, an expansion of a polytechnic college and teacher's college, and others. Most of the older colleges have added various new departments, including faculties of law, business, etc. Other new growing colleges include Jijiga (Somali state) University, institutions in Debre Markos, Semera (Afar), Aksum, Tepi, Nekemte (Oromia), Kombolcha (Amhara State), Dire Dawa and in Debre Birhan. Wollega University in the Oromia state is the most recently finished university in Ethiopia with various modern facilities, with 20 new fields of study and the new Wolaita Soddo University started taking in students in February 2007. Including the new Axum University, 12 new universities are starting operation in 2007<sup>[109]</sup> Other fairly new universities like Dilla University in the Gedeo Zone SNNP region launched new facilities, expanded laboratories for research, and initiated new post-graduate studies. In the last decade, more than 30 new private colleges & universities have been created, including Unity College. The University Capacity Building Program (UCBP) is a leading project in this sector.

### Women's rights

The TPLF has promoted gender equality since the days of armed conflict, when, in the northern states, Tigrean and Amhara women soldiers fought together with men against the Derg dictatorship. Meles Zenawi's administration, along with the powerful First Lady Azeb Mesfin, have strongly advocated equal rights and opportunities for women in Ethiopia. Despite the country having a rich history of respected queens and empresses, Meles inherited a national situation in which Ethiopian women did not have equality or basic rights. Since his administration began, there has been a steady growth of women's organizations, women activists and employment opportunities and a forum where women discuss

backward cultural issues on national television. In their long fight against destructive traditional practices, HIV transmission, early marriage, lack of legal rights for women, unfair public policies, job opportunity and other issues, various organizations continue to work with the government including the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association (EWLA), Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations, the Ethiopia Media Women's Association (MWA), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Women in Self Employment (WISE), the Ethiopian Medical Women's Association (EMWA), the Women's Association of Tigray (WAT), the Kembatti Mentti Gezzima-tope (KMG), the Ethiopian Nurse Midwives Association (ENA) and others. The Ethiopian leadership has made significant advances to protect women's rights in recent years. It has its first Minister of Women's Affairs and has overhauled legislation on rape, female genital mutilation, and other offences.

### Foreign policies

Meles Zenawi, like previous Ethiopian governments, wanted Ethiopia to have a larger share of the Nile River. In order to end its decades-long dependency on foreign aid, Ethiopia needs to develop its irrigation system. The country has already lost millions of people to poverty due to its inability to use the Nile water, 85% of which runs through Ethiopia.

### Eritrea

Although Meles Zenawi and his administration claim they preferred a united but federal nation that included the Eritrean state, since Zenawi's TPLF fought together with EPLF, Zenawi originally left the decision of independence to the Eritrean citizens. According to Time magazine's 1991 analyses, Zenawi and the TPLF endorsed the right of the Eritreans to their referendum but wanted a unified Ethiopia and so hoped that the vote, if held, would go against secession.

However, after the EPLF secured their borders when Mengistu's regime fell, and after the majority of Eritreans voted for independence on 24 May 1993, Isaias Afewerki Isaias became the leader of Eritrea after it seceded from Ethiopia. Many people in Meles Zenawi's Ethiopian government and the opposition parties were angry over the decision to grant Eritrea its independence in 1993.

Despite working together against the Derg regime, Meles and Issaias' positive relationship turned sour after Meles succumbed to US pressure to deliver elections within a year and Issaias abandoned his original promise to create a transitional government in the early 1990s. The Eritrean-Ethiopian War began in May 1998. After the Ethiopian breach of the western front and subsequent capture of an economically worthless triangle of western Eritrea, a costly war led to the death of tens of thousands of people on both sides. By the end of the devastating war, the Ethiopian army had captured the town of Badme and driven back Eritrean forces until they controlled around one-third of Eritrean territory, including the Barentu region. The Ethiopian President Negaso Gidada gave a victory speech and a peace treaty was signed a few weeks later. According to the peace treaty Ethiopia then pulled out. The stance of the EPRDF-led Ethiopian government to pull out its troops and let go of Barentu and eastern Eritrea led to one of the many reasons for EPRDF's unpopularity in Ethiopian cities. Although the Ethiopian government accepted the border ruling "in principle" with 5-point conditions, tensions between these two nations still exist. Many Eritreans were driven out of Ethiopia and they are still discriminated against in Ethiopia today.

### Somalia

Meles Zenawi and his government had a relatively strong relationship with the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia. Two of the main points of agreement were state borders and secular values.

In 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an Islamist organization, assumed control of much of the southern part of Somalia and promptly imposed Shari'a law. The Transitional Federal Government sought to reestablish its authority, and, with the assistance of Ethiopian troops, African Union peacekeepers and air support by the United States, managed to drive out the rival ICU and solidify its rule.

Following a declaration of jihad by al-Qaeda-linked Islamists in Mogadishu, the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia invited Ethiopia to send troops into southern Somalia at the end of December 2006. With the help of Puntland and together with TFG forces, Ethiopian troops captured Mogadishu and installed the transitional government. Since the Ethiopian intervention, the fighting has led to the deaths of over 10,000 civilians in southern Somalia. Charges of war crimes were made and denied on both sides of the fighting.

According to the Somali news organization Garowe Online, clan-based radio and other media outlets in Mogadishu were used by the rebels as propaganda against the TFG and its Ethiopian allies. According to Wikileaks, Meles Zenawi also told US officials in a confidential 2006 meeting that the ICU needed to be divided into two groups to alienate the jihadists. Ethiopia's "limited military action might precipitate this divorce," Meles predicted. On 8 January 2007, as the Battle of Ras Kamboni raged, TFG President and founder Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, a former colonel in the Somali Army, entered Mogadishu for the first time since being elected to office. The Somali government then relocated to Villa Somalia in the capital from its interim location in Baidoa. This marked the first time since the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 that the federal government controlled most of the country.

Following this defeat, the Islamic Courts Union splintered into several different factions. Some of the more radical elements, including Al-Shabaab, regrouped to continue their insurgency against the TFG and oppose the Ethiopian military's presence in Somalia. Throughout 2007 and 2008, Al-Shabaab scored military victories, seizing control of key towns and ports in both central and southern Somalia. At the end of 2008, the group had captured Baidoa but not Mogadishu. By January 2009, Al-Shabaab and other militias had managed to force the Ethiopian troops to retreat, leaving behind an under-equipped African Union peacekeeping force to assist the Transitional Federal Government's troops.

Some political parties in Ethiopia opposed Meles Zenawi's policies and demanded the complete withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia. Merera Gudina, leader of the opposition party United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) said "the military victory against the Islamic Courts forces was not followed by political victory or national reconciliation." He also said staying in Somalia harms the Ethiopian economy and some of the leaders in the transitional Somali government were not reaching out to civil society members in Somalia. With the exception of the SPDP, UEDP-Medhin (EDUP) and ONC opposition parties, not many opposition parties in Ethiopia supported the choice of intervention in Somalia by Meles Zenawi's ruling party. Some members of the Somali parliament expressed their appreciation of Ethiopia's help publicly, but opposition remained against the intervention, which was portrayed as an invasion instead.

Between 31 May and 9 June 2008, representatives of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government and the moderate Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) group of Islamist rebels participated in peace talks in Djibouti brokered by the former United Nations Special Envoy to Somalia, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah. The conference ended with a signed agreement calling for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in exchange for the cessation of armed confrontation. Parliament was subsequently expanded to 550 seats to accommodate ARS members, which then elected Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former ARS chairman, to office.

In October 2011, a coordinated multinational operation began against the Al-Shabaab group of insurgents in southern Somalia, with the Ethiopian military eventually joining the mission the following month. Analysts expect the additional troop reinforcements to help the Somali authorities gradually expand their territorial control.

### **Widespread repression in Oromia**

According to Freedom House, under the government of Meles Zenawi discrimination against and repression of Oromo people has been widespread. Human Rights Watch (HRW) notes that local government in the Oromia Region has "routinely commit[ted] various human rights violations against people they believe to be critical or unsupportive of the government." After relations between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the ruling government broke down in 1992, the government banned the OLF,

and has since regularly accused political detainees of being OLF operatives. HRW further notes that "according to former Ethiopian President Negasso Gidada, when he left office in 2001 roughly 25,000 people were in prison on OLF-related charges throughout Oromia and in Addis Ababa and no public moves have since been made to substantially reduce the number of detainees." Oromia is the largest and most populous of Ethiopia's nine regional states, but remains so far under heavy repression.

### **Anuak genocide**

On 13 December 2003 a massacre by Ethiopian defense forces and highlander militias in Gambela town killed 343 Anuaks in one day and hundreds more over the coming months. According to Amnesty International, federal soldiers participated in the killings and regional authorities did not take necessary preventive measures against the violence. Two on the ground investigations by Genocide Watch concluded that the genocidal massacres were planned and conducted by the Meles Zenawi regime in order to drive Anuak off the oil-rich land they inhabited and to clear it for leasing to multinational agri-business companies from China, Malaysia, India, and Saudi Arabia. Another investigation by Human Rights Watch a year later came to the same conclusions.

The highlanders are mostly from the northern regions of Amhara, Tigray, and Oromia. They populated the Gambela region after they were forced to move southwest from the north in the mid-1980s under the communist Mengistu Haile Mariam regime. More than 1.5 million Ethiopians were forced to relocate, which led to more than 200,000 Ethiopian dead in one of the worst humanitarian crises of that decade. Since then northern highlanders have been living in Gambela, adding fuel to an already existing conflict between the Nuer refugees from Sudan and the Anuaks.

The massacres were labeled a "genocide" by Genocide Watch, which has since charged that genocidal massacres have also been committed against ethnic Ogadenis, and other groups, and has called for investigation of the human rights record of the Meles regime in an open letter to the UN Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Anuak people maintain they have been gradually displaced from their traditional lands. Despite 5,000 Ethiopian troops being deployed to keep peace in the area, tensions are still high. Anuaks still fear for their lives.

### **Post-election violence**

On 18 October 2006 an independent report said Ethiopian police massacred 193 protesters, mostly in the capital Addis Ababa, in the violence of June and November following the May 2005 elections. The information was leaked before the official independent report was handed to the parliament. The leak made by Ethiopian judge Wolde-Michael Meshesha found that the government had concealed the true extent of deaths at the hands of the police.

The Meles Zenawi regime claimed that the opposition party provoked the riots but their protest was peaceful and non-violent. An Ethiopian judge, Mr. Meshesha, who has sought political asylum in Europe, described the deaths as a massacre. He claimed that he had to leave Ethiopia because he thought he would be arrested, tortured, and killed by the government. He stated Zenawi ordered troops to shoot at protesters.

An official report by the parliament gave exactly the same details as the leaked inquiry. It said that 193 people had been killed, including 40 teenagers. Six policemen were also killed and some 763 people injured. Police records showed 20,000 people were initially arrested during the anti-government protests. Many are still in prison, held without charge.

### **Political Prisoners**

Currently, the Ethiopian government claims that all of the leaders of the main opposition party (CUD) are out of jail after the post-election violence. All of these charges are denied by the CUD leadership both in



and outside Ethiopia, and the European Union continues to plea for the political prisoners to be released after a speedy trial. Some of these elected CUD officials endure very harsh conditions inside Ethiopia's poorly maintained prisons and they are at risk of various medical complications. As a result of the violence after the elections, many thousands were arrested and imprisoned. Even though some have been freed many remain in prison.

Several opposition leaders remain in custody, accused of trying to violently overthrow the government. After the original arrests the Prime Minister told the parliament that releasing "these hardliners" would embolden them to think "whatever their action, they will not be held accountable." However, Amnesty International claims that the detainees are "prisoners of conscience" who are innocent and should be freed immediately and unconditionally.

In June 2007, the Ethiopian court found the CUD opposition party's 38 senior figures guilty of the charges and forced them to sign a paper accepting responsibility for the violence. The top leadership of the CUD party were released after the pardon board accepted their apology letter.

### **Ethiopian crackdown in Ogaden**

Meles Zenawi's government has carried out brutal counter-insurgency attacks against the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), particularly after the ONLF killed more than 70 oil facility workers in the region in April, 2007. Both sides accuse each other of human rights abuses. In June 2008, HRW criticized the lack of Western condemnation of Meles Zenawi's counter-insurgency policy and the military activities by Ethiopian Defence forces in reaction to ONLF's attacks.

Both fighting forces accuse each other of killing civilians and burning villages, with HRW claiming that accounts by refugees fleeing out of the country support ONLF's accusations.

### **Inflation and drought management**

Ethiopia has seen a rise in the general level of prices since around 2004, which has worsened the malnutrition problem caused by drought, as reported by UN humanitarian organizations. The inflation rate was reportedly in the low teens in 2005–2006, high teens during 2007 and in the 20s in 2008. This inflation crisis has deeply affected the urban population in Ethiopia.

According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Program, the inflation problem is occurring because more income for farmers is causing higher prices in shops. Ethiopian farmers are the driving force of the rural based economy where only 15% of the population is urban. The UN report says "as markets get less centralized, and farmers become more sophisticated and better informed traders are starting to complain about the market power of the farmers." The "farmers are now better off, and able to wait and spread their grain sales through the year, rather than having to rush everything to market immediately after harvest when prices are at their lowest." The UN report says that "grain prices in Ethiopia, have become unaffordable to the urban poor, though they are still below world prices and below prices in neighboring countries."

**The looming drought and political instability in Ethiopia after Meles Zenawi's death, could create a crisis situation for Ethiopians, who will again require massive amounts of food relief.**

**Genocide Watch declares Ethiopia to be at Stage 6, Preparation for major conflict.**

*Genocide Watch acknowledges the assistance of the researchers at Wikipedia for their summary of the situation in Ethiopia and of the many reports from human rights groups over the past ten years.*