



PRESS RELEASE

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TPLF/EPRDF “Suspends” its Land Allocation Program!

“Suspends!” This one word really signifies a great accomplishment by hard-working activists, both Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians, who have sought to stop the rapid-paced land grabs going on in the country. We all should be rejoicing at this news, revealed earlier this week in The Reporter,¹ that the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) will suspend land allocations for investment purposes until they better assess their own internal structures and the compliance of investors! **This is a “battle” won and should be a source of great encouragement to us! It should strengthen our resolve to win the greater “war” for truth, freedom and justice in Ethiopia!**

This move by the MOA is a definite sign of retreat from the regime’s previous strong denials of the facts and its misguided hope that they could successfully repress the information from getting out or avoid the consequences of deporting hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians from their homes and indigenous land by intimidating and terrorizing the people.

The Meles regime has known all along that what they have been doing is illegal, immoral and incendiary, but what exactly brought this abrupt “suspension” of this TPLF/EPRDF leasing scheme into being may be the result of a number of complex factors; some of which we may never know, but probably include exposure, international pressure, resistance, regime survival and even possibly, the afflicted consciences of some within the ranks. Nevertheless, we give credit to the MOA for taking this step forward for the people and for the future of Ethiopia, but much more is needed.

This land grabs strike at the very heart of life and survival in Ethiopia and without significant change they have the potential for destabilizing all of Ethiopia, region by region, and eventually, as a whole, until the entire country could explode. Up until now, the resistance from those affected has been mostly passive due to pervasive fear of repercussions; however, from what we hear on the ground, this may not continue to be the case unless the TPLF/EPRDF makes very major adjustments and this move is not nearly enough.

We thank the countless people who did take the risk of providing testimony to international civic organizations, human rights groups and international media, all giving the facts from the ground that are diametrically opposed to previous regime propaganda. The MOA’s sudden admission that these land deals might not be “working” on the ground, supports the findings of Human Rights Watch’s recent report <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/01/17/waiting-here-death>, the land investment study co-sponsored by the Oakland Institute and the SMNE <http://www.solidaritymovement.org/downloads/110608UnderstandingLandDealsInAfrica.pdf>, the PBS report <http://video.pbs.org/video/2203388630>, John Vidal’s report http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/21/ethiopia-centre-global-farmland-rush?CMP=tw_t_gu for the Guardian, Al Jazeera report http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Mr2xzRS73Bw and many others.

We know these land grabs, which are essentially regime-sponsored robbery, are not in the best interests of the people; but neither are they in the best interests of the investors. These investors now find themselves in a very vulnerable position as they face new scrutiny to determine whether or not they have utilized the land as per their agreements.

The TPLF/EPRDF may likely name some of them as the new scapegoats, especially those who are “less useful” to the regime; however, from its conception, the entire land-leasing program was a precarious “set-up” for the weakest and most disadvantaged players, which means everyone but Meles and his cronies. In this case, it is no longer only the people, but now includes the investors whose investment security is at the fickle whim of the regime. If this new suspension of land allocations is an image-saving tactic, certain investors may be conveniently blamed in order to absolve the regime of any responsibility.

What lessons do we learn from this? First of all, it shows that the work of those trying to ensure protection for the people and compliance with the Ethiopian Constitution and international laws achieve their goals only through commitment, hard work and persistence. **Some people are afraid of change and end up settling for less than they should or even are so afraid of challenging the status quo that they accommodate what is clearly wrong. We cannot afford to do this!**

What if some of our greatest heroes of justice had done the same? During slavery, Wilbur Wilberforce, a well-positioned and influential statesman in England would not rest until slavery was outlawed in Britain. He faced great resistance for decades but his efforts persisted until he achieved his God-given mission for humanity.

When it came to Ghandi, he persisted for many years and sacrificed immensely to achieve greater equality in India. He summed up his experience in the following memorable statement: *"First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, and then you win."* What if he had given up too soon and had settled for less?

Martin Luther King faced resistance, even from other African Americans who said that the country was not ready for change and that he should not push for equal civil rights. What if he had given up his dream and not accomplished his God-given calling for humanity?

In South Africa, some did not agree with apartheid but yet they felt it was not the right time to push for equality among people. What if Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu had given up on their God-given mission for equal civil rights for all people?

Our world has too many dictators where the majority has sat on the sidelines; yet, some have refused to settle for less than the truth and what is right. As a result, they have pushed until there was a forceful shift of power. Look at the founding fathers of America who only became a great country by refusing to accept unfair domination and taxes from Britain. Some resisted them, siding with the British, yet because the love of freedom and justice could not be forced out of the hearts of these activists, with God's help, they prevailed.

During the independence movement in Africa, many countries achieved their independence and Ethiopia was able to resist the Italians in their efforts to claim Ethiopia as theirs. Many other examples come to mind where dictatorships have fallen; like Pinochet of Chile, Pol Pot of Cambodia, Milosevic of Yugoslavia and even Mengistu. More recently, no one would have thought Mubarak would fall nor the other casualties of the Arab Spring; yet, it is likely to claim others like Bashar al-Assad of Syria or our own dictator, Meles of Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia, this suspension of land allocations is a sign that when people persist, they will ultimately make the decision. Could the TPLF/EPRDF be feeling the heat and be panicking; fearing that the land grabs will be what brings them down and that is why they are backing off?

During the last few months, the TPLF/EPRDF had attempted to pass a new law, further undermining basic rights by giving Ethiopians ownership of only their actual homes, but not the land on which they were built. After a significant public outcry, they backed down. Could this suspension of land allocations be another example? Land issues are extremely sensitive. It is what brought down Haile Selassie.

If the TPLF/EPRDF pushes, how much more will it take before the scales tip? A government that gives away its peoples' land to foreigners so that a foreign nation can feed their people while its own remain hungry, it is literally giving away a nation and the future of its people. What living thing does not somehow resist if the very means of life are taken away? Perhaps, out of such fear of rising resistance, the Meles regime is now trying to pacify the people and this is the reason we are now hearing the word "suspend." This is exactly the time when we Ethiopians must work all the harder in our struggle and it may come from different directions.

Could the scales be tipped by the teachers who are now rallying throughout Ethiopia because they have not been paid for a long time or by the business owners who are being pushed aside or by public servants, who, like the teachers, have not been paid?

Could the scale be tipped by the food shortages or high inflationary rates that are making life unbearable for Ethiopians? Only God knows these answers, but a government that discards its own citizens, favors its own ethnic group and cronies, who uses a mafia-style godfather billionaire to support them while robbing the country and then a military junta to kill resistance to all of the above, can never last. History has shown us that a government that fears its own people will eventually implode and then collapse.

May God give us the faith, wisdom, strength, courage and self-control to bring that day closer in a way that is pleasing to God so that what replaces this regime becomes a blessing to not only Ethiopians but also to other nations. For this to happen, we must be honorable and righteous people who seek a New Ethiopia where we care about the humanity of each other, "putting humanity before ethnicity" as we uphold the rights of others, for "no one is free until all are free!" This includes all people, including Tigrayans who are our brothers and sisters and who the TPLF wants to alienate from us. We refuse! May Cush reach its hands out in submission to God so He might bless our precious people and beautiful land! =====//=====

Please do not hesitate to e-mail your comments to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE at: Obang@solidaritymovement.org. You can find more about us through our website at: www.solidaritymovement.org

¹ <http://www.2merkato.com/201203191019/ethiopia-suspends-providing-land-for-investment>; by Meron Tekleberhan, The Reporter, Ethiopian Business News, Monday, March 19, 2012.