

Closing Peaceful Resistance for Good: Dr. Merera Gudina's Arrest

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I have known Dr. Merera for many decades; and have come to admire his commitment to academic excellence, peaceful resistance, Ethiopia's territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as his unbridled commitment in defense of the rights and freedoms of all of the Ethiopian people. He never shied away from challenging the Dergue as well as the EPRDF and his constant plea to stop their brutality and inhumanity. He felt strongly that the state, party and government under the later have forced Ethiopia's 102 million people to the brink of disaster and civil war. His defiance against oppression did not begin with the TPLF/EPRDF. He was a member of the opposition under the Dergue; and as a result, spent 7 years in jail for his defiance of oppression.

I therefore find it outrageous that the TPLF/EPRDF arrested Dr. Merera under the most shameful pretext of attending a conference sponsored by the European Parliament and for expressing his views on the human atrocities taking place in the country he loves and the society he served for numerous decades. Unlike many of us who left Ethiopia, Dr. Merera stayed and fought back a system that has learned nothing from the fall of previous dictatorships in Ethiopia. Rightly, his arrest has generated global outrage and demands for his immediate release.

In a statement on December 1, 2016, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL said this:

"The arrest of Merera Gudina is an outrageous assault on the right to freedom of expression and should sound alarm bells for anyone with an interest in ending the deadly protests that have rocked Ethiopia over the past year. This is a move that will exacerbate, rather than ease, the underlying tensions currently simmering in the country. Instead of resorting to further repression and clamp-downs, the Ethiopian government must urgently and meaningfully address the human rights grievances that are fueling unrest."

On December 2, 2016, the Washington Post reported that "A top opposition politician from Ethiopia's Oromo ethnic group who criticized the country's state of emergency at the European Parliament has been arrested...Police arrested Merera Gudina and three others in Addis Ababa late Wednesday shortly after his return from Brussels." Why? Dr. Merera criticized the Ethiopian regime for arresting "tens of thousands" under the pretext of a State of Emergency. This State of Emergency is nothing less than a "license to kill, wound, maim, arrest." Estimates of arrests range from a low of 20,000 to a high of 60,000 Ethiopians in the Amhara and Oromo regions alone. At least 700 innocent lives have been lost;

and tens of thousands have been “forced to disappear.” More than 130 jails have been filled with political prisoners; and an undeclared “civil war” is raging in Gondar, Wollo and Gojjam. Sadly, this is likely to expand over the coming months.

The regime’s real motive and excuse for arresting Dr. Merera is that he “communicated with banned terrorist organizations.” By all measurements, any person or group that opposes the TPLF controlled regime is an enemy of the party, state, government and Constitution; and is therefore a terrorist. Any person who attends a conference with others accused of terrorism is equally an enemy; and therefore a terrorist. Think of this. Anyone who opposes the regime is a terrorist. By definition the vast majority of Ethiopians are terrorists.

The arrest of Dr. Merera epitomizes the severity of Ethiopia’s problems and deepens them further. The more people the regime arrests, the greater the chances of a country-wide resistance. This is because the regime has closed all peaceful dissent and political space.

I call on the global community, especially the European Union and European Parliament as well as the United States to be bolder; and to stop shoring up one of the most hated regimes on the planet.

Equally, it is time for Ethiopian opposition groups to set aside their differences, unify their resources and force the dictatorial regime to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible.

Last but not least, I join all those who demand the immediate release of Dr. Merera and other political prisoners.