

Moral Hazards of the Aid Industry in Ethiopia: justice is overdue

Commentary

Aklog Birara (Dr.)

“Africa is treated as the dustbin of the world...To donate untested food and seed to Africa is not an act of kindness but an attempt to lure Africa into further dependency on foreign aid.”

Michel Chossudovsky “The Globalization of Poverty and the New World Order”

In October each year the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund created in 1944 to reconstruct worn-torn Europe and the rest hold their meetings alternating between Washington and other countries. These meetings discuss and define global monetary and development policies that affect and often bind the global community regardless of economic and political status. I had the privilege of attending these meetings representing Ethiopia and as a Senior Member of the World Bank Group. My observation is that wealthy and powerful countries decide policies that help their own societies first. As the only independent country in Africa, Ethiopia served as a founding member of numerous multilateral and UN and regional agencies and is recognized as a founding member of the Bretton Woods Institutions. Committed to multilateralism, Ethiopia served the world community (Korea, the Congo, for example) much longer than the vast majority of countries that were colonized at the time. It played a leading role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity and its successor the African Union that it continues to host. Nevertheless, largely because of its poverty and technological backwardness, its influence in the Bretton Woods institutions is minimal; as is the influence of the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. Poor and underdeveloped nations are by definition at a disadvantage in globalization. They are receivers rather than policy makers. So, why is Ethiopia preferred as the largest aid recipient in Africa today?

When did aid to Ethiopia begin?

Today, Ethiopia is the largest aid recipient in Sub-Saharan Africa and among the top in the world for a strategic reason. It is important to note though that aid to Ethiopia did not start under the current governing party, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and the ethnic coalition, the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Party (EPRDF) that this minority ethnic elite dominates. Ethiopia received its first loan from the World Bank in 1950 in the amount of \$5 million for a road rehabilitation project following the devastating Fascist invasion that had destroyed the country’s modest social and physical infrastructure. The World Bank’s participation in alleviating Ethiopia’s poverty continued for more than 64 years. Prominent in the Bank’s development effort and contributions is significant investment in the social sectors---education, health, nutrition, sanitation, safe drinking water, HIV/AIDs, agriculture and food security and rural roads; and in institution capacity building. The Bank’s economic and sector analytical work and policy directions in Ethiopia are equally notable. These contributions have been especially pronounced over the past 24 years. Total Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the TPLF-led government has exceeded \$30 billion. Why?

My thesis is Ethiopian Western allies and the donor community especially multilaterals such as the World Bank, the European Commission and the African Development Bank and bilateral agencies such

as USAID and DFID (UK) transferred enormous financial resources since the current government took political power in 1991 for strategic reasons. The Governments of the United States and United Kingdom identified Meles and his party as indispensable friends not only in the Horn but also in the rest of Africa. On October 22 214, David Smith of the Guardian wrote an outstanding piece, “**Ethiopia, 30 Years after the Famine,**” in which he underpins direct correlations between the American War against Terrorism and massive aid to the Ethiopian government under Meles and beyond. “Ethiopia is seen as a reliable police officer (client state) in the region, hosting a U.S. Military base and sending troops to fight the Islamist militant group al-Shaabab in neighboring Somalia.” The War on Terrorism is now a pretext used by the TPLF to terrorize Ethiopians. Being a powerful country’s “police officer” pays for those in power; but has practically wiped out the semblance of civil liberty or human rights or a sense of human worth in Ethiopia today.

The aid narrative articulated by the donor and diplomatic community differs from my thesis. Instead, the narrative is that Ethiopia deserves more aid because of its intractable poverty and the destitution of the vast majority of the population; and especially the intractable dilemma of feeding its growing population that has reached 96 million. Even if we accept this definition, the aid industry has not made a headway to make the vast majority of Ethiopians self-sufficient and secure and the middle class prosperous. Ironically, one of the fastest growing economies in the world has impoverished the tiny middle class instead of enriching it. Most members of this class rely heavily on relatives in the Diaspora to make ends meet. Forget the poorest of the poor who barely survive. Ethiopia is a country of extremes: a tiny minority, mostly Tigrean that is filthy rich; and the vast majority who are unable to eat three meals a day. The filthy rich does not alleviate poverty in its home base, Tigray either.

Ethiopia is one of the hungriest and unhealthiest nations on the planet. It is also one of the most repressed and oppressed. Per capita income is still a miniscule \$470 per annum. It is not just the poor and the unemployed or underemployed who leave the county in droves. It also the most educated. Between 1991 and 2006, 3,000 of 3,700 Ethiopia- educated and trained medical doctors left the country. Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian youth take enormous risks seeking employment alternatives in North Africa, the Middle East, the rest of Africa and the West. Many of the 160,000 day laborers expelled by Saudi Arabia and shipped to Ethiopia last year trekked back to the country that expelled them. They are being re-expelled. Young Ethiopians immigrate to the Ukraine, an economic basket case with at least 10 percent unemployment. They are being expelled. This does not suggest the growing Ethiopian economy that is enriching the few and creating new millionaires, including TPLF generals each year has the absorptive capacity to create the required 2.5 million jobs each year. The Ethiopian government does not care for citizens. It only cares for the preservation of the Orwellian state that is backed by Western Governments, especially the U.S. and the U.K and financed by multilaterals such as the World Bank and the E.U. Ethiopia’s security, intelligence and defense forces have links to their backers in the West. No one knows what percentage of Ethiopia’s GDP subsidizes spies, security, defense, wealthy defense, federal police and other officers. I reckon it is high.

There is no argument. Ethiopia’s middle income families are unable to cope with life, often unable to feed their families. In other countries, it is this class that purchases modern homes, cars etc. and sends their children to school. Three meals a day is inconceivable for most Ethiopians. Globalization and massive aid have done little to address and remove the policy and structural hurdles the vast majority of Ethiopians face. Imagine those expelled from Saudi Arabia went back to the country that expelled

them because opportunities and living conditions in their home country are intolerable. If they protest for jobs and a fair share they go to jail or worse.

Despite growth Ethiopia today is as dependent, and from the perspective of the majority of the population as poor and destitute as it has been over the past two or more decades. Unlike countries in East Asia and the Pacific region that boosted their private sectors---taking advantage of globalization via fair and equitable Foreign Direct Investment partnerships directed by nationalist governments--- and grew their domestic middle classes fast by educating and creating millions of jobs for youth including girls and rural folks in manufacturing and modern agriculture, Ethiopia's economy remains largely rural. The rural population is kept in the "middle ages." Keeping the rural population poor and isolated from the urban population enables the governing party to manipulate aid and dictate the outcome of elections. Farmers still use Biblical tools to plow. They do not have legal rights to the lands they till. Unlike China and Vietnam, the Ethiopian domestic private sector is among the least developed in the world. There is no anti-monopoly regulation that protects domestic industries. The regulatory framework is opaque and biased in favor of the state, party, increasingly the army and endowments. There is no level playing field. It favors loyalty more than merit; and operates in collusion with FDI over the national private sector. Given their capital, management know-how and markets, foreign firms command a comparative advantage over the nascent private sector. In contrast to countries such as China, Russia and India that are led by patriotic and nationalist leaders, Ethiopia is ruled by "narrow ethnic and tribalist" elite who see nothing wrong with exclusion and minority ethnic-elite dominance in every meaningful sector of life. This makes the Ethiopian economy open to numerous risks, including nepotism, kickbacks, bribery, corruption and illicit outflow. In light of this, it is less productive and competitive than its peers. Even access to education, degrees and diplomas depend on ethnic-loyalty to the TPLF. It is a country where degrees are manufactured and sold.

In particular, the lack of independent institutions to provide oversight, a free press and independent civil society to monitor and report on misdeeds reinforces the risks the economy and society face. Especially worrisome is the merger of ethnic-elite political and economic capture, the state, critical government and business. I do not find any institutional mechanism or boundary that separates these governing institutions. They support and reinforce one another to the detriment of the vast majority of the population. The defense establishment's loyalty is first and foremost to the TPLF; not the nation. The one party state is at the same time a system of debilitating crony capitalism that is tolerated and some say encouraged by the forces of globalization and globalism. In the above mentioned article by the Guardian, Smith reports "Three decades after images that shocked the world (meaning the Great Famine), the country has become darling of the global (I add, the investment) community---and the scourge of the human rights lobby." It is a darling because the ruling party serves as the "policeman" keeping Ethiopians silent and maintaining security in the region.

Keeping a country by "policing it" does not show confidence in the goodness of the government or confidence in the population. It shows real fear of the population and especially those who seek justice. In terms of the donor and diplomatic community, I suggest that it is by translating into action the principles that make the "human rights lobby" indignant that the future of Ethiopia will be decided. It is not by shoring up the "policeman" that governs through fear and repression. In this regard, the UK has taken a prudent, bold and wise step by withholding millions of dollars of aid to the Ethiopian government to train police and security forces. Moral indignation for those that shore up the police state is also where my argument of moral hazard for the aid, U.N. and diplomatic

community resides. This group has literally given up on its obligation to defend civil liberties, human rights and democratization in one of the most important countries in Africa, boldly and consistently. Ethiopia's dictatorship feels justified to punish opponents including those who believe in a peaceful transition largely for two reasons: Ethiopia's inept and fractured civic and political opposition is dysfunctional; and the donor and diplomatic community acquiesces and continues its unconditional support to the TPLF.

Let us agree that the country is growing at a fast pace depending on our definition of growth. In my estimation, growth cannot be separated from recognizable improvements in the wellbeing of the vast majority. What is good for China, East Asia and the Pacific and the rest should also apply to Africans. In a riveting book, "The Fortunes of Africa: A 5,000-Year History of Wealth, Greed, and Endeavor," Martin Meredith points out that colonized, enslaved and disempowered Black Africans paid immense prices while enriching their conquerors and colonizers. Africa is endowed with incredible natural resources and human capital---petroleum, gas, gold, diamonds, uranium, wild animals, irreplaceable trees and forests, rivers and arable lands etc. Episodic and opportunistic physical infrastructure and pockets of growth that support exploitation of resources by elite, countries and multinationals is a common phenomenon. Italy built roads to facilitate control of Ethiopia. Despite indisputable infrastructure, the vast majority of Africans remain poor to this day. Meredith is right this exploitation of African natural and human resources goes back to the times of the Pharaohs and beyond. Africans were impoverished then and are largely impoverished today. The actors have changed but not the conditions. Today, Africans are oppressed and exploited by Africans. Africa's natural resources are being plundered at a pace that is alarming. Today's exploitation and plunder is slightly different from the past. The actors are a mixed bunch. Africans are nominally independent and their countries are run by Africans. Those who govern them are as oppressive and exploitative as the colonizers they condemned. With a few exceptions such as democratic Botswana and increasingly Ghana, governments are not accountable to their citizens. They are accountable to themselves, the rulers and those who collude with them. This is the case in Ethiopia. The overthrow of the President of Burkina Faso after 27 years is a case in point that most African countries have a long way to go.

There is no doubt Ethiopia's physical infrastructure is changing dramatically. The Guardian is right that "Ethiopia is creating millionaires faster than anywhere in the continent.....Yet, the frantic expansion has uprooted thousands of farmers while, critics say, those who speak out against it are rounded up and jailed" without the possibility of appeal. Other countries with similar dictatorships had produced millionaires, including poverty stricken Haiti. There isn't credible evidence to show the vast majority of the population in Ethiopia has benefitted from this growth. Millions are literally dispossessed. This begs the questions of "Who really owns Ethiopia and its resources?" Who is really super rich and how did he/she get there? What did he/she invent or produce from scratch?" The Chinese would answer that they own theirs; so would the Russians; so would the Iranians and so on. They produce and they improve life conditions. Those who defend and promote justice and asset ownership by the disempowered, disenfranchised and dispossessed in Ethiopia have no place in the country. There is no single independent journalist left. Temesgen Dessalegn, the last and only credible journalist critical of the party and government was arrested in early October 2014 and sentenced for three years in jail on October 27 2014. He was accused of "defamation and incitement." Interestingly enough, the young and emerging leaders in Ethiopia that the TPLF hunts down and jails will, at some point in the future emerge as prominent figures.

Statements without teeth

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Department of State, the EU and others continue to express concern and in some cases outrage at human rights violations in Ethiopia. These pronouncements and statements are meaningless. They are not backed by real action. For example withholding aid to the Ethiopian government; at least conditioning and linking it to human rights would send a more credible signal than a press statement. Refusing to fund police and security training will send a powerful signal, etc. On October 30, 2014, the U.S. Department of State issued a press release. "The U.S. is deeply concerned by the October 27, 2014 sentencing of Ethiopian journalist Temesgen Dessalegn to three years in prison for "provocation and dissemination of inaccurate information. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are fundamental elements of democratic society, and the promotion and protection of these rights are the basic responsibility of democratic governments...We urge the Ethiopian government to make similar (meaning to the famed growth) progress with regard to respect for freedom of the press and the free flow of ideas and reiterate our call for the Ethiopian government to release journalists." As I argued in a previous commentary, President Obama gave the wrong and misguided signal when he met with Prime Minister Hailemariam praising his government for "stability and remarkable growth of the economy." The President missed a golden opportunity to send a meaningful message that would serve Ethiopia and the US in the long-term. A strong message would have mitigated the ongoing onslaught. Nothing fundamental in the area of civil liberties and human rights had changed when the President met with the Prime Minister. The Ethiopian government took the accolades by the President as legitimacy to continue abuses. What do I mean by opportunities missed?

President Obama could have, for example, asked the Prime Minister why the Ethiopian government fails to abide by international human rights laws and protocol and its own constitution. Article 29(2) says "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without interference." Temesgen Dessalegn was denied this fundamental right of expression. He is sentenced under false charges and joins the pool of journalists, bloggers and political dissenters imprisoned earlier. President Obama could have used the past and present of abuses to inform the predictable and intolerable future and avert it.

Closed Political Space and the Pretense of Free and Fair Elections

The President could have asked the Prime Minister how his government expected to conduct free and fair elections in 2015 by closing political space, jailing those who dissent and incarcerating journalists and bloggers. Article 30(1) says "Everyone has the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed." Thousands of democrats and human rights activists throughout the country who exercised this freedom "peaceably" are in prison. The right "to assemble and to demonstrate" may placate donors and diplomats in Addis Ababa but is proving to be meaningless for most Ethiopians. When the party allows demonstrations, security agents identify potential leaders, monitor, follow and accuse them as "trouble-makers and inciters." Sustainable and country-wide demonstrations are not permitted. President Obama's advisors could have guided him to ask how Prime Minister Hailemariam and his team could justify the decimation of independent civil society the President believes in and are granted under Article 31 "Every has the right to freedom of association for any cause or purpose." This is a joke. Associations that challenge the regime are criminalized and independent civic societies do not exist. Instead the TPLF creates phantom civic

organizations, human rights organizations, professional and other groups and staffs them with its cadres, almost all from its own ethnic group.

The President could have posed the legitimate question why the Prime Minister uses the Anti-Terrorism and CSO Laws of 2009 to suppress social and economic rights, peaceful demonstrations, the formation of independent civil societies and the legitimate right of Ethiopians to live and work anywhere in the country without fear of persecution, uprooting, forcible evictions, killings, jailings etc. It would have been reasonable for him to ask these laws be dropped and at minimum amended. The President's Advisors know Article 41 says boldly "Everyone Ethiopian has the right to engage freely in economic activity and to pursue livelihood of his choice anywhere within the national territory." Country-wide activity is only allowed for members and supporters of the TPLF. Article 41 is an all-inclusive law and should apply to each Ethiopian regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. The President and his advisors know that the Amharas have been singled-out not only by the TPLF but also by ethnic elites it created, encouraged and emboldened to uproot them. One study that we are in the process of validating shows that 350,000 Amharas have been uprooted from their farms, properties and livelihoods since the TPLF/EPRDF took power. This is unlikely to stop.

The President could have pointed out that civil, human and social and economic rights are indivisible. They either apply to each and all; or they don't apply. Selective uprooting is a form of ethnic or racial or religious discrimination and a form of bigotry that leads to genocide. It is a violation of human rights. If the world condemns discrimination and other human and civil rights violations against the Dalit (untouchables) in India, religious minorities in Iraq, followers of Islam in China, the Roma in Eastern Europe and Spain and so on, why is there not an outcry in the case of Amharas? Or Annuaqs? Or Somalis in the Ogaden? Or Oromos who protest? It is chilling that there isn't a single reference to the uprooting and other crimes of Amharas in reports by the Department of State, the UN Human Rights Council or others.

Similarly, the U.N. and its human rights arm's rhetoric has done little to change the human rights situation in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government considers statements and rhetoric as inconsequential. They have no teeth. On March 12, 2007, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said "All victims of human rights abuses should be able to look to the Human Rights Council as a forum and springboard for action." On October 28, 2014, the Special Human Rights Rapporteur assigned by the UN to North Korea, Marzuki Darusman, presented a compelling argument on gross human rights violations and "crimes against humanity" to the UN General Assembly. The report called on the United Nations to ask the UN mandated International Criminal Court (ICC) to take up the matter as crime against humanity. A Washington Post editorial dated October 31, 2014 refers to a February 2014 UN "commission of inquiry" report that substantiates the allegations and reinforces the Rapporteur's conclusions and recommendations that crimes against humanity have been committed by high officials of the government of North Korea. "North Korea has carried out the most grotesque and debilitating treatment of its own people, including the revelation that four camps hold some 80,000 to 120,000 political prisoners." The commission of inquiry "delivered evidence of "extermination, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial, and gender grounds, the forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearance of persons and the inhumane act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation."

I admit not every country's case is the same. And no country is treated the same by the global community. Africans know this better than anyone else. Apartheid was not only condoned but supported by numerous countries in the West. The argument here is that Ethiopia's surveillance based Orwellian state is accused of similar human rights violations most notably in Gambella and the Ogaden. The Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Genocide Watch, Oakland Institute, International Rivers, Freedom House, the Department of State, the UN Human Rights Council and numerous Ethiopian human rights and civic groups have provided tons of evidence that would, at minimum deserve a UN commission of inquiry in Ethiopia. It will be hypocritical to treat Ethiopia differently from others including North Korea for the sole reason that the Ethiopian government serves as a "policeman" in the region. The world can at least agree that there is "torture, rape" in the Ogaden and in Gambella, "enforced disappearances and forcible transfer of populations" in the form of 'villagization' funded by the World Bank, DIFID and others. The aid and diplomatic community can agree with Ethiopians who cry for justice on "persecution on political, racial (ethnic) grounds." Reliable domestic sources inform us there are 70,000 political prisoners in Ethiopia. Given conditions, no one really knows the real number; but it is tens of thousands. It is therefore reasonable to treat the Ethiopian case as not being dissimilar; and conduct inquiry into gross human rights violations by security forces, police and other officials.

In September this year, the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteurs on Ethiopia presented their findings and "urged the Government of Ethiopia to stop misusing anti-terrorism legislation to curb freedoms of expression and association in the country." The report comes at a time when the government's crackdown on dissent is much worse than it has ever been. In brief, the Universal Periodic Review which applies equally to all 193 UN Members States reiterated previous concerns and urged the Ethiopian government to respect international law and its own constitution. "Two years after we first raised the alarm, we are still receiving numerous reports on how the anti-terrorism law is being used to target journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and opposition politicians in Ethiopia. Torture and inhuman treatment in detention are gross violations of fundamental human rights." The Council called "upon the Government of Ethiopia to free all persons detained arbitrarily under the pretext of countering terrorism...Let journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents and religious leaders carryout their legitimate work without fear of intimidation and incarceration."

Since the civilized world accepts that "torture and inhuman treatment in detention are gross violations of fundamental human rights" and thus illegal, Ethiopian officials must be held accountable for crimes with an established pattern.

Stability under Ethiopia's Dictatorship is Illusory

The Council confirmed its desire to send Special Rapporteurs to Ethiopia to investigate and assess first hand alleged human rights violations and the conditions and possible release of political prisoners. As far as I know, the Ethiopian government does not acknowledge much less consider the Council's, Human Right Watch's, Amnesty International's or the State Departments statements or recommendations to stop the onslaught, release political prisoners and investigate crimes. It is impervious to the plight of any group. The government continues to hunt down, incarcerate and torture political prisoners in the same manner that the North Korean government does. Anyone accused by the government of any crime falls into the category of a terrorist, anti-government and

anti-constitution. Dissidents abroad are sentenced to life sentences in absentia. There is no evidence the Ethiopian government makes any distinction between real terrorists who do not value human life or appreciate the rule of law or accept peaceful conflict resolution; and Ethiopians who defend and promote justice, ask for the right to live in their ancestral lands, defend and promote genuine equality among citizens, the rule of law and peaceful transition toward democracy. Given Meles' edict that there is no "correlation between democracy and development," the current Prime Minister is obliged to use unrestrained power to suppress dissent. It is like North Korea. The people can suffer and the global community can cry "foul." It does not acknowledge or consider the notion the Ethiopian Orwellian state is an obstacle to sustainable and equitable development.

The global community knows well that South Koreans are more prosperous and enjoy freedom of choice than North Koreans because they are free from dictatorship. That the people of Botswana are better off than the people of Ethiopia. They enjoy political pluralism. In the long-run Ghanaians are better positioned to claim their destiny than Ethiopians. They hold free and fair elections. Brazilians and Chileans are better off under democratic governments than they were under military dictatorships. Their governments are accountable to the people. No one is above the law. The list goes on. Would you prefer to live in North Korea or South Korea? Ethiopia or Botswana? My personal choice is to live and try my luck in a governance environment that respects rights. The UN Human Rights Council is right "Confronting terrorism is important, but it has to be done in adherence to international human rights to be effective." The UN experts had earlier urged the Ethiopian government to amend the Anti-Terrorism and CSO laws. "Anti-terrorism provisions need to be clearly defined in Ethiopian criminal law, and they must not be abused." The Ethiopian government did not budge and is unlikely to budge. It is not set up to be just, participatory and inclusive.

For this reason, I contend that the Ethiopian government's and its champions' (donors, the US, UK and EU) perception of peace, stability and growth without commitment to and respect for rights is totally short-sighted and illusory. The Socialist Dictatorship the current one replaced was among the best military machines in Africa. It failed because it was brutal. The late Prime Minister Meles' argument that there is no correlation between "development and democracy" is utterly false and misleading. Why? The most prosperous societies on the planet are democratic (liberal) and social democratic. The argument that Ethiopia needs a brutal dictatorship to be stable is equally illusory. In the long-term, Ethiopia will enjoy sustainable and equitable growth and will remain unified, will be stable and peaceful only if it serves all of its people impartially. Cruel punishment, disenfranchisement, dispossession, forcible eviction, killings, jailings, disappearances, tortures, incarcerations, expulsions etc. of innocent people in Gambella, the Ogaden, Beni-Shangul Gumuz, Oromia and atrocities against the Amhara population are tantamount to crimes against humanity.

Struggle for rights and democracy will create convergence

It is about time that the UN, donors and Western governments, especially the US and UK begin to distance themselves from Ethiopia's Surveillance State. Why? In the long-term, only an all-inclusive, just and democratic Ethiopia would serve as a beacon of stability and prosperity in Africa. Free people won't allow terrorism to take roots. A democratic state would never be inimical to the Western world. On the contrary, any democratic government that would and should replace the current dictatorship would be in the interest of the West and other countries. Democratic Ethiopia's national interests will converge with democratic countries; not with dictatorships or extremists or

fundamentalists or terrorists. For this better alternative to emerge, the UN, donors and the diplomatic community have an obligation to their own societies and to Ethiopians that they defend and propagate civil and democratic rights, the rule of law and free and fair elections in real terms. Rhetoric and periodic statements won't do. The onslaught must stop. Democratic and rights activists in jail must be freed from jail in order to build a just society.

In this connection Smith of the Guardian points recurring onslaught on journalists, bloggers and members of the opposition, religious leaders and others that must cease now. "During the visit by the Guardian to the prison on the outskirts of Addis Ababa (a symbol of Ethiopia's glitz), one prisoner said he had been locked up in a 20 square meter room with 100 inmates." Imagine the level of inhumanity prisoners endure. "It is mental as physical torture...The only freedom I have here is thinking...Even though we know we are innocent, we know we have to accept it," meaning jail without credible evidence. The Orwellian state fabricates evidence to arrest and sentence individuals who dissent. Since there are no checks and balances, the state is the accuser, jailer and the ultimate judge. It is not just journalists and bloggers who suffer. It is also their families and the society. The onslaught is not confined to this group. "Opposition parties, who boycotted Parliament, after the last election (the party won 99.6 percent of the votes) say their members have been incarcerated or worse." When Oromo students and activists protested against the dispossession of 150,000 farmers in the vicinity of Addis Ababa this year, police and security killed at least 15 protestors including children. Hundreds were arrested. On October 28, 2014, Amnesty International reported that the Ethiopian government had incarcerated 5,000 Oromo nationals accusing them of subversion and supportive of the outlawed Oromo Liberation Front. The global community did absolutely nothing.

The Ethiopian Constitution is not Worth the Paper on which it is written

Article 10 (2) declares adherence to human rights. "Human rights of citizens and people shall be respected." Article 13 (2) strengthens it. "The fundamental rights and freedoms specified in this chapter shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights and international instruments adopted by Ethiopia." Ethiopia signed these agreements but does not adhere to them or respect them. Arbitrary arrests are standardized and institutionalized, including arrests and renditions of dissidents who live abroad. This is in violation of Article 17 (2). "No person shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, and no person may be detained without a charge or conviction against him." The ruling party that adopted a human rights-centered Constitution on December 8, 1994 continues to devalue and degrade its own Constitution. Article 18 (1) "Everyone has the right to protection against cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" is an affront not only to those who are degraded but to all Ethiopians and the international community, especially the UN Human Rights Council. The degradation and cruel punishment Ethiopians endured under the Socialist Dictatorship has been replaced by another "cruel, inhuman and degrading" party and government. There isn't an iota of difference between the two dictatorships in terms of rights. One is socialist-based and the other ethnic-minority dominance based.

Information denied is freedom denied

Access to information is a source of power. The TPLF/EPRDF government fears the free flow of information and Ethiopia's youth more than anything else. It also fears a countrywide popular

uprising. This is why it the TPLF populated top positions in the Federal Police, Security, Defense and other critical government institutions by loyal Tigrean nationals. Because it is bounded by ethnicity, it fears non-ethnic Tigreans. In a country of 96 million, the Tigray ethnic group represents only 6 percent of the population. Close to 96 percent of the top officers of the defense establishment are Tigrean: out of 55 there is one Amhara and one Agew; and no Oromo. The telecommunications system is managed by Tigreans. The governing party restricts non-government controlled telecommunications and arrests, jails and sentences journalists and bloggers. It is determined no one is left to critique it. Ethiopia is one of two top jailers of journalists in Africa and one of ten in the world. Access to information democratizes societies and emboldens youth as we witnessed during the Arab Spring. The ruling party knows that a well-informed public, especially youth, will demand rights and good governance more than financial or food aid. Free and empowered citizens are better equipped to think, create, innovate and improve their lives than people who live under constant surveillance and fear. A society that lives in fear cannot possibly be creative, innovative and productive. This is the difference between North and South Korea. South Korea has one of the most highly educated, creative, innovative and productive societies in the world and a dynamic independent media. North Korea does not and can't feed itself.

The judiciary system is politicized and ethnic; it does not serve justice. It is a political arm of the ruling party as are the Federal Police, Security and national defense. Their loyalty is not to the country and its people but to the TPLF. Top officers and officials believe in entitlements and in getting rich and not in the altruistic and patriotic notion of honor, sacrifice and service to county. Each TPLF controlled institution operates seamlessly by carrying out what the party dictates. The Ethiopian state is omnipotent and omnipresent in similar ways that the Old Soviet Union was and today's North Korea is. This is why "Activists and journalists (I would add human rights activists, political dissidents of every persuasion and ethnic and religious background) describe" the merged Ethiopians state as "an Orwellian surveillance state, breathtaking in scale and scope, in which phone conversations are recorded and emails monitored by thousands of bureaucrats reminiscent of the Stasi in Berlin. The few who dare to take to the streets in protest are crushed with deadly force" reports Smith of the Guardian. This is the reason why Amnesty International, one of the few human rights organizations that calls it like it is describes this horrendous condition as an "assault on dissent." It is actually more than that. Hundreds of thousands of indigenous people in the Afar Region, the Omo Valley, Gambella and others have been evicted forcibly from their homes, farms and livelihoods to make room for global capital and for the rising largely ethnic-elites, including top officers in the army, security and federal police affiliated to and supportive of the TPLF. In October 2014, more than 500 Amharas were massacred in Gambella under the watch of Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn. There was no federal or central authority to protect them. There was no international condemnation.

Ethiopia today is a country of two different worlds

The division between the new haves created by and affiliated to the TPLF rulers and the vast majority have-nots is sharpening at a faster rate than the reduction of structural poverty. These two groups live in two different worlds within the same country. The few dissidents who do not accept this diametrically opposed world and wish to change it for the better are not in a position to do so. Whether in prison or outside, these Ethiopians argue that the developmental state the late Prime Minister Meles left as a legacy is not inclusive, fair, just, participatory or empowering. Some go further and argue that the TPLF core and its new ethnic allies and other beneficiaries operate like a "Mafia,"

protecting and enriching one another. All has to be within the ethnic elite family. Meles had pronounced the overarching political economy that guides the state and his successor government has not moved an inch from his legacy. The power behind is still the TPLF. This world view of a zero sum model is embraced by the new millionaire class and government officials at all levels. Some say that one can't blame them. They are better off than the vast majority and Ethiopia's middle class and the poor. The new haves under the TPLF are best described by a Tigrean millionaire Tesfakiros who has made it big under the current government. He typifies the organic relationship between business, global corporations, the ruling party and government. The state is his. Similar to his peers, Tesfakiros commands a business empire "in transport, procurement, construction, food, wine and manufacturing. He operates with Geldof", the Humanitarian who contributed a great deal during the famine and was a close friend of Meles and the TPLF. According to the Guardian, in 2013 Tesfakiros made a profit of \$5 million. Among other things, he owns or has leased land to produce and export wine. He is allowed to operate nationally and is a mini-EFFORT. This conglomerate was established by the TPLF during the civil war and diverted humanitarian resources for party and personal riches. It is now one of the largest monopolies in Ethiopia. Tesfakiros doesn't see anything wrong the country is food aid dependent and one of Africa's leading "dustbins." There isn't a shame in begging for food to feed the hungry as long as one is a millionaire and insulated from the suffering of the majority of Ethiopians. There won't be a shame if Ethiopia continues to be aid dependent and debt-ridden. *"Apre moi le deluge."*

The contrast in world view between Tesfakiros and a representative of the opposition who spoke to the Guardian risking his life in the process, epitomizes the deepening gulf pervasive in Ethiopian society. Instead of narrowing it, non-competitive, opaque and non-participatory growth is widening and deepening social and economic inequality. Unless policy and structural reforms take place, this condition may turn out to be impossible to resolve the social ill created by the TPLF. In the old Soviet system, those at the top lived in luxury while the working class and peasants toiled. In North Korea and other dictatorships, those who rule the country are always better off than those who are expected to obey laws and regulations they never created in the first place. Human rights violations, arrests and incarcerations without evidence do not bother those who benefit from political and economic capture. Their affinity is to the status quo and to the quest for riches. In fact, they see democratic reforms as threats. Among other things, reform means opening up the economy for fair competition. Tesfakiros is quoted saying "If progress means surrendering civil liberties, including his phone calls being tapped that is a price he is willing to pay." He does not see anything wrong trading wealth with civil liberties, personal freedom, justice, the rule of law and political pluralism. Not surprisingly, his view is confirmed by a government official who says. "This is a safe, secure place and we want to keep it that way. We have 90 million people...You try to control them." He meant "Safety and security" for those in power and with wealth. The innocent killed, maimed, tortured and dispossessed in the Omo Valley, the Ogaden, Oromia, Gambella and others and Amharas uprooted from their livelihoods do not accept that they enjoy "safety and security" in their own country. Neither party cadres nor new millionaires see the prospect of wealth creation and elimination of poverty under an inclusive, participatory and democratic government. All dictatorships believe in political, social and economic capture and monopoly. Ethiopia is no different. Those with courage to stand up to this repressive governance do not last: either they are incarcerated or flee.

“Courage is not the absence of fear-----it is inspiring others to move beyond it”

Nelson Mandela

Despite the Orwellian State, there are still courageous Ethiopians from all ethnic and religious groups who find the current state appalling. They argue, for instance that the parallel of this type of political, social and economic dominance by a minority ethnic elite is South Africa under Apartheid. The minority Whites, largely Christians, condoned wealth for the minority and the Bantustan system of impoverishment, destitution and concentration of millions in slum-like dwellings for the majority black Africans. It was acceptable to enjoy their wealth extracted from South Africa’s rich mines and lands and produced by African blacks. Whites found this morally and ethically acceptable and propagated it to the rest of the world. They saw nothing wrong with denial of “civil liberties and human rights.” Rights and privileges were for Whites only. They felt strongly that South Africa was “safe and secure” and that it was critical for the Apartheid State to control the majority through surveillances, police and security and one of the best armed forces in Africa. They did not do this alone. They had global capital and numerous countries behind them. It took courageous leaders like Mandela to smash this Surveillance state. Aid to Ethiopia’s police and security does the same thing.

Ethiopia’s Surveillance State

According to the Guardian and others, the Ethiopian government is in complete control of the “telecommunications system and has virtually unlimited access to the call records of all phone users.” This technological edge in surveillance of an entire society dominated by a network of Tigrean minority ethnic elites and thousands of well-paid bureaucrats is inconceivable without foreign suppliers. Ethiopia does not manufacture the equipment or weapons of control. The Chinese and numerous Western companies supply the equipment and train the personnel to run Ethiopia’s sophisticated surveillance system. On the security side, the US, UK and others play prominent roles. In any case, this wide-ranging and absolute spying and control of 96 million people won’t happen without globalization, FDI and different types of aid such as security and investments in the system. It is a quid pro quo: scratch my back and I will scratch yours.

The Other Side of the Narrative

The dissident who spoke to the Guardian presents a contrasting view that only people with courage would utter. He sees the problem from the system side of abrogation of “civil liberties” and abuse of human rights. “Foreigners” including Secretary of State John Kerry “who see these tall buildings will say Ethiopia is developing. People like Bob Geldof and others consider they have helped our people and of course they have....The EPRDF used the money from that time to build the empire (EFFORT and party and Defense Establishment owned enterprises and urban and arable lands and water sources) they are in control of. Somebody hijacked the money from that hunger” and enriched themselves and their friends. “It is written in black and white.” Since then, several studies on bribery, corruption and “the bleeding” of Ethiopian society through massive illicit outflow of capital conducted by the World Bank, Transparency International, the University of Massachusetts, Global Financial Integrity and others show public money is stolen, bribery is paid, under and overpricing is common and illicit outflow of capital is massive. “The West has left us, left the people. The U.S. is aiding dictators and

turning a blind eye to us...They give the taxpayers money for buying weapons or for the police station to handcuff our people.” Naturally, beneficiaries do not agree with this attribution. Nor proponents of globalization, donors and the diplomatic community that continue to shore up the Ethiopian government and the newly rich. As I have pointed out numerous times this cardinal truth. What drives Western policy and for that matter the policies of other countries in Ethiopia is short term national interest. My argument is that short-term interest and affinity to dictatorship is dangerous. It overlooks and undermines rights and democratic aspirations, equal treatment under the law etc. that are more enduring.

The bias in favor of “security and safety” and stability over rights is best explained by national interest of key governments, bilateral donors and the multilateral agencies they control. Human Rights Watch (Abuse Free Development: how the World Bank should safeguard against human rights abuses, July 22, 2013) and Oakland Institute (numerous articles on land grab and dispossession in Gambella) offer a plethora of evidence that aid is helping the suppression of the vast majority of Ethiopians by the government while creating unprecedented wealth for ethnic- elites whose fate is intrinsically linked to the one party state. William Easterly’s latest book, “The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor” puts it succinctly. “Another view of bad government—also known as oppressive institutions—is that wherever people lack rights and when oppression pays off for the rulers (ethnic-elite and others), the rulers will oppress their subjects...Unchecked power is abusive power.” This epitomizes the Ethiopian Surveillance State. Unconditional aid, security and diplomatic support to the TPLF/EPRDF produces more abuse and repression not less. This was the case in Kenya under Arap Moi, Egypt under Mubarak, Chile under Pinochet, Zaire under Mobutu etc. The donor and diplomatic community cannot morally justify massive aid to Ethiopia’s dictatorship and expect a different outcome. It does not happen. Occasional press releases won’t do. It is inevitable that dictators lose in the end; not freedom, human rights, the rule of law and political pluralism. It is time for the donor and diplomatic community and Western Governments that sustain the life of the TPLF than most others to be on the side of history. The People.

The donor and diplomatic community is right in one area. The Ethiopian opposition—civic, political or individual—has very little to show in terms of tolerance of one another for the good of the country and its diverse population in the delivery of sustained and unified struggle in defense of civil liberties and human rights. In order to appeal to the hearts and minds of the world community, the opposition must make a decision to change in fundamental ways. It can’t legitimately demand donors and Ethiopia’s allies to change unless it also changes. Ethiopians in the opposition camp—whether civic or political—must bridge differences that span ideology, class, ethnicity, religion, generation and gender. How can they critique donors and the diplomatic community if they don’t get their act together?

Ethiopia’s opposition is not blameless: it is time to speak with one voice

The donor and diplomatic community, especially the U.S., UK and the EU know and some of their officials admit privately they know silencing dissenters is instrumental in preserving Ethiopia’s unfair, punishing and unjust system. In private, they do not subscribe to the onslaught. In public, it is another story. What I know and agree with is this group keeps telling the opposition to stop quarreling and must muster the leadership and organizational leadership skills and more important the wisdom to articulate a better alternative. The opposition outside Ethiopia does not have any excuse. It must acknowledge the criticism of lack of solidarity to work on common issues. Because of divisions within

the opposition camp to which the ruling party contributes relentlessly by hijacking and bribing members of the opposition, the Ethiopian government has the audacity to misinform donors and Western backers that there is no “viable opposition at all.” There can’t be if it jails or expels the most competent and committed. Ethiopian officials tell their counterparts in the US, UK and others that the current government is better positioned to serve as the “policeman” in the Horn and increasingly in the rest of Africa. It accuses any dissident as a terrorist plot and justifies its legitimacy. We need to debunk such stories; and we must agree with critics that we have failed. Those in the opposition camp—civil or political must do their share to defend and promote civil liberties and human rights by working together. They can’t do this as mini entities and enclaves. The opposition must build bridges, collaborate and form greater solidarity. It is time to ask one key question and answer it. “What do we (in the opposition camp) have in common and how can we work together? “At least we can agree on the lack of civil liberties, human rights, equal treatment under the law and political pluralism and on systemic tortures. The opposition must stop thinking of political power without public participation and vetting. It makes no difference who will end up in power as long as the ballot box decides within a framework of free and fair elections. It is the Ethiopian people who should decide and not unelected political elites. Commonalities must be debated and once endorsed as guides embraced by all who oppose the Orwellian state. If and when this occurs, my bet is that donors, the UN system and Ethiopia’s allies can be begin to listen to the opposition and begin to believe that it offers a better alternative than the dictatorship.

Further, the opposition camp must accept the notion that globalism and globalization are inescapable facts; they are here to stay. The question is whether the timid, fractured and quarreling civic and political opposition—at home and abroad—is capable and willing to surmount the hurdles it faces and agree to step up to the challenge. I say this because donors and Ethiopia’s allies do not see a willingness and capacity within the opposition camp to fill the void of crafting and embracing a national vision and program and forging the organizational and leadership modalities to offer a compelling alternative. The opposition must tolerate and accommodate non-strategic differences. Tolerance will provide it the best chance to navigate the intricacies of globalism and globalization and negotiate terms with global actors and the governing party. I have learned the hard way that in light of this glaring vacuum-- primarily created by the ruling party, condoned by donors and the diplomatic community and sadly perpetrated by the opposition--- the global community does not respect the opposition. This is why it continues to ignore our pleas, protests and recurring gross human rights violations unacceptable in today’s world. This critical vacuum must be compensated by the opposition, especially those of us who enjoy freedom. For the opposition to be taken seriously, it must work on actionable steps in the area of human rights. Is it inconceivable to work together, mobilize talent and resources and lodge a formal complaint on crimes against humanity or plunder of the country to the International Criminal Court? Or work together and appeal to donors and TPLF’s allies to stop financing its police, security and defense machine?

Given world reality and tactically, the opposition should not reject politically motivated aid as unacceptable as long as it is conditioned in defense of measurable civil liberties and human rights. The narrative by the opposition that would lead to this is aid has failed to advance civil liberties, human rights and open society, political pluralism, a sense of fair play in accessing opportunities, the rule of law and unrestricted public participation etc. There are donors and governments that agree with this thesis. For example, Canada, the Nordic countries, some members of the EU etc. These countries do

not disagree with the contention that, in large part, the decision to increase aid to Ethiopia is political and strategic. It is America's "War against Terrorism" and the Ethiopian government's role as the "policeman" in the Horn. The consequence is a devastating effect on civil liberties, human rights and democratization in Ethiopia.

In summary,

- a) The UN System, bilateral and multilateral agencies and the diplomatic community, especially the US and UK need to revisit their aid to the Ethiopian government. Unconditional aid to the minority ethnic-elite is unlikely to change the structure of Ethiopia's economy in such a manner that Ethiopia achieves sustainable and equitable growth that will lead to Middle Income status in the foreseeable future.
- b) The TPLF core group that rules Ethiopia misuses American, British, Canadian and other bilateral aid intended for "governance and security projects" for continued "assaults" on opposition groups and indigenous people. The UK has taken the right step by "axing" 27 million British Pounds to the Orwellian state (the Daily Telegraph). The British confirm that police and security training is routinely used to "torture, murder, rape" uproot civilians and dissenters. They have upgraded risks of unconditional aid from "medium to high." It is time that others follow this best practice, especially the U.S. It is in its own long-term national interest.
- c) The moral hazard the UN system, bilateral and multilateral donors, Ethiopia's allies and non-governmental organizations face in Ethiopia is substantial. In the long-term the damage they cause by their silence, collusion and or benign neglect by siding with one of the most brutal and inhumane governments in the world is far greater than they are willing to acknowledge.
- d) History suggests that it is in their own long-term national interest to stand up firm with those in jail and outside who have the courage to defend and promote civil liberties, human rights, the rule of law and political pluralism.
- e) Equally, Ethiopia's civic and political opposition has a historical responsibility to set aside differences and work in solidarity with one another and defend and promote these same rights. It is only then that the world community will begin to listen and change its ways.
- f) The Ethiopian opposition should refrain from lumping all Tigreans in the same category. The TPLF has denied the people of Tigray civil liberties and human rights in the same manner as the rest of the country. The TPLF does not allow political freedom in Tigray. Accordingly, free and fair election is not feasible in the homeland of the minority ethnic elite. The majority of Tigreans are therefore in the same boat as the rest of Ethiopia.
- g) An area of opportunity for democrats, human rights activists and groups who live and enjoy freedom abroad is to set aside differences and form solidarity on human rights violations by the TPLF. There is ample data to suggest that they can entertain legal action abroad even if it

does not succeed. This will send a powerful signal that “torture, murder, rape,” the uprooting of citizens, ethnic cleansing etc. is no longer acceptable.

11/2014