



የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝባዊ አብዮታዊ ፓርቲ (ኢሕአፓ)
Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party(EPRP)

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UPDATE ON THE DROUGHT AND FAMINE IN ETHIOPIA

The Meles Zenawi regime has been forced finally to admit the existence of famine in Ethiopia and to ask for urgent international assistance. It has claimed that some 6.5 million people need assistance while in reality close to 14 million Ethiopians face the deadly spectre of famine.

For more than a year the regime denied the actual number of famine victims because it went against its claim of 11% economic growth per year. Meles himself went on record accusing international NGOs of exaggerating the level of the disaster. In the meantime, hundreds died from lack of food aid. The regime's drastic move to ban many NGOs and to make disaster areas no go zones also made the crisis worse. Furthermore, the cruel regime used the famine situation and food aid as a political weapon to punish dissident areas or to take action against those people who backed or showed sympathy to the opposition. As in the past, when the imperial regime and the totalitarian regime hid the famine and caused the deaths of millions, the Meles regime also tried to cover up the famine because it contradicted its false claims of double digit economic progress, full granaries and surplus maize exports to neighbouring countries. During the 1984 famine, the ruling front which was then a rebel front in Tigray used the food aid for the famine for its benefit and caused the deaths of thousands all over Tigray, in Wedi Kewli and other places. It is doing the same now by using food as a political weapon against the opposition and in conflict areas like the Ogaden.

While the effect of drought can be acknowledged, the famine in Ethiopia is also a consequence of the bankrupt economic and agricultural policies of the Meles regime. The 85% of the Ethiopian people lives in agriculture and the land he is tilling belongs to the state. The farmer doesn't have the right to sell, to rent or do what ever pleases him to do with. Its refusal to admit in time the existence of famine has aggravated the crisis. Once again, it has been forced to admit the problem and it is preparing to divert the food aid for its own benefit. Hence, donors must make sure that the food aid goes direct to the victims and not to the ruling front or its so called NGOs. More than 14 million Ethiopians have been forced to starve and the help should not be handed out to the very regime that out them in this predicament.

EPRP
P.O.Box 73337
Washington D.C. 20056
U.S.A
Tel. : (202) 291-4217
Fax : (202) 291-7645

E-mail ESPIC@aol.com

EPRP
BP 22
Bois Colombes 92270
France

Website: <http://www.EPRP.com>