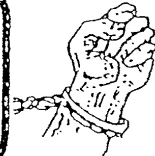




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SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE FOR ETHIOPIAN
POLITICAL PRISONERS (SOCEPP)



December 7/2010

REPORT ON THE VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS AND CLIMATE OF FEAR IN ADDIS ABEBA

The following is an in depth report by the top Ethiopian English newspaper Addis Fortune about the ongoing crisis in the capital Addis Ababa, a crisis that is also allegedly growing in many regional cities around the country in the name of development.

- Government to "relocate" thousands of graves either into mass burial sites or other churches
- "A troubling climate of fear and collective alarm has been hovering over Addis Abeba
- "People do not feel secure in the jobs they have had for many years, because they feel like victims of political bias and retribution"
- "People seem not to know that the houses they own are really theirs and that there is no game changer to deprive them of the right to property"
- "Businesspeople seem to know little, if or when they get arrested"
- "Neighborhoods are no longer sure how long they would be able to stay where they have been settled for decades"

Not even the dead in Addis Abeba are spared the dignity to rest in peace, for eternity, as has always been believed. The extent of chaos and near anarchy is evident at the burial grounds of St. Joseph Church, where the relatively well-to-do and better known residents have been put to rest.

An obscure agency in the city administration, the Addis Abeba Permanent Graveyard Development and Administration Agency tries to prevent additional burials at the cemetery and to "relocate" thousands of graves either into mass burial sites or other churches where surviving families wish to take them. To date, over 2,000 graves have been deracinated, while 4,000 or so are left to be dealt with.

In many cases, officials from the agency conduct this operation with little regard for the concerns of the people left behind, resulting in their emotional turmoil. Despite claims that the public has been informed through the state media; many here and abroad, whose loved ones have been at rest for over seven years, remain uninformed.

Those who have already been informed and rushed to the cemetery have horrifying stories to tell. For many, the chaos and complete disorganisation of the process denotes a complete disrespect for the dead and little show of sympathy for the living. The rules of the game have become such that neighbourhood youths bully the emotionally vulnerable, church authorities conspire to milk them dry, and city officials do little to help except reciting laws and municipal regulations starting from the days of the Emperor.

The mark this leaves on the collective psyche of residents – a chronic and pervasive anxiety threatening to choke almost everyone – is troubling. Sadly, this feeling of constant fear (perhaps of the unknown) is hardly restricted to cases such as this urban mismanagement.

A troubling climate of fear and collective alarm has been hovering over Addis Abeba lately. Unlike many other problems related to municipal crises, the sense of insecurity appears to be more of self created and induced by authorities both at the federal and city agency levels.

It is alarming to see how many people feel hunted and hounded. Such a feeling of perpetual fear is not new for many Ethiopians. Particularly during the time of the Derg, people had lived in fear. However, their fear was corporeal.

They had lived in fear of their doors being next on the *kebele* list to be knocked down and that they would be forced to watch in helplessness while a loved one was dragged off. They had feared for the safety of their daughters which came with the vulnerability of being a woman.

They had lived in fear through the Red Terror when their sons left home never to return, by the hundreds of thousands.....

Those days are history.

Nonetheless, what appears not to be over is the collective sense of insecurity and uncertainty about many things which ought to be taken for granted. These feelings, whether real or outright imagined, are there above isolation, beyond anecdotal, and shared by many, ironically crossing boundaries of identities and political affiliations. Those in support of the ruling party appear to be as insecure as those who resent the regime.

People's perception of having lost their "pull" for recourses of a judicial or administrative nature is one source of this uncertainty. Perception is a powerful stimulant, where the reality is what the individual makes it out to be.

Yet, the fears which appear to torment so many in the business community as well as other residents of the capital may not be whimsical and can be supported by genuine testimonies of those upon whom tragedy has fell.

People do not feel secure in the jobs they have had for many years, because they feel like victims of political bias and retribution. Some may have lost their livelihoods because of

their outlooks or been denied promotions and opportunities due to their affiliations, or lack thereof.

People seem not to know that the houses they own are really theirs and that there is no game changer to deprive them of the right to property. Businesspeople seem to know little, if or when they get arrested because their cashiers and accountants have made mistakes, whether by accident or committed purposely.

Neighbourhoods are no longer sure how long they would be able to stay where they have been settled for decades, for the districts can notify them at anytime that they must move elsewhere. No one can be sure which part of the city is considered not shanty and thus spared from redevelopment or urban renewal.

Subsequent to the fall of the military regime, the government returned properties which had been unlawfully confiscated by the Derg. A happy group of people completed the process and paid all fees in accordance with the laws of the land and received their deeds. Many sold these properties to third parties, going through all the legal processes and paperwork.

Such a massive national process is subject to abuse; no wonder there were people who took advantage of the cracks and holes in the system.

Much to the dismay of all the 600 and more who were made to go through painful processes to claim their properties which had supposedly been "rightfully returned," the government began asking for resubmissions of all original documents for forensic investigations. Instead of going after those who might have manipulated the system, the government seemed to be bent on trying to take out an anthill with a cannon ball.

Businesspeople, be they giants or tots, live in this state of near panic mostly due to uncertainty. A vacuum has been created and reinforced by a government both fickle in its affections and unpredictable in its reproofs.

A government willing to "amend" the law of the land to suit its whims creates a flux in its domain as those who enter into lawful contracts with it and its agents can hear the ground cracking under their feet. This does not engender confidence.

With the rules changing halfway through the game, individuals stand to lose much, if not all. In a youthful game of rough soccer, such unsportsmanlike conduct would be screamed down and booted. Not so in the real world where money changes hands much in the same way that players pass the ball. The similarities end with the team members' recognition of each other.

The government's capricious adaptation of laws and directives gives rise to feelings of insecurity and causes those in business not to be hopeful. When instability reigns, the first victim is nearly always businesses which fall when the risk factor weighs in heavily. Businesses would far rather stash their money in an environment where there is a sense of predictability; too much excitement tends to wreak havoc on the private sector.

The tax authorities are up at the crack of dawn (it seems like) ready to accuse value-added tax (VAT) offenders of the slightest misstep, not to mention the Anti-corruption Commission rearing its head (ugly or not) every now and again.

The combination of so much retribution and rule alteration has contributed greatly to this widespread alarm.....

Unsure whether or not they hold the property which they have lawfully constructed, on land rightfully leased from the mandated government agency, businesspeople in Addis Abeba grow cautious, insecure, and timid. They seem to feel like scared and cornered rabbits which have run out of burrows to scurry to, away from the relentless eyes of a screeching hawk. Stalked at every turn, businesses cower in fear as they watch the hunter close in.

It is in this atmosphere that they hear the public sector's call for them to join in and sing with optimism of the touted five-year plan about which they dare not voice dissent.

Is it any wonder that the trumpet has sounded from only one camp, so far?"

SOCEPP adds to this the existence of dozens of secret prisons in and around the capital in which political prisoners, often chained to wall and kept in the dark, are brutally tortured. Thousands of Ethiopians have been sent out of their houses by the government without due and adequate compensation. This action is now taking place in four regions of the country as the regime uproots more than a million people from their fertile land in order to lease these lands to foreigners.

INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS INJUSTICE EVERYWHERE
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