

Addressing the root cause of famine and poverty in Ethiopia.

The current famine hitting Ethiopia is considered to be the worst because it has exceeded the previous ones both in its magnitude and scope. According to the World Food Program, more than 12 million people are affected by drought in southern, central, western and north-eastern Ethiopia. Moreover, the organization has reported falling crop production and death of livestock (http://www.wfp.org/hornofafrica/horn_of_africa.asp). The actual scale of the crisis could be more than the one reported considering the efforts and manipulations of the regime aimed at downplaying and concealing it. The famine of the 80's was blamed on the regime in power then and the current western propped up regime should also be held responsible for the devastating famines breaking out under its rule. The difference is that the massive western assistance and involvement in the post Derive era have not been able to contain the spread of famine and poverty in Ethiopia. Many Ethiopians are wondering why the billions worth of western aid has not been effective in at least minimizing famine.

It is well established that there is a strong correlation between famine and economic development or growth. Economic growth leads to development and reduction in poverty and famine. Real economic growth embracing and benefiting all the citizens of a country produces safety mechanisms which are of vital importance in alleviating or avoiding displacements and live destruction emanating from famine. The suffering and significant loss of lives resulting from persistent famines which are hitting Ethiopia could not be avoided or even mitigated owing to the shrinking economy or increasing poverty in the country. On the other hand, one can not avoid but face the irony of Ethiopia failing to be self sufficient and feed its population despite possessing all the potential to do so. Thus a critical examination of the major stumbling block or factor acting as a bottleneck and preventing the country from eradicating or even coping with famine is necessary. In earnest all the arrows point to the dictatorial and repressive political system plaguing the country. The man made factor or the absence of democratic governance catering for the public needs of development and progress is the foremost hindrance preventing the country to break out of this cycle of tragedy . Dictatorial or poor governance imposed by successive repressive regimes and its attendant unfavorable political climate has been largely responsible for hindering economic and social progress in Ethiopia. Through years, the country has come to be identified with famine and starvation and become the scene of large scale relief operations where one finds a range of foreign organizations coordinating and providing aid. With the persisting dictatorial and corrupt political environment and governance, the prospects for extricating the country from these scourges of humanity appear to be bleak and remote. Consequently, there has emerged a common understanding and consensus across the broader section of the Ethiopian population on the indispensability of overhauling the political system and democratising the country to push through the agenda of

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economic and social progress or development. Democratic governance which entails popular and voluntary participation in all stages of decision making can enable the country to mobilize its human and material resources and overcome poverty and underdevelopment. Transparency is part and parcel of a democratic and popular governance and does away with all the rampant official corruption, grafting and nepotism which are impeding progress in Ethiopia at the moment. The international donor community with the stake in the development of the country, should also be cognizant of the crucial importance of democratic, popular and transparent governance in moving the country ahead in the path of progress. I think this is why the democratic and progressive political forces of Ethiopia seek the genuine partnership of donors to tackle the plethora of development problems facing the country. The partnership of the donors with the narrow based ethnic and dictatorial regime of Meles Zenawi has not been paying off and is resented by the vast majority of Ethiopians who are experiencing increasing hardships, economic and political marginalization. Meles Zenawi's ethnic based regime is non-inclusive in nature and can not be compatible with any democratic or development agenda aimed at alleviating the economic degeneration and famine engulfing the whole country. Suffice it to say that there are now adequately convincing grounds for the donors to reassess and review their partnership with the despotic regime of Meles Zenawi who has not been even able to mitigate famine despite the infusion of billions of foreign aid and loans. Partnership of this nature which nourishes and sustains the power of one of the ruthless dictators of the third world is not in the interest of the tax payers of the western countries. Nor is it in the interest of Ethiopians who are suffering and dying of famine which is mainly the making of a regime overwhelmingly rejected in the country. Thus Ethiopians have legitimate and justifiable grievances against some Western countries continuing to provide unqualified support to the regime of Meles Zenawi. The west are cuddling Meles Zenawi who can abandon their camp at any time of his choice and begin to play the China card.

This overall ineffective partnership can be a case in point in illustrating the indispensability of democratic, free and participatory political systems in reducing poverty and bringing about economic and social progress. Continued partnership with ruthless dictators like Meles Zenawi, who place ethnicity at the core of their governance policy and openly pursue discrimination, would undermine the credibility and standing of donors as regards the critical issues of democracy and development. Ethiopians know why Meles Zenawi is in Ethiopia. His vision for Ethiopia is magnification of differences and inciting internecine violence. His primitive ethnocentric dictatorship though dressed with western expertise and money, has proved to be detrimental to democracy and development.

Government ownership of land in Ethiopia is known to be depressing or retarding agricultural productivity in the country. In the absence of land reform, the country will continue to experience

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severe famine and poverty. Land reform is unacceptable to the regime of Meles Zenawi because it views the measure as committing suicide. It will lead to the loss of the stifling grip it has on the peasantry which constitute the overwhelming majority of the population in the country. The peasantry are denied their basic rights of land ownership and doomed to live in perpetual poverty and are very vulnerable to devastating famines.

Meles Zenawi is the world's champion in lying and does not enjoy any confidence among Ethiopians. He is born liar and his regime has specialized in lying. The massaged or sexed up growth figures were futile efforts on the part of Meles Zenawi's regime to conceal the famine that is engulfing the country. The fabricated stories of economic growth and prosperity are just packages of lies which have exploded in his face.

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