

Open Letter to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi

First, I would like to extend my greetings and good wishes:

This marks the second time I am writing to you. During your presidency, I had written to you regarding the issuance of visas. There was a reply to my letter in your name – too far from the truth---, which I chose to acknowledge in my reply as not having originated from you, only to protect your integrity. Over the many years since, the questions that I raised then have been answered for the most part. Today, I am raising questions that will demand immediate answers as they are of an extremely urgent nature and therefore do not allow us the luxury of let alone years, but even days. The situation in the country is extremely grave and critical.

There is one truth that we all cannot deny. Whether it was deliberate or not, or unbeknownst to you or not, you have allowed for the creation of the path for the Ethiopian people's long awaited, final lap towards achievement of freedom and ownership of future. Now, while you are capable of and indeed have the responsibility to ultimately guide the Ethiopian people towards this finish line, that you seem to be guiding them towards the precipice--out of hatred and vengeance--will suggest to experts of history that even initially, you might have only unintentionally taken this path.

It is hard for me to believe that you do not realize that you are throwing not only yourself and your family, but your rank and file along with their families, and those that have spent countless years in the trenches, and those that have paid the ultimate sacrifice, and indeed the Ethiopian people into an intractable quagmire. I cannot imagine that you have not learned from your colleagues' experiences and sacrifice that an individual's or a small group's personal success and survival cannot demand priority over those of a nation's and its people's. In fact, I would expect that conceding that priority would allow a nation and its people to move from a culture of armed struggle to that of a political struggle, thus serving as the nation's springboard into a different historical era. I would imagine you will not deny yourself and your limited number of colleagues this honor. Politics devoid of hope, love and trust is worth nothing and therefore futile. Sometimes, self-restraint and control allow for greater triumph and dignity.

It is obvious that you are troubled. I completely understand your dilemma. We met once while you were President, and when I mentioned to you that it was a wrong for EPRP and Medhin not to have been allowed to participate in the first conference, you argued that it would be inappropriate to engage so with groups that were involved in armed struggle, and of course we did not agree on this. Yet today, you are completely transformed, turning away from dialogue with, and dishing out preconditions to political opposition parties that have completely and unequivocally denounced violence; while at the same time offering to engage in dialogue without any preconditions with the OLF. While you completely dismiss and disregard your counterparts in the nonviolent political campaign and struggle, to which you have contributed significantly, you now are attempting to embrace those that have actually challenged your regime militarily. It is not clear whose respect and admiration you are expecting to gain from this. Is it the OLF's, while you attempt to deceive it a second time, or is

it that in maligning the peaceful political challengers and embracing the armed opponents, you would expect to successfully fool both? Or one? The Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

“Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law, “....

I fully agree that OLF should be invited. What I see as problematic is your attempt to drive away the peaceful political challengers, driving them to take over OLF's position. I suspect all of the opposition groups would like to see OLF engage fully in a peaceful political process. On the other hand, we hear that one of your subordinates is stating (his wish) that he will push the secession agenda for Oromia. Does he not realize that OLF can easily see through this?

Your problem also manifests in yet another way. We now hear of Tigray's secession agenda too. Were it not so sad, it would have been laughable. Either what I know of the people of Tigray is completely flawed, or your perception and understanding of the people of Tigray is completely colored by your self-interest. As I said earlier, this wish could not have come out of a heart filled with love. Are the people of Tigray currently not enduring more than their fair share of suffering and duress that one would cook up yet another difficult situation for them?

I had two lifetime wishes. One was to see the people of Ethiopia express their wishes, and vote for their leaders, of their own free will, free from fear and in public. This happened for me on May 8, 2005 and May 15, 2005. For this, I am sincerely grateful to you. I am not sure that my second wish will be realized in my lifetime. I know that if Ethiopians live in a free and democratic society for ten years, the country will become the Japan of Africa. I truly believe that that can happen. I am not sure that I will realize this wish. Please do not transform this path to democracy that you have begun to one of bloodletting. The bloodshed will invariably hurt most the young, and those that really have not had the opportunity to savor life at all.

Mr. Meles, please open up your heart to love, and your mind to history, and allow the Ethiopian people to walk this path of democracy, while learning from their mistakes and progressing away from poverty and backwardness. I plead with you, in the name of your children, your compatriots who have sacrificed their lives, and all Ethiopian parents, please do not block off this opportunity that you have opened up to Ethiopians to become free.

Respectfully yours,

Mesfin WoldeMariam

September 28, 2005