

Famine: Zenawi's Stealth Weapon of Genocide and Repression

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The conscience of the world is challenged once again by the outrageous crimes of Meles Zenawi, who is using famine as a weapon of mass destruction and economic exploitation against the very people that he has ruled with an iron fist for almost two decades.

Without regard to repeated calls for action by humanitarian groups about the looming human tragedy, Zenawi and his repressive machinery have been running a campaign of misinformation and deception about the true cause, nature and severity of the famine.

The measures taken by Zenawi relative to the famine and other public tragedies have been consistent with a policy intended to use these calamities for political and economic gains. More precisely, the famine has been exploited as an instrument of revenge for the humiliating loss the despot suffered in the 2005 elections, as a continuation of the ethnic cleansing he has officially embraced, and as an economic opportunity for his immense financial enterprise that has unlimited control over every major economic activity in the country.

Zenawi and his ruling clique grudgingly acknowledge the tragic situations in the country only if they perceive that the relief efforts add business value to their economic monopoly or if they feel that leaked reports of the famine would jeopardize the flow of the billions of dollars of donors' money to their private bank accounts.

In his book, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford, 2001; p.16), the winner of the 1998 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science, Amartya Kumar Sen, wrote: "...no famine has taken place in the history of the world in a functioning democracy ...".

Indeed, no dictatorship has exemplified the correlation between dictatorship and famine more affirmatively than the tyrannical rule of Ethiopia's Meles Zenawi.

In its June 13, 2008 issue, *The Economist* squarely placed the current human tragedy in Ethiopia on the failed policies of the autocratic government of Zenawi.

Pointing to the greedy economic agenda of the dictator, the paper argued:

“After several good harvests since the last big famine, in 2003, Ethiopia had a chance to progress. Instead, it dithered over reforms to promote private business and overhaul the country's sclerotic banking system and mobile-phone sector. Ethiopia is one of Africa's very few countries that still has virtually no

serious private business—and thus few jobs—outside the state sector. Almost three-quarters of the population may be under- or unemployed.”

With regard to the viciousness of the dictatorship imposed on the people of Ethiopia, the report further noted:

“The government’s lack of enthusiasm for private enterprise is matched by its lack of enthusiasm for competition in politics. Mr Zenawi has already splintered the ... opposition parties with the liberal use of torture and imprisonment.”

Earlier, the world reacted with compassion and held accountable the government of Emperor Haile Selassie and that of the tyrant Mengistu Haile Mariam for the famines of 1973 and 1984/85, respectively.

Tragically, the human disasters that shocked the world in the 1970’s and 1980’s pale in comparison to the horrifying situations under Zenawi’s autocratic rule.

- According to a July 28, 2003 report of the *New York Times*, while a million people died in the famine of 1984 and 1985, in 2003 more than 12 million were at risk, half of those children under 15.
[<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B02E7D91E3FF93BA15754C0A9659C8B63>]
- Based on a recent report of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), eight million Ethiopians are chronically food insecure and at least 3.4 million Ethiopians are in need of emergency food relief.
- The Centre for Research on Globalisation (CRG), an independent research and media group, disclosed: ”... several million people in the most prosperous agricultural regions have ... been driven into starvation. This time, as eight million people face the risk of starvation, we know that it isn't just the weather that is to blame
[<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=366>]
- A recent report of [Concern Worldwide](http://www.concern.net/news-and-features/features/a1000199/When-the-rains-don-t-fall.html) confirmed that the present drought has severely affected people in Ethiopia's rural south, forcing many to eat the seeds that they would have planted for this year. [<http://www.concern.net/news-and-features/features/a1000199/When-the-rains-don-t-fall.html>]

The measures that the dictator took to deceive the world about the famine, and its exploitation for political and economic ends, include numerous instances of misinformation, diversionary propaganda, and blatant intimidation of foreign and domestic observers:

1. In an address to his rubber-stamp parliament on March 18, 2008, Zenawi mendaciously and brazenly declared that reports of drought-related deaths were "false." [<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/226/v-print/story/39021.html>]

2. Zenawi has "... denied that pastoralists in the south are losing livestock to the drought or that the rates of malnutrition elsewhere are at all close to what foreign aid workers claim." [*The Economist*, June 13, 2008]
3. Recently, he ordered his Deputy Prime Minister to denounce reports of the current famine. In a bizarre press conference, Addisu Legese blamed the messengers by declaring:

"..... some institutions engaged in relief work consider the decline in the number of the needy as a threat to their existence. They therefore have been suggesting to report inflated figures so as to get huge assistance..."

[\[http://www.waltainfo.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=487&Itemid=52\]](http://www.waltainfo.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=487&Itemid=52)
4. As reported by international humanitarian agencies, he has greedily impeded steady flow of foreign relief supplies to affected regions by charging exorbitant fees and requiring exclusive use of the transportation system controlled by his financial empire.
5. Zenawi has proposed a new law on charities and NGOs to essentially paralyze the activities of groups "working to improve human rights and encourage press freedom." [*The Economist*, June 13, 2008]
6. "The government has banned photographs of the starving and has told field workers not to give information to foreign journalists." [*The Economist*, June 13, 2008]
7. Earlier in 2007, his government refused to declare a cholera outbreak that killed hundreds of people and infected more than 60,000. Despite U.N. tests showing that the epidemic was indeed cholera, Ethiopian officials insisted on calling it "acute watery diarrhea" (<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/226/v-print/story/39021.html>).

In view of the unfolding human tragedy in Ethiopia,

- We call upon the world community to condemn the systematic starvation of millions of Ethiopians under the cruel and genocidal policy of Meles Zenawi and his ethno-fascist regime.
- We urge all organized groups inside and outside the country to coordinate their efforts and bring an immediate end to Zenawi's egregious use of famine as an instrument of repression.
- We particularly call on the armed forces in Ethiopia to question their allegiance to a vicious dictator, who has repeatedly demonstrated lack of basic human decency and subjected the vast majority of the citizens to perpetual misery, hunger, ignorance and destitution.
- And lastly, we ask international organizations, donor countries, and religious institutions to actively engage in preventing a human catastrophe perpetrated by one of the most vicious dictators of our time.

June 15, 2008

Selected Distribution:

1. Mr. Ban-Ki Moon, Secretary-General, United Nations
2. Mr. Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
3. Foreign Ministers, Donor Countries
4. Mr. Robert B. Zoellick, World Bank President
5. Mr. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Managing Director, IMF
6. Amnesty International
7. Popular Ethiopian Websites
8. Editors of major newspapers