

Letter to Hon. Dr. Condoleezza Rice

from Imru Zelleke

2 December 2007

December 2, 2007

The Hon. Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC

Madame Secretary,

I am addressing you this letter in view of your planned visit to Ethiopia next month to attend a regional Conference of Leaders of African Great Lake Region. My assumption is that the main tenets of United States policy for Ethiopia and the Horn area have been:

- Fight against terrorist penetration in the Horn of Africa
- Political stability and democratization in Ethiopia and the Horn area.
- Humanitarian aid, development assistance and good governance
- Avoid getting involved in the quagmire of local ethnic and factional politics
- To insure the success of the above objectives.

The rejection of the EPRDF regime by a very large majority of the people of Ethiopia, if not by all, is clear and does not leave room for any doubt. Popular protests, which the regime counters with extreme violence, indiscriminate arrests and mass detention, have become a daily occurrence. Extensive efforts exerted by the US and EU countries to mediate some peaceful solutions have failed, because of the extremely negative response of the regime, that wants to stay in power at all costs, even the cancellation of some vital aid programs. Moreover, the United States unqualified support of the regime because of its alleged anti-terrorist alliance, has further bolstered its uncompromising position. Donor countries and International Institutions threats to stop development aid were in the process of stopping all development aid unless of democratic reforms and respect for human rights have been reversed and aid has continued to be given, even at a larger scale. In return to their pressure the regime seems to give more attention to developmental problems than hitherto.

According to Meles, Ethiopia can do without foreign assistance to further her development. An absurd assumption, considering the country's extreme conditions of poverty and all-around underdevelopment, and its dependency on the huge amounts of foreign aid it receives, including substantial budgetary subsidies. This kind of vain statement attests that Meles's commitment to democracy is sham, and contingent to the survival of his regime and its nefarious practices. Fearful of the growing donor's apprehension over the failings of his regime, Meles has been playing the China card, and possibly that of Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and other anti US regimes. In partnership with EPRDF corporations China is already becoming the dominating power over the Ethiopian economy and eventually politics, as in the Sudan. China will likely pick up the tab of any donors aid to Ethiopia that will be cancelled, like the 375 millions dollars budgetary supplement. Whatever the case, the priority for the regime is not the welfare of the people, but its own survival.

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After an initial pyrrhic victory, the anti-terrorist military campaign that the regime has undertaken in Somalia in conjunction with the United States is now bogged down. The warfare is spreading into Ethiopia proper. In spite of their boastful treats to carry a jihad, the Islamists in Mogadishu were not a real threat to Ethiopia. As soon as the EPRDF came to power in 1991, the first diplomatic measure they took was to close some embassies as in Greece, and establish diplomatic relations with Syria and Iraq. Since that time militant Islamic groups have been actively spreading their credo all around Ethiopia. The Wahabist from Saudi Arabia were taking thousands of Ethiopian Muslims for to Saudi Arabia for so called work. Some, especially women were employed as domestics servants (or sex workers), many of the men were indoctrinated and sent back to Ethiopia. In Addis Ababa where there were a dozen Mosques, there are 134 today. Similarly, hundred others have been built around the country in such provinces as Wollo, Keffa, Bale, Sidamo, Harar, and Arussi. In Ethiopia Christians and Muslims have lived in peace and harmony for over thirteen centuries. The last serious religious conflict did occur in the 16th century during the invasion of Mohamed Gagn. It is only after the EPRDF came to power that a possibility of religious conflict between Christians and Muslims has emerged. Serious and very cruel attacks and murders have been made against Christians in recent years, in various parts of the country as early as this years in Jimma and Gore. Moreover the new intervention of the Meles regime into Somali affairs is likely to exacerbate the potential danger of a religious conflict. Let's not forget that over thirty percent of the Ethiopian population is of Muslim faith. Fortunately, a vast majority of them do not share these radical views or given-up their historical national identity and traditions.

Thus, day by day the instability of the country has increased, thereby endangering conditions of the whole area of the Horn. The infusion of 24 billion US dollars in aid, during the past sixteen years, has not improved significantly the dire poverty that the country suffers. UNCTAD in its 2007 report ranks Ethiopia 114 out of 123 of poorest countries. Intense discontent and frustration is plainly visible amongst both the urban and rural population. Evidence of armed rebellion has begun in various parts of the country. During last year, the desertion to Eritrea of a battalion of the Armed Forces led by a Brigadier General and some officers, and statements made these officers that there is a growing discontent in the army caused by ethnic discriminations, is symptomatic of the diminishing loyalty of the armed forces to the regime. As these defections will undoubtedly continue, making the defense and security capability of the regime rather dubious. Thus, the failed military campaign in Somalia, and the looming war with Eritrea, can hardly insure of the stability of the regime and thereby the area of the Horn,

In view of the above it is evident that the US must make a serious revision of the policies followed hereto, and adopt a real and pragmatic approach to the problem. The assumption that peace and stability can be maintained by terrorizing a whole nation of seventy-seven million people, is unrealistic and doomed to fail. Neither, the injection of huge amounts of financial and humanitarian aid will quell the deeply seated popular animosity, created by the violent,

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corrupt and incompetent governance of the regime. Sustaining and imposing an unpopular regime against its own population will not work, nor will it stop its eventual demise.

The establishment of AFRICOM will achieve its objectives if and when a proper free and democratic system of government will reign, and stability is secured in the areas in which it operates. The countries of the Horn suffer profound political, economic and social ills, for which no viable solution has been found. At best what is seen is some erratic progress in some sectors, while little has been accomplished to alleviate the problems of poverty, unemployment, environment degradation, land tenure, communications, IT, finance, justice, land reform and a multitude of major issues. The main causes for these failures being, not the lack of funds or technical ability, but the inept, incompetent and corrupt character of the dictatorial regimes. Whether in Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East or Africa, a policy of expediency tied-up to unpopular regimes, is clearly in contradiction with the proclaimed promotion of democracy and human rights. Even though some failures might be expected in nascent democracies, the use of violence, murders, mass arrests and such despicable acts should not be tolerated and considered acceptable norms for the sake of “national interest”. Particularly, in Ethiopia whose vulnerability is exacerbated by its own bad governance, rather than foreign enemies. Although the people’s discontent has not reached a critical mass in Ethiopia as it has in Pakistan, the symptoms of such eventuality are clearly evident. The anti-regime chants people were singing during the great national race this month, bare testimony of the bitter despair of the people.

Heavily committed military in Somalia and in the Ogaden, a very large military build up on the Eritrean front, a highly charged unpopularity inside the country, the question is whether the regime can maintain stability and survive? Another factor is also the looming war with Eritrea, and its dire consequences. Courted and pampered by China, Russia, Venezuela, Iran, Turkey, Libya, India and the like regimes, and incensed by power and huge amounts of corrupt money, and confronted to a fragmented and ineffective opposition, they live in their own self made reality. Hidden in Menelik’s Palace, a Prime Minister terrified to show himself in public, Meles lives in a cloistered realm surrounded by sycophant partners in corruption and ill-governance. He admits frankly that his absolutely loyal to party decisions, that he executes faithfully. He is certainly a clever and capable man, unfortunately he is blind to the consequences of his actions. He is said to be a voracious reader, he would have learned much from biographies of some defunct dictators.

Therefore, I would like to suggest the following steps to be taken, by the US in order to find a viable solution to the Ethiopian crisis. The firm position that the US has taken with regards to Gen Musharaf in Pakistan, is a clear indication of what a determined US policy can achieve.

To have the required credibility and acceptability by all concerned, this must be primarily a US initiative with its full endorsement. EU countries and other donors will undoubtedly follow suit.

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The US must seek an alternative to the EPRDF regime and support overtly the opposition as it has done in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries.

It must insist on the liberation of all political prisoners and the freedom and resumption of all political activities; freedom of expression of assembly, full access to mass media and freedom of all newspapers and magazines; release of all restrictions on legitimate civic organizations.

It must help to organize an ad-hoc government representative of the various political factions and civic organizations in and out of the country.

The regular Defense Forces of Ethiopia and the Civilian Police must be guaranteed their present status. They must be National Institutions independent of any ethnic and regional affiliations. Party militias and cadre must be disbanded and criminal elements prosecuted.

Human rights and the Rule of Law must be enforced vigorously with a restructuring of an independent judicial system and the election board.

In order to achieve the above the US must adopt appropriate measures, including the resources of the substantial and influential Ethiopian community in the US and abroad.

Since there will be national election in 2010, the least the US could do is to ensure that there will be a real Independent Election Committee, a free media and press, and a free and fair election properly supervised by international observers.

Politically this new policy will be a big plus for the US policy to promote democratization in Africa, which has momentarily faltered in Ethiopia, Uganda, Egypt, the Sudan and Nigerian, and given lieu to suspicion and incredulity. Moreover, a freely elected democratic government is likely to conduct an effective campaign against terrorism than an unpopular dictatorial regime.

There is no material or financial cost involved. Hopefully there will not be any reductions in aid granted to the country, but for an in-depth revision of projects and their implementation.

The ultimate result of the new policy will be the permanent stability of Ethiopia and the area of the Horn of Africa, a promising future for the people as whole and a lasting friendship and respect for the United States.

On my part I would gladly contribute my efforts towards the success of such initiative.

Sincerely yours,

Imru Zelleke
(Former Ambassador of Ethiopia, Ret.)