

Oslo hosts Ethiopia conference on democracy

Support Group For Democratic Change in Ethiopia, Oslo Norway (DCESON)

March 30, 2010

The Norwegian capital Oslo is among the places in the western world where active and engaged support groups are playing useful roles in aiding the struggle for democracy, freedom, justice and defending national sovereignty in Ethiopia. Similar meetings dealing with a variety of issues concerning the political crisis and situation in Ethiopia were organized and conducted successfully in Oslo in the preceding years. This meeting was called and organized by the Support Group For Democratic Change in Ethiopia (formerly Kinijit Support and Development Organization in Norway).



The speakers covered various issues, ranging from the political conditions to the condition of political prisoners, including the continued detention of opposition leader Birutkan Mideksa



The audience also asked several questions which were addressed by the guest speakers Mideksa

The intention of the meeting was to re-examine, evaluate and review the past and present status of the struggle and chart the way ahead. The support group has decided to conduct a periodic evaluation and review of the struggle and the genuine opposition forces involved in it. The issues to be dealt with in the public meeting were framed withing the theme of `Things we need to do to advance the struggle, and achieve our set goals of creating a democratic system in Ethiopia`.

This topic was chosen because it is considered relevant and timely. The support group identified the appropriate guest speakers and invited them to provide their viewpoints and suggestions concerning a range of topics within the framed theme of discussion and exchange of opinion. Chairman of the organizing committee, Ato Demissew Tesema welcomed and thanked the guests, and

public for accepting the invitation and coming to the meeting. He opened the meeting by introducing the invited guests and making some remarks about the meeting and its objectives. Then a minute of silence was observed for the leader of the Unity For Democracy and Justice Party, Woizerit Birtukan and all others killed and imprisoned by the brutal regime of Meles Zenawi. The invited guest speakers were: 1. Dr. Wondimu Mekonen, a renowned human rights activist based in London, Britain 2. Dr. Tadesse Biru, official of the Ginbot7 movement based in London, Britain 3. W/T Habtam Mezmur, journalist living in Norway 4. W/T Nebiyat Gebissa, journalist living in Norway.

The first guest speaker was Dr. Wondimu Mekonen, who began by thanking the organizers and expressing his appreciation to Ethiopians living in Norway. He also extended the message of greeting from Ethiopians in London to their fellow Ethiopians in Norway and received applause from the public. Dr. Wondimu Mekonen read out his amusing and educational poem before proceeding with his main topic. His speech focused on the necessity and indispensability of unity among Ethiopians in the struggle to get rid of the repressive regime of Meles Zenawi.

In his arousing and gripping speech Dr. Wondimu Mekonen elaborated on the true and vicious nature of the TPLF, the methods it employs to divide and weaken Ethiopians and emphasized that struggling in unity is the only effective and fruitful option Ethiopians have to move ahead and attain their goals. He indicated the long standing tactics of the TPLF such as its promises to offer plots of land to build houses and promote free investment and business in Ethiopia. Some weak individuals have fallen into these traps of the TPLF and abandoned the struggle, their country and people. He recalled his publication some years ago of the TPLF's 52 page secret document in which it outlines its methods to divide, weaken and control Ethiopians living in the west. His reasons for making this document known to the Ethiopian public was to expose the machinations and plots of the TPLF to sow its seeds of discords among Ethiopians and weaken our struggle.

The next speakers were Journalists Habtam Mezmur and Nebiat Gebissa who began by thanking the organizers of the meeting and spoke about the range of difficulties and obstacles government employed journalists and others in the profession are facing in Ethiopia. They stated that the repressive TPLF regime does all it can to prevent balanced, fair and objective reporting or coverage of news in the country. The regime uses punitive measures like deducting salaries and dismissals to prevent government employed journalists from fulfilling and exercising their professional duties and rights.

The control and repressive arrangements and mechanisms the regime has put in place to guide the functioning of government media outlets are denying are forcing journalists to do self censorship and denying citizens rights to accurate and free information. Despite increases in the number of journalists in the country, the media are effectively under the tight control of the regime and journalists are work and live under constant government surveillance. Journalist Nebiyat Gebissa suggested the establishment of a strong media in the Diaspora to serve the people of Ethiopia. The last guest speaker was Dr. Tadesse

Birru who is the official of the Ginbot7 movement for freedom and justice. Dr. Tadesse began his speech by posing a pressing and relevant question which is in the minds of Ethiopians.

Why is our struggle not moving ahead and succeeding?. He read out a short relevant story in which one can find the answer(s) to the above question. The story teaches the usefulness and values of hard work and persistent efforts in achieving set goals. He reviewed the systems in the past 50 years spanning from the period of the emperor to the present regime and described their similarities in terms of the gaps between what they say officially and the reality in the country. All the past governments used to tell the public about their achievements and successes in the economic as well as political areas.

The present TPLF regime has just refined and renewed the tactics and doing the same thing and committing the same mistakes. The TPLF regime is making false claims of transforming and modernizing agriculture and the emergence of farmers who are millionaires as a result of its favorable policies in the sector. But the reality on the ground shows that famine and poverty are on the increase and millions of peasants are dependent on foreign food aid. He stated that we have not gone further or stagnated in the past 50 years.

According to Dr Tadesse's own investigations and observations, the main impediments to the progress or causes for lack of progress are summarized as follows:

1. Lack of permanent institutions.
2. Fear. This factor is prevailing in the country and arresting the forces of change and progress in the country. If Ethiopians do not overcome fear, they will not be able to mobilize and bring about the desired changes for progress. Avoiding fear makes one happy. It is necessary to get rid of the fear gripping us.
3. Lack of vision. Leaders with good vision are needed because those who know their destination will reach it. What we witness in Ethiopia is making the same mistakes and expecting better or different outcomes.
4. The inability to notice small changes which are the signs of bigger changes to come. Coping with the changing conditions is of vital importance to move ahead. But we do not have many people who sense changes, trends and developments.
5. Lack of critical observation of events and taking swift measures or decisions as necessary. The few who observe and sense dangers are not heeded to or are overlooked. We need to develop a habit of listening to good observers.
6. Bickering and wasting time on trivial matters.
7. Lack of receptiveness to new ideas and innovations and the desire to change oneself.

Dr. Muluaem Adam and Ato Demissew Tesema, chairman and head for diplomatic activities of Democratic Change in Ethiopia Support Organisation in Norway (DCESON), respectively, briefed the a about the past and current state of the support chapter and the different activities it carried out and has planned to accomplish in the future. He stated that despite splits within the former Kinijit, the members of the support

chapter have been able to maintain their harmony, unity and resolve to support the legitimate and just struggle of Ethiopians back home. Ato Adane Asres read a moving poem and the floor was opened for discussions, opinions and questions. The opinions forwarded mainly focused on the importance of getting actively involved in organizations and having our own strong media in Norway as part of the free press. The following relevant questions were raised and the guests responded to them accordingly.

The reasons for our inability to unite and move ahead, working with the TPLF and divisions along ethnic lines were inquired and discussed. Besides, the question of taking part in and using the coming elections as a means to advance the struggle was raised. Dr. Wondimu Mekonen responded by clearly indicating that the TPLF is not a constructive force and the only option Ethiopians are left with is to act together and get rid of it. He also stated that the TPLF is now like a home on fire and advised its members to vacate it on time. He went on and added that we Ethiopians make ourselves the suitable subjects for conflict and division or are prone to division since there is a tendency towards aggregation or grouping among us. As all of us are humans and Ethiopians, we should go out of the confines of ethnicity and unite for the common causes.

Responding to the question of taking part in the coming woyanne elections and using them as a means to further the struggle, Dr. Wondimu Mekonen pointed out the foregone conclusion that woyanne has already won it. He wished the opposition could stay out of the farce and refuse to play company to Meles Zenawi. He mentioned the importance of informing the western public and winning friends and supporters among them. We can dry up TPLF's sources of money through bringing the crimes and violations of Meles Zenawi to the attention of the western public. Regarding the question of being a member of political parties, his response was that one does not need to be a member of a political party or organization to make contributions to the struggle. Civic organizations play significant roles also. However he stated that those involved can strengthen their organizations and continue the struggle.

Dr. Tadesse on his part mentioned that organizing is not a new idea and has existed in the country for the past 50 years and what we lack is building permanent institutions. He stressed the importance of institutions and the roles they play in creating, developing and maintaining a democratic system. We should not be disappointed over the political parties and organizations but explore and find new ways of organizing. Ginbot7 has followed and is applying this approach and is struggling with the aim of creating a free and competitive political environment in the country. Building permanent institutions is one of the aims of Ginbot7 and the movement stands for the democratic way of holding and transferring power.

Journalist Nebiyat Gebissa addressed the question of whether journalists should be neutral and expressed her view that journalists have a critical role in the struggle and should not be neutral. They can take active part in organizations and make contributions to the struggle.

Dr. Muluaem Adam responded to the question concerning the name and activities of the `Support Group For Democratic Change in Ethiopia` and said that the group is free, independent and supports the genuine Ethiopian opposition political forces constantly working to advance the struggle and interests of the country. He added that the decision as to which party (ies) to support is based on the thorough and periodic evaluations and reviews the group makes. The yardstick for supporting is waging a genuine struggle against the TPLF and mobilizing Ethiopians to unite and struggle for their rights.

At last, the chairman thanked all presenters, audience and coordinators of the meeting, Ato Demissew Tesema, Dr. Derje Hilemariam and W/t Addisie Tesfu for their excellent job.

Overall, the meeting was conducted in an atmosphere of cooperation and understanding and was a success in terms of both attendance and issues dealt with.

Support Group For Democratic Change in Ethiopia, Oslo Norway (DCESON)

Horn Conference and Zenawi's attempt to subvert it

By Robele Ababya | April 5, 2010



Meles the Menace

There is a desperate move to subvert the April 9-11 Conference on Ethiopia and Horn of Africa at Double Tree Hotel in Arlington, Virginia. The subversive move by Ethiopian government hirelings comes at a critical time when US lawmakers are openly expressing their concern over the widespread human rights violations in Ethiopia.

For instance, US Congressman Donald Payne (D-NJ) recently said: "I'm deeply concerned and troubled about the deteriorating conditions in Ethiopia. The EPRDF regime is becoming increasingly totalitarian." Previously, Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wis) also called on President Obama not to hesitate to stand by the side of the Ethiopian people. Such calls by two prominent US lawmakers were followed by the State Department's damning Human Rights Report on government atrocities in Ethiopia.



LONDON - Rights activists carry huge banners with the portrait of jailed opposition leader Birtukan Mideksa, calling on British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to stop financing Ethiopia's ruthless tyrant Meles Zenawi. Read [Wondimu Mekonnen's report](#)

The Conference is aimed at fostering dialogue, peace and reconciliation in a troubled region, and motive of the campaign to subvert it is worth probing, understanding, and taking counter measures.

Despite the hype by hirelings of the despot, Meles Zenawi, who exalt their boss as a “statesman leading Africa,” Ethiopia has long suffered injustice under the regime in power since 1991.

Over the last 19 years, the TPLF regime led by Meles Zenawi has taken measures aimed solely at destroying what generations of Ethiopians have died for building up. Ethiopians recall vividly how Meles Zenawi went on national radio and TV and desecrated the Ethiopian flag as a piece of rug. The intense campaign to break Ethiopian morale as free and independent people started with earnest. He also tried to dismantle the Statue of Emperor Menelik in Addis Ababa. By defeating European colonial forces at the 1896 Battle of Adwa, Emperor Menelik not only honored Ethiopia as a sovereign, independent nation, but more importantly, his leadership and crushing military defeat to colonialists served as a beacon of hope to all black peoples who have been struggling for freedom and independence. The victory of Adwa set precedence to a long and arduous struggle and sacrifice, culminating in the independence of countries like Ghana under the leadership Kwame Nkrumah – a visionary intellectual who dedicated his life to the creation of African Unity.

Unfortunately, the leader of the TPLF regime saw an enemy in Menelik, and hence the attempt to desecrate the Menelik Statue. Meles was the architect of ethnic federalism that has fragmented Ethiopia into eighty-three (83) ethnic groups. Though promoting the inflammable politics of ethnicity is outlawed and treated as treason in a country like the emerging model of democracy in Africa, i.e. Ghana, the politics of ethnicity and division is deliberately promoted in Ethiopia. To keep the people divided and weak, ethnicity is promoted under the guise of promoting "the rights of nations and nationalities." It is a sugar-coated venom. By pursuing the detrimental politics of ethnicity, Meles has proven not only an enemy to Ethiopia but also to Africa as well. His actions speak for themselves that he is a deadly enemy of African unity. That is why he is hell-bent to subvert conferences on regional stability and greater unity.

The international community has collected records of gruesome acts of atrocities, including crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

Right from the start in 1991, the Zenawi regime has never had the trust of the Ethiopian people who helplessly saw their country’s crucial national interests violated, traded for or severely compromised. Under Meles, Ethiopians have realized the fall of their country to the worst enemy in their history. Evidences abound to justify this claim. The measures taken by the TPLF regime transcend national boundaries, which, unfortunately, do not promote regional co-operation but destabilization. Today the Horn of Africa is in turmoil and it doesn’t take to be a genius to understand who threw the region into chaos. A few evidences are suffice to support our claim that TPLF:

- Dismembered and landlocked Ethiopia, thus exposing Africa’s second most populous nation to regional insecurity and the concomitant poverty and underdevelopment associated with being landlocked,

- Invaded Somalia and expedited the birth of Islamic extremism, such as Al Shabab of Somalia
- Committed genocide against the Anuak people of Ethiopia.
- Have reduced Ethiopian farmers to landless serfs, thereby encouraging food aid dependency, while on the other hand, 'leasing' the country's most fertile farmlands and virgin forest areas to giant international corporations to periods that range up to 99 years. No one for sure knows how much billions of dollars are the country's agro farms are being sold out mysteriously and at an alarming rate.
- Carried out a daylight robbery of votes at the 2005 polls; killed at least 193 unarmed citizens in cold blood and detained tens of thousands of opposition supporters.
- Has locked up Birtukan Mideksa, the prominent opposition leader millions upon millions of Ethiopians regard as their leader who can rescue the country that has been openly abused and misused by the incumbent ruling party of Mr. Zenawi. It is worth noting here what the US State Department Report on Human Rights on Ethiopia stated on March 11, 2010:

“Opposition UDJ party president Birtukan Mideksa, whose pardon was revoked and life sentence reinstated in December 2008, remained in prison throughout the year. She was held in solitary confinement until June, despite a court ruling that indicated it was a violation of her constitutional rights. She was also denied access to visitors except for a few close family members, despite a court order granting visitor access without restrictions. There were credible reports that Birtukan's mental health deteriorated significantly during the year”.

It is with such background that the Zenawi regime is masquerading to the outside world as if he were a leader of an emerging democracy whose country would hold elections next month. But how free and fair would such elections be?

In his letter to President Barrack Obama “on the fragile state of democracy in Africa” Senator Russ Feingold on March 5 said: “There is no way that elections can be fair, let alone credible, with opposition leaders in jail or unable to campaign freely. At the bare minimum, the international community should push for the release of these political prisoners ahead of the elections. And if nothing changes, we should not be afraid to stand with the Ethiopian people.”

Indeed, nothing is changing in the country. In fact, things are going from bad to worse as Meles Zenawi has launched his attack on the international media after decimating much of the local press following the ill-fated 2005 elections. Zenawi's insanity is now aimed at silencing the Voice of America broadcasting from Washington, DC.

He brazenly stated that his government was working to build up a capacity to jam the Voice of America Amharic Service broadcasts to Ethiopia.

The world should gauge his motive when he deliberately made this shocking statement:

“We have been convinced for many years that in many respects, the VOA Amharic Service has copied the worst practices of radio stations such as Radio Mille Collines of Rwanda in its wanton disregard of minimum ethics of journalism and engaging in destabilizing propaganda.”

The comparison of radio programs run by highly qualified VOA journalists to the thugs of Rwanda who carried out the 1994 genocide is indeed scary, not for the powerful nation on Earth - America - but for the poor country that has endured 19 years of brutal rule by Meles Zenawi.

Nothing can powerfully warn the international community in what predicament is Ethiopia given that the prime minister's intentions are embedded in the Rwanda Genocide. In fact, this is the second time Mr. Zenawi has referred to the Rwanda genocide. In 2005, when he suffered a humiliating defeat at the polls, and resorted to mass arrests and extra-judicial killings nationwide, Mr. Zenawi compared the winning opposition party to the thugs that carried out the genocide. He compared respected opposition leaders he later threw into prison with the Interahamwe militia who carried out the Rwanda genocide.

But his blatant statement didn't go by unchecked. He was caught off guard by Ana Gomes, the charismatic leader of the EU delegation that monitored the election, who warned him that he was responsible for importing a term from the Rwanda genocide into a country that was at peace with itself and had no remote resemblance with the dreadful genocide that Rwanda is associated with. He shamelessly accused Mr. Anna Gomes of being the 'viceroy of colonialism' - knowing that the word 'colonialism' would keep honest critics like the Honorable Gomes at bay. Actually for the Ethiopian people, Meles Zenawi is a mercenary enemy worse than the colonialists that had tried to invade Ethiopia in the past.

The regime is totally isolated by the Ethiopian people, and it looks like it has run out of ideas. So in retreat from its overly exaggerated claim in development activities, it is brandishing its image that it is the only strong power to ensure stability in the fragile region of the Horn of Africa – which in fact is a region destabilized by the regime since it expedited the secession of Eritrea in 1993, engaged itself in the 1998-2000 Ethiopia-Eritrea War that claimed 100,000 lives, and invaded Somalia in 2006, which proved catastrophic.

The Conference on Ethiopia and Horn of Africa was organized by well-intentioned people who would like to contribute to the healing of a region so much torn by war, death and destruction.

The Conference signals the beginning of consolidating a robust unity of opposition forces with diverse views that Ethiopians have been so earnestly craving for decades. Its success is instrumental in what would be arduous but rewarding march to victory over tyranny. Pundits participating in the Conference have historic responsibility to seize upon this long-awaited opportunity to correct their past mistakes in a new mindset of paradigm-

shift to bring stability. They owe this much and more to the Ethiopian people who have been victims of abject poverty, bad governance and arbitrary breach of the rule of law for the last 19 years.

The Conference organizing Committee should be congratulated for naming Birtukan Mideksa its Honorary Chairperson of the Conference. This is a fitting tribute to the distinguished lady languishing being tormented in the dark dungeons of Zenawi for telling the truth about the negotiation leading to her release in 2007. Birtukan's 72-year-old mother and five-year-old daughter are under the same ordeal in the larger prison, which Ethiopia is.

The Committee should also be appreciated for its courage, tenacity, and foresight in organizing the Conference that will bring together participants with diverse views.

Release Birtukan Mideksa and all political prisoners!

LONG LIVE ETHIOPIA!!!