

Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners (SOCEPP – Canada)

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Help the starving in Ethiopia while also addressing the root causes of the vicious cycle of Famine and all sorts of Misery.

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person”. (Art. 3)

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself/herself and of his/her family, including food, clothing, and housing.....”(Art.25) - The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

Once again, millions of Ethiopians are starving while agonizing on the loss of personal and political freedom. After 20 years in power, the ruling group in Addis Ababa - the TPLF/EPRDF regime, has persistently failed its basic responsibility as a government to provide the basic necessities of life to its citizens. Instead of taking responsibility, the regime is now resorting to the same approach that has repeatedly failed – reliance and dependency on foreign aid.

The warning signs of an impending draught in Ethiopia have been evident for a long time. However, the authorities in Ethiopia have deliberately failed to take proactive measures as to allocate the necessary resources to avert the current tragedy. Instead, they were engaged in a deceptive public relations ploy and propaganda about “development” as well as *realpolitik* aimed at diverting the public’s attention from the real issues while millions of people were facing an imminent threat of famine and starvation. For the authorities who have been in power for over 20 years, such a response is not a new approach. For far too long, the ruling group’s response continues to be a rehash of the same: denial, diverting attention, covering the magnitude of the problem and finally pushing the responsibility onto others - the international community.

Instead of looking inward and examining how the government’s own failed policies and practices have been contributing to the unending misery of the millions of helpless Ethiopians, the regime continues to repeat the same mistakes over and over again and yet expect different outcomes. Clearly, the current Ethiopian rulers are “addicted to foreign aid” and failed to fulfill their basic duties as a government. The international community should not enable such a dysfunctional regime to continue to govern.

While a critical shortage of rain and the effect of Sahara continue to be factors in the repeat occurrence of famine in that part of the world, the current crisis cannot and should not be fully attributed to such factors only. The regime’s inadequate and

misguided agricultural, economic, social and political policies play a major role in the perpetuation of poverty, in general; and the occurrence of famine, in particular.

As variously reported by credible media outlets such as the BBC (March 2010 and August 5, 2011) and international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch (2009, 2010), and the Chair of the European Election Observer Mission to Ethiopian Election 2005 – Ms. Anna Gomes (MP, European Parliament – August, 2011) - the ruling group in Ethiopia is using international Aid as a tool to further its political dominance and to repress dissent in the country. Starving families (farmers and pastoralists) who oppose the ruling group or those who are suspected of sympathizing with the opposition are denied basic food aid. Villages that are suspected of sympathizing with any opposition group/s are abandoned to wither away with hunger and disease.

Clearly, the evidence shows that the ruling TPLF/EPRDF cannot be trusted to distribute aid in a non discriminatory manner. As also reported by Transparency International: “corruption in Ethiopia is a very wide spread reality.” (Please provide reference?) As such, the ruling group could not be trusted as to responsibly manage public funds and international aid.

As a result of the ongoing repression, which gave the ruling party a fraudulent claim of 99.6% victory, Ethiopians have become unable to hold their government accountable. The ruling party is not held accountable at all for its failure to provide the basic necessities of life: food, clothing and shelter.

The free press, which continues to be muzzled and remain under strict repression, has not been able to expose the government’s failure as widely and as objectively as possible. It is to be remembered that the ruling group has passed a draconian legislation that basically prohibits any NGO from getting involved in any meaningful way to advocate for human rights and/or public policy issues. This also remains to be one of the major issues deliberated upon by the United Nations Human Rights Review of Ethiopia. (See the July 2011 Geneva Preliminary Report on the UNHCHR website.)

It has become evident that resolving the perennial hunger and starvation in Ethiopia requires more than the act of giving food aid, relief supplies and/or blank check to the regime in power. The donor community and international NGOs need to go beyond the immediate task of relief aid and engage in actions that will hold the ruling party accountable and force it to begin taking meaningful measures that address the structural and policy obstacles in the country. In other words, the international community’s action should be one that breaks the aid cycle and the Ethiopian authority’s addiction to international aid.

This requires speaking up openly against repression, and in favor of the respect of the human and political rights of the Ethiopian people and the standards of transparency and accountability. This requires speaking up against the corruption in the system, against the regime’s embezzlement of international aid money and its discriminatory practices in the country favoring one ethnic and/or political group over others.

Hence, we call upon:

- The Government of Canada and the international community at large to use a multi faceted approach to save lives and address the underlying problems of the cycle of starvation in Ethiopia.
- The Government of Canada as well as other donor nations to channel relief aid only through reliable non-government organizations that work directly with the people in dire need.
- And urge Canadian NGOs and other humanitarian organizations to go beyond providing charity and involve in activities that empower the Ethiopian people. We urge you to speak up on behalf of the voiceless about systemic and policy issues that continue to render the Ethiopian farmer dependent on food aid.
- And urge the international community to press the ruling group in Ethiopia to allow both local and international journalists to travel freely and report on the draught situation in Ethiopia, including the alleged misuse of international aid.
- And urge the international community to take a strong action for the respect of human and democratic rights and a far-reaching political reform in Ethiopia. The policy of appeasement has only benefited the ruling group to tighten its grip on the Ethiopian people and continue with its repressive practices widely. Playing down the role of foreign aid in augmenting the repressive capacity of the regime should come to an end. The international community should demand for more transparency and call for an investigation by a credible third party

And finally:

SOCEPP Canada urgently requests the Government of Canada, law makers and the rest of the donor community to take a decisive action as to investigate whether not aid has and/or is being misused in any way by the Ethiopian authorities. We urge that such investigation be conducted by an independent third party, free from any and all influences by the ruling party in Ethiopia, and the outcome of such investigation be released to general public.

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