

US recommits to strong partnership with post-Zenawi Ethiopia

Tuesday 4 September 2012

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September 3, 2012(ADDIS ABABA) – The US government is committed to further deepen its partnership with the new leadership of Ethiopia, the US permanent representative to the United Nations (UN), Susan Rice has said.

Susan Rice attended the funeral ceremony of the late Ethiopian Prime minister, Meles Zenawi, on Sunday in the capital Addis Ababa, during which she extended deepest condolences and heart felt sympathy on behalf of the Obama administration and the American people.

“We feel it is deeply unfair to lose such a talented and vital leader so soon when he had so much more to give” said Rice, while addressing the tens of thousands of mourners including dozens of African leaders and other prominent foreign dignitaries gathered to pay their last respect at a farewell ceremony held at Addis Ababa’s Maskal Square.

Meles Zenawi was a key US partner on counter terrorism operations in neighbouring Somalia where Al-Qaida linked Al-Shabab Islamic militants’ pose threat to regional security. Ethiopia sent troops to Somalia in 2006 to battle a radical Islamist groups and therefore has been a close US ally in the Horn of Africa.

Zenawi's loss is profound but Ethiopia’s greatness is undiminished, Rice said.

“The United States renews its commitment to strengthening and deepening our valued partnership with the people and government of Ethiopia and we do so both in mutual interest and in a spirit of mutual respect”.

Rice reaffirmed that the US government will extend its support for Ethiopia as the Horn of Africa nation tries to strengthen its institutions, to build democracy, develop economy and contribute to peace and security across the continent.

“As always we encourage peaceful political dialogue, civil society development, and protection of human rights including the freedom of the press” she said, noting the tasks awaiting the leaders of post-Zenawi Ethiopia.

Under Zenawi, Ethiopia has seen significant economic development, despite the International Monetary Fund casting doubt over official claims of double-digit growth over the past few years.

Zenawi is also credited for promoting regional peace and stability and being the voice of African at International forums. However he was criticized for his regime's human rights record and for stifling press freedom at home, leaving behind mixed legacy.

Rice, in her speech, noted a need for the new Ethiopian leadership to further commit to furthering development, maintaining regional security, and enhancing democracy and human rights for a better future.

“For the sake of the youth and the future generation, the legacy Zenawi leaves must be more than a monument; it must be a foundation for renewed efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, a foundation for sustainable development, and a foundation for deepening Ethiopia’s democracy and a foundation for peace and security across Africa and the globe” she stressed.

Meles, who led Ethiopia for 21 years after toppling the former dictator Mengistu Hailemariam's Derg regime, died on August 20 at the age of 57 after two months of an undisclosed illness.

Zenawi's funeral on Sunday was the first state funeral ceremony to be held for an Ethiopian leader in more than 80 years.

“He was uncommonly wise, able to see the big picture in a long game” Susan Rice said of the late Ethiopian leader, adding that he was consistently reasoned in his judgment and thoughtful in his decisions.

“He was driven not by ideologies but by his vision of a better future for the land he loves. Of course he had little patience for force or idiots as he like to call them”.

“Zenawi worked vigorously to end bitter conflicts from Burundi to Liberia. He was crucial in the negotiations and implementations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended Sudan’s tragic civil war” she said.

She said Zenawi was the midwife to the birth of world’s newest nation, the Republic of South Sudan.

Rice honored how much Ethiopia, under Meles Zenawi's leadership, has offered to the United Nations in its life saving efforts,

from preventing and resolving conflicts, to striving to meet the millennium development goals. She also mentioned his efforts to combat climate change and in Ethiopia's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, most recently to the disputed Abyei region which is claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan.

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