

# **Ethiopian-Americans for Democracy**

ethiodemocracy@yahoo.com

October 31, 2005

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are deeply concerned about the violence unleashed by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia against pro-democracy forces and the apparent decision of the United States to remain silent and to keep Mr. Zenawi's regime in power against the will of the people.

From the December 2003 massacre of 424 indigenous Anuaks to the June 8, 2005 killing of 42 unarmed protestors, there is a substantial body of evidence implicating Mr. Zenawi and his associates in crimes against humanity.

Regrettably, Western powers have created a moral equivalence between a violent regime and a peaceful political opposition. Whatever the pretext, this approach has favored the government and undermined the bottom-up struggle for democracy. It is partially responsible for the current tension and impasse.

The ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a minority-centered group, is determined to destroy the opposition forces and to hang on to power at any cost. The following three factors have emboldened the regime of late to disregard the people's will:

1. The perception of its indispensability to Western powers;
2. The formidable security forces, — forces equipped, trained and financed by the West, including new special forces, which, since the elections, have all been put under the sole control of Mr. Zenawi; and
3. The extensive financial resources at its disposal. Much of this money comes from party-controlled businesses, while the rest is likely siphoned off from the generous (over \$20 billion in 14 years) Western aid meant for Ethiopia's poor.

Thus, regime survival is very much dependent on Western approval and the continuing flow of aid.

Ethiopians are paying a heavy price for standing up for their liberty. On May 15, 2005 the people of Ethiopia voted in unprecedented numbers and overwhelmingly rejected the continuation of Mr. Zenawi's regime. A ruling party that underestimated the popular revulsion was stunned by the results. Instead of accepting the people's verdict, it embarked on a convoluted and unprecedented three-month long vote "counting" and election stealing process.

Having rigged the elections, it unleashed a vengeful, systematic and violent campaign against the democratic opposition. Instead of negotiations, repression has been the preferred method for handling any opposition. The repression in turn is fueling popular anger.

The campaign of intimidation, violence and murder of opposition forces has intensified in recent months. During a four-week period leading up to the most recent escalation, at least six members and supporters of the Coalition for Unity and

Democracy (CUD) were killed; 837 are known to have been rounded up and thrown in jail; and some 25 branch offices have been ransacked.

The first act of Parliament on October 11, 2005 was to deny immunity to the elected members of CUD. The latest move was to attack an opposition meeting denying them the fundamental right of peaceful assembly. On October 28, 2005, according to an Associated Press dispatch, security forces invaded the offices of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the main opposition group, and “roughed up dozens of its politicians, diplomats ... after the party held a meeting at its headquarters.”

A two-pronged attack is now underway. The objective is to:

- Destroy the many local and regional organizational structures of the opposition through intimidation, jail and murder;
- Isolate, encircle and destroy the leaders of the opposition.

These have been the standard practices of the ruling TPLF for the last 14 years. They are now being aggressively deployed against the CUD and other opposition parties.

The silence of the United States in the face of egregious human rights violations and a reign of terror has made Ethiopians wonder about a double standard. Electoral fraud and political repression were unacceptable in the Ukraine, Georgia or Zimbabwe. Why must a different standard apply to Ethiopians? The frequent retort is that Mr. Zenawi and his group will maintain stability.

Ethiopians had expected the United States to be an honest broker that will a) intervene and stop the violence; and b) encourage negotiations on equal footing.

Unfortunately, this did not happen. Instead, the US appears to have chosen the easy way out by supporting the status quo.

*A tyrant rejected by his own people cannot be a bulwark in the fight against terrorism or a source of regional stability. We believe the United States has a moral and practical responsibility to publicly distance itself from this regime and to avert an impending tragedy. Since we are certain that you can use your powerful influence to stop Mr. Zenawi from taking a nation of 77 million people down a ruinous path, we appeal to you to move before, and not after, the facts.*

We fear a blood bath is in the making if the regime is not brought to its senses — soon. If it goes unchecked, Mr. Zenawi's insistence to hang on to power at all costs is bound to lead to a great deal of death and destruction, to an unprecedented suffering of millions of people, to a major humanitarian disaster and considerable instability in the Horn of Africa.

Most importantly, however, the Ethiopian people whose democratic aspirations are being frustrated may take matters into their own hands, leading us into uncharted territory.

There is a disconnect between the people's outrage and the Western reaction. Western powers are underestimating and misreading the extent and source of the popular fury against Mr. Zenawi's regime.

*Diplomats of powerful countries spend an inordinate amount of time listening to the ruling party's self-serving rhetoric that says the sky will fall if they don't continue to rule. The diplomats have little contact with the average person. They devote much less time, if any, understanding the grievances of a regular Ethiopian. We believe this is an important reason for the disconnect. It is essentially an*

*intelligence failure that will have dire consequences not only for Ethiopia, but also for the whole region.*

*It will therefore be a profound misreading of the situation for any great power to attempt to impose the TPLF group on Ethiopians for another five years. Such a decision may be expedient but it will bring neither peace nor stability. On the contrary, it will breed chaos, suffering and instability.*

The Prime Minister frequently extols the virtues of respecting the constitution and working within the “legal” framework. In practice, however, the regime is the major lawbreaker and violator of its own constitution. Arbitrary application of the law is common and there is little accountability.

Freedom House succinctly put it this way:

*“Few structures hold government officials accountable to citizens in Ethiopia, and no innate sense of such responsibility tempers arbitrary decision making. The media is closely controlled, the judicial system barely functions, and the executive branch of government issues decrees against political opponents and arrests them on dubious charges of corruption or for supporting armed rebels. Elections held to date have been crass manipulation of the electoral process to the advantage of the ruling party.”* May, 2005, Jeffrey Clark, FREEDOM HOUSE, Countries at the Crossroads, Ethiopia.

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/crossroads/cac.htm#menu>

**Please see the attached documentation (Attachment A) for some examples of the ruling party’s long history of violence, law breaking and dirty tricks.**

In the minds of the leaders of the TPLF, all opponents are enemies. They are fair game; they are to be hunted down, charged with false crimes and eventually destroyed. Even a member of the European Parliament is not spared. When Parliamentarian Ana Gomes, Head of the European Union's Election Observer Mission, wrote a somewhat critical (but factual) report, the Prime Minister and the state media accused her of taking bribes from the opposition, of being racist and a "colonial viceroy." She was viewed as an instant enemy.

Similarly, all domestic oppositions, past and present (as the attached documentation shows), including elected members of parliament and leaders of political parties are viewed as enemies

Perhaps unappreciative of the TPLF's violent and uncompromising past, Western Powers have pressured the opposition to join parliament and to work within the "legal" framework.

The pressures applied against the opposition ignore several recent acts of bad faith by the government. These include the introduction of last minute rules by the outgoing parliament to require a 51 percent majority to introduce an agenda item, the prohibition of discussion of budgetary items by the new parliament and the stripping of major sources of revenue from the Addis Ababa city administration (where the opposition won by a landslide.)

These acts tie the hands of the opposition while giving the ruling party a guaranteed majority each and every time. They render the notion of "working within the system" meaningless. The Prime Minister and his party showed, on day one of the convening of the new parliament, the effect of this "new" power by removing the immunity of protesting CUD parliamentarians.

Mr. Zenawi and his group have little history of compromise. Instead they are accustomed to getting their way by destroying anyone who dared to speak up or have the slightest disagreement.

Supporting the democratic aspirations of the Ethiopian people is the ultimate guarantor of their dignity, peace and prosperity — the best foreign aid there is.

We believe the following steps are essential to redress the people's grievances and to bring about peace and stability in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa:

1. Press Mr. Zenawi to respect the right of Ethiopians to peaceful protest. Free speech and peaceful protest are the inalienable right of all people and cannot be criminalized. Accusatory rhetoric about legality and frequent references to the constitution are no excuse to legitimize the government's violent effort to muffle all opposition.
2. Immediate and unconditional halt to the violence and intimidation targeting opposition party leaders and supporters.
3. Unconditional release of all opposition party leaders and supporters.
4. Impress upon Mr. Zenawi that he is personally responsible for the safety and security of all opposition leaders and their supporters.
5. Stop the hate propaganda and intimidation spread by public-owned media.
6. Access to public-owned media by the opposition parties.
7. Independent investigation into the June 8, 2005 killings of 42 peaceful demonstrators.

8. Support a transitional arrangement that will prepare this traumatized nation for truly free and fair elections within a prescribed time.

Mr. President,

In your second inaugural address you eloquently stated the following:

***“All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: the United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you.”***

Ethiopia’s millions have stood up for their liberty. They pray that you deliver on your promise.

Respectfully yours,

Ethiopian Americans for Democracy

CC:

Prime Minister Tony Blair  
Secretary of State Condoleza Rice  
UK Foreign Office  
Ambassador Yamamoto  
US Embassy, Addis Ababa  
UK Embassy, Addis Ababa  
European Union  
European Mission, Addis Ababa  
The African Union  
The Carter Center  
The African Union





## Attachment A

Examples of Violent Methods Employed by Ethiopia's Ruling Party –

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

To Defame and Destroy Individuals and Organizations it Finds Unacceptable.

1992 - 2005

---

### **1. Imprison or kill opponents, including those elected to parliament.**

- The ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), since the May 15, 2005 elections, has embarked on a multi-faceted offensive to destroy the opposition by criminalizing peaceful protests and by using violence and dirty tricks. In the last three weeks alone six members and supporters of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the main opposition group, have been killed; 837 have been rounded up and thrown in jail; and some 25 branch offices have been ransacked.
- In 2003, the Ethiopian army targeted and killed 424 indigenous Anuaks. Genocide Watch reported: "We have collected detailed testimony suggesting that acts of genocide and crimes against humanity were committed against unarmed civilians by Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Defense Forces (EPRDF)...." The Prime Minister called it "fiction." After much international pressure, a government-run investigation blamed low-ranking officers. (Genocide Watch International, The International Secretariat of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT))

<http://www.genocidewatch.org/ETHIOPIA.html> Also,  
<http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/eth-summary-eng>)

- In 1998, Assefa Maru, Acting President of the Ethiopian Teachers Association, and Executive Member of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, was shot and killed by four policemen while walking to his office. Police claimed Mr. Maru was “making preparations to destroy economic establishments, and assassinate individuals holding public office.” (Human Rights Watch 1998).
- Over a period of several years, at least 44 internal dissenters or rivals were executed by the TPLF. (Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners (SOCEPP) <http://www.socepp.de/october27.htm>).
- In 1993, Abera Yemane Ab, an opposition leader, accepted Prime Minister Zenawi’s invitation to participate in the Peace and Reconciliation Conference to be held at the Ghion Hotel. Upon arrival in Addis Ababa, security forces arrested him. Each time he was acquitted by the courts, he was rearrested at the order of the Prime Minister. (*Ethiopian Register*, February 1998.)

## **2. Criminalize all protests.**

- Peaceful demonstrations are allowed under the constitution. But the Prime Minister has found no protest he likes. So he has single-handedly defined all opposition as illegal, criminal, treasonous and, by extension, unconstitutional.
- On October 28, 2005 security forces dispersed a peaceful meeting at an office of the CUD; several members and leaders were attacked. According to Reuters, “Some 20 people, some of whom were elected members of parliament, were forcibly taken as they left the main office of the CUD on

Friday," an opposition leader told reporters. He was quoted as saying "What has happened today is an attempt to destroy CUD and an escalation of the harassment of members of the opposition party."

- For example, when the opposition requested for permission to conduct mass rally protesting election irregularities, the Prime Minister accused the leaders of "high treason." On June 8, 2005, 42 people were gunned down in Addis Ababa while protesting electoral fraud. The government rejected an independent inquiry. (Human Rights Watch, <http://hrw.org/doc?t=africa&c=ethiopia>).

### **3. Destroy opponents' organizations by systematically dismantling their local and regional offices through arrest and intimidation.**

- In October 2005 alone, six members of Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the main opposition group, were killed; 837 were rounded up and thrown in jail; and some 25 branch offices were ransacked.
- Beginning in 1994, the leadership of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) was attacked for three years, and eventually replaced by pro-government forces. (Human Rights Watch [http://www.hrw.org/worldreport/Africa-05.htm#P482\\_123943](http://www.hrw.org/worldreport/Africa-05.htm#P482_123943))
- In 1993, Dr. Beyene Petros and his Hadiya National Democratic Organization (HNDO) were expelled from the Council of Representatives for supporting a reconciliation conference. Supporting negotiations was declared a "hostile" act and a "breach of confidence." The HNDO was given an ultimatum to renounce their position or be expelled. When they refused to surrender, the government created dissension within the Southern parties

and formed rival parties to take over the vacated seats in parliament. Local and central administrative officers who refused to go along with the government and join the new affiliated parties were booted out. (J. Young, *Regionalism and Democracy in Ethiopia*, 1998. Also, Sigfried Pausewang, *Ethiopia: A Decade of Democratic Pretension and Performance*, 2002)

- During the 1992 elections, OLF candidates were threatened, their families were put under pressure, and their children were beaten or harassed. OLF Offices were closed down, or the landlords were warned not to allow OLF to rent an office. Candidates were arrested and put in prison under dubious pretexts. At a later stage, more violent methods were applied. Candidates were beaten up or even killed – and if investigations were ever carried out, it was officially announced either that they had been killed when resisting arrest after committing some criminal act, or that they had been slain by unknown criminals. (Sigfried Pausewang, *Ethiopia: A Decade of Democratic Pretensions and Performance*, 2002)
- The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the TPLF cooperated closely and used Tigray as a launching base for their military operations. The TPLF eventually turned on the EPRP, attacked it and drove the EPRP out of the Tigray region in 1978.  
([http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/ins/ethiopia\\_amharas\\_93.html](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/ins/ethiopia_amharas_93.html))
- In the 1970's, the TPLF eliminated the Tigray Liberation Organization, having tricked the leaders into “negotiation,” and then arresting many and executing others. (*Ethiopia: A Country Study*, Library of Congress, 1991, p. 245. See also, <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4508.html>).

#### **4. Arresting opponents on false charges of committing a crime or “preparing”**

**to commit a crime.**

- A 2004 State Department Human Rights Report pointed out, “The Government continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily, particularly those suspected of sympathizing with or being members of the OLF. Thousands of suspects remained in detention without charge, and lengthy pretrial detention continued to be a problem. The Government infringed on citizens' privacy rights, and the law regarding search warrants was often ignored.”  
[http://www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/hrp\\_reports\\_mainhp.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/hrp_reports_mainhp.html)
- On May 8, 2001, Dr. Berhanu Nega and Professor Mesfin Wode Mariam, human rights campaigners, were falsely charged with “having incited students to riot” and sent to prison. The specific charges included: encouraging students to riot instead of using “legal” means ” (Articles 32-1 and 480 of the Criminal Code) as well as with colluding with the Ethiopian Democratic League (EDL), an organization considered illegal at that time (but which has been registered since), in order to “create a clandestine party in order to change the Constitution by illegal means” (Articles 32-1 and 250 of the Criminal Code).

They were released only after much international protest and uproar.

([http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id\\_article=2369](http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=2369) and Human Rights Watch 2002.)

- April to June 2002 over four hundred members of the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) and over one hundred members of the Ethiopians' Democratic Party (EDP) were arrested. The police claimed that the AAPO and EDP members had "a clear role in the violence" and had been active in

organizing "hooligans" to riot." <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k3/africa5.html>

- In 1996, Dr. Taye Wolde Semayat, President of the Ethiopian Teachers Association, was sentenced to fourteen years in prison. He was charged with illegal anti-government activities, including conspiracy to overthrow the state, and was held in solitary confinement for two years. He was denied legal representation during much of his imprisonment. Amnesty International called the trial "unfair and politically motivated." (American Associations for the Advancement of Science, Human Rights Actions Network, Case # ET9613. Amnesty International, News Release, 5/17/2002. Human Rights Watch, World Report 1999).
- In 1994, Professor Asrat Woldeyes, President of the All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO), a frail, 70-year-old accomplished and reknown surgeon was arrested on charges of "inciting armed rebellion." Amnesty International stated that the imprisonment of Professor Asrat and his four AAPO colleagues was made on "the basis of slender and dubious evidence and without direct proof of the alleged conspiracy." He was sentenced to serve 5 years in jail. Repeated court appearances and adjournments of over 120 times was among the chief psychological pressure tools the government used. His health continued to deteriorate. He died several months after being released from prison. (Amnesty International Press Release, July 1, 1994. Human Rights Watch, 1998. ISCEPC Human Rights Week Observance and Conference, <http://ethiopians.com/asrat2.html>).

## **5. Entangle opponents in endless court appearances that typically go on for years.**

- Seye Abraha, the former Minister of Defense has been brought before the

court no less than 100 times in the last four years. He has been thrown in jail for disagreements with the Prime Minister Zenawi. Instead of political crimes, he has been charged with corruption.

- A special proclamation to keep Mr. Abraha in jail was retroactively enacted, rushed through a rubber stamp parliament in less than 24 hours after a court had ordered his release. Retroactivity is clearly violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Ethiopia is a signatory. From then on, the Prime Minister decided that charges of corruption were not bailable.
- This retroactive law was used as an opportunity to put business rivals of party-run companies out of business. The same law has been used to keep bankers and businessmen in jail indefinitely. This law, however, has been applied only selectively. A few years back some people were caught running a vast, underground enterprise that siphoned off the revenues of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Corp (ETC). Once it was discovered they were friends of the Prime Minister and his family, they were let go ([www.justiceinethiopia.net](http://www.justiceinethiopia.net)).

6. **Forced Exile.** Leaders of opposition movements and journalists have been forced into exile. Such was the case with the leadership of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party and the Oromo Liberation Front.

The government has also created a deliberate policy of keeping opponents at home and overseas off balance by creating deliberate ambiguity about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable political behavior. A Brookings Institute researcher wrote

“...Government has arrested some, ignored others, held some until they renounced violence, and continued to hold some despite their renouncing



violence. The larger point is that the very unpredictability is part of the policy. Addis Ababa has a number of political opponents operating openly. On the other hand, some have been arrested for murky reasons and held under murky provisions of the law. The inability to predict the consequences of returning is the result of an intentional absence of clear lines between acceptable political activity and unacceptable activity. The resulting uncertainty keeps political opponents off balance and reduces their ability to operate”

<http://www.law.wits.ac.za/humanrts/ins/ethiop94.pdf>.

## **7. Physically intimidate opponents.**

- Several opposition leaders such as Hailu Shawel, Dr. Yacob Hailemariam and Lidetu Ayalew have been the subjects of constant surveillance, house arrest or the pointing of guns to their head by government spies.
- Human Rights Watch reported that leading up to the 1995 elections “ There were increasing allegations of human rights abuses, often involving intimidation of leaders of members of parties and groups that were competing with the EPRDF in the political process. These political opposition parties and groups included the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF), the Ogadeni National Liberation Front (ONLF), Ethiopian Democratic Union Party (EDUP), the All Amhara People's Organization (AAPPO), and the Council of Alternative forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE).

**<http://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/WR95/AFRICA-03.htm>**

## **8. Invade their personal privacy – bug their telephones, intercept**

### **correspondence, harass family and friends.**

- IFTIN, a newspaper run by the intelligence services, for example, regularly publishes minutes of opposition meetings electronically bugged or infiltrated by government spies. See ([www.waltainfo.com](http://www.waltainfo.com)).
- Overt and covert surveillance of opposition members, their families and friends is common. Intercepts are selectively “leaked” to government-run media. The invasion of privacy is both for intimidation purposes and to cause disruption and dissent within the opposition.

### **9. Economically destroy opponents.**

- A recent report by Human Rights Watch disclosed, "Control over fertilizer and agricultural inputs in general have given Meles's government a remarkably effective tool for quashing dissent in rural Ethiopia. .... Most of the farmers said that they simply tried to keep quiet at community meetings rather than risk angering the local authorities by expressing their opinions. .... While local authorities often single out farmers who criticize the government by rigorously enforcing their debt repayment obligations, they will allow pro-government farmers to carry their debts over from year to year." <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/09/05/ethiop11727.html>

### **10. Presumption of guilt until proven innocent.**

- The Prime Minister, for example, has determined that the leader of CUD, the main opposition party, has committed crimes of treason. This finding of guilt is made without bringing the accused to any court.
- The Prime Minister has refused an independent investigation into the killing of 42 unarmed demonstrators on June 8, 2005. Yet, he has already prejudged

and blamed them as unemployed hooligans. (Interview with Steven Sackur of the BBC, July 1, 2005.)

### **11.Character assassination.**

- The reputation of any one who is even mildly critical is fair game.
- The European parliamentarian Madame Ana Gomez, for example, was slandered as corrupt, racist and a “colonial viceroy,” by the Prime Minister and the state-run media for her critical report on the flaw of the May 2005 elections. ([www.waltainfo.com](http://www.waltainfo.com))