

Human Rights Abuses Escalate In Sidama, Ethiopia, Following A Popular Demand For Regional Status.

March 14, 2006.

I. Facts About Sidama

- 1.1 The Sidama people who live in South Ethiopia have been demanding regional status since Meles Zenawi's regime illegally dissolved 5 independent regions in Southern and South Western parts of the country to form an illegal South Ethiopian Regional Administration in 1993.
- 1.2 Sidama has a population of over 5 million at present. The Sidama people have always rejected a unilateral decision of Meles Zenawi to dissolve their regional status in 1993.
- 1.3 The Sidama land makes massive economic contribution to the central government. It produces over 40% of washed coffee. Coffee earns over 60% of export revenues for the country.
- 1.4 The capital town of Sidama, Awassa, (also called Hawassa in Sidamic) is located 275 kms south of Addis Ababa.
- 1.5 The unconstitutional decision of Meles Zenawi's government to remove the Sidama people from their land of Awassa in April 2002, led to a massive peaceful anti government protest on May 24, 2002 in Loqqe, suburb of Awassa, in which 7000 people participated.
- 1.6 However, the government defence and police forces used live ammunition against unarmed civilians killing over 69 people instantly and injuring over 1000. This incidence led to arrest and torture of over 2000 people. Some people are still in jail.
- 1.7 Following this massacre hundreds of Sidama intellectuals and businessmen left the country and most of them are currently living as refugees in Africa, Europe and other continents.
- 1.8 The current regime in Ethiopia follows a deliberate policy of underdevelopment in Sidama land. Since the political unrest in May 2002, NGO supported development programs were dismantled and the government stopped carrying out its limited development activities in the Sidama land altogether. The regime solely follows undeclared state of emergency to manage political unrest in Sidama land since May 2002. Government offices have stopped functioning in Sidama land except the defence and police forces.

1.9 Hundreds of children and the elderly are dying of hunger and malnutrition in many parts of Sidama land following regular drought that could have been averted easily. The international community has witnessed this fact in 2005.

II. The Current Crisis In Sidama For The Attention Of The International Community.

2.1 Following a humiliating defeat in May 15, 2005 elections, which the regime reversed by a massive post election vote rigging, Meles Zenawi met the representatives of the Sidama people and agreed to restore the Sidama regional status after a referendum in June 2006.

2.2 However, after he managed to crush the major opposition party and put its elected leaders in jail, with limited or no opposition from the international community, Meles Zenawi turned his back on the Sidama people.

2.3 After returning back from the meeting of “progressive governance” held in South Africa, Meles Zenawi met the representatives of the Sidama community for the second time in Awassa, Sidama land on 14th of February 2006. In a sharp, but a usual U-turn from his earlier pledge, Meles Zenawi told the representatives of the Sidama community this time that their demand for regional status *would not be accepted*.

2.4 This sparked a serious peaceful protest in Sidamaland. Thousands of students from Awassa University and the Sidama people from all districts gathered in Awassa town on March 10, 2006 and demanded the Sidama representatives of EPRDF, the ruling party, to ensure that the status for Sidama which is guaranteed by the current “constitution” of the country be granted as soon as possible.

2.5 This legal and peaceful demand of the people led to yet other massive human rights abuses in Sidama. Since March 12, 2006 thousands of students from Awassa University have been arrested and tortured in Awassa and others districts prisons respectively. Thousands of military (Agazi Brigade), and police forces have been deployed in all parts of the Sidamaland. Sidamaland is turned yet again into a garrison.

2.6 Hundreds of Sidama civil servants and local Sidama NGO leaders are being removed from their positions. Duka’le Lamiso, the managing director of the reorganized Sidama Development Fund and a civil servant, Abera Doba are among the key figures removed from their positions in the past two days. It is feared that these people will also be jailed very soon.

III. The Appointment of Melese Marimo as an Ethiopian Ambassador to South Africa

- 3.1 The unrecognised dictator of Africa, Meles Zenawi, appointed Melese Marimo the EPRDF cadre in Sidama, as an Ethiopian ambassador to South Africa.
- 3.2 Melese Marimo was the former vice president of the illegal South Ethiopia Regional Administration and the person who was one of the responsible peoples for the May 24, 2002 massacre of the Sidama people.
- 3.3 The Sidama people both at home and in Diaspora requested the current regime to bring people like Melese Marimo who were responsible for the May 24, 2002 massacre to justice.
- 3.4 Amnesty International and other international and local human rights organisations condemned the May 24, 2002 massacre in Awassa, Sidama.
- 3.5 However, the defiant Ethiopian Prime Minister promoted the well-known human rights abuser as an Ambassador to South Africa, which is the model of democracy in Africa.

IV. The International Community

- 4.1 We appeal to the international community to put pressure on the Ethiopian regime to respect the basic human rights and stop massacre, arrest and torture whenever people voice their legitimate rights.
- 4.2 In particular, we request the international community to put pressure on the Ethiopian Prime Minister to stop massive imprisonment and torture of university students, removal of Sidama civil servants from their legitimate jobs and condemned the appointment of the well known human rights abuser as an Ambassador of the country to South Africa.

The Sidama Communities at Home and in Diaspora.

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