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Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP)

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Norway Section

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Open Letter to ex-Norwegian Minister of Development, Mr. Erik Solheim

The high profile Norwegian minister of development, Erik Solheim, strongly defended Norway's aid policy towards the brutal regime of Meles Zenawi, in an interview he gave to the leftist newspaper Klassekampen. He proposed an increase in aid of NOK 350 million over the current level of NOK 240 million to the dictatorial regime on the ground that the latter has had an impressive track record of development aid. He also praised the regime's achievement of UN's Millennium Development Goals.

Given the fact that the amount of aid the brutal ethnic regime of Meles Zenawi receives from Norway is relatively modest in relation to size and magnitude of the flow of aid from EU, US and the emerging economies such as China and India, what is the benchmark the minister applies when he comes to the conclusion that aid money has been properly utilized by the regime? Is it the quantity of bricks and mortars visible in the very much trumpeted construction boom the country is allegedly undergoing to benefit State controlled construction firms? Is it the dilapidated road network the Chinese are responsible for and which gradually is disintegrating under torrential rainfall? Is it the millions of homeless and starving Ethiopians who subsist on Western food handouts for a price of «1 birr» per portion? Is it development that could be seen, felt and experienced by the ordinary people in terms of schools, clinics, health stations, youth clubs, vocational skills training, agriculture extension services (credit, fertilizers, seeds, market outlets, etc.)? In short, can the Minister, with hand on the heart, tell the Norwegian public, whose tax money is the source of aid, that the ordinary people of Ethiopia are the beneficiaries of aid money?

When Mr. Jan Egeland, regional director of HRW, raised the issue of human rights violations in Ethiopia vis-à-vis the purported «developmental success» attributed to the regime, Mr. Solheim was quick in dismissing the allegation by saying that it is not widespread according to the opinion of «the donor group». But, it is widely known that Norway's cooperation with the Meles' regime has invoked criticism from different quarters, Amnesty International and Human Rights, Watch being the foremost. The two organizations have documented in their reports widespread violations of democratic and human rights in the country especially after the introduction of so called «anti-terror law» and the law against the proper functioning of human rights organizations and NGOs. Several hundred members of the opposition and independent journalists have been harassed, imprisoned and tortured by the regime's federal police and secret agents. Over 30,000 political prisoners are languishing in the brutal regime's prisons and detention camps.

Has the aid money done any good beyond strengthening the repressive apparatus of the ethnic dictatorship in Ethiopia? Has poverty been reduced let alone abolished as a result of Norwegian aid?

Mr Solheim claims that Ethiopia has been instrumental in establishing and strengthening the peace processes in Somalia and South Sudan. Has this «instrumentality» been made possible at the expense of violation of democratic and human rights in the country? Where is the peace in Somalia? We are told that Meles' regime deserves reward for its efforts in combating global climate change. But how does this fit in the scheme of things to the dictatorial regime which indiscriminately burns forests to pave the

way for large-scale agro-business being spearheaded by our modern day land grabbers such as India, China and other multi-million investors? The present burning of the century old forests of Ziquala and Asebot monasteries (to mention but a few) are glaring examples of the environmental degradation purported by the Meles regime. Maybe Mr. Solheim is influenced by the so called fertilizers that the regime is buying from Norway much to the detriment of the soil?

Mr. Solheim was recently sacked from the post of Development Minister by the newly elected party leader, Audun Lysbakken. He has apparently fallen out of grace with the new head of the party, SV (Socialist Left Party of Norway). We do not shed tears for the mishap that has befallen the ex-Minister. But we sincerely wish Mr. Solheim to address all the pertinent questions we raised in this short narrative.

Best regards,

EPRP Norway

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