



Ethiopia: Changes without Improvements

The Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia Deteriorated

Rapidly After the New PM Came to Power

HRLHA Statement

Ethiopians and the friends of Ethiopia have recently witnessed two major changes taking place in the country particularly in relation to honouring and protecting human rights. One is the replacement of Mr. Meles Zenawi, whose government tightly restricted fundamental human rights and severely punished those who attempted to exercise some of their basic freedoms, by another prime minister. The other change is Ethiopia's election to the United Nations' Human Rights Council.

Following those changes, again Ethiopians and their friends expected some kinds of improvements in terms of human rights situations in the country. There have been reasons why improvements were expected in both cases. Firstly, the new prime minister, Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn, was believed to be much more and well educated person than Mr. Meles Zenawi, who was just a rebel leader and a first-year university drop-out before coming to power. Besides, contrary to Mr. Meles' underlying political principles of racism and regionalism, Mr. Hailemariam was expected to be far from racial partiality, discriminations and political biases. Secondly, membership to the UN Human Rights Council comes with such obligations as holding the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe (UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251). Unfortunately, the expected improvements haven't happened. Instead, we are witnessing the worsening of the human rights situations in the country. Good most recent cases in point are the Suri massacre in the Omo Valley, south-western Ethiopia, and racially motivated brutal crackdown against the students of Addis Ababa, Arat Kilo University, almost all of whom were Oromo nationals.

The massacre of members of the Suri tribe took place in December 2012, when a heavily armed national army was sent to the area to silence the Suri people's protest against evictions and displacements from their ancestral land, properties, and all forms of livelihoods against their will and out of their consent. According to the report obtained from a Human Rights researcher

called Doglas Burji¹, 147 Suris were killed in a one time attack by the national army at an area called Beyahola in Suri village; and their dead bodies were buried in a mass grave deep in the Dibdib forest not far from the village.



Photo By Douglas Burji, The Army surrounded the Suri women, 28 December 2012

The Oromo students of Addis Ababa University were severely attacked, apprehended, and sent to detentions simply because they attempted to express their anger and opposition to racial attacks. In the incident, more than 130 students (most of them Oromos) were arrested². Among the detainees, one student was severely beaten by security forces and died in a hospital where he was taken to for a pretentious treatment. From among the 130 detained students, many were released during the first week of their detention; while 35 Oromo students are still in prison. Both cases were not the first of their kinds to happen. They were exact duplications of

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² HRLHA Urgent Action, Arrests and Detention at Addis Ababa University, Jan 5, 2013, <http://humanrightsleague.com/2013/01/ethiopia-beatings-arrests-and-detentions-at-addis-ababa-university/>

previous similar incidents that took place for the same purposes of promoting political and economic interests of the group in power.

Not only the international documents and/or treaties that Ethiopia has so far ratified, but also a lot of legal and constitutional documents issued at different times by different regimes of Ethiopia, including the ones currently in power talk a lot about the protection and promotion of fundamental human rights. But, all remained on paper. As a result, Ethiopians from all walks of life, age, and gender, religious and ethnic groups have been paying so dearly including in their lives.

It is still not too late to reverse the current harmful approach to human rights in Ethiopia and, by so doing, to prevent the worst from happening. Therefore, the HRLHA calls up on all local, regional, and international human rights and diplomatic agencies to renew, under the new leadership, their commitment to encouraging and supporting the protection and promotion of fundamental rights in Ethiopia. We also call up on those agencies to put all necessary pressures on the Ethiopian Government so that it abides by all laws and constitutional provisions of the country that apply to human rights as well as the international human rights instruments it has adopted.