



# ***Advocacy for Ethiopia***

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## **No Blank Check for African Kleptocrats at Copenhagen Climate Conference!**

From December 6 to 18, 2009, leaders and representatives of nations around the world, international organizations, and prominent individuals will convene in Copenhagen, Denmark at the much anticipated **Summit on Climate Change**. We look forward to a positive outcome of this gathering and are hopeful that the conference achieves its objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to avert the colossal implications of climate change globally. We also recognize that those who would be most affected by ongoing damaging climate change are the people of developing nations, particularly those living in the continent of Africa.

Nevertheless, we are disappointed that the African Union has selected and the Climate Summit has given an opportunity to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia to represent the African continent. We believe that Meles Zenawi is the wrong person to represent Africa, since his policies are the causes and drivers for the incalculable environmental degradations currently taking place in Ethiopia. Under Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's regime, Ethiopia is facing an ecological catastrophe: deforestation, recurrent drought, and desertification. Water pollution, air pollution, soil erosion are becoming alarmingly high due to Zenawi's regime lacks both sustainable development plans and non-transboundary environmental policies. It is due to this fact that UNDP and other environmental organizations have been reporting about the alarming state of the ecological degradation in Ethiopia. Mr. Meles Zenawi's colossal failures in environmental policies are highlighted by his regime's land tenure policy and his relentless suppression of civil and economic rights. Millions of Ethiopians are exposed to periodic hunger and famine in part due to his regime's land tenure policy. After almost two decades of Zenawi's rule, in 2009 over ten million Ethiopians are exposed to hunger and malnutrition.

As is customary, Meles Zenawi's regime has signed numerous international and environmental treaties that it never implements. To add insult to injury, Mr. Meles Zenawi even chairs Ethiopia's Environmental Council. It is partly due to his control that the existing Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lacks the political clout to discharge and enforce the duties and responsibilities vested in it. To those who pay attention to what is going on in Ethiopia, the story of the EPA's feebleness is a direct byproduct of profuse lip service given by the regime of Zenawi about its concern for the environment-- as is the case about good governance, democracy, human rights, etc.. In addition, Mr. Zenawi's hostile attitude towards Environmental NGOs - and civil society organizations, in general, has created enormous hurdles for those who want to mitigate the colossal environmental crisis facing Ethiopia.

According to the government's own *Ethiopian Agricultural Research Institute*, Ethiopia has been losing up to 200,000 hectares of forest every year. In a very recent statement, the head of the same Institute, stated: "deforestation has continued at an alarming rate in several parts of Ethiopia as a result of *illegal* logging, deforestation and other human induced activities". Forty percent of the land covered by forest by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had gone down to 5.5% in 1987 and only 0.2% in 2003. If the current trend



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continues, Ethiopian forest covers would be extinct along with the loss of the country's uniquely rich wildlife, fauna, flora, and a broad and general loss of its biological diversity.

The governance problem is one of the main causes of the environmental distress taking place in Ethiopia. Soil erosion, which is linked with deforestation and Meles Zenawi's land tenure system, continues to contribute to the drying up of the country's lakes. Major Ethiopian Lakes such as *Haro Maya (Alemaya)*, *Adele*, *Awasa*, and others have dried out totally. Acute shortages of water afflict major towns such as the city of Harrar and the capital city, Addis Ababa. As a result of the shortage of water resources, thousands of Ethiopians are affected by water born diseases.

The use of pesticides, untested and unfitting fertilizers, other toxic chemicals, some of them long abandoned by the industrialized countries, are now common in Ethiopia. The excess chemicals that are being washed off from the farms to rivers, streams, and lakes, are causing a plethora of problems including the poisoning of inhabitants, increasing algae blooms, and excessive plant growth leading to eutrophication, thereby making the water bodies and vegetation harmful to humans, wild and aquatic life and polluting the underground water. The level of environmental destruction caused by the chemicals used by foreign and party owned commercial flower farms and the leather industry is among the worst in the world. The environmental destruction and its hazardous impacts on human life and other inhabitants at and around Lake *Koka*, for instance, are captured by a few investigative reports and were televised recently by the members of the International media such as the Al-Jazeera Television Network and detailed by an eminent British Scientist.

Vehicular emissions in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, are alarmingly high. The presence of lead and sulfur in imported fuels, despite a ban since 2002, and the absence of emission inspection clearly indicate that the laws Zenawi passes only give lip service to clear and present dangers to the lives of Ethiopians.

Ethiopia's government human right abuses and suppression of press freedom are well-documented, by Human Rights Watch; The US State Department Annual Report on Human Rights, Amnesty International, the New York based Center to Protect Journalist (CPJ), Journalists without Borders, and many other creditable international and regional human rights and press freedom organizations. The organization--Genocide Watch-- has called on the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to initiate an investigation against the atrocities committed by the government of Meles Zenawi. Wide spread corruption also adds to the malaise of ordinary Ethiopians. Transparency International's most recent report has ranked Ethiopia as 126<sup>th</sup> most corrupt country in the world.

Periodic ethnic conflicts in the country are destroying and weakening the institutions and these in turn are prohibiting the citizens and the NGOs to make informed decisions about the environment. The governance problem is one of the main causes of the environmental distress taking place in Ethiopia.



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**We believe that in an age of Globalization humanity's interest, wellbeing, and destiny are directly intertwined. In view of this, we urge you to take tangible steps that include the following concerns of ours:**

1. Mr. Meles Zenawi must be held accountable to the massive environmental degradation in Ethiopia. We urge you not to ignore the environmental damages that the Zenawi's regime has committed inside Ethiopia. For doing so sends a very bad message to all of us who care about the environment. Zenawi should not be rewarded for the seemingly non-transboundary environmental degradation he has brought to Ethiopia.
2. Emphasize the crucial roles of a representative's records in environmental protection, social justice, good governance, human rights, and the rule of law that are important in shaping and averting Global crisis in climate change.
3. Ensure the appropriate use of any climate change financing package to nations with non representative leaders with bad track records on environment, human rights, good governance, and social justice by binding conditions tied to strict measures that would ensure that the funds would not be siphoned off by corrupt leaders such as Mr. Meles Zenawi and others in Africa.
4. Refrain from giving funds to a corrupt regime such as Zenawi as doing so would be a waste of resources and tantamount to committing the same mistakes that the world community has made during the 1983/4 Ethiopian famine when., as recently revealed by Zenawi's rebel comrades, the food aid and money was used to build his Red Army. Mr. Zenawi will use the same international funds, as in the past, to keep political and ethnic cronies to continue suppressing the Ethiopian people.
5. Do not undermine the importance of social justice, good governance, human rights, and the empowerment of citizens, and their civil societies in shaping and in averting Global warming

We urge countries of the industrialized world attending the conference not to write a blank check and reward dictators, such as the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, who have abysmal records of human rights and the environment.



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