

## **The anti-Meles protest demonstrations in Oslo**

The arrival of Meles Zenawi in Oslo had sparked and was met with a big protest demonstration. The demonstration highlighted the human rights violations and atrocities of the regime of Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia. The participants denounced Meles Zenawi and called for the freezing and termination of all aid to his brutal regime which has one of the worst human rights records in the world. The demonstration has attracted and brought together Ethiopians from different communities and political persuasions. It was also a demonstration of the unity of purpose and expression of common opposition and rejection of the atrocities and violations of Meles Zenawi. It was one of the long and powerful demonstrations Ethiopians have staged in Oslo to support the struggle in their country of origin and act as the voice for the suppressed and voiceless.

The participation of Meles Zenawi in the Oslo conference, energy for all with a theme financing access to the poor, has outraged Ethiopians in Norway and elsewhere. Upon getting the news of the invitation and participation, Ethiopians in Oslo took the immediate steps to form a task force entrusted with the task of mobilizing, organizing a protest demonstration and conveying their opposition and concern to the host, the Norwegian government. The members of the task force were drawn from the different opposition groups and individuals engaged in supporting and contributing to the struggle for democracy, freedom and justice in Ethiopia. The task force got down to business and worked out its plans and programs for the protest demonstration. The preparations included making posters bearing the pictures of prisoners of conscience, letters to the Norwegian government, a press release and announcements aimed at mobilizing the public. The task force has made considerable efforts and got the support of Ethiopians as needed.

The posters prepared were posted on the media and pasted in different parts of Oslo frequented by Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia. A Paltalk room and Facebook were also used as the media to reach as many as possible and achieve maximum mobilization. Ethiopians in Oslo have good experiences from the previous demonstrations against the Yara prize and violations of Meles Zenawi.

The main demonstration was staged in a public park located beside the Radisson blue plaza hotel where the participants were accommodated and which was the venue for the conference on the 10th of October 2010. It was scheduled for 8:00a.m.to 3:00p.m (15.00). In addition to the participants from Oslo and the different parts of Norway, there were Ethiopians who came all the way from Sweden. Ethiopians residing in the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) had always joined and participated in similar protest demonstrations held in any of these countries. There was a visible police presence along with metal barricades in the place. The demonstrators began to arrive at 8:00 and marked the beginning of the protest. By 9:00 all of the expected participants had arrived and began the chanting of slogans and singing of Ethiopian songs. The participants bore different placards highlighting the violations, showing the pictures of political prisoners and victims and denouncing the regime of Meles Zenawi. Among the placards and slogans chanted were: Release all political prisoners! Meles is the black Hitler! and Meles is the black Breivik! Shame! Shame!. Anders

Behring Breivik is the Norwegian who carried out the terrorist attacks in Oslo and committed the mass killings at Utøya on July 22, 2011. The slogan chanting and singings were well coordinated and synchronized to be intense and loud enough to be heard around and in the conference hall. We came to know that the voices of the protesters were audible in the conference hall. The program of the day included the distribution of flyers to the public in the city center. The members of the task force and participants distributed the flyers to the passers in different corners of the city center. The slogans and songs were supplemented by the speeches made by the representatives of the support chapters, political parties and invited individuals. The task force has sent a letter of concern and opposition regarding Meles Zenawi's participation to the Norwegian government, parliament and political parties.



*Protest demonstration at Public Park by the side of Radisson blu plaza hotel where the participants were accommodated and the venue for the conference.*

Ato Ghidey Zeratsion, the chairman of the task force and leader of the Tigrayan Alliance for National Democracy in Norway was the first to address the participants. He noted the violations the regime of Meles Zenawi is committing and diversionary tactics it is using. He indicated that Meles Zenawi has no national agenda and vision and has raised the Nile Dam as a simple tactic of diversion. The next speaker to address the participants was Ato Getinet Wubishet, the leader of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP)-Norway. He began by thanking the organizers and mentioned the struggle of the EPRP for democracy, freedom, justice and unity in Ethiopia and re-iterated his party's calls, position and willingness to join forces and work with the forces of unity. He also noted the anti-Ethiopia nature of the TPLF or Meles regime and its collusion with our country's external enemies. Ato Dawit Mekonen the chairperson of the Democratic Change in Ethiopia Support organization in Norway (DCESON), also addressed the participants. He thanked the organizers and spoke about the unabated violations of the Meles regime, ever worsening and deepening crisis in Ethiopia. He reminded the public that every citizen has the obligation and responsibility to

take part in and contribute to the struggle and emphasized the importance of unity, broader participation and working together. Ato Yussuf Yassin, an analyst on the horn of Africa also addressed the demonstrators. He thanked the organizers and participants and said that he was pleased to see Ethiopians joining hands and demonstrating together. He also indicated that the task ahead needs the contributions and participation of all the stake holders and citizens.

The day's major and long demonstration ended at 15:00 as planned but the participants agreed to hold a discussion after break. The unity of purpose, discipline and orderly and peaceful manner of the demonstration were appreciated and found to be inspiring. More discussions and exchanges of ideas and opinions focusing on the way ahead were held in the Ethiopian Community House. In the ensuing discussions it was recommended that the task force prepare a report outlining its work and call a meeting to chart out the way ahead and work out a roadmap for collaborative, inclusive and participatory struggle.

The protest continued in front of the Oslo City Council where the luncheon for the conference participants and other invited guests was held. This took place on the same date, October 10, 2011 from 19:00 to 20:30. There was a protest gathering on the eve of the conference 09.10.2011 from 19:00 to 21.00 in the public park where the big demonstration was staged. This protest gathering coincided with the arrival of Meles Zenawi in Oslo on this date.



*Protest demonstration at the luncheon for conference participants and other invited guests at Rådhusplassen*

The Norwegian newspapers and National Broadcasting Television Channel (NRK) have covered the conference and main protest demonstration. The evening post (Aftenposten) has a detailed coverage of the conference and protests. One of its news headlines on the conference is: Warns against interference. <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/article4251968.ece>.

It appears that the atmosphere the protest demonstration had caused created unease and discomfort in Meles Zenawi. The newspaper reports that the Norwegian Prime Minister Mr. Jens Stoltenberg has raised the arrest of the two Swedish journalists and the alleged killings and ill treatments of civilians in the Ogaden region. Western aid is indispensable for the survival of his regime but he is warning the Norwegian government against raising the issues of human rights and the rule of law or in his words interference in the affairs of his regime. This warning indirectly concerns the other western donors.

The Norwegian aid and hailing of Meles Zenawi are drawing criticism and scrutiny from the 2 main opposition parties in the parliament. The progress and conservative parties are demanding the government to give an explanation on the aid being given to the regime of Meles Zenawi. The present Norwegian aid to the Meles regime stands at two hundred million (200000000.00) Norwegian kroner annually. Both of the opposition parties are demanding the Norwegian government to pose clear demands as regards improvements in democracy, human rights, and tackling corruption.

<http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/article4252993.ece>

The raising of aid to the Meles regime as an issue in the Norwegian parliament is a diplomatic and political achievement for the voices of democracy, freedom and justice in Ethiopia. However, the present center-left and labor party dominated Norwegian government is defending its policy by echoing the false and exaggerated economic growth figures provided by the regime of Meles Zenawi. It is worth noting that dialogue and engagement occupy a central part in the foreign policy of this government. Despite this, Ethiopians will build on this momentum and continue to engage and press the government to review its current policy and attach aid to human rights and the rule of law in Ethiopia. We will do all we can to close the Norwegian money pipe to the regime of Meles Zenawi.

As a whole the protest demonstrations were peaceful and conducted in the atmosphere and spirit of unity, solidarity, gentleness and understanding. The task force thanks all who took part in the protest demonstrations and acted as a voice for the voiceless.

**The anti-Meles demonstration organizers, Oslo Norway**

**Oslo, October 12, 2011**