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CRISIS IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Beware of the Coming Storm

Our religious leaders have continued "to serve God" under police escort. The police force is not yet through with keeping law and order in the secular world. However, religious leaders have entrusted the police with the responsibility to "keep law and

order" in the spiritual domain. Religious leaders should have taken the responsibility to stabilize and comfort the faithful. But that "responsibility" has been taken over by the Police Commission of Region 14. Clubbing and imprisoning believers would only

worsen the situation. Such acts would not remedy the deadlock. It is a matter of time before the storm breaks loose. (AGERE, January 24/97)



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IN THIS ISSUE

EDITORIAL:

The Horn: Back to Square One

FOCUS:

The Revolutionary Democratic Private Sector

POLITICS:

The Crisis in the Church

DOCUMENT:

EHRCO's 11th Report

HUMAN RIGHTS:

Norwegian disillusionment

Amnesty concerned about «delayed justice»

Protest by Committee to Protect Journalists

EHRCO calls for continued protest

UNREST AND MILITARY CLAIMS

After the hijacking tragedy

Islamists declare «Jihad»

Government forces attacked in border towns

A CARE worker killed



GRAPECA

Groupe de Recherche et d' Action pour la paix en Ethiopie
et dans la Corne de l' Afrique.

Research and Action Group for Peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

RAGPEHA

EDITORIAL

THE HORN: BACK TO SQUARE ONE!

During Mengistu's era, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan played host to each others' rebel forces. The Sudanese government supported TPLF and EPLF rebels against Mengistu. The latter provided military, financial and other material support to Sudanese and Somali armed opposition forces represented by the Sudan People's Liberation Front (SPLA), the Somalia Salvation Democratic Front and the Somalia National Movement (SNM), now ruling over the self-declared independent state of Somaliland.

With the demise of the Derg regime, Meles paid back general Al Bachir's support during the «liberation war» by not only withdrawing all backing from SPLA but also by brutally expelling rebel leaders and fighters plus some 400,000 refugees from Ethiopia. The Transition Charter proclaimed «peace and stability» for the Horn and vowed that Ethiopia, which was to pursue a policy of friendship with its neighbours, would do away with Mengistu's «evil policy of war and destabilization of neighbouring states».

This in fact was as it should be. Neither Sudan nor Ethiopia have any reason to go to war—there are no territorial disputes and neither country was harbouring dissident forces attempting to destabilize the other. Somalia, caught in its tragic clan wars, is no threat to Ethiopia's peace and stability.

As we noted in an earlier issue of AD (N° 6/7 September/ October 1995) «of all the parties in the crisis now unfolding in the Horn, Ethiopia stands as the one which has practically nothing at stake».

Now, Meles is dragging the country into potentially disastrous conflicts on Ethiopia's western and eastern borders, fighting not Ethiopia's but America's war, and to a lesser extent the war of Issayas Afewerki.

In a recent interview with an Arabic newspaper, Al Itihad, Meles confirmed that he would provide support «to forces bent on removing the Al Bashir

government». (IT'OP 01/01/97). The Sudanese government has accused Meles and Issayas of sending troops to Sudan to fight alongside rebel troops and even claimed, in a statement reported by the state-run newspaper Al Sudan Al Harif, that «317 EPRDF troops and one Shabia (EPLF) soldier have been mowed down and armoured vehicles destroyed» in a military confrontation in northern and southwestern Ethiopia along the Ethio-Sudanese border. The New York Times for its part reported that the recent U.S. \$ 20 million assistance to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda is earmarked for «the purchase of heavy duty trucks, uniforms and communication materials» for «Sudanese rebels and refugees» who have mounted a military offensive against Khartoum.

On the eastern front, Meles is meddling in Somalia's tragic clan wars by providing military and material support to forces opposed to Hassan Aideed, son of the late warlord General Aideed, a declared «enemy» not of Ethiopia but of the United States. In late January, twenty-six political parties including that of Al Mahdi Mohammed, Aideed's arch enemy, de facto leader of North Mogadiscio, and self-proclaimed «interim president of Somalia» concluded a two-month long «Peace and Reconciliation Conference» at Sodore (100 km south of Addis Abeba) by establishing a so-called «Somali National Salvation Council». Meles, who sponsored this conference did not stop at providing political support to this anti-Aideed coalition. Somali groups opposed to the «Sodore Coalition» have accused him of recently delivering 70 tonnes of arms and ammunition to Al Mahdi Mohammed's stronghold in Northern Mogadiscio!

As should be expected, Meles Zenawi's provocative acts against Khartoum and unwarranted intervention in the Somali civil war has triggered a wave of «anti-Ethiopia» sentiments both in Sudan and Somalia.

The Sudanese leader, Dr. Hassan Al Tourabi, who only a year ago used to emphasize «Sudan's positive attitude towards Ethiopia which has been

repeatedly demonstrated by Khartoum's handover to Ethiopia of anti-government elements operating from its soil» now vows to support Ethiopian opposition forces. In a recent interview with the New York times, (24/12) he threatened to «take the flames of war to Ethiopia and Eritrea unless the US renounces its attempts to overthrow the Sudanese government with the connivance and collaboration of neighbouring countries».

The situation in the east is no less alarming. The call for «Jihad» against Ethiopia made by the fundamentalist group Al Itihad is now being openly supported by Sudan as well as by «an increasing number of Somalis». According to the Amharic independent weekly TIKURET (06/01) «Two important Somali faction leaders, Hussein Aideed and Somali National Army leader Mohammed Ali Abdi, as well as youth and elder leaders are said to

have positively responded to the call».

Meles Zenawi's unwarranted military and political posturing against neighbouring countries may help him poise as «a front line fighter» against fundamentalism and enable him to draw more support from the Americans. But he is definitely playing with fire. With a new and «more favourable» geopolitical situation, Ethiopian opposition forces will surely be encouraged to launch and/or intensify armed struggle against his ethno-military dictatorship.

Unless the international community steps up efforts to defuse the crisis, we fear that all the ingredients are present for the entire region to move back to square one: to the terrible dictatorial regimes of the '80S which «externalized» their internal crises by supporting dissident armies against their neighbours.

FOCUS

THE REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATIC
«PRIVATE» SECTOR

The ethno-military regime now taking root in Ethiopia is not interested exclusively in political control which TPLF has arrogated to itself by virtue of the Stalinist constitution imposed on our people. In the economic domain the organization did not stop at decreeing State ownership of land in the predominantly agrarian society. After having «accepted» the principle of a market economy, the Front is now consolidating its hold on the country's economy through its own «private companies».

This strategy was clearly outlined in the secret TPLF document we published in the last issue of Addis Digest:

«State control of the economy which was approved by the First EPRDF congress is no longer acceptable in current global economic thinking - imperialism and the comprador bourgeoisie are against it. Therefore various reliable Revolutionary Democratic associations, organizations and individuals should take over the role of the State and invest. The State should use fiscal instruments to encourage growth of

these forces and destroy those that are not in line with the goals of Revolutionary Democracy. We will reduce or write off taxes due from those who support us and pile up the tax burden of those who do not support us.»

This policy having been pursued relentlessly over the last five years, Ethiopia today is on the verge of being controlled by «one giant, military, political and ethnic organization, TPLF Inc.» Summarizing the results of a thorough study of the Ethiopian economy under TPLF, the independent monthly «ETHIOPIAN REGISTER» noted:

«TPLF has almost monopolized key sectors of the Ethiopian economy from retail business in the Piazza to wholesale distribution throughout Ethiopia, from stone quarrying in Tigray to gold mining in Lega Dadi, from trucking to air transport, from smuggling to manufacturing. Indeed, according to international financial institutions, the TPLF controls or owns more than 80% of Ethiopia's economy. If events unfold as the TPLF hopes they will, the Ethiopian economy will be controlled by one giant, military, political and ethnic organization: TPLF Inc. Such an unprecedented degree of control by a political, military, ethnic organization has obvious, ominous political