

People must live under conditions where

they are free from fear and poverty

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Ethiopia is among the poorest countries of the world that receive alms in the form of support from developed nations. Political instability in the country, an economy that is going down the drain with each passing day, drought that has widely devastated most of its regions, ethnic conflicts and civil wars that repeatedly spring up in the various regions, the border dispute with Eritrea that culminated in a destructive 2-years war, problems of implementing government policies that have not been properly studied and other numerous reasons have all converged and plunged it (the country) into the morass of extremely serious problems.

The potential mental and physical capacities of the youth of the country that would have otherwise been deployed in various constructive activities continue to be simply wasted. Since there are hardly any employment opportunities, the jobless youths have only one alternative: to wait for manna from heaven or for handouts sent by the industrialized countries. One could just walk through the main streets of Addis Ababa and have a look left and right. It is common to see a large number of youths lying hopelessly in the avenues (squares) and under trees. It is common to see school-age children, aged men, and women carrying small children on their backs, begging at traffic lights and at bus and taxi stops.

Lately, the Government has adopted and implemented an educational policy that has deprived a large proportion of the youth of their educational opportunities. They have also been deprived of the right to earn their living by working. They are often seen roaming the streets of the cities and towns. Many ultimately become drug addicts and serve the sinister motives of criminals. These problems have, more than ever, become widespread and rampant in all the cities and towns located in different parts of the country. The number of people in the cities who “earn” their living (survive) by begging and stealing is alarmingly increasing by leaps and bounds. And these problems have become conspicuous and widespread in Addis Ababa in a way that is quite different from any other part of the country.

Addis Ababa, which is the country's capital city and the seat of the African Union, is obviously in a much better position than the country's other towns in terms of providing better living facilities, as the result of which there is a continued influx of people into it.

The population of Addis Ababa is thus on a steady increase. Since 1991, especially, innumerable people have abandoned their abodes and flooded into Addis Ababa. Thousands of Ethiopians who used to live in Assab and Eritrea flocked to Addis Ababa because of the change of government and the Ethio-Eritrean war. Thousands of members of the former armed forces and their families are staying here in Addis Ababa. Inhabitants of the regions have come and continue to come to Addis Ababa in great numbers in search of better life and educational opportunities. These situations have become a great burden to the city of Addis Ababa - a burden that is hard to bear. Because of these developments, the city, among others, is facing extremely serious housing problems. Addis Ababa has reached a very critical stage where it has not been possible to satisfactorily render housing, water, electric power, telephone, health and other related services.

The Government and other concerned bodies have so far taken a number of measures with a view to alleviate these problems facing the capital. It is, however, saddening to note that, the measures were not instrumental in stamping out the root causes of the problems. Some of the steps that were taken by the Government have, in fact, been causes for the surfacing of other problems that replaced previous problems or have given birth to more problems.

Let us take one classical example to illustrate this point: As is to be recalled, the Government had, in the past, repeatedly rounded up street children, men and women, beat them up, crammed them on to military trucks, and dumped them in forests and jungles located far away from the city. It should also be recalled that the Ethiopian Human Rights Council had repeatedly condemned such irresponsible Government actions.

In line with the "policy changes" which the EPRDF regime claims to have adopted, a new Charter for the administration of the city of Addis Ababa has been issued,

and a transitional city Government has been inaugurated. The administration of the capital has been re-structured.

The new city administration which is said to have started functioning lately has embarked on an operation that seeks to effect urban sanitation and bring about fundamental changes. The city administration deserves high commendation indeed for undertaking this very important engagement. It must, however, be emphasized here that the Government policy changes and the process of implementing such changes should not be carried out in a way that infringes upon the fundamental and constitutional rights of nationals. At the time when the African Summit was proceeding in Addis Ababa, the city Administration had taken measures with a view to maintain law and order and security in the capital. As a result of these measures, the security of the lives of many urban residents who toil to earn their daily bread have been shaken up.

As is well known, the standard of living of the majority of the population of Addis Ababa is very low. Many city residents who have no permanent means of income lead hand-to-mouth existence. Quite a large number of the residents get their income from what they can do on the road or street sides. Lately, sides of the streets of the city were congested by vendors of second hand clothes, and other house -hold articles. This situation had caused great congestion in the pavements. Besides the topsy-turvy of the situation these areas have been fertile grounds for the breeding of muggers and thieves. In consequence, urban residents (pedestrians) were practically deprived of free movement. On the other hand, vendors in the street-sides have partially or wholly, taken over the business of the legally operating traders in shops, and kicked them out of the market. If allowed to continue unchecked, this situation could plunge the country into dire economic straits. Besides, there is a possibility that anarchy could set in.

In its drive to resolve this problem, the Government should, instead of focusing on only one specific direction, take concrete actions that would result in fundamental changes and in the eradication of the problems faced by all citizens. The Government has the responsibility to make sure that the action that it is taking against residents of Addis Ababa who, at present, earn their living by vending lottery tickets, shoe shining, selling second hand clothes and other articles is fair and balanced and does not result in human rights violations. The police forces have taken action against these people who, because of lack of other alternatives, have been engaged in these activities. As a consequence of police actions, many citizens have been beaten up, properties under their possession have been taken away; were detained, mistreated and finally released with warnings. These measures would only push citizens into more serious difficulties and problems and

instigate them to involve themselves in criminal acts. Such actions would not bring any positive change to the city.

Besides engaging in urban sanitation activities, the Government is expected to find solutions that would create employment opportunities (means of livelihood) for these people who are also breadwinners for their respective families. To blindly (arbitrarily) force these people to quit their jobs and declare “we would put them in their proper place” is tantamount to passing a death sentence against them.

This is a country where employment opportunities are almost non-existent. This is a country where the basic needs of the majority of the people are neither properly met nor satisfied.

It is unfair on the part of the Government, that claims to stand for the advancement of popular causes, to deprive these people of their means of livelihood under a situation where there are no other alternatives.

After all, these people who have chosen to earn their livelihood by working rather than begging, would at least sustain themselves through hard work. Unlike those who are engaged in beggary, these people are not burdens to the Government and the community. It is by giving incentives to these people and making them partners in Government development activities that it is possible to fight poverty. Chasing and harassing these people would only result in destroying the poor rather than eliminating poverty. The measures being taken by the Government at present gravely violate the Universal Declarations of the UN and the FDRE Constitution.

The Addis Ababa Administration is presently engaged in activities that deprive its residents of the means of livelihood in violation of Article 41 of the FDRE Constitution which stipulates that:

1. Every Ethiopian has the right to engage freely in any economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his/her choice anywhere within the national territory.
2. Every Ethiopian has the right to choose his or her means of livelihood, occupation and profession
3. Every Ethiopian national has the right to equal access to publicly funded social services.

4. The state has the obligation to allocate ever increasing resources to provide to public health, education and other social services.
5. The state shall, within available means, allocate resources to provide rehabilitation and assistance to the physically and mentally disabled, the aged, and to children who are left without parents and guardians.
6. The state shall pursue policies which aim to expand job opportunities for the unemployed and the poor and shall accordingly undertake programmes and public works projects.
7. The state shall undertake all measures necessary to increase opportunities for citizens to find gainful employment;

The city's activities also violate article 11 of the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which Ethiopia has ratified.

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Conclusion

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council urges the Federal Government and the Addis Ababa City Administration to immediately stop the inhuman activities that are being carried out or to work out appropriate alternatives.

In addition, EHRCO calls on the Federal government and the Addis Ababa City Administration to give special attention to the issue and:

1. give incentives to nationals who make efforts to earn their livelihood by working; arrange places where those street people could earn their living by working and facilitate other necessary conditions for them;
2. effect the immediate return of properties that have been taken away from those individuals who were detained or see to it that they are compensated;
3. immediately stop the beating, imprisonment and mistreatment of these nationals.

EHRCO calls on nationals, governmental and non-governmental organizations to write letters to the Ethiopian Government officials and bodies listed below requesting them to look at the human rights violations described in this report, to take legal measures against the violators of these rights and ensure the respect of human and democratic rights, and the rule of law:

- The House of Peoples Representatives

P.O.Box 80001 - fax (252-1) 550900, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- The House of the Federation

P.O.Box 80001 - fax (252-1) 550722, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- H.E. Lt. Girma Wolde Giorgis, FDRE President

P.O.Box 1031, fax (252-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, FDRE Prime Minister

P.O.Box 1031 - fax (252-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- H.E. Ato Harka Haroye, FDRE Minister of Justice

P.O.Box 1370 - fax (252-1) 520874, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- The Addis Ababa City Administration

P.O.Box 2458, Fax (251-1) 51 14 79, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

