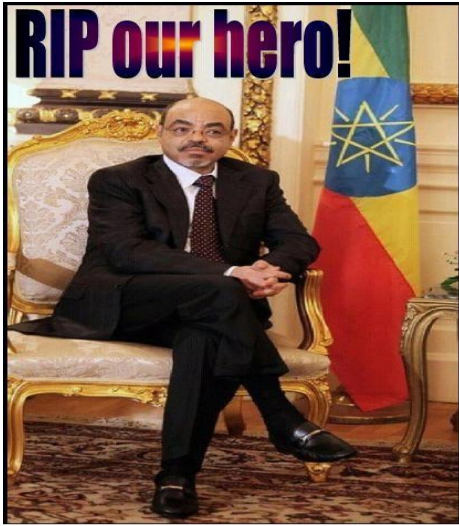


A Fitting Tribute to the Late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi

This morning, I woke up to the bad news heralding the untimely death of Ethiopia's beloved Prime



Minister Meles Zenawi. I am shocked and saddened. Ethiopia in particular and Africa in general lost the greatest leader of all time. Despite this huge loss, however, I take solace in the great achievements of the prime minister thus far and the promising foundation he laid for the country.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was a man who possessed every quality of a good leader one can imagine. He was charismatic, visionary, wise, compassionate, passionate, great communicator, daring, disciplined, persistent, and honest leader Ethiopia ever has had in its entire history.

Charismatic: This trait of the Prime Minister had served him well in winning the hearts and minds of his people, world leaders, international monetary institutions, and the donor community. He had an exceptional talent to bring people to his fold, and champion his cause. His charisma helped him to effectively instill the "I can do" attitude in the Ethiopian youth.

Visionary: In his early twenties, he had a vision for Ethiopia where its nations and nationalities enjoy their God-given rights; have equal rights under the constitution; and realize a government for the people by the people. To attain his vision, he quit his Medical School education and joined the peoples' struggle that culminated with the demise of the brutal junta government of Mengistu Hailemariam in 1991. After he became Prime Minister of Ethiopia, his long term vision was to eradicate the proverbial poverty from Ethiopia once and for all. And he was well on his way in accomplishing his vision. Ethiopia's economy has been growing in double digits and continues to do so. With the completion of Hadasie Gidib (Renaissance Dam), the brain child of the Prime Minister, Ethiopia is set to achieve miracles in the economic front for years to come.

Wise: No one could deny the wisdom of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Friends and foes alike admire him for his wise leadership and razor sharp intellect. Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf offered this comment: "In our regional meetings he (Meles Zenawi) stood out of his intellect and his ability to respond and lead dialogue on matters relating to African development. He will be missed in all of our meetings and all of our endeavors."

Daring: Many past leaders of Ethiopia had attempted to make use of the waters of the Nile River, but Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was the first Ethiopian leader who put his words into action and started building the Renaissance Dam on the Abay River; thereby mobilizing the necessary man power and monetary resources-- solely from the Ethiopian people. He challenged Egypt and Sudan, countries which have enjoyed the lion's share of the Nile waters, to come to the table and hold discussions with other members of the river basin on the equitable usage of the water.

Passionate: The Prime Minister had passion for transforming the lives of Ethiopian people from poverty to prosperity. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso observed the Prime Minister's Passion for work: "He demonstrated his strong personal commitment over many years to improving the lives of not just his own, but all African peoples, through his work on African unity, climate change, development and promoting peace and stability, particularly in the Horn of Africa."

Compassionate: The Prime Minister's compassion for his people was evident in his more than two decades of service for his country. He was a very caring and good hearted individual. For instance, he donated the \$200,000 Yara Prize—he received for great leadership-- to an organization that supports disadvantaged Ethiopian girls to go to school who would not, otherwise, attend school.

Great Communicator: He had superb communication skills that captivated his audiences. As a leader of a great nation, he proudly promoted the interest of the Ethiopian people and the African continent in many world stages with exceptional caliber and unmatched oratory skills.

Persistent: Many leaders change the course when the going gets tough. Prime Minister Meles was the exception. In 1991, he assumed the daunting task of leading a nation that was in shambles, poverty-ridden, and inhabited by people who lost hope in their government's ability to lift them from poverty. He persisted in changing the image of the country --that was synonymous with drought and hunger-- to major economic hub. He unequivocally declared that Ethiopia's number one enemy was poverty. In mere ten years, he managed to change to lives of the Ethiopian people for the better, and under his leadership, Ethiopia has become a country hope and bright future for its entire people.

Disciplined: Even in his early years as a fighter, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was known for his good-manner and utmost discipline. He continued that culture of discipline until his death.

Integrity: *One of the common Achilles' heels of most leaders is keeping promise to their people.* Many promise to alleviate people's problems, but they succumb to 'business as usual' once they ascend to the throne. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was among few leaders who mean what they say as displayed in his drafting and implementation of the Ethiopian constitutions that guaranteed equal rights to all the nations and nationalities; forming a government for the people by the people; implementing solid economic foundation that started bearing fruits; and commencing the construction of the Renaissance Dam on the Nile River.

Even though the Ethiopian people lost their industrious leader, they are determined to continue his legacy as outlined in the Five-Year Transformation plan. He will be remembered as the father of a new and prosperous Ethiopia that saw tremendous economic progress under his leadership.

At this juncture, I wish to extend my condolences to his immediate family, friends, and the Ethiopian people in general. May God rest his soul in heaven!

Mezgebe Gebrekiristos

Chicago (August 21, 2012)