

**Dear Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of the ‘Human Rights Watch’,  
U.S.A**

Good Day!!

Here writing to you is Habtamu Alebachew Simesh from Ethiopia, Lecturer in my profession on Political Science and International Law. You may rightly find my name on your e-archive list of ‘victims of human rights abuse’ in 1993 while I was a university student in Addis. I reminded you this not for any special motive but simply to inform you of my knowledge about your institution. I also have another story of falling victim to false accusations after twelve years. I had to stay in prison for one and half a year before I was released free. By this, you can appreciate how I have been opportune to have stored a good deal of practical knowledge about the ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy’ situations of Ethiopia, which, genuinely speaking, only a few independent people could experience.

**Dear Kenneth Roth,**

I came across your article on the death of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia. I read it curiously just between lines and tried to make out its essences to the best of my efforts. However, the article raised a dozen of thorny questions in mind. As I implied to you above, I was 26 when I was jailed in 1993 while Meles was 38 years old. I am now 46 and Meles died at his 57. In the mean time, Ethiopia, the Ethiopian people and I myself have undergone tremendous changes. My questions arose out of my confusion about the relevance of your comments to these changed circumstances in my country. Let me raise some of the questions:

- What is exactly your problem with the ‘human rights’ situations in Ethiopia under Meles and after him? Is it that Meles, by deliberate policy and strategy of rule that his regime violated ‘human rights’? Or, is it that Meles received foreign aid himself in billions but he forbade civil societies from doing the same?

- What do you mean by such Western coinages, which some civil society officials mockingly term as 'civil society', 'democratization', 'human rights', 'strongman' and other similar terminologies?
- Where did you get all the information about 'aid', donors, opposition parties, development and so on? Are you somehow an Ethiopian by half or by some other miracle, more responsible and committed than, for example, I, who was a repeated victim?
- Do you believe that you have adequately captured and understood the basic and average 'Ethiopian mentality' about foreigners, Ethiopianists, political authority, citizen-state reciprocal views? Specifically, what do you mean by an 'autocrat' and do you believe you have the moral ground to lecture on its meanings for poor Ethiopians who knew both paying for autocracy and fighting autocracy to its shameful defeat?

**Dear Kenneth Roth**

I guess you must have some kind of relevant specialty in social science fields. I reasonably predict what your answers for my questions will more likely be the repetition of what you already stated in your article. I said this not standing in the Angele's feet, but, as a student of political science. I could tell the precise ideological undertones on which your article has been founded, and, I know very well that you know almost nothing about Ethiopia from the ordinary citizen's angle for a list of justifications.

Your deliberate use of the term 'autocracy' to explain Meles and his rule is wholly inconsistent with what you stated in ensuing paragraphs. Ok, Melese was talking about the importance of what you said 'collective leadership; but, real power in his hands.' What kind of description is this? Are you saying Meles did not care about collective leadership so that he was autocrat? I wonder how a giant international personality like you could not base himself on the Constitution as the baseline of characterizing whether a leader was autocrat or not. We Ethiopians have now been clear that Meles used to spend almost 16 hours of his daily time schedule to the cause of broad-based development. He personally curved up policy parcels into a dozen of documents. At present, many

Ethiopians agreeably credit these policy documents as guarantees of insuring the desired goals of socio-economic growth. Meles wrote them not as a matter of constitutional division of labor but as a voluntary commitment to his cause of development.

The libraries of several domestic and foreign universities now keep these documents as enquiries of social science and development studies. I, as a university professor, feel ashamed that it was me who should have written such scholarly and qualified intellectual literatures. Meles had to sacrifice his precious time to do the job as I was weak to quickly map out how Ethiopia should grow in the existing world characterized by the falsified dominance of neo-liberalism and liberal democracy. Thus, was Meles an ‘autocrat’ because he pioneered these astounding intellectual successes?

### **Dear Kenneth Roth**

I still could not make sense out of your descriptions of Meles *as an ‘autocrat’ but ‘strategic and smart’ that he communicated you two times, the second by his own initiative*. You also said Meles caused a significant economic growth but he was ‘violating human rights’ by manipulating aid resources for political goals through reward for his fans, and denial for dissenters. Here, I realized false-cause-fallacies in your statements. Once you understood Meles as an ‘autocrat’ (a leader who is above the law and identifies himself with the state of Ethiopia, if this what you wanted to say), what perceived advantages did he seek from his conversations with you, as an autocrat? Were you the commandant over Meles’s and Ethiopia’s entire destiny, which you almost implied from your self-picked position of a tutor and a pointer to the way Meles had to have walked? This is, by all standards, the deep habituated value of yours so that latent racist, colonialist and imperialist mentality operating in your mind. By this, you see Meles and Ethiopia down from an imagined high post tower, which amounted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘civilizing mission’ sham of your conqueror grand fathers.

You also tipped that you showered Meles with successive fires of questions while he summoned you in an apparent bid to depict Melese as being ‘dwarfed’ before you on his

chair. What a nice composition it was for people who did not know Meles! By the way, is is the choice of an ‘autocrat’ by your categorization to voluntarily face an international human rights activist? Which ‘autocrat’ do you remember having done so? Did Mengistu Haile Mariam, Hosni Mubarak or Saddam Hussein ever try to do so?

**Dear Kenneth Roth**

Your understanding of ‘human rights and democracy’ heavily sounds the traditional Western version of hypocrisy, in probably the American context. What I am saying is that you could see that ‘aid’ for a poor country under the ‘autocrat Meles’ was a demand for compensating for with timely insufficiency of basic resources. By this, I understood you saying ‘aid’ in Ethiopia served far reaching political goals that shape the behavior of a regime beyond party and government principles.

In plain English, I felt that the message of your ‘aid statements was that Meles fought all his life to attain control of ‘aid sources’ that would guarantee his stay in office. By this, while you saw ‘aid’, as far as Ethiopia is concerned, within the prism of ‘human rights and democracy’, you could not understand ‘democracy and human rights’ within the same valve, which is ‘aid’. The message of your point is clear: Meles would have respected human rights if had had no aid from donors. In other words, ‘aid’ is a matter of insuring ‘human rights’ but use of aid for political proposes is violation of human rights. By your accusation of ‘aid manipulation’, how can your answer this question: is it only by the loyal followers of Meles and his party, who were discriminately advantaged of fertilizer or any aid, that the current double-digit growth was achieved?

Unfortunately, your missiles missed your primary target, Meles, to have shot millions of Ethiopians and wounding their pride and Ethiopian sensibilities. I wonder how a man of long distances for Ethiopia would lecture us that we are like animals conforming to undemocratic, autocratic and anti-human rights rule for two decades. Do you mean that we Ethiopians are stupid and ignorant about what democracy means for us? Or, Are you

saying that Ethiopians could never understand the implications of the state of such affairs unless a certain self-appointed white guardian tells them?

I was confused with your argument that equates ‘democracy and human rights’ with civil societies and opposition parties of Ethiopia. After all, what do you mean by a ‘civil society’ in Ethiopia’s context, a country which you depicted as ‘aid-prone, uncertain about its continued existence’, and so on? In both instances of my stay in prison, which places me at a better advantage than the opposition leaders, I witnessed that there were a good number of military officials, regional cadres, security officers, etc, who were convicted for crimes against human rights ad civilians. If you are serious, I am willing to email you their exact figures and numbers. Even by prison standards, I saw them better living almost as free men.

You further tried to belittle the fact of Meles’s being free from corrupt practices and even dispositions. Your other documents for training purposes say corruption is also one grand violation of human rights. I participated in several scholars conferences in Africa and outside. What would you say when a certain African deputy minister for Water and Mining Ministry told you officially in his opening speech that he had a Real State investment worth of 40 million USD? What would you say when you learned that a deputy president gave a letter of free deforestation title for a certain Chinese company in exchange for a bribe of 50, 000USD in some west African country, and he argued that words of his letter were abused? What would you say if you by chance came across thousands of South Africans clashing with government police because their electric lines were cut by a private company, which you may call a civil society? What would you say if you by chance encountered thousands of African farmers having gone on violent demonstration because a huge American company blocked all water springs in the name of purchased investment land from some households of impoverished peasants?

**Dear Kenneth Roth,**

You believe it or not, all these horrible stories are, confidently speaking, theoretically unthinkable and physically impossible in Meles’s Ethiopia and in the future. I really got

puzzled how you made a synthesis among human rights violation but no record of corruption; dramatic economic growth but no democracy; stability but no hope of post-Meles national unity. I am morally under pressure to say again that you never very well know either Meles Zenawi or Ethiopians at all.

You also preferred the word ‘strongman’ to libel Meles. Juggling as an independent citizen, I argue that Meles was never a ‘strong man’, at his death. I am absolutely convinced that he was rather a Great Leader; Please, look your Sociology textbooks to appreciate the differences. Meles imprinted his progressive values in the hearts of Ethiopians. He is above all else remembered for his unparalleled epistemological excellence in mapping out the right course how Ethiopians would make changes in a heavily divided world where anyone self-appointed guy like you styles to be a master over our destiny in the 21st century.

To your bitter taste, Meles immortalized himself through his immense influence in that he defined democracy to mean freedom from restraint of the individual from releasing his/her inner potentials; he defined human rights to mean the right to change one’s inner potential for the utilitarian benefit of all in a world of capitalist and neoliberal greed; Meles thought Ethiopians and Ethiopia could never grow by the lip-service of Euro-American agents whom you call ‘civil societies’.

I agreed with Meles’ Hegelian understanding of ‘civil society’ as a bottom-up, broad, based, natural and inside out socio-economic growth; Meles never believed that civil society growth was as an external appendage to the internal body. He was correct that civil society without this Hegelian criterion is a mutated malignancy under Ethiopian guise. Meles was always telling us that democracy in Ethiopia was never for its own sake; but to achieve a higher goal of self-emancipation from all forms of dependences unlike your civil societies and Oppositions in Ethiopia. Meles, as you said, was a nationalist at heart, who never hesitated to block imperialist interventions, in the name of investment, on the economic side, and in the name of global principles, on the value side, that is you.

**Dear Kenneth Roth**

I want to remind you that your way of influencing government for the cause of human rights should be based on the appreciation of improvements; you should prioritize cooperative and positive engagements in stead of trying to impose ideologically driven beliefs on government leaders. You should recognize that you could be assumed to have painted yourself as a ‘catholic more than the pope’ when you confront a leader, who is versed with nationalist, inside out orientations and unmistakable preference to what the domestic setting says than a certain white activist laments. This is so not because there were human rights violations but because his self-image of an international human rights Leviathan position was ignored.

Finally, I assure you my readiness for any open debates on the wrongness of your methodology with you or any expert of your organization or any civil society agent, if you invite me through any communication route

So long!!