



## *Meles the Lion*

By  
Daniel Gizaw

The metaphor, lion, doesn't fully reveal the unfathomable depth and the iron will Mr. Meles was possessed. For Ethiopia, after the murderous carnage conducted by the brutal leader named Mengistu, Meles came as her elixir. He surrounded himself with exceptionally talented and dedicated individuals who sacrificed their entire being for the progress and development of Ethiopia. Meles out-eclipsed himself as a leader. He shone over the entire Africa. Time and time again he proved to be a dauntless hero. Like his predecessors, Tewodros, Yohannes, Menelik, Haile Selassie, Meles preserved the soul and the spirit of a nation that was mortally damaged.

To deal with a nation that had suffered a long journey of darkness from famine, poverty, civil war and other maladies wasn't an easy task. He captured a squandered and badly impaired nation. For Meles the lion, the task was cheerless, but he never gave up. He never doubted himself nor did he doubt his associates. His wife, Azeb (a lioness in her own right) was by his side all the time, from the darkest moment of their journey to the hours of their victory. And again, Mr. Meles rose to the call of duty pertinent to his beloved country. For twenty years, ever since he assumed power, he vehemently declined a little vacation time, a little respite. For him, Ethiopia came first!

I am scribbling this short piece filled with profound sadness. I had a unique opportunity to have met him twice, once in the Ethiopian embassy in Washington, D.C., in 1994 three years after the fall of the Dergue. Again, I was privileged to meet him in his office, Addis Ababa in 2007.

Mr. Meles was gracious to me on both occasions. I knew him to be a compellingly eloquent speaker, but to hear him in close proximity was spellbinding. His visions for Ethiopia were profoundly mesmerizing. He believed that Ethiopia will liberate herself from the yolk of poverty sooner than expected. He was adamant about that. Regardless of the nasty and sleazy criticisms he faced from the Ethiopian Diaspora extremists, he was never bitter nor acrimonious toward them. He spoke in the spirit of democracy and believed that there should be adequate room for those who opposed his policies.

This is a very sad moment not only for Ethiopia, but for the whole of Africa. I am not surprised that the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU), Jean Ping, was shocked and saddened by the untimely passing away of Mr. Meles. In a statement released the Commission stated that it will remember the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi for his exceptional contribution to the advancement of the objectives of the AU and the promotion of Africa's interests in global fora. Having followed his career closely, I am aware that

the late Prime Minister played a vital role in African politics, particularly the Horn of Africa. His visions and indefatigable spirit to bring peace to Africa has been noted by notable African leaders.

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To fully fathom what Prime Minister Meles meant to African leaders, the following eulogy obtained from Walta Website can explain it all, making mine incalculably small.

Raila Odinga, Kenyan Prime Minister

“Meles Zenawi was a great leader, an intellectual, someone who was very dedicated to pan-Africanism. One will remember him for the great effort he put in to transforming the Ethiopian economy.”

Jacob Zuma, South African President

“It is an absolute tragedy for Africa and the people of Ethiopia to mourn such an exceptional leader who contributed as an active role-player in various continental and global initiatives. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had been a strong leader, not only for his country but on the African continent, acting as mediator on numerous talks, particularly in the Horn of Africa region.”

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia

“Meles Zenawi was an economic transformer, he was a strong intellectual leader for the continent. In our regional meetings he stood out because of his intellect and his ability to respond and to lead dialogue on matters relating to African development. He will be missed in all of our meetings and all of our endeavour. I don't have fears [over the transition] because I believe there are many other leaders in Ethiopia who will get the support of regional leaders to make the transformation that is necessary, moving towards an open society.”

Barnaba Benjamin, South Sudanese Information Minister

“It's a very, very sad day for the people of the Republic of South Sudan and the people of the East African region as a whole. This has been a tremendous nationalist leader, a president who had always let peace come to his neighbours. We in South Sudan in particular, consider Ethiopia and especially Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, a strategic ally that (who) always never let a friend down. Indeed we greatly mourn him and we extend our extensive condolences to the people of Ethiopia.”

European Commission president Jose Manuel Barroso

“Prime Minister Meles was a respected African leader. 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 in promoting peace and stability, particularly in the Horn of

Africa. I sincerely hope that Ethiopia will enhance its path of democratisation, upholding of human rights and prosperity for its people, and of further regional stabilisation and integration."

David Cameron, British Prime Minister

"Prime Minister Meles was an inspirational spokesman for Africa on global issues and provided leadership and vision on Somalia and Sudan. His personal contribution to Ethiopia's development, in particular by lifting millions of Ethiopians out of poverty, has set an example for the region. Our thoughts are with his family and with the nation of Ethiopia. He will be greatly missed."

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair

"It is with great sadness that I learned of Meles Zenawi's death. He was a hugely significant figure in Ethiopia's history, in particular helping guide his country from extreme poverty to an era of economic growth and development."

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In closing, I would like to extend my deepest sorrow to his wife, his children and his entire family. I would also like to extend my condolence to all Ethiopians who are deeply affected by this tragedy. His colleagues, most of whom I met in my visit to Ethiopia in 2007, those dedicated and loyal servants of Ethiopia, deserve my profoundest sympathy.

In summarizing, I would like to say that the visions Mr. Meles had outlined for the nation will continue and I have full confidence Mr. Haile Mariam will step up to the plate and make us all proud that the transformation of Ethiopia will be unfettered.

May God bless Ethiopia!