

May 27, 2008

Sir Bob Geldof  
c/o William Morris Agency NY  
1325 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, New York 10019  
USA

Dear Sir Geldof,

As a world figure with demonstrated concern for social justice and human rights, we are writing to ask you to join millions of Ethiopians to urge Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to release Ethiopia's most popular pop singer, Tewodros Kassahun (a.k.a. Teddy Afro), who has been imprisoned without bail.

As widely reported in world media, Kassahun was arrested and charged last month in connection with an alleged hit-and-run incident that occurred in 2006. There is concern among those who closely follow the undemocratic track record of Zenawi's vengeful judicial system that Kassahun is targeted for his political beliefs and thus will not get a fair trial.

The people of Ethiopia have sought solace in Kassahun's songs, including the popular "[Jah Yasteseryal](#)," especially following the tragic massacre of innocent civilians in the aftermath of the disputed 2005 parliamentary elections.

From the historic 1984 *Band Aid* to the 2005 *Live 8* concert, you have made remarkable contributions in bringing the unimaginable human suffering in Africa to the conscience of the world. Thanks in part to the efforts of people like you, much of Africa is now making genuine progress toward democratic governance, rule of law and economic reforms.

Regrettably, the government of Ethiopia under Meles Zenawi has chosen to exercise the failed tactics of the bygone days of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Soviet Union, as exemplified by the deteriorating political, economic and social fabrics of the country.

Blaming the current global economic crisis as a cover for his corrupt economic policy, Zenawi continues to plunder and squander the meager resources of the country and donor's money to build a financial empire whose only purpose is to strengthen his repressive machinery and to fatten the foreign and domestic bank accounts of his family members and close collaborators.

- A May 2008 report of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs revealed that the economic conditions in Ethiopia are so precarious that immediate infusion of resources are needed to carry out life-saving interventions.

- The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) recently pointed out that eight million Ethiopians are chronically food insecure and at least 3.4 million Ethiopians are in need of emergency food relief (<http://mail.google.com/mail/?shva=1&ui=1>).
- According to a recent finding of [Save the Children](#), a U.S.-based independent global humanitarian organization, Ethiopia is among the 10 bottom-ranked countries with respect to an index that compares the well-being of mothers and children in 146 countries (<http://www.savethechildren.org/newsroom/2008/best-worst-countries-mother.html>).
- Even by the accounts of the U.S. Agency for International Development, as many as 9 million Ethiopians will need emergency food aid this year. (<http://mail.google.com/mail/?shva=1&ui=1>).

The government of Prime Minister Zenawi also has one of the worst records with respect to human rights and freedom of speech. He deceitfully uses donors’ money to bolster his repressive rule, as a recent commentary of Human Rights Watch summed up:

*“If the west was better informed about the war crimes and human rights abuses committed by Meles' military forces ....., western taxpayers might balk at the thought that their governments are providing Ethiopia with hundreds of millions of dollars of military and economic aid.”*

(<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/01/31/ethiop17947.htm>)

- According to a recent research report of the Committee to Protect Journalists, *“Ethiopian authorities have not relented in their long-standing pattern of repression of independent media through intimidation, arrests, criminal prosecutions, and legal and administrative restraints”* (<http://www.cpj.org/news/2008/africa/ethiopia05may08na.html>)
- The recent issue of the US Department of State “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices” on Ethiopia stated:

*“Human rights abuses reported during the year included: limitation on citizens' right to change their government...; unlawful killings, and beating, abuse, and mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters by security forces; poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly of those suspected of sympathizing with or being members of the opposition or insurgent groups; detention of thousands without charge and lengthy pretrial detention; infringement on citizens' privacy rights and frequent refusal to follow the law regarding search warrants; use of excessive force by security services in an internal conflict and counter-insurgency operations; restrictions on freedom of the press; arrest, detention, and harassment of journalists for publishing articles critical of the government; restrictions on freedom of assembly; limitations on freedom of association; ...; and government interference in union activities, including killing and harassment of union leaders.”* (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100481.htm>)

On the international front, the government of Meles Zenawi has implemented bizarre policies that are intended to prolong his authoritarian rule, while compromising the long-term security of the country and the stability in that volatile part of the world.

- A decade ago, Zenawi and his former comrade-in-arms, Isaias Afewerki, engaged in a senseless war that claimed tens of thousands of lives.
- Recently, he attacked Somalia, a country that had posed no tangible threat to the security of Ethiopia, and has committed the scarce resource of the country to conducting a protracted war, whose only purpose is the consolidation of his tyrannical rule as a “trustworthy ally in the War on Terror”.
- Currently, Zenawi is sowing seeds of animosity among the peoples of Sudan and Ethiopia, by illegally transferring Ethiopia’s sovereign land to the government of Sudan in return for protection against potential threats to his autocratic rule. This was clearly amplified in a recent report of Amnesty International that stated:

*“... the Sudanese authorities forcibly returned 15 recognised refugees, among them Atanaw Wasie, to Ethiopia. They were handed into the custody of Ethiopian security ... at the Ethiopia-Sudan border. Their current whereabouts in Ethiopia is unknown, and Amnesty International believes they are now at risk of enforced disappearance, arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture and unfair trials.”* (<http://impact.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR25/024/2007/en>)

In total disregard of the will of the people, Zenawi has completely wiped out almost all viable political opposition groups, and has created an ethnic-based, monolithic government that continues to terrorize the populace, and violently suppress any form of dissent.

- Despite his defeat in the May 2005 elections, Zenawi incarcerated leaders of the opposition on trumped up charges, massacred at least 193 peaceful demonstrators, and sent thousands of Ethiopians to concentration camps.
- As recently as last April, he conducted sham elections, excluding viable opposition through systematic intimidation, harassment and coercion. According to a Human Rights Watch report:

*“Candidates allied with the ruling [party] .... will run unopposed in the vast majority of constituencies across Ethiopia. ... Local ruling party officials ... systematically targeted opposition candidates for violence, intimidation, and other human rights abuses since the registration period began .... Particularly in areas with established opposition support, local officials ... arbitrarily detained opposition candidates, searched their property without warrant, and in some cases physically assaulted them.  
..... Some were arbitrarily detained and then interrogated or threatened by wereda administration officials in the presence of zonal officials. Others were arbitrarily detained by wereda police and then transferred to the custody of zonal security officials or federal soldiers.  
..... Prospective voters who might support the opposition have been similarly*

*targeted by the government. ....*

*Local authorities have also prevented the registration of opposition candidates in many constituencies where the opposition's success in 2005 parliamentary polls appeared to give them a chance at winning. .... In many cases, acts of intimidation have gone hand-in-hand with unjustifiable bureaucratic and procedural bars on free opposition participation in the polls. Some representatives of the NEB responsible for the registration of candidates at the constituency level have worked with local officials to block opposition registration. In some cases NEB agents have cancelled the registration of opposition candidates either without explanation or based on age and residency criteria despite clear evidence to the contrary. In other instances, NEB representatives provided the names of opposition candidates to local officials and to the police. Police in some of those constituencies then cordoned off access to NEB offices and physically prevented suspected opposition candidates from entering.*

The report further noted:

*"The run-up to these elections illustrates how meaningless the process of voting can be in an environment of intimidation and fear... The Ethiopian government must publicly commit itself to ending the systemic human rights abuses that have become part of the foundation of its hold on power."*

( <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/10/ethiop18510.htm>)

The current incarceration of Tewodros Kassahun is a continuation of the policy of the dictator to stifle the voice of the opposition, to terrorize musicians and singers from reflecting the misery of the people in the face of a vicious dictatorship, and to subject the population to a life of misery, ignorance, fear and devastating poverty.

John F. Kennedy once said, "*The rights of every person are diminished when the rights of one are threatened*". We believe that the incarceration of Kassahun in Zenawi's police state should be viewed as a threat against all those who stand for democracy, social justice and freedom from any form of oppression.

In light of your illustrious record on human rights and social justice, we are confident that you will use your influence to exert pressure on Zenawi to gain the freedom of your fellow singer-songwriter and to show your solidarity with the millions of Ethiopians who are gripped by devastating poverty and oppression under one of the most vicious dictatorships of the modern era.

Sincerely,

Selam Beyene, Ph.D.

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