

September 14, 2010

Joseph E. Stiglitz
University Professor
Uris Hall, Room 814/Columbia University
3022 Broadway, New York, NY 10027
Phone: +1 (212) 854-1481
Email: jes322@columbia.edu cgtmail@gmail.com

Dear professor Stiglitz,

It is with a great sense of dismay and incredulity that we learned about the invitation extended to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia as a keynote speaker to launch "The World and Africa" series organized by your Committee on [Global Thought \(CGE\) at Columbia](#).

By any measure of good governance, Prime Minister Zenawi [stands as one of the most vicious dictators and corrupt leaders of the modern era](#).

As recently as May of this year, he stunned the democratic world by declaring a 99.6% victory [in an election](#) that was characterized by fraud, intimidation, deceit and coercion. As documented by all credible human rights groups and other international observers, in the run-up to the elections, which were reminiscent of the dark days of communism and fascism, he utterly incapacitated all potential threats to his monopoly of power and subjected the populace to unimaginable degrees of social and economic suffering and political repression.

[Earlier in 2005](#), he had violently suppressed another popular movement for democracy, [massacred over 193](#) peaceful protesters, incarcerated all opposition leaders, and sent to concentration camps thousands of suspected members of opposition groups. To this day, one of the most popular leaders of the opposition, [Birtukan Mideksa](#), is languishing in prison on trumped-up charges.

As a man of letters, we trust that you are all too familiar with the Prime Minister's appalling records on academic freedom. In Zenawi's Ethiopia, universities and other institutions of learning are under a state of siege. Absolute loyalty to the ethno-centric regime is a pre-requisite for admission to colleges, and consideration for employment requires card-holding membership to the ruling party. Armed cadres planted among the students openly terrorize those with views that are at variance with the party line, and peaceful protests in campuses are [violently crushed](#), as was the case, for example, on April 18, 2001 when the Special Forces police opened [fire on a peaceful protest at Addis Ababa University and killed at least 41](#) people and wounded 250, or when in January of 1993, hundreds of students were shot and mutilated by Zenawi's police for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression.

As a respected economist and Nobel Prize laureate, we have no doubt in your appreciation of the spurious growth figures Zenawi fabricates to attract foreign aid, while the country he has governed with an iron fist for two decades ranks at the bottom of the developing world with respect to every index of human development. Despite the billions of dollars in aid that he has amassed and [embezzled](#) since he snatched power from another dictator, [a recent report](#) placed Ethiopia as the second poorest nation in the world, with 90% of the population living in poverty, and 61.5% deprived of adequate schooling.

We do understand your [close partnership](#) with the despot, and your effort to give him legitimacy in the aftermath of his dubious 99.6% victory. The people of Ethiopia still remember the similar effort by your colleague, [Jeffrey Sachs](#), who came to Zenawi's rescue with the [Yara Prize](#) following his crushing defeat in the 2005 elections. Nonetheless, we believe that the motive of giving the dictator a cover for [his crimes against humanity](#) through a platform at Columbia University would be inconsistent with the image of the university as a bulwark of human rights, social justice and good governance.

We, therefore, ask that you demonstrate your sensitivity to the plights of the millions of Ethiopians who are suffering under the yolk of dictatorship by withdrawing the invitation extended to Zenawi and using the forum instead for a more genuine discourse on the promotion of democracy and good governance in that part of the world.

The world has never forgiven those intellectuals who willfully embraced and promoted Hitler's atrocious policies that resulted in the extermination of millions of innocent lives. The verdict of

history will be equally unkind on the erudite of our time that collude and cuddle with dictators at the expense of the suffering of millions in one of the poorest countries in the world.

Sincerely,

Selam Beyene, Ph.D.

Beyene50@gmail.com

cc:

President Lee Bollinger
202 Low Library
535 West 116th Street, Mail Code 4309
New York, NY 10027 officeofthepresident@columbia.edu

University Programs and Events
Office of the President
Columbia University in the City of New York
202 Low Library
535 West 116th Street
New York, NY 10027
Email: worldleaders@columbia.edu

Office of the Secretary of the University
The Trustees of Columbia University
211 Low Library
535 West 116th Street
Mail Code 4324
New York, NY 10027
secretary@columbia.edu

Columbia Daily Spectator
2875 Broadway, Suite 303, New York, NY 10025
Email: info@columbiaspectator.com

Editor, *The New York Times*
executive-editor@nytimes.com