

Ethiopia -The truth, the whole truth and...

Alemayehu G. Mariam

2010-04-15,

Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has damned a recent report by the US Department of State into the country's human rights practices in 2009 as 'Lies, lies and implausible lies'. Alemayehu G. Mariam imagines how Zenawi might respond to a sample of the findings included in the document.

'Lies, lies and implausible lies,' blasted Meles Zenawi, the enfant terrible of Ethiopia, in describing the 11 March 2010 US State Department's ['Report on Human Rights Practices'](#) in Ethiopia. Apparently, the US State Department is not worth a damn when it comes to lying: 'The least one could expect from this report, even if there are lies is that they would be plausible ones,' snarled Zenawi. 'But that is not the case. It is very easy to ridicule it [report], because it is so full of loopholes (sic). They could very easily have closed the loopholes and still continued to lie.' His consigliere, Bereket Simon chimed in, 'It is the same old junk. It's a report that intends to punish the image (sic) of Ethiopia and try if possible to derail the peaceful and democratic election process.'

So here is a representative sample of the implausible, ridiculous and junk lies of the US State Department and the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth of Zenawi's dictatorship:

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #1:

There were numerous credible reports of unlawful detention of opposition candidates and their supporters. Opposition UDJ party president Birtukan Mideksa, whose pardon was revoked and life sentence reinstated in December 2008, remained in prison throughout the year. She was held in solitary confinement until June, despite a court ruling that indicated it was a violation of her constitutional rights. She was also denied access to visitors except for a few close family members, despite a court order granting visitor access without restrictions. There were credible reports that Birtukan's mental health deteriorated significantly during the year.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #1:

A humongous LIE! Birtukan is actually at the 'Akaki Hilton Spa and Resort' doing R&R (rest and relaxation). Her health situation is in perfect condition. She may have gained a few kilos, but other than that, and that may be for lack of exercise, she is in perfect health. All the lies about Birtukan's bad health situation are made up by the 'usual suspects' who shall remain nameless. She is not denied access to visitors, but she is shy and prefers to visit only with her mother and daughter. In short, she is having the time of her life. Or as the French say, 'C'est la Vie!'

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #2:

The constitution and law provide citizens the right to change their government peacefully. In local and by-elections held in 2008, virtually all of the more than three million seats open at the federal and local levels were taken unopposed by the ruling EPRDF and allied parties. Of the 3.6 million local and by-election seats open to be contested, opposition parties won three.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #2:

The State Department should know better than telling this ridiculous lie. The opposition won only three seats because 'there is no alternative in the opposition.' Everybody knows that including 'most

Western governments [who] want Meles to continue because there is no alternative in the opposition. As long as the elections are semi-democratic, they'll probably stay quiet, keep giving aid, hope for liberalisation of the economy and leave full democracy for later.' Here is a hint: The opposition will completely lose again in next month's election regardless of how many candidates they run because they don't understand a simple fact about elections: 'The people who cast the votes do not decide an election; the people who count the votes do.'

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #3:

Although the constitution and law prohibit the use of torture and mistreatment, there were numerous credible reports that security officials tortured, beat, and mistreated detainees. Opposition political party leaders reported frequent and systematic abuse and intimidation of their supporters by police and regional militias... Abuses reportedly include being hung by the wrists for several hours, bound by chains and beaten, held in solitary confinement for several days to weeks or months, subjected to mental torture such as harassment and humiliation...

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #3:

Lies! Torture is a matter of semantics. The alleged torture-victims in the State Department report have an unusually low threshold for psychological and physical pain and discomfort. They also exaggerate stuff. The truth is that the so-called torture-victims are all wusses and wimps. Intimidation is a state of mind as is solitary confinement. Some people just scare easy. Individuals in solitary confinement are not really 'solitary' because they can talk to themselves all day and all night. It is a bold-faced lie for the State Department to say, 'the [Ethiopian] constitution and law prohibit the use of torture and mistreatment.'

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #4:

The country has three federal and 117 regional prisons. There are several unofficial detention centers operating throughout the country. Prison and pretrial detention center conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. Severe overcrowding was common, especially in sleeping quarters. Juveniles were often incarcerated with adults, sometimes with adults who were awaiting execution. Men and women prisoners were generally, but not always, separated... The government continued to prevent International Committee of the Red Cross representatives from visiting police stations and federal prisons throughout the country including those where opposition, civil society, and media leaders were held.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #4:

Lies, dirty lies! The so-called prisons are actually popular spas and resorts, as Birtukan can testify. The reason they are 'severely overcrowded' is because of high popular demand. It's 'la dolce vita' (the sweet life) as they say in Italian in those spas, or 'c'est la vie' as they say in French. As to juveniles, women and condemned prisoners being held together, what difference does that make? A criminal is a criminal. The Red Cross? They are too nosy, always asking questions. Shouldn't they be helping out flood, earthquake and disaster victims somewhere else instead of sniffing around spas and resorts?

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #5:

Although the constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, the government frequently did not observe these provisions in practice... The federal police acknowledged that many of its members as well as regional police lacked professionalism. In July the Addis Ababa Police Commission fired 444 staff members, including high-ranking officials, for involvement in serious crimes including armed

robbery, rape, and theft. There were no prosecutions of those dismissed.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #5:

Another pack of lies! The State Department is putting words and numbers in the mouths of the Police Commission. The allegedly 'fired' police officials are still in their jobs continuing to do armed robbery, rape, and theft.

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #6:

Authorities regularly detained persons without warrants and denied access to counsel and family members, particularly in outlying regions. Although the law requires detainees to be brought to court and charged within 48 hours, this generally was not respected in practice... While in pretrial detention, authorities allowed such detainees little or no contact with legal counsel. Police continued to enter private residences and arrest individuals without warrants.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #6:

First of all, the whole due process thing is overrated. Lawyers, warrants, procedure and all that legal mumbo jumbo are a big waste of time. The applicable principle is that one is presumed guilty until proven innocent. So, why do guilty people need lawyers? It does not make sense. Why should warrants be required to arrest guilty people? Anyway, even if these people did not commit a crime, they definitely thought about committing one. They are guilty, guilty, guilty! The State Department is obviously pushing some new-fangled Western idea that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. What a bunch of liars!

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #7:

In May the director general of the Federal Police reported that 65 per cent of the 45,000 criminal cases filed at the federal first instance court in 2008 were eventually dropped due to lack of evidence or witnesses... There was a large backlog of juvenile cases, and accused children often remained in detention with adults until officials heard their cases.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #7:

As the old saying goes, there are lies, damned lies and statistics. The State Department is fabricating false statistics to show that the regime is going soft on criminals. That is a lie! It is a well-known fact that a criminal case is filed only after a person has been convicted of committing a crime. To claim that nearly 30,000 cases were dropped for lack of evidence is to unfairly suggest that the vast majority of those charged were not guilty. How could that be so? The director general of the Federal Police never reported such statistics. It is all a figment of the State Department's warped imagination.

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #8:

Political party leaders reported incidents of telephone tapping and other electronic eavesdropping. In May a former employee of ETC, the state-run monopoly telecom and Internet provider, reported from self-imposed exile that the government had ordered ETC employees to unlawfully record citizens' private telephone conversations... The government used a widespread system of paid informants to report on the activities of particular individuals. Kebele officials have been reported to go from house to house demanding that residents attend ruling coalition meetings. Those persons who do not attend party meetings reportedly have difficulty obtaining basic public services from their kebeles.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #8:

Ding, dong! All lies told by paranoid opposition leaders who are afraid of their own shadows. By using the phrases 'widespread system of paid informants', 'forced attendance of party meetings', etc., the State Department unfairly suggests that the country has become a police state. Not true! If they had done their 'investigations' right and interviewed the 'informants', they would have easily found out that the 'informants' are actually researchers doing field studies in social anthropology using 'participant observation' techniques. Kebele officials never force people to attend party meetings. The people just love to party and show up uninvited.

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #9:

During the year the government loosened restrictions on the delivery of food aid from donor organizations into the five zones of the Somali region in which military activity was the most intense. Approximately 83 per cent of food aid reached beneficiaries, a significant improvement from the previous year.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #9:

Liars! The State Department in its usual manner is cooking up numbers. No food aid reached beneficiaries in the five zones of the Somali region.

IMPLAUSIBLE, RIDICULOUS AND JUNK LIE #10:

The government restricted academic freedom during the year. Authorities did not permit teachers at any level to deviate from official lesson plans and actively discouraged political activity and association of any kind on university campuses. Frequent reports continued of uniformed and plainclothes police officers on and around university and high school campuses. College students were reportedly pressured to pledge allegiance to the EPRDF to secure enrollment in universities or postgraduation government jobs. Non-EPRDF members were also reportedly denied teachers' benefits, transferred to undesirable posts, and restricted in promotions.

THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH #10:

Ha! Who would believe in their right minds anything those fog-headed college students and their absent-minded professors say? There is a good reason why they are not allowed to engage in politics or deviate from the official lesson plan. We know from personal experience decades ago that you if give students and their professors an inch, they will take a mile. If you give them 'academic freedom', they will soon be yapping in the streets for speech freedom, press freedom, associational freedom, assembly freedom and all sorts of other freedoms. That is just too much freedom for those crazy students and their air-headed professors to handle.

It is just too bad the US State Department can't handle the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!

BROUGHT TO YOU BY PAMBAZUKA NEWS

* This article first appeared on the [Huffington Post](#).

* [Alemayehu G. Mariam](#) is a professor of political science at [California State University](#), San Bernardino, and an attorney based in Los Angeles.

* Please send comments to editor@pambazuka.org or comment online at [Pambazuka News](#).

<http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/63713>

