

## PM Hailemariam at Helm of “Emerging Giant” Dependable Operating Ground, But Formidable Challenges Remain Challenges of PM Hailemariam Desalegn

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Since the illness of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was reported for the first time in July 2012, we have heard of several speculations and analyses about alleged political quagmire and deep division within the ruling Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Some analysts even went too far to predict that the country was on the brink of disintegration claiming the ‘internal feud within the party and the absence of clear successor as the late premier was the alpha and omega decision maker and the master mind of all activities’.

### Supportive Ground

However, the reverse is happening since the death of PM Meles Zenawi back to 20 August 2012. In line with the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) article 75, the Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn took the duties of Mr. Meles immediately until his assignment was officially endorsed by the national parliament on 21 September 2012. The stalemate in bureaucracy, significant security problem and allegedly deep fracture within the party, the state and the government has not been seen so far. There may be several reasons for the peaceful and constitutional nature of power transfer that has happened for the first time in the country’s modern history. However, the increasing maturity of the democratic institutions (DIs) including the House of Peoples’ Representative and the House of Federations’, the willingness and commitment shown by many senior government officials to preserve the constitution and the decentralization of power and authority with the regions and lower forms of administrations contributed a lot to this effect.

On 16 October 2012, the newly appointed Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn responds on the questions raised from the members of the House of Peoples’ Representatives.. The new Prime Minister had refreshing and masterly answers to concerns about a wide range of issues including the soaring inflation, the Nile dam project, quality of education, the planned railway project and good governance. In his presentation, the Premier admitted inflation persists as one of the major challenges of his administration. Regarding the Nile dam project he said more than 11 percent of the project had been executed and the project would be finalized according to plan. He also granted lack of good governance as being a major challenge for his administration.

If we compare the first days of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn with the long-time performance of his predecessor, (since comparison is unavoidable), differences are a matter of reality. The obvious difference has to do with personal traits. Furthermore, when a huge and significant difference in several aspects. Mr. Meles was assigned as the President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1991, the main priorities of the general public towards the government were merely very basic ones, including the need to end the arbitrary killings and massive imprisonment without any trial, to ensure a relative peace and stability across the country, to defuse tensions and conflicts across the country mainly along ethnic and ideological lines and most importantly to save the country from explosion and disintegration into many pieces.

Of course, the late Premier achieved astonishing results in many aspects of the above mentioned areas and beyond. He tried to establish 'free and fair' justice system at least in relative terms. We don't often hear now imprisonments without the court knowledge and arrest warrant issued. Of course, we often hear imprisonments along political lines and for simply exercising constitutional rights. It is also obvious that the procedures on their own only do not prevent illegal activities absolutely; rather, accountability in the administration of justice remains a valid concern.

In terms of ensuring peace and stability, the late Premier has a great deal to his credit. Today, Ethiopia is considered one of the safest places in Africa by many foreigners and diplomatic communities. The pacification work has been done on two tracks. One was through establishing and developing a capable security force to avoid and mitigate possible attacks by the armed groups within or outside the country. In this regard, the country has achieved commendable results mainly after the surprising attack of the Eritrean government back in 1998. Since then the Defense Ministry has been advancing itself both in manpower and technologies. The other method employed was through dialogue and negotiation with the opposition groups and armed rebels across the country. For this mission, the Meles administration has used religious leaders and local elders as the main peace brokers.

Meles was also successful in defusing ethnic tensions significantly in the past two decades. The Federal form of government that puts in place the organizing principles of the Constitution in 1995 contributed a lot for this effect. Since then the power accumulated in the hands of the central government have been devolved to the regional states and city administrations with a relative freedom of self administration. Different ethnic groups also have gained their right to be judged, schooled through their chosen means of communication and develop their languages alongside promoting their cultures. The country which was expected to explode with the problem of ethnicity twenty years ago is successfully managed to mitigate the problem under Meles administration.

Meles was also very successful in crafting a new form of developmental state ideology that pulls millions of people out of severe poverty. The success registered with micro and small scale industries, the double digit economic growth registered for the past eight years, the inception and execution of large scale projects (like hydro-electric dams) are the few that can be mentioned as positive developments under PM Meles Zenawi's achievements which have been reinforced by perceptions of world leaders as an inspirational and iconic de-facto leader of Africa.

## **Challenges**

The new Prime Minister has taken over a totally different Ethiopia compared to its conditions in the early '90s. Today's Ethiopia is not a hopeless, shattered state with poverty and brutal dictatorship. Rather; it is the country with promising future in economy, democracy and social development. Therefore, the expectations are also big and different by now. Now the demand is not about ending arbitrary killings and massacre across the country as it was when Mr. Meles, took the helm of power, but to ensure further openness, accountability and rule of law in the country. Ensuring good governance mainly in the lower forms of government administrations and combating corruption towards its elimination are also the other major expectation of the new Premier alongside with effective and democratic handlings of religious and ethnic based demands.

Today, PM Hailemariam is not expected only to bring bread for the survival of the population for a single day rather to maintain or increase the double digit economic growth and fair distribution of wealth among the society. The new Premier is expected to further reduce the rate of inflation in the coming few months. As Mr. Hailemariam has a burden of effectively executing the blueprints of the late Premier, such as the ambitious plan (widely known as the Growth and Transformation Plan) People are also expecting him to adopt his own big development projects that would effectively reflect his legacy in the future. Equally important is the fact that people in and outside Ethiopia will be eager to watch how PM Hailemariam maintains an enhanced posture attained by the late Premier on the regional, continental and international planes with particular reference to Ethiopia's role in the Inter governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) the African Union the United Nations.