

NORWAY, ETHIOPIA and “YARA FOUNDATION”

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Ethiopia, Norway and “Yara Foundation” in Perspective

The year 2005 will go down as momentous and memorable in the contemporary history of Ethiopia for a number of reasons. It is the year of an ongoing and bloody struggle for democracy, much as was the case in Georgia and Ukraine recently. It also turns out to be the infamous year of “Yara Foundation” and its curious cash prize to an incumbent head of the ruling junta in Ethiopia. The biggest multinational fertilizer business called “Yara” (formerly known as Norsk Hydro), based in Norway, is described as “the world’s largest supplier of plant nutrition.” Yara grabbed the headlines in mid-July when it announced offering a controversial cash award of US\$200, 000 (more like a kickback or an agent’s commission) to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (PMM), who has been buying millions of US\$ dollars worth of Yara fertilizer for the last five years for his party’s state monopoly. “Yara Foundation” made the gratuitous announcement on the heels of highly publicized fraudulent derailment by the regime of PMM, of the democratic process and aftermath of the 15 May elections in Ethiopia. And, when Addis Ababa residents went to the streets on 8 June, to peacefully and rightfully protest election rigging by his EPRDF regime, PMM personally presided over the cold-blooded murder of at least *42 innocent unarmed Ethiopians*--not to mention hundreds injured and thousands jailed and tortured. The final undisputed outcome of the election impasse is still outstanding more than three months later.

Besides, the vast majority of Ethiopians know that their country is still chafing under debilitating impoverishment, hunger, disease, angst, intimidation and insecurity under an oppressive EPRDF regime. *Ethiopia has not known a Green Revolution in the last 14 years or before.* Under such circumstances, YARA’s claim, *inter alia*, that PMM has taken “decisive steps towards increasing food production and reducing poverty in one of the poorest countries of the developing world” is, to say the least, not just scandalous but a callous *insult to the sense of dignity even in poverty* of the Ethiopian people. They know themselves and their conditions better than others at a distance whose relationship is often with those in high places who deal with them through the nexus of mutual business or political interests. Consequently, the Yara phenomenon has elicited intense

outrage and continued protests in Ethiopia and abroad. So far, however, the authorities of “YARA Foundation” have not responded to the challenges and objections raised on *the premises, the timing, and the ethics* (or lack thereof) that characterize the award. This brief essay is an analysis in perspective of the propriety of the YARA award and a call for the responsible authorities to reconsider their grave ill-considered decision.

In the annals of history, there are few countries and peoples still extant, bearing their original name and habitat as Ethiopia and Ethiopians. The Greeks and Romans as well as the Persians, the Jews and other peoples of the ancient world have known Ethiopia. It is cited throughout the Hebrew Bible beginning in Genesis 2 and revisited in Acts 8 of the New Testament. The current state of research in paleoanthropology confirms the original manger of humankind to be in the Afar region of Hadar in Ethiopia—where the most complete three-and-a-half million years old humanoid fossil nicknamed *Lucy* was found in 1974. Throughout history Ethiopians and the outside world have interacted in war and in peace. Ethiopia is the only black African land to establish and continue to maintain a presence in Deir Sultan of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Since mediaeval times contemporary Europeans have developed increasing curiosity about Ethiopia, which in time expressed itself in some benign and, more often than not, malign contacts initiated by them. During the era of colonialism in the nineteenth century when European colonialists controlled the entire continent, Ethiopia alone successfully fought and acquitted its independence and was dubbed by the colonialists “the last problem in Africa.” After its resounding victory over the Italians in 1896, Ethiopia became a beacon of freedom and dignity for all black peoples. But, in the 1930’s Fascist Italy tried once more to subdue the country and, after five years of protracted struggle, Ethiopia again evicted the Fascist marauders from the mainland although its coastlines were alienated and it was rendered landlocked. Like much of Africa, Ethiopia remains a rich land inhabited by mostly impoverished rural people. All too often in the last sixty years it has become a poster child for famine and a theater for endless domestic and regional deadly conflicts--especially during the Cold War years. As a result, by 1991 Ethiopia and the region of Northeast Africa have been rendered veritable carcass areas.

Norway is a country whose distant Nordic roots can be stretched back to prehistoric times of some 5000 years B.C. and then to the Viking era of the 9th Century A.D., tangled with German, English and Swedish history along the way. Its more recent history commences in 1905 when it separated from Sweden and became an independent state. With a population of less than 5 million, Norway is one of the richest countries in the world with more than US\$ 150 billion dollars budget surplus--generated largely by its enormous oil and gas assets--invested abroad. In terms of overseas development assistance (ODA), Norway is the most generous country in the world, disbursing the highest official amount of its GDP in aid (0.92 %) to the developing world. Norway has also been an active participant in world affairs, particularly in areas of conflict resolution and humanitarian relief, through its numerous NGOs and churches as well as its governmental institutions. The country has a stable constitutional monarchy and a welfare capitalist economy that has served its people well. In addition, Norway has the global limelight focused on it, because of the special honor it enjoys presiding over the annual

ceremony in Oslo awarding the prestigious *Nobel Peace Prize* to respective winner/s. Some of us, who have had occasion to know Norwegians as visitors in Ethiopia and also by interacting with them in their homeland, have learned to appreciate how compassionate, modest and sincere they generally tend to be in their relations with others.

Relations between Norway and Ethiopia are of relatively recent vintage. Emperor Haile Sellassie relates in his [Autobiography](#)¹ that, at the time of the Italian Fascist invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, then King of Norway His Majesty Haakon VII, had initially written to Him indicating that Norway would not recognize Italy's claim to Ethiopia. The forum that facilitated Ethiopian-Norwegian international relations is the General Assembly of the newly formed United Nations Organization in the late 1940's, where the post-WW II disposal of Italian colonies in Africa—Libya, Somalia and Eritrea--was being deliberated on. The future status of Eritrea and Somalia were a matter of vital interest to Ethiopia, which itself was struggling to stabilize after five years of Fascist invasion (1936-1941). In 1950 the UN set up a fact-finding Commission on Eritrea, composed of Burma, South Africa, Norway, Guatemala and Pakistan. Norwegian representative, Mr. Justice Erling Qvale, was of the view that except for the western region, the rest of Eritrea should be returned to Ethiopia. Eventually, Norway went along the majority position of voting for Eritrea to be a “unit federated with Ethiopia under the Ethiopian Crown” by UNGA Resolution 390A (V).

The other contact between Ethiopia and Norway occurred also at the United Nations in 1959 when retired First Secretary General Trygve Lie of Norway was appointed to become Arbitrator between Ethiopia on the one hand and Italy—as a UN Trustee in Somalia on the future of Somalia. Although Mr. Lie tried hard to draw the two parties closer to agreement on the basis of his draft *compromis d'arbitrage*, the UN's effort ended up being an “Exercise in Futility.”² Still, these exercises were good enough for Norwegians and Ethiopians to draw closer together, in time establish diplomatic relations and sustain mutually beneficial interactions. In the 1950's, Emperor Haile Sellassie awarded the mission of setting up Ethiopian naval operations and training cadets in Massawa to Norway—even as Sweden was doing the same for an Ethiopian Air Force in Debre Zeit. Norway's king Olav V paid a state visit to Ethiopia in 1966. Since the 1970's Norwegian NGO's such as [Save The Children](#) helped alleviate famine in Ethiopia. Due to prevailing Cold War alliances and outlooks during the difficult years--1975-1991--relations between the two countries were on occasion strained, but not snapped. Norway hosts a sizable number of Ethiopian refugees who are productive residents. Along with some of its Nordic neighbors, Norway also carries on missionary activities in Ethiopia.

Let us now fast forward to recent events in 2005 that have prompted the dialogue at hand on **Norway, Ethiopia and the “Yara Foundation.”** The quiet, almost sleepy but burgeoning relations between Ethiopia and Norway were struck with lightning in the middle of July 2005 with the news of “Yara Foundation” cash award announcement for Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia. Outside of global business tycoons, stock market numbers crunchers and Internet junkies, most people did not know who or what “Yara” is, let alone its “Foundation.” Now that the “Yara” affair has become public, it behooves us to take a serious look at it and make a careful scrutiny as an object lesson on

the pitfalls of mixing business with politics, especially as it relates to the developing world.

As one expert in the matter put it “fertilizer is to the soil what blood is to the body.” Indeed, for a country like Ethiopia where at least 85% of its population is rural and the mainstay of its subsistence is agriculture and animal husbandry, the availability and affordability of fertilizer is critical along with a host of other inputs. In the years immediately preceding EPRDF’s seizure of power in 1991, the supply of fertilizer to the farmer was subsidized but the produce could only be sold to state agencies. After 1991 the policy was changed whereby the farmer buys fertilizer from the parastatals of EPRDF but can sell produce in the open market. In a 2001 comparative study³ of “Total Fertilizer Nutrient Use” and “Per Capita Agricultural Production Index “ using FAO data, figures for Ethiopia and Kenya for selected years are as follows.

Total Fertilizer Nutrient Use Per Capita Agricultural Production Index

<u>Year</u>	<i>In thousands of metric tons</i>		<i>1989-91=100</i>	
	<u>Ethiopia</u>	<u>Kenya</u>	<u>Ethiopia</u>	<u>Kenya</u>
1980-84	41.2	75.8	116.1	93.1
1985-89	71.6	115.0	100.0	100.7
1990-94	92.7	112.7	94.6	92.7
1995-00	156.0	126.5	98.5	86.6

The world’s first fertilizer producing and supplying company formed in Norway in 1905 known as Hydro Norsk/Hydro Agri, was christened in March 2004 as Yara⁴. It is the biggest fertilizer company in the world and growing bigger every year as global fertilizer consumption rate increases annually. What then brings Mr. Zenawi and Yara together? In 2000, the Meles regime decided to sideline other, longtime suppliers, in favor of Yara, agreeing to pay it more than the going market price per metric ton. Since then, Yara has become the major exporter of fertilizer to Ethiopia, albeit a relatively small market by Yara’s profit calculus. Companies like Ethiopian Amalgamated Limited, which serviced the supply of fertilizers from the plant to the farm, streamlined the process and helped reduce the cost. Yara, however, shipped the fertilizer to Djibouti from where Mr. Meles Zenawi’s EPRDF’s designated parastatal agency with a fancy name-- Agricultural Inputs Supply Corporation or Enterprise (AISCO/E) or another so appointed body takes over. About two-thirds of the fertilizer supply is then distributed to subsidiary parastatals of EPRDF’s ethnic regions namely Dinsho in Oromia, Ambasel in Amhara, Guna in Tigray, Wondo in Southern Peoples of Ethiopia. AISCO/E or its variant reserves the rest of the supply to use as politically expedient.

Premises of Yara Foundation Award to PM Meles in 2005

In March 2005 Mr. Thorleif Enger, Yara's contented President and CEO declared, "We feel that we have reason to celebrate and be proud of our first year at Yara... We maintained our focus and delivered strong results throughout 2004..." He went on to announce that as part of its Centennial Celebration, Yara was embarking on "a new commitment to combat hunger on the African continent, support for UN Millennium Project (of Jeffrey Sachs) and respond to Kofi Annan's call for a green revolution in Africa. He then spelled out three initiatives to achieve the said goal, the first of which is "The establishment of a Yara Green Revolution in Africa Foundation" because among other things, "...Africa is the only continent that has yet to harvest the benefits of modern agriculture." These are noble and laudable goals coming from the head of the financially well-endowed fertilizer business enterprise. Suddenly, barely six months after the launching of the Yara Foundation was made, it was announced (14 July 2005) that PM Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia was going to be the first recipient of \$200,000 cash award from the Yara Foundation. The first question that arises here is, "*Did Yara Foundation's decision-making body have the requisite time to prepare some guidelines and criteria and engage in proper field research, consultations with concerned persons including farmers, poring over the dizzying statistical data—often self-serving--to determine the modalities and propriety concerns on managing and dispensing of Foundation emoluments to worthy beneficiaries?*" Political decisions can be made in nanoseconds if need be, but serious decisions with serious implications and consequences such as business partners awarding "Foundation" money cannot be made in such cavalier manner without serious deliberations and without adequate long-term data of achievement worthy of encouragement.

In the official announcement of Yara's the first African *Green Revolution* award, it is said that PM Meles is being recognized "for his contribution to improved *food security and human nutrition* in ways that also *protects the environment*." This is an astounding statement about the contemporary state of affairs in Ethiopia that flies smack in the face of all reliable facts. "What Green Revolution in Ethiopia?" No knowledgeable Ethiopian or non-Ethiopian has ever or can ever utter Ethiopia and Green Revolution in the last 14 years of the Meles regime or at any time in recent history of the country. Mr. Desalegn Rahmato, who has studied the peasantry, land tenure and development in Ethiopia for some 40 years. In a recent 2003 paper titled "Access To Resources And Livelihood Insecurity" in Ethiopia⁵, he cautions his readers that statistical measures of "crop yield" should be related to "labor productivity." In so doing, he has this to say on the state of agricultural productivity in Ethiopia in the 1980's and 1990's

"Average crop yield in the decade of the 1980's was 11.1 quintal per hectare while in the 1990's the comparable figure was 10.3. The highest yield achieved was 12.8 per hectare in 1982/83 and 12.5 quintals per hectare in 1988/89, both during the Derg. These figures have not been equaled in the decade of the 1990's. This is remarkable because much more fertilizer and improved seeds were distributed in the 1990's than during the Derg. The best yield under the current agricultural strategy was achieved in 1996/97 when productivity reached 11.7 quintals per hectare."

Dessalegn notes further that in a 2002 Institute of Development Studies survey for the World Bank on “destitution in northeast Ethiopia” it was determined that there is “growing impoverishment” in the region. When he and another colleague surveyed the region, they asked respondents there if there has been an “improvement or deterioration of well-being” in their communities in the last 10 years (1990-2000), the vast majority replied, “people are poorer now than before.” Among other things, the litany of beatification of PM Meles that the Yara Foundation has heaped on him also notes that he has “secured ownership rights” for the poor. *In fact what he has secured is insecurity rights for the poor by alienating all land from the Ethiopian farmer in the rural areas, thereby inextricably linking food insecurity with land insecurity.* The landless farmer is rendered vulnerable to the vagaries of the regime’s parastatals that whimsically manipulate the distribution and sale of vital fertilizer not to promote productivity primarily but to exact loyalty to the regime. In effect, monopoly of fertilizer supply is also a way to fleece the farmer, making him perennially indebted to the sharks of the regime’s so-called credit establishments but in actual fact debit machinery while the regime becomes richer and richer at the expense of the farmer. A study made in 2001 and published by Development Studies Association on “Fertilizer Marketing and Credit in Ethiopia”⁶ reveals an astonishing pattern of exploitation of the Ethiopian farmer by the Meles regime. The world market price of fertilizer, like any other commodity varies from year to year and supplier to supplier. Normally, one expects that those “responsible” in a developing and famine-prone country like Ethiopia, would do what they can to pass on to the poor farmer any savings they have when the global price is down. What the Meles regime does, it turns out, is the opposite. When it buys for less from abroad, it sells the commodity for more to the farmer at home. Here are figures for the years 1996 through 2001, comparing purchase price in U.S. Dollars per metric ton for DAP brand of fertilizer and then the sale price to poor Ethiopian farmer in EtBirr (One US\$ is about 8 EtBirr).

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fertilizer Price in USD</u>	<u>Local Price in Eth. Birr</u>
1996	220.24	2000.00
1997	209.61	2449.60
1998	210.23	2237.00
1999	187.52	2330.00
2000	145.66	2648.30
2001	177.17	2698.30

Let alone to the expert, even to the layman, these stark figures easily show how the state-owned and operated business of fertilizer supply in Ethiopia by Mr. Meles and his regime exploiting rather than subsidizing or supporting the Ethiopian farmer. What is bought for less from abroad is sold for more in the country. Yara Foundation experts and advisers as well as others can calculate the respective ways and rates of the Ethiopian farmer. It is

much easier to say that, *for the most part, the opposite of what the “Yara Foundation” attributes to Meles gratuitously is in fact the fundamental truth.* However, for reasons that are opaque but not stated, it appears that Yara had already decided to give him some money anyway. It is very taxing to spend time and energy trying to show PMM’s patrons at Yara that they have played havoc with the truth and thereby done a severe injustice to the impoverished, oppressed, exploited and insecure people of Ethiopia today. The Yara manifesto declares on behalf of the EPRDF regime that “in spite of the fact that about 40% of the population is malnourished, Ethiopia’s food security program aims at *enabling 4-5 million chronically food insecure to attain food security within 3-5 years,* (emphasis added) a major step towards accomplishing the Hunger Millennium Development Goal”. Since when are politicians or guerrillas rewarded for promises or plans they make for the future? It is instructive to recall here what Professor Jeffrey Sachs, the very person involved in the Yara Foundation, Special Adviser to UN Sec.Gen. Kofi Annan and Mr. Meles’s latest guru had said about a year ago in an interview with IRIN⁷. He stated that Ethiopia “is a country living on the edge...almost half of the population lives on around \$0.33 a day.” And he is getting ready to hand money to Mr Meles, for lording it over the poor who are subsisting on \$0.33 a day—which, by the way, is an inflated figure.

The fact of the matter is that *Mr. Meles and his junta did not take over Addis Ababa to serve Ethiopia, to fight poverty, to keep the country’s integrity, to respect its flag, to honor its history or to bring about peace and development to the vast majority of Ethiopians.* Their openly declared aim was first and foremost to guarantee the secession of Eritrea, to build Eritrea and Tigray at the expense of the rest of the country, to alienate the land from the Ethiopian people, to disarm everyone except themselves, impoverish everyone else but themselves and *to rule by the gun (naeft) wearing coat and tie.* As one writer who knows them well said recently Meles Zenawi’s regime rules by “conspiracy, intimidation, lies, violence, murder, kidnappings, detentions and secretiveness like a medieval court.”⁸ One wonders if Yara Foundation, Jeffrey Sachs and other involved personages are saying that all this is beside the point. Granted statistics are the cheapest and the most easily concoctable commodity in the world. But, unless Mr Meles and his sycophants abroad are using self-serving statistics out of whole cloth and playing badminton with them, the real reality in Ethiopia does not support the premises marshaled by Yara Foundation.

A recent (12 August 2005) article by John Donnelly in [The Boston Globe](#)⁹ describes the current worsening famine situation in Africa and based on “Famine Early Warning Systems Network funded by US Agency for International Development. The report portrays the risk level and emergency status of famine, which is plotted on a map of Africa. Accordingly, it is noted that, “28 of Africa’s 54 nations are identified as having some degree of food shortages.” Of these, the countries in the severe Emergency level—from least to worst affected people (in millions) today, as we speak, in 2005, in the year of Yara award to Meles Zenawi, are as follows:

Somalia:1.0m Niger:2.5m Zimbabwe:3.9m Sudan:8.5 **ETHIOPIA:13m**

Furthermore, the Network also cautions that in Ethiopia an additional 2.5 to 3 million people may need help by year's end. Thus, in effect the country whose ruler is touted as the paragon of Green Revolution in Africa by Yara and Sachs is in charge of 16 million people in an acute need of food. "Is this worthy of an award of even a symbolic \$20.00?" Or, does that not matter! It is hoped that the foregoing few paragraphs show that the premises offered by Yara Foundation to rationalize its decision to pick PMM in Ethiopia as the poster child of Green Revolution in Africa are full of holes and unwarranted. A matter of this seriousness dealing with life and death issues of millions of people should be handled carefully and with deliberate speed by Yara, not in a cavalier way just to get something done for an anniversary.

Timing of the Yara Foundation Award

The next relevant point to be raised with regard to the July 2005 announcement of the first Yara Foundation Award is its timing. Beginning in May of the year, Ethiopia has been cast on a roller coaster connected with alternating democratic dreams and nightmares. There is no doubt that like in other areas of the world, there was some modest coverage in Norwegian and generally in Nordic media about the May 15 elections and the cauldron following it. As Norwegians know there is an old-fashioned saying found in an old-fashioned book: "There is a time for everything...". What added salt to the wound Ethiopians at home and abroad was sustaining was the way Meles was doing everything to steal the election by nullifying the expressed will of the Ethiopian people. The regime's brazen intent not to bow to the will of the people took the form of cold-blooded murder of innocent citizens who came out to protest vote rigging by Meles and his henchmen. On 8 June Meles assumed the role of military Marshall and personally took control of his special forces called Agazi trained not to defend the country against foreign invaders but as sharpshooters trained to kill Ethiopians at will. That day, 36 (and by the end of July it was 42) unarmed peaceful demonstrators were shot and killed, a number of them shot at close range execution style, which indicates that the shooters were in no danger as they were killing their victims. In a [BBC Hard Talk](#)¹⁰ interview with Mr. Stephen Sacker in early July, Mr. Meles admitted that he personally gave the order to his crack troops to "stop the insurrection." He did not want democracy in Ethiopia to take shape the way it had in Georgia and Ukraine. The interviewer reminded PMM that the student demonstrators had no guns for insurrection. Mr. Meles said until "an independent investigation" proves otherwise he will continue to believe what his forces tell him. Besides, he pointed out that 80% of the demonstrators were "unemployed youth" anyway. In that interview Mr. Meles also referred to the murdered as his "compatriots." As this essay is being written the whole world has been glued to television sets watching the struggles of Israeli soldiers Vs Israeli settlers in Gaza. Israeli soldiers were unarmed because the struggle is between compatriots. The soldiers took everything by way of words and pushing and shoving, but in the end the soldiers managed to evacuate Gaza. Mr. Meles either does not know what "compatriot" means or he does not have Ethiopian compatriots. If those killed in cold blood on 8 June were his compatriots he should have immediately been looking for the anti-Ethiopian culprits who killed them and bring them, at least, to his kind of 'justice'. However, *to this day, Mr. Meles and his criminals who*

murdered the defenseless demonstrators have not been brought to “justice.” The grieving families have not had any closure or restitution.

The President and his associates at Yara Foundation could not have been oblivious to these developments when they made the shocking announcement in mid-July, barely a month following these tragic events in Ethiopia. *Unless too much wealth becomes a kind of cataract to the eyes of conscience, even doing something right becomes truly right when it is done at the right time.* Decisions are made on given issues not in discrete isolation of parts but in broader context and deeper perspective. And in this case the Yara award to Meles--awarding money or anything else to a political tyrant--when the blood of his victims has scarcely dried, is insensitive and callous. It is all the more so because in Ethiopia death claims more from survivors and bereavement from loss takes a long time. *As it happens mourning continues for forty days at a stretch, and unfortunately, the timing of the Yara announcement to award money, etc. to the very perpetrator of the very public atrocity against innocent people hurts and hurts badly.* It should be pointed out here quickly that speaking of bad timing does not imply that the decision by Yara is otherwise correct or kosher. The premises for the award have been examined in the earlier section of this essay and found to be wanting.

The timing of the announcement adds injury to insult—to vary an old saying. *Mr. Meles has blood on his hands, and unless the message from the folks at Yara is that he can kill right and left and if we are enamored of him we shall shower him with our gifts, the decision is odious and an act of callous disregard for the humanity and dignity of the Ethiopian people.* He could go to Oslo, plant a tree, and be paid for it, but not for what he has done for the Ethiopian people. Under the circumstances, the announced Yara award can only be seen as a reward for what Meles Zenawi has been doing *against* the Ethiopian people. As was adumbrated in the early paragraphs of this writing, *this kind of carelessness, callousness and insensitivity does not comport with the character and values some of us know regarding the Norwegian people.* One cannot help but muse at this point if the same modality, criteria and standard would have been applied in similar situations in Europe or elsewhere outside Africa. One commentator has expressed his understandable holy indignation at the Yara award announcement by suggesting that if Meles goes on and kills even more and more people, he might even qualify to get the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo.

The Ethics of the Yara award to Mr. Meles Zenawi

When business, politics and ethics are juxtaposed in a given scenario one can expect getting into murky and treacherous area. At a minimum what we have is the mix of money, power and code of behavior. Perhaps the ongoing investigations on the UN “Oil for Food” scandal in Iraq illustrate the lures, the pitfalls and the devastating consequences—especially to the Iraqi people of the wrong mix of business, politics and ethics in which ethics becomes the odd man out. Unfortunately, the case of the 2005 Yara Award announcement to PM Meles raises certain serious questions of ethical import. *The first thing that is suspect is the propriety of a business concern which does business with a given country making cash or kind award to an incumbent ruler of that country.* “Is

there a precedent for this?” One can appreciate such recognition or award by Yara to a certain community of farmers who over time have shown extraordinary strides through cooperative work, like a most efficient and effective use of fertilizer supplies, and so on. Alternatively, individuals or groups of scientists, doctors, agronomists or teachers can be awarded something for visible work in advancing the cause of Green Revolution. But, exactly where do bureaucrats or politicians and especially rulers of Meles’ ilk ever become beneficiaries of an international award? As it happens, he knows how to use a gun, but he does not know how to use a hoe. *He has neither cared for nor inspired the peasant in Ethiopia but used the peasant for his political ends.* Nor does he have the calling or training for this kind of livelihood. He may purvey a picture with some farmers for propaganda purposes, but serious people cannot afford to be so gullible to take that as proof that he is doing something for the people.

A ruler like Meles who is ensconced on the citadels of power not by the will of the people but by the gun does not worry about the people in relation to his tenure. What he has to worry about are those close to him with guns who also want to take turns to get the honor, attention and spoils of power he has been enjoying for far too long. Any foreign business establishment like Yara that wants to do business in Ethiopia very quickly learns that in a system like the Meles regime, the buck stops at his desk. However camouflaged, politics and business (foreign and domestic) are inextricably linked together. Yara has been sleeping with the dictator with impunity doing fertilizer business in Ethiopia for several years now. Yara was or is not giving away fertilizer to Ethiopia but selling, which it is entitled to do. Apparently, it did not see a need to question how the country is governed and how the ruler has treated the people of Ethiopia. But now, when Yara jumps from that stance to rewarding or awarding Meles Zenawi for allegedly doing so much he didn’t even dream about, it raises red flags. Everything Meles did or does is a whole package to Ethiopians. Outsiders may afford to compartmentalize what they perceive to be Meles’ alleged accomplishment or good side in one area and feign unfamiliarity about his dark sides in most other areas. After all, he is not their ruler and they don’t have to be affected by his hideous and brutal tyranny. Ethiopians however cannot afford that because they have been on the receiving end, not of his concocted “Green Revolution” saga but about his anti-Ethiopian deeds, killings, incarcerations, tortures, maimings, intimidations, impoverishment, lies, wars, vote rigging, treason, arrogance of power, disarming the people of Ethiopia, alienating land from the people, Bantustanization of the country into ethnic enclaves, breaking up the country and making it landlocked. Mr. Meles subordinated everything and everyone in Ethiopia to benefit EPLF and then plunged the country into war in 1998 with his creation of Eritrea, which resulted in a combined casualty of more than 100,000 people. The situation at the border remains in a state of no war, no peace.

So, shouldn’t someone at Yara ask, *“Is there an ethical question to be raised and answered before the offending award is made to such a ruler like Meles?”* Trying to rationalize that it is not Yara but “Yara Foundation” that is making the award does not hold water. It is like a boxer who hurts someone but pleads that it was not him but his gloves that did the harm. Evidently, nobody asked that question. That is why we are where we are. Ethics becomes a casualty when business and politics become bedfellows.

If the intention of the Yara Foundation is—and one wishes it to be—to encourage farmers in Africa to improve their lives, *why not make the award to the deserving farmers themselves?* What does the ruler or politician have to do with day-to-day backbreaking work in the farms? “What is the knowledge or expertise of the ruler in the area of farms and use of fertilizer and seeds or about farm animals?” Rulers come and go but the farmer is there tied to the land, even when as now he does not own it. He should be the deserving awardee of such largesse as Yara is ready to bestow, not the politician or armed ruler who rides on the backs of the impoverished. To get a perspective on EPRDF’s record, it is recommended that the reader consult Ethiopia since the Derg: a decade of democratic pretension and performance (2002) edited by Siegfried Pausewang, Kjetil Tronvoll and Lovise Aalen. For perspectives on more recent events, one may browse the series of Open Letters by the Network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES) Scandinavian Chapter on the Internet. Cf. also the just released (August 25, 2005) ‘preliminary statement on the election appeal’s process...’ by the European Union Election Observation Mission Ethiopia 2005.

Concluding Remarks

The main thrust of this essay on Yara’s announcement of awarding money to PM Meles in Ethiopia is to raise valid questions on the litany of his alleged deeds to alleviate poverty or generate rural productivity consistent with the UN’s Green Revolution in Africa. In addition, it is neither fair nor justified to ignore the ruler and his behavior vis-à-vis his subjects in all areas of life and death, wealth and dearth during his 14-year tenure which he has *maintained not by the will of the people but by the gun—only that Mr. Meles wears coat and tie--Mafia style*. There is concern that callous, cavalier or patronizing decisions and policies by outsiders—mostly EuroAmericans—when it comes to Africa betray lack of genuine care for the people by plucking out individuals whether they are tyrants or thespians or a mix of both, which is more the case of Mr. Meles. They tend to prefer to ignore his true persona as a tyrant to the people of Ethiopia because he intrigues and entertains them as thespian. Relations between the people of Ethiopia and Norway have been friendly and benign even if their business connections are very much below the radar of attention. But an event like the Yara affair or scandal of 2005 can poison the relationship hence, if Yara insists on pleasing or mollifying one individual at the expense of the Ethiopian people as a whole. The Ethiopian people have not done anything against the Norwegian people to deserve this.

This writer cannot tell Yara Foundation how to solve the problem at hand. However, it bears repeating that if anyone is to be awarded, it should be the peasant or farmer who is the ultimate subject and object of the whole effort of agricultural productivity. The US\$200,000 should go to the peasant, not the politician. Perhaps Yara Foundation can fund a Model Pilot Project in a rural locale of Ethiopia where the latest knowledge, technology, organization, fertilizer and other inputs can be used to achieve a given target within a specified period. That would be a good use of Foundation money, expertise and goodwill.

Finally, some may feel that this essay has become visible somewhat late. The writer begs to differ. *It is never too late to do the right thing* or to correct that which is wrong or perceived so by the objects of the wrong act. *It is better to be late doing the right thing than to miss the opportunity and regret the harm that inflexibility will incur.* There are hundreds of death row inmates in US jails that wait their turn to be executed. After many years in prison, some--often black people--are released thanks to DNA evidence that exonerates them. Others are led to the execution chamber and go through all the process of getting ready to die or have reprieve by the governor of the respective state, **one minute to midnight.** *If one minute before a deadline is enough to save or destroy life itself, it should be enough time for Yara Foundation to do the right thing on the issue at hand.*

Endnotes

¹ Autobiography of Emperor Haile Sellassie, Volume Two: Translated by Ezekiel Gebissa, et.al. and edited by Harold Marcus, et.al. 1994.

² Negussay Ayele "The 1952-54 Ethio-Italian Boundary Negotiations: an Exercise in Diplomatic Futility" Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. IX No.2.

³ "False Premise or False Promise? The Experience of Food and Input Market Reform in Eastern and Southern Africa." T.S. Jayne, et al. (2001).

⁴ <http://www.yara.com>.

⁵ Dessalegn Rahmato, 'Access to Resources and Livelihood Insecurity', Forum for Social Studies (2003).

⁶ National Fertilizer Industry Agency, 'Fertilizer Marketing and Credit Study in Ethiopia Draft Report' , (Vol. 1), Development Studies Association.

⁷ IRIN News Release on Ethiopia Anti Poverty Goals, interview with Jeffrey Sachs 5 July 2004.

⁸ The Splendor of Hope : Book Review and Commentary, <http://www.tecolahagos.com>.

⁹ John Donnelly, "Food shortages continue to mount amid host of troubles", Boston Globe, 12/8/05.

¹⁰ BBC Hard Talk interview of PM Meles Zenawi by Stephen Sacker posted on Internet 4 July, 2005.

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