

Haraldur Olafsson
Norwegian Church Aid
P.O.Box 1248
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

I, and many others who are very familiar with events in Ethiopia, are shocked by your letter to Aftenposten under the heading "Meldingene om misbruk av hjelp". In your letter you refer to the misuse of relief aid by the Ethiopian authorities as being "groundless and without proof" in the diplomatic and aid-workers circles. Your attempt to defend the Derg and its evil deeds is markedly unjust, unfair and unchristian. As to the diplomatic circles it is no surprise at all because experience has taught us that diplomats are not there to tell the truth but rather to suppress it or be indifferent to it so that the governments they represent can pursue their commercial and diplomatic interests in the country without hinderance. The work of a diplomat, as every person can see it today, is first and foremost to bridge a good working relationship between his government and the host government at all costs and beyond any other human or moral considerations

As far as aid-workers are concerned there are unfortunately two categories. The first group, just like the diplomats, are tied by interest with dictators, fascists, and other anti-democratic forces and allow themselves to be a tool and supporters of their evil policies and deeds. To mention some of the interests that can tie them is for example fear of losing their job, could be influenced financially, or they may suffer from poor mentality of enjoining association with people in power. The second group of aid-workers are the honest ones who refuse to be influenced by corrupt, unpopular and above all unrepresentative leaders of the Ethiopian type, those who display their help and good-will to the big majority of the people who are tormented by suppression and hunger, those who struggle for truth to prevail (not the truth as told by fascists but the truth happening to a people) those who see the problems of other people in the context of political rights and human rights. In short those who are worthy of the name.

The reasons you have listed in your attempt to hide the truth regarding the gross and world-wide known reality of misuse by the government of Ethiopia is typical of the Ethiopian authorities mastery of deceit. It is unbelievable and shocking that you chose to defend a government very well known for its brutality and notoriety. It is a government that kills hundreds of thousands of its people, destroys harvest, poisons rivers and wells, bombs villages, forcibly recruits thousands of peasants to the army, purchases billions of dollars worth of arms while its people die every day to hunger, spends hundreds of millions of dollars to celebrate 10 years of terror. I could provide volumes of horror stories that took place in the country and still taking place. Very truly the world has not seen terror of this magnitude since Nazi Germany. The government that you defend is one that creates famine. For them the famine has come as a manna. Since they can save on their bombs. They don't have to bomb harvest this time because there is no harvest to be bombed. Famine is a good political weapon for them and they have clearly displayed this policy to the world. How on earth can your soul allow you to write that a government that destroys harvest would deliver them food coming from outside?

The misuse of food aid is not a speculation but a long time reality. It has happened and it will never stop. In fact they are not only diverting food aid to feed their hungry soldiers but they are even selling it on the market. It is a world wide truth that the Ethiopian Government has effectively blocked food from reaching the hungry in the areas they don't

control. In some villages outside the big towns they control, they are distributing food only in exchange for carrying their gun. If this was not true why don't they accept a cease-fire proposed by the liberation fronts and supported by all aid-donors including prominent personalities like Willy Brandt. While you write to Aftenposten saying the misuse is a speculation, the same week a British film was shown on Sky Channel how food aid was sold inside Ethiopia and even in the Sudan. The merchants confirmed they bought it from Ethiopia authorities. The film was produced by independent body which travelled within Ethiopia. Eritrea and the Sudan to investigate the truth about the alleged misuse. Is that a speculation?

In fact two Norwegian aid-workers in the beginning of 1984 told me that there is no doubt about the gross misuse by the Ethiopian authorities but we have to suppress this news in order the public not to react negatively. Even this is illogical and dishonest. It is the duty of relief organizations and workers to tell the truth and find new arrangement by which aid could reach the people who need it. Under such circumstances the aid should be controlled, supervised and audited by the donors. It should be clear that we are not against food aid going to Ethiopia. We are strongly in favor of sending food to the famine stricken people but not to the military or to boost the government of the Derg, which is actually the creator of the famine. Because, as it is today, some western donors are not different from what the Russians are doing to the country i.e to strengthen the position of the Derg in the wake of strong opposition to its rule by the people.

In the last paragraph of your letter you however mentioned that private donors like Norwegian Church Relief and Redd Barna have control over the distribution of their aid. This carries truth. We know it and we respect such donors because they follow it until its destination. Although they distribute it in areas only recommended by the authorities. But the point of our discontent is the aid that is sent by the EEC, the U.S. Australia and Canadian sources. These aid is channeled and delivered to the authorities and is actually motivated by politics. These donors have been informed about the misuse but since they have political objectives they prefer to ignore it. Or simply call it a speculation.

You seem to understand the problem in the country very wrongly even after living there for so long, The problem is not drought, Drought in Ethiopia would not kill a single person if we had a government concerned about its people. The country has enough water even to flow over to Sudan and Egypt. What is lacking is social justice and political independence. And the people are fighting to achieve these rights, Don't ever think the people are fighting in order to be given food from abroad. We are fighting to get rid of fascism, be politically independent, eradicate social backwardness and be self sufficient not only in food but in all aspects of life, we are very much opposed to the Derg's way of being permanent begger and cheater.

If you believe the government is delivering food to the people why are leaving their villages and crossing to the Sudan? Even in the presence of foreign aid workers and the world focusing attention to the hungry people, the Ethiopian authorities are giving priority to unloading Russian ships carrying armaments than ships carrying food. You wrongly claim that aid workers consider the misuse as "groundless". Is it not the aid workers who are loudly complaining and accusing the government of indifference to the famine campaign, denying the outbreak of cholera, hindering the work of the aid-workers by demanding permission to go out from the cities, and censoring them. What do you say to the fact that aid workers are complaining because the Derg is bombing villages and killing hungry people. What do you say to the fact that aid workers are complaining about the governments priority to arms than food?

What better evidence do you want more than a sealed and signed letter from the RRC chief instructing his staff to destroy evidences leading to the misuse prior to the arrival of auditors? It is a high ranking RRC man who defected and brought the paper with him. Besides if hungry people are receiving food from the Derg why are thousands of them fleeing to the Sudan every day? The majority of the people in Wollo, Tigray and Eritrea are not receiving food but bombs. It would be ridiculous if you say you know better than the people who are the victims. Denying the reality of this situation in Ethiopia is just like denying Nazi Germany's occupation of Norway or claiming that Hitler was a generous leader to his people and the people he occupied. I thought it was a Norwegian to write of things you don't know let alone to write just contrary to the truth. By your deeds you seem to be in perfect tune with the Russians and the Derg against the Ethiopian people. But I can't imagine neither the Norwegian government nor the Norwegian Church Relief is interested in fabricated and distorted stories.

As if your Aftenposten lie is not enough you choose to continue to display your ignorance by giving slanderous interviews to other newspapers too. You have to know that your lies have no effect since parallel to your stories are always coming other stories totally contradicting your account and views. A lie is always a lie. It may confuse some people for some time. But since it is a lie it will fade away. But truth no matter how much you suppress it sooner or later it will come to the surface. We are never shaken by lies. As long as what we seek is just and what we tell is the truth we know we will not lack friends and above all we are certain of victory over fascism. I don't tell you to believe what we say and refute what the Derg says. Study the situation and investigate the truth for yourself. There can be no easier task than this. But this has one requirement. One has to be honest.

Just in case you are a victim of the Ethiopian authorities propaganda, I hereby send clippings of newspapers and magazines containing the truth of what is happening to the food aid, how politics is affecting food distribution, and all the true revelations of the evil deeds of the Derg. The sources of information, reporters, editors, aid-workers, and other observers are all people of unquestionable integrity. They are individuals who hate to speculate and do not suffer from lack of capacity to distinguish truth from untruth.

I hope you understand why I have to be anonymous, I will however contact you for a face to face discussion when you return to the country where truth has a chance to be expressed without fear or persecution.

(this letter was a quick response to the article written by H.Olafsson criticising all the critics of the Derg which was printed in Aftenposten on the 26 of november 1984. This anonymous letter was remailed from France without indicating who the sender is.)