

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Funeral of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia

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AS DELIVERED

Good morning. First Lady Azeb Mesfin, President Girma, Acting Prime Minister Hailemariam, members of the Council of Ministers, members of Parliament, excellencies, distinguished guests, and the great people of Ethiopia – thank you for the privilege of speaking here today.

We gather to mark a profoundly sorrowful loss for Ethiopia, for Africa, and for the entire world. Our shared grief is palpable.

On behalf of President Obama, the United States government, and the American people, I wish to extend our deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathy for the untimely passing of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Our prayers are with the people of Ethiopia and, most especially, with Prime Minister Meles's beloved wife, Azeb, and their cherished children, Semhal, Senay, and Marda.

As we join you in mourning, we affirm our deep respect for, and solidarity with, the proud citizens of Ethiopia, and we renew our commitment to our valued partnership with the people and government of Ethiopia.

I suspect we all feel it deeply unfair to lose such a talented and vital leader so soon, when he still had so much more to give.

Meles was a friend—both to my country and to me, personally. Whenever we met, no matter how beset he was, he would always begin by asking me about my children. His inquiries were never superficial. He wanted detailed reports on their development. Then satisfied, he would eagerly update me on his own children. Meles was a proud father and a devoted husband. As he laughed about his children's exploits and bragged about their achievements, a face sometimes creased by worry, would glow with simple joy. In his children and all children, Meles saw the promise of renewal and the power of hope.

Meles was disarmingly regular, unpretentious, and direct. He was selfless, tireless and totally dedicated to his work and family. In the toughest of times, he retained that twinkle in his eye, his

ready smile, his roiling laugh and his wicked sense of humor. True, he never belied any lack of confidence in his judgments. He was tough, unsentimental and sometimes unyielding. And, of course, he had little patience for fools, or “idiots,” as he liked to call them.

For, among Prime Minister Meles’ many admirable qualities, above all was his world-class mind. A life-long student, he taught himself and many others so much. But he wasn’t just brilliant. He wasn’t just a relentless negotiator and a formidable debater. He wasn’t just a thirsty consumer of knowledge. He was uncommonly wise – able to see the big picture and the long game, even when others would allow immediate pressures to overwhelm sound judgment. Those rare traits were the foundation of his greatest contributions.

Still, there was no shortage of occasions when, as governments and friends, we simply, sometimes profoundly, disagreed. But even as we argued – whether about economics, democracy, human rights, regional security or our respective foreign policies – I was always struck by two things: Meles was consistently reasoned in his judgments and thoughtful in his decisions; and, he was driven not by ideology but by his vision of a better future for this land he loved. I will deeply miss the challenge and the insights I gained from our discussions and debates.

Prime Minister Meles was remarkably ambitious – but not, as is typical, for himself. He was both a son of Ethiopia and a father to its rebirth. Passionately proud to be Ethiopian, Meles was determined that you, its people, conquer your history of poverty, hunger, and strife. Meles was profoundly shaped by the memory of fragile young lives snuffed out in the 1980s by folly-induced famine and despair. The torment of that terrible time spurred him to join in driving out the strongman who had turned Ethiopia into a parched field of sorrow. It spurred him to remake himself overnight from guerrilla to statesman. It spurred him to make sustainable development both a personal passion and a national priority. And it spurred him to resolve that Ethiopians will claim and maintain your rightful place as peacemakers and generous contributors on the world stage.

Of course, Meles’s vision and impact never stopped at Ethiopia’s borders. Across Africa, fellow leaders looked to Prime Minister Meles to help them make peace and jumpstart their economies. He was instrumental in building the African Union. He made IGAD deliver. He confronted terrorism directly and countered violent extremists bent on undermining the state and the region he did so much to build. He worked vigorously to end bitter conflicts – from Burundi to Liberia. He was crucial to the negotiation and implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Sudan’s tragic civil war. Prime Minister Meles was midwife to the birth of the world’s newest state, the Republic of South Sudan, and he sought to nurse this fragile progeny to strength.

I also can testify personally how much Ethiopia, under Prime Minister Meles’s leadership, has given to the United Nations and its lifesaving efforts – from preventing and resolving conflict to striving to meet the Millennium Development Goals, from combating climate change to serving in UN peacekeeping operations, most recently in Abyei. These contributions remind us that even nations facing their own challenges can make vast contributions to our shared security.

On this mournful day, let me thank, in particular, President Girma, Acting Prime Minister Hailemariam, and other government leaders for their dignified and constitutional response to this sudden tragedy.

To the people of Ethiopia, we say: while Meles's loss is profound, Ethiopia's greatness is undiminished. Our admiration for your accomplishments is enduring. Your moving outpouring of grief and dramatic displays of national unity in the face of this tragedy have inspired us all. Your talents and strengths are those of a remarkable people, far larger and deeper than any single remarkable man. Ethiopia's future can and must be brighter. And, I am confident it will be.

So, today, the United States re-commits to strengthening and deepening our partnership with Ethiopia. We do so both in mutual interest and in a spirit of mutual respect. As such, we will support Ethiopians as you strengthen your institutions of state and build your democracy, even as you continue to develop your economy and contribute generously to peace and security across the continent. As always, we will encourage peaceful political dialogue, civil society development, and protection of human rights, including freedom of the press. As ever, we do not promise always to agree, but we can promise always to engage respectfully, candidly, and from a bedrock of firm friendship.

The legacy Meles leaves will long endure. But for the sake of the youth and the next generations of Ethiopians, that legacy must be more than a monument. It must be a foundation—a foundation for renewed efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger—a foundation for development that is sustainable and sustained—a foundation for deepening Ethiopia's democracy and defending all of its citizens' inalienable rights—and a foundation for peace and security across Africa and our interwoven world.

Prime Minister Meles was an uncommon leader, a rare visionary, and a true friend to me and many.

We all, my friend, will miss you mightily. May you rest well—and true to your memory, may your beloved Ethiopia know a future of prosperity, hope, and peace.

Thank you and God Bless.