

**OUR MAIN OBJECTIVE,  
FIRST AND FORMOST,  
IS TO FREE OURSELVES  
FROM BACKWARDNESS**

**MENGISTU HAILE MARIAM**

**REPLIES TO QUESTIONS**

**FROM**

**"TIME" MAGAZINE**

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**July, 1986  
Addis Ababa**

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## INTRODUCTION

On July 28, 1986, Mengistu Haile Mariam, Secretary General of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, Chairman of the Provisional Military Administrative Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, received a group from the American news magazine 'TIME' for an extensive interview ranging over broad matters of Ethiopia's internal, regional and international policy.

Present on the occasion were Henry Muller, TIME Assistant Managing Editor and Chief of Correspondents, and James wilde, TIME Bureau Chief in Nairobi.

The interview covered the momentous developments of the last 12 years which have seen Ethiopian society transformed from a medieval autocracy to one which today finds itself in the final stages of preparation to becoming a People's Democratic Republic.

The Secretary General of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia also gave a succinct exposé of the programmes of resettlement and villagization, which have been the subject of some uninformed and prejudiced criticism on the part of certain circles in the West.

Ethiopia's policy with regard to regional cooperation and its relation with neighbouring countries is discussed in considerable detail.

The reply to the final question traces the development of Ethio-US relations in the last twelve years and the prospects for their improvement in the future.

Brief excerpts from the interview were published in the August 4 issue of TIME. This booklet presents the full text of the questions and of a translation of the answers which took place in the course of a session that lasted four hours.

### The Publishers

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**QUESTION:** Mr. Chairman, you are about to promulgate a historic constitution. Could you please define this constitution, its purposes and what it represents for Ethiopia which until your revolution 12 years ago was feudal?

**ANSWER:** Before defining the constitution and its purposes, I would like to take up the question from the point of view of what the constitution signifies and represents in Ethiopia's long, feudal heritage.

To do this, I think it is essential to dwell in some detail on what the feudal order meant in the life of the people and what pre-revolutionary Ethiopia really looked like.

Generally, feudalism represents that stage in the historic evolution of human society that followed upon the mode of production based on slave-labour and was, as such, characterized by an extremely backward level of production, by unlimited levels of oppression and exploitation and by the obscurantist philosophy of divide-and-rule that kept the vast majority of the people in ignorance and darkness. In its worst forms, it was a horribly cruel order.

In its Ethiopian manifestation, feudalism was characterized by the fact that land provided the livelihood for the overwhelming majority of the population and agriculture was almost the sole basis of the national economy. When we speak of agriculture here, it is not the type of agriculture with which you're familiar, but rather one which is based on the most primitive methods and tools and, consequently, of an unimaginably backward nature.

Even as agriculture was the principal economic activity in the country and provided the livelihood for the vast majority of the 40 million population, 80% of the land was owned by a mere handful of the aristocracy and nobility whose number barely exceeded a thousand.

The remaining vast number of the peasantry, which is to say almost the entire population, laboured under a myriad of feudal bonds and obligations for the exclusive benefit of these rich few. As a rule, the Ethiopian peasant was a tenant who had to surrender anything between 75% to 80% of his produce to his landlord — thus having barely enough left to feed his family and, in addition, carried the burden of further obligations to his master which made his lot no different from that of the serf or slave.

If he were fortunate, he would work on the landlord's large estate in return for a small plot of land on which to produce for himself and his family. The luckiest ones only surrendered 50% of their produce. But in this latter case, the peasant would have to provide the oxen, the tools and all the other necessary means of production to work the land to which the landlord held title, etc. etc. Even then, the peasant had absolutely no guarantee of tenure, let alone the wherewithals to demand any rights — for the landlord was always at liberty either to confiscate his total produce or to evict him from the land altogether if he found it to his advantage to do so.

In the conditions of pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, it had become the fate of all those who thus fell victim to the growing greed of the landlord class either to move into the barren wilderness, there to eke out an existence alongside the beasts of the wild, or to turn to common robbery and brigandage. The number, likewise, was not small of those who flocked to the urban centres to swell the army of the unemployed and to lead the desolate life of beggary and prostitution.

The condition of life of the urban population was no better. That 80% of all urban land and houses as well as the entire social and economic infrastructure in Addis Ababa and other cities was in the hands, again, of a handful of rich people gives a measure of the glaring iniquity that existed.

The extortionist rents and the unlimited speculation in urban real estate that the rich engaged in in pursuit of profit had made the life of the urban population doubly miserable.

Furthermore, social services such as educational and health facilities were planned and located not with the interest of the people in mind, but with the exclusive purpose of satisfying the needs of the rich in both the countryside and the towns.

Consequently, in spite of certain limited concessions that were forced upon the reluctant ruling classes in later periods, all such facilities remained at the service of the aristocracy and the nobility, and the small crust of technocrats who had high incomes.

Similarly, with regard to social security and labour and professional organizations there was not, in the country, even that level of rights achieved in other developing nations in the form of labour laws and the right of association. The working class in Ethiopia had to conduct a long and protracted struggle to achieve

even that level of limited organization which it had come to have in the few years before the revolution.

In this respect, it was not just the local nobility that exploited the workers in Ethiopia. Even those foreign enterprises that came to operate in Ethiopia set wages at their own will and whim and paid workers on a scale that had absolutely no relation to the labour and services they got. They could cut wages and altogether dismiss workers any time they wanted to. Even worse, some of the more ruthless ones did imprison, flog and, at times, murder workers that showed any signs of activism in the demand of their rights.

Professional and labour organizations were almost absolutely prohibited.

Such, then, was the general picture in the areas of administration and economic and social life. This iniquity was reflected fully in the political life of the nation. There was no room whatsoever for popular participation in the political process and no mechanism for guaranteeing the rights of the people. What constitution there was was for the purpose of legalizing the interests and the absolute sovereignty of the ruling classes and one can hardly speak of a popular constitution in the context.

Aside from the opposition movement that in later periods gathered momentum among the armed forces, the intelligentsia and the university youth, the Ethiopian people had absolutely no means of airing their grievances either through writing, or demonstration or through public gatherings. The idea of a political party was inconceivable.

Whatever the magnitude and enormity of their crimes, the monarchy, the aristocracy and the nobility could not be brought to account. Indeed, the source of political power was genealogical lineage and was passed down from generation to generation

among a handful of families. The popular will and the people's choice had no place in this scheme of things.

Not only were the ruling classes not subject to the people's will, but the crown, in particular, claimed to be supra-human and to hold its authority by divine right and anointment. This obscurantist fiction had for centuries been drummed into the consciousness of the people by a clerical class that itself was a party in the exploitation and the dehumanization of the masses of the people.

Having said this much about the nature and character of the ruling classes in feudal Ethiopia, it is only reasonable to expect the question as to how the Ethiopian people, in so short a time, came to achieve the level of democratic rights and popular power that they enjoy today. Well, it will really be difficult to go into the full details of this in the short time that we have.

But I believe it is a generally known fact that the political and cultural heritage in Ethiopia represents one of the earliest instances, not only in Africa but in the world, of a civilization based on a full-fledged and centrally organized state. The heroism of the Ethiopian people in the long struggle for the maintenance of their independence is also equally well-established on the international arena. But I do not think that the rest of the world was ever aware of the contrast between this international image of the Ethiopian people and the crushing misery of their internal life. Nor will it be an easy task in the future to bring out full depth of this discrepancy.

Anyway, such was the reality: the unbridled greed of a totally reactionary and self-seeking feudal ruling class that held sway over the country in recent times had reduced an ancient and proud people to a level of such unspeakable backwardness that exposed them to the tragic disasters that afflict them to this day.

Over the years, a large number of patriotic and democratic forces as well as individuals had arisen in an effort to change this deplorable situation. But such was the strength of the entrenched feudal hierarchy and the support that it was able to secure from outside that all the leaders of such efforts always ended up before the firing squad or on the electric chair. But their sacrifices have not been in vain: they did, in the end, produce the mass upheaval that gave birth to this revolution.

Beyond making the Ethiopian peasant the master of the fruit of his labour, the revolution has enabled the masses to have the organizational strength to defend their victories. It has made possible the total eradication of that shameful and anachronistic feudal order.

In the last twelve years of struggle, an impregnable edifice of social organization based on class, sex as well as residential and work places has been built on the foundation of our revolutionary victories. And on the basis of this unshakeable social foundation, the draft constitution today finds us on the eve of the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which will be the ultimate expression of the political power of the people.

The draft constitution was prepared by the representatives of the people and it is currently being discussed by the entire citizenry both at home and abroad. Once the draft constitution has been consolidated by the enriching opinion and comments of the people, it will be submitted to a popular referendum for adoption. It is the first time in the entire history of the Ethiopian people that such open democracy and such universal popular participation has ever been exercised.

So, to come to the question: I think it must now be obvious what the new constitution signifies for the Ethiopian people; who it is prepared by and for whom; who it stands for; by whom it



is being implemented. Besides, copies of the draft constitution are openly available for everyone. And, even better than what I have to say about it, one can read the contents of the draft constitution and form one's own opinion and judgement.

Once political power is put into the hands of the people by this, the first democratic constitution in the history of the country, Ethiopia shall never again be ruled by the personal absolutism of any one individual or a handful of individuals. For us, justice, democracy, social progress and political consensus are not demagogic passwords as in some countries.

Because the country is backward and underdeveloped, it does not mean that we will be exclusively governed by our material needs. True, the satisfaction of the material needs of the people is a major objective and task.

But we are also setting out to build a society that is imbued with humane and high moral values, and that has a keen sense of freedom and independence — a society that is prepared to pay whatever sacrifices are required to achieve and defend these goals.

With regard to international relations, our policy, based on the new constitution as well as on the fundamental tenets of our revolution, will be one guided by the principles of equality, peace, the resolution of differences without resort to force, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, mutual advantage, non-alignment, and respect for the sovereignty and the political and social line of development chosen by others. Ethiopia is fully prepared to make its contribution to world peace and human welfare by working together with its neighbours, with the countries of the continent and with all countries of the world who share these principles.

That is more or less what I wish to say in answer to your question.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Chairman, the second question is as follows. It also relates to the constitution, which we had a chance to read the draft versions of. What does autonomy of the nationalities mean in the constitution? And could you expand on what is meant by, I quote, "the autonomous regions shall have various administrative units according to need" and, also I quote, "the boundaries, levels and jurisdiction of autonomous region shall be decided by law?"

**ANSWER:** As I stated earlier, political power belongs to the people. This will find expression in the full participation of the people in the political process without regard to nationality, sex or religion. A vital point in ensuring the correct implementation of this is, of course, the structure of the state. At the very summit of this structure will be found the National Assembly (*Shengo*), which will be made up of the representatives of the entire people. Below this, and deriving their authority from this highest national body, will be different levels of administrative units with defined powers and responsibilities. And because the country is made up of different nationalities and communities at different stages of development, special care will be taken to ensure that no discrimination exists on this account.

The revolution itself is the outcome of the struggle of the people as a whole. The entire people have shared in the struggle and sacrifices for the defence of the territorial integrity of the country. Today, it is the wish and desire of the people to work together to overcome our difficulties and work for development. On the basis of the indivisible unity of our people, the constitution provides for the existence of a unitary state within which will be contained organs for the exercise of the people's rights. Concretely, this will find expression in the implementation of regional autonomy. Thus, there will be autonomous as well as administrative regions.



Based on their constitutionally defined powers and following the acts of legislation of the National Assembly, these autonomous and administrative regions will have regional *shengos* with jurisdiction over the political, economic and social affairs of their respective regions. In the setting up of autonomous regions, beside the criteria of economic, administrative and social factors, special consideration is made for the distribution of nationalities in the region and whatever particular characteristics may ensue as a result.

Both administrative and autonomous regions will have sub-units for the more effective execution of internal administrative matters. And the setting up of both types of regions will be made in the interests of the people of the region and of the country as a whole. The constitutional right to set up these regions and to determine their size and level belongs to the highest body of popular power — the National *Shengo*.

It will, therefore, be wrong and undemocratic to preempt the authority of this supreme body and to determine this issue at this stage of the draft constitution. The National *Shengo* is the highest legislative organ and when it is said that the issue will be determined by law, it means it will be decided by the National *Shengo*.

Incidentally, we are only talking of the draft constitution at this stage, and the final shape of the constitution will be determined only when the comments of the people have been taken into account and the necessary amendments made thereof.

That, in brief, is my comment on your question.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Chairman, could you please explain the role of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in the on-going process of national revolution?

**ANSWER:** I think it is a universally acceptable definition of a party to say that it is an organization into which people come together for a common political purposes. The Workers' Party of Ethiopia is no exception.

Our party is the first free association of Ethiopians to emerge out of the long and painful period of feudal oppression and exploitation and draws its membership from among those who have chosen to be in the forefront of the struggle to build a society based on justice, equality and common prosperity. And because it stands for the interests and sovereignty of the people and is totally committed to their welfare, ours is a party that has the full support of the masses. It is a party of the people that lives in and for people. It plays a vanguard role in the task of realizing the people's desire for a society of justice and prosperity. It will work for a balanced development in the fields of economic, social and cultural life.

It does not set out to limit or in any way inhibit the full play of local initiative and creativity. It does not at all insist on uniformity in all aspects of life. Its aim is to inspire and coordinate the functions of state bodies and mass organizations and not to represent or substitute them. It does not issue orders and does not seek to command: it only sets out guidelines and indicates direction. It leads through the vanguard example of its members and not by the issue of commands. As neither the party nor its members have aims and interests other than those of the people, we are at one with the masses. There will be no difficulty on this issue because, in future, the party will also work within the framework of the constitution.

Those of us who are committed to serving the people with sincerity have come together in the party. And the doors of the party are at all times open to those who wish to work in the same spirit. We consider it a success that we have established a united party that works for the single objective of advancing the cause of the people.

We do not believe that there is a single, exclusive law or formula governing developments in this respect. It is possible to have one or more parties in a country depending on its specific conditions and circumstances. There cannot be any hard and fast rule laying out such and such a formula for countries following the capitalist way, such and such for those on the socialist path, and still more for others. The true measure of democracy and of the sovereignty of the people cannot be gauged by the number of parties, one or more. There is no such law or formula.

In our view, the main consideration ought to be what degree of power is given to the masses and to what extent their rights are protected and guaranteed.

As clearly stated in the programme of the party and the numerous practical measures that it has undertaken, its sole aim and purpose is to assure the democratic rights and sovereignty of the people.

Such, then, is our concept of the party and its role in democratic Ethiopia.

**QUESTION:** Does the private sector, both domestic and foreign, have a role to play in this revolutionary process? And if your answer is yes, would you please elaborate on that?

**ANSWER:** As you know very well, ours is a largely undeveloped economy. And though we have set ourselves the ultimate

goal of building socialism, it will require a very long period of transition before we can begin to tackle this. Our revolution, therefore, is a national democratic revolution and not a socialist revolution at this stage. To transform the backward economy of Ethiopia that had for so long been hamstrung by feudalism into a modern economy, we will need the democratic participation of all sectors. Accordingly, Ethiopia's economy today contains all three sectors: state, cooperative and private.

In this period, the role of internal private capital in particular is very crucial. Let me give you some figures: the private sector accounts for 95% of production in agriculture, 46% in industry and crafts; 80% in transport and 38% in construction.

Due consideration has been given to the role of private capital in our ten year perspective plan as well as in the draft constitution. We have laws and special provisions to encourage and protect private investment. State agencies have the duty to provide assistance to private enterprises in their respective sectors.

Regarding foreign capital, we do not see ourselves as being outside of the global pattern of interdependence and cooperation in different sectors of economic life. It is unthinkable for a country to have substantial economic development in isolation and without the cooperation of others. And I doubt if there is a single country in the world today that is totally on its own and does not have economic relations with other countries. So, we believe in economic cooperation with others on the basis of equality and mutual advantage.

This has been our position from the very beginning of the revolution. We have promulgated a joint-venture law for the introduction of foreign capital, technology and skills. There are also considerable areas of cooperation that even fall outside the purview of this law. One such is the exploration of petroleum.

where a special proclamation has been instituted to fully protect and guarantee the interests of foreign firms. A similar situation obtains regarding other mineral resources. Accordingly, a number of private American and Western European firms have demonstrated interest in working in Ethiopia and an encouraging number of operations are already underway.

**QUESTION:** The following is a two-point question. Ethiopia has been the subject of dissent among some foreigners concerning its current resettlement programme. Would you please spell out what you consider to be the aims and results of this programme? The second part of the question: are drought and famine in this country now under control?

**ANSWER:** As has been pointed out on various occasions, resettlement is not a new scheme that was introduced in reaction to the current famine, but a programme that had already been with us for sometime — although on a small scale. Over a period of several years, we have been conducting resettlement on a modest scale by encouraging and supporting people from the drought-prone areas to move to more fertile parts of the country. We even, at one point, had a state resettlement agency that was charged solely with the implementation of this programme. Later on, this was merged with the emergency relief agency to form the present Relief and Rehabilitation Commission that now handles both the relief and rehabilitation aspects of the work. Moreover, resettlement is a fully integrated part of our agricultural development policy as outlined in our ten-year perspective plan.

As I am sure you are well aware, the mountainous nature of the country has made it vulnerable to soil erosion. This fact has been doubly exacerbated by the scattered settlement pattern of our people which has contributed considerably to the ecological imbalance we see today. The problem was recognized long ago

and institutions like the World Bank had recommended that a policy of resettlement was one way of restoring a reasonable man/land ratio. Other countries have used variations of the same policy and it should not be taken as being peculiar to Ethiopia.

The aim of the resettlement policy, in brief, is this: to resettle those sections of the population who:

- (a) have been repeatedly hit by the recurrent drought,
- (b) live on land whose fertility has been totally destroyed as a result of extremely backward agricultural practices,
- (c) because of the high density of population do not have enough land to work on,

to fertile parts of the country where they can have enough land to cultivate and build decent lives for themselves.

Emergency relief plays a vital and life-saving role in providing food to the starving. But no country or people can live on a policy of emergency relief and thus become a burden on the rest of the world. To live permanently on emergency relief is not a policy that can be supported indefinitely by any country or, indeed, any donor.

So, the resettlement programme is conducted in those regions of the country where the need for it is clearly evident. On the other hand, we do not resettle people even from the drought-prone areas when there is the possibility of rehabilitating them there, in their own regions. That is why the rehabilitation of the drought-affected regions continues to be a central part of our effort.

Resettlement is, in fact, only one part of our general programme of rehabilitation and it is designed to apply not to any one particular section of the population but to all those who are in need of it. Let me elaborate this a bit more.



We obviously give first priority to those who have already been hit by the drought and whose lives are in immediate danger.

We then consider those who either because of the reduced fertility of the land or because of the pressure of population density, are forced to live only a margin away from starvation. If preventive measures are not taken to reduce the pressure on such land, then, the people living there will very soon be the next victims.

The following category, if you like, will be those who cultivate mountainsides and land generally unsuitable for agriculture. Here, neither reduced fertility nor population pressure is the immediate problem. Rather, it is the long-term trend of destructive agricultural practice which, by denuding forests and exposing top soil to erosion, has so tragically contributed to the current ecological disaster. So, here again, we encourage such people to resettle on land better-suited for agriculture.

And finally, resettlement is a means of creating job opportunities to those who have not been able to find employment in other areas and are not likely to find any, soon.

Resettlement is not a transient programme designed for any particular region or any particular sector of the population. It is not what ill-wild and prejudiced observers would have you believe it is. It is an integral part of our development strategy. This is the reality. And if you have the time, you can get about the country and see for yourselves the scale of the operation, the areas thus effected and what sectors of the population have been its beneficiaries. A number of countries, including some from the West, have seen the sincerity of what we are doing and are assisting us in the task.

Let me at this point also deal with the related issue of villagization.

Generally, all the economic and social programmes that we are presently undertaking have the aim, beyond the relief of the current crisis, of taking into account our long-term requirements and development needs.

In this spirit, the villagization programme has the aim of creating the necessary favourable conditions for social and economic development in rural Ethiopia. It sets out to free the peasantry from a backward way of life and work. Living in communities is a fundamental aspect of human progress and our effort to advance this in Ethiopia should not be taken up as a bone of contention.

For various historical and compelling reasons, the settlement pattern in rural Ethiopia — in contrast to most parts of the world — is extremely scattered, and finds people living in isolated homesteads on inaccessible hillsides, in deep ravines and so on. This has been cause to a lot of misery to the people. It has made them easy victims to both natural and man-made calamities. Even in the current crisis, such was the isolation and inaccessibility of some regions that we had to air-drop basic food and medical supplies to reach millions of drought-affected people.

The whole justification behind the villagization movement today is, therefore, to take advantage of the democratic gain of the revolution that has made land the property of the people in order to introduce a rational system of land use whereby residential, agricultural, grazing and forest land are scientifically laid out and demarcated to lay the basis for a more advanced economic and social life..

We are not bandying about empty words when we say that this will make the opportunities limitless for overcoming backwardness. Besides, as you can well imagine, it will be impossible to provide such services as schools, health, water, transport



and markets to each isolated peasant homestead. Let alone a poor economy like ours, even the most advanced economies cannot do this. Again, you can see for yourselves how much this programme will contribute to making the rural population beneficiaries of such social services.

To bring this about, and to speed up the social and economic development of the country, it is imperative that the resources of the state as well as the initiative, manpower and creativity of the people be brought into full play. If this is done, it will not be long before the stick and mud tukuls of the typical peasant home should make way for brick houses. And it is only when the peasantry can thus be beneficiaries of such services that the present practice of cultivating with hoes or oxen can be replaced by modern agricultural machinery.

Having said this, I must emphasize that the choice and right of peasants who come to live in villages as regards individual or cooperative farming is absolutely free and guaranteed.

And when we speak of the very small cooperative sector that exists, the options even here are fairly wide. I think it may be relevant to say a bit more about this here. There is, for instance, a type of cooperative where only the land is held by the cooperative and the peasants retain individual ownership of their private plots, their farm tools, their animals etc. . . . Each individual is then paid on the basis of the investment and the work he has put into the common effort.

Others, of their own free will and based on an appreciation of their common interest, may decide to hold not only the land but also draught animals and agricultural tools cooperatively.

Yet others may opt to continue to farm individually but come together for the purpose of better access to such services as credit, marketing, supply of materials and machinery and

other social services i.e. to set up just a service cooperative. All these options are there for the peasants to take and every stage is carried out entirely on the peasants initiative, without any coercion from outside. This range of choices is available both in the villagization and resettlement programmes.

I indicated earlier on that the settlement pattern in Ethiopia has contributed to the ecological imbalance in the country. To ensure that this disastrous pattern does not continue in future, we must insist on a rational land use policy and modern and better methods of agriculture. The best way to go about doing this is to adapt our settlement pattern to such policies and free the peasantry from backward attitudes and practices.

Furthermore, what makes developing countries really backward is their inability to follow on the advances of modern science and technology and, consequently, their failure to benefit and draw on the economic advantages that issue from it. From this point of view, I believe what we are doing here deserves to be emulated.

Nature is not uniform. Soil and weather vary from place to place and what you plant on a particular piece of land for best results depends on a large number of factors. This requires a long period of research-based work and study. All we are doing is in the direction of creating the conditions for conducting this type of work which is the only way out of our present agricultural quandary.

Why is this well-intentioned strategy viewed with so much prejudice and hostility in some quarters in western countries? Are they telling us to remain yoked to our traditional and primitive practices?

But Ethiopian society can no longer accept this. The consciousness of the people has taken a giant leap away from such destructive traditionalism.

Apart from this, we realize that the foreign dissent that you mentioned regarding villagization does exist among circles that claim to be concerned by it. In the minds of such people, both villagization and resettlement are taken to be identical with the building of socialism. But this is totally mistaken. Villages exist in all societies the world over. But I do not think it follows that where you have villages, you have socialism. Or that those who strive to build socialism necessarily build villages. It takes more than villages to bring together the whole complex of factors — above all, the level of consciousness of the people — that go into the movement which makes the building of socialism possible.

As we keep insisting, our main objective is first and foremost to free ourselves from backwardness. Villagization — to the extent that it will enable the peasant to benefit from modern methods of agriculture and to become the beneficiary of vital social services that will make him a productive pillar of the economy — is only a means towards this objective.

I had to dwell on this point at some length because it has been the object of some wild rumours which have absolutely no basis in reality. But I must stop here.

I should perhaps logically move onto the question of whether, through such measures as have been taken so far, the famine in the country has been overcome.

Let me begin by saying that drought in the country has been so persistently recurrent and its causes so deep-rooted and complex that it is not something we can bring under control in the immediate short-term. This can be achieved only by a combination of short-term measures and the long-term strategy that I tried to outline earlier on. Right now, we do not have people dying from famine. Of late, too, nature has improved its pat-

terns as evidenced by this year's rains, although the distribution is not as even as we would like to be.

But, even with the improvement of weather conditions, no appreciable increase in production can be expected unless radical measures are taken to replace the primitive level of farming with modern methods of agriculture and machinery. So, the number of people requiring assistance both from the mobilization of internal resources and from the assistance of foreign governments and humanitarian organizations continues to be considerable.

There is still a shortage of food supplies and the caloric intake of people is still not sufficient. We cannot deny this. Only when our agricultural development strategy enables us to produce greater quantities of food and have sufficient reserves can we fully overcome the problems of drought. It will take sometime before we can do this.

QUESTION: Has your government been talking recently with Eritreans and other minorities about the armed conflicts within the country?

ANSWER: There has been no time when we have refrained from extending our hand of peace and trying to bring to their senses the narrow-minded and self-seeking groups who, without regard to the peace and development of the people and under pressure and support from outside, have been responsible for the problems in the country. But they persist in believing that they can use force to advance their destructive mission.

Their effort even to exploit and take advantage of the current crisis of drought for their own narrow and selfish ends has been considerable.

I think you are also aware of the considerable and unexpected effort exerted by these secessionist groups in the north of our country in the early days of the revolution when our whole attention was directed at repulsing the foreign aggression launched against us. These efforts, of course, were never successful and it is our duty to the peace and well-being of our people to foil all such attempts whenever they occur. But our policy has always been and continues to be one of seeking a peaceful solution, of bringing peace peacefully.

We have had various levels of contact at various times with the secessionist groups. But because of their total disregard for the welfare and the peace of the people and their total lack of responsibility, all our efforts so far have not led to any fruitful advances. As we have repeatedly indicated, however, the way is always open and clear to all who seek peace, and we are prepared to listen to any opinion which takes the interest and welfare of the people into account.

Although past efforts have not been successful, I believe there is now, more than ever before, an opportunity to work with those who genuinely want peace. The establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the draft constitution of which is currently being discussed by the people and will soon be submitted to a referendum for their approval, will provide this forum. It will be up to these groups to come forward and make use of this opportunity.

These secessionist groups have so far been trading in the name of the people, claiming to represent their interests while, in fact, advancing their own selfish aims and exploiting the very people that they claimed to be fighting for. But now, it is this very people who are about to become full masters of the political fate of the country. I do not think that the time is far when we shall see a sorting out of those elements who may genuinely

have been misled into thinking that they were advancing the cause of the people from those who are bent on destroying the interest and sovereignty of the people in the pursuit of their selfish and evil aims.

QUESTION: Could you please brief us on the situation in the region: you recently had a unique meeting with Somali President Mohammed Siad Barre. Your foreign minister may be going to Somalia later this month. There have also been meetings recently in Addis between warring North and South Sudan.

The question here is: are you hopeful that Ethiopian relations with Somalia and Sudan will be more harmonious, and bring peace to the region?

ANSWER: The origin of the problems in our region — in the particular region of our continent known as the Horn of Africa — has its roots way back in the expansion of European colonialism. But unfortunately these problems have not gone away with the disappearance of colonialism. Our problem principally is with Somalia and not really with the other countries. And the very root of this problem is of course the declared intention of Somalia to expand at the expense not only of ourselves but also other neighbouring countries in the region.

The boundary between Ethiopia and Somalia is a matter that has been established and ascertained by internationally recognized instruments of law and something that has been recognized at a number of international forums. If I may cite some of these: there is the 1950 meeting of the U.N. mandatory administrators' meeting; there is also the resolution passed by the summit of OAU heads of state held in Cairo in 1964; and at the 2nd session of the non-aligned movement again held in Cairo. This was further confirmed, even more lately, at the OAU reconciliation meeting held in Lagos.



And although the origin of our problems with Somalia is the declared intention of that government to expand at our expense, it must also be said that because of the strategic location of the Horn of Africa, the situation has invited the interference of other outside powers as well.

For a country to develop peacefully, for a country to be able to undertake vital tasks of development, we think it is essential that there be peace and cooperation between nations, and we particularly believe it is absolutely essential that there be cooperation between neighbouring countries. Mutual development and peaceful co-existence with all countries is one of the very fundamental principles of our foreign policy. And I say this very sincerely. I may cite in this regard the recently established IGADD, or the Preferential Trade Area, that represent a number of countries in the region. These kinds of cooperation are essential.

And in this region of ours it should be possible to create even more such organizations and instruments which will encourage cooperation, mutual assistance and development. Well, to come back to the question though, it is true that we did have a meeting with President Siad Barre on the occasion of the founding meeting of IGADD in Djibouti. And we did establish a preliminary understanding of how to get rid of the tense and difficult relations between our two countries.

Accordingly the joint committee that was established then has already held its first meeting in Addis Ababa. And although one cannot hope to wipe away such long-standing problems at a single stroke, the beginnings of the talks in my opinion have not been completely hopeless. Our foreign minister will go to Mogadisho for the 2nd following meeting to be held there.

Obviously, it is difficult to say what will come out of that meeting. We shall wait and see. But on the whole, I can say

that if the common effort to find a solution is pursued sincerely and if what has remained the major obstacle in our relations — namely, this unrealizable aim and expansionist intention on the part of Somalia — is removed, I do not foresee anything hindering the full development of our relations. But of course if the problem is left open to be manipulated by outside foreign influences which do not wish to see reality recognized and the tension in our region subside, then we anticipate the process will be slow and that there might even be some difficulties. In any case, we will continue our effort with goodwill and with sincerity. This is what I have to say concerning our relations with Somalia.

Since you coupled the question together with this one, what I have to say regarding our relations with the Sudan is as follows.

To begin with, we believe the fact that the Sudanese have been in our capital to discuss and seek a solution to their problems is something that speaks for itself. I also think it is a measure of our goodwill and of our readiness to cooperate with our neighbours that we should have taken all the effort to arrange and to make possible such a meeting and to create the necessary conditions for a neighbour's effort to solve its problems.

By contrast, we have never enjoyed the benefit of a similar gesture made in our direction. This also speaks for itself.

In our opinion, the problem in the Sudan is an internal Sudanese problem. And as far as we understand this problem, it is not one between the Southern and Northern parts of Sudan, but one of fundamental disparity of outlook between the different political groups concerning the general situation in the country. So I don't think it is a problem of one part of the country being against the other, namely the South against the North. If this is the way the outside world looks at the situation in Sudan,



it needs to be corrected. This is not the reality behind the issue. Some have presented the problem and do continue to present it as one of an effort at secession on the part of the Southern Sudanese. But, on our part, we do not know of any such intention. We do not see any intention on the part of the Southern Sudanese to secede.

It is our sincere wish and hope that the different warring parties in Sudan will come together to negotiate and find a peaceful resolution to the problem in their country. And as I said earlier, it is as an earnest of our desire to see such an outcome and as an expression of our neighbourly concern that we worked to make such a meeting possible.

Having said that there is, perhaps, a wrong perception of the nature of the problem in Sudan in the outside world, I should say something about what we, as close and immediate neighbours, understand of the problem on the basis of what we hear and observe both directly or indirectly.

In our understanding of it, the problem in Sudan is not something that has suddenly emerged in our time, but one which has very deep roots going way back in history. It is a problem that involves fundamental and very important human problems at its origin and it has been the cause for a great deal of bloodshed in the past as it flared up and died down only to flare up again.

Because we are immediate and close neighbours of the Sudan, all the major political and social disturbances that erupt in that country obviously overflow onto us. Our concern here does not arise out of any desire to interfere in the internal affairs of that country, but simply because it is a problem which we cannot escape. I would like to emphasize this point here: that it is our geographical proximity which has Sudan's problems unavoidably spilling over onto us that is at the origin of our concern.

We believe the proper, realistic and constructive way to go about seeking a solution to the problem in Sudan is for the Sudanese to seriously address themselves to their fundamental problems. But if, instead of doing this, the people in Khartoum go about in different parts of the world campaigning that this is an anti-moslem movement, that it is a challenge against Islam, and that the Arab and Islamic world should go on a Jihad against it; and if, on the other hand, they go to the West to campaign that this is a communist conspiracy which should be countered and fought by the West; and if on the African plane, the people in Khartoum go about campaigning that this is a secessionist problem and a danger to African unity that should be handled as such, then I really believe things are moving away from a solution and not towards it. As I said before the internal problem in Sudan is one that demands a broad democratic solution.

I think the world should see this problem for what it really is. And as long as the government in Khartoum develops and follows a proper approach to the problem, and as long as it thinks we have a role to play and a contribution to make, we are perfectly ready to assist in the search for a solution, and for guaranteeing the peace and the unity of the country.

Such a course will be vitally important not only for a solution of the problem in Sudan, but also for the general tranquility of our region and, in particular of course, for the development of relations between Sudan and Ethiopia. Briefly, this much on the prospect of good neighbourly relations between Ethiopia and Sudan and the common security of our two countries.

**QUESTION:** If I may, I would like now to turn your attention to my own country, a country with which Ethiopia had in the past warmer relations than those today. How do you define

Ethiopia's relations with the United States: what they are, what you think they should be, and what kind of constructive exchanges you envisage between the two countries?

ANSWER: Ethiopia's foreign policy is based on the fundamental principles of peace, equality, and mutual advantage and its seeks relations with all countries of the world on these bases. As you personally know very well, we as a people do not bear any animosity towards any people, and particularly not towards the American people. As our long history clearly testifies, our major concern and effort has always been directed at the maintenance of our freedom and independence.

The United States is no stranger to us. We still have full diplomatic as well as trade relations. And we believe that the development of our relations on the basis of mutual advantage and equality will be for the good of both the peoples of Ethiopia and the United States. This has always been our fundamental stand and I do not believe that there are any problems between the two peoples.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that from the onset of our revolutionary process, our relations and our traditional friendship have continually deteriorated and are not what they should be. I think the question arose from a perception of this reality. But before proceeding to answer the question of how this deteriorating relations can be improved, I think we should try and see why our relations deteriorated in the first place.

As I said earlier in answer to another question, the people of Ethiopia lived for long under a very oppressive, exploitative and backward feudal order.

In spite of the tremendous sacrifices that they have historically paid for the maintenance of their proud statehood, and their freedom and independence — you must remember that

this was the sole independent nation in Africa while the whole continent was under colonialism — the people in the 20th century found themselves without even those modest social and economic advances and the democratic rights enjoyed by newly independent countries. All this as a result of the unlimited greed and exploitation of their feudal oppressors.

While the potential economic and human resources of the country are such as to be able to support a much bigger population than exists in the country, it is the retarding backwardness imposed on the nation by its feudal rulers that has made misery and poverty a part of our lives.

The Ethiopian people had the basic and sovereign right to fight this backwardness, to struggle against the regime and the order that had condemned them to such a vicious circle.

The fact that the Ethiopian people exercised this right and overthrew the oppressive regime and the monarchy should not have irritated and offended Washington.

This is the origin of the deterioration of the relations between the two countries. We were denied all the support and the aid which had been given before. And when we found ourselves in a crisis where our very national existence and our sovereignty were mortally endangered, the Pentagon and the White House chose to give help and encouragement to all the enemies of our popular revolution, a revolution which, after all, was brought about and enthusiastically embraced by the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian people.

We did not do anything in retaliation to this. We also did not have the capacity to react to this adequately. All our effort was directed and geared towards survival, towards the defence of our existence as a nation.

On the other hand, we have the belief that it is the sovereign right of any people to choose its own path of development, the social order that it wants to establish and follow. In any case, it was impossible to restore the old order and to bring back the feudal regime which had been rejected and violently overthrown by the people. It was not the intention of the revolution to bend to pressure to bring back a situation which the people had rejected. Apart from this, apart from the refusal on the part of the US government to accept the choice the Ethiopian people have made, I personally do not know of any other problem or contradiction that should have stood in the way of the traditional friendship between the governments and the peoples of our two countries.

We have, on our part, repeatedly tried to explain our views and to come to an understanding that would be the basis for good relations. We have done this on various occasions in meetings with delegations of American Congressmen and representatives of the Administration and through our mission in Washington.

Our main effort and commitment is to free ourselves from the scourge of underdevelopment. Our objective, in so far as possible, is to become self-sufficient and self-supporting and to cooperate with whatever government, whatever political party that is prepared to assist us in this effort. This is our right.

For anyone who is prepared to look at them objectively, all the programmes that we have at various times undertaken and implemented in our internal policy are programmes which have a fundamental humanitarian and democratic content and which should be judged on their merit.

Just as we accept the political and social order that exists in the United States, we think also that the United States Government should accept the new Ethiopia for what it is and accept

the social and political choice we have made. The failure of the US Government to do this is the source of the problem.

You are Americans and I do not have to tell you about the great achievements of the American people in many fields of human endeavour — in science, technology and the Arts and in their tradition of anti-colonial struggle — for which not only the Ethiopian people but the entire world holds them in great respect and admiration. American society has passed through a great many stages of development to reach the present level it has today.

But it is not only us Ethiopians who are having problems in our relations. There is a fundamental flaw that affects the relations of the US with many other countries and a matter which the American people and Government should really look into and reconsider very seriously.

Whatever colourings it may be given, the sources of the difference (of US government policy) with us or with other developing and developed countries is the question of private or social ownership of the means of production. Aside from this, I do not believe that there is any law that sets one people as an enemy of another.

But then this is a matter of policy and of national choice which it is the right of any country and people to make. When reduced to the level of the individual it is also the right of each one to make his own choice. I know the parallel does not quite fit, but one does not expect unanimity on everything even in a family or between two spouses.

How can there be any dialogue or understanding if all who adopt a social mode of the ownership of property — be they socialist, communist or democratic — are taken as outright enemies of the United States? This, I think, is the very root of the problem in American policy.



It is a common practice observed today — in countries both developed and developing — whereby parties either in coalition or independently adopt and implement different policies in different parts of the world. It becomes a source of problems if one country tries to impose its choice on others, or if it makes its vigorous disapproval of the choice other countries have made the cornerstone of its policy towards them. This cannot be acceptable in the 20th century and it leads to a denial of the search for peaceful co-existence and detente.

In our relation with the US we have never borne any ill-will or hostility towards its government, let alone towards the people. The origin of the problem is one on the part of the US government opposing and continuing to oppose a path of development that we have chosen as a solution to our historic, economic and social problems.

Even now, there are signs not of improvement but of a further worsening. A hostile anti-Ethiopian radio station has been established in Washington and it pours slanders on our people everyday. The offspring of the aristocracy and feudal barons who only yesterday oppressed, imprisoned and flogged our people are given full encouragement and provided with facilities for conducting their propaganda. What are the Ethiopian people to think of a US government that daily tries to tell them of the basic goodness of a feudal system that they have not forgotten, that they remember all too painfully?

In the recent natural calamity of famine that afflicted large parts of our country, some highly-placed members of the US administration rose publicly to say that it was the Ethiopian government which was deliberately starving its people. They spoke as if we had purposely brought about the famine. This is absolutely incredible. The mind simply boggles at such statements and at

the mentality that makes such statements possible. How could such a perverse train of events ever be imagined !

And whether such statements are made by individuals or by representatives of the government, they are made in the name of the American people and it does obviously colour our view of issues. But even in the United States itself there have been and there are natural calamities every now and again which bring destruction to regions and to people's lives. Is it to be said that it is the American government that has deliberately brought about these disasters?

Lately, too, in the general campaign to support counter-revolutionary movements in Nicaragua, Angola, Kampuchea and so on secessionists and other anti-revolutionary elements have been taken under the wing of the White House and a commitment has been undertaken to give them material and moral support. It astounds us that such totally discredited elements have been taken under the wing of the White House, and it obviously adds a different dimension to the possibility of our relations. In such circumstances, how can any efforts we make to improve relations have a chance?

If this revolution had not been conducted in the interests of the people, if it had not been embraced and supported by, at the very least, 90 per cent of the people, how could we possibly have withstood the onslaught of our internal enemies? How could we have overcome and defeated the massive external invasion that was directed against us? I think the American people should understand that this revolution does not represent the interests of a clique, or a small group of individuals, but of the vast majority of the Ethiopian people.

A choice will have to be made at some point between Ethiopia and its people which will eternally be there, and between



those elements that would like to pander to whatever prejudices may please others.

The present trend of supporting such anti-revolutionary, anti-Ethiopian elements might, of course, lead to difficulties for us. It might lead to the destruction of a certain amount of property, it might even lead to the death of people, to assassinations and so on.

There might be sacrifices but it will not change the direction of our advance. The only result of such a policy will be to embitter and poison coming generations of Ethiopians and to leave behind a heritage of bitterness against the US. Parties and governments come and go, but people and countries will always be there.

All this is in the absence of any ill-will or animosity towards the people and country of the United States and simply because of the policies pursued by the Administration. If you think this is just my personal opinion, you can go to any village in any part of the country and have it confirmed for yourselves. It is the universal opinion in the country.

If I have gone into this point in great detail, it is to explain fully the situation as we see it and to say that we have not been responsible for the deterioration of our relations. As to the question of how these relations can be improved, I must state again that the only obstacle to the improvement of relations is the hostile and negative policy adopted towards us by the other side.

This apart, we have repeatedly expressed and demonstrated our desire to improve our relations on the basis of equality, mutual respect and the mutual advantage of both peoples and countries.

This is a policy that we have always pursued with regard to the US or indeed any other country. We have perfectly good

relations with certain Western countries which, beyond economic cooperation, also cover cultural and other fields of interchange and interrelationships. We have joint commissions with, for example, Italy and France which operate in the fields of science, technology, education, trade, culture and so on. We have very close and admirable relations with Canada and Australia.

Ironically, more than any of the countries in the West with which we have good relations today, it was with the United States that history and tradition had prepared the ground for the existence of close and friendly relations. Unfortunately, this is the pass we have come to in spite of all the conditions being there for good relations between the two countries.

I have been frank and open with regard to my views on the bilateral relations between the United States and Ethiopia. But outside of these bilateral relations, there are certain things, certain events, certain attitudes in the world which affect us very closely and which we feel very passionately about. One such problem is apartheid.

I just fail to understand what prestige or what advantage the United States draws by adopting such policies on such very vital issues that affect the interests of masses of people. For any one who looks at it objectively it goes against reason and history. Sooner or later, by one means or another, South Africa must be free and will be free. The situation in South Africa is not just a question of freedom. It is something that affects the fundamental human self-respect of the millions of black Americans, of the four hundred million Africans, and of the hundreds of millions of other people in the rest of the world who care about justice and human dignity. That the United States should adopt such a policy as it has on such an issue is something that really puzzles and perplexes me. That the America and the Americans I knew should today, under the leader-

ship and influence of president Reagan, be identified with such a policy is something that I find saddening.

I apologize, if I have said anything extreme. But how can future generations of Americans build relations of friendship with other peoples of the world with such a heavy burden of bitterness on their backs? I could be wrong, you probably have a different outlook on the problem. But I have been absolutely frank and open with you in expressing my views as I have.

With regard to the question of disarmament and arms reduction, you may believe it or not, but I am convinced that the proposals put forward by the socialist countries are genuine. These proposals are constructive, and both the leaderships and the people are very sincere about them. They earnestly wish the arms race to stop and for the money that goes wastefully into this to be redirected towards economic and social development.

It is for the benefit of every body, of all mankind. What is so difficult about accepting this? It is an investment in the future of generations to come.

As for nuclear weapons it has now been established that the stockpile which already exists is sufficient to destroy the world several times over. A further piling up of this either quantitatively or qualitatively cannot bring about any fundamental change, only more waste and destruction. We are also at a point where it cannot be believed that one side or the other will come out triumphant in a nuclear war.

This is not an issue which we must leave only to the United States and the Soviet Union. This is a problem that affects everybody who lives on this planet, and we are very deeply concerned. As president John F. Kennedy once said,

whether we like it or not, we all breathe the same air, the same atmosphere and we share this earth. I don't think any arrangements have been made for the American people to live on a specially prepared set of air supplies. While pursuing such a policy one should feel responsible towards the world and to humanity.

One should hold things in proper perspective. Governments, Parties, Administrations are all transient. But peoples and countries are eternal. I think one must always bear this in mind.