

# German Chancellor Merkel backs oppressive Ethiopian regime

By Johannes Stern  
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To conclude her three-day Africa visit which also took her to Mali and Niger, German Chancellor Angela Merkel travelled to the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa on Tuesday where she was welcomed with military honours.

Her reception speaks volumes about the reactionary character of the return of German militarism to Africa. Just two days prior to the chancellor's visit, the Ethiopian regime declared a six-month state of emergency in order to undertake even more brutal measures to suppress popular protests.

On the previous weekend, heavily armed security forces attacked a mass rally to mark the traditional harvest festival of the Oromo people. Fifty-five people were killed, according to official statistics, but opposition sources reported more than 650. Youtube videos showed helicopters dropping tear gas onto the crowd of people and security forces firing into the crowds.

According to media reports, the army has shot more than 1,000 people since the protests broke out last November in the Oromo and Amhara regions.

The protests are directed against the government of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which has governed the country in an authoritarian manner since 1991 and brutally suppressed all opposition. The uprising by the Oromo and Amhara peoples was triggered above all by the government's land policy, which compels impoverished farmers to sell off their land for next to nothing to the state in order for it to be sold off to foreign investors.

With a population of 92 million and an average gross national income of \$570, Ethiopia is among the poorest countries in the world. The economic growth of the past decade has benefited only a small corrupt ruling elite. The vast majority of the population lives below the absolute poverty level. According to World Bank data from 2015, more than 30 percent of the population in 2011 had to live on less than \$1.25 a day.

The repressive measures of the regime are so obvious that even sections of the bourgeois press in Germany could not avoid discussing it. "If we had peace in this country, then 200 people would not have died in this way," Biru Tadese, the father of a victim, told ARD. "Who should we complain to? The government acts like God. Who should we talk to? We just bury our dead. I saw how they loaded bodies onto trucks like wheat or corn. But these are human beings."

Another father named Khala complained, "My son just went out to charge his phone. They shot him from behind as he tried to run away from them. He never threw any stones, nothing. He is a teacher. My son died even though he did nothing bad."

None of this prevented Merkel from meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and the commission president of the African Union (AU), Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. She presided over the opening of the so-called Julius Nyerere building for peace and security, which was funded by Germany to the tune of €30 million, as planned. It will serve as the headquarters for the AU and has a conference hall as well as a store and headquarters to lead military interventions.

It is becoming ever clearer that an important factor in the imperialist powers' offensive in Africa is the fear of a revolutionary upsurge of the masses as took place in Egypt and Tunisia five years ago. At a joint press conference with Desalegn, Merkel offered German support for the Ethiopian police and warned, "The hatred and dissatisfaction towards the political institutions is growing to such an extent that the acceptance of the state is no longer there."

In her speech to the AU, Merkel also made clear to the African regimes that she supports the suppression and brutal exploitation of their populations in the name of "peace and security." She cynically declared, "The African Union and its regional organisations have

demonstrated how important the ability to act is. With rapid reactions and negotiations, it has been possible to prevent several large-scale outbreaks of violence. This experienced responsibility saves lives and opens new perspectives.”

Merkel made clear the “perspectives” she was talking about in her subsequent remarks. She called for the prevention of illegal migration, caused by Africans “with completely wrong impressions” setting off for Europe. To this end she referred to the migration partnerships with the European Union (EU). Under these agreements, despots like the Egyptian dictator al-Sisi, Sudan’s Omar el-Bashir and even Desalegn himself will receive €1.8 billion from the EU to detain refugees in Africa and keep them away from Europe.

In addition, Merkel praised Germany’s military interventions in Africa. Of the German army’s military operations in Mali, she said, “Germany is making its own contribution there. Up to 600 German soldiers are involved in MINUSMA. Securing the stability of Mali is of decisive significance for developments throughout West Africa.”

Berlin is now apparently advancing similar plans in other parts of Africa. Merkel referred to the Democratic Republic of Congo and how “ten years ago [...] German soldiers ensured that the presidential elections took place peacefully.” Now “the issue is whether free elections take place,” to “protect Congo from a deep crisis.”

“The situation in Burundi” caused her “great concern.” One could see there “the danger that old conflicts could flare up once again.” By contrast, “the engagement of the African Union in Somalia” was impressive. Now more than ever it was necessary to “direct all forces to stabilise Libya.” For this, she explicitly encouraged “the African Union to intervene and brings its influence to bear to resolve the conflict.”

While Berlin officially opposed the NATO bombardment of Libya in 2011, it has been pushing more strongly into Africa since the foreign policy shift carried out in 2013-14. This has not only included German imperialism’s traditional spheres of influence during the colonial period, but also those of its historic rivals.

An article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* entitled “In the French sphere of influence” remarked in noticeably excited tones, “The European security mission in Mali [...] is strongly characterised by German influence” and is taking place in a region “which was previously an exclusively French sphere of influence and area of interest.” Alongside the “terror threat” and the

“pressure of economic migration ...France’s declining security resources” had contributed to the destabilisation of countries on the southern border of the Sahara and “created new conditions.” Mali showed “[t]he answer the European Union is trying to give—with overwhelmingly German weight.”

The FAZ left no doubt that the German-European mission in Mali is only the prelude to a much broader process of recolonising the continent, which is rich in resources and has a large population. The intervention was spreading “also into Mali’s neighbours.” Four further states in the Sahel region—Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania—would be “incorporated into the military and civilian strengthening of their security forces.” The Eucap Sahel mission, which “was led by German diplomat Albrecht Conze,” was “preparing a much more energetic expansion into neighbouring countries.”

“Diplomats under the EU flag” were currently being sent “to the capital cities of the countries concerned to register their security deficits.” It would soon become clear “how many forces from European countries would be required to cover them.” Germany would “certainly then have to mobilise more forces.”

Therefore it was timely that “the German air force is in the process of building an air transportation base in the heart of the Sahel zone in Niamey, the capital of Niger.” €10 million had already been allocated for the coming year “to establish waiting rooms and permanently accommodate the German contingent.”

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