



July 18, 2008

## Racism from Ireland and the reality of development in Africa and Ethiopia

Last week an article in the Irish Independent (“Africa is giving nothing to anyone – apart from AIDS” by Kevin Myers) hit a new low in Irish journalism. It was racist, offensive and deliberately intended to cause outrage and to provoke, and Mr. Myers' admission that his article would win no friends did nothing to moderate the disgust anyone would feel on reading such rubbish. It has nothing to do with freedom of speech or expression. It is a classic case of total irresponsibility, calculated to give journalism a bad name. It is no surprise that the Immigrant Council of Ireland is planning to make an official complaint about its publication which clearly appears to breach Irish law under which it is an offence to publish or distribute written material if it is threatening, abusive or insulting and intended to, or is likely to, stir up hatred. This is in fact an article that might, indeed should be ignored. It deserves to be buried.

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However, in its accusations that Africa only survives by help from the outside world and then wastes it on increasing its population, it does use Ethiopia as an example. Mr. Myers claims that Ethiopia is “vastly over-populated, environmentally devastated and economically dependant”, aligning himself with those who have been trying to get restrictions on aid to Ethiopia. He refers to the “self-serving generosity” that has been one of the curses of Africa, sustaining political systems that would otherwise have collapsed and has been inspiring Bill Gates programme to rid Africa of malaria, which he describes as “one of the most efficacious forms of population control now operating.” Evil is not a word to be used lightly but it seems appropriate here.

It is also appropriate to note that Africa, and Ethiopia, bears little relationship to the continent Mr. Myers portrays. In the last five years, Africa as a whole has achieved over 5% average growth, and last year, ten African states had a growth rate of over 7%.

Ethiopia at 9.5% had the highest rate of any non-oil economy. In fact, over the last five years Ethiopia has averaged double figure growth, and despite the problems of this year, caused by drought coupled with the sharp international rises in oil and food prices, will still manage nearly 11% growth this year. A joint UN/African Development Bank statement in June noted that industry grew at 11% of GDP in 2006-07 and

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manufacturing at 10.5%; agriculture at 9.4% in real terms. Last year saw the fifth good harvest in a row. Exports increased by over 18% in 2006-07 to \$1.2 billion, and are expected to rise to \$1.8 billion this year. Growth has benefited from investment in infrastructure supported by donor funding, and paradoxically electricity shortages in May and June (due to shortages of water) underlined the enormous increase in demand produced by development. All these are not merely abstract figures in government or donor balance sheets. Subsistence farmers are being drawn into the commercial economy. The agriculture sector, helped by institutional reforms and increased infrastructure is becoming more resilient, even though this year there has been an increase in numbers needing food aid following poor belg rains. In the Amhara Regional State, for example, there has been a 25% increase in land under cultivation, from 2,900 to 3,700 hectares in the five years to 2006. Since 2002, the number of jobs in the region has risen by nearly half a million, 52,000 in industry last year alone. 45% of the region now has access to pure water, 1645 villages have telephone links and there are some 80,000 mobiles in the region. Primary school enrolment reached over 90% two years ago, and the region now has five universities, five agricultural colleges, five teacher training colleges and three technical colleges. There are 2283 health clinics (up from 421 in 1991), 168 health centres (39 in 1991) and 17 hospitals (9 in 1991). The Somali Regional State has some 1,000 primary and secondary schools, colleges and a university. There are six hospitals and over 250 clinics and health centres. It, too, is benefiting from the substantial investment in telecommunications infrastructure; one recent project has been the connection of more than 600 secondary schools to the Internet. Similar statistics could be adduced with respect to all other regional states.

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The Government's primary concern remains the war on poverty, and the key objectives of the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), covering the period 2005/06-2009/10, to achieve sustained, robust and pro-poor economic growth to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, one of which is to halve poverty by 2015. This is showing positive results. The proportion of people living in poverty declined from 44% in 2000 to 39% in 2005, and both urban and rural poverty indices have fallen. PASDEP aims to reduce this proportion to 29% by 2010. It is undeniable that a great deal remains to be done. Ethiopia is deeply appreciative of the generosity of donors. It does, however, put aid to good use. It



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is on track to achieve most MDGs and to lift Ethiopia into the ranks of middle-income countries within the next two or three decades.