

Ethiopia 'ready to help Eritreans topple regime'



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ADDIS ABABA (AFP) – Ethiopia is ready to help the people of Eritrea topple the regime of Issaias Afeworki, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told lawmakers Tuesday, ruling out

a military invasion.

Meles accused the Eritrean government of trying to destabilise Ethiopia by backing rebel groups such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) as well as the Somali Al Qaeda-affilia

"We have to facilitate ways for Eritrean people to remove their dictatorial regime," he told journalists. "We have no intention to jump into their country but we need to extend our influence there. If the Eritrean government tries to attack us, we will also respond."

The border war that pitted Eritrea against Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000 left some 80,000 dead. Despite a peace agreement signed in 2000 in Algiers, tension continues to run high between the two Horn of Africa neighbours.

Meles also slammed what he said was the influence of the Egyptian government, which he accused of encouraging Eritrea to destabilise Ethiopia, in order to dissuade Ethiopia from developing the Nile.

"Recently, Eritrea has been training and deploying Al Shebab and home-grown destructive forces to terrorize our country. But Egypt is the direct force behind these destructive elements," he told lawmakers.

He called on Egyptians to realize that Ethiopia is not their enemy, saying that Ethiopia's plan to build a major dam on the Nile will also benefit the downstream countries.

"We want the Egyptian people to realise that we do not want to hurt them," he said.

Ethiopia has plans to use Nile waters for agricultural projects. Egypt feels such projects would threaten its water supply.

AFP – Prime Minister of Ethiopia Zenawi Meles, pictured in Mexico in December, says his country is ready to ...

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