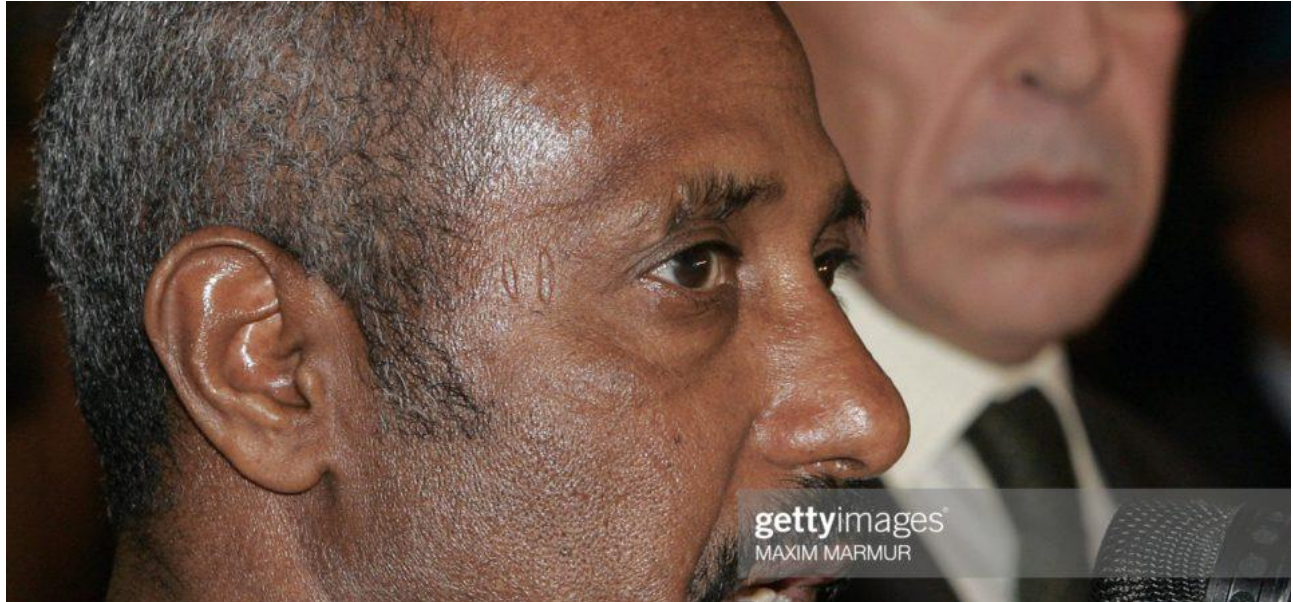


## Seyoum Mesfin (1949-2021)

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by [Ethiopia Observer](#) |



Former Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, one of the officials targeted by arrest warrants alongside other leaders of the Tigray region's ruling party following the military operation there was reportedly killed by security forces on Wednesday.

Seyoum Mesfin had served for more than two decades at the helm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as foreign minister from 1991 to 2010 and Ethiopian ambassador to China from 2010 to 2018.

Born as Ambaye Mesfin on January 25, 1949, in Azeba, Agame district of Tigray, he would later change his name to Seyoum as *nom de guerre*. He attended his primary education at Agazi School in Adigrat. He completed high school in 1967 and earned a diploma in chemistry from Bahir Dar Polytechnic Institute in 1971. Seyoum joined the then Haile Selassie I University in 1972 where he studied chemistry and physics until 1974. He was one of the seven Tigrayn students who formed the Association of Progressive of the Tigray Nation- which was later shortened to the Tigrayan National Organization.

After the Derg seized power, Seyoum dropped out of the university in the fourth year and in 1975 he slipped out of Addis Ababa to join a secretly formed Tigrayan political party, the Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF), switched from the association formed at the University. He was sent to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) for military training in the same year.

Seyoum had been the TPLF's foreign relations office head since 1979 and had operated from his base in Sudan for 15 years. It is said that during his stay in Khartoum, his surname was changed to 'Musa'.

In 1989, he became an executive committee member of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) and received the foreign affairs portfolio. After participating in the London Peace Conference in 1991 alongside Meles Zenawi and Berhane Gebre-Christos, Seyoum returned to Addis Ababa and assumed responsibility for foreign affairs in the Transitional Government of Ethiopia.

After the overthrow of the Derg, Seyoum traveled to Addis Ababa in an aircraft offered to him by the then Sudanese president Omar Al-Bashir. The aircraft had a technical problem and Seyoum feared he would die without seeing the fruit of his 17 years struggle but the aircraft managed to land safely in Addis, he recalled in an interview.

In the May 1995 general elections, Seyoum won a seat to the House of Peoples 'Representatives in Tigray Region in the fifth position behind Meles Zenawi, Tewolde Wolde Mariam, and Alemseged Gebre Amlak, and Sebhat Nega.



*(Meles Zenawi and Seyoum Mesfin toast with Russia's President Vladimir Putin, with Abadula Gemedo and Girma Biru watching behind.)*

Seyoum Mesfin had been one of TPLF's stalwarts since the TPLF-led coalition, the EPRDF took control of the country. When a split occurred in March 2001 in the TPLF, following the outbreak of a border war with Eritrea in May 1998, Seyoum was one of the central figures who rallied behind Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

In March 2003 an independent boundary commission officially awarded the disputed town of Badme to Eritrea, but Seyoum held a press conference, alleging that all the Ethiopian government's territorial demands had been met and Badme regained, contradicting the commission's statement. This had tarnished his credibility and this charge that had been used against him by critics for many years to come.

Seyoum's efforts to conclude a peace agreement during the Ethiopia-Eritrea war and his mediation to the Eritrea–Yemen border dispute in 1995 had largely been unsuccessful. So was his attempt to restore peace to Somalia in 1997 by facilitating the signing of the Sodere agreement between 26 Somali faction leaders.



*(Seyoum Mesfin at IGAD meeting with, South Sudan's Gen Taban Deng and IGAD special Envoy Mohammed Ahmed Mustefa in Addis Ababa on February 11, 2014.)*

Seyoum was also accused by his political opponents of the role he played in gross human rights violations perpetrated within the ruling EPRDF in which TPLF played the dominant role.

After Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power, Seyoum continued serving in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in his role advisor within the Prime Minister's Office until 2019. However, he resigned and went to Mekele reportedly unhappy with his post.

When tensions between the federal government and the TPLF escalated, Seyoum had repeatedly criticized Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. In one interview, he even said that the Nobel committee was considering rescinding the prize it has awarded to Abiy Ahmed. However, the committee said that there was no provision in the Nobel statutes for rescinding the prize once it has been awarded.

Seyoum and other senior TPLF leaders remained in the Tigray capital, Mekele until the Ethiopian army captured the city but later it was reported that they fled to the mountains of the region. The federal authorities a few weeks ago offered a reward in exchange for information that could help locate leaders and on Wednesday, three TPLF officials, including Seyoum, were killed, and five other party members were captured, after they refused to surrender to the military, the government said. (Main pic: Seyoum Mesfin with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.)