

Can Ethiopians Save Ethiopia from Itself?

-the Ethiopian state is ethnically polarized, repressive, murderous, and corrupt—

Aklog Birara (Dr)

"I am sick and tired of hearing about deaths and constant lies" in Ethiopia.

Human rights and social activist Obang Meto

"Please let me live. I shall no longer claim to be an Amhara or Christian."

An Amhara girl in Wellega, Oromia

"He (Abiy Ahmad) intentionally closed his eyes to the TPLF's maneuver to keep its modern weaponry and its professional defense forces. It seems that Abiy and the TPLF have silently agreed that the handing over of old weapons and the disbanding of TPLF recruits is enough to fool Ethiopians into believing that the TPLF has disarmed. "

Kenyan Journalist Leo Okere, "Abiy Ahmad's Machinations for Amharafrei," February 22, 2023

" Neglect by the Ethiopian government, Ethiopia's neighbors, global powers, and the African Union (where, at the recent AU summit, while talking about finding 'African solutions to African problems, Ahmed shamefully failed to mention the Amhara's plight/problem), which has also been deafeningly silent, in public at least, arms the gunmen; encourages mobs to slash and burn homes; gives no value to the lives of those men women and children being attacked, and thereby grants license to the terrorists to continue. Stand up, stand up all who are aware of this horror in our midst and demand that the Ethiopian government acts to stop the carnage."

Journalist Graham Peebles, "Ethiopia: the agony of tribal nationalism," March 10, 2023, in Counter Punch

The level of shamelessness may differ from regime to regime. In my lifetime, the Ethiopian state and government have always been repressive. It is unlikely this political condition will change any time soon unless Ethiopian political and social elites abandon tribal nationalism altogether and chart a new course.

The purpose of this commentary is to persuade the international community, especially the government of the United States whose Secretary of State, Anton Blinken will soon be heading to Ethiopia, the European Union, specialized UN agencies, the African Union and Commission, human rights organizations as well as ordinary people across the globe to call for accountability of Ethiopia's federal government leadership before things get even far worse.

Regardless of the American motive behind, pouring more aid to save a repressive, tribally oriented, incompetent, dysfunctional and corrupt regime may send the wrong signals in the same manner it did when the USA channeled tens of billions to the TPLF regime. Remember thieves of state and the phenomenon still fresh in the minds of millions of Ethiopians that the TPLF received \$30 billion from the USA, enriched a few, diverted billions and kept Tigray poor and food aid dependent to this day.

Ethiopia's Prosperity Party that replaced the TPLF and that runs the state and government---is unabashedly dominated by the Oromo Prosperity Party and behind it the Oromo Liberation Front

(OLF), the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) as well as the Liberation Army they command---are on the verge of rewriting Ethiopia's history and dismantling the fabric of Ethiopian society with clear intent of homogenizing it.

This incontestable and perceptible merger of party, state, and government, the complete collapse or subordination of Ethiopia's opposition parties under the watch of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed make human rights abuses including ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity such as genocide, internal displacement of millions, the suffering from hunger of 22 million Ethiopians, the bulldozing of hundreds of homes in Addis Ababa, ethnicity-based nepotism, theft, graft and corruption possible.

The void in institutional checks and balances and the dearth of independent labor unions, civil society and professional organizations compound Ethiopia's deep rooted institutional and structural problems.

It is time for the international community including donors to acknowledge that the Ethiopian state and government are no longer impartial actors. They are part and parcel of the core institutional and structural hurdles Ethiopians deal with every day.

In his study "State Repression and Political Order," distinguished political scientist Christian Davenport, 2013, summarizes the essence of state and government sponsored repression this way. "State repression includes harassment, surveillance/spying, bans, arrests, torture, and mass killing by government agents and/or affiliates within their territorial jurisdiction."

Why do state and government authorities sponsor repression?

I recall the euphoria that swept Ethiopian society and spread like wildfire around the globe when Reuters reported on August 14, 2018 "As forgiveness sweeps Ethiopia, some wonder about justice". This refers to the refreshing speech that make me an Abiy fan.

What happened then after Prime Minister acceded power in April 2018 underpins and contrasts the tectonic changes that took place after the honeymoon.

1. Abiy declared publicly that Ethiopians had suffered from "state terrorism" for which he asked forgiveness; and released thousands of political prisoners reversing decades of state and government sponsored security abuses under the TPLF.
2. No single individual or group knew how many political prisoners were maimed, lynched, flogged, or tortured. No one was held accountable for torture and other human rights abuses.

Most were jailed by the TPLF dominated EPRDF state and government because they demanded fair treatment, freedom, justice, and the chance to live and work in any part of Ethiopia without fear.

3. Ethiopia's state of emergency was lifted.
4. Ethiopia made peace with Eritrea.

5. Abiy declared that he will liberalize the Ethiopian economy by opening it up for foreign competition.
6. Whether intentional, foresight or negligence, Abiy did not announce plans to investigate human rights abuses and redress horrible actions committed by TPLF security or its defense forces commandeered by top Tigrean military officers.

It is public policy akin to saying saying to the international community that the Ethiopian government shall “forgive and move on. In his inaugural address, Abiy retorted “I call on us all to forgive each other from our hearts. To close the chapters from yesterday, and to forge ahead to the next bright future through national consensus,”

Without justice, the “next bright future” is delusional, crafty, jaded, sinister, and irresponsible.

Simply put, justice was left aside then as it is left alone today after 5 years of another ethno-nationalist supremacy and dominance of the Ethiopian state and government this time headed by what one Ethiopian expert opined is “Ethiopia’s trojan horse.” It is not up to me to figure what that means.

The point I wish to emphasize is this. Once you deny political prisoners justice in a court of law by holding those who committed human rights violations, crimes against humanity and the like, you tend to believe that your model of “forgive and move on” is the right one for the state and government to follow. One political prisoner who benefited from the release by the name of Kefyalew Tefera, who was shot and wounded by TPLF security and whose legs were amputated while in prison put the matter starkly to Reuters. “I am still a prisoner. I left half my body in there, I have no legs, I don’t consider myself free.”

This attribution is shared widely today. Ethiopia’s judicial system is broken. It is an understatement to state that it is far worse today than it has ever been. Because there is no justice at all. At the time ex-political prisoner Kefyalew complained about the lack of justice, one of Ethiopia’s highly acclaimed human rights lawyers, Wondimu Ibssa, who represented hundreds of political prisoners then and still represents many, said

“A lot of work needs to be done because the judiciary has been disgraced.” I share his description of Ethiopia’s justice system as “a mockery of justice” that regional authorities also mimic.

The state and government of Ethiopia cannot possibly protect victims if authorities operate above the law. It is sheer madness and fantasy to claim love, togetherness,

unity, peace, and reconciliation while ethnicity and religion-based atrocities are tolerated, condoned, or encouraged by the Ethiopian state and government.

Why not learn from the past?

By paying lip service, ignoring persistent crimes against humanity, pumping tens of billions of aids without accountability in the West, especially the European Union, the USA and specialized UN agencies emboldened TPLF dominated EPRDF. It did more harm than good over three decades of brutal rule. Ethiopia is still poor and dependent,

Similarly, the international community, the AU, the Ethiopian people including the Diaspora let their guards down, provided critical public relations, public diplomacy, material and technical support to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed who acceded power and promised the prospect of Ethiopianism over repugnant tribalism, civil and democratic rights over state sponsored repression, an inclusive, just, democratic and prosperous Ethiopia outlawing theft, graft, tribal nepotism and corruption and introducing a competitive and open market economy that will boost employment and make goods such as foods and services available and affordable to millions.

Behind this façade rapid and bold institutional and structural reform over the past five years is an astutely crafted machination and transformation of the Ethiopian state and government into a “newly minted Ethiopia” characterized by Oromo political, social, cultural, and economic elite governance.

While the West led by the government of the United States focuses primarily on the terrible war between Russia and Ukraine, horrific and repulsive crimes against humanity including ethnic cleansing, genocide, beatings and maiming, lynching, expulsions from homes in Addis Ababa as well as unprecedented ethnicity based displacements are taking place throughout Ethiopia. Displacement of an estimated one million Amhara and increasingly minorities such as Gurage, Guji, Hamar and others are taking place, making the second most populous country, home of the African Union and more than 100 embassies and consulates lawless.

Internal displacement causes hunger. Hunger causes deaths. Targeted deaths constitute a form of genocide with intent to downsize the targeted ethnic group, in this case Amhara.

The strangulation of Addis Ababa

The Oromo Prosperity Party-- blend of the OLF/OPDO/OLF liberation army as well as the Prosperity Party dominated Addis Ababa municipal government—

- Ban and restrict mostly Amhara from moving into Addis Ababa and demolish and or bulldoze homes occupied by Amhara and Gurage.
- Restrict the free flow of foods into Addis Ababa from the Amhara region.

- Deny access to water to citizens of Addis Ababa by demanding they pay exorbitant prices to the Oromia regional government.
- Shift investment capital from Addis Ababa to the Sheger Megacity Project that will cost hundreds of billions of Birr.
- Propagate innuendos and misleading allegation that Addis Ababa, a city of close to 6 million Ethiopians who hail from diverse ethnic groups serves as a hub of Amhara hegemony and center of influence.

The claim of Amhara hegemony, strangulating the city of Addis Ababa and forcing the submission of millions of Ethiopians for the benefit of Oromo tribal political actors is sheer madness. The city is a hub of international diplomacy, the center of Ethiopia's industry and serves as a beehive of activity.

Consequently, Addis Ababa is critical for the welfare of all Ethiopians and for the continuation of Ethiopia as the world knows it.

What do I suggest then?

1. The Government of the United States, members of the EU, UN specialized agencies, the African Union, IGAD, human rights groups and the rest have a moral obligation to leverage their resources and institutions and urge the federal government of Ethiopia to assume responsibility and stop the carnage that is taking place in Ethiopia under the watch of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his Prosperity Party.
2. I share the concern and debate reported by Foreign Policy on March 9, 2023, that the Biden Administration in general and President Joe Biden in particular administration "have not done enough to acknowledge or hold Ethiopia accountable for atrocities, ethnic cleansing, and possible war crimes it committed during a devastating two-year war against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) rebel group in the country's northern Tigray region. That war cost hundreds of thousands of lives and destabilized Africa's second-most-populous country."

That is not all, President Biden and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken cannot afford to ignore targeted ethnic cleansing, genocide and massive displacement of Amhara, Gurage, Guji and other minorities in Wellega, Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz, Northern Shoa and the City of Addis Ababa.

3. While I fully understand motivating factor of US national security interests in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, it will be prudent for US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to visit the Afar, Amhara regions as well as the hub of massive displacement, in the city of Debre Berhan

where thousands of Ethiopians suffer in makeshift camps and where hundreds of children are on the verge of starvation.

4. I also agree that “Mass killing never stays buried. Everyone in the victim community and the atrocity-prevention community will remember which U.S. policymakers made this call to ignore its own information and move forward with these economic packages.”

US Secretary of State Blinken can avert or at least mitigate US reputational risk by demanding cessation of atrocities and human rights abuses not just in Tigray but also in Oromia and the city of Addis Ababa, where Amhara are banned by Oromo authorities with the consent of Ethiopia’s Prime Minister from entering Addis Ababa.

5. There is no doubt that Ethiopian macroeconomic conditions are teetering and that the economy is on the verge of collapse. Food prices are beyond reach for ordinary Ethiopians. More than 22 million Ethiopians go hungry each day. Drought victims in the Somali, Afar and Southern (some parts) regions are in immediate need of emergency food assistance that only the United States possesses the means to alleviate. It therefore seems to me that USAID must channel its largesse to affected communities including the millions in the Afar, Amhara and Tigray regions.
6. In this instance I agree with “Officials in the other camp, including U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) chief Samantha Power, who argue in internal policy debates that the administration needs to extract more commitments from the Ethiopian government on human rights and accountability for war crimes and other atrocities before agreeing to fully open access to economic and trade lifelines”.

Finally, I urge Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to go back and embrace his promissory start and make history.

“I call on us all to forgive each other from our hearts. To close the chapters from yesterday, and to forge ahead to the next bright future through national consensus,”

March 10, 2023

Children in makeshift camps in the City of Debre Berhan



Children deserve education not human degradation (next page)

