

Liberty

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WHO IS TO STOP THE BLOODBATH IN ETHIOPIA?

It is now 12 months since the appalling bloodbath started in northern Ethiopia's Tigray and extended beyond it; and, as we go to press, the killing fields are not far from Addis Ababa. The



UN Security Council, which so far met ten times over the war; the United States; the European Union, the African Union and literally the entire world, begged all sides in the conflict to stop the fratricidal killings before they inflict totally irreparable damage to them-



selves as Ethiopians. As we helplessly watch the mass killings, we recall with sadness the cost of the border war of 1998-2000 that claimed about 100,000 lives on both sides. The current one-year old conflict in Ethiopia has already proven to be more savage. The final count of an all-round damage will definitely show much uglier figures. >>p.5

ERITREA: LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

Ironically, Eritrea has not been in peace with itself and others ever since it attained a hard-won sovereign statehood three decades ago. Painful hostilities with its neighbours have been numerous, costly and all unnecessary - including the one currently raging in Ethiopia with Eritrea's full-fledged participation. But the country's prolonged lack of peace with itself has been the worst and much costly. Unquestionably, the tyrant in Asmara has been the main, but not the only, source of all the untold miseries suffered by its people. The other enemy has been lack of unity and joint action among and by those which were expected to act and help in bringing about democratic change in Eritrea. >>p.2



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ERITREA: LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

Since the 1990s, there have been many attempts inside Eritrea and abroad to make the expectant people see light at the end of the tunnel. Unfortunately, all lacked unity of purpose and action. In recent years, the grassroots movement of Yiakil/Kifaya (for enough-is-enough) was started and in no time drew the attention of vast number of diaspora Eritreans, including former regime supporters. It of course took sometime to organize it mean-

ingfully. But as of this summer, the Global Yiakil Movement of Eritreans (GYME) is a force to be reckoned with. Its democratically elected councils (Baytos) in eleven countries, bring together literally all Eritreans in diaspora.



The other welcome news of the season is that the Eritrean Political Forces (EPF), an

emerging platform of all political formations in exile, is seriously working to go beyond a coordination stage and become a meaningful political umbrella.



The challenge now is for these two combinations (the GYME and the EPF) to find a way of closely working together and finally be able to provide the much expected leadership, **ONE LEADERSHIP**, for the entire camp of justice seekers, which has been in disarray for quite a long time. By observing the statements and documents released at different occasions by the two emerging formations, one can say that they share almost all the key political issues and principles concerning the future for Eritrea: that the tyranny in Eritrea must end soon and be replaced by people-power, and that the protection of Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity is none negotiable.

There of course were similar attempts in the past. But, times have changed, and one can hope that this time round that the flickering light at the end of the tunnel will be real and come true before more damage is inflicted upon the Eritrean people and their hard-won sovereignty which is nowadays being threatened by regional forces and betrayed by their homegrown dictator and his small clique in Asmara.

PLIGHT OF ERITREAN REFUGEES IN LIBYA, ETHIOPIA ...EVERYWHERE

Have you heard about what is happening to Eritreans in inside their own 'homeland', Eritrean refugees in Libya, in northern Ethiopia, in the Sudan, in Israel and other places? And have you contemplated of how one can help?

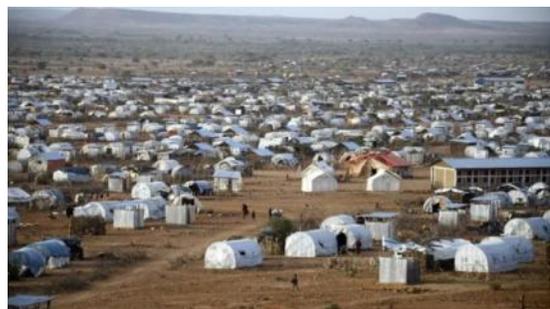


As we know, there is what they call a 'donor fatigue', as there also is a 'news fatigue.' People tune closely to hear more about events negatively affecting other humans. Humanitarian donations then flow generously. But with the passage of time, one's interest to know more about them declines sharply as does the readiness to help. This could be the case of Eritreans and Eritrean refugees suffering everywhere.

As activist Eritreans in diaspora solemnly marked the 8th anniversary of the Lampedusa Island tragedy that claimed over 360 Eritrean lives, they also had to try to be a voice to their refugees stranded and dying in war-torn places like Libya and the Tigray region in northern Ethiopia.

This year's September and October witnessed yet more tragic acts inflicted upon helpless refugees by lawless factors in those countries. As armed groups in Tigray killed, kidnapped, raped refugees and looted their dwindling food stores, similar acts were reported in Libya as of the first week of October. Local militias and Libyan government authorities rounded up and detained under horrible conditions over 4,000 Eritrean refugees and African migrants. Many were reportedly killed and wounded while trying to flee from the detention camps.

The refugees and migrants are often at risk of arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, and extortion.. The latest wave of arrests is part of wider crackdown by the Libyan authorities on migrants and refugees in Libya and the environment is becoming increasingly more restrictive. Sadly, the international community has not yet come with a reassuring response to their plight. Nonetheless, the appeals for help continue, as they did for decades in the long past.



For example, the Eritrean Political Forces (EPF), an emerging coalition of seekers of democratic change in their country, once more came with a strong message to the UNHCR and, through it, to the rest of the potential world actors, urging them to help. In its 13 October message to UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, the EPF urged the UNHCR to be ready to avert the return of Eritrean refugees to their own killer regime, as some reports had it. (>>p.4)

The EPF appeal also demanded the UNHCR “to exert its full power to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of the refugees” and even recommended that it actively engage “on resettling these refugees in Europe and North America where their safety can be guaranteed.”

In a separate message dated 12 October, the Red Sea Afar Human Rights Organization, expressed grave concern about the plight of Eritrean Afar refugees in Barahle inside Ethiopia where approximately 52,000 refugees have been residing since the 1990s. As confirmed earlier by Human Rights Watch and others, “Eritrean government forces and Tigray Militias have committed killings, rape, and other grave abuses against Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region”.

Global Demonstrations in Support of Refugees in Libya

During October, Eritreans held massive demonstrations in 20 world metropolitans appealing for international action to protect the safety of refugees in Libya.



The biggest of these events was the one held in the southern Germany city of Munich where an estimated 15,000 people showed up. The other demonstrations took place in the Canadian cities of Toronto, Ottawa and Winnipeg; in the US capital of Washington DC and in Seattle; in Frankfurt and Berlin; Dusseldorf; the Hague; Brussels, Rome; London; Geneva; Stockholm and

in South Africa’s Pretoria and other world cities.

1st African Woman from Eritrea Elected to German Bundestag

Eritreans at home have long ago forgotten all about elections and parliaments. Yet, increasing number of persons of Eritrean origin are exercising the right to elect and be elected in legislatures of countries where they have been naturalized. The latest such person is Awet Tesfayesus in Germany where she arrived as a refugee at the age of six 41 years ago. (It’s to be recalled that Eritreans started to become refugees in large numbers way back as of February 1967 due to Ethiopia’s scorched-earth policies at that time. Sadly, the same bad fate of fleeing home continued under the homegrown tyrant for the last three decades).



As first woman of African origin in the German Bundestag, the Honourable Awet (meaning ‘victory’) Tesfayesus of the German Green Party may be expected to look into pressing African issues. One would wish she will start with the problem in Eritrea.

A year ago in October 2020, a young Eritrean refugee, Ibrahim Omer, was elected as Labour Party MP in New Zealand after having fled from Eritrea in 2003. Also elected to the US Congress in 2019 was Joe Neguse, son of an Eritrean migrant. He was elected from the State of Colorado as the first Eritrean to do so in USA and the first black person from the State of Colorado. In earlier years, three naturalized Swedes of Eritrean origin served in the Swedish parliament. **The BIG question is, will they ever be helpful to the people in their original Eritrea, whose ruthless dictator had in the first place uprooted them, their parents and over a million of their own generation?**



WHO CAN STOP THE BLOODBATH ...?

(>>from p.1) Affected peoples everywhere know the truth that the UN Security Council has long proven not to be a real guarantor of regional and world peace. On the other hand, the United States, that in the past made a few selective attempts to intervene to stop genocidal wars is also no more there. The big question, then, is what can be done if this kind of killings continue for indefinite periods and endanger the lives of millions?

The World Order, as it now stands, cannot provide an answer as to who can stop wars. But, until the current UN system gives way and is replaced by another guarantor of peace in this planet, one can only advise concerned warring sides to do it by themselves.

In this case, one can repeat the advice to all armed Ethiopian sides to lay arms without preconditions and start talking. And in order to make that sane decision, our Ethiopian brothers and sisters must first agree to tell their Prime Minister's bad advisor from Eritrea to leave them alone. Until then, they will not be able to stop the bloodbath and live in peace.

That is a sincere advice of their Eritrean neighbours, themselves victims of the same source of evil, endless suffering, death and devastation.



DOES ETHIOPIA HAVE A FUTURE?

Writing for the Centre for Global Development on 6 October 2021, Mark Lowcock, one of the Centre's distinguished fellows, worried that, based on what has happened in the last 12 months, Ethiopia is headed towards destroying itself. He believed that scenario planners and research intuitions in many countries also "assess the consequences to be very bad" for Ethiopia. Reprinted below is his analysis under the heading, 'How to Destroy a Country: Does Ethiopia have a Future?'

"Here's an easy five-point plan for the leadership of a country which has emerged from civil war and dire poverty over recent decades and now wants to destroy itself.

***First**, pick a fight with a corner of your territory run by a previously powerful minority ethnic group. Cut off their resources. Provoke them into a response. Send in the army. Invite a neighbouring army in to rape and kill civilians and destroy their crops, businesses, schools, and clinics. Persuade the victims they are about to be subject to a genocide and promote hate speech about them among the rest of the population. >>p.6*

Second, divert resources from other parts of your country with a history of ethnic tensions. That will stir up things there too.

Third, tank the economy. Print money, order weapons you can't afford from abroad, aggravate inflation and, especially if you are landlocked and dependent on imports, incite attacks on your supply lines.

Fourth, alienate your most important international supporters, particularly those you rely on for finance. Public attacks on their leaders work quite well for this, as does whipping up antipathy towards them among your own population. Buying weapons from their enemies is good too.

Fifth, antagonise a few of your immediate neighbours. Inflaming arguments over disputed land is one option; giving them reason to think you plan a grab on shared water resources is another.

I don't think Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other leaders in Ethiopia actually want to destroy their country. But an intelligent observer from outer space with an insight into the human condition might, having watched what has happened in the last 12 months, easily conclude that they do. Let's run through the list to see how the five-point plan has been executed.

It was foolish to [to resort to arms] last November in an attempt to resolve what was essentially a political argument. It was beyond reckless to invite the Eritrean army in to help. And it was criminal to abet and incite the campaign of mass rape, killings, and destruction of property that followed. It was also counterproductive: the population of Tigray concluded they faced a genocide and reacted to defend and protect themselves accordingly.

Ethnic tensions have been high across much of Ethiopia in recent years. It is said that years ago, Nelson Mandela tried to persuade then Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi that he should be trying to create a country in which people from the many tribes and groups that make up the country see themselves as Ethiopians first, and members of their ethnic group a distant second. The examples of Tanzania under Nyerere and (more controversially) Rwanda under Kagame were cited. For whatever reason, it did not happen.

This has proved Ethiopia's Achilles heel. Meles was, with difficulty, able to keep the lid on. But things crumbled after his death in 2012. In early 2018 I met people from towns along the border between the Oromia and Somali regions in south-eastern Ethiopia who had just been displaced by fighting over resources and political power.

In January 2019, in the south of the country, I met some of the nearly one million people forced to flee violence over access to land around Gedeo and West Guji. There are many other conflict areas, especially in the western half of the country. Federal forces deployed to maintain order have since been diverted to Tigray. Watching what is happening, groups elsewhere have armed their own militias ready to defend their interests. Hardliners have gained influence all over.

*Notwithstanding the huge economic progress Ethiopia has made over the last 30 years, which I recalled in *The Washington Post* nearly a year ago, the macroeconomic position has always been a juggling act between maximising growth and avoiding over-heating. Inflation, foreign exchange, and fiscal risks, already growing because of the pandemic, are now acute.*

Meanwhile, the reaction of the international community to events in Tigray has evolved from concern and alarm to threats and sanctions as the crisis has grown and Abiy has continued to throw fuel on the flames. Western countries are (whether they should be or not) proud of the contribution they have made to progress in Ethiopia in recent decades, especially what their development aid has helped achieve. Using the national propaganda machine to whip up popular feeling against them, as the authorities in Addis Ababa have done in recent months, is a provocation. If the calculation is that others, like China, will compensate for lost resources from western countries and international institutions, it is quickly going to be proved wrong. The World Bank alone has been giving Ethiopia more than a billion dollars a year in grants and very cheap loans in recent years, most of it financed by taxpayers in North America and Europe. No-one will replace that if it dries up. Even worse, widely circulating rumours that Abiy has bought attack drones from Iran make it look like western money is subsidising the Iranian defence industry.

And closer to home, Abiy's need for support from the Amhara population complicates the scope for de-escalating the border dispute with Sudan over Al-Fashaga, an area covering 600,000 acres of fertile land and river systems. Most of the Ethiopians living there – on contested land - are Amhara. Likewise, the completion and full operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, one of the world's great current infrastructure projects, which I visited in 2016, is now at risk.

The project, to which many Ethiopians have contributed their own money from the little they have, is a national totem. It is designed to be the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, and the sixth largest in the world, relieving the country's acute energy shortage. Regulating the flow of the Nile more consistently through the year, as the dam could do, would help both Sudan and Egypt. But concern over the rate at which it is filled and fear that water might be diverted for agriculture in Ethiopia have put the Egyptians on red alert. A previously unknown armed group has become active in the local area. This should all be soluble. But the febrile atmosphere has heightened tensions.

All this threatens the stability of the whole country, but the immediate priority must be averting imminent catastrophe in Tigray. In June, in my last few days working for the UN, I made clear I believed there was then famine in northern Ethiopia. I said a re-run of 1984, when a million Ethiopians died in what may have been the world's worst famine of the last 50 years and the regime responsible for it was subsequently deposed, was not fanciful. A cessation of hostilities and access for humanitarian agencies could prevent that. But time was running out.

African sentiment has recently swung against Abiy. In a carefully crafted statement in late August on behalf of all the African countries on the UN Security Council, the Kenyans, who had been among those previously biting their tongues, called on him to accept offers of mediation. They urged the government to scale back ethnic attacks and remove barriers to a political dialogue. They warned of an uncontrollable spread of violence and bloodshed.

They urged that Tigrayan forces, which had surprised many by their success in defending themselves, pull back too. They called for unfettered humanitarian access and a resumption of basic services to the people of Tigray. They urged the west to provide humanitarian assistance and, once a mediation effort was properly underway, offer economic support too. And, importantly, they explicitly rebuffed those in Ethiopia calling for war to be given a chance.

But the penny hasn't dropped. The screws on Tigray have been turned further in recent weeks. Fresh recruits to the Ethiopian military, summoned by mass mobilisation campaigns preying on their patriotism, have been deployed in human wave attacks against Tigrayan defensive lines. This has so far failed: the main result is tragic piles of corpses of young men and boys. But the Tigrayan population of 6 million face mass starvation now. Their farms, businesses, and schools were destroyed, and their access to banks, electricity, water, and health services cut off, in the early months of the crisis. The government claims to be willing to let aid in, but its flunkies harass aid workers crossing lines and intimidate truck drivers in UN convoys, so many are now too terrified to show up for work. Barely ten per cent of the food needed is getting through. Recent eyewitness reports from aid workers describe people eating nothing but green leaves for days, exponential increases in starvation in both rural and urban areas, and even the children of the staff of the main hospital in Mekelle, the regional capital, showing signs of malnutrition. Humanitarian workers managing to get seats on the rare flights to the region have, as the Associated Press recently reported, been told they cannot bring dental floss, multi-vitamins, personal medicines or things, like flash drives, that could have a use in documenting what is going on.

All this reveals – or confirms – that Abiy has two objectives in Tigray. The first is to starve the population either into subjugation or out of existence. The second is to do that without attracting the global opprobrium that would still, even in today's fractured geopolitical environment, arise from deliberately causing a massive famine taking millions of lives. It is also clear that the second objective is less important than the first.

That is the message to be taken from the threatened expulsion last week of UN humanitarian leaders from Ethiopia. Abiy would rather take the criticism for that than allow them to see what he is trying to do.

The irony, well-informed experts privately say, is that Abiy's game plan cannot work. If he tries and fails to destroy Tigray, he will be destroyed himself. If he succeeds, he will never survive the backlash that will follow. His only out is to take up the African Union's call for dialogue. But does he see that?

Scenario planners in leading countries and institutions now think Ethiopia may disintegrate. They assess the consequences to be very bad. For everyone. Not just in Ethiopia, but further afield too. Is it still possible to pull back from the brink?" (bold font added).