“Never Again!”  A Hollow Promise

On Dec 9, 1948, the United Nations member states, including Ethiopia, approved the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, a treaty born out of the fervent desire to ensure that “never again” would any person face the horrors of genocide, such as the atrocities inflicted by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

In July of 2020, these sacred promises once again became hollow words, as the world chose to ignore a silent genocide going on in Ethiopia, as innocent people were killed, mutilated, crucified brutalized and displaced, and their properties burned down for who they were -- Amharas and Christians.

Article II of the Convention states:

“In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Since the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) under the cover name of EPRDF took over the government in 1991, the two overriding priorities, as stated in the TPLF manifesto of 1976, have been to destroy the Amharas. Over the last three decades, these objectives have been systematically implemented in subtle, and sometimes in very unsubtle, ways. The forced sterilization of the Amhara women to depopulate the ethnic group; the illegal detention and torture of hundreds who are still alive to tell their stories; the murder and disappearances of many Amhara activists and politicians; the occupation of historical lands of Amharas; the destruction of the homes and properties of Amharas; and the dislodgments of Amharas, making Ethiopia one of the countries with the largest number of displaced people on earth, all are documented facts and can be presented to any legally established inquiry commission, particularly the International Criminal Court (ICC).

When Abiy Ahmed came to power as Prime Minister of Ethiopia and leader of the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) in March of 2018, Ethiopians hoped he would usher in a new era of peace and stability. It was this expectation that won him the admiration of the people of Ethiopia and elevated him to be the winner of the 2019 Nobel Prize for peace. Regrettably, two years after he took power and less than a year after he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Abiy is presiding over a country that is on the brink of
disintegration and has become home, through his silence and inaction, of the most harrowing crimes ever committed in the land, and perhaps in Africa since the Rwandan genocide. The victims of these crimes are predominantly Christians, Amhara people, or moderate Oromos, who live mostly in the Oromia region. Graphic images of these crimes have overwhelmed the social media. No recent genocide, except the ones committed in Rwanda in 1994, can parallel the gruesome nature of the murders of Amharas and Christians in the Oromia region in the month of July, 2020. The scale, the intensity and the manner in which these crimes have been committed are likely to cause irreparable damage to the unity of the country and eventually lead to civil war. As recorded by popular media, such as Abbay Media, Asrat Media, Mereja TV, Zehabesha, and many others, some of the atrocious crimes included:

- Parents executed in front of their children.
- A 9-month pregnant Christian woman humiliated in front of her husband and threatened with murder. She died of the trauma.
- A wife witnessed her husband beaten and dragged by a car on the streets with his head tied to a rope and then decapitated.
- Young men beaten, mutilated, and their guts taken out and spread all over the place; and parents not allowed to recover the mutilated bodies and to properly bury their dead.
- Numerous churches were burned down.
- Chants and slogans for the destruction of the Amharas continued through extremist media outlets.
- Properties belonging to Amharas and their sympathizers were burned and destroyed.

And, many more stories remained unrecorded because the government shut off the Internet and did not allow journalists or any civilian to move to these areas for a month. Paradoxically, the state owned-media and government officials have yet to openly expose or admit the extent of the massacre and destruction. As the world watched these horrific tragedies with incredulity, Abiy Ahmed chose to be silent and did not make any statement or blame the perpetrators; but was quick to send his condolences to the families who lost loved ones in the recent explosion in Lebanon.

Journalists and other observers, who have been to the places, believe that this was all preplanned, since in most of these places the murderers asked their victims for ID cards to make sure whom they were killing. The hatred expressed in the social and other media outlets by Oromo extremists was reminiscent of Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines that orchestrated the Rwandan genocide.

There is nothing more harrowing than this story that the world should have been talking about in the month of July 2020. Ethiopia was once again forgotten. The evidence is compelling and the testimonies streaming in the social media and other outlets are gut wrenching. The international community should not be selective in its
condemnation of genocide and crimes against humanity. **How many more people have to be massacred, tortured, displaced, and brutalized to condemn these acts in Ethiopia as genocide?** Kofi Anan, the late United Nations Secretary General, stated in his Nobel Lecture in 2001: “A genocide begins with the killing of one man – not for what he has done, but because of who he is. A campaign of ‘ethnic cleansing’ begins with one neighbor turning on another”

In 1994, at least 800,000 Rwandans were slaughtered in a 100-day genocide, when Hutu soldiers and militias slaughtered members of the Tutsi ethnic group. As Annan later acknowledged, if the UN, various governments and the media had paid more attention to what was unfolding in Rwanda, the massacres might have been averted, and declared: “The international community is guilty of sins of omission.”

If the international community has learned any lessons from its past sins, it must take stock of the gravity of recent acts perpetrated against Christians and Amharas in Ethiopia, and must do everything possible to hold those responsible to account and to prevent further escalation.

“Accountability matters – not only because it provides justice for victims and punishment for perpetrators. It matters because ending impunity is central to ending genocide,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said. “Prevention and punishment – the explicitly stated twin aims of the genocide convention – can never be seen in isolation from each other. Punishment is key to prevention. Impunity is an enabler of genocide: accountability is its nemesis.”

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August 7, 2020

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