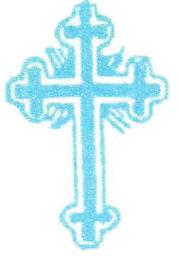




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The Holy synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church



No. 2090/2015
Date May 1, 2015

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Ethiopia shall Soon Stretch out Her Hands unto God." (Psalm 67:13)

A Statement of Declaration by the Legitimate Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church on the Recent Heart-rending News Concerning Ethiopian Christian Victims in Libya at the Hands of ISIS and on the Sufferings of all other Ethiopian Refugees or Immigrants in the Middle East and Africa

The Legitimate Holy Synod of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) in North America, which is headed by His Holiness Abune Merkorios, Patriarch of the EOTC in Exile, held its 41st Biannual Meeting on April 29-May 1, 2015 at the Baltimore Eyesus Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Maryland, U.S.A. What follows is a text of the resolutions passed by the Legitimate Holy Synod and approved for dissemination.

Throughout the long and illustrious history of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has had a profound effect on the cultural, literary and spiritual development of the country, while playing an epic role in contributing to the advancement of religious arts, literature, and philosophy, as well as the production of biblical manuscripts that give a special meaning to the unique trajectory of the Church's centuries-old immersion into Christianity. Considered by adherents of the faith as the holiest of the holy, this ancient Orthodox Church has been a source of societal cohesion in a country where Islam and Judaism have also co-existed side by side with it--- for the most part peacefully--- throughout the centuries. Thus, viewed from the contexts of both history and the Church's standing within the Ethiopian Orthodox community, Ethiopia and the Orthodox Tewahedo Church, together, can be likened to the "two sides of the same coin," a euphemism meant to convey that they exist in fusion and hence are inseparable until the end of time. In essence, this celebrated Church has made its indelible mark on the Orthodox faith for years following strictly the Church's conical law, which, among other things, calls for the founding of The Holy Synod--- the supreme canonical authority comprising of all the diocesan archbishops of the Church. Within the Oriental Orthodox group of churches, of which the EOTC is the largest, the Holy Synod formulates the rules and regulations regarding matters of church organization, faith, and order of service.

The Legitimate Holy Synod in Exile, in keeping with the Church's centuries-old practices of praying and speaking out for the downtrodden and for those victimized by unjust and cruel methods of rule everywhere, has been horror-struck by atrocities of unparalleled proportions perpetrated against



Ethiopian political and economic refugees recently in some parts of the Middle East and Africa; the beheadings of 28 such refugees in Libya in particular under barbaric conditions by the extremist, Jihadist outfit called ISIS have sent deep-seated shockwaves throughout the Diaspora Ethiopian community, in Ethiopia, and the entire world. Thus, after thoroughly probing these and others political dynamics that have created the human tragedy in Ethiopia today, which is best manifested in the massive and unabated migration of thousands of Ethiopian citizens to neighboring states to escape poverty and domestic terrorism at the hands of operatives of the current regime in Addis Ababa, the Holy Synod has issued this well-timed communiqué. As such, the resolutions enumerated below are to amplify the gravity of the crisis facing our people in Ethiopia and in other countries, such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Sudan and South Africa, just to name a few, where Ethiopians find themselves as refugees but are being treated under the most appalling conditions ever recorded in the annals of human history:

- 1) As the Great Apostle Paul, who himself was beheaded in Rome during the reign of Nero Caesar for his Christian beliefs and evangelical work, so reminds us all, those who believe in the Kingdom of God should never succumb to the temptations of nonbelievers who may try to force us into abandoning our Christian faith even to the extent of subjecting us to the most crude forms of physical abuse and other inhuman treatment. Furthermore, The Great Apostle, during his evangelical expeditions throughout Jerusalem and Rome, made it known that "...as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the faithful will always be subject to possible extermination and even to being slaughtered as that of a sheep." In the same vein, the recent beheadings and executions of 28 Ethiopian immigrants in Libya by Islamist extremists (ISIS), owing to their Orthodox Christian faith, may symbolize in many ways the life experience of the Apostle himself. Indeed, the Ethiopians sacrificed their lives for the sake and honor of their belief in Jesus Christ. Given this backdrop, **let it be resolved that the massacre of those patriotic Ethiopian religious victims be memorialized from hereon as "Ethiopian Martyrs in the Land of Libya";**
- 2) The Holy Synod has also bestowed the honor of "martyrdom" upon those who perished along with their Orthodox Christian brethren in Libya, although they may have been of a different faith or of a religious background lacking **salvation through baptism** (Being saved by believing that Jesus is the Christ and thus putting one's full faith in Him). As the Scriptures so bear witness, the death of a person in life shall not be in vain, for such death is one that Jesus Christ himself endured for the salvation of humankind. That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day all speak to this biblical truth. Hence, even those who died without salvation through baptism in Libya are immortalized by the death of Jesus and that their death, along with their fellow Christian brothers, places them on the path of martyrdom, as well, because, in their death and sufferings, they lived through the fate of Jesus who shed His blood and endured excruciating sufferings at the time of Crucifixion. Given this biblical imperative, therefore, **let it be resolved that those who lost their lives to executions and beheadings by ISIS in Libya, including those who were not Christian but chose to die with their fellow Christian compatriots in support of the latter's cause, as martyrs of our time;**
- 3) The Holy Synod believes that the Ethiopian victims in Libya are the true martyrs of our time, having earned that honor by scarifying their lives for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We further believe that, those who died for their Christian faith and others for their convictions in the righteousness of humankind all have

reached the pinnacle of honorable distinction in the eyes of The Lord. We think also that those who fatefully perished in Libya as the "sacrificial lamb" may have joined truly those who have already earned their rightful place in Heaven by their deeds and honorable actions. In light of this imperative, **let it be resolved that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church throughout Ethiopia and in the Diaspora commemorate annually the date of the beheadings/executions of the Ethiopian sacrificial victims in Libya on an occasion (date) set aside for a special religious observance so as to make their martyrdom more noticeable and thus celebrate their strong stand for their faith for generations to come;**

- 4) We, in the Holy Synod, are also cognizant of the pain and grief that families of the victims in Libya are experiencing at this time, and we feel the same pain as they do and thus express our deepest condolences to them, first and foremost. At the same time, we wish to advance the well-known doctrine of Christianity that those who sacrifice their lives for the faith will have a special place in the Kingdom of God and thus their passing in defense of their religious beliefs will lead them to the ultimate reward of redemption. For example, the excerpt from the Scriptures speaks well to the ultimate reward that one may earn by doing righteous things in respect of the Lord: "And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the Day of Judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world" (1 John 4:17, NLT).
- 5) We, in the Holy Synod, strongly feel that the physical, mental and emotional conditions of the thousands of Ethiopian refugees in Africa and the Middle East call for an urgent response from all rational and conscientious human beings around the world. In addition to the victims in Libya, thousands are languishing under merciless conditions in several nearby countries from Ethiopia--- all victims of a callous regime bent on causing hardship, misery, torture, ethnic cleansing, and political killings, among other methods of repression, to its own people while stifling political dissent by imprisoning journalists and jailing others who express their dissatisfaction with the regime's rule through demonstrations. Thousands are in jail and even more so leave the country everyday in droves as refugees, often at the risk of drowning across oceans and of being killed and abused while crossing national boundaries; the ethnic-based rule and the monopoly of both political power and the economic resources of the country by a minority ethnic oligarchy can be attributed to the massive exodus of Ethiopians from their homeland. Therefore, **let it be resolved that Ethiopians of every ethnicity and political persuasion who work and live in Western countries and elsewhere use every means possible to assist their fellow country men and women in need and exert your collective voices to demand justice for the people of Ethiopia, particularly for those languishing under appalling conditions as refugees in several of the countries mentioned above. Furthermore, the Holy Synod implores that responsible world governments, humanitarian agencies, multinational organizations and religious entities of all types see to it that justice prevail in Ethiopia while lending a helping hand to alleviate the horrifying misery in which Ethiopian political refugees find themselves in Africa and the Middle east today. It is further resolved that a Task Force headed by an Archbishop of the Holy Synod and consisting of representatives among the clergy, members of the Sunday School, and church parishioners be set up immediately to coordinate efforts with governmental and non-governmental entities and design plans that will help end the crisis facing Ethiopians at home as well as the sufferings of those who exist as refugees elsewhere;**
- 6) The Holy Synod had authorized in its previous biannual meeting the observance of the Anniversary of His Holiness Abune Merkorios's 25th Enthronement as Patriarch of the EOTC, which was scheduled to be held on May 2, 2015 in an auditorium at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., along with the inauguration of the official opening of the newly purchased Patriarchate Office building in Maryland. This was to take place following the April 29-May 1, 2015 Biannual Meeting at the Baltimore Eyesus Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in Maryland. However, upon a formal request made by His Holiness to the Holy Synod, this special occasion was dedicated to those who died in Libya under the barbaric actions of Jihadists, including those who perished while crossing the Mediterranean Ocean to seek refuge in Europe, and others still languishing in prisons or left helpless on the streets of Middle Eastern cities, as well as those burnt alive in South Africa where their shops were looted and burnt down by vigilante groups infected with a sickness of xenophobia;
- 7) Furthermore, the Holy Synod had authorized previously the drafting of church by-laws that would be used across affiliated churches, primarily aimed at creating administrative guidelines that would be commonly used while offering flexibility for each church to design the by-laws, as deemed appropriate to the laws of each state and locality. As such, a committee consisting of members of the clergy and selected representatives from the affiliated churches was

established for that purpose. At a special meeting convened in Oakland in January 2015, the committee discussed proposals and agreed on a final draft that was distributed to affiliated churches for their review and revision, so that the changes proposed by each church would be submitted for further consideration by the Holy Synod. At the Baltimore meeting, **it was resolved that all affiliated churches engage intensely in the process of revising the draft sent by the committee wherein the clergy of each church, members of the board in each church, and the entire membership of each affiliated church are to participate fully in the process.**

- 8) With the forceful seizure of political power in Ethiopia by the current regime more than two decades ago, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has since undergone a crisis of leadership. Primarily due to regime interference in church affairs, the EOTC has split for the first time in its long history into two Holy Synods—one in North America under the leadership of the legitimate and exiled Patriarch and another in Ethiopia headed by an illegally-enthroned Patriarch in violation of the practices of Oriental Orthodox churches. Attempts of reconciliation between the two Synods and of bringing the split to an end have failed so far. At the same time, Ethiopian Orthodox churches have proliferated throughout the world since then, although some opting to remain neutral until reconciliation will bring back the unity of the Church while others simply choosing to be affiliated members of the Holy Synod in Exile. As we have done in the past, we call upon all “neutral” Ethiopian Orthodox churches in the Diaspora that are currently not affiliated with their sister churches of the Holy Synod in Exile to join us in the name of national unity, so that we may collectively tackle the challenges facing our Orthodox Church while marshaling our shared resources to assist our people wherever they may be and give support to each other, as communities of immigrants around the globe. We believe faithfully that our unity can be a source of strength, wherein we could use it effectively to strengthen our collective voice as well as to influence others so they may embrace our cause;
- 9) The Holy Synod wishes to issue this appeal, in the strongest possible terms, to all Ethiopians in the Diaspora and within Ethiopia, as well: Throughout our three-thousand history, Ethiopia has never faced as much danger of survival from the machination of an internal enemy as that of the current regime in Addis Ababa. Since taking the helm of power in 1991, the regime has designed a political system of ethnic federalism as an experiment of nation-building, the consequences of which have been devastating to our people, who had lived for centuries peacefully; moved from one part of the country to another freely; intermarried without regard to ethnic and linguistic affinities; protected the independence and territorial integrity of the country with fervent patriotism; and, more importantly, demonstrated time and again unity in the face of external threats. However, all these past idiosyncrasies of our people are in danger of being wiped out before our eyes under the present regime’s political and social re-engineering, which is aimed at perpetuating the rule of a minority ethnic oligarchy in Ethiopia. Using the “divide and conquer” tactic of autocratic regimes based on religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences, the ruling clique running Ethiopia today will do anything to remain in power by dismantling, among other things, the social institutions that had made Ethiopia stronger as well as unique among other African countries. One of such institutions targeted by the regime for annihilation is the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Indeed, there are many pieces of evidence corroborating the regime’s complicity in this area, but this is neither the place nor the time to illustrate the facts pointing to that here at this time. Nonetheless, we wish to implore that, as Ethiopians of good conscience, you not remain indifferent to the issues affecting our country and that you do have a moral obligation to be involved in one form or another to make a positive contribution to the wellbeing and survival of your native land. You must do so through ways that promote our unity, civility and strength amongst us, so that we will pass the values that had kept Ethiopia what it is today to the generations to come. At the same time, **let it be resolved that we engage in reconciliation, negotiation, compromise, and fellowship to bring a lasting unity among us, so that we may eventually overcome those issues that have made our solidarity beyond our reach; we must prevail over our differences, forge a renewed unity amongst us, and reorient our collective will to the motto of “peace, justice, liberty, equality for all in Mother Ethiopia and its people.”** Also, the Legitimate Holy Synod wishes to take this rare opportunity to convey, as we have done before, that we extend our message of readiness for peace to those who genuinely seek to bring about the unity of the two Holy Synods and thereby the reconciliation of the Holy Fathers in exile and in Ethiopia, respectfully, so that the faithful once again rejoice in the return of normalcy to our much-loved Church;
- 10) We, in the Holy Synod, condemn in the strongest of terms the atrocities committed against all Christians anywhere around the world, particularly of those Ethiopian Christians martyred in Libya, by Islamist extremists and ask all civilized people to denounce all evil acts by individuals and such groups against innocent people based on their religion, race/ethnicity, and national origin. We call all governments, religious institutions and civil societies to

