

Why the US Should Consider Siding with the Ethiopian People Now!

Aklog Birara (DR)

“Courage is not the absence of fear-- it’s inspiring others to move beyond it.”

Nelson Mandela

It is no longer defensible for the U.S. and other Western countries to provide financial, intelligence, military, diplomatic and logistics support to the TPLF dominated government unless the TPLF is ready and willing to embrace an inclusive government now. On the ground, the pendulum has shifted dramatically to the side of the people. It should be self-evident to American policy makers including the Pentagon that the more TPLF’s Agazi and allied forces kill the more defiant and determined the resistance is deepened and broadened. In turn, this condition creates a fertile ground for terrorists and Ethiopia’s traditional enemies. The Obama administration should therefore condemn TPLF state sponsored atrocities in all parts of Ethiopia. History tells us that, in the long-run, people united and not ethnic elites transform societies for the better.

The TPLF has hardly learned anything from past mistakes, including the mistakes by the repressive regime it replaced. Tragically, the TPLF is emboldening the resistance through its traditional method of extrajudicial killings. For instance, on August 20, 2016, the TPLF snipers killed four people in Gondar, including the young activist Gizachew Ketema. Here is the reason. The people of Gondar came out in droves wearing white to symbolically recognize the **dreadful and exclusionary** days of the Meles regime and demanding that Ethiopians go beyond ethnicity and religion and unite to end the hegemony of the TPLF. A new, united, independent, sovereign and all-inclusive Ethiopia that embraces and celebrates its diversity and empowers each and every individual to fulfil her/his potential is the only way all of us can save Ethiopia from destruction. **The country and its 101 million deserve such a compelling and forwarding looking vision.**

America’s Policy towards Ethiopia should be recast

As a student of international relations, I often ask myself the question of “What should inform U.S. policy with regard to Ethiopia in such a manner that the two countries benefit.” I suggest the following:

- Recognition that Ethiopia is one the oldest cradles of civilization, origin of the human species and the center of coexistence of three great religions: **Christianity, Islam and Judaism**. In a world of turmoil and failing states in the Horn, North Africa and the Middle East, this tradition of mutual tolerance and respect matters; and America should strengthen it by giving the right signals and by siding with the population.
- Appreciation of the fact that Ethiopia has an established record as an independent state predating of those of most European nations. This status is a result of the unity of the country’s diverse population at times of its greatest need. Despite internal conflicts, repression by governments and lack of good governance, Ethiopians have more in common than is portrayed by self-serving political elites and foreign governments.
- Although production methods are Biblical, Ethiopia has a well-established culture of settled agriculture, especially crop production and animal husbandry. U.S. aid can strengthen this sector.

- Ethiopian-American relations were established under Emperor Menilik in 1905. Since then, people to people relations have flourished and remain constant regardless of regime change.
- American participation in Ethiopia's modernization and institution building begun under Emperor Haile Selassie with various agreements and projects such as the "Point Four Agreement for Technical Cooperation, 1951", the Peace Corps under President Kennedy, a major survey of the hydroelectric and irrigation potential of the Abbay River, the Imperial Highway Authority, Ethiopian Airlines in 1945, the Ethiopian Airforce initially supported by Sweden and numerous institutions of higher learning. The Ethiopian Airforce was among the most competent not only in Africa but also the Middle East. Now completely dominated by TPLF staff, EAL was the first to fly to numerous African countries.
- In summary, measured on the basis of quality and not numbers, more Ethiopians were educated and trained by the United States than by any other country. This is the foundation of an enduring Ethiopian-American people to people relationship that should not be under stated by U.S. policy makers.
- It is true that this remarkable relationship between Ethiopia and the United States changed abruptly in the 1970s. It is not my intent to dwell on this unfortunate change.
- While most Ethiopians subscribe to America's war against terrorism in the Horn of Africa and understand the motive behind according the TPLF government the status of an "ally," this policy is short-sighted. It can no longer be justified because the TPLF-led government is narrowly based. It is punishing its own people through extrajudicial instruments under the pretext of "anti-terrorism." The Obama administration, the U.S. Congress and the public ought to appreciate that America's good will, values, image and long-term interests are being damaged severely.
- The Obama administration and Congress must appreciate the notion that Ethiopia's famed double digit growth has practically come to a halt. Famine-driven hunger has been compounded by an outbreak of underreported cholera and by a popular countrywide resistance that is deep and wide. The central government is unable and incapable of to provide basic services to the public. In effect, it is incapacitated. Its focus is survival of the one party state and government. The root causes of the resistance remain unaddressed. The government's preoccupation of crushing the resistance has been overcome through imaginative house-sit-ins, economic boycotts etc. Social media, especially mobile phones, person to person exchanges of information are widely used. Ethiopia's trade to historical places in Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, the Semien Mountains, the Omo Valley, the Oromia lake district and other places have practically stopped. All these conditions contribute to a low or zero growth scenario. Prices are escalating at an alarming rate. **(See Letter from Addis Ababa: Ethiopia doesn't want you to know," the Washington Post, August 20, 2016).**
- The Obama administration and Congress must appreciate the unintended consequence of TPLF arrogance and intransigence that peaceful resistance in response to a legitimate grievance can be crushed. It can't. Those who defy the one party ethnic-minority state and government are fully aware that the public purse is used to kill, maim, jail and incapacitate. They thus resort to boycotts, house-sit-ins, refusal to pay taxes etc. Does the TPLF intend to go house to house and arrest hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians?

- In short, the Obama administration and Congress, donors, investors and other foreign stakeholders must come to grips with the reality on the ground that there is no stability in the country; and that the current resistance is unlikely to stop unless its root causes are addressed.
- Protesters indicate the majority of Ethiopians feel strongly that the harsher the regime, the more the resistance! Those who support TPLF harsh treatment of protestors by demeaning the Oromo and Amhara population are adding petroleum to the fire. The rest of us should do everything we can to focus on the system rather than on persons and ethnic groups.

Why the American public should care

The people of the United States, Congress, Presidential candidates Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump as well as the Obama administration to whom this commentary is addressed should heed to the plight of the vast majority of the Ethiopian people and speak out loud and clear that the TPLF/EPRDF must initiate a serious discussion on the formation **of a Transitional Government of National Unity** involving all stakeholders now. I say this because the country and its diverse population face imminent danger and disaster. There is ample evidence to show that TPLF die-hards are under the illusion that they own the entire country and can save it from disaster by deploying force of arms. History and numbers are against this illusory, nihilist and narcissistic model. Over the past quarter century, the TPLF has been highly successful in asserting command and control of the entire country, its institutions and its resources by “telling Oromo that their enemies are Amhara, Amhara that their enemies are Oromo and Tigreans that their enemies are both Amhara and Oromo” as the situation demanded. Activists at home and abroad opine that this formula is outdated and no one buys it! It is not the intent of this commentary to elucidate on who the beneficiaries of this DIVIDE AND RULE model are. I subscribe to the notion that it is a worn-out and tired strategy that has been debunked by Amhara and Oromo youth at home and abroad.

People shape history

Here is the demographic reality in terms of the solidarity of the population that is fighting for change. The Oromo (34 percent, Amhara 27 percent (debatable census figure that underestimates the number with millions of Amhara living in Oromia **and 2.4 million** unaccounted for), Somali 6 percent, Sidama 4 percent, Gurage 3 percent and other minority ethnic groups representing 20 percent, a combined 94 percent of Ethiopia’s 101 million people are part of the popular resistance against the TPLF in one form or another. Ethiopian observers feel strongly that, had the TPLF allowed the people of Tigray who represent 6 percent of the population to exercise their freedom to protest, they too would join their compatriots in the resistance for freedom, justice, genuine equality and the rule of law. I have no doubt for a single second that the **people of Tigray** have as much stake in the future of a country they defended for thousands of years as any one of us. Inclusion means the Tigrean people too.

The TPLF has, instead, created a wedge between the vast majority of Ethiopians and Tigreans for a strategic reason. Just look at the following glaring **statistics of minority ethnic-hegemony in decision-making where it matters most; and ask the lead question of who owns Ethiopia’s national institutions and assets today?** (Annex 1).

As shown in the Annex, the strategic objective of institutional supremacy in **defense, security and intelligence, telecommunications and the media, justice, foreign affairs, finance and budget and civil society organizations** by the TPLF at a level that is both **shameful and unprecedented** in any country is

simple. It is to ensure that these institutions are impenetrable by non-TPLF members. Differently put, it is to continue political, intelligence and military, budgetary, financial, natural resources and diplomatic hegemony over the rest; and to do it at any cost. I have argued in the past that this merger of party, state and government by an ethnic-minority party will unravel at one point. The unraveling of this dominance is manifested in at least the following areas:

- Decentralization under the ethnic-federal system has been undermined. It is the central or federal government governed of the TPLF that is supreme in all sectors of life, for example natural resources ownership and exploitation. The TPLF interfered in the affairs of the Amhara region; sidelined the regional party; and exercises total oversight. Among other things, it plans to disarm the population by any means necessary. It has capacity to reject the indigenous population's demand of federal government recognition of identity and ownership of lands. The bottom line is this. If there ever was genuine decentralization of policy and decision-making to the regions it is now gone.
- No one really knows today who stands for Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people. There is hardly any central administration to speak of.
- It is vital to remember the reality on the ground. The capacity to kill and subdue peaceful people who protest for justice is entirely dependent on who is well-armed. Equally, the capacity to conduct ethnic-cleansing using a variety of instruments depends on who is armed and has ample financial resources to achieve its objectives.
- The capacity to shut-off all forms of media communication including social media is also dependent on who controls the state and government (see Annex I on the Tigreanization of the communications and media establishment). These are the mouthpieces of the TPLF. Further, this supremacy enables the TPLF to buy foreign journalists to tell its side of the story without the benefit of presenting the other side.

For example, a reporter of Al-Jazeera wrote the following quoting Tigreans anonymously rather than the protestors and relatives of those killed in Gondar. Charles Strafford's piece of August 21, 2016 presents a distorted and inflammatory picture; and should be retracted by Aljazeera. "Thousands of ethnic Tigreans have fled the Ethiopian city of Gondar to escape anti-government protesters....Their homes and businesses have been attacked over their perceived connections to the government." He quotes another anonymously that "He and many Tigreans like him have been forced to flee from their homes and business in the northern city of Gondar because of threats by some members of Amhara community. " As a journalist, he should have asked if any Tigrean was attacked by any Gondarie. He accepted the rumor mill as fact and gave ammunition for the TPLF to take harsh measures against the Amhara population of Gondar. "Rumors and threats started spreading that all of the Tigreans would be forced to leave Gondar in the coming days...Tigreans living in and around the city are very afraid because property have been attacked and people have been killed." Those killed are Amhara and the killers are Agazi. It is tragic that he and those quoted equate property with human life. They fail to mention that the fear culture in Gondar and other parts of Ethiopia is created by the TPLF. It therefore defies the imagination that the TPLF turns things around and accuses victims for crimes committed by TPLF state and government and no one else! "They think that almost all the Tigreans are supporting the government. And many think in order to weaken the government they have to kick out all the Tigreans from Gondar. Many Tigrean business have been attacked - hotels, cafes, shops and even homes have been targeted." Would these same sources admit that the Amhara population has been a target of

ethnic-cleansing, marginalization, displacement and demeaning by the TPLF and its supporters for a quarter of a century? (**Annex II: Silent Genocide on the Amhara Documentary.**)

Gondaries and other Amhara are routinely labeled by the TPLF and its surrogates in derogatory and demeaning terms such as “retards and donkeys” in their own turfs. It is common for the TPLF and surrogates to call Oromo as “criminals and terrorists.” How does the TPLF and its loyalists reconcile these divisive and exclusionary degradations with the needs of the Tigrean people to live without fear anywhere in the rest of Ethiopia? Whether I may have a differing view or not, the reality is that all TPLF symbols of power and control (parks, statues, real physical property etc.) become targets because people are simply fed up being treated like animals. They want to be treated with dignity and respect. Is this not the reason why the TPLF took arms against the Military Dictatorship?

As far as I know the TPLF and not the people of Gondar or other parts of Amhara and Oromo made the decision to airlift all Tigreans from Gondar and other locations. The TPLF COMMAND should be asked why; and not victims of its security and defense establishments.

Whether the symbol of wearing white or carrying red cards, boycotts, house sit-ins, prayers and other forms of resistance, lifting fists upwards as is done by Oromo activists, the principle of collaboration and solidarity across ethnic, religious and generational lines is monumental and irreversible. For the first time in a quarter of a century, solidarity among the Amhara and Oromo people is much stronger than ever before. The central tenet of resistance among these immense popular forces with potential is **freedom, justice, the rule of law, fair and just treatment of citizens**, equitable distribution of income and ultimately people-anchored democracy. Against this irreversible principle and movement is total denial of reality on the ground; and a hard line and disingenuous position on the part of the TPLF that dominates party, government and state. What is the evidence? Plenty.

On August 20, 2016, activists in Addis Ababa were in the process of mobilizing the population to demonstrate on Sunday August 21, 2016. They issued millions of red cards as symbols of defiance and to end TPLF rule. In a panic, the TPLF mobilized and swarmed the city with Agazi and other instruments of repression. Someone told me on the phone that “the city looked like a militarized zone.” It is said that the TPLF offered “financial incentives and subsidies” to members of security and other forces who obeyed orders to kill, club, maim and arrest. This indicates a growing suspicion within the ruling party that members of the defense forces may refuse to kill their own people. Reports indicate that there were more special hit squads in the city than protestors. The TPLF had managed to go house to house and arrest activists. Their whereabouts is unknown. Meantime, protests, house sit-ins and boycotts erupted in other towns and rural areas. Defiance has become the norm in Ethiopia. In Gondar one activist is quoted saying this. “The more innocent people the TPLF kills, the more defiant and resolved we become.” In Addis Ababa one spokesman of the organizing group captured the resistance this way. “The TPLF is doing our work. It advertises arrests and beatings to the public. In doing so, those who did not know of the ongoing resistance are alerted and informed. People are ready to die rather than live in constant misery!” Those killed, maimed and arrested have become heroes and heroines of the resistance movement. Some insiders say that the people of Addis Ababa may resort to staying home, boycotts and silent resistance, a model that many say is effective in Gondar, Bahir Dar etc.

We are told by reliable sources that some peasant communities in the Amhara region are self-governing. Some members of the TPLF’ inner circle admit that the government and state have literally collapsed and the country has become ungovernable. Sadly, these same insiders are reluctant to say that the

TPLF’s narcissistic model of governance by punishing ordinary and innocent citizens is producing the opposite effect of more defiance and resistance against the TPLF state and government. The regime is haunted by a sense of encirclement by the very people it has been ruling and plundering for a quarter of a century. The economy is burdened by huge debt; and the current posture of repression rather than negotiation for a transition deepens the structural problems Ethiopia faces. What the Ethiopian people are asking is not more of the same; **but a radical restructuring of governance.**

What do I mean with more of the same? I suggest that readers take heed of the following leaked message of August 20, 2016 of an insider within the TPLF intelligence from Security Chief Debretsion Gebre Mikael urging the TPLF security and defense forces to “identify, select and subdue the growing unrest triggered by anarchist and terrorist forces.” Specially gulling and irresponsible is the pinpointing of Gondar as the locus of anti-Tigrean sentiment and plot. This is why I objected to the misleading and unbalanced Aljazeera piece. The stakes are too high to provide a biased picture by any journalist. We should be reminded of Rwanda where those in power called on the population to rise up and murder the “coach roaches,” the Tutsi. The world was absolutely ignorant with regard to what followed. As a result of this ignorance and benign neglect hundreds of thousands of Tutsi were massacred. **Here is the instruction from the TPLF Chief of Security. It is scary for everyone.**

" ጆግናው የመከላከያ ሠራዊታችን፤ የሀገራችንን ሰላም ለማረጋገጥ ከመቸው ጊዜ በላይ በንቃትና በተጠናከረ ሁኔታ በመንቀሳቀስ ፤ በቅርቡ በሀገራችን የተከሰቱ አመቶችን፤ ስልታዊ በሆነ መልኩ ፤ ሥርዓት በማሲያዝ ላይ ይገኛል ። በየክልሉ የሚነሱ ረብሻዎችን ሰብስቦ በማድረግ፤ በአንድ ብኔር ላይ ያነጣጠረ ጥቃት በመከሰት ላይ ይገኛል ። በተለይ ብጥብጡ ከበረታባቸው አካባቢዎች፤ የጎንደር ነውጥ በጉልህ የሚጠቀስ ሲሆን፤ ሠራዊታችን ከነውጠኞች ጋር ያደረገውን ፍልሚያ በጀግንነት እያተወጣ ይገኛል ። ከዚህ ጋር በተያያዘ፤ አመፅ ፈጣሪ የሆኑ አካባቢዎችን በመለየት የጦር መሳሪያ የማስፈታቱ ሂደት ፤ የመንግሥት የቅርብ የቤት ሥራ ይሆናል ። እንደዚህ አይነት ሥርዓት አልበኝነት የማክሸፉ ሂደት፤ በተጠናከረ ሁኔታ የሚቀጥል ነው የሚሆነው ። ድል ለመከላከያ ሠራዊታችን ። " There is a wise saying in Amharic. “አያ ጂቦ ሳታመኻኝ ብላኝ።”

Ethiopia is not under foreign attack. There is not an iota of evidence to suggest that the Eritrean government or any external force or internal opposition party is leading the popular resistance. The resistance is driven by systemic issues; and is grassroots based. Those who are dying each day are the sons and daughters of the Ethiopian people; no one else. Similar to other countries and on the basis of Ethiopia’s established tradition, the primary role of Ethiopia’s defense forces is to protect the country’s borders and preserve its territorial integrity and national sovereignty. It certainly is not to side with the ruling party and punish ordinary citizens. I should like to flag a historical fact.

Ethiopia’s defense force that was both **national and multiethnic** has been diminished and degraded by the TPLF. The TPLF demolished the country’s multinational defense and security infrastructure and personnel and replaced it by a Tigrean command system and personnel. At present, there is no distinction among the TPLF, security and defense forces, the state and government. They operate as one and the same and carry-out orders at the behest of the TPLF. This is the reason why keen observers conclude that, for all practical purposes the situation between the Ethiopian people on the one hand and the TPLF on the other mimics Eritrea and Ethiopia. In other words, Ethiopia is enveloped by a dicey environment of no peace or no war because of the TPLF. The internal target are Ethiopians and not a foreign enemy. I know of no single country where a government in power that labels peaceful citizens who protest for justice as “enemies” and targets them for extrajudicial measures on behalf of one ethnic group. Ethiopia’s defense establishment ought to distinguish its primary role of defending the country and all of its people; and the political role imposed by the TPLF of defending a rejected system and serve as a camouflage of protecting the Tigrean people who too are suffering under the yoke of the TPLF. The people of Tigray need no protection from ordinary Oromo and Amara. They need protection from the TPLF!

I therefore urge the West in general and the Obama and British administrations in particular to demand that the government of Ethiopia stops the carnage and withdraw troops from cities and towns immediately if not sooner.

I also urge all Ethiopians, including Tigreans, to continue the new and encouraging trend of reaching out to one another, collaborating with one another and learning from one another. Tolerance and not arrogance! Both the West and Ethiopians together must speak with one voice that arrogance, warmongering and tribal selectivity and exclusion by the TPLF invites civil war and genocide regardless of who initiates it? I pose this question for anyone who cares about Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people to answer. “Why is the TPLF targeting Gondar and the Amhara population at this time? Why did it airlift all Tigreans from Gondar?” The TPLF and its supporters must answer this question.

I strongly urge skeptics within the Obama administration who continue to give mixed signals to consider the following that emanates from the TPLF Manifesto before it took power in 1991.

1. The TPLF had declared hatred for the Amhara in its Manifesto explicitly. “The Amhara are the enemy of the Tigray people. Not only are that, Amhara are the double enemy of the people of Tigray. Therefore, **we have to hit the Amhara. We have to annihilate Amhara. If the Amhara are not destroyed, if the Amhara are not beaten up and uprooted from the earth**, the people of Tigray cannot live in freedom. And for the government we intend to create, the Amhara are going to be the obstacles.” A newly released documentary on ethnic cleansing by a credible British Journalist shows that the TPLF continues to carry-out systematic and **most often silent** ethnic cleansing of the Amhara. The epicenter of Amhara atrocities was in Gondar and its vicinities. The same city and environs is also the epicenter of popular defiance against the TPLF. This is why the TPLF security chief identified Gondar as its target. In specific terms, this targeting entails selective killings, disappearances, expulsions, jailings, disarming the population, especially the peasantry.
2. The world community, the African Union, the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom—two of the largest bilateral donors to the TPLF government as well as all Ethiopians should be deeply concerned and take action before it is too late. Why? Unless the UN Security Council, the AU, the governments of the United States and the UK urge the government of Ethiopia to cease killing its own people, lift martial law and initiate meaningful dialogue towards a transitional government of national unity involving all stakeholders, civil war and genocide might occur. I wish I could be wrong. I do not want or like civil war. I have always revolted against publically motivated killings. Civil war is enormously costly and has a lasting effect. Tribalism is wrong and must be outlawed. I do not want to see an Ethiopian society that targets and demeans any ethnic group. I want Ethiopia to remain intact. I want Ethiopians to be free of poverty and disease. I know its people have enormous potential to join the family of prosperous nations. But, evidence suggests things are getting out of hand; and Ethiopia does not seem to have statesmen to guide it. To put this plea as clearly as I can it is time for President Obama and the Prime Minister of the UK, the US Congress as well as members of the European Union to state clearly “What the government of Ethiopia is doing against its own people is wrong. Killings must stop. Peace and stability must be restored. The martial law environment that deepens fear must be lifted.”
3. Given the history of state-sponsored extrajudicial killings, disappearances, unabashed ethnic hatred and ethnic cleansing over the past quarter century, the current situation is dangerous for the entire volatile and unstable Horn of Africa. To put it harshly, it is apocalyptic. It is therefore time for the UN Security Council to prevent genocide of the Amhara. This body more than any other can and should urge the government of Ethiopia to lift martial law, stop killings, withdraw troops from the Amhara and Oromia regions and stop to pit Ethiopians against Tigreans.
4. The government of the United State has ample leverage with the government of Ethiopia to call for an **all-stakeholders conference** and for the formation of a **Transitional Government of National Unity**. This transition must be as orderly as possible; and should avoid any form of retaliation and revenge against any ethnic or religious group.

Why the US, the UK and the UN system should side with the Ethiopian people now

The cry of millions of Ethiopians matters more than the false pretense of stability that does not exist in reality. The Ethiopian people, most of them young, have shown a fierce determination and resiliency in their collective pursuit of freedom, justice, equality and the rule of law. They continue to defy the repressive government that has shown a recurrent proclivity to use bullets, massive incarcerations and disappearances through the use of state-sponsored extrajudicial killings and other cruel punishments rather than a willingness to resort to dialogue, consultation, negotiation and accommodation of all stakeholders in a transitional political arrangement that will lead to free and fair elections. This option will spare the country from disaster.

According to the latest data, including a powerful open letter to President Obama by Mr. Obang Meto of Solidarity, more than **800 innocent people**, most of them young, have been killed by security forces since the Oromo popular uprising in November 2015. Recently, more than 100 young people were killed in the city of Bahir Dar, the Amhara region. Over the past weekend, four young people were killed in Gondar. Earlier, an estimated 400-600 Oromo youth were killed by the same forces; and 5,000 were jailed. In the most recent popular uprisings in the Amhara region, 800 people (400 in Gondar and other towns and 400 in Bahir Dar)--most of them young have been jailed. The number of disappearances in the Amhara and Oromo regions is said to be "staggering." No one really knows where the TPLF led security and defense forces "hide" these thousands. It is said by domestic observers that the regime is building more prisons to accommodate an escalating number of political prisoners. Is there an end to these killings, disappearances and jailings?

Reinforcing the above plea, the purpose of this article is:

I (a) To urge the global community, especially the UN Security Council, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the African Union; and the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom---the lead financiers of the TPLF minority ethnic junta--to side with the Ethiopian people. While the West has a history of supporting minority elites subservient to their needs, this model won't work in Ethiopia for a simple reason. The vast majority of the population refuses to accept the status of subordination; and this majority is mostly young and aspirational. Siding with the Ethiopian majority is smart. It is in America's own long-term national interest. Otherwise, the U.S. will have another Syria in its hands.

Taking external threats as a basis, I have provided documentary evidence that onslaught on ordinary Ethiopians has made Ethiopia more vulnerable to extremist and terrorist groups such as Al-Shabab and the country's traditional enemies that finance various groups in order to destabilize and fracture Ethiopia (**A Race to the Bottom and Ethiopia at Risk, Ethiomedia etc.**) The bottom line is this. It is time for President Obama (for his own legacy in Africa) to state to the government of Ethiopia "***What you are doing to your people is wrong. You can't respond to popular demand for freedom, justice, the rule of law and respect for human rights by killing, maiming, imprisoning and expelling Ethiopians.*** You can't persuade the U.S. that the uprising is guided by terrorists and bandits. If you want America's support, come to peace with the vast majority who are marginalized. **If not, you no longer deserve our support. Negotiate for a political transition now in order to save the country from Balkanization, civil war and genocide."**

I (b) The current popular uprising among the Amhara and Oromo population—the vast majority of Ethiopia's 101 million people—is a cumulative response to 25 years of repression, land annexation, marginalization and state-sponsored displacement of millions of Ethiopians. It is a response to silent killing in the form of ethnic cleansing of the Amhara and land grab that has been taking place since 1979.

This period marks the plot and design by the TPLF to initiate social engineering at a massive scale. Why this social engineering?

The core issue is land and identity

1 (c) As a Tigrean businessman said rightly a few months ago, Tigray does not possess ample farmlands in order to feed its population. In essence, geography has become destiny for the region; and without planned and deliberate social engineering using state power as an instrument, you can't change geography. The TPLF acquires land assets conveyed by geography using brute force. What does the TPLF do to achieve its goals? Among other things, it embarked upon a new fabricated history of land claim. It still rewrites history and develops a new curriculum to teach children that "What is not yours is in fact yours." And children begin to believe fiction as fact. According to scholars who know the subject, the TPLF designed a plan to expand the Tigray region and begun annexing and incorporating lands from Wollo and Gondar into Tigray. It then started a two-pronged approach **in social engineering**: transfer of hundreds of thousands of Tigreans into the annexed lands; and "silently kill" and openly trigger disappearances, marginalization and displacement of an equal number or more Amhara. Greater Tigray expanded at the expense of the Amhara population. It is now clear from the uprising in the entire Amhara region that this **zero sum** game (I survive and thrive at your expense) can only last as long as those marginalized and displaced tolerate it. **It is a matter of survival.** If you wish to survive as an entity, you have no option but to **organize and defend your rights and defend these rights at any human cost.** It is this reality on the ground that the world community, especially supporters of the TPLF fail to see. Is there a better option? There is.

1 (d) As far back as I can remember, mobility to other parts of Ethiopia among Tigreans and Amhara goes back thousands of years. This is the gold standard of a diverse society! The Amhara region, especially the fertile lands in Setit Humera and other locations attracted hundreds of thousands of Tigreans as a norm. The Amhara welcomed and accepted Tigreans as brothers and sisters. Contrary to the animosity implanted by the TPLF, these two ethnic groups have more in common: faith, intermarriages, contiguity, history and more. It was natural and normal to coexist. No one questioned then the right of any Ethiopian to move to and settle anywhere in the country in order to improve their lives. This norm has been shattered deliberately and systematically by the TPLF and its allies. Just think of this dichotomy. Ethiopians are unable to move, settle, own property, elect and be elected to office outside their Kilil but enjoy this right outside their homeland.

1 (e) Didn't millions (more than 4 million by the latest count) of Ethiopians leave their country and settle across the globe? Does the US for example, restrict their movement by state and ethnicity? Internally, that is, in order to establish lasting peace and shared prosperity within Ethiopia, there is no substitute to this fundamental principle of mobility of citizens within their own country. Citizens' rights means just that--the right to live anywhere in Ethiopia, own property, elect and be elected. Certainly, what is unnatural is forcible expulsion of indigenous people and resettlement by new settlers. This is a recipe for disaster. When you preselect people to move and own property by ethnicity, the unintended consequence is that those selected become targets. The TPLF airlifted Tigreans from Gondar and is selectively moving them from Oromia because of fear of retaliation. Who implanted this fear? Is it the victims or those who exercise hegemony over the Ethiopian people? Studies show that, ultimately, no force of arms can enforce and implement a strategy of social engineering, narrow economic and natural resources capture and of changing geography. Admittedly, the balance of military force might give one

the impression of invincibility in reengineering society and in reshaping geography. But, this is illusory and temporal. You can't take over lands from Oromo farmers and give it to Tigrean elites and foreigners and live in peace. By the same token, you can't annex lands from the Amhara and incorporate these into Greater Tigray without triggering permanent conflict and war. It is a matter of sheer survival. I repeat what is best. Depoliticize ethnicity and embrace the common humanity of all Ethiopians!

I (f) Studies show that under conditions of ethnic elite political and economic capture, gains from economic growth are inevitably captured by those who govern. It is insane to think that what is left can lift millions out of abject poverty. Trickle-down economics has not worked in America and can't work in a poor and backward economy like Ethiopia. If we accept that the current uprisings are a result of **cumulative repression**, marginalization and displacement of millions of Ethiopians, we need to entertain the notion that neither the Ethiopian government nor the donor and diplomatic community has been prepared for the political and economic **flash points** that erupted suddenly. These flash points in the form of popular uprisings are driven **by systemic** social deprivation including hunger, political repression, the demeaning of specific ethnic groups, marginalization of indigenous people, annexation of lands and incorporation into greater Tigray; by grants to foreign investors; and by a proclivity to pit Amhara against Oromo and vice versa. They underpin the systemic nature of the issue.

I (g) Despite famed "double digit growth," the government and donors failed to channel and use scarce resources effectively. This is the reason why famine and starvation recur and persist; and why the economy is not resilient. In effect, aid has failed to change the structure of the economy because benefits are stolen, budgets and aid are squandered, wasted and deployed as a political and diplomatic tool. Despite rhetoric, aid has failed to tackle huge unemployment among youth. It has not diminished chronic hunger, disease and poor sanitation. It has not promoted safe drinking water, proper shelter and other basic necessities for the vast majority of the population. It has failed miserably to deal with elite rent seeking, corruption and massive illicit outflow of funds, the squandering of public funds and ethnic bias and nepotism. In fact, the system has deepened inequality and instability. Gold is mined and exported but indigenous people are among the poorest in that location. Lands are cordoned for development; but farmers who should own them are barred by the federal government and local elites.

1 (h) Ethiopia has gained an infamous status as a laboratory of development. It is replete with non-governmental organizations whose social impact is negligible. With a few exceptions, their singular preoccupation is self-serving. Most follow the political line of the ruling party and serve the interests of their own governments. They do not speak out in support of human rights and human dignity. They are managed by professionals with personal interests, in their incomes and wellbeing rather than by passion for justice, the rule of law and the advancement of democracy. This is a worldwide phenomenon, especially in Africa where civil society is weak and global actors are supreme. At the same time, there are outstanding exceptions such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists and others I commend. They say it like it is. The work of Human Rights Watch, especially Mr. Felix Horn is outstanding.

I (j) Turning to UN organizations, Ethiopians are heartened by the fact the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid Raad Al Hussein. He was vocal in his criticism of the government of Ethiopia for recent killings and for Ethiopia's deliberate and recurrent use of extrajudicial measures to suppress dissent. His call to send international observers to Ethiopia to investigate the killings is commendable and encouraging. As expected, the regime rejected this request. The UN Security Council has a

responsibility to look into this repetitive rejection by the Ethiopian regime of a request by one of the most important organs of the UN system. Investigators must be allowed to go to Ethiopia and establish the truth.

I (j) I genuinely believe that it is time for the UN system and supporter governments of the TPLF junta as well as all Ethiopians supporting the popular uprising to recognize that issuing press releases every time state-sponsored killings take place is no longer enough. Lip service is immoral. **The dead** and the missing are not mere statistics. They are human beings. They leave behind parents, spouses, children, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, friends and other relatives who care. The young could be tomorrow's leaders, teachers, scientists, businessmen and women etc. They are huge losses for the country and their communities. The number of the unknown dead is probably huge.

I (j) I am fully aware that Ethiopia does not offer reliable data. Nevertheless, what is available is compelling and the illustrative sample below shows the magnitude of state-sponsored killings:

--- Security forces killed **40** Addis Ababa university students in April 2001 for demanding academic freedom to publish a student newspaper.

---In the town of Teppi, **200** protesters from the Mazenger and Shekicho ethnic groups were killed on March 10, 2002. The reason is that they protested the regional boundary lines and wanted to form a political party, both allowed by the Constitution.

---**25** Sidamo civilians were killed in Awassa on May 24, 2002 while protesting peacefully against the federal government's involvement in Sidamo regional affairs.

---Ethiopian Defense Forces, accompanied by local civilian militias armed by the state, massacred **424** unarmed Annuak in Gambella on December 13, 2003. Genocide Watch determined these killings constituted crimes against humanity. This was followed by wanton destruction of homes, crops, schools, health clinics, wells and the limited infrastructure that exists in Gambella.

--- TPLF-led security forces killed nearly **200** peaceful protesters in the streets of Addis Ababa following peaceful protests in the aftermath of the stolen national elections in 2005. Thousands were jailed and hundreds were wounded. Meles declared that protestors and the parties they supported were going to commit ethnic genocide against Tigreans in a similar vein as that of Rwanda. The same propaganda is being propagated against the Amhara population in Gondar, Debre Tabor, Bahir Dar, Debre Markos and other towns. There is absolutely no basis to accuse the Amhara population in Gondar or elsewhere of such ill-will and ill-intent against Tigreans. The art of propaganda is always to blame the victim. This absurd and untrue propaganda is being used to airlift all Tigreans from Gondar and other towns to safe havens in Tigray and Addis Ababa. What is the strategic reason for this move? What would happen next?

---Human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Genocide Watch and others reported that Ethiopian forces committed mass crimes against humanity in the Somali regional state. These included widespread killing of civilians, rape and destruction of homes, livestock and wells and the displacement of tens of thousands in 2007. Some human rights organizations went as far as labeling these atrocities as a "silent Darfur." Sadly, the numbers are not well established.

--- Widespread human rights abuses in the Afar and Beni-Shangul Gumuz regions have been reported.

----- **200** Oromo were killed by security forces in 2014. From November 2005 up to the recent uprisings in July and August this year, an estimated **600** Oromo protesters were killed.

-----In the most recent uprising in Bahir Dar alone 100 people were killed by security forces; and dozens of others were killed in Gondar, Debre Tabor and other towns and numerous have been wounded. Each day we receive reports of killings and disappearances.

(k) It is worth noting what the Washington Post captured on August 10, 2016. In “A year after Obama visit, Ethiopia is in turmoil,” it described the situation as follows: **“In the country side (where there is no media) the week was a bloodier story.** Rights groups and opposition figures estimate that dozens were killed in weekend of protests that shook this U.S. ally in the Horn of Africa....This country of 100 million has been hit by widespread drought that has halved growth, and anti-government protests have spread across two of the most populous regions...Amnesty put the toll at about 100.” Later on reports show that 100 people were killed in Bahir Dar alone. Professor Merera is right when he told the Post that “The government is responding in the same way it has responded to such incidents for the last quarter century.” More critical is to note this depiction. “In the face of the repression, the protests quieted down in Oromia, only to erupt last month in the neighboring region of the Amhara, the historical ethnic center of the Ethiopian state and home to spectacular rock-cut churches and medieval castles that attract tourists....Protestors in Amhara declared solidarity with the Oromo people and their opposition to the government, which many say is dominated by the minority Tigrean ethnic group.” People in both regions have at last concluded that they have no other option. They have no voice. The Post quotes Professor Merera again. “These protests are at a level **of intifada** (the Arabic term for the Palestinian resistance movement—people in their own ways are resisting the government pressure and demanding their rights. I don’t think it is going to die down.” I agree with this assessment.

Nothing exemplifies the plight of the Ethiopian people as dramatically and as vividly as the protest of a global athlete. The Washington Post depicted the rise of an Ethiopian hero of Oromo nationality. Feyisa Lilesa who “crossed the Olympics marathon finish line and put his hands above his head in an “X,” the Oromo Hashtag of protest against killings and defiance of the TPLF. “Most of those who watched Lilesa’s spectacular silver medal performance didn’t know what that meant — or just how dangerous a protest they were watching. The plight of the Oromo and the Ethiopian government’s use of force against civilians have received some attention recently, **but nothing as prominent as Lilesa’s defiance...** But likely because Ethiopia remains a U.S. ally in the fight against Somali Islamist group Al-Shabab, American officials have been reluctant to offer any further condemnation.” So, Amhara, Oromo and other protestors are on their own. The young defiant Feyisa Lilesa should inspire each of us to side with those who are dying for justice and freedom.

I (l) Compelling and urgent too is how much the TPLF has deliberately exposed Ethiopia to external threat and instability. Rashid Abdi, director of the Horn of Africa project, the International Crisis Group put this real threat succinctly. “It is clear Ethiopia has a potentially serious and destabilizing unrest on its hands.” The TPLF led government’s leadership is doing the opposite of what is required. Things will begin to quiet down only to the extent that the TPLF stops killing; and is willing and ready to negotiate a transition. Otherwise, the root causes that led to the uprisings and the corresponding killings will continue. The social and economic costs will enormous.

(m) Current rumors and speculations of a variety of scenarios within the TPLF: a) continue repression, direct and silent killings, disappearances and further marginalization and repression to save the TPLF b)

deal with the people directly and make some concessions c) negotiate with an amenable ethnic political party and or parties and restore the 1991 model d) initiate a staggered process of reconciliation and peace with the opposition and buy time and e) **discuss the option of a Transitional government of national unity**. It seems to me that only options that may satisfy the vast majority might be options d and e. Time is of the essence. These and other sensible options **should be pursued vigorously and systematically**. In the meantime and given the volatility of the Horn of Africa, the world can ill afford to watch state sponsored killings. This carnage must stop now. Whether Ethiopia is an ally of the U.S. or not, the long-term costs of the crisis will be huge not only for Ethiopians and the regime but also for Western governments that shore-up the regime. I urge American policy makers including the Pentagon to change policy by siding with the majority.

The UN High Commissioner's recommendation for a special investigation by international observers reflects the magnitude of the problem. This recommendation should be enforced by the UN Security Council.

While quantitative data and global attention have been drawn with regard to killings in Gambella, the Ogaden and Oromia, massive ethnic cleansing of the Amhara has not received such attention until recently. This unprecedented ethnic cleansing of the Amhara population before and after the TPLF took power has now been well-documented and deserves global attention. (See a recent documentary on Ethnic Cleansing of the Amhara <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K--5J6tmdg>) **Annex II. Killings continue. On August 20, the TPLF killed at least 3 people in Gondar. Their crime is to protest peacefully in defense of freedom, justice and equality. It is clear that these atrocities won't stop until the global community, especially the U.S. sees dangers ahead and unless the system changes.**

In brief, in all cases there is still lack of engagement with the population by donors, NGOS and the Diplomatic community in Addis Ababa. Daily killings continue with the world community dead silent as if nothing happened. Only Ethiopians who care must stand with the people and provide sustained support. There is also a dearth of commitment by these groups to people's empowerment and capacity building, including participation in policy and decision making. If the donor, NGO and diplomatic community conducted a survey in Ethiopia they will be shocked that the flash points mentioned above are taking place under their noses while the TPLF wines and dines them. It is tragic to note that donors, diplomats and NGOs are detached and thus appear irrelevant in the lives of the vast majority of Ethiopians. We are not helpless at all. I am convinced that we can change this situation through collective action and voice.

It is therefore time for the Obama administration to side with the Ethiopian people, especially young Amhara and Oromo who are sacrificing their lives for a just, equitable, rule of law based and democratic system of government for all Ethiopians.

Annexes

Annex 1: Who Controls Ethiopian Institutions? This partial list reflects situation as of August 20, 2016

I. Defense

Who are 7 of the top commanders?

1. General Samora Yunus—Chief of Staff (Tigrean)
2. Lt. General Tadesse Worede—Chief of Armed Forces Training (Tigrean)
3. Lt. General Gezaee Abera— Chief of Logistics (Tigrean)
4. Brigadier General Gebre Della— Chief of Security, Armed Forces (Tigrean)
5. Major General Gebre-Egziabhier— Chief of military campaign (Tigrean)
6. Lt General Berhane Negash— Chief of military engineering (Tigrean)
7. Major General Adem Mohammed—Chief of the Airforce (Tigrean)

II. Justice

1. Hagos Woldu— Judge, Federal High Court—(Tigrean)
2. Mesfin Equbeyohannis—Federal High Court— Tigrean)
3. Medhin Kiros— Vice President of the Federal High Court (Tigrean)
4. Desta Gebru— Judge, Federal High Court (Tigrean)

III. Intelligence and Security

1. Getachew Assefa—Director of Intelligence and Security (Tigrean)
2. Hadera Abera— Deputy Chief, Intelligence and Security (Tigrean)
3. Yared Hiluf—Chief of Domestic Intelligence and Security (Tigrean)
4. Commander Teklay—Chief of National Intelligence and Security Services and Federal Police Task Force on Terrorism (Tigrean)

IV. Media Broadcasters and Journalists

1. Temesgen Beyene—ETV News Broadcaster—(Tigrean)
2. Kibrom Woldeselassie—ETV News Broadcaster to the **Amhara region** (Tigrean)
3. Eden Gebrehiwot—ETV Special Entertainment Program Broadcaster (Tigrean)
4. Hermella Gebrekidan—ETV News Broadcaster (Tigrean)
5. Hilina Mebratu—ETV Amharic News Broadcaster to the Amhara region (Tigrean)
6. Alganesh Teka---ETV Correspondent (Tigrean)
7. Solomon Nigremedhin—ETV Correspondent, SNNP region (Tigrean)
8. Eden Berhane—ETV Correspondent assigned to Menilik Palace (Tigrean)
9. Abrehet Adem---ETV Camera/Film (Tigrean)

10. Daniel Gebre-Egziabhier—News Broadcaster to the SNNP region (Tigrean)
11. Kibkab Tadesse---ETV Correspondent (Tigrean)
12. Atakilti Gebremeskel—Photographer (Tigrean)
13. Tsegaleul Woldetsadik—Program Manager (Tigrean)
14. Rahel Tekleyohannis—English News Broadcaster (Tigrean)
15. Sarah Fissihaye—Program Manager (Tigrean)
16. Alemayehu Gebrehiwot—Program Manager (Tigrean)
17. Seifu Assegid—Program Manager (Tigrean)
18. Gebremikael Gebremedhin—Special Program Manager (Tigrean)
19. Tesfaye Mahari—Amharic Correspondent for the Amhara region (Tigrean)
20. Kiros Tsega—Amharic Correspondent for the Amhara region (Tigrean)
21. Firehiwot Zemikael—Computer Correspondent (Tigrean)
22. Afewerki Kahsay—Special Program Manager (Tigrean)
23. Tadesse Mizan Teka---Lead Program Manager (Tigrean)

V. Ethiopian Sports Federation

1. Berhane Kidanemariam—President, Ethiopian Olympics Committee (Tigrean)
2. Kiros Gebremeskel—President, Ethiopian Tekquando Association (Tigrean)
3. Kiros Habte—President, Ethiopian Swimming Association (Tigrean)
4. Tesfaye Asgedom—President, Ethiopian Volley Ball Association (Tigrean)
5. Rezene Beyene—Ethiopian Cycling Association (Tigrean)
6. Dagmawit Ghirmay—Secretary, Ethiopian Olympics Committee (Tigrean)
7. Ghidey Gebremedhin—President, Ethiopian Chess Association (Tigrean)

Annex II: Ethnic Cleansing

The Silent Genocide on the Amhara Documentary- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K--5J6tmdg>

To be continued

August 23, 2016