

Washington Update
July 11, 2020

1. Ethnic genocide

The Ethiopian government has lost the ability to ensure the most basic rights to its citizens: protection from targeted violence, killings and rapes; freedom from arbitrary arrest; and the ability to communicate be informed.

In Washington, the State Department and some members of Congress have been briefed on the situation, but there is little prospect of the U.S. or any other country taking strong actions that would lead the Ethiopian government to restore peace and stability. The U.S. and the world must speak out against the horrors that are occurring in Ethiopia, in the name of humanity and to prevent a strategically important country from descending into barbarism.

The most recent round of genocidal killings and violence against non-Oromo peoples in Ethiopia was triggered by the murder of Haacaaluu Hundeessaa, an Ethiopian artist widely revered among Oromo ethnic group. At least 239 people were killed in Shashmane, Wolega, Nekemet, Awasa and Addis Ababa. Videos have circulated on the Internet of the killings and violence. Ethiopia's attorney general Adanech Abebe told state media that two men who had been arrested and confessed to the killing were acting on orders of the Oromo Liberation Army as part of a strategy to incite violence between Oromos and Amharas.

The most recent outrages are part of an ongoing spiral into violence and chaos. In recent months there have been other killings, millions of people dislocated from their homes, property destruction, and kidnappings.

2. Arrests and torture of peaceful human right activists

The Ethiopian government has exploited the chaos to crack down on peaceful political opponents. The latest outrage is the arrest by Ethiopian security of Eskinder Nega, journalist and internationally respected human rights and democracy activist, and of Sentayhu Checole, who has also publicly advocated for human rights. Their only "crime" was speaking on behalf of voiceless Ethiopians who have been dislocated from their homes.

The Ethiopian government is violating the human rights of Eskinder Nega and Sentayhu Checole. They are being beaten, denied food and held in cruel conditions. They must be released immediately.

3. Roots of conflict

The root cause of the misery in Ethiopia is the nation's constitution which is based on divide and rule ethnic federalism, Ethnic conflicts that threaten to tear Ethiopia apart are the result of the 1994 Constitution, introduced by then-Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front governing coalition. The constitution recast the country from a centrally unified republic to a federation of nine regional ethnic states and two federally administered city states. The system of ethnic federalism was troubled with internal inconsistencies because ethnic groups do not live only in a discrete "homeland" territory but are dispersed across the country. Non-native ethnic minorities live within every ethnic homeland. Peace and stability depend on abandoning the ideology of ethnic division and launching a project to revise the Ethiopian constitution. The present constitution was created to exacerbate ethnic divisions. It will lead to the destruction of Ethiopia.

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