

Washington Update
January 28, 2020

1. Abduction of university students.

Reuters reports about the abduction of Amhara university students in the Oromia region. The report notes that 18 university students, 14 of them female, were abducted and that the government of Prime Minister Abiy has said nothing publicly about the situation. There is growing anger about the situation in Ethiopia. “Ethiopian authorities have failed to protect the victims of the abduction and to take necessary measures to bring them back,” Yared Hailemariam, director of the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, said in a statement.

Reuters notes that the abductions were conducted by the Oromo Liberation Army.

This is another tragic example of the Abiy government’s inaction in the face of terrorist activity in Ethiopia. The government must speak out against these kinds of outrages, and take strong steps to protect innocent lives. Instead, it says and does nothing. When there is no rule of law, there will be more and even worse violence.

2. Ethiopia on list of top ten “conflicts to watch” in 2020.

At a press conference at the National Press Club on January 27, the International Crisis Group listed Ethiopia as one of the top ten “conflicts to watch” in 2020.

The ICG noted the “fraught debate over the country’s ethnic federalist system.” It mixed praise for Prime Minister Abiy with serious warnings that he isn’t delivering on promises of democracy and human rights.

The ICG concluded: “Ethiopia’s transition remains a source of hope and deserves all the support it can get, but also risks violently unraveling. In a worst-case scenario, some warn the country could fracture as Yugoslavia did in the 1990s, with disastrous consequences for an already troubled region.”

3. Blue Nile Dam

Washington Update has been writing about the Blue Nile project, and submitting written testimony to Congress about its importance, for over ten years.

Now, with completion of the dam on the horizon, diplomatic negotiations in Washington are determining how effective it will be in addressing the urgent needs of Ethiopia for power and irrigation.

Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan have reached a preliminary agreement on water sharing from the \$4.6 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project on the Blue Nile. News reports indicate that the three countries have agreed to fill the dam in stages during the wet season, starting in July. The agreement is supposed to be finalized during a Jan. 28-29 meeting in Washington. Eighty-five percent of Nile waters originate in Ethiopia from the Blue Nile. The Renaissance Dam project is critical to Ethiopian economic development. It will be important to assess details of the agreement, which have not yet been released, to determine their effect on Ethiopia.

Mesfin Mekonen