

Washington Update - by Mesfin Mekonen

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A horrific massacre of Amhara people in Oromia region during the first week of June is the latest news in a downward spiral of killings, human rights abuses, and forced displacements that have afflicted Ethiopia over the last two years.

Western news media reported at least 200, and possibly as many as 1,000 innocent people were killed in Tole, Oromia, by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).

The attack, and others like it, are the direct result of Ethiopian government policies, including a policy of deliberately looking the other way while forces aligned with Prime Minister Abiy, including the OLA, terrorize the nation. As has been clear for years, the barbarism is rooted in divide-and-conquer policies of ethnic division that were first implemented by the TPLF government under former Prime Minister Meles, and that have been maintained to this day.

Speaking on behalf of the Ethiopian-American community, Mesfin Mekonen contacted members of Congress, including Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Gregory Meeks (D-NY) to request U.S. action to help stop the killings of Amahara people, free journalists and political prisoners, Sentayehu Chokole and Tadios Tantu who have been unjustly imprisoned. Meeks subsequently tweeted: “Shocked and dismayed by the mass killing of hundreds of Amhara civilians in western Oromia. I condemn these atrocious acts of violence and call for an independent and transparent investigation.”

The U.S. and Europe have issued statements condemning the violence, but have done little to help prevent the situation from worsening. The lack of action is in part a result of the false belief that Ethiopia is stable, or that the crisis can be contained within its borders.

While Ethiopia is not on the top of policy agendas in Washington, the current situation in Ethiopia demonstrates that countries can change quite rapidly. Ethiopia is approaching a decision point: it could become a free, prosperous nation, or, if the current policies are kept in place, it could descend into instability. These views are articulated in a new White House report. The National Intelligence Council recently released a report on Global Trends 2030. This report highlights the opportunities and dangers in Ethiopia’s future. On the one hand it states that Ethiopia, along with Egypt and Nigeria, “have the potential to approach or surpass South Africa in overall national power.” It adds that “the key will be better

governance to further economic growth and social and human development.” The report also ranks Ethiopia as 14th among nations at highest risk of “state failure” by 2030. Its scenario for 2030 predicts that unless urgent action is taken to improve governance — which means transitioning to a real democracy that adheres to the rule of law and respects human rights — Ethiopia could “fragment along sectarian, tribal, and ethnic lines” and become a safe haven for terrorists.

The current tragedies in Oromia, Tigray and throughout Ethiopia point to the urgent need for political change. The innocents who have been slaughtered cannot be brought back to life, but it is possible to act to prevent an even larger scale catastrophe. The international community must support the creation of a transitional government that includes members of the peaceful opposition, civic and religious leaders. The transitional government must preside over the revision of the constitution, the formation of a new military representing the 13 provinces and regions of Ethiopia, and the formation of a committee for peace and reconciliation. All of these steps must be directed toward the goal of holding new free and fair elections in Ethiopia within a year.