



April 21, 2015

“ETHIOPIA, A COUNTRY WITHOUT A GOVERNMENT”

THE PROTEST SLOGAN SHOUTED OUT BY ETHIOPIAN MOURNERS IN THE STREETS OF ADDIS ABABA TODAY FOLLOWING THE MASSACRE OF ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIANS IN LIBYA

Press Release

On Sunday, April 19th, the Islamic State (IS) released a video depicting the gruesome killing of Ethiopian Christians in Libya. It is said to have been carried out at two separate locations; one where they were shot in the head and the other where they were decapitated. It has been upsetting for anyone to see; however, it has been especially heart-rending to the people of Ethiopia.

Mr. Obang Metho, the Executive Director of the *Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE)*, is calling on Ethiopians from every ethnicity, religion, region and political viewpoint to come together in unity to mourn for these Ethiopians who have lost their lives and to find ways to protect the many others who remain in dangerous situations.

The SMNE is a non-violent, non-political social justice movement of diverse Ethiopians whose work has largely focused on the widespread human rights crimes and systemic injustices perpetrated by the current regime of Ethiopia against its own people. Due to massive outflows of Ethiopians to other countries, the SMNE has also advocated for the countless refugees and migrant workers throughout the world. The SMNE is located outside of Ethiopia due to extreme restrictions on such work within the country.

Mr. Metho states:

“Ethiopians all over the world are grieving the loss of these brave Ethiopians, who were willing to stand up for their faith as Christians despite the threat of death from people who despise their own God-given humanity—for who else could commit such evil?”

No words can describe the shock, grief, and compassion so many of us feel at this time for the families and friends of those so coldly murdered. We give our heartfelt condolences and wholly condemn these acts. We stand strong together as one Ethiopian family, no matter whether or not we share the same religion, ethnicity, political view, age, gender or any other characteristics; for, we are first and foremost human beings, created with intrinsic worth and dignity by an Almighty God. The pain of this tragedy should never let us forget our shared humanity simply because some have descended into such moral depravity. God calls us to be above this. ”

In the last weeks and month, Ethiopians fleeing their homes due to the threat of arrest, persecution, human rights abuses, land evictions, repression, ethnic apartheid policies, endemic poverty and those who are desperately seeking a better life, have encountered terrifying situations where their vulnerability has been exploited, leading to injury, danger, and death at the hands of others.

Just last week, on April 16th, mobs of South Africans in Durban attacked, beat, and murdered Ethiopian immigrants in their country. Three Ethiopians died, including two young men who were set on fire and burned alive. Reportedly, many of those threatening them are neighbors who see the influx of foreign migrants and refugees as competitors for jobs and opportunities due to high unemployment in the country. On Sunday, these foreign nationals were warned that any persons possessing a foreign passport or without a South African identification card, would be assaulted. Many fled their homes out of fear.

In another location, also occurring on Sunday, an overcrowded boat carrying between 700 and 950 migrants from Libya to Italy capsized in the Mediterranean Sea. Only a small number of them survived. It is believed that many were Ethiopians.

Last month in Yemen, many Ethiopians were trapped in the fighting going on between the rebels that overthrew the government of Yemen and those defending it. It is believed that numbers of Ethiopians were killed in the bombing by Saudi Arabia as well as by the fighting going on within the country. Ethiopians have been desperately trying to find a means to leave the country, but few wanted to return to Ethiopia. It is believed that close to 100,000 Ethiopians are still stranded there and remain in imminent danger.

The timing of all of these incidents makes the massacre in Libya all the worse. As Ethiopians, the shared sorrow we feel at the loss of our people is overwhelming. From the news reports we hear that thirty Ethiopian Christians lost their lives in Libya. Those murdering them claimed they were taking revenge on these Christians for *Muslim blood* and called Ethiopia "*a nation of the cross.*" However, Ethiopia has been a nation that has demonstrated how Christians, Jews and Muslims have been able to peacefully live side by side for hundreds of years, often intermarrying. As a result, they are related by blood, not only by the nation they share.

In fact, Ethiopian Muslims have publically come out with one of the [strongest statements](#) seen in regards to their total condemnation of these killings by IS. They are standing together with their fellow Ethiopians against the murder of innocent civilians, calling it "*immoral, illegal, barbaric, and in direct contravention*" of their beliefs. They state: "*We therefore, condemn in the strongest terms the killings of our fellow Ethiopian brethren in Libya and asking justice be served to the perpetrators of these crimes.*"

In other words, this act by IS is not about religion, but instead is about power, ambition, greed, hatred, self-interest and self-worship; claiming to be carrying out God's work while actually violating God-given principles.

To outsiders, these thirty victims may be numbers, but to us they have names, ages, life stories and relationships with the people they have left behind. Some families are only now finding out that their son, husband, father, brother, cousin, or friend is among the victims; with others it may take longer. Some may remain unnamed; however, they died for their faith and are now gone from this world of greed, guns, barbarism, and selfish interest. Christians strongly believe that when a Christian believer is gone from this world, each will be welcomed by name, one by one, to their heavenly home. As it says in the Bible, "*...absent from the body, present with the LORD.*" [2 Corinthians 5:8] This is comforting to many of us.

Most of these were young men with dreams for a better life that will never be realized now. Although they knew it would be a dangerous journey, they risked it for many reasons—threat of arrest, persecution, or lack of freedom, but also because they may have wanted jobs and an education so as to help their families back home. They may have wanted to make the way for others to follow later—wives, children, parents, sisters and brothers. They are gone now and it has left a big hole in our hearts and souls.

In Ethiopia, the reaction from the government to these tragedies has been reprehensible and shameful. The current one-party government of the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)* has been in power since 1991. It is a coalition of four ethnic-based parties representing four of the eighty or more ethnic groups in Ethiopia and four out of nine of its regions. Worse yet, the EPRDF is controlled by one ethnic-based party, the *Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)*, which represents one region and one ethnic group made up of 6% of the total population. A minority of Tigrayans, making up the *Central Committee* make all the decisions in the land. They control every sector of society and have exploited the opportunities, the resources and the economy for their own benefit, leaving out the majority. This is why people of Ethiopia regard the regime's system as being ethnic apartheid. This is apparent in the wide disparity between those within the TPLF and those not included.

For example, while regime cronies have accumulated great wealth, the majority of Ethiopians remain impoverished, despite claims of double-digit economic growth. No wonder people are leaving the country in such large numbers. Therefore, the inadequate response to these crises is not surprising. This is not a regime that cares about its own people, only its own survival and international public image.

The regime's first response to the massacre of Ethiopian Christians was to distance themselves from the emotions or any responsibility surrounding this brutal event until the victims were positively identified as truly being Ethiopians despite the fact that the killers had already named them as such. This angered many Ethiopians. Once there was proof of the nationality of the victims, the TPLF/EPRDF made a [public statement](#) on April 20 claiming their government had been on the “*frontlines against terrorists for a number of years and [had] been a leader in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism*”, self-righteously saying: “*There could never be any excuse for such deliberate crimes against humanity.... The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia strongly condemns the brutal murder of innocent people.*”

However, this regime is well-known for its extra-judicial killings, massacres of innocent civilians, torture, the arrest of journalists, religious leaders and activists and human rights reports that document their own crimes against humanity. This includes the US State Department's Annual Human Rights Report on Ethiopia.

Mr. Metho explains why such claims [upset so many Ethiopians](#):

To outsiders who are wondering why Ethiopians are suffering all over the world—in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Lebanon, Yemen, Kenya, Libya, Malta, South Africa, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and in other places—you should know that it is not by accident. Some people may even be tired of hearing about the trials and hardships of Ethiopians, believing it is about poverty rather than oppression because Ethiopia is so often portrayed as a democratic government as recently as this past week by the [Undersecretary of the US State Department, Wendy Sherman](#), the fourth highest-ranking official there. As these accounts of the killing of Ethiopian Christians in Libya and South Africa come out, Ethiopians will tell you that this is not the first time they have witnessed this kind of thing.

Look at the silent genocide in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia—still ongoing, the massacre in the Amhara region in the nineties, the massacre of 424 civilian leaders in the Gambella region in 2003, the killing of 197 student protestors following the flawed 2005 election, the killing and mass arrests of the Oromo, the ongoing assault on the Afar people, and the ongoing human rights crimes in every region of the country. One of those killed by IS was a student leader who protested the regime's eviction of Oromo from their homes in Addis Ababa and was going to be arrested, forcing him to flee the country. If you ask the people, the ruling ethnic-apartheid regime in Ethiopia is the IS or terrorist of Ethiopians, despite portraying themselves to outsiders as a government of the people.

On April 20, the TPLF/EPRDF declared that there would be [three days of mourning](#) for the victims and that flags would be at half-mast. The Ethiopian Parliament was to convene to discuss the situation; however, only 56% of the parliament's 547 members showed up on April 21 to participate. Why? How much do they care?

The regime is also making decisions as to how Ethiopians can grieve, but they are denying Ethiopians their cultural way of grieving for the loss of loved ones, which is always done by gathering people together. Instead people are to remain in their homes to grieve alone. They are not to come out in the streets or to set up tents for people to congregate. This is outrageous. This regime should allow people to freely grieve the way they want. If they want to cry out in the streets as they sometimes do; they should be allowed to do so. When the former prime minister, Meles Zenawi, died, mourning in the streets was orchestrated and went on for days.

Allegedly, the TPLF/EPRDF has now called on religious leaders to tell Ethiopians not to leave the country for other places. In doing this, they essentially blamed the victims for putting themselves in harm's way. They fail to acknowledge their own responsibility in it—that the mass exodus of Ethiopians had nothing to do with their own brutal, ethnic-apartheid policies they followed.

Religious leaders should be genuine and stand with the families in distress. They should also be free to speak the truth—that the source of the problem is the lack of good governance, the lack of opportunity for the people, and the favoritism of one ethnic minority over all others—more specifically, TPLF regime cronies, over everyone else, including other Tigrayans. The minority controls everything while the majority continues to leave the country. Regardless of any warning from the regime or from religious leaders, danger will not prevent the majority from leaving due to the terrible conditions within the country. Only genuine change will reduce the flow of Ethiopians to other places.

The regime is also putting the blame on human traffickers for what is happening. Mr. Metho challenges this thinking as another effort to avoid accountability. He says:

Yes, traffickers take advantage of the vulnerable and the desperate, but what is at the root of the problem? Why are so many continuing to leave the country regardless of the risk? The TPLF/EPRDF must look at themselves first. In fact, some allege that there is evidence that regime cronies are closely linked to the traffickers, those in international employment agencies, those giving working visas and passports, and others along the way.

Ethiopians have taken to the streets:

On April 21, with heavy emotions, the people of Ethiopia have come out in large numbers on the streets of Addis Ababa to grieve together for their fellow Ethiopians. Mr. Metho states:

Like the Biblical Good Samaritan, who did not ask the religion, ethnicity, or political view of the wounded man on the side of the road before helping him, we call on Ethiopians to do the same. Show compassion towards the hurting, putting humanity before ethnicity, religion or any other of our human differences. This is a basic principle of the SMNE. This is a time to stand for God-given values of life, liberty and loving one's neighbor as oneself for no one will be free to live or worship freely without caring about the freedom, justice, religious freedom, and well being of others—another primary principle of the SMNE.

The death of our people should unify us as one people regardless of our differences. If we had a government that respected the value and dignity of all of its people, and if we as people honored God by following what is right, true, and good; the root cause for our people being scattered throughout the world may be reversed. If Ethiopia were a home where we could actually live and thrive, we would not be hearing of such tragic and horrific acts against our people.

Instead, when these problems happen, the current regime has repeatedly demonstrated a desire to minimize the problem in order to protect their own interests, fearing a backlash. This means blocking media coverage, blaming the victims, putting pressure on religious leaders to cover for them, inciting ethnic and religious divisions, polarizing groups and people, and denying their own injustices and human rights crimes against the innocent people of Ethiopia. Mr. Metho goes on to say:

These Ethiopians in Libya, South Africa, in Yemen and in the Mediterranean Sea have died senseless deaths; but let Ethiopians come together to mourn, repent of our wrongs and pray that God will bring good out of what was intended for evil so these precious people have not died in vain.

It is God who condemns the bloodshed of the innocent as something that pollutes the land and the soul of those involved. Yet, it is the same faith of these victims in Libya that calls for forgiveness and reconciliation between God and humankind and between our fellow brothers and sisters.

May Ethiopians of every faith cry out to God for our deliverance, mourning our failures and seeking the moral transformation of ourselves, our people, our society, and this regime.

May our religious leaders be strengthened to resist human manipulation; and to instead, be courageous, standing true to the One who has called them to Him—their Creator.

May we all become reconcilers, defenders, and peacemakers in our beloved country—excluding no ethnic group, no religious group or anyone else, because **no one is free until we all are free!** Even if we are imperfect and flawed in carrying it out; because of that, with God's help, let us be ready to forgive, to restore, and to live rightly to the best of our ability.

May God protect those still in danger or difficulty, both within Ethiopia and in places all over the world.
LONG LIVE ETHIOPIA!

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