

'Time for Machetes'

by Dawit Giorgis .

In a brilliant book titled 'A Time for Machetes,' Jean Herzfeld discusses the Rwandan genocide with the killers. The famous author of several books, Susan Sontag commenting on the book writes, " Our obligation and it is an obligation, is to take in what human beings are capable of doing to one another, not spontaneously (crimes of this order are never spontaneous) but when mobilized to think of other human beings – people who were their school friends, neighbors, co-workers, and fellow parishioners- are not human beings at all, and when organized for and directed to the task of slaughter. For the issue, finally is not judgment. It is understanding." To try to understand what happened in Rwanda has been very painful personally, since I had seen first hand the effects of what happened in Rwanda in 1994. But nevertheless we cannot push it aside. We have to remember it, understand it and learn lessons from it.

On 31 January, I read a news post in Amharic written by a certain Yohanis Mekonen, including huge number of comments, which reflected the shock and outrage of millions of Ethiopians. The writer states that in the city of Harar, in an area known as 'Fourth', he verified the unloading of 36000 machetes in three separate storages belonging to the Risk and Disaster Management Agency, which usually stores food and humanitarian assistance to people affected by natural and man made disasters. I used to head this agency

but then it was called the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC.) The writer says that he called Addis Abeba, the head quarter of the agency and asked for explanation. He was told that it was going to be distributed to 24 Eastern districts to be used as agricultural tools. Times may have changed but during the times I lived and worked in Harar, machetes were not normally used for agricultural purposes.

It is sensitive times and even if they were to be used for agricultural purposes the timing was not right. When some of our people are using machetes to kill others and are often seen in public threatening to kill holding machetes, it is certainly not a good idea to put these weapons in places where violent criminal gangs are operating freely and amongst people who are living in an atmosphere of fear of being slaughtered by machetes, unless it is intended to be used by them as weapons which is the opinion of many.

Once again I was reminded of the Rwandan experience. In 1993 approximately a year before the genocide took place, a project to import a large number of machetes from China, under the cover of agricultural tools, was underway. Rwanda had never imported machetes from China or anywhere in the previous years. Linda Malvern, author of Conspiracy to Murder, the Rwandan Genocide explains her findings: (page 56)

“ As an illustration of the sheer volume involved, the total numbers machetes imported weighed 581,175

kilos and cost 725,000 US; there was an estimated one new machetes for every third male in the country. One of the companies involved in these purchases belonged to Felicien Kabuga, the businessman who had helped finance the RTLM. (RTLM is the hate radio station, which spread hate speech and coordinated the genocide.

The silence of the Prime Minister in this and similar circumstances raises more concern about the capacity of the prime minister and lingering suspicions about his sinister agenda. But whatever the truth may be it will eventually catch up with him and he will be brought to justice unless he takes bold steps to align himself with the forces of unity, peace and freedom. As of now most people have come to believe that he is not serving the best interest of the country and himself. In May 1998 the Prime Minister of Rwanda pleaded guilty 'for sanctioning a climate of fear, hatred and paranoid, inciting violence and ultimately sanctioning mass murder' and was convicted on all six counts.'

Under international law, crimes against humanity includes the following: Murder; Deportation or forcible transfer of population; Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; Torture; Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic,

cultural, religious, gender as defined in paragraph 3, or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court; Enforced disappearance of persons; Other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health.

Under Article II of the genocide convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The Ethiopian government officials need to read the above over and over again and see what applies to them collectively and individually and understand what lies ahead for them in due time. And that time will come.

It could be proven in an independent court of law that some of the above have occurred in Ethiopia particularly since Prime Minister Abiy came to power. This has all the hallmarks of possible repeat of history but one that can still be averted with the

collaboration of the international community. Prime Minister Abiy stands accused one more time for complicity with genocide and crimes against humanity. . Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines complicity;

“ Involvement or knowledge of a situation, especially one that is morally wrong dishonest “ Prime Minister is fully aware of the crimes that are being committed routinely in many parts of Ethiopia, largely directed at the Amharas. Amharas and Orthodox Christians are being singled out for persecution. Reminisce of the Nazi Germany, when Jews were being singled out and persecuted, Amharas’ are being offloaded from public transports and detained; Amahras are being chased from certain areas dominated by extremist Oromos, in Harar, Bale and Arsi for example; Amhara students are being persecuted, kidnapped, tortured and chased out of many schools in the Oromia region; Amahras are being hunted down and beaten and their houses burnt. Both the Orthodox Church and the Amhara ethnic group are the prime targets of these extremist elements. There are hundreds of thousands of people who can testify to the occurrence of these crimes. They have been committed in full view of the public and with the full knowledge of this Prime Minister. In a court of law he could be found guilty of complicity.

According to ‘FindLaw ‘ composed of legal experts, “**Complicity** is the act of helping or encouraging another individual to commit a crime. It is also commonly referred to as aiding an abetting. One who is complicit is said to be an accomplice. But, even though an accomplice does not actually commit the

crime, his or her actions helped someone in the commission of the crime.

The concept of accomplice liability means an accomplice faces the same degree of guilt and punishment as the individual who committed the crime. Indeed, accomplices can face the same penalties, including prison time. The key consideration is whether the individual intentionally and voluntarily encouraged or assisted in the commission of the crime, or (in some cases) failed to prevent it.”

In 2017 the Rwandan government released an independent report accusing French officials of complicity in the 1994 genocide. The report commissioned by the Rwandan government and conducted by a Washington law firm, alleges that French military forces trained their Rwandan counterparts, supplied them with weapons even after an arms embargo, and gave cover, under the auspices of a United Nations-sanctioned humanitarian mission, in the last moments of a genocidal campaign.

More recently Gambia has denounced the Nobel Prize winner for peace Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi's "silence" over alleged atrocities against Rohingya Muslims. The case was heard in the international Court of Justice (ICJ). Lawyers said Ms. Suu Kyi had ignored widespread allegations of mass murder, rape and forced deportation. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) announced its first ruling in the highlighted genocide case against Burma on January 23 of this year. The court ordered Burma to carry out

emergency measures to protect the Rohingya from further violence and persecution. Aung San Suu Ky is the democracy icon and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, who fell from grace. This also can be repeated. PM Abiy is quickly falling from grace.

When responsible people who had the authority to prevent crimes against humanity, men and women whose duty is to protect the people that put them and betray the trust people had on them and allow mass murder, kidnapping, torture and mass displacement to take place, they are considered as accomplices to the crimes committed. Their silence and inaction is complicity and is punishable both under international and domestic laws. The charges could even be more serious when it is targeted against specific groups of people with the intention to eliminate them, humiliate them, displace them. This will be tantamount to genocide. In Ethiopia it feels that this has already started. Heinous crimes are being committed almost on a daily basis in largely against the Amharas.

The situation needs the urgent attention of the international community because this government of Prime Minister Abiy has failed to stop it. Now the people are asking seriously whether he is not an accomplice to a series of criminal events that have taken place in the last two years since he took power? His silence and his inactions on every single criminal acts including the burning of churches, the murder of many, the war mongering by his own

colleagues and the party that he leads, the kidnapping of Amhara students and the virtual impossibility of free movement in the country, has made it difficult to understand his behavior.

He travels when to a country, Equatorial Guinea, the most corrupt nation on earth, to visit a President Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo, who has been in power for 41 years, to receive a prize from him. In the same week he travels to Guinea Conakry, one of the most corrupted nations in Africa, whose president Alpha Conde is currently trying to change the constitution so he can stay in power for a third term, and then to Eritrea and gives the impression that the country is normal. During all these times the country was and is still gripped with fear with millions out on the streets demonstrating and demanding rule of law. He travels to seek adulation and to escape from the reality. The demonstrations are unprecedented. The last time such demonstrations took place was in support of Abiy when he came to power. Such is the irony of history. It took the Prime Minister only two years to turn this tide of support against him though it did not take me that long.

The constant behavior of Ably is his narcissistic personality, which, according to the book on such disorder, 'occurs where a person has an inflated sense of their own importance and seeks to gain recognition of this from others. Noticeable symptoms may include: Excessive self-importance, preoccupied

with fantasies of power, success seeking, constant admiration, praise and approval' etc.

It is widely known that the scheduled election is not going to change the complex political and security situation in Ethiopia. The whole purpose of this exercise is to anoint Abiy as the legitimate leader of Ethiopia. He will win under what is expected to be a rigged election. The controversy that will almost certainly come out of this choreographed and fake election will add another layer to the already complex security situation of Ethiopia.

There are Ethiopians and members of the international community who are recording all these crimes. As I write this, the International rights groups, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International made a statement on; “ the worrying development especially with key elections coming... the return of mass arrests of opposition activists and supporters is a worrying signal in Ethiopia.” Human rights activists in and outside the country are putting the Prime Minister on notice that if he fails to stop this carnage, he will stand accused of crimes against humanity and of what could possibly happen (genocide of biblical proportion) as a result of his inactions.
