

February 8, 2023

His Excellency Joe Biden, President of the United States

His Excellency Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation

His Excellency Xi Jinping, President of China

Her Excellency Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

His Excellency Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General

His Excellency Mackey Sall, Chairperson of the African Union

His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairman of the African Commission

His Excellency Koker Turk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Juanita Goeberitus, Director, Human Rights Watch

Dr. Agnes Callamard, Secretary General, Amnesty International

Dr. Elisa von Joeden- Forgey, Co-Founder and Co-President, Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention

Daniel Bekele, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Subject: The International Community Must Express Outrage at State Sanctioned Religious Persecution in Ethiopia

We submit this letter on behalf of the Ethiopian Beza Orthodox Church, a faith-based, tax-exempt civil society organization affiliated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Synod and located in the United States of America. Like tens of millions of Ethiopians across the world, our membership is hugely disturbed by the explosive situation in Ethiopia. We are especially alarmed by the level of lawlessness, persecutions, targeted killings, wanton destructions of Church property, theft, graft, corruption, and human rights violations.

As you know, Ethiopia is one of the earliest nation states to accept Eastern Orthodox Christianity in the world.

Before advances in modernization fueled by technological and biological innovations, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) served a huge social purpose to its members and non-members by providing health services using traditional medicines and methods.

During times of external aggression against Ethiopia, the EOTC played pivotal roles championing, mobilizing, and defending Ethiopia's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and national independence. In recognition of this essential role by the EOTC Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had declared while on a visit to the USA that the "EOTC is Country." In other words, **Ethiopia's very survival depends on the autonomy and continuity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its Synod.**

The EOTC has an unmatched track record in the field of education. It created the unique and one of a kind Geez Alphabet and taught Ethiopian citizens to read and write; document and record for succeeding generations the country's remarkable, rich, and diverse cultures, histories, state, and government formations.

The EOTC initiated and implemented a robust program of spreading the gospel by tapping into different local and indigenous languages including Afaan-Oromo. It strengthened the diversity profile of the Church by promoting and appointing Bishops and other senior members drawn from different nationality groups.

State Interference and Religious Persecution Intensified

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, and numerous others provide a plethora of evidence that religious persecution and undue political interference in the affairs of faith groups has reached an alarming level over the last five years and has worsened since January 2023.

Religious persecution and deliberate destruction of Churches and monasteries is not new in Ethiopia. We cite the following prominent ones as illustrative:

- In the 10th century, Queen Yodit Gudit carried-out the burning of churches and monasteries and the destructions of invaluable manuscripts of the EOTC.
- In the 16th century Ahmed Gragn (the left-handed) applied a scorched earth policy of burning churches and monasteries and all properties held by the Church and slaughtering members of the Church who resisted.
- In the 17th century, Emperor Susneyos attempted to use his considerable powers to convert Ethiopia's religion from the Eastern Orthodox faith to that of Catholicism.
- The battle of Adwa in 1896 and the battle of Maichew in 1935 were fought for the soul of Ethiopia with which the EOTC associated and identified.

Events since he took power show the current Ethiopian regime led by Abiy Ahmed embraces the worst aspects of Ethiopia's debilitating past. Abiy is callous, pretentious, calculating, sinister,

dismissal, arrogant and tyrannical. His regime is carrying out egregious atrocities, persecutions, and relentless intimidations with singular focus on the EOTC as an institution as well as against the Amhara nationality.

The international community ought to understand that Abiy and his Prosperity Party do not differentiate between the independent EOTC and Amhara.

Abiy Ahmed has a track record of dismantling Ethiopian institutions that do not meet his criteria and endurance test. He dismantled the Islamic Sharia, sponsored, and replaced it by an illegal group in violation of the current constitution that separates Church and State and recognizes the independence and autonomy of all faith groups---EOTC, Islam, Protestant, Catholic and others.

Today, Ethiopia's 122 million people are going through one of the most perilous times in the country's long and distinguished history.

We are fully cognizant that the international community agrees on the imperative that all members of the UN system must accept, promote and defend the **universality and indivisibility** of human and civil rights as well as the importance of accountability for crimes against humanity.

Tragically, we have concluded that the government of Ethiopia led by Abiy Ahmed does not meet this universal litmus test in good and democratic governance. He and most members of his cabinet do not possess ethical, moral, spiritual, and political leadership standards and competencies to lead the second most populous country in Africa and the 12th in the world.

We urge the international community to stop the bleeding by airing its concerns directly to the government of Ethiopia. At stake is not just the integrity of the EOTC and Synod—we believe it will survive as it has done for more than 2,000 years.

Equally, the international community must recognize that Abiy Ahmed and his Oromo Prosperity Party are pushing Ethiopia towards catastrophic collapse and fragmentation.

We urge the international community to appreciate the indisputable fact that trust and confidence in the Abiy government leadership is at an all-time low.

A simple question of why Abiy Ahmed travels to Italy while the country is burning says it all. He does not care about human life or human security, peace, or stability. Abiy has, instead normalized diversion and agenda flipping as political and diplomatic tools of longevity. When things fall apart, he is likely to declare a state of emergency and commit more atrocities,

The undersigned believe that the international community including multilateral donors can no longer acquiesce or lend deaf ears and blind eyes to recurring ethnic slaughters, beatings, persecutions, killings and executions, tortures, incarcerations of EOTC Bishops, priests and members as well as destructions and plunders of EOTC properties.

The undersigned call on each of you to condemn state and non-state sponsored atrocities and religious persecutions and the politically motivated fracturing and dismantlement of the EOTC that enjoys membership of more than 60 million Ethiopians.

Among other things, this policy move will avert the unthinkable---an all-out religious civil war followed by the collapse of Ethiopia.

Finally, the undersigned believe that it is high time for the international community in general and for the UN system and the AU in particular to hold Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and his government accountable for crimes of war, crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and now crimes against religious persecutions.

On our part we condemn state-sponsored religious persecutions and call on all Ethiopians and their friends across the globe to continue to hold vigils, protest and if things do not change boycott transmitting funds to Ethiopia.

EOTC Shall Prevail

Ethiopia Shall Prevail

CC:

ETOC, Ethiopia

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, Ethiopia

Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonen, Ethiopia

AEPAC