

Washington Update - by Mesfin Mekonen

1. US. Government response

It is important for U.S. government officials and the public to understand that Prime Minister Abiy's optimistic comments on the situation in Ethiopia do not reflect the actual situation. The country's most serious problems have not been solved. The U.S. should take steps to encourage him to move forward resolutely and should hold him accountable for delivering on his promises.

The U.S. Congress should enact legislation that will put the U.S. on the right side of history by promoting a transition to democracy in Ethiopia, halting ethnic cleansing and preventing Ethiopia from becoming a breeding ground for terrorist groups such as Al Shebab and Al Queda. The New York Times, Washington Post and Ethiopia independent TV as well as Diaspora media outlets have reported on ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia, especially attacks on the Amharas by terrorist extremist Shenne/OLF groups, including reports of killings, beatings, harassing and destroying houses based solely on ethnicity. Among the many horrific events, the recent shootings of Orthodox Christians at Waybela Merriam Church are especially shocking.

2. Dialogue and Reconciliation

The recent initiative by the Ethiopian government for "Dialogue and Reconciliation" seems to be a perversion of the idea of creating a Truth and Reconciliation commission modelled on the South African experience.

The Ethiopian initiative lacks the vital aspects of uncovering the truth and of holding individuals accountable. At the outset, before there has been any "dialogue" and in the absence of any reconciliation, criminals are being released. The results could be dire.

The process should start with a truth and reconciliation project animated by the spirit that propelled change in South Africa. The goals are clear: peace, justice, respect for human rights, democracy, and prosperity. Achieving these basic goals will require a process of truth telling, particularly about human rights abuses, achieved through testimony from both victims and perpetrators, coupled to a pledge of reconciliation. A declaration calling for this was signed by prominent Ethiopians. The selections process for membership on such a commission must ensure that it is staffed by neutral individuals who are dedicated to its goals.

3. Investment in Ethiopian recovery

There has been a discussion among Ethiopian-Americans about help their homeland by investing and creating new opportunities, especially for young Ethiopians. Economic development and employment of the young is essential for the nation's prosperity and stability.

Despite actions by the Ethiopian government that are driving away investment, there is some positive news. On January 26, World Vision and USAID announced a \$309 million joint project in Ethiopia's Amhara, Oromia regions. The goal of the five-year program is to support food security efforts in the two regions.

This is small step toward the massive investment that is needed to offset the devastation of the ongoing conflict. Reuters news recently reported that a "new food security assessment, released today by the United Nations World Food Programme, shows that almost 40 percent of Tigrayans are suffering an extreme lack of food, after 15 months of conflict." The assessment said that across Tigray and the neighboring regions of Afar and Amhara, also affected by the war, an estimated 9 million people need food aid.

4. The appointment of Ambassador Tracey Ann Jacobson, [as Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. at Embassy Addis Ababa](#)

According to U.S. State Department press release, Ambassador Jacobson will lead U.S. engagement in Ethiopia. The Secretary of State selected Ambassador Jacobson to continue the work undertaken by Ambassador Pasi to press for an immediate cessation of hostilities, an end to ongoing human rights abuses and violations, unhindered humanitarian access, and a negotiated resolution to the conflict in Ethiopia.