

Washington Update - by Mesfin Mekonen
October 2, 2021

1. Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) criticizes pro-TPLF bias at U.S. State Department

Representative Chris Smith issued a statement criticizing the U.S. State Department for failing to recognize and condemn the atrocities committed by the TPLF. In a statement posted on Twitter, Smith said: “Regarding Ethiopia, I think there has been a failure by the State Department to call out the atrocities, regardless of who commits them. Ethiopia is multi-ethnic and religiously diverse nation. Each group sadly are both victims and victimizers. The State Department has however for the most part called out the atrocities committed by the Ethiopian government and Amhara regional forces while neglecting equally horrifying atrocities committed by the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front which precipitated the immediate conflict last November. By painting Amhara solely as the victimizers, by neglecting to mention atrocities committed in Tigray against ethnic Amhara...the question arises, has the State Department, perhaps unwittingly, abetted a scapegoating narrative that singles out one ethnic group as perpetrators of violence and implicitly absolves other ethnic groups of committing the same atrocities, thereby fueling additional tensions and conflict. What they should do is recognize who is committing the atrocity and who is the victim, regardless of who is implicated.”

2. International Youth Peace Forum recognizes Mesfin Mekonen

At a reception at the National Press Club, the International Youth Peace Forum presented its Peacebuilder award to Mesfin Mekonen for his work from 2019-2011 in support of work on conflict prevention/ resolution & peace building with youth.

Announcing the award, Tony R. Culley-Foster, Founding Director of the IYPF said Mesfin Mekonen’s “long-time personal advocacy for peace in your beloved Ethiopia is inspiring.”

The International Youth Forum (IYF) is a platform that provide young people with the opportunity to present their concerns and ideas to Member States and help shape the direction of World Development.

Receiving the award, Mesfin Mekonen discussed U.S. - Ethiopia Relations and the conflict in Ethiopia. He noted that the U.S. relationship with Ethiopia dates back to 1903, when King Menelik II signed a treaty of commerce with a representative of the U.S. government. Ethiopia supported the U.S. during the Cold War and has sacrificed the lives of its soldiers in the war on terrorism.

The U.S. has provided generous support for Ethiopia, on a humanitarian basis and in support of American strategic objectives. For decades after the

fall of the communist regime in 1991, American aid helped Ethiopians overcome drought and famine, even as the country was ruled by a corrupt, violent and repressive dictator, Meles Zenawi.

Mesfin Mekonen discussed with the attendees their Young Ambassadors for peace initiative and praised their efforts to train and educate the next generation of peace leaders. Young people everywhere particularly in Africa are vital force for change as they make up 70% of the population in Ethiopia, he said. We need to engage them in conversation across all platforms.

Young people throughout the Horn of Africa especially in Ethiopia face political and economic issues that impact their lives.

Turning to the present conflict in Ethiopia, Mesfin Mekonen informed the attendees that the TPLF provoked military confrontation when “in the early hours of November 4, 2020 [it] carried out an attack on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces.” He noted that the TPLF acknowledges that it fired missiles at two airports and rockets into Eritrea. It also describes how hundreds of “ethnic Amhara people were stabbed or hacked to death in the town of Mai-Kadra in the Tigray region” in a criminal act that witnesses attributed to the TPLF.

The root cause of the misery in Ethiopia, he said, is the nation’s constitution which is based on divide and rule ethnic federalism. Ethnic conflicts that threaten to tear Ethiopia apart are the result of the 1994 Constitution, introduced by then-Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front governing coalition. The constitution recast the country from a centrally unified republic to a federation of nine regional ethnic states and two federally administered city states. The system of ethnic federalism was troubled with internal inconsistencies because ethnic groups do not live only in a discrete “homeland” territory but are dispersed across the country. Non-native ethnic minorities live within every ethnic homeland.

Peace and stability depend on abandoning the ideology of ethnic division and launching a project to revise the Ethiopian constitution. The present constitution was created to exacerbate ethnic divisions. It will lead to the destruction of Ethiopia, Mesfin Mekonen said.