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Unabated TPLF-EPRDF Genocidal Crimes against the Amhara People: The Case of Chemical Pollution by Bahir Dar Tanneries.

An important message to create awareness about the environmental pollution, and the crime against humanity in general and the Amhara people in particular.

February 13, 2017

Background

In the course of long Ethiopian history, all rulers, no matter what form of government they adopted to their administrations, had a sense of duty to preserve the sovereignty of our nation, Ethiopia, and ample evidences point that all of them cared for the generations to come. To this end, they used various methods to deal with foreign and internal threats to their rules. They mobilized their people and led successful battles against foreign invaders. In dealing with internal resistance to their rules, they used appeasement, marriage and when necessary, coercion. However, once a leader prevailed over rivals and controls the state, the usual traditional norm had been to treat all different ethnic groups as the people of one country. Despite, the diversity in the country, homogeneity was achieved via the leaders' quest to instill Ethiopian nationalism. Acceptance of the king by regional lords and tax payments extended to the king were the only mandatory demands that had to be fulfilled by all the subjects. It had never been their ethnicity background nor their linguistic nature that was used as the basis for their rules. This non-discriminatory approach stemmed from their sense of the fear of God, and their consciousness of judgment of history. On the contrary, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a political party that is a force behind the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), is ethnocentric, barbaric, and racist to its core. Since it took over political power in 1991, TPLF has used the colonial era principle of divide and rule to destroy the unity of the people that had been the hallmark of Ethiopian nationalism. It excluded

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major stakeholders of the country from the social, political, and economic participation. In a stark contrast to its favoritism to the Tigray ethnic group, TPLF's disdain and hatred towards the Amhara people in particular is so deep that its demand of them is not only paying taxes but complete servitude and eventual extinction.

Since its inception in 1974, TPLF has identified the Amhara People as its prime enemy to the illusion of "Tigray Supremacy". To cement this in the minds of its narrow nationalist followers, it has misrepresented and demonized the Amhara through its official organizational platforms and propaganda songs. In addition, TPLF continues to threaten other ethnic groups who have similar attitude with the Amhara People towards the 'Sovereignty' of Ethiopia and the necessity of genuine democracy.

Due to their hateful mindset and racist platform, TPLFites deliberately reduced Ethiopia to as if it was the making of the Amhara people. In Article 39 of the so-called constitution, TPLF has outlined that any part of Ethiopia has the right to secede from the federal union. This is to fulfil TPLF's dream of establishing the "Republic of Tigray" as stated in its manifesto. Whether "Tigray" stays as part of Ethiopia or not, TPLF sees the Amhara people as a threat to its evil intentions. Thus, it has been working hard to weaken and marginalize the Amhara people from the Ethiopian social, political, and economic dynamics through all possible means and methods. Accordingly, the Amhara race has been targeted in multifaceted, open, and covert manners for the last 26 years under the TPLF's rule.

TPLF's primary plan is to rule Ethiopia for centuries. To execute this, TPLF has to kill, imprison, and evict Amhara people from their ancestral landholdings across the country where they used to live together in harmony with other Ethiopians in good and bad times for centuries (Tesfaw, 2016). In case this plan, does not work, an alternative plan has simultaneously been in place, i.e., to create "**Greater Tigray**" through mass killings and weakening and the subjugation of millions of the



Amhara people and illegally confiscating their historical land and looting their wealth using all the available governmental structures. These TPLF's plans are not secret to the public. On September 2, 2008, for example, the Genocide Watch has described this tragedy as genocide after genocide, first on Amhara and then against Anuak and small ethnic minorities.

Land grabbing in the bigger cities as well as farm areas at the expense of indigenous Amhara communities is another crime against humanity committed by TPLF. By evicting and dislocating the Amhara people, TPLF's Tigre civil and military officials and supporters have become owners of high-rise buildings, large mechanized farms, mines, and various kinds of valuable properties across the country. TPLF members and military officers own almost all the rental properties, luxurious villas as well as import and export companies in Ethiopia (Patriotic-Ginbot-7, 2009; WilkiLeaks, 2009). Besides, TPLF has placed Amharic-speaking Tigrians in all key administrative hierarchies across the "Amhara Region", in the name of Amhara People's representatives, to run its business empire while excluding the majority of the Amhara People from any such business activities. If there are a few Amhara businesspersons, they have been forced to pay unfair huge taxes and penalties to the point where their fate is filing bankruptcy. As a result, the entire businesses in the "Amhara region" be it large or small are now taken over by TPLF.

Evicting the Amhara people from their fertile and strategic ancestral lands has been a non-stop phenomenon since TPLF took power in 1991. **Amhara territories bordering "Tigray" such as Kafta Humera, Welkait-Tegede, and Telemite from Gondar province and Ende-Mahari, Raya-Azebo, Wefela, Alamata from Wollo province were first forcefully annexed to "Tigray" in 1991 (Tamiru, 2016).** Subsequently, the demography of these annexed Amhara areas has been maliciously altered through mass killings and displacement of the natives, and moving in new Tigre settlers from "Tigray region". Even more recently between 2013 and 2016, over 300,000 Amhara people have been brutally evicted from their ancestral land in Metekel, which



historically used to be part of Gojjam in “Amhara region”, now annexed to "Benshangul Gumuz region", Ethiopia. Ironically, this forcefully evacuated land was given to 350,000 Tigre settlers from a faraway "Tigray region", several hundred miles away. These tragedies are part of the plan B to create the so-called “Greater Tigray” which stretches up to the site of Blue Nile Dam construction and are the main causes for the ongoing uprising and resistance of the Amhara People (Amhara Resistance/ ‘የአማራ ተደራሽነት’).

TPLF has also been engaged in underground and quiet mass extermination of the Amhara people. This includes, involuntary administering of contraceptives and mass sterilization, poor health care status, poor educational status, denial of economic opportunities to the youth, and extremely low standard factories. The combined outcomes of these hidden programs have resulted in degenerative disease that slowly kill the population, and remarkable fertility rate reduction in economically important big cities as well as in the rural areas of the "Amhara region" for the last continuous 26 years. The Amhara population growth rate is selectively reduced compared to that of other ethnic groups. These situations are manifested on the 2007 Census by Central Statistical Agency (CSA) of Ethiopia where the Amhara population was short by millions, and further corroborated by significant decline in the numbers of children at kindergartens and elementary schools in the “Amhara region” (IHSN, 2013; USAID_&_DRMFS-Ethiopia, 2011).

The economy has also been used against the Amhara people. For example, TPLF dismantled billions of dollars' worth, multipurpose, and eco-friendly Tana Beles Project in Amhara region, which was a success and beneficial to the population of approximately 100,000 inhabitants during the former Ethiopian Government (APU, 2016a, 2016b). TPLF has deliberately discouraged and denied permits for high yield projects in the “Amhara region”. On the other hand, they encouraged the establishment of extremely low standard factories such as tannery factories that release toxic chemicals. The essay therefore focuses on the Chemical Genocide that has been committed by the



ethnocentric fascist TPLF on the people of Amhara through the establishment of extremely low standard tannery factories in Bahir Dar, under the cover of “investment”.

Bahir Dar Tanneries Chemical Pollution

Chromium (Cr)-tanning is the most common type of tanning in the world for its high-quality leather production. However, Cr particularly the hexavalent Cr (Cr^{+6}) form is known to be the most toxic metal both to animals and plants. Of the 275 most toxic substances classified, Cr^{+6} ranks 16th. Because of Cr^{+6} adverse effects to humans and environment, developed countries set a strict legislation for tannery factories. As the consequence of this many tannery factories have ceased production/operation in developed countries while others moved their factories to developing countries like Asia and India.

Recently, Ethiopia has become the most vulnerable destination for TPLF-affiliated foreign and/or local Cr-based tanning factories. There are 29 Tannery factories in Ethiopia, almost all of which are purposely planted in the Amhara populated cities and farm Lands (ACCSA, n.d.). Among these, Habesha Tannery (Abesha Tanya) and Bahir Dar Tannery (Bahir Dar Tanya) are planted in the suburbs of Bahir Dar, current “Amhara region” capital (Figure 1). These Bahir Dar tanneries utilize Chromium (Cr)-tanning system (Belay, 2010).

Despite the devastating effects of the untreated Cr-tanning effluents on the health of the local people, animals and the environment, and the financial limitations of these factories to buy and install the complicated and expensive Chromium Treatment Technology, the TPLF government licensed those factories to operate so that it could accomplish the cleansing of the Amhara people in the area.



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Figure 1. Location map of tannery factories in Bahir Dar (Google Earth Image). Note how closer they are located to Chimble Stream, Abay River and Lake Tana.

Since their establishment, these tanneries have been discharging untreated or inadequately treated solid and liquid effluents directly into the nearby farmers' irrigation canal, animal grazing fields, and rivers including the Blue Nile River (Figure 2). This has put millions of residents in extreme health and economic danger. Recent studies conducted 15 years after these tannery factories' establishment have shown that the concentration of Cr in the effluents released from these tanneries to the surrounding environments, including Blue Nile River, exceeded 36 times the permissible limit

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recommended by WHO guidelines (Wosnie & Wondie, 2014a, 2014b). Blue Nile River (Abay) is the principal source of water used for various purposes such as drinking, cooking, bathing, swimming, fishing and farming for approximately one million people who reside in Bahir Dar and its suburbs. Thus, polluting Abay River affects millions who are dependent on the river in one way or another.

Figure 2. Tannery effluents released into river canal. Screenshot from video (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017).

There are two main factors that determine the level of health hazards from Cr+6 exposure by



ingestion/inhalation/contact: one is the amount of the chemical and the other is the duration of exposure. Since the establishment of these factories, hundreds of thousands of Amharas in Bahir Dar and the surrounding suburbs have been exposed to Cr for more than 15 years. The most exposed are estimated to be more than 500,000 citizens who are factory workers and dwellers in the communities (comprised of 13 kebeles) near to the tannery factories. The local people clearly identified and appealed to the government about the devastating effects of these tanneries on their health, livestock and crops It should have been the responsibility of the so called Ethiopian government in general and

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the Ministry of Health and/or Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in particular to take whatever necessary measures to mitigate the devastation these Amhara people have been subjected to. Instead, the government has ignored the people's voice and as a consequence of such crimes, the suffering of those people has continued while the factory owners (who are usually affiliated with the TPLF) have made millions of dollars in profit at the expense of the local people's lives and the pollution the environment suffers. Despite their limited education, the community members precisely blame the tannery effluent as the cause of the mysterious illnesses that have been claiming the lives of their family members as well as their livestock, and devastated their crops.

According to WHO and CDC guidelines, Cr 6+ causes several respiratory disorders such as allergic illness and asthma when inhaled at high concentration. The worst outcomes of Cr 6+ inhalation are lung and nasal cancers as it is a proven carcinogenic chemical. Studies of leather tannery workers in developed countries found lung cancer risks between 20% and 50% (Were et al., 2014). Although there is no published data available, one would expect well over 50% of lung and nasal cancer-cases and -deaths among the Bahir Dar tannery workers who are forced to work without safety precautions as seen in Figure 3 and the people who live near these tanneries. Communities near these factories as well as residents in the downstream of Abay River have no safe water supply, and are forced to use Cr-contaminated Abay River water for drinking, cooking and bathing over the last 15 years (Figure 4). This shows that these people are exposed to Cr 6+ on daily basis. Ingestion of high dose of Cr 6+ on daily basis causes various health effects including gastrointestinal disorders, haemorrhagic (bleeding) diathesis and cardiovascular shock, which eventually leads to death. It does also cause infertility in male. The most terrifying is that these people are at high risk to develop cancers of the stomach, intestine, liver and kidney.



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Figure 3. Tannery workers at work with no protective gloves and masks. Screenshot from video (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017).

As mentioned above, the damage caused by the release of untreated effluents from these factories is not limited to chronic human sufferings and deaths. It does also involve the cattle and goats these people depend for their livelihood. Cattle and goats of the communities in the nearby areas of the tannery can be exposed to Cr in similar ways as people get exposed via inhalation and ingestion of contaminated air and water, respectively. However, cattle and goats are more exposed to higher concentration of Cr by directly feeding solid tannery waste dumped to the area because of its salty nature. Cattle and goats exposed to Cr in this way suffer from respiratory and gastrointestinal problems. Some exposed cattle and goats give stillbirth and birth with defects while others become



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infertile. As reported by community members, their cattle and goats are dying at a much higher rate from different kinds of cancers related to Cr than they ever witnessed before.



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Figure 4. Effluent joining Abay River (Wosnie & Wondie, 2014a)

In addition to its use for domestic purposes, Abay River is used for small-scale irrigation agriculture by nearby farmers. As shown in Figures 2 and 4, this river is constantly receiving tannery effluents with high concentration of Cr along with other heavy metals. This implies that irrigated crops are exposed to toxic Cr on daily basis. Cr in irrigation water is toxic to the various agricultural crops even at lower concentration. Some seeds do not germinate at all in the presence of high concentration of Cr. Some may tolerate and able to grow but eventually die due to damage caused by gradual accumulation of Cr in their roots and stems (Figure 6). Cr also causes reduction in flowering and the subsequent fruit and seed production. Studies in countries like India and Bangladesh found up to 80% yield reduction in crops irrigated with Cr-polluted water. Community members near to Bihar Dar tannery report similar yield reduction to the scale that they are no longer able to feed their family members. This adds salt to their wounds. For details, please watch this referenced video (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017).

As one of the community elders in the referenced video clip (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017) said: “the whole Community in the region is slowly perishing as the

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consequence of the ill-effects of these tanneries, because the tannery factories are more important than the lives of millions of innocent Amhara People.” Our tribute goes to those who had finally recorded and brought into public one of the plights of Amhara people by breaking the stiff resistance from both factory owners, CEOs, and the government to cover up the chemical genocide. For details, please watch the referenced video (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017) to witness the horrendous crime committed by TPLF and to play your part to stop such Chemical Genocide against innocent Amhara People. The managers of Habesha and Bahir Dar Tanneries had



tried their best to play with their deceiving words against the innocent Amhara People while the survival of the affected

Figure 5. Farmers showing evidences of contaminated river water by tannery waste. Photo extracted from video (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017).

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farmers depends entirely on the safety of the river water, small scale farming on plots of land and their livestock (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017). Despite these facts on the ground, the handpicked TPLF representatives in the local Amhara government are collaborating with TPLF's agenda of discriminating, and marginalizing the Amhara.



Figure 6. Poisoned irrigated crops due to contaminated irrigation water. Screenshot from video (Amhara-Mass-Media-Agency, 2017; Anonymous, 2017).

The source of Abay River, as shown in Figure 1, is Lake Tana, a highland lake, which is the largest in Ethiopia. This lake is extremely rich in biodiversity, a unique habitat for a wide variety of large and small animals. It is best known for harboring a highly distinctive fish fauna. About 70% of the fish species in the Lake Tana are endemic. Also, it is internationally recognized as an Important

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Bird Area (IBA), serving as a resting and feeding ground for numerous wetland birds (217 species) such as great white pelicans and grey crowned cranes (Figure 7) as well as for many Palearctic migrant water birds. Besides being a biodiversity hotspot, Lake Tana is also commercially important lake. It is a backbone for the Fishing industry and supplies about 1,454 tons of fish to the city of Bahir Dar alone each year. However, the presence of these toxic tanneries in a very close range (<1 mile) from the lake is a real threat for the biodiversity in Lake Tana as well as Fishing Industry. It is, therefore, the responsibility of both the international and the local communities to protect Lake Tana, the most precious natural resource, from pollution to achieve sustainable development in the “Amhara Region” in particular and Ethiopia in general.



Figure 7. Birds of the Lake Tana area are among many faunas in the contaminated area.

Summary and the way forward

TPLF have been targeting the Amhara people as its number one enemy since its inception in

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1974. They have been depopulating the Amhara people through varies means, such as, displacing, birth control, mass killing and the like during their rebellion period and after they took power in 1991. They annexed the Amhara historical virgin lands neighbouring Tigray province such as Wolkait and Raya-Zebo to the newly created “Tigray region”.

The establishment of extremely low standard tannery factories, namely Bahir Dar and Habesha Tanneries, in Bahir Dar town, the capital of “Amhara region”, is one of the delectable evil acts by the TPLF-led government to depopulate the Amhara people and to commit long lasting ecological damages to the Amhara virgin lands. Untreated toxic effluents discharged from these tannery factories have been causing human, animals and irrigated crops health hazards for more than a decade. This chronic pollution of the environment for over a decade will also have devastating impact on the health of future generations. Amhara Professionals Union (APU) strongly believes that this is a crime against humanity being committed on our Amhara people by TPLF led-government. Therefore, the TPLF-led government, its handpicked so-called Amhara People's representatives, owners and CEOs of the tanneries are all responsible for their deliberate acts that costed the lives of thousands of Amhara people, and kept millions under poverty. Therefore, Amhara Professionals Union (APU) calls on any concerned body to halt this chemical genocide on the Amhara people before it is too late, and to hold the perpetrators accountable. APU is determined to work with concerned bodies to bring the perpetrators to international justice, unless the situation is reversed. We call up on concerned bodies to work with us to halt this carnage of the Amhara people.

For further information, we are available at apuamba@gmail.com or editor@ambapu.org.

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