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Congressman Smith and esteemed members of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, on behalf of the organization I represent, Amhara Association of America, Ethiopian-Americans across this country, and all Ethiopians who have suffered unconscionable brutality at the hands of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the ruling party of Ethiopia, I want to thank you for holding this hearing and bringing awareness to a humanitarian crisis that has been unfolding for the past 26-years. I praise your leadership and devotion to the Ethiopian people and commitment to a U.S. Foreign Policy that serves the interests of both Americans and Ethiopians.

The subject of today's hearing: Democracy Under Threat in Ethiopia is an misnomer in many ways since Democracy has never existed under this current Ethiopian government.

Since the establishment of Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), in their 1976 Manifesto, they labeled their struggle as "anti-Amhara oppressors" and in order to achieve their struggle against the Amhara oppressors they must destroy the old and the dominant Amhara culture and replace it by a new and revolutionary culture. It is only through this struggle that they may be able to secede from Ethiopia and establish the Republic of Tigray. TPLF ascension to power was due to a power vacuum created as a result of the many warring parties during the Ethiopian civil war. TPLF purports to represent the Tigray ethnic group which makes up 6% of the population. In essence, the result of the TPLF's rule is a minority party controlling the majority of the population in Ethiopia. Since coming to power, the TPLF ruling party has been persecuting Amharas to achieve their mission as stated in their Manifesto.

The TPLF led government has forcefully annexed historical Amhara lands of Wolkite, Tegede, Humera, Tselemete and Raya-Azebo to Tigray. Under the late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, the TPLF transferred thousands of Tigray settlers to the annexed Amhara land in an attempt to change the demographic make-up of the region. The land mass of the Tigray Region has grown by a 3rd since annexation of historical Amhara lands including lands annexed from the Afar Region. This forced annexation has had a devastating effect on the Amhara people in the Wolkite Region. As the ruling party of Ethiopia, TPLF has been and continues to commit ethnic cleansing on the Amhara people in Wolkite. Their native tongue Amharic is suppressed. Widespread discrimination, killing, arrest, torture, and confiscation of land have led to many of the ethnic Amhara people in this region escaping to Gonder City, other regions of Ethiopia, and foreign countries for survival.

In 2015, under the guidance of the Ethiopian Constitution's covenants, the Amhara people organized themselves and petitioned the Ethiopian Government to have the Wolkite Region rejoined to the Amhara State. The response by the TPLF regime was swift and brutal response:

the TPLF Special Forces deployed to kidnap the Officers of the Wolkite Amhara Identity Committee in the middle of the night, and then charged them with terrorism.

These officers were named in a Joint Letter to the UN Human Rights Council by 15 Human Rights Organizations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

They are:

Colonel Demeke Zewudu, the face of the Amhara Resistance

Getachew Ademe (Chairman)

Atalay Zafe

Mebratu Getahun

Alena Shama

Addisu Serebe

Nega Banteyehun

This is what led to the massive protests in the Amhara State. My family is from Wolkite, I myself was born in the Wolkite city of Humera. Some of the men arrested are either related to me or close to my family. The Chairman, Getachew Ademe was a student of my father. Nega Banteyehun is a cousin. These men and many other members of the Wolkite Amhara Identity Committee members who are now charged with terrorism have not committed any crime against the state. Their only crime is being Amhara and petitioning the Government of Ethiopia for the Wolkite Region to be rejoined to Amhara State.

I have family members who have fled Ethiopia to neighboring countries because they are being hunted down, one escaping with bullet wounds. So these past few months have been extremely challenging for my family. I have had to collect money to send to these young men who have fled to Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda. It has been both financially and emotionally challenging for us.

But, Wolkite and Raya-Azebo are not the only areas where ethnic cleansing and genocidal acts have been committed against Amharas, we can cite:

1. In Metekel, Benishangul from 1992-1994, between 15,000 and 20,000 Amharas were killed. In the same area, in 2013, 5,000 Amharas were displaced from their homes.
2. In West Arsi, 60,000 Amharas were displaced in 1992 and many were killed.
3. In East Arsi in 1992, 5 woredas (areas) were put on fire; 1,500 Amharas were killed and 500 thrown to a deep underground pit alive.
4. In West Arsi, Gelemiso from 1991-1993, between 13,000-20,000 Amharas were killed.
5. In Kemash, Benishangul, in 1990, 300 Amharas were burnt alive. In 2013, 5,000 Amharas were displaced from their homes.
6. In Wollega, in the year 2000, 1,200 Amharas were killed and 14,000 displaced from their homes. During this atrocity, children were thrown into fire and a 4-year old child was forced to drink the blood of her dead father.
7. In Bench Maji, 22,000 Amharas were displaced from their homes and in 2015 600 Amharas were killed.
8. In West Shewa, 500 Amharas were displaced in 2015.

9. Since the Amhara Protests began in 2016, over 227 (government provided numbers) have been killed but we believe the numbers are much higher.

This is just a small sample of the many atrocities committed against Amharas.

As stated in the 2007 Ethiopian Census that was released in 2010, the Amhara population was short by 2.5 million. A debate was not even allowed in parliament when this fact was presented. Some estimates have the number now closer to 5 million. We believe there has been a systematic effort by the government to depopulate the Amhara population. Thus, the recent protests by Amharas was not about democracy or economics, but was simply about their identity, their land, and the need to survive as a people. Hundreds have been killed while peacefully protesting, hundreds of homes burned by security forces in retaliation against Amharas, and thousands upon thousands imprisoned. We can never know the exact number killed, wounded, tortured, and arrested unless an independent and transparent investigation is conducted by an international body.

When all these horrendous acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing were occurring, the world including Ethiopian Opposition groups were silent. It is because of this silence, the Amhara people had no other choice but to organize themselves so they may have a voice, it is because of this silence and the basic need for survival the Amhara farmers in Gonder and Gojam decided to wage an armed struggle. Since the armed uprising began, over 500 TPLF security forces have been killed in the Amhara State. These brave farmers were led by the late Amhara leader Gobe Malke.

The Amharas of course are not the only victims of this brutal regime; we have witnessed the atrocious violence committed against Oromos where thousands have been killed while peacefully protesting, the Konso people, Anuaks, Afars, Somalis, and I can go on and on. It is very disturbing to see a government forcefully remove millions of people from the land they have farmed and cared for for thousands of years only to be sold to foreign investors and the beneficiaries being TPLF bureaucrats.

The Ethiopian Government has had one of the worst human rights records in the world. The free press is non-existent, there's no space for opposition political parties, and civic organizations are constantly under attack via the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO) law. Though the U.S. State Department is aware of these atrocities there has been no meaningful action taken against the government. The TPLF led political party; Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won 100% of the Parliamentary seats in 2015 election and 99.99% of the Regional elections. That's an improvement from the 2005 election where they only won 99.99% of the Parliamentary election. You don't need any more proof then this to understand the level of oppression and corruption by this regime.

In the past 26 years, Ethiopia has received over \$30billion from the United States and over \$20billion from our European allies. This figure does not take into account the humanitarian aid Ethiopia receives from the U.S., Europe, and other donor countries. Still, Ethiopia ranks as one of the poorest and corrupt countries in the world. Independent research has revealed a corrupt system whereby \$2-\$3billion annually is leaving the country. Ethiopia is again facing a massive

famine, with an estimated 5.6 million Ethiopians requiring emergency food assistance by June 2017. Where is all the U.S. Aid going? Where is the accountability from the State Department and European partners? This is not representative of democratic form of governance, and a may even be failure by our own democratic government to account for tax-payer aid.

Unaccountable support to the Ethiopian Government does not serve the national security interest of the United States. The Ethiopian Government is a destabilizing factor to the region and its own citizens. Even with the State of Emergency in place, the Ethiopian Government cannot sustain control of the country when majority of its citizens have risen against it. Just two weeks ago over 20 Ethiopian security forces were killed by Amhara armed resistance fighters. Amharas, Oromos, and other ethnic groups are taking to arms because they have had enough of the brutality and unfair treatment against their own people. Thousands of Ethiopians are fleeing the country with the hopes of reaching Europe or America for safety putting pressure on neighboring countries. When a majority of the Ethiopian citizens in almost all parts of Ethiopia are protesting against this government, we expect our U.S. Government to stand with the Ethiopian people, not a government that has turned its guns against its own people.

I am honored today to be accompanied to this hearing by one of my younger brothers Yowseph Tirfe who is a veteran of the U.S. Marines and who proudly served a tour in Iraq. He was inspired to give back because he valued the freedom that he and our parents were afforded by the United States as immigrants and he wanted to play his role in preserving our freedom. Another inspiration for Yowseph was the service of another younger brother, Eyassu Tirfe who served in the United States Army. Many Ethiopian-Americans have proudly served in the U.S. Armed Forces because they love this country and want our values preserved. Ethiopian-Americans are law abiding, hardworking, tax-paying citizens who are proud to be Americans and deeply cherish the security, opportunity, freedom, value of human rights, and representative democracy we have in America. However, we are very disappointed with the U.S. Foreign Policy that has failed the Ethiopian people and have appeased a brutal regime. We believe there can be balance that ensures our national security interests and move Ethiopia on a path towards democracy.

As an Ethiopian-American based organization, Amhara Association of America would like to make the following recommendations to our elected officials, State Department, and policy makers keeping in mind our U.S. national security interests:

1. All Foreign Aid to be tied directly to measureable improvement towards democracy and improvements in human rights.
2. Release of all journalists, political opposition leaders and members, human rights activists, and protesters who were arbitrarily detained during and after the protests.
3. Allow opposition political parties to operate without persecution.
4. Allow independent media to operate without persecution.
5. Open up radio, television, and Internet to private and independent Ethiopian companies. All these entities are now under the control of the Ethiopian government.
6. Allow independent civil institutions to operate without intimidation and to flourish. A strong and vibrant independent press and civil institutions are the foundations of a strong democracy.
7. Repeal the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) which has been used to jail journalists, human rights activists, and opposition politicians.

8. Repeal the 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO) which has shuttered many nongovernmental organizations and the few that exists has hampered their ability to work on human rights, good governance, and advocacy on the rights of oppressed ethnic groups, women, children, and the disabled.
9. Stop the persecution of Amharas and other ethnic groups who are targeted by TPLF.
10. Return and Integrate Wolkite and Raya-Azebo Region to the Amhara State. This will offer some level of protection to this targeted group.
11. Allow for international, independent, and transparent investigation to the cause of 2.5million-5million missing Amharas.
12. Allow for international, independent, and transparent investigation into all of the deaths caused by Ethiopian security forces and other human rights violations and hold those responsible accountable.
13. Immediate and targeted sanction including travel visa bans to individuals and entities that have committed internationally recognized human rights atrocities.
14. Invest more in civil institutions that have seen their numbers shuttered and capacity diminished due to the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO) law.

If the Ethiopian Government does not take immediate and measureable efforts on the above points, the State Department should cut 1/3 of the foreign aid funding and redirect to civil institutions. And cut an additional 1/3 each year after that if there are no measurable improvements. We believe if the above measures are taken via legislation, a more humane, democratic, stable government will emerge in Ethiopia that will ensure America's security interest and a Government that more closely aligns with our shared values of Freedom, Democracy, and value for human Dignity.

Amhara Association of America's immediate concern is regarding the millions of "missing" Amharas. We are requesting the members of this subcommittee to immediately take this issue to the Ethiopian Government and the United Nations Human Right office of the High Commissioner and request an independent investigation.

Thank You. I look forward to answering any question.

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