

## **Once again on the wrong side of history.**

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I started this article by this heading and through the process I questioned myself: What is the right side or the wrong side in history? Does this really exist? Unless it means the religious concept of justice after death the idea of injustices committed today will be corrected 50 or 100 years from now, here on earth, is simply superstitious or a myth, for me. It is a moral justification that falsely promises hope to the victims. What is wrong today should be judged today not left for history. Morality changes and there cannot be ethics and morale debate beyond our times. None have the authority on human morality and ethics. They evolve. On many instances history is written by winners and what have been accounted as crimes today could be written as 'just' in history. If it was true, America could have been on the wrong side of history since it has committed mistakes in the past that it has not learnt lessons from. But has history made them wrong or have prices been paid for those mistakes that were done in the past?

The right and wrong sides of history are about where you stand on issues that are contentious in a given time. Martin Luther King Jr. who famously encouraged hope by saying that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice," later offered a different approach.

"In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," he wrote: "Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively."

Amharas of Ethiopia have to fight every day for justice and redemption **today**. Amharas, being so deeply religious, may have hope on biblical redemption. That is God's work. But while they live on earth, they wait for redemption every day. They have to fight for justice on this earth with all the power that they have. No justice should be left for history. There is no justice without peace or the other way round. Which comes first is a political decision but they are mutually inclusive. We cannot have one

without the other. As the suffering of our people in Ethiopia, particularly the Amharas, continues unabated we have wondered why America is so quiet. Everything was not always politics. There was the human side of America which has saved the lives of millions of people across the world.

Yes! many Ethiopian lives were saved through decisions made by American administrations to protect many from persecution by their own governments. We Ethiopian Americans are witnesses and we are grateful for this. Since World War II, more than four million refugees have come to America in order to find safety and freedom. They flourish in the creative openness that the United States has to offer. This aspect of American policy has survived despite enormous stress from conservatives. But the American compassion and the pressure it exerted on policy makers resulting in creating movements across America and the world, to save lives and to help the poor, the displaced, the persecuted and those in conflict or those under severe starvation is absent these days. That is why consecutive administrations have allowed themselves to behave contrary to what the American people would have wanted them to do. Americans are not informed, or are misinformed or distracted.

I was here in the USA, Hollywood, when the United Artists of America decided to publish a song to promote the cause of those starving in Ethiopia in 1983;85. The song which came out after my discussions on the lyrics with some of the artists of Hollywood: **"We Are the World"** mobilized the sympathy of millions of Americans and millions more across the world. It embodied the spirit America thrives to be. Immediately after our ports in Ethiopia were overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of tons of food, to the point where the problem became, not the availability of food but the transportation of the food within the country. Later on, as I took around Harry Belafonte, the representative of the artists and his team who came to Ethiopia, to the shelters, established to feed and treat the starving and those displaced from their villages, there was a sense of pride in him and a sense of grief. He was proud and grateful to be amongst the people because he knows thoroughly their history of as the people who had been the symbol and inspiration of the black movement which he was part of in his youth and later as a leader of the African American civil rights movement. He had songs on the plight of black people which inspired Bob Marley to continue on that path. Bob Marley sang about the black pride and black oppression until his untimely death. Harry was sad because he saw these

valiant and dignified people succumb to natural disaster and failure of their own government to stand on their side in their time of need.

I took Senator Kennedy, another giant American, and his children to the shelters. When they visited, he shelters at Makale the family cried. Senator Kennedy refused to eat that night. Early morning, he left his room without telling anybody and walked to the shelter where he has been during the day, 3 kms away. People found him there feeding children along with our staff. He wanted to extend one more day just to be with the people. He did the same when I took him to Bati and jijiga. The most striking thing about those trips, he told me, was “the dignity and calm of the people. It was hard to comprehend how people facing imminent death from starvation could wait in orderly lines to receive the meagre rations” He said in most other countries, there would have been riots, -an observation repeated by many foreigners. Senator Kennedy was a staunch supporter of Ethiopia in the Senate and mobilized enormous resources and stayed as a friend of Ethiopians till his last days. Such were the compassion of Americans during those critical days for millions of Ethiopians.

Today our people have been stripped of this dignity, their pride, their culture and their rights to worship. Today the Amhara population, the bastion of valor, are being masacraed indiscriminately in their homes and farms by a home grown Fascist group organized by a leader gone mad. Every day when I pick up my computer to start writing about the ongoing massacre, I find out hundreds or thousands more are being killed and displaced for who they are: Amhara. No word can explain these crimes except genocide.

**“People being intentionally killed for who they are.”** Today armed government forces and militia are fighting the poor unarmed women and children. They know that they cannot fight the **Fanos.**( the organized Amhara resistance movement). They are deliberately after the weak and the helpless. Day after day, for the last five years, intensified more recently as the government felt more insecure, people die in horrific mass killings across the Amhara region; and the world is not there to even write about it.

Americans used to be sensitive to human rights violations wherever it happened. Millions of distressed and helpless people depended on food aid from America. America used to support people fighting for democracy. It advocated for change and threatened authoritarian governments (though not in all cases) who oppressed people. Yes; much has changed since the

last few decades. America has become numb and the only thing that it sees through the sufferings in Africa is; its national, material and strategic interests. Human rights used to be a national interest at the time of the song "**We are the World.**" Jimmy Carter, the American president between 1977 to 1981, believed Human rights should be part of the national interest of the USA. and proclaimed human rights an important part of his administration's foreign policy. Carter and other idealists argued that human rights were consistent with the national interest of the United States.

On November 4 1984: I addressed the UN General Assembly expression our gratitude for the overwhelming response of the America and the Western countries during the famine crisis in Ethiopia:

"Mr. Chairman, one cannot help being moved by the the sight of human suffering depicted in those pictures (referring to a film) Even governments which were hitherto less than forthcoming is now following the humanitarian example of their public. We in Ethiopia are actually protected by the goodwill and generosity shown by ordinary men and women. All this renews our faith in humanity, reenforces our confidence in international solidarity and indeed encourages us to try even the impossible to have the lives of our unfortunate brothers and sisters. "

In all these difficult years unprecedented help was received from the US and the Western world as a result of the pressure from the American public. Through the PR skill of the of the RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission) we were able to mobilize the sentiments of the American and European people. In the UK, the Band Aid led by Bob Geldof produced a song: "**Do they Know it is Xmas**". It circulated like wild fire and galvanized much needed international support. Through all these it was again the public and not the governments that played critical roles. From states after states the fire that started in Hollywood consumed America and Ethiopia was the topic for every adult and child.

During my tour in Europe and America, Canadian PM, Pierre Trudeau, called me in New York and asked me to come over to discuss Ethiopia's urgent needs. I was busy with other appointments and asked for change of time. He said that he is flying to India for the funeral of PM Gandhi and that he would like to meet me by next day if possible. I was not able but I did go lo Ottawa later and met his senior staff. The question was 'What can we do

for Ethiopians?’ The former Italian PM Giulio Andreotti asked me, while I was in Brussels, if we can meet in Rome on a particular day before he presents Ethiopia’s case to his parliament. I told him I had another appointment with Swedish foreign office. He told me to come early morning and fly to Sweden in the afternoon and talk over breakfast at his home. He was in his pajamas’. He said: “In this competition to help Ethiopia I assure you Italy will lead”. The same day he authorized the immediate donation of 80 trucks and 5000 tons of food aid. A few months later, through the Italian Government grant I signed the Belesa project with Salini. Margaret Thatcher talked to me over the phone from the office of the minister of Foreign Aid, Minister and MP Timothy Raisin, in London and asked me to cooperate so they can send the Royal Air Force to help transport the food from our ports to needed places in the country. Country after country offered their hands for Ethiopians. They were specific. They wanted to be sure that their aid reaches the people it is intended for. There were numerous such gestures that came because there was enormous pressure from their people at the grass root level. It was like a movement to save Ethiopians. Elected officials were engulfed with demands from the public to act immediately. Officials were never given any chance to ignore these demands. The response had to be big and immediate. We won and we saved lives. No other country since the second world war has garnered such responses. It was the Cold War period. But the East and West met in Ethiopia for a joint operation, the only one of its kind ever. The operation was then dubbed as the largest humanitarian operations since the second world war. It was; indeed

“If it had not been for Dawit Wolde Giorgis it would have been impossible to achieve the aim of saving the lives of 1.6 million Ethiopians.” Kurt Janson, United Nations Assistant Secretary General in his book ‘The Ethiopian Famine; ‘It was not meant to be personal. It was to the highly skilled and passionate staff, the men and women of the RRC I was heading and the American and Western public that made it possible. It was international compassion at its best.

Many books and documents have been published about this operation and the event in general. 1.6 million was considered a huge number then. Today more than this number have been decimated by the brutal force of PM Abiy’s government on its people. One 8-month war alone, in Ethiopia between Abiy’s and TPLF forces, took the lives of over a million people, according to official documents. The number of Amharas, not only starved

but killed through the most heinous form of execution, and brutally displaced, runs to millions. Ethiopian government wanted to hide it. In 1984 and 85 the world was not able to know about the famine in time. Today with the communication technology the world has, it cannot say: It did not know.

There will come a time when the US will be forced to take a strong position. That is when the entire region is completely destabilized and its interest in the region is directly affected. But that will be too late. Millions would have died by then. It will not address the paramount needs of our people: the need to be protected and the need for the establishment of a political order that ensures their safety and guarantees their rights and their basic needs. This might come but at a great price. We need the world to take a position that will allow our people to handle their own problems by fighting back to bring change on their own not through proxies: Now. Change through proxy will never bring the desired change that can guarantee sustainable future. Sooner or later the resistance forces known as Fanos will win. No one should doubt that. The question is what price our people will pay and what the consequences will be in the region and perhaps globally. **America is on notice**. There will be strategic and material loss. The entire region is volatile and it needs little to explode.

Western media has refused to acknowledge the ongoing genocide. Human rights is not seen as an American National Interest. Further; Americans have been denied from knowing the truth. There are more important issues for the press and their interest lies in the money that news can generate. Journalists are paid to write any story including fake stories. **Independent UN human rights exerts are warning that there are overwhelming atrocity crimes that will continue in Ethiopia.” Nov 2023. Yes, it has continued.** The massacre continues every day and wherever Amharas live; they hear about friends, family, neighborhood villages and poor helpless people being uprooted killed and maimed for who they are. **AMHARAS**. Here in the USA Amharas make demonstrations; write to State Department; to their elected officials; tell their neighbors; work mates but that magic is yet to be seen. It seems that that point can only be reached through a movement that can shake the establishment the way the 1984=85 movement did. The media can do it if it wants to but it must be pressured or bought. The public is the answer. Today's media can make anybody so angry through fake stories and headlines without realizing that it's not real. The media can make you outraged on an issue if it wants to. It

is the greedy media that has changed not Americans. I have still faith in humanity.

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