

African Citizens' Letter to the United Nations Secretary General

On the risk of genocide in Ethiopia

Friday 26th November 2021

Antonio Guterres
Secretary-General
United Nations (UN)
405 East 42nd Street
New York, NY, 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

Concerning the Need to Take Urgent Action to Prevent Genocide in Ethiopia

We, the undersigned, write on behalf of ourselves, our members across the regions of the African continent and the Diaspora and on behalf of concerned Africans and humanity everywhere, to request you to provide leadership in taking urgent measures to prevent imminent genocide in Ethiopia. Absent such action, we believe that genocide is likely to happen under your watch as the Secretary-General which will be a blot not merely on your record in that capacity but also of our collective humanity at this time. To avert this, we urge you to initiate or take the following steps urgently: -

1. Work with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to make inventories of all internment centres in Ethiopia and ensure access, monitoring and oversight of conditions therein by the ICRC;
2. Deploy, without further delay, your Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide (SAPG), Ms. Alice Nderitu, on an urgent assessment mission into Ethiopia;
3. Take steps in liaison with Member States to convene a special session of the Human Rights Council on Ethiopia;

4. Secure a clear Security Council Statement of commitment to the prevention of genocide in Ethiopia and authorization of measures to follow up on that commitment; and
5. Provide a clear commitment by the Secretary-General to ensuring the prevention of genocide in Ethiopia.

Mr. Secretary-General,

As you may recall, on 21 May 2000, the International Panel of Eminent Personalities (IPEP) on the Rwandan genocide, chaired by Botswana's former president, Ketumile Masire, submitted its Report to the United Nations through the Secretariat of the Organisation of African Unity. The title of the Report was "**Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide**". The Panel transmitted the Report under cover of a letter part of which contained the following words: -

"Indisputably, the most important truth that emerges from our investigation is that the Rwandan genocide could have been prevented by those in the international community who had the position and means to do so. But though they had the means, they lacked the will. The world failed Rwanda."¹

Specifically, the Report found that the United Nations "simply did not care enough about Rwanda to intervene appropriately."²

We write because 21 years later, under your leadership, the United Nations does not appear to have taken any of these lessons to heart and the world could be auditioning for yet another preventable genocide in Ethiopia. The evidence is all too glaring: -

- (a) A rebel army defined mostly by ethnic identity is marching relentlessly towards the capital city (Addis Ababa).
- (b) An incumbent regime, enabled by trappings of international recognition, precariously clings to power through appeals to narrow identity and is programming its populations for a campaign of extermination against populations almost exclusively defined by ethnicity.

¹ International Panel of Eminent Personalities (IPEP), *Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide*, pp v-vi (2000)

² *Ibid.*, xiii

- (c) Around Addis Ababa, the Federal Government and the Amhara Regional Government are distributing crude arms to neighbourhood and popular militias and programming them for the extermination in the name of self-defence.
- (d) At the beginning of November 2021, the Federal Government in Addis Ababa promulgated a state of emergency empowering themselves to intern almost exclusively people of Tigrayan identity. Around Addis Ababa, tens of thousands of Tigrayans have been rounded up and interned in makeshift detention centres – malls, shops, police units, construction sites – just for the crime of who they are or where they come from. The numbers are ambulatory but best reliable estimates indicate the numbers now interned or disappeared could be close to 40,000 and rising rapidly. This is happening also in other major cities around the country controlled by the Federal Government and its allies. These internees are denied basic dignity and are not afforded access to visitation. The internment centres and conditions are equally not under the oversight or monitoring of any independent institutions.
- (e) While all these happen, the United Nations and the African Union as a regional arrangement under Article 52(1) of the UN Charter, have failed to take any concrete steps to prevent the real likelihood of imminent mass extermination, beginning with all the internees.

Mr. Secretary General,

- On 5 February 2021, your own Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (SAPG), Ms. Alice Nderitu expressed “alarm” at “the continued escalation of ethnic violence in Ethiopia and allegations of serious violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the Tigray region”, including “attacks against civilians based on their religion and ethnicity as well as serious allegations of human rights violations and abuses including arbitrary arrests, killings, rape, displacement of populations and destruction of property in various parts of the country.”
- On 30 July 2021, your own SAPG, Ms. Alice Nderitu, “condemned inflammatory statements used by top political leaders and associated armed groups. The use of pejorative and dehumanizing language like ‘cancer’, ‘devil’, ‘weed’ and ‘bud’ to refer to the Tigray conflict, warning that “hate speech, together with its propagation through social media is part of a worrisome trend that contributes to further fuel ethnic tensions in the country.”
- In their Joint Investigation Report issued on 3 November, 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

found that there were “reasonable grounds to believe that a number of (...) violations may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.”

- On 8 November 2021, your own SAPG, Ms. Alice Nderitu, communicated that she is “gravely concerned at the deterioration of the situation of Ethiopia, where escalation of violence, increased incidence of ethnically and religiously motivated hate speech, displacement of populations and destruction of property display serious indicators of risk of commission of atrocity crimes.”

It is quite clear that if Addis Ababa should come under threat of falling to the rebel army, the internees - wherever they are held – would, under current conditions, be liable to be exterminated. This is easily foreseeable. It can also be prevented.

We further note the alarming evidence of the likelihood of (continued) perpetration of other serious crimes under international law on populations including extermination, torture, rape and persecution.

The United Nations under your leadership can surely stop history from repeating itself. You have the means to do so but time is running out and posterity will be brutal in its judgement of your tenure if, despite the clear notice with a calendar, this genocide is not prevented.

Yours Sincerely,

**Signed by the following institutions and individuals
as at 5.00 p.m. (East African Time) on Friday 26th November 2021**

A – Institutions

1. Africa Centre for Open Governance (AfriCOG)
2. African Initiative for Peacebuilding, Advocacy and Advancement (AfriPeace), Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria
3. African Union Watch, Banjul, The Gambia
4. Atrocities Watch Africa (AWA), Kampala, Uganda
5. Cameroon Women's Peace Movement (CAWOPEM)
6. Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Nigeria
7. Coalition burundaise des defenseurs des droits de l'home (CBDDH), Burundi
8. Coalition des Defenseurs des Droits Humains du Benin, Benin
9. Coalition Malienne des Défenseurs des droits de l’homme, Mali
10. Coalition Togolaise des Défenseurs des Droits Humains (CTDDH), Togo
11. Coalition Burkinabè des Défenseurs des droits humains (CBDDH), Burkina Faso
12. Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits de l’Homme, Côte d’Ivoire
13. Coalition for an effective African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACC), Arusha, Tanzania

14. Le Forum pour le Renforcement de la société civile (FORSC), Burundi
15. Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED)
16. Hope Advocates Africa (HADA)
17. Human Rights Defenders Network Sierra Leone
18. Institut des Médias pour la Démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (IM2DH)
19. International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), Kampala, Uganda
20. Mouvement des Femmes et Filles pour la Paix et la Sécurité au Burundi, Burundi
21. Mozambique Human Rights Defenders Network
22. Nawi – Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective, Nairobi, Kenya
23. Network of Independent Commissions for Human Rights in North Africa
24. Nigerian Human Rights Defenders Focal Point, Nigeria
25. Pan African Citizens Network (PACIN), Nairobi, Kenya
26. Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), Arusha, Tanzania
27. Réseau des Citoyens Probes (RCP), Burundi
28. Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale
29. Réseau Nigérien des Défenseurs des droits de l'homme
30. Réseau Ouest Africain des Défenseurs des Droits Humains
31. Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (Southern Defenders)
32. Tax Justice Network Africa (TJNA), Nairobi, Kenya
33. Victim Advocates International (VAI), Nairobi, Kenya
34. Youth Forum for Social Justice

B – Individuals

1. Achieng AKENA, Executive Director, International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), Kampala, Uganda
2. Ida BADJO, Togo
3. Joseph BIKANDA, Cameroon
4. Professor Danwood CHIRWA, Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Cape Town, South Africa
5. Maître Francis DAKO, Lawyer Benin
6. Caryn DASA, Cameroon
7. Donald DEYA, Chief Executive Officer, Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), Arusha, Tanzania
8. Adaobi EGBOKA, Human Rights Lawyer, Nigeria
9. Chibuzo EKWEKUO, Lawyer, Abuja, Nigeria
10. Hannah FORSTER, Chairperson, CSO Coalition on Elections, Banjul, The Gambia
11. Immaculée HUNJA, Mouvement des Femmes et Filles pour la Paix et la Sécurité au Burundi, Burundi
12. James GONDI, Human Rights Lawyer, Nairobi, Kenya
13. Ibrahima KANE, Lawyer, Senegal
14. Naji Moulay LAHSEN, Morocco
15. Bonaventure N'Coué MAWUVI, Togo
16. Alvin MOSIOMA, Executive Director, Tax Justice Network Africa (TJNA), Nairobi, Kenya
17. Vera MSHANA, New York, United States of America (USA)
18. Salima NAMUSOBYA, Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), Kampala, Uganda

19. Stella W. NDIRANGU, Human Rights Lawyer, Nairobi, Kenya
20. Dismas NKUNDA, Executive Director, Atrocities Watch Africa (AWA), Kampala, Uganda
21. Bahame Tom NYANDUGA, Chairman *ad interim*, African Union Watch, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
22. Professor Chidi Anselm ODINKALU, former Chairperson, National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria
23. Gladwell W. OTIENO, Nairobi, Kenya
24. Charles Donaldson OGIRA
25. Dr. Feyi OGUNADE, Executive Director, African Union Watch
26. Silas Joseph ONU, Convener, Open Bar Initiative, Nigeria
27. Caylen SANTOS, The Shalom Foundation, Franklin, TN
28. Crystal SIMEONE, Nairobi, Kenya
29. Mélanie SONHAYE KOMBATE, Togo
30. Arnold TSUNGA, Lawyer, Zimbabwe
31. Rosalie Wakesho WAFULA, Lawyer, Kenya

With copies to: -

Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Geneva, Switzerland

Mr. Peter Maurer
President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
Geneva, Switzerland

Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu
United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (SAPG)
United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
New York, United States of America (USA)

Ms. Karen Smith
United Nations Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect
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Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga
United Nations Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa
Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa

Ms. Hanna Serwaa Tetteh
Special Representative of the United Nations to the African Union and Head of the United Nations
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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia