

Why is the Noise in Minnesota Causing death and destruction in Ethiopia?

Ethiopia came a long way from dictatorship towards the establishment of a democratic system of government. Embarking in such a grand project is not easy and makes it more difficult in a country that is diverse and complex as Ethiopia. History teaches us, the founding fathers of the United States strongly believed that democracy can flourish in small states and understood the challenge of establishing a democratic system of government in a large country. Ethiopia, with its 110 million people and more than 80 ethnic groups are determined to get to that “promised land” despite the challenge and obstacle it's facing.

It is the more than 45 years of tears, sweat, and blood that brought Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to power. The change that took place in Ethiopia in April 2018, did not bring Only Dr. Abiy Ahmed to power, it brought the Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO) to power. The Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), the party that brutally ruled Ethiopia for 27 years, intentionally designed the country's ethnic administration and the ethnic-based constitution because it knew only by fomenting division and hate among various ethnic groups, it can stay in power as long as possible. Therefore, Dr. Abiy inherited ethnic politics, by its nature can only flourish in contradiction among various ethnic groups.

It has become the new administration's job not only to take the country towards a democratic path, but also to establish a unified nation that can be only governed by the consent of the people and by the rule of law. It was with that mindset; this administration allowed the return of all political parties and media outlets to return to Ethiopia and allowed those outlawed to take part in our country's political affairs.

Such a liberal approach allowed extremist elements to flourish in the country. Dr. Abiy's administration tolerated many individuals, media outlets, political organizations, and activists hoping that they will learn from their mistakes and assist in nation-building. Instead, the extremist elements took such tolerance as weakness and tried to take advantage of the situation.

Among the media outlets that are allowed to operate in Ethiopia was a Minnesota based media called the Oromo Media Network (OMN). Although the OMN is a tax-exempt non-profit organization funded by the US taxpayers, many mainstream media outlets reported as if the OMN is owned by an activist named Jawar Mohammed. Jawar took advantage of the situation and he acted as he owned it. In its IRS filing, the OMN stated it is established with the purpose of reporting citizens based journalism and educating the public; however, its main purpose is to promote hate against ethnic Amhara's and cleansing the Oromia region of Ethiopia from non-Oromos. This media invited Oromo politicians whose views are contrary to the history of

Ethiopia and promoted their extremist version of Ethiopian history dehumanizing Amharas. The OMN began its operation in the state of Minnesota in February 2012, but got notoriety in 2015, particularly during the anti-TPLF government movement that began in November 2015 in Oromia.

The OMN true nature has been to start a “revolution” in Ethiopia with the objective of bringing Jawar Mohammed, the executive director of OMN, to power to rule Ethiopia. Using the non-profit organization facade, this organization is led by naturalized US citizens conducting an operation that has significant implications and negative impacts in the Ethio-US relation. Because most members and officials of the OMN are citizens of the United States, they are hiding behind the United States flag believing that they are above and beyond the reach of the Ethiopian law. The OMN broadcasters who mask themselves as “journalists” have never presented an objective or alternative views in their programs. Their purpose has been to indoctrinate young Oromos with the idea of “the Oromo nation”. By many, these extremists are considered fringe elements who do not represent the fraction of the Oromo people let alone the entire ethnic Oromo people. Most of them make noises in the street of America hoping the noise they are making will bring more funding and hoping it will be heard in the Oromia region extremists “valley” and cause death and destruction in the Oromia minority community.

Since Dr, Abiy came to power, these extremist elements believed that they have the political capital to hold hostage the Abiy administration. They acted and functioned as a de-facto government. Their poisonous message caused the death of more than 30 people and property destruction in Burayu and the vicinity of Addis Ababa in September 2018. The Abiy Administration tolerated such brutality avoiding heavy-handed reactions. Such complacency, however, emboldened the extremists and continued to harass non-Oromos in various parts of the country. Extremist Oromos in Minnesota continued to fund and support the idea of building an “Oromo nation” free of non-Oromos. It is with that desire, they wanted Jawar Mohammed to run for office. Jawar claimed that he has renounced his American citizenship and declared that he was running for office in Ethiopia. He provided no evidence that he has renounced his US citizenship. He was asked to provide evidence by the Ethiopian Election Board but refused to do so. The OMN and Jawar Mohammed believed that they were above the law and functioned as such.

In October 2019, Jawar declared the government security forces have surrounded his home when in fact his bodyguards assigned to him by the government itself were in his home protecting him. The OMN declared that there was an assassination attempt on Jawar’s life. Following such false news, their supporters killed more than 85 non-Oromos in the Oromia region, burned churches, and destroyed properties. Such a reaction empowered the OMN, Jawar Mohammed, and the extremist elements in Minnesota. The OMN used the massacre in the Oromia region to raise funds from its supporters in the US and Europe. Army of loyal supporters in Minnesota was ready to launch a fund-raising event not only in Minnesota but, in more than 20 cities in the United States and Europe. Most of the money was given to Jawar Mohammed

with no accountability to use it as he wished; it is with this fund; he bought his way into an organization called the Oromo Federalist Congress. Jawar felt like a “de-facto” Prime Minister and, the OMN became a mouthpiece for likes of jawar Mohammed. The hope we had for democratic Ethiopia, once again became an illusion.

Dr. Abiy Ahmed, became a prominent politician in the Oromo political sphere before he became the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. However, his vision of Ethiopia and the extremists’ vision of Ethiopia could not go hand in hand. Extremist Oromos propaganda machine declared Abiy as a non-Oromo, and as someone who betrayed the Oromos’ cause. Hoping to navigate the extremists’ political destruction wisely, Abiy continued to craft his roadmap towards establishing a democratic Ethiopia. However, the noise in Minnesota grew louder to isolate Abiy from the Oromo people and make him *persona non grata* in the Oromo political sphere. Unfortunately for Ethiopia and the rest of the world, COVID 19 forced the Ethiopian Election Board to postpone Ethiopia’s election. Although the international mainstream media and Ethiopian opposition politicians blamed Dr. Abiy for the election postponement, the fact shows he has nothing to do with it. It is reported that Dr. Abiy had a heated argument with the Chairwoman of the Ethiopian election Board because he was upset because the Election Board postponed the Ethiopian election. According to reliable reports, the chairwoman told Dr. Abiy she operates based on the law, not his order. When the fact clearly indicates that dr. Abiy has no power on election matters, the extremist elements used the opportunity to declare “Abiy postponed the election because wants to be a dictator”.

The extremist elements from various parts of the country have done what they can to destabilize Ethiopia without success. It is with the objective of overthrowing the Ethiopian government the well-known, and well-liked musician, Huchallu Hundessa, was assassinated on June 29, 2020, in Addis Ababa. Following his assassination, the OMN and extremist elements in Minnesota declared war against ethnic Amahars and Orthodox Christians. In well-orchestrated killings in the Oromia region, extremist elements brutally killed more than 235 innocent citizens; women, elderly, and children were not spared. Millions of dollars’ worth of properties are destroyed. A town called Shahemene is destroyed. Following this incident, the government closed the OMN’s Addis Ababa’s office and arrested many who incited such violence and caused property destruction. After the closure of Addis Ababa’s OMN office, the extremists in Minnesota made every effort to claim Oromo People as victims brutally killed by the government security forces. Nothing can be further from the truth. Innocent non-Oromos, Oromos who were trying to save their neighbors, and Orthodox Christians were selectively killed by these extremists supported and incited by the extremist Oromos in Minnesota. As many witnesses stated, these brutes had listed names and knew who they were going to kill. This was a well-coordinated and well-orchestrated brutal killings and property destruction.

The killing was inhuman, some were beheaded, a pregnant woman was reportedly killed in front of her family, five members of one family were killed in their home; so far, the report indicates it was a gruesome and inhuman act of ethnic cleansing. Even after this cruelty, the

noise in Minnesota grew louder. They hired lobbyists to bring the likes of Congresswoman Ilhan Omer to their side; congresswoman Ilhan Omer shamefully organized 20 of her colleagues and wrote a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in support of these brutes. How is it possible for any member of Congress to stand with the group that calls for genocide and for the assassination of the Ethiopian Prime Minister?

It does not take much for congress to learn the truth. All they have to do is get a report from the American embassy in Addis Ababa. For likes of Ilhan Omer, it is too inconvenient for their political seat to make an effort to find out what the truth is. She rather has 235 votes in her congressional district than be a voice for 235 innocent people brutally killed because of their religion and their ethnicity as a result of violence incited by group members who are residents of her constituency. The OMN is supposed to be a nonpartisan educational media, it is supported by the United States Taxpayers. It is neither non-partisan nor educational; it is extremist elements propaganda machine and a piggy bank of few OMN officials. The question is why is this organization allowed to function when it is operating in violation of the United States Federal and State law? Why is the noise in Minnesota allowed to continue to cause death and destruction in Ethiopia? Who is accountable for such a heinous crime?"

Tibebe Samuel Fenenji, the writer is a founder and Executive Director of Tibebe and Associates, a consulting firm based in Maryland.