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Let Alfred Nobel rest: Revoke the Medal from Abiy

At the time when the Nobel Prize Committee (NPC) awarded the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, the Nobel peace award in 2019, many were elated hoping that the accolade would help the inexperienced Abiy with much needed morale boost to bring about democracy and peace. There were also many of us who were concerned that the award was out of step with what the PM was doing inside Ethiopia in terms of delivering real democracy, peace and stability. Granted, the Nobel Prize was given to him for his “efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation, and in particular for his decisive initiative to resolve the border conflict with neighboring Eritrea”. On the face of it, ending a 20-year-old conflict and tension deserves much praise, if only this was the case. By mid-2019 it had become evident to the world that his ‘peace process’ with Eritrea did not have regional or international peace intentions and did not involve the Tigray region of Ethiopia, which shares border, language and history with Eritrea. Rather, it was very much motivated by national politics and his intention to use his new-found alliance with Eritrea to stifle political differences inside Ethiopia by force. One would think that the Norwegian NPC, with its century old tradition and deep network globally, would have done sufficient research into Abiy’s record since assuming office in 2018. There were sufficient clues between 2018 and 2019 that this was not a man of peace, but rather a man of conflict, who rules by deception, double dealings and disregard for the wellbeing of citizens.

Six months ago, as many of us had feared, Abiy declared war on Tigray region, and many asked why a Noble peace laureate would do this? Before the war, Tigray was stable and individual rights and wellbeing were protected under the law. Six months into the war, millions have been displaced, tens of thousands killed, thousands of girls and women systematically and violently raped, private and public infrastructure including houses of worship deliberately destroyed and atrocities and war crimes committed on a massive scale. What makes this war especially disturbing is how the primary targets are civilians, and international norms of engagement including the Geneva Conventions have been breached with impunity, giving sufficient credence that the war in Tigray has the hallmarks of a genocidal war. All this has been documented by many human rights and humanitarian agencies and the few reporters who managed to visit the otherwise isolated and encircled Tigray. The question many are asking NOW is not why a peace laureate declared war but what the NPC is waiting for to revoke the medal form Abiy? How can the NPC sit idly while one of its awardees is actually in breach of international humanitarian law and committing war crimes that has horrified the entire world?



The ongoing tragedy in Tigray is akin to what we witnessed in Rwanda and Syria combined. It also has its own unique tragic features never seen before. Working hand in glove with his ally Eritrean president, Isayas Afwerki, Abiy has deployed incredible cruelty to terrorize and humiliate the people of Tigray. Ethiopian and Eritrean forces are not just killing people but denying them proper burial forcing people to leave the corpses of their loved ones to decay and be feasted upon by scavengers and vultures; sexual violence is intentionally brutal, involving gang rapes, damages to the female body and insertion of objects including metal into female genitalia; they are not only destroying public and private properties they are targeting houses of worship and heritage sites; they are not only looting every imaginable property but burning and destroying all means of livelihood including basic farming equipment essential for subsistence farming. **What would Alfred Nobel say?**

When Abiy Ahmed received the Prize, one of his accomplishments read: *“After 16 years of “no war, no peace” between the two countries [Ethiopia and Eritrea], Abiy Ahmed broke the deadlock and accepted the decision. In September 2018, he and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki signed a historic peace agreement.”*

Many welcomed the “peace deal” but those of us who know the region, Abiy and Afwerki were not under any illusion. We knew this was not a peace deal but a war pact to destroy Tigray and its leaders. This was borne out by what has unfolded since the war started. Afwerki is not known to be a peace-loving politician. More importantly he harbors an unmatched animosity against Tigray and its leaders, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which was elected by 2.7 million people in September 2020 and had formed a very popular regional government just weeks before Abiy and Afwerki launched an invasion on Tigray.

When a Nobel Peace Prize is linked to a peace deal, it is customary for the Prize to be shared by the two parties, but Afwerki was not invited to share the prize. The NPC seems to have taken note of the fact that since 1991, he has led a pariah state that is often referred to as “Africa’s North Korea” and ranked 180th in world press freedom index out of 180 countries. What it did not seem to have considered or was unaware of is Afwerki’s malicious intentions to avenge, once Tigray and its leaders found themselves between Eritrea to the North and the rest of Ethiopia, especially the Amhara Region, to the south. In Abiy, Afwerki saw a formidable tool to achieve his goals. Abiy also saw a great tactical tool in Afwerki to weaken and if needed destroy Tigray in order to consolidate his dictatorial ambition in Ethiopia and the region. Consistent with what many predicted Abiy and Afwerki, have sadly but successfully transformed the “no war, no peace” situation, which the NPC said had ended, into a full-blown civil and genocidal war that involves the entire armed forces of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Amhara region in addition to alleged support from Somali soldiers and UAE drones. All working against Tigray. **In essence, this is the first Nobel Prize winning peace agreement that delivered a catastrophic war featuring, war crimes and crimes against humanity.**

The second accomplishment cited by the Nobel committee was that *“in his [Abiy Ahmed] own country, he granted an amnesty to political prisoners and abolished press censorship”*. This



accomplishment was in fact part of the sweeping reforms that were already promised by the then leading party, which included the TPLF. Abiy's predecessor, Mr. Haile-Mariam Desalegn, ushered in the battery of resolves widely acknowledged to be political reforms for the country. To many people's dismay, however, tens of thousands including many politicians and journalists who were released are now back in prison with many more newly added. Eskindr Nega, Bekele Gerba, and Jawar Mohamed are some prominent examples. The latter played a key role during the civil unrest that brought Abiy to power and even renounced his American citizenship (Ethiopia does not allow for dual citizenship) with hopes to take part in a peaceful political process. Today, hundreds die every day in all corners of Ethiopia, mainly run by special militarized command posts as result of significant tensions and volatility. The telltale signs were already there for those paying attention to Ethiopian and the region's politics, even before the Nobel Award was bestowed.

Abiy Ahmed's third accomplishment reads: *"Democratisation poses serious challenges in a country with 100 million inhabitants and more than 80 different ethnic groups. In 2019, Ethiopia, a country with no tradition of free elections and democracy, was still racked by major internal conflicts. At the time Abiy Ahmed received the Nobel Peace Prize, there was considerable **suspense** as to whether he would succeed in fulfilling his promise of free and fair elections in 2020."* There is no **suspense** anymore. The planned elections in May 2020 were postponed indefinitely under pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic and now Abiy oddly is planning elections for June, at the peak of the pandemic in Ethiopia. Of course, an important development is that key political leaders of major political parties have been imprisoned since and are hence kept out of the elections. Tigray, however, had gone ahead with regional elections in September 2020 that saw an unprecedented turnout giving the TPLF a landslide victory. Ironically and tragically, Abiy used this regional election, which was conducted against his wishes, as a ploy to wage war against Tigray. **Tigray thus is being punished for voting.**

What has unfolded in the aftermath of Abiy Ahmed's Prize is extremely frightening. In addition to the severe humanitarian calamity described above, the war has taken on a regional dimension and is likely to trigger the destabilization of the Horn and possibly the Red Sea region. Back in 2018 the NPC, like many others, may have seen hope in the young Ethiopian leader. But like all those, at home and abroad, that had fleeting hope of democratic reformation in Ethiopia, the honorable committee was duped by the soft spoken Abiy. It is apparent today that the war pact between Abiy and Afwerki was a tactic to find a way to defeat Tigray and its people rather than bring peace.

A Nobel Peace Prize is sacred. That it was given to a person who was already in negotiations with the vindictive and warmongering Afwerki, to attack his own people, defeats all purpose and reason. Millions in Tigray are suffering, and Alfred Nobel is turning in his grave. Indeed, the Peace Prize has delivered a genocidal war and has helped embolden Abiy in his campaign to consolidate power by coercion!



The NPC is, however, yet to make a statement or acknowledge what has now clearly been revealed as a misjudgment. The committee has to live up to the noble and sacred heritage of the peace prize by doing the right thing and making a public stand to acknowledge and help stop the suffering of millions. An injustice is being committed in your name and there is a start to everything. **Let Alfred Nobel rest: Revoke the medal from Abiy.**

Co-signing Associations

1. Tigray Community Association in Adelaide, South Australia (TCAASA)
2. The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)
3. Tigray Frauenverein in Deutschland e.V
4. Security and Justice for Tigreans in Ethiopia (SJTE)
5. Tigrayan Community Association in South Africa (TICASA)
6. Tegarü Gemeinde der Kriegsgeschädigten in Deutschland e.V.
7. Hara_Global Union of Tegarü Youth/GUTY/
8. Alliance of Tigray Associations in Germany
9. Tigrayan Community of Western Australia (Perth)
10. Tigray Community in Sydney
11. Tigrean Association in Canberra
12. Tigray community in New Zealand incorporated, Auckland
13. Tigray Community in Queensland Australia (TCQA)
14. Mekete Tigray United Kingdom (UK)
15. Tigray Development Association (TDA) China
16. Tigray Development Association (TDA)-South Korea
17. Tigrayan National Association in Sweden
18. Tigray Development Association in Sweden
19. Tigrayan Women Association in Sweden
20. Tigrayan Youth Association in Sweden
21. Tigray Relief in Sweden
22. Agiazi Alumni Association in Sweden



23. Shire Alumni Association in Sweden
24. St. Yared Tigrian National Orthodox Association in Sweden
25. Tigray-Äthiopischer Verein in Deutschland e.V.
26. Tigray cultural organization in Germany
27. Union of Tigreans in Belgium
28. Association of Tigreans in Denmark
29. Seb-Hidri Civil Society of Tigrai
30. Tigrean Ethiopian Community Association of British Columbia, BC
31. Tigrayan Canadians Cultural Society in Edmonton, AB
32. Tigray Community Association in Calgary, AB
33. Cultural Association of Tigrayan Canadians in Saskatchewan, SK
34. Tigrian Community in Manitoba, MB
35. Tigray Association of Toronto and Surrounding, ON
36. Tigray Community in Ottawa, ON
37. Tigray Community of Windsor, ON
38. Association D'Entraide des Tigreen
39. ASSOCIATION D'ENTRAIDE DES TIGRÈEN EN FRANCE (A.E.T.F)
40. TIGRAY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (TDA)
41. Vereniging van Ethiopische Tigreers in Nederland (VETN)
42. Maeger Tigray Women Association in North America

ⁱ GSTS is a 501(C), and 33/2011 legally registered non-partisan, not-for-profit, and autonomous Global Knowledge Network of over 3,000 Tigrai Scholars and Professionals aimed at creating Knowledge-based economy and society in Tigrai, and beyond. It stands for academia, multidisciplinary and cross sectoral research and applied policy development, human capital development, fostering and advancing science, technology, and innovation, technology and knowledge transfer, youth and gender development, migration and displacement, and other educational and development related endeavors. It also works in educational advocacy and collaborates with various stakeholders towards promoting peace, good governance, human rights, and humanitarian activities.