

VOICES FROM TIGRAY



BRUTALITIES AGAINST RELIGIOUS LEADERS, HOLY PLACES AND HERITAGE IN TIGRAY

JUNE 8TH, 2020

14:00 – 16:00 EAT

13:00 – 15:00 CET

07:00 – 09:00 US EST

Introduction Of The Webinar – Paddy Maguinness (Moderator)

Paddy has lived through the conflict in Northern Ireland and also has first-hand experience of how communities are torn apart due to conflict.

He has a long track-record in dealing with conflicts around the world. Paddy will be moderating the session





CHAIR

DR. REGINALD NALUGALA,
Tangaza University

Opening Address by:

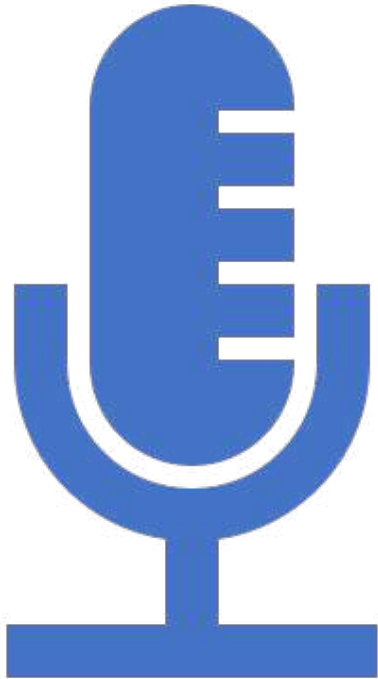
HIS EMINENCE, ARCHBISHOP
ANGAELOS, Coptic Orthodox
Church UK

Testimonies

OPENING ADDRESS

HELEN BERHANE, a Former Prisoner Of
Conscience and Campaigner for Human
Rights In Eritrea and Tigray

TESTIMONY 1: MASSACRE IN AXUM





TESTIMONY 2: BOMBING OF AL NEGASH MOSQUE



Testimony 3: DESTRUCTION OF THE OLD MONASTERY OF DEBRE DAMO





LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF ADIGRAT

Testimonies 6

Testimonies 7

TERRIBLE
THINGS ARE
HAPPENING IN
TIGRAY



Dr. ALULA TESHAY ASFHA, Post-doctoral
researcher at university of Tsukuba, Japan
and Lecturer at Mekelle University, Ethiopia



**Dr Hagos Abrha Abay, Researcher of
Philology and Ge'ez Manuscript Culture**



Brutalities against Religious People, and Heritage Destruction in Təgray

Dr. Hagos Abrha Abay, Postdoctoral
Researcher at Center for the Study of
Manuscript Culture (CSMOC),
University of Hamburg, Germany

Webinar Presentation for European
External Program for Africa (EEPA)

June 8, 2021

Introduction

- Təgray is a region endowed with immense religious and cultural heritages that are footprints of millennia's history, which extends back to 4000 BCE
- Hence Təgray is a foundation for hundreds of thousands of written artifacts (inscriptions and manuscripts).
- They, simultaneously, are epistemological tablets and tangible heritages, inscribed and scribed in Gə'əz.

Cont'd

- The early literacy and social progress in the region enabled the Aksumite (today's Təgray) people to establish academic, religious, administrative, cultural, etc. institutions.
- The institutions were under the inseparable nodes of the church and the state.
- The church and the state together happened to be dwelling continuum of a historical travel for almost 2000 years.
- Tradition of **heritage production** and **preservation** was also well established in the region.
- All the archaic and precious heritages, destined to be under the mercy of ruthless soldiers, today are endangered values.

Təgray Heritages as Icons for Ethiopia and Africa

- The mysteries Gə'əz writing system, originated in Aksum (Təgray) and its knowledge production disproves the single story of Africa as ethnographic continent.
- The Ethiopian history and literature, for the last two millennia, is also an exclusive result of this language mainly before the 19th century.

The Battle of Adwa

- The battle of Adwa is an icon for the African independence.
- Təgrayans have paid much of the cost during the battle of Adwa, against the Italian colonialism.
- It is the birth place and discourse of the Pan-African movement and establishment of African Union.
- The fundamental reason for Addis Ababa as seat for the AU is Təgray's Adwa.
- Adwa is in central Təgray, currently under the extreme bombardment of Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers.
- What is AU doing about the current Təgray crises???

Christianity and Islam

Aksum Tsion symbol (in Təgray) for the first introduction of Christianity into Sub-Saharan Africa

AlNejash Monsque a symbol (in Təgray) for the first introduction of Islam into Africa

The first Ethiopian and African Christian Monastery

The monastery is called Däbrä Dammo, established in 6th CE

It was among the targets and bombed by the Eritrean soldiers.

The first African Christian and Islam diasporas in Təgray

**Mohammed family fled from the Quraish in
613/14 CE**

**Syrian monks fled from the persecution of the
Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE**

Cont'd

- Hundreds thousand of Eritrean have been refugees in Təgray until the ongoing crises started.
- Təgray has been consists to host the destabilized people from the Aksumite diasporas up to today's Eritrean refugees.

Eritrean refugees in Təgray (Shimelba) today

Brutalities against Religious People, and Heritage Destruction in Təgray

- A random killings and abrupt destructions of heritages in Təgray became a day today news in the glob.
- According to the Təgray Orthodox Church diocese report at the beginning of February, [326](#) members of the church priests were among the countless civilians randomly and callously killed. However, many have been killed with in the four months after that.
- By estimation, **hundreds** of religious places and monasteries (with their heritages) are damaged and/or their tradition vandalized.
- Most of them seem to be intentionally orchestrated and demolished by plan.
- That is why most Təgray heritage icons were targeted.

Target of the Brutalities

- Church elites and historical icons were among targets:
 - Aksum (the placement of the Ark of the covenant, and origin and center of Christianity in Ethiopia),
 - Al-Nejash Mosque (a symbol for Təgray as first Islamic settlement in Africa)
 - Däbrä Dammo (the first African Christian monastery)
 - Waldəbba (the biggest and most well-established hermits' desert and monks' monastery in Təgray)
 - Maryam Dängälät (newly discovered ancient value laden church)
 - Däbrä Abbay (benchmark for traditional school in the flied of Qəddase, mass service)
 - Samuel Qoyetsa (one of the places for the origin of the Stephanites, 16th century social revolutionary monks)

- Gär'alta churches (more than 10 including the Monastery of Abunä Abrəham),
- Enda Mädhane-alem Gu'tolo(Ganta Afeshum),
- Mäsqälä Kirstos Ma'abino(Asimba),
- Enda Kirkos (Ganta Afeshum),
- Endabba Nob(Temben),
- Enda-Amanuel (Wuqro),
- Abba Tadevos (Temben),
- Asira Metira (Astbi),
- Enda Kirqos Ligat (Zalambesa),
- Endaba Tsihma ('Edaga Arbi),
- Aḥsə'a (where more than 48 priests were massacred)
- Mär'awe Kirstos (Hərmi),
- are few examples among the monasteries, churches, historical places that were exposed for the brutalities and hostilities: pillage and destruction.

Some Demonstration

10 priest & many civilians were killed and manuscripts looted in **Mä'awe Kirstos, North West Təgray (by **Ethiopian solders**)**

Monastery of Abunä Abrəham (Eastern Təgray) was bombed and some priests intimidated. The damage is not worse here.

Cont'd

Waldəbba is the biggest and most well-established hermits' desert and monks' monastery in Təgray. Monks of different origin live there together.

Hundreds of **Təgrayan origin** monks were singled and casted out of the monastery by **Amhara Milisha**. They exiled to different places and some happened to refuges in North west Təgray areas.

Cont'd

Enda Kirqos Ligat (Zalambesa, Eastern Təgray) bombed and damaged by the Eritrean solders

Mäsqälä Kirstos Ma'abino (Asimba, Eastern Təgray) bombed and destroyed by the Eritrean solders.

Cont'd

One of the most horrific actions, by the Eritrean soldiers, in Təgray crises.

- The church was destroyed and burn down.
- 61 civilians were killed around the village.
- 5 priests were percecuted.
- One old man was said to have been tied for three days in front of his three killed children.

Enda Mădhane-alem Gu'tolo (Ganta Afeshum, Eastern Təgray)

List of the civilians and priests killed in that place only

1. Adayu Desta
2. Akeza Kumnit
3. Alem Hintsä
4. Alema Hagos
5. Alemnesh Zewde
6. Aregawi Berhe
7. Aregawi Tesfay
8. Asefa Gebrehannis
9. Baraki Hailu
10. Berhe Gidey
11. Birhan Tesfay
12. Buru Adhanom

1. Debesay Tadesse
2. Debesay Zer'u
3. Desta Mirach
4. Fitwi Tesfay
5. Gaim Berhe Hagos
6. GebreMedhin Girmay
7. Gebresilassie Gebregziabher
8. Gidey Gebray
9. Gidey Hagos
10. Girmay Kahsay
11. Goitom Meresi'
12. Hadush Hagos

Cont'd

1. Hadush Weldu
2. Hagos Adhanom
3. Hagos Berhe
4. Hagos Berhe
5. Hagos Tesfay Desta
6. Haile Nigus
7. Hailu G/Mariam
8. Kahsay Gidey
9. Kife Weldu
10. Letebirhan Tesfay
11. Letzgu Tiku'
12. Li'met Kumnit

1. Masa G/Medhin
2. Mebrahtom Ftiwi
3. Mebrahtom Gidey
4. Mehari Tesfay
5. Meles Abadi
6. Mirach Sibhat
7. Nigisti Asgedom
8. *Priest Alema Hagos*
9. *Priest Desta Gebray*
10. *Priest Gebre Gebremariam*
11. *Priest Hagos Reda (his house and mill company was also burned)*
12. *Priest Weldu Kumenit*

Cont'd

1. Redae Abay
2. Selamawit Aregawi
3. Sidra Tegadelti (Mill)
4. Tamirat Kahsay
5. Ṭe‘ame Alma
6. Ṭə‘umay Hagos
7. Tesfalem Berhe

1. Tesfay Hagos
2. Tesfay Medhin
3. Tiku' Tesfay
4. Tu‘um Baraki
5. Yohannis Gebray
6. Yohannis Kidanu

Cont'd

It is over reported that hundreds of civilians massacred in Aksum Tsion the head of Orthodox Church in Ethiopia.

AlNejash Monsque a symbol (in Təgray) for the first introduction of Islam into Africa was bombed.

Motive of the Brutalities

- Most of the destruction of Təgrayan heritages were not only caused by war casualties; it mainly is resulted of an intentional value discarding.
- Many astonished international people asked me “Are there Christian solders destroying the Təgrayan Christian heritage? And what is the motive?”
- The answer is obviously clear that most of the ethnic cleansing and heritage destruction are orchestrated by the Eritrean and Amhara Christian elites, except some side manipulation in the ground like the Eritrean- Tigre solders.
- Irrespective of the spatial displacement and long-lasting narrative distortion of the Aksumo-Təgrayan values, its well-established cult remained unchallenged, which is headache for most modern Amhara elites, because written artifacts cannot be easily swayed by media manipulation or bamboozle like folklore unless the heritage material documents are physically demolished; and this is what is currently happening in Təgray.

Cont'd

- A competitive claim of the Aksumite legacy with its full package and heritage ingredients that have branded the archetype Ethiopia/Abyssinia and instrumentalized the narrative of the pseudo-Ethiopia or Utopia, that has been conjunctively mystified and bumbled with bigotry and its calculated projection, lasted until today.
- Consequently, bifid vie patterns of branding values of different contents but the same brand name lasted for at least two centuries from now; surprisingly enough the contestation is a pendulum between preserving once own heritage and “**nick otherwise devastate**” approach of snatching others heritage.
- The archaic and value laden Təgray heritages are salient and pinnacle components in the East African historiography.
- Therefore, they are center of political vigilance from the Aksumite- Təgrayan package hub for the **hegemony of value ownership in today's Ethiopian political atmosphere.**

Consequences of the Brutalities

- If people are denied owning and entertaining their values, the crises turn out into a question of existence as entity.
- Cultural values and believes were means of **quantum healings** during trauma and social crises.
- Based on the Təgray culture for example, religious institutions, spiritual places, folk belief performing settings, etc were used to be the **last hopes as sanctuaries** during war crises and natural disasters.

Cont'd

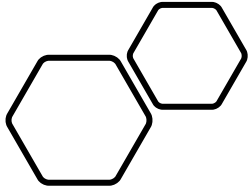
- Thus, not only the merciless killings of people but also the brutal damaging of cultural heritages creates long lasting psychological crises; however, this is understated crime in the international media.
- World is loosing some of its precious and rare heritages.
- **A priest in Təgray** is multidisciplinary: a farmer, theology expert, story teller, scribe (manuscript producer), church servant, painter. And it is too costly to have a priest in few years. Təgray have lost many encyclopedias during this crises.

Conclusion

- People without their heritage can **exist** but cannot **live**. Təgrayans are now in an extreme demand to exist and to live.
- Irrespective of that the world history is incomplete without Təgray and its heritage, even though Təgray heritages are icons for African pride, nonetheless the role of Təgray's heritage for branding Ethiopia and Eritrea has been remarkable,
- **Təgray** is suffering by the brutalities.
- Ethiopia and Eritrea are devastating **Təgray**.
- Africa has failed **Təgray**.
- World voice is not enough for the cessation of the hostilities in **Təgray**.

Təgray and its heritage should not be compromised!!!

Thank you!



FR. MUSSIE ZERAI, Roman Catholic Priest from
Eritrea in Italy

**Fisseha Tekle, Amnesty International
researcher for Ethiopia**



WOLBERT SMIDT,

Ethnohistorian Jena

University and Adjunct Prof

Mekelle University

**BENOIT LANNOO, Ecumenical,
Interfaith & Interreligious
Dialogue**



DR. KHATAZA GONDWE, Head of
Advocacy and African Middle
East Team Leader at Christian
Solidarity Worldwide



Response to questions from the audience

- Paddy Maguinness

Closing Remarks

Dr Reginald Nalugala,
Tangaza University

Thank You For
Attending