

Organize and Standup Against Hate and Misinformation

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The last few months have been a very difficult and challenging time for the government and peoples of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian people have very legitimate demands and grievances caused by widespread corruption and lack of good governance. The Ethiopian government has, for quite some time, repeatedly admitted and made public, the need to promptly address and resolve all the legitimate demands of its people. The ruling party has been looking inward and found itself lacking. In order to address the many issues of great concern to the people, it came to the conclusion that it needed to start by cleaning house. But, the process of implementing the government's decisions to root out corruption was too slow in getting started. The time it took to bring about the needed reform for good governance took a long time in coming, it is just now starting to get traction. The Ethiopian government's slow response to the needs of the people ended up causing the discontent and grievances of the people grow even deeper.

The government's slow response opened wide the door for extremist elements in the diaspora to take advantage of the situation to foment and incite hate and violence with the goal of bringing about instability and fragmentation of the country. Their goal was, and still is, to use any means possible to bring about the downfall of the government and disintegrate the country. To make matters worse, a couple of countries with sinister intentions on the integrity and sovereignty of Ethiopia rallied their resources and used these extremist elements to cause mayhem and destruction. Some of the groups intent on destabilizing and disintegrating Ethiopia through violent means are supported by and operate in Eritrea. Anti-Ethiopia elements in Egypt have been openly supporting the OLF's mission to come to power using violence. The goal of these Egyptian groups is clear, they want to control the Nile and stop Ethiopia from completing the GERD (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam).

Social Media Used as a Tool to Push Misinformation, and Promote Violence

A very interesting article, "*Is Twitter Hurting Ethiopia? Rumor and Unrest in a Fragile Federation*" by James Jeffrey, has been posted on ForeignAffairs.com. The article details for us (corroborates what we already knew) some glaring facts about the social media strategies used by the extremist diaspora elements. Most of us are also aware of, and are witnesses to, the virulent hate and violence being unfurled by these elements. They spread misinformation and untruths on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media — and for the most part, they go unchallenged. They push their violent and anti-people agenda and propaganda with the aim of inciting violence and the destruction of property. They exploit the discontent of the youth caused by unemployment and lack of good governance that were mentioned above. Mr. Jeffrey concludes his article thus: "*In Ethiopia, social media is a double-edged sword, capable of filling a need for more information and of pushing the country toward even greater calamity.*"

As Mr. Jeffrey affirms, "*The diaspora's current fixation is to influence protests on the ground, which many see as a pathway for **bringing down the government.***" One propaganda tool they use is lies and untruths. On the sad turn of events that occurred in Bishoftu (Debrezeit) on October 2, 2016, at the Irreecha annual festival, Jawar Mohammed and other extremists spread lies and false information saying that a government helicopter had fired into the crowds. The truth of the matter, as witnessed by many foreign journalists, is that the helicopter overhead was actually dropping leaflets wishing everyone a "Happy Irreecha". These groups are only intent on "*perpetuating wild and bogus claims about government violence*". Following the Irreecha incident, extremist

elements called for “five days of rage.” The violence and destruction of property that ravaged the Oromia region destroyed many government buildings, tourist hotels and factories and left many thousands of citizens unemployed and without a livelihood to support their families. We had already witnessed a similar destruction in Gondar and Bahr Dar in the Amhara region, where even a water supply system for the city was burned to the ground, not to mention the destruction of other government property and factories, and homes and businesses belonging to Tigrians.

Social Media Used as a Tool to Promote Hate Speech

A more sinister tool these elements use is hate speech, targeting especially the people of Tigray. Mr. Jeffrey writes that a foreign politico living in Ethiopia said of the diaspora opposition groups behavior in influencing protestors in Ethiopia: *“They live in a secure democracy, send their children to good Western schools, and are at liberty to say whatever they want to cause mayhem in Ethiopia”*. He says this could prove dangerous. Mr. Jefferey continues, *“In Rwanda, radio programs such as Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines spread much of the toxic hatred that fueled the country's genocide. Social media appears to be just as effective in spreading untruths and even ethnic barbs in Ethiopia. Many of these have an anti-Tigrayan slant ... In August, after unrest in the Amhara city of Gondar, there were reports of Tigrayans fleeing the city in fear of their lives.”* Here is a repeat summary statement of the article, *“The diaspora's current fixation is to influence protests on the ground, which many see as **a pathway for bringing down the government.**”* [emphasis ours]

Hate Speech has become one of the most dangerous tools used by these elements. Facebook has been the primary tool used to spread such hate by individuals like Yoni Magna. These hate speeches have primarily targeted the people of Tigray, and it should be easy to conclude that these posts did play a role in the violence that targeted Tigrians who lived in the Amhara and other regions. Many were, and still are, refugees in their own country. Many had to flee to Sudan so they could enter Tigray from the west — because it was very dangerous and unsafe for them to travel directly to Tigray. At last count, 8,000 (eight thousand) Tigrians were displaced and fled to Tigray. A most recent estimate is 12,000 (twelve thousand) Tigrians living as refugees.

What You Can Do — Organize and Challenge Hate and Misinformation

“Genocide is often preceded and accompanied by widespread hate speech. The leaders who planned mass killings in the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Srebrenica disseminated ideologies of hatred to spur their followers to act, to cow bystanders into passivity, and to justify their crimes.” (USHMM)

Martin Niemöller famously said, *“...Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out — Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.”* Hate speech does not stop there, it does not stop with violence, history indicates that hate speech is the precursor to genocide — the Holocaust and Rwanda are painful reminders. No-one should stand idly by.

Organized and united, we can challenge and fight back against the hate mongers and liars. A famous quote, some say wrongly attributed to the Nazi Joseph Goebbels, goes like this: *“If you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it.”* We can't afford lies to spread unchallenged, we must stand for the truth because these lies spread hate, division and disunity among the people of Ethiopia. Ethiopia's history is replete with unity, peace and brotherhood of its diverse population;

and a common stand against foreign enemies and aggressors. Our forefathers, from the four corners of Ethiopia, came together in 1896 and vanquished a modern invading enemy force. The mountains of Gossoso, Soloda, Kidana Mihret, Aba Gerima, the plains of Raayo, Adi Bechi, May Abuur, and Geraa stand firm as witnesses to remind us of our duties and responsibilities, the bequests our forefathers passed on to us.

Here are there actionable steps we can and must do:

- 1) The extremist groups are scattered across North America, Europe and other developed countries. Some are haphazardly organized and others not. They use different social media outlets, primarily Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. In order to be up to the task to face these challenges, we can do no less than **organize** nationally and internationally.
2. Use the same **social media** avenues to monitor and promptly respond to and challenge any misinformation, lies and hate propaganda. Websites are great tools that can be used effectively to analyze, respond to and expose harmful and untrue ideas and divisive propaganda. Lies and hate on video sites should not be left to fester and spread - they must be cauterize immediately.
3. Use each **social media's policy on hate speech** to fight back and report to and get the corporation to take action by deleting the media, suspending and closing the account of the culprit. Here is the Facebook policy on hate speech:

Content that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease is not allowed. We do, however, allow clear attempts at humor or satire that might otherwise be considered a possible threat or attack. This includes content that many people may find to be in bad taste (ex: jokes, stand-up comedy, popular song lyrics, etc.). What does Facebook consider to be hate speech?

We are not alone here, recently German prosecutors have started investigating Facebook over hate postings. We also need to investigate the hate speech policy of other social media outlets and use those policies to get the media outlet to enforce its policy.

4. Finally, **use the laws** of the nations the organization is registered in to use the legal system to bring these violence and hate speech protagonists to court. This task makes the importance of organizing crucial. All available means and avenues must be used to stop people who spread hate and division among people.

The people of Ethiopia have a democratic constitution that allows any group to use peaceful means to organize and advances its political goals and vision without restriction. We highly recommend and advice any anti-peace groups to abandon their mission of violence and hate and stand on the side of the people.

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