

Remarks

By

H.E. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal
Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

At

**The Commemoration of the 19th Anniversary of
the Genocide in Rwanda**

7 April 2013

Addis Ababa

Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Excellency Mr. Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Excellency Prof. Joseph Nsingimana, Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union and UNECA,

Excellencies Commissioners,

Excellencies members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Religious Leaders,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to commemorate the victims of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, a heinous crime committed against humanity. Nineteen years ago, an estimated 800,000 to 1 million Rwandans were exterminated by their fellow citizens while the outside world did nothing to stop it.

The International Panel of Eminent Personalities that was established by the then Organization of African Unity upon the proposal made by our late Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Meles Zenawi,

investigated the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and concluded that if there is anything worse than the genocide itself, it is the knowledge that it should not have happened. The simple truth is that the genocide was avoidable and that it would have been relatively easy to stop it prior to 6 April 1994.

The Panel further indicated that those in the international community, who had the position and the means to prevent the genocide, lacked the will to do so. The world failed Rwanda and hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings were senselessly massacred.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

When the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948, the world said 'never again'. But as we saw in Rwanda, genocide occurred so often in the last sixty-five years.

Ethiopia was among the first countries in the world to ratify the UN Convention on Genocide in 1949. Unfortunately, in the

1970s, the country was engulfed by what was termed as the Red Terror campaign. Historians refer to it as “one of the most systematic uses of mass murder by the State ever witnessed in Africa”. Thousands of innocent lives were decimated due to genocide, mass killings, torture and summary executions under the military regime which ruled the country in the 1970s and 80s. Civil servants, students, teachers, trade unionists, business owners and suspected members of opposition political parties were targeted and killed.

As you might know, this very place where we are gathered today stands on the site of an infamous former central prison, known as ‘Alem Bekagn’, where thousands of people were silenced in some of the most horrific and cruel manner.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa has lived its fair share of gruesome experiences and tragic events that have traumatized its population throughout its history. In this regard, I am glad to note the encouraging initiatives the African Union is taking to prevent and resolve conflicts in the

continent. When our Heads of State and Government established the African Union in 2002, they made sure that its Constitutive Act reflected their unflinching commitment to fighting impunity. Their resolve to prevent the recurrence of such massive crimes as the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda was clearly demonstrated in their unanimous agreement to include in the Constitutive Act, a provision that gives the Union the right to intervene in a member State where grave circumstances, such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity occur.

In addition to the Constitutive Act, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government endorsed the proposal made by the African Union Commission to establish a Permanent Human Rights Memorial dedicated to the victims of human rights violations including the Rwanda genocide, the Ethiopian Red Terror, Apartheid in South Africa, slave-trade and colonialism.

As we all recall, on 28 January 2012, our Heads of State and Government laid the foundation stone for the AU Human Rights Memorial (AUHRM) during the inauguration of the new AU Conference Centre and Office Complex. This is a very important

project not only to preserve the memory of mass atrocities but also to prevent future recurrence of such crimes. We should, therefore, spare no effort to enable this Memorial achieve its central objective of becoming a permanent centre where people from all over the world gather to reflect on the sanctity of life. It should also serve as a place where our policy makers renew their collective commitment to prevent atrocious crimes such as genocide from happening ever again on our continent.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At a time when Africa is discussing how to make the AU Human Rights Memorial more effective and beneficial for future generations to learn from history and build a better society, other parts of the world are erecting mausoleums dedicated to the memory of war criminals such as the case in Italy where a mausoleum was recently inaugurated in memory of the Fascist Field Marshal Rodolfo Graziani whose ruthless crimes against humanity and the massacres he committed against thousands of

innocent lives in Libya and later in Ethiopia earned him the title of a “Butcher”.

These are the types of actions that encourage the perpetration of unimaginable carnage and violence, which we should not only condemn unanimously but also fight vigorously. The international community and the member States of the African Union in particular should stand in unison against any expression of tolerance or indifference towards crimes committed against humanity in Africa or elsewhere. Those who deny and/or minimize these atrocities should also be condemned in no uncertain terms.

Therefore, I would like to conclude my brief remarks by reiterating my country’s firm commitment to stand hand-in-hand with all the member States of the African Union not only to prevent and fight the recurrence of crimes against humanity but also to ensure that denial and impunity are not tolerated in our continent.

I thank you