



Remarks By
H.E. Ambassador Taye Atseke-Selassie
State Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal
Democratic Republic Ethiopia
at
The 22nd Commemoration of the Rwandan Genocide

April 2016
Addis Ababa

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

Distinguished Ambassadors,

Invited Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

We are here today to pay solemn tribute and to remember all those innocent Rwandans, men, women and children, mercilessly massacred during the genocide of 1994. It was a crime whose extent and brutality has had few parallels in history.

It is also an event that reminds us all-too-strongly of importance of prevention and of the collective responsibility of Africa, and the international community, to act speedily in order to prevent such mass atrocities. We have a duty to remind future generations never to forget the Rwandan genocide, and that the world could have prevented or at least minimized the carnage that took place.

Excellencies,

The Rwandan Genocide is engraved in our hearts in Ethiopia, not least because of our own “Red Terror” two decades earlier, similarly ignored by the international community, but also the Ethiopian peacekeeping troops were among the first to arrive in post genocide Rwanda, and see the horror of what had occurred. The International Panel of Eminent Personalities, established by

the Organization of African Unity, was proposed by our late Prime Minister Mr. Meles Zenawi.

The conclusions of that Panel are worth repeating and remembering: **“If there is anything worse than the genocide itself, it is the knowledge that it did not have to happen. The simple, harsh, truth is that the genocide was not inevitable; and that it would have been relatively easy to stop it from happening prior to April 6, 1994, and then to mitigate the destruction significantly once it began”**.

The Panel added: **“Ultimately, we reached the extremely disturbing conclusion that the international community was in fact in a position to avert this terrible tragedy entirely or in part”**.

It is very clear that those in the international community, who were in a position and had the means, and above all, the obligations, to prevent the genocide, failed to do so. One reason was certainly because of the archaic power politics institutionalized in the interpretation of the UN Charter, despite the Charter itself being crafted to prevent such calamities.

The world failed Rwanda and hundreds of thousands of innocent African souls perished.

It was another rude call to Africa that it had to build its own capacity as a continent to prevent the occurrence of genocide and crimes against humanity, to be able to act when necessary to stop any such atrocities taking

place. It was another sad lesson that Africa must always take the leading role in matters relating to its own peace and stability.

Excellencies,

Times have changed, and for the better. In the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, the OAU established the Central Organ for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Later the African Union set up the AU Peace and Security Council as one of AU's principal organs of Africa's Peace and Security Architecture. The establishment of the PSC together with other organs, is an impressive institutional affirmation of the continent's collective determination to give to the African Union the right to intervene in a Member States in respect of grave circumstances, such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. This is stipulated in Article 4 of the Constitutive Act. We now have an African Standby Force ready to provide the means to prevent such activity. All of this can, and should go a long way towards implementing our commitment "to silence the guns by 2020."

Excellencies,

Now, of course, Rwanda has also come a very long way from the disaster we remember and commemorate today. And indeed, we can learn a lot from the way the people of Rwanda have achieved this - the way they have used home-grown solutions to achieve reconciliation among communities and overcome the after-effects of that terrible time. Today, for example, a country whose women suffered the cruelest forms of brutality has become a beacon of progress in empowering its women. Rwanda has become a major Troop

Contributing Country for UN Peacekeeping missions, and a major voice in Africa's collective call for a reformed UN peacekeeping system.

Excellencies,

Let me close my brief remarks by once again stressing that the commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda should always be an occasion to renew our commitment to prevent all forms of crimes against humanity, including genocide, from ever happening again in Africa. We should, we must strengthen our early warning systems, build up our rapid deployment capacity and strengthen coordination between our regional communities and our continental Union. We must remain alert for the symptoms - of intolerance, hate extremism, autocracy, totalitarianism - which can make up a recipe for genocide.

We must, in fact, put into practice all the commitments that we have made in the Constitutive Act, to fight impunity and ensure good governance – all across our continent.

On this day, we shall remember our brothers and sisters so that they are not forgotten into obscurity. We shall remember our bitter past, so that we can heal our memory. We shall indeed change the memory of our past into a collective hope for our future.

I thank you