



What a Life!

The Autobiography of Dawit Wolde Giorgis

The extraordinary account of a man whose life has been dedicated to the victims of war and natural disaster in Africa.

As head of relief in the Great Ethiopian Famine of 1984-5 Dawit Wolde Giorgis fought to save the lives of millions of his countrymen and women when faced with an uncooperative government and an indifferent world. Knowing his life was in danger, he left Ethiopia to write *Red Tears*, his groundbreaking exposé of Ethiopia's communist regime, while working to free Ethiopia from the stranglehold of dictatorship.

For the past 30 years Dawit has devoted his life to helping those most in need throughout Africa. From rebellions in Eritrea, Angola, Liberia, Sudan and South Sudan to genocide in Rwanda, Major Dawit has witnessed the horrors of war as a soldier, a diplomat, and a humanitarian. In the end he was forced to confront the most agonizing battle of all: his faith in a loving God.

Dawit's autobiography is a unique account of a man who has seen the best and the worst in Africa. He has worked closely with the giants of African independence: Julius Nyerere, Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, Sam Nujoma, Samora Machel, John Garang, Oliver Tambo. He has confronted the power-hungry autocrats and tyrants. He has met world leaders like Fidel Castro, Daniel Ortega, Giulio Andreotti, Samuel Doe, Thomas Sankara, Jerry Rawlings, and many others in Europe and South America, including Mother Teresa, whose words to him have left a profound, lifelong impression.

Today he continues to work toward the betterment of the African people as one of the foremost analysts at AISSS (African Institute of Strategic and Security Studies) where he serves as executive director.

Dawit Wolde Giorgis is the author of
Red Tears
Kihdet be Dem Meret (Amharic)
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Dawit has been a Visiting Fellow at Princeton, the University of Cape Town African Studies Center, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and Boston University African Studies Center.

By Dale Coye (PHD) Editor of this Book: A retired Professor and author from distinguished universities in the USA.

This 646 page book titled 'What A Life 'is an autobiography of the author which covers a wide array of personal, Ethiopian and African stories based on the experience of the author. The following are just some quotes which readers can relate to current situation in Ethiopia. Script was given to editor last year. The book may not cover developments since then. The following are quotes which might be relevant to ongoing situations in Ethiopia. The details are to be found in the book. The book will be valuable to the public in two weeks.

In early August, 1994, while working in Namibia, I was very surprised when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia (later President of Liberia) called me out of the blue to work in Rwanda where Hutu extremists were trying to wipe out the Tutsi population in massacres that left thousands dead every day. I had never thought of working in Rwanda up to that point. She told me that my name was proposed by Swedish government and charity workers who I had worked with during the Great Famine. She did not know me and in fact had never heard of me, but she needed an experienced African to lead the first UN-coordinated humanitarian response. After the call from Mrs. Johnson Sirleaf and her agreement with the office of the prime minister of Namibia to have me released from my UN assignment there, I quickly made my travel arrangements.



***The UN and
The Genocide in Rwanda***

The UN's role was a disaster, or rather a disgrace. A peacekeeping mission of 2500 men under Gen. Roméo Dallaire had been sent in October 1993 to monitor a cease-fire agreement between the Hutu government and the Tutsi RPF. The mission was not allowed to use military force to achieve its aims, but was limited to investigating breaches in the cease-fire, helping humanitarian aid deliveries, and contributing to the security of the capital, Kigali. Despite the urgent requests by Gen. Dallaire to be allowed to step in to stop the massacre, permission was denied. His force stood by while the slaughter took place right in front of the buildings where they worked and lived.

When the genocide started in April 1994,... they were forbidden by [UN headquarters] in New York from intervening on the grounds that they had only a monitoring mandate. Even as mobs with machetes slaughtered civilians in the city centre, the blue berets were confined to their barracks. A patrol of ten Belgian soldiers was ordered to the house of the prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a moderate Hutu opposed to the killing, to escort her to safety. When they arrived, they were surrounded by a mob baying for her and their blood.... They were hacked to death. The Security Council

ordered Boutros-Ghali to withdraw the troops. As the killing intensified, it backtracked and tried to raise an intervention force, but nothing happened. The UN monitors were left literally to pick up the bodies.

Major-General Dallaire, the UN commander, was later vilified back home in Canada for failing to act, but the blame lies with the Western governments for whom an African genocide was not worth risking any lives. [Dallaire later stated] that he could barely control his anger at the Western powers for, he said, failing in their duties.²¹⁵

Gen. Dallaire had requested approval from the UN for a new draft of rules of engagement that would have allowed him to use all "available means" to stop "ethnically or politically motivated crimes." He never received a positive response for his requests.

Had UNAMIR been reinforced or even kept at its original force level with this kind of mandate, many hundreds of thousands of victims might still be alive. There is no question that several brigades from a NATO member state, properly armed and equipped with even light armored vehicles, would have made short work of the Interahamwe. Yet even after weeks of slaughter, the Secretariat still seemed more concerned about the United Nations' neutrality than about saving lives. In May, when Boutros-Ghali announced that a genocide was taking place and asked for troops to reinforce UNAMIR, he emphasized the United Nations' role as impartial broker: "It is not our intention to impose a certain formula on the two protagonists to the dispute. We need the agreement of the protagonist and then we will have to play the role of catalyst, of mediator."²¹⁶

The UN's mistake was to think of this as a war with two sides, both armed. For war there is the UN convention on the laws of war that relates to the obligations of the warring parties. This was beyond that. This was genocide and there is no law regulating how genocide is to be conducted. Genocide is a crime universally condemned and there

are no two parties, no rules or laws, no rules of engagement. There is only one law and that is the one which is known by those committing the genocide: it is called hate and vengeance. For me the statement of Boutros Ghali was irresponsible. It was an excuse not to send troops in time and with adequate mandates to protect the lives of human beings from arbitrary executions. Genocide is the most serious crime against humanity and it is covered by the principles established at the founding of the United Nations in the UN Charter and later by the Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention. That's all the UN needed to justify stepping in to stop the massacres.

The UN could not seem to do anything right. On April 21 another big blunder was made when it cut the level of its forces from 2500 to only 250 following the murder of the ten Belgian soldiers assigned to guard Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana. On 30 April the UN Security Council, spent eight hours discussing Rwanda, while the killing was going on. The resolution was weak and did not even use the word genocide. That would have obliged the UN to move to a "prevent and punish" mode. In the meantime tens of thousands of refugees crossed the borders to Burundi, Tanzania, and Zaire, eventually totaling two million.

On May 17 after hundreds of thousands had been killed the UN agreed to send 6800 troops and policemen. The new resolution stated: "acts of genocide may have been committed" in a vaguely worded resolution. Sadly the US government did not permit its spokesperson to use the term genocide. As if that weren't enough the small force that the UN decided to send was delayed because there was an argument over who should pay the bill for the heavily armed vehicles of the peacekeeping mission. On June 22, with the delay of UN forces, France was authorized to send its troops to southwest Rwanda to create a safe zone, but the killings continued there even with French troops around. The French soldiers actually ended up guarding a Hutu enclave from the Tutsi RPF rebel army that was taking over the country. The RPF was advancing and wanted the French to leave, but they refused. The French were supporters of the previous regime and their policy during and after the genocide confused everybody. The French wanted to wait until an orderly exit was organized so the Hutus could cross the border to Congo. I was there during the time of these negotiations.

Despite the French presence, Rwanda dealt with the tragedy alone. The killing ended only because the RPF moved in. On April 8, the day after the first massacres, the RPF launched a major offensive on all sides of Kigali to stop the genocide and save the 600 of its troops who were stationed in the capital as part of the Arusha Accords. In July 1994 the RPF entered and controlled Kigali, then spread its forces across Rwanda. The government of Rwanda, hundreds of thousands of Hutu militia and others fled to Zaire. The French troops were replaced by Ethiopian troops under the auspices of the UN. The RPF set up a transnational government headed by a Hutu member of the RPF, Pasteur Bizimungu.

The US and the UN: 'Complicity With Evil'

The early warning was there for all the world to see that this was going to happen. No responsible person can say that they did not see it coming. The unfolding of the genocide was there in front of our eyes to see and try to stop. Neither the UN nor the

most powerful nation on earth were ready to stop it. Like all of us they were mere spectators. In the end their leaders issued apologies, some more heartfelt than others.

The late Kofi Annan who was the head of the United Nations peacekeeping department commissioned an independent report on the massacres when he became the secretary-general of the UN. The report stated that the UN ignored warnings in the months and days leading up to the genocide, even from Gen. Dallaire, the commander of the UN force.

The report made 14 key recommendations, including calling for the UN chief to initiate an action plan to prevent another genocide. It also recommended the United Nations apologize to Rwanda.

Kofi Annan took this seriously. As secretary-general of the United Nations, he addressed the Rwanda parliament:

“Now we know that what we did was not nearly enough — not enough to save Rwanda from itself, not enough to honour the ideals for which the United Nations exists. We will not deny that, in their greatest hour of need, the world failed the people of Rwanda.

In your people’s agony, an ideology of hate and inhumanity tore the very fabric of existence and made victims of an entire people, turning every Tutsi man, woman and child into human prey in a concerted, planned, systematic and methodical campaign of mass extermination.

In the face of genocide, there can be no standing aside, no looking away, no neutrality — there are perpetrators and there are victims; there is evil and there is evil’s harvest. Evil in Rwanda was aimed not only at Tutsis. It was aimed at anyone who would stand up or speak out against the murder. Let us remember, therefore, that when the killers began, they also sought out Hutus now described as “moderate” — that is, Hutus who would not kill, Hutus who would not hate.²¹⁸

The UN security forces are not on the side of truth or people’s needs but with the individual interests of the most powerful who have the veto power to say no to any proposal or resolution that is contrary to their own interests.

There have been some attempts to prod the UN into a greater peacekeeping role. In November 2000, the UN Security Council accepted the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations known as the Brahimi Report and unanimously adopted a wide-ranging resolution containing a series of recommendations. The report emphasized that the UN must remain impartial in conflict situations *except* where one party is violating the terms of the UN Charter. In that case, if the UN continues to treat both parties equally it “can in the best case result in ineffectiveness and in the worst may amount to *complicity with evil*” (my emphasis).³⁶¹

The US apology took a different tone. Samantha Power who was then a journalist, later US Ambassador to the United Nations describes it:

“In March of 1998, on a visit to Rwanda, President Clinton issued what would later be known as the “Clinton apology,” which was actually a carefully hedged acknowledgment. He spoke to the crowd assembled on the tarmac at Kigali Airport: “We come here today partly in recognition of the fact that we in the United States and the world community did not do as much as we could have and should have done to try to limit what occurred” in Rwanda.

This implied that the United States had done a good deal but not quite enough. In reality the United States did much more than fail to send troops. It led a successful effort to remove most of the UN peacekeepers who were already in Rwanda. It aggressively worked to block the subsequent authorization of UN reinforcements. It refused to use its technology to jam radio broadcasts that were a crucial instrument in the coordination and perpetuation of the genocide. And even as, on average, 8,000 Rwandans were being butchered each day, U.S. officials shunned the term “genocide,” for fear of being obliged to act. The United States in fact did virtually nothing “to try to limit what occurred.” Indeed, staying out of Rwanda was an explicit U.S. policy objective...

The story of U.S. policy during the genocide in Rwanda is not a story of willful complicity with evil. U.S. officials did not sit around and conspire to allow genocide to happen. But whatever their convictions about “never again,” many of them did sit around, and they most certainly did allow genocide to happen.”²¹⁹

As politician, as US Ambassador to the UN and now the USAID administrator Samantha Power showed to the Ethiopians that she does not have the courage or the moral commitment of the on going silent genocide of the Amharas , with full knowledge of the US embassy in Ethiopia. This is called ‘complicity with Evil’ as the UN report worded it or “ many US politicians sat around, and they most certainly did allow genocide to happen “ as Samantha Powers herself termed it in the case of Rwanda.

I have worked with the United Nations peacekeeping missions in Angola, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan and Liberia. I have visited the peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone, CAR and DRC. I have written extensively on the problems of violent extremism in North and sub-Saharan Africa and have acquired an enormous amount of information on the devastation that terrorism is causing in these regions and what the international community can do to prevent this from happening. This part of the story that I narrate is based on experiences and reports I have read on the UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. We must ask the agonizing question: why have they, in most cases, failed to stop so many raging conflicts?

After the holocaust and the enormous death and suffering caused by World War II, the UN was founded on the idea that *never again* would such horrors be allowed to occur. Despite these noble pledges, horrors that far exceed those of the Second World War have taken place in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa. The United Nations’

failure to prevent genocide, massacres, and crimes against humanity is well recorded. Why has this happened?

To understand why the UN is failing, it's important to recognize one key fact: A peacekeeping and human-rights decision on the deployment of peacekeeping missions is primarily a political decision within the United Nations Security Council.

There is a phrase that is often heard at the UN: "The primacy of politics" in conflict resolution. It means two things at least. One is that the first and most important aspect of getting a peacekeeping mission off the ground takes place in New York. It is there that the Security Council members meet and must approve peacekeeping resolutions. The members' relationships are complex, particularly among the five permanent members (the P5). Once a decision on the need is approved, the next question is resources. Resources would not be available unless the mandates fully reflect the interest of all P5 members. Once that is all sorted out, all that remains are negotiations with the countries contributing the forces.

The interests of the stakeholders in the Security Council, particularly those who contribute the largest amounts to the UN—the US in particular—usually dictate the terms and conditions of the deployment of the peacekeeping forces. However, their interests vary. Since there are 15 Security Council members at any one time, there are a lot of juggling and behind-the-scenes discussions before decisions are reached. In the end it is the primacy of their political interests that prevail and this usually compromises the needs and desires of the people on the ground.

The ineffectiveness of the UN in peacekeeping was inherited from its predecessor, the League of Nations. In the run-up to World War II there were numerous cases of genocide, crimes against humanity, massacres, severe human-rights violations, and wars that the international community was unable to stop, most notably the brazen Italian attack on Ethiopia. The League of Nations failed Ethiopia by refusing to act immediately to stop the genocide and the brutality of the Italian invasion including the use of mustard gas to wipe out any resistance to its blatant invasion, tacitly sanctioned by the Western powers including the Vatican. The League had pledged to preserve the territorial integrity and political independence of every member state if threatened by aggression. There were 46 members then and Ethiopia was the only African nation, a founding member of both the League and its successor the United Nations. Emperor Haile Selassie had faith in the League of Nations and appealed to it to protect his nation in his historic address in Geneva in June 1936: "The Emperor spoke with great dignity, and with our knowledge of what soon followed in Europe, his speech is chillingly prescient."³⁶²

There has never before been an example of any government proceeding to the systematic extermination of a nation by barbarous means, in violation of the most solemn promises made by the nations of the earth that there should not be used against innocent human beings the terrible poison of harmful gases.³⁶³

He appealed to the League to live up to the letter of the charter that they all signed to implement collective security, protect weak nations against the strong, and help Ethiopia regain its sovereignty. The League took extremely weak, ineffective measures while several members of the League actually recognized the occupation. ³⁶⁴

..... The point is, that the British, acting together with Ethiopian patriots, fought a war that culminated in the defeat of Italy.

The UN and Human Rights

In my life and work in Africa I have also witnessed human rights violations which have not been addressed by the human rights body established for this very purpose. In Africa every kind of human rights violation takes place routinely and only becomes news when the interests of the developed world are affected or when it becomes tragic enough to warrant media coverage.

The problem with policing human rights from the UN is that the violators are the very members themselves.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, captured popular feeling towards the Commission when he described it as, “a jury that includes murderers and rapists, or a police force run in large part by suspected murderers and rapists who are determined to stymie investigation of their crimes.”³⁹⁸

So the CHR was replaced by the HRC (Human Rights Council) with the hope it would be more credible in its condemnation of violations. But the problem has not gone away.³⁹⁹ The HRC is just a political forum, powerless to do anything to stop the worst human rights violations around the world. It has no executive powers. It cannot impose sanctions or provide a mandate to intervene. It is not the Security Council. Its only power is to pass resolutions despite the opposition of the country concerned. If it comes to a vote, those resolutions only need a majority to pass but it cannot go beyond that. It is indeed a paper tiger which has been witness to so many crimes against humanity, yet has been unable to do anything about it except pass resolutions.

The HRC’s credibility has been undermined by the United States which has chosen not to join the body. One of the greatest criticisms of the CHR was that throughout its years it became highly politicized, dependent upon the political will of its members even to prepare independent reports and pass resolutions. The United States was one of the four nations, alongside Israel, the Marshall Islands, and Palau, that voted against the creation of the Council despite holding a seat continually on the Commission. The reason is simple:

The US [is] preoccupied with the maintenance of its leading world power status and is reluctant to submit to universal principles that might put it in jeopardy.... Lack of US engagement in the Council has had repercussions on the Council’s credibility and its ability to act with global legitimacy. As the largest financial donor to the UN, the US is arguably its most powerful member. Primarily as a result of the Council’s condemnation

of Israel, the US has argued that the Council has developed a credibility deficit akin to the Commission and has threatened to withdraw funding.⁴⁰⁰

The HRC has failed in its mission because there is a lack of meaningful criteria that member states must meet in order to be seated on the Council.

Thus, even countries with deplorable records can run and win seats on the UN's premier human rights body. ... Countries ranked "partly free" and "not free" have been instrumental in undermining the work of the Council. They collude to shield each other from rigorous human rights scrutiny and undermine earnest efforts to promote fundamental human rights and condemn governments that violate those rights.⁴⁰¹

For now the Human Rights Council has not made much of a difference. The world and particularly Africa is full of human rights abuses: denial of freedom of expression, arbitrary arrest, execution, torture, and rigged elections. Countries like Ethiopia which has had one of the largest number of political prisoners in the world continued to get the political support of the UN and the Western powers who have poured money into the coffers of one of the most corrupt governments on earth. (Complicity with Evil)

The most heinous crimes that no one ever thought could happen have happened in Ethiopia. The ties that have bound the people of Ethiopia for centuries are now unraveling as the country faces its most serious challenges ever. The ethnic hostilities and unbridled rhetoric coming from all ethnic corners, the chastising, the hate, and the killings have begun in earnest.

I also hope that I will not be forced to rewrite it, if the worst-case scenario becomes a reality. No country in the region will be spared from the impact of a civil war in Ethiopia with a population of over 100 million. I hope and pray that it will not happen but if it does I will not live to see it.