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APRIL 25: ETHIOPIA STILL AWAITS APOLOGY FROM THE VATICAN

On April 25, Italy celebrates its liberation from the fascist rule of Benito Mussolini. As usual, few are those who give due credit to the role played by Ethiopia in the struggle against Italian fascism. More than a million Ethiopians died in the fight against the invading forces of Mussolini and the defeat of Mussolini in Ethiopia was crucial in the demise of the fascist system in Italy.

On this important day for Italy, Ethiopians are obliged to once again demand due and proper apology from the Vatican for its open and all out support for the invasion. The Vatican has time and again apologized to Jews for its condemnable role during the Holocaust. Yet, it has up to now refused to address an apology to Ethiopia and her people just as Italy has failed to pay due reparation to Ethiopians who lost a million lives and immense property as a result of the brutal aggression. Pope Pius XI had struck a deal with Mussolini (he said on December 20/1926: "Mussolini is a man sent by Providence") and when the invasion against Ethiopia was launched the Vatican blessed the undertaking with the Pope justifying it as a "defensive war". Nuns gave their golden rings for the invasion effort and the invasion was presented, in the words of the Archbishop of Tarano, "as a holy war ... (that would open)...a country of infidels and schismatics to the expansion of the Catholic Faith". The invasion was catastrophic for Ethiopia. More than half a million homes were burnt, mustard gas killed thousands, monks and intellectuals were slaughtered.

The demand for an apology is a demand for justice. The Vatican needs to apologize to Ethiopians as much as it has apologized to Jews. The present Pope Benedict XVI called the Holocaust an "unimaginable crime" while Pope Paul II had apologized outright for the nefarious role of the Vatican. The EPRP had in the past demanded for such an apology and it, along with the Ethiopian people, is still waiting for a formal apology. As Italy celebrates yet another year of its Liberation from Fascism it is incumbent on the Vatican to close that sad chapter of history by apologizing to the Ethiopian people for its backing of aggression, invasion and massacre.

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