

2 November 2012

H.E. Mr. Giorgio Napolitano,

President of the Republic of Italy,

H.E. Mr. Mario Monti,

Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy

Your Excellencies,

The 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies was held in the eastern Ethiopian city of Dire Dawa from 29 October to 2 November 2012. The conference brought together three hundred scholars from twenty-six countries from all over the world. It was the latest in the series of conferences first held in Italy in 1959.

On the last day of the conference, we the participants noted with great dismay the erection in August 2012 of a monument to the Fascist war criminal Rodolfo Graziani in the town of Affile. The name of Graziani is associated with the worst atrocities of Italian Fascism in Ethiopia and, earlier, in Libya, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of Africans. He is remembered for vowing to deliver Ethiopia to Mussolini “with or without the Ethiopians”. He went on to fulfill that vow with indiscriminate use of chemical weapons and the massacre of thousands of Ethiopians. The notorious “Graziani Massacre” that followed the attempt on his life on 19 February 1937 was marked by brutal and inhuman killing of thousands of innocent Ethiopians. Targeted for liquidation in particular were a number of young educated Ethiopians. This was followed by the massacre in May of nearly three hundred monks and over twenty other Ethiopians in the medieval monastery of Debre Libanos.

Graziani was never tried for his war crimes in Africa. Had he been alive, there is no doubt that he would have been forced to face justice at the International Criminal Court. The erection with public funds of a monument for someone who has the blood of so many Africans on his hands is therefore adding insult to injury.

The participants of the conference have noted the great contribution that Italian scholars have made to Ethiopian studies as well as to the initiation of the series of conferences that have brought them together to discuss their research findings for the last fifty-three years. They are also aware of the good relations that have existed between the peoples and governments of the two countries.

But they fear that the erection of such a monument to a confirmed war criminal jeopardizes those relations. They, therefore, express their solidarity with the Italians and Ethiopians who have already expressed their strong displeasure at this act and demand either the dismantling of this shameful monument or its rededication to the tens of thousands of victims of Graziani. Further, we feel that the Italian Government should pass a law that makes it illegal to celebrate and commemorate people who have committed internationally recognized war crimes.

Respectfully,

The Participants of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies

Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

cc. H.E. Ato Girma Wolde Giorgis,

President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

H.E. Ato Haile Mariam Dessalegn,

Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

H.E. Mr. Renzo Rosso,

Italian Ambassador to Ethiopia

Italian Association of African Studies