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Ethiopia's ruling minority junta decides to remove the iconic statue of Martyred bishop, Abune Petros.

By *Getahune Bekele*



“My countrymen... do not believe the fascists if they tell you that the patriots are bandits. The patriots are people who yearn for freedom from the terrors of fascism.

“Bandits are the solders (Italians) who are standing in front of you and me; who came from afar to terrorize and violently occupy a weak but peaceful country. May God give the people of Ethiopia the strength to resist. Never to bow down to the fascist army and its violence.

“May the Ethiopian soil never accept the invading army's rule.”

The last pithy words of his holiness Abune Petros, executed by the Italians on 29 July 1936, for denouncing colonialism and brutal oppression.

No one thought that the little shepherd born in the tiny northern town of Fiche would become a shining comet of Ethiopian patriotism which still flows

from one generation to the other like the mighty river of Abaye.

In the year 2000, honored as one of the millenniums' martyrs by the church of Sweden, Abune Petros was just a young monk when fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1932. That same year, the patriotic clergy followed emperor Hailesilassie to the decisive battle of Maichew where he witnessed the undiscerning terror of the invading Italian army.

He watched Italian bombers spraying nerve gas, wiping out forests, burning villages and indiscriminately killing civilians.

Later, he safely returned to the famous Debre Libanos monastery and started preaching against the invasion and unlawful occupation of Ethiopia, at times visiting the patriots and guerilla groups in their hideouts of central and northern highlands.

However, in July 1936, he was captured inside Addis Ababa while encouraging the people to show merciless resistance to the Italians.

*Once in jail, the occupiers gave him an ultimatum of accepting the Italians as legitimate rulers or face death by hanging, to which he famously replied **"the cry of my country men who were killed by nerve gas will never allow my conscious to accept your ultimatum. How can I see my God if I turn a blind eye to such a crime."***

Soon after giving that incandescent speech, a swarm of bullets from the execution platoon killed the beloved bishop on July 29, 1936 in central Addis Ababa.

His statue was raised 10 years after his death, a few meters away from where he was martyred.

Nonetheless, according to fresh reports emerging out of Addis Ababa, the imposing structure will be demolished in the coming days to make way for a rail project that passes through the capital, and it remains to be seen if such cruel move doesn't incite the people of Ethiopia to open rebellion.

As the junta continues to destroy the country's revered heritage sites, the removal of Abune Petros's statue will go down in history as the most ignoble and gruesome one.

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