

RODOLFO GRAZIANI

A WAR CRIMINAL WHO ESCAPED JUSTICE¹

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Rodolfo Graziani

INTRODUCTION

Rodolfo Graziani was one of Fascist Italy's top military leaders during Benito Mussolini's rule of that country. Although Graziani had important military roles in Italy, Libya and the Italo-Turkish wars, this article is, on the main, focused on his devastating war crimes in Ethiopia. The war was part of Fascist Italy's "civilizing mission to Ethiopia", resulting in the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians, including 30,000 people killed within only three days in Addis Ababa during February 19-21, 1937 as well as over 2,000 monks and parishioners at the Debre Libanos Monastery. Graziani was not prosecuted at an international court despite Ethiopia's attempt to bring him to justice under the United Nations war tribunal. He was later prosecuted for his crimes in Italy and sentenced to 19 years imprisonment but was released after only two years (some say four months) of incarceration. Despite the legal action taken against him in Italy, Graziani was virtually raised to the status of a hero as a mausoleum was inaugurated for him in August 2012 at an Italian town called Affile in the presence of a Vatican representative². The

¹ This article is prepared as a presentation to the conference on justice for Ethiopia (Sept. 26, 2015 in Washington, DC). The author is responsible for its contents. Dr. Getachew Haile's views on the draft are appreciated.

² The BBC reported: "The mayor of the village of Affile attended the opening ceremony on Saturday, together with a representative from the Vatican."²

international outrage against such an action was expressed in over 30 cities throughout the world including Rome and Affile in the form of public demonstrations, conferences, and/or prayers as part of the “Yekatit 12” commemorations in the context of a worldwide campaign launched by the Global Alliance for Justice – The Ethiopian Cause (www.globalallianceforethiopia.org). The Lazio Provincial Council has also issued a resolution recently demanding the removal of the name Rodolfo Graziani from the mausoleum failing which the financial provisions provided for its construction would be withdrawn as well as taking appropriate legal action. The issue remains unresolved at this stage.

Rodolfo Graziani was a war criminal who, thanks to British and Italian resistance, escaped justice and got away with mass murder, atrocious human rights abuses, destruction of several thousand churches and homes, the looting of vast quantities of Ethiopian properties and died peacefully in Italy in 1955 at the age of 73.

It is apparent that to Italian Fascists, especially in the Affile town area, Graziani is still a hero whereas to Ethiopians as well as, presumably, to anti-Fascist Italians and people who are aware of the Fascist crimes in Ethiopia, he evokes memories of grief, outrage, protest, and an unending sense of tragedy as well as an unabatable yearning for justice. This memory and the mausoleum installed for the Fascist criminal, Graziani, also underlies the importance for the international community i.e. the accountable ones such as Italy to pay adequate reparations to the Ethiopian people, the Vatican to apologize to the Ethiopian people for its complicity with the Fascists as well as the restitution of the looted properties currently in the custody of Italy and the Vatican.

GRAZIANI: PRIOR TO HIS ASSIGNMENT TO ETHIOPIA

Rodolfo Graziani was born in Filettino, the province of Frosinone in 1882. In the 1920’s, he was serving in Libya in various capacities including his being the commander of the Italian forces during which he was responsible for the death of thousands of Libyans, including the hanging of Omar Mukhtar. The Arabs knew him as “the Butcher of Fezan”. In 1935, he was appointed as governor of Italian Somaliland.

FASCIST ITALY’S INVASION OF ETHIOPIA AND GRAZIANI’S ROLE

After 40 years of preparation following its defeat at the famous war of Adwa in Ethiopia, Italy began its second attempt to colonize Ethiopia in 1934. Emperor Haile Selassie I stated³ that due to Italy’s accumulation of war materials at the borders with Ethiopia, an attempt was made first

³ Haile Selassie, Emperor, “Hiwotenna YeEthiopia Ermejja” (My Life and Ethiopia’s Progress), 1965 EC, pp 168/169

to settle any disputes through mediation but as that initiative was not accepted by Italy, a letter of appeal dated Ginbot 7, 1927 EC (May 14, 1934) was submitted to the League of Nations.

Ethiopia's peaceful efforts at avoiding the conflict through repeated mediation initiatives, however, failed due to Italy's intransigence as well as the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations. Italy proceeded with its unprovoked attack on Ethiopia with the Walwal skirmish caused by Italy December 5, 1934⁴ in the Ethiopian territory of the Ogaden. This was followed by a much heavier frontal attack by a Fascist Italian army commanded by General de Bono. This army crossed the Ethiopian frontier with Eritrea on October 3, 1935 and occupied Adwa, on October 7, 1935 and Mekele on 8 November, 1935 without resistance while Ethiopia was awaiting the League of Nations' action which turned out not to be forthcoming.

Marshal de Bono was replaced by General Badoglio on November 26, 1935 because of Mussolini's view that he was advancing too slowly.⁵ As instructed, Badoglio was much more brutal and advanced fast by applying all available war materials including (even then) the internationally forbidden mustard poison gas as a result of which the Italian army reached Addis Ababa on May 5, 1936 mainly due to the fact that the Ethiopian armies were brutally attacked by superior air attacks including the Fascist use of mustard poison gas at various battles including those carried out at Tembien, Ambalage, the war led by Emperor Haile Selassie I at Maichew, Dessie, etc.

In the mean time, the Italian army led by Graziani was also advancing in the south by occupying the Ethiopian territory of the Ogaden and later the city of Harer on May 8, 1936. His army overwhelmed the Ethiopian armies led by Dejazmach Nesibu, Dejazmach Desta and the famous patriot, Grazmach Afework. He was thus able to occupy southern and eastern Ethiopia and managed to reach Addis Ababa on May 21, 1936.

Graziani was elevated to being a Marshal and Viceroy of Italian East Africa ("Africa Orientale Italiana") including Eritrea, Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland on June 1, 1936.

In the mean time, Emperor Haile Selassie I left for Europe on May 2, 1936 and addressed the League of Nations on June 30, 1936 as well as on May 12, 1938 calling for international solidarity on behalf of Ethiopia. However, his timely wake-up call on the League of Nations fell on deaf ears only to discover later that the fire that was ignited in Ethiopia went on to consume the international community with World War II.

⁴ Hilton, Andrew, "The Ethiopian Patriots", 2007, p 39

⁵ GnoGno, Paulos, "YeEthiopianna Yeltalia Tornnet" (Amharic), 1980 EC, p 75

THE OPPOSING ARMIES OF ETHIOPIA AND ITALY in 1934/35⁶

There was no comparison in the strength of the opposing armies of Fascist Italy and Ethiopia not only in terms of size but also with regard to the quality of the arms applied.

Fascist Italy's Army comprised:

- 685,000 soldiers deployed from Italy in addition to those already existing in Eritrea (400,000) and Italian Somaliland (285,000);
- 6,000 machine guns, 2,000 artillery, 599 tanks and 390 aircraft imported in addition to 3,300 machine guns, 275 artillery pieces, 200 tanks, and 205 aircraft already existing in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland;
- Other war materials including mustard poison gas which was put to a devastating use by the Fascists.

Ethiopia's Army comprised:

- An army of 350,000-760,000 trained and untrained peasant soldiers;
- 400,000 mainly old rifles;
- 234 antiquated artillery;
- 75 anti-tank guns;
- 4 Fiat 3000 tanks of World War I variety;
- 13 outmoded aircraft with four pilots.

Therefore, Ethiopia's army could not defeat such a modern and huge army which also used poison gas extensively.

ETHIOPIA'S LOSSES DUE TO THE FASCIST WAR CRIMES⁷, FASCIST ITALY'S "CIVILIZING MISSION"

Ethiopia suffered devastating losses as a result of the Fascist Italian invasion during 1935-41 of which the following were the main ones:

- One million Ethiopians including patriots, women and children were massacred of whom 30,000 were killed, under Graziani's orders, within only three days (February 19-21, 1937) in Addis Ababa⁸ as well as over 2,000 monks and parishioners at Debre Libanos Monastery⁹. My own grandfather, Grazmach Gessesse Fanta was killed while he was fighting against the Italian Fascists in the Ogaden in Ethiopia.

⁶ Wikipedia, "Second Italo-Ethiopian War"

⁷ Opcit, p. 225

⁸ Campbell, Ian, "The Plot to Kill Graziani", 2010

⁹ Campbell, Ian, "The Massacre of Debre Libanos – Ethiopia 1937, 2014

- 2,000 churches¹⁰ and 525,000 homes were destroyed;
- Huge quantities of Ethiopian properties were looted including the following which are mere examples:¹¹
 - 300 bags of loot by Badoglio;
 - 79 bags by Graziani;
 - Four trucks full of property by Terruzi.
- The Axum obelisk which had been looted from Ethiopia and erected in Rome until it was eventually returned thanks to the sustainable struggle by several individuals including Prof. Richard Pankhurst and his wife Rita as well as Engineer Tadele Bitul, Dr. Abera Molla, and members of a committee established by the Ethiopian Government.
- Destruction of 14 million animals as a result of the environmental destruction caused by the mustard poison gas sprayed in many parts of Ethiopia;
- The suffering that was inflicted on hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians due to wounds suffered during the invasion, imprisonments, application of the Fascist apartheid policy, and other forms of atrocities;¹²
- The destruction of the British Red Cross facilities that were providing medical services to the Ethiopian army;¹³
- The Fascist use of mustard poison gas was the main reason for the devastating loss as well as the success of the Italian invasion.¹⁴ Lina Grip and John Hart stated that “...4336 aerial bombs filled with sulphur mustard and 540 aerial bombs filled with diphenylchloroarsine had been used against Ethiopian forces”.

The article also presents the following list of locations which were bombed by the Fascists with chemical weapons:

- Town Date of attack
- Takkaze 22 Dec. 1935
- Amba Alaa 26 Dec. 1935
- Borena 31 Dec. 1935
- Sokota 10 Jan. 1936
- Makale 21 Jan. 1936
- Megalo Feb. 1936^a
- Waldia Road 27 Feb. 1936
- Quoram 16 Mar. 1936
- Ylanserer 17 Mar. 1936
- Quoram 17–18 Mar. 1936
- Irga Alem (Yirgalem) 19–21 Mar. 1936

¹⁰ Belaine, Be'erq Yihun, *Amestu Yemekera Zemenat* (in Amharic: *The Five Years of Torment*), 2007EC

¹¹ Sbachi, Alberto, “Ethiopia Under Mussolini”, pp 47-63

¹² Laszlo, Saska, “Fascist Italian Brutality in Ethiopia, 1935-1937, An Eyewitness Account”, 2015

¹³ Haile Selassie, Emperor, “*Hiwotenna YeEthiopia Ermejja*” (My Life and Ethiopia’s Progress) 1965 EC, pp 226-227

¹⁴ Grip, Lina and Hart, John, “The Use of Chemical Weapons in the 1935-36 Italo-Ethiopian War”

- Indomahoni 29–30 Mar. 1936
- Quoram 4–7 Apr. 1936

^aThe exact day was not available to the Ethiopian Government.

Source: League of Nations, Letter, dated April 13th, 1936, from the Ethiopian Representative to the Secretary-General, 13 Apr. 1936, *League of Nations Official Journal*, Annex 1592, Apr. 1936, pp. 479–80.”

- Emperor Haile Selassie I, had stated:
 - “The picture of many thousands of soldiers as well as rural people including women and children who were burned to death by the poison gas used by the enemy is still etched in our mind.”¹⁵
 - “Italian airplanes came in drones of 9, 15, and 18 to drop rains of poison gas on people, animals, rivers and streams as well as pastures.”¹⁶ (p. 255)
- Barker states¹⁷ that Ethiopian soldiers were not familiar with the “terrible rain that burned and killed”. It can be stated that if it were not for the use of the internationally forbidden poison gas by the invading Fascist forces, the Italians would have suffered a second defeat at the hands of the Ethiopians similar to the war of Adowa in 1896.
- Graziani was reported to have reported to Mussolini that he would hand over Ethiopia to him “with or without Ethiopians”.¹⁸

International Laws Against the Use of Chemical Weapons

The Hague Convention of 1899 was the first instrument that forbade the use of chemical weapons. That was followed by the Geneva Protocol of 1925 forbidding the use of poison gases. Therefore, the Italian Fascist Government used chemical weapons in its war crimes in Ethiopia in utter disregard of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. For more details of the various conventions and the atrocities committed in various countries, please see the graphic presentation by The Economist hereunder (kindly shared by Ambassador Alemayehu Abebe)¹⁹:

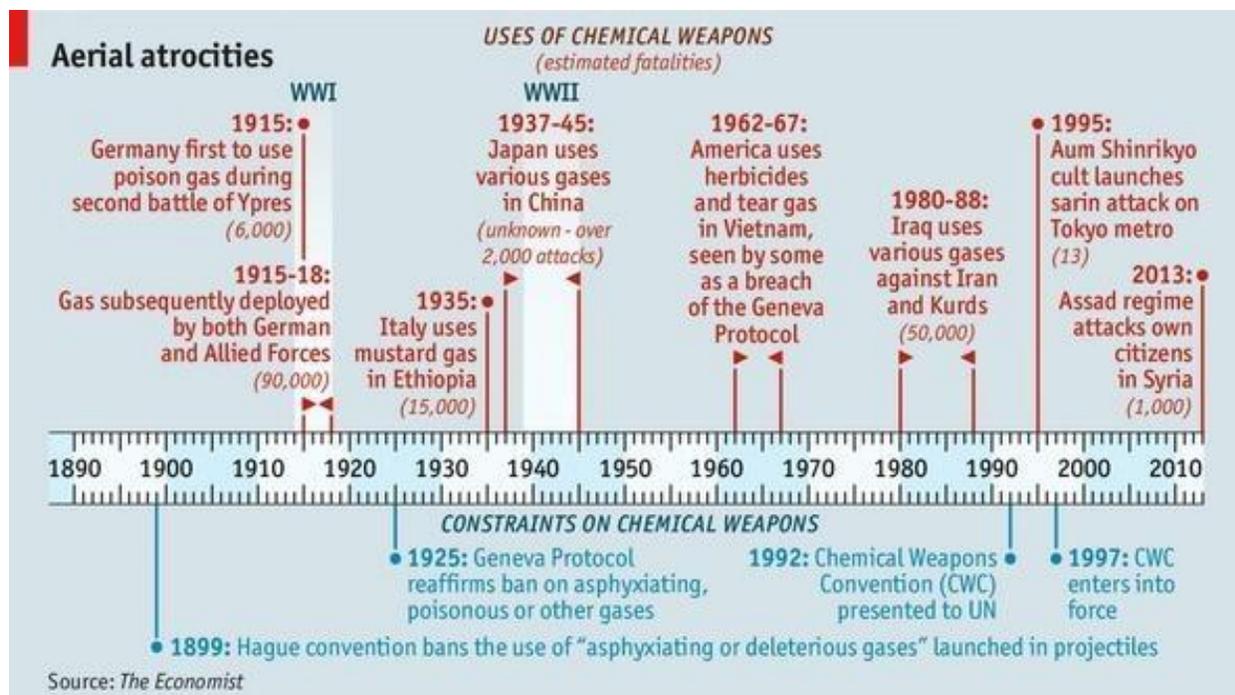
¹⁵ Opcit, 244

¹⁶ Ibid, 255

¹⁷ Barker, A.J., “The Rape of Ethiopia 1936”, p 56

¹⁸ Graziani’s statement: “The Duce will have Ethiopia....with or without Ethiopia”, The Gurardian, June 29, 2012

¹⁹ This information was also used in my article: **“Ethiopia and Syria: International Community’s Contradictory Responses to the Use of Poison Gas”, 2013**



The Italian Government has yet to account for its illegal use of chemical weapons on Ethiopia.

Fascist Italy's Racist Laws Applied in Ethiopia

Sbacchi stated: "Colonial legislation considered the Ethiopians a race of subject people; the Italians were the masters, in whose presence they could not sit and whose hand they could not shake....."²⁰

FASCIST ITALY'S WAR METHODS = ITS "CIVILIZING MISSION":

1. Unrestricted massacre of civilians and soldiers (men, women and children) by using mustard poison gas, bombs, and bullets;
2. Unrelenting attack on the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church including the destruction of 2000 churches, and the killing of Bishop/Abune Petros, Abune Mikael as well as numerous priests, monks, etc.
3. Throwing people from high points and from the Fascist airplanes;
4. Burning people within their homes;
5. Brutal use of hand instruments such as daggers, truncheons, etc;²¹

²⁰ Sbacchi, Alberto, "Ethiopia Under Mussolini", 1985, p 169 (Also see: Ggogno, Paulos, YeEthiopianna Yeltalia Tornnet", p 186

6. Cutting patriots' heads off;
7. Destruction of numerous homes;
8. Application of apartheid (racist) laws and systems.

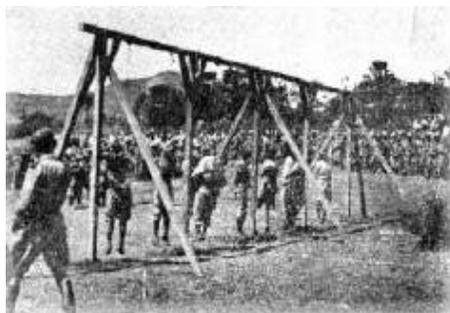


Victims of Fascist mustard poison gas



Fascist soldiers showing off the head of an Ethiopian patriot

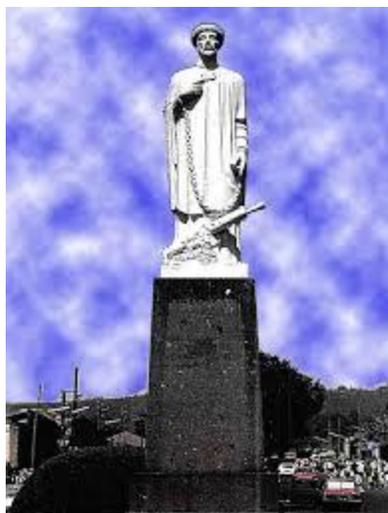
²¹ Laszlo, Saska, "Fascist Italian Brutality in Ethiopia 1935-37", 2015, pp 128-133



Ethiopian Patriots hanged by Fascists



A Fascist standing in front of Ethiopian victims



Statue of Abune Petros²²

ROLE OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS IN THE FASCIST INVASION OF ETHIOPIA

As an independent country and a member of the League of Nations, Ethiopia should have been provided with the League's fullest solidarity and support against the unprovoked and aggressive invasion by another member of the League, Italy. However, what actually transpired was the League's half hearted and ineffective measures which in fact facilitated Fascist Italy's perpetration of devastating war crimes in and occupation of Ethiopia for five years.

The League of Nations imposed sanctions on Italy on November 19, 1935 only to remove them on July 15, 1936. Mussolini was reported to have stated that if oil sanctions had been imposed and applied on Italy, he would have been forced to withdraw his army within a week.²³

The use of the forbidden mustard poison gas by Fascist Italy on Ethiopia did not have any semblance of concern on the part of the League of Nations.

It should be recalled also that in accordance with the 1884 Hewett Treaty between Great Britain and Ethiopia (then under Emperor Yohannes), the area known as Bogos (now part of Eritrea) was supposed to be ceded to Ethiopia. Due to the British betrayal, the region was taken over by the Italians. A later relevant evidence of the British and French Governments' collusion with Fascist Italy was the so-called Laval Treaty of 1935 according to which an attempt was made to partition and colonize Ethiopia to Italy's advantage.

²² Abune Petros' statue had been erected at the very point, in Addis Ababa, where he was shot down by the Fascists but it was later removed, reportedly temporarily, until a railway project was completed. For more details about the project, please see my article entitled: "Sele Abune Petros Hawelt Yaltemellesu Teyyaqewoch" Translation: Unanswered Questions Regarding the Abune Petros Statue).

²³ Ristuccia, Cristiano Andrea, "1935 Sanctions Against Italy: Would Coal and Crude Oil have made a difference?", p7

Therefore, the members of the League of Nations should be accountable for allowing Fascist Italy to perpetrate war crimes in Ethiopia resulting in the devastating loss in terms of human life and property.

ETHIOPIAN RESISTANCE AGAINST THE FASCIST INVASION AND GRAZIANI'S DEPARTURE

Although the Fascist Italians occupied a number of cities and towns, the rest of the country including villages and the rural area was under the control of patriots who were waging their continued struggle against the occupiers.

Numerous Ethiopian patriots including renowned leaders such as Ras Abebe Aregai and Belai Zelleke conducted an unrelenting resistance against the Fascists during 1935-41. Several authors have recorded the history of the Ethiopian resistance to the Fascist occupation but a few recent ones might be of interest at this stage.²⁴

With regard to Graziani, though the Ethiopian resistance during his role as viceroy of Ethiopia was wide spread, the episodes that have registered a historic and an understandably unique attention are with regard to the bombs that were thrown against him and his comrades by two Ethiopians, Mogus Asgedom and Abraha Deboch, on February 19, 1937 resulting in his being wounded and rushed to the hospital. As stated above, a three-day massacre took place in Addis Ababa resulting in the loss of 30,000 lives. This was followed by another massacre at the famous Ethiopian monastery of Debre Libanos where over 2,000 people were massacred. For further information on these tragic occurrences, references to Ian Campbell's books: "The Plot to Kill Graziani" and "The Massacre at Debre Libanos Ethiopia 1937" would be useful.

The assassination attempt against Graziani had a devastating effect on him with a result that he was recalled back to Rome. Sbacchi stated:

"Graziani's eventual recall, however, resulted from a nervous breakdown he suffered after would-be assassins threw bombs at him on 19 February 1937. From then on Graziani suffered from a persecution complex and a desire for revenge against the Ethiopians, and his administrative and political effectiveness suffered as a result. It was, therefore, decided to replace him. On his return to Italy Graziani was made Marshal and Marchese di Neghelli, with a salary of 500,000 lire per year."²⁵

Graziani was replaced by the Duke of Aosta.

FASCIST ITALY'S DEFEAT AND LIBERATION OF ETHIOPIA

²⁴ Hilton, Andrew, "The Ethiopian Patriots", 2007; Also Teferra, Gebeyehu (Dr.) and Alemu, Dessalegn, "Yetedebeqew Mastawesha", 2007 EC (Amharic translation of "A Memoir of the Italian War of 1935-36 by Dr. Harald Nystrom - English translation by Dr. Thomas P. Coleman)

²⁵ Sbacchi, Alberto, "Ethiopia Under Mussolini", 1985, p 48

Emperor Haile Selassie I's diplomatic struggle from Britain supported by activists such as Sylvia Pankhurst²⁶ coupled with the continued fight by Ethiopian patriots as well as the significant support by British forces led by General Cunningham from the East and General Wingate from the west, culminated in the total defeat of the Italian army. Great Britain's support in the fight against Fascist Italy should always be remembered with appreciation.

The emperor returned to Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941, the commemoration date for Ethiopia's liberation from the Fascist five-year occupation.²⁷

THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE ON BEHALF OF ETHIOPIA

74 years after the liberation of Ethiopia, the quest for justice from the international community remains unresolved. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 was virtually oblivious to Ethiopia's losses when considering the issue of war reparations. This can be clearly surmised from the fact that although Ethiopia's demand for war reparations was Sterling Pounds 184,746,023²⁸, what was meted out to Ethiopia was a miniscule \$25 million which was used for the construction of the Koka Dam. Italy agreed to pay \$125 million to Yugoslavia, \$105 million to Greece and \$100 million to the Soviet Union. Finland had agreed to pay \$300 million to the Soviet Union which also obtained an agreement from Hungary for the payment of \$200 million. Recently, Italy has also agreed to pay a compensation of \$5 billion to Libya. It is, therefore, obvious that based on the huge losses inflicted on Ethiopia, there is still a need for an appropriate payment of war reparations by Italy including the restitution of looted properties.

Most of the looted properties have not been returned with the exception of the Axum Obelisk, thanks to the great effort by Prof. Richard Pankhurst and his wife, Ms. Rita Pankhurst, Dr. Abera Molla, Eng. Tadele Betul, etc.

The struggle for justice on behalf of Ethiopia is being undertaken by the Global Alliance for Justice – The Ethiopian Cause (www.globalallianceforethiopia.org) which has five objectives:

1. Adequate reparations by Italy to Ethiopia;
2. A Vatican apology to Ethiopia for its complicity with Fascist Italy;
3. Restitution of Ethiopian property currently in the custody of the Vatican and Italy;
4. A UN recognition of the Italian war crimes/genocide in Ethiopia; and
5. The removal of the mausoleum installed for Graziani at the Italian town of Affile.

Among the numerous actions taken by the Alliance, mention can be made of letters of appeal submitted to the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, the Italian

²⁶ Pankhurst, Richard, "Sylvia Pankhurst Counsel for Ethiopia", 2003

²⁷ Mockler, Anthony, "Haile Selassie's War", 1984, pp 372-380

²⁸ Gnogno, Paulos, "YeEthiopianna yeltalia Tornnet" (in Amharic: The Italo-Ethiopian War), 1980 EC, p 224

Government and the Vatican asking for justice on behalf of Ethiopia. The European Union Parliament has responded by stating that it would consider the appeal

An international petition asking for a Vatican apology to the Ethiopian people is being signed on the Alliance's above mentioned website. At the time of writing this article, over 4,600 people from 30+ countries have signed it.

The Alliance's international campaign for the commemoration event of Yekatit 12, the day (February 19, 1937) when the massacre started in Addis Ababa, has been celebrated annually in some 30 cities throughout the world.

With regard to the Graziani mausoleum, Lazio Regional Council's legal action is being awaited in order to remove his name from the monument as a war criminal does not deserve such an honour under current Italian laws.



Graziani's mausoleum being inaugurated in August, 2012.

As stated on page 1 above, the BBC reported on this inauguration ceremony stating that it was attended by the mayor of Affile as well as a representative of the Vatican.²⁹

²⁹ BBC (report by David Wiley), August 15, 2012

CONCLUSION

Rodolfo was a Fascist Italian war criminal who, under the leadership of Benito Mussolini and in collaboration with other Fascists such as Badoglio, perpetrated huge war crimes/genocide on innocent Ethiopians. The immense loss suffered by Ethiopia in terms of human life, looting, and environmental degradation during the war still calls for justice on the part not only of Italy but also the international community, especially the United Nations which should be accountable for the gross negligence of the League of Nations which virtually facilitated Italy's war crimes on Ethiopia instead of defending Ethiopia, one of its member nations. The main countries that were responsible for neglecting their responsibilities of applying the League's principle of collective security and applying a brief and inadequate sanction on Italy and providing it with the important resources such as oil as well as leaving the Suez Canal open for the Fascist transport of its army and war material should be required to pay adequate compensation to Ethiopia. These countries include France, Britain, and other responsible nations.

Holistic and detailed studies are required to determine the extent of reparations that ought to be paid to Ethiopia for the huge war crimes inflicted on it. Such reparations should be undertaken in the form of projects of direct benefit to the Ethiopian people especially in the rural areas, not in the form of money which might be subject to various forms of corruption.

In addition to its responsibility for reparations and restitution of Ethiopian properties, Italy should, without any further delay, remove the shameful mausoleum for the war criminal, Graziani.

Similar to its apologies to the people of Latina America and the Jews as well as its recognition of the Turkish genocide on Armenia, the Vatican should perform its Christian duty by offering its public and official apology to the Ethiopian people for its complicity with Fascist Italy.³⁰

³⁰ Global Alliance for Justice – The Ethiopian Cause (www.globalallianceforethiopia.org), "Letter of Appeal to Pope Francis I", 2015