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 The Government of National Regional State of Tigray
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 Office of President

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Open letter from the Government of Tigray to the Secretary General of the United Nations

His Excellency
 Mr. Antonio Guterres
 Secretary-General
 United Nations
 New York

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you to highlight the multifaceted crises currently afflicting Ethiopia, imperiling the integrity of the state and threatening to tear the country at the seams. At present, Ethiopia is in the midst of cataclysmic social, economic and political upheavals whose ramifications will reverberate for generations to come. At the root of the country's seemingly insurmountable crises is the declaration and vicious prosecution of a genocidal war on Tigray, resulting in massive dislocation and unleashing a conflagration that has metastasized throughout the country.

At the same time, there has been a regrettably mistaken assumption on the part of the international community that the decision by Tigray forces to withdraw from neighboring regions in December was enough to ensure Ethiopia's peace and security. In reality, the deployment of our forces outside Tigray was the result, not the driver, of the crises that have been convulsing the country. However, the conditions that gave rise to our forces' advances towards the center of the country are still in place. A series of fateful decisions and ill-advised adventures by the central leadership and its allies have made Ethiopia a combustible tinderbox. There is no doubt that the current status quo is unsustainable, replete as it is with a number of interlocking socioeconomic, political and security elements that, if not attended to urgently, will lead to the collapse of the state, and the disintegration of the country's social fabric, which is already hanging by a thread.

One tragic element accelerating the country's journey to the abyss is the cruel and inhumane blockade of Tigray, putting millions of people at risk of death by starvation. The UN's relief chief, Martin Griffiths, had highlighted the deleterious impact of the "de facto blockade" of Tigray on humanitarian

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operations months ago. While limited aid—far from sufficient to meet burgeoning needs—had been trickling into Tigray from July through mid-December, no humanitarian aid was delivered from mid-December through the end of March overland. In fact, in the last 4 months, only 67 truckloads of supplies have arrived in Tigray, representing a mere 6 percent of what is required to meet increasing needs.

Exacerbating this colossal humanitarian crisis is the suspension of essential social and economic services. Total electricity and telecommunications blackout; the shortage of basic commodities; and the suspension of banking and transportation services have wreaked havoc on Tigray. The unconscionable decision to suspend banking services is particularly harrowing, as millions of Tigrayans have not been able to access their hard-earned savings, exposing them to extreme hardship. Furthermore, Tigrayans in the diaspora cannot send remittances to their relatives in Tigray, or to any Tigrayan in need in general.

The blockade of Tigray, the willful obstruction of humanitarian operations, the denial of humanitarian access to civilians, and the suspension of vital services have one overriding goal: to use starvation and civilian suffering as a tool of war—a war crime under international law as well as a moral obscenity that no human being should endure or countenance. In short, it is an assault on humanity. The people and Government of Tigray cannot continue to tolerate this looming danger to their survival as a people for long.

Not surprisingly, thousands of Tigrayans have already died, directly and indirectly due to the war and subsequent siege. Aside from the rampant extrajudicial murder of thousands of Tigrayans, hunger and lack of basic medicines have also resulted in thousands of deaths across Tigray. Given the fact that, even following the regime’s declaration of a “humanitarian truce,” the humanitarian situation in Tigray remains essentially unaltered, these avoidable deaths will continue unabated in the absence of meaningful international intervention.

Furthermore, it is a well-documented fact of the war on Tigray that our adversaries have done all they could to destroy Tigray’s economy, including by plundering and destroying individual Tigrayans’ livelihoods. Among other cruel things, they had killed, maimed and otherwise looted cattle, and burned seeds, and fertilizers. At present, if our farmers cannot obtain the seeds and fertilizers they need for the coming farming season, Tigray’s already calamitous crisis is going to take a turn for the worse.

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A second element highlighting Ethiopia's deep structural malaise is the debilitating economic crisis that is ravaging the country as a whole, exposing millions of Ethiopians to immense suffering as well as making beggary a critical part of the government's foreign economic "policy." The humanitarian bill arising from a collapse in food production, rampant inflation, and disruption to services and markets, will be delivered to the international donor community. No society can continue to absorb such shocks without losing its resilience.

A third element putting Ethiopia at an elevated risk of violent disintegration is the proliferation of communal conflicts across much of the country. As the central institutions of the state fail, it has lost its ability to broadcast authority, maintain law and order and respond to societal needs. As a result, centrifugal challenges to the state abound, pushing it to the brink of calamitous failure. Sadly, the federal government's active involvement in stoking conflicts is the chief culprit in the drastic erosion of state authority, contributing to the intractability of the country's problems.

A fourth element is the ongoing occupation of parts of Ethiopia by Eritrean forces along with Eritrean penetration of key sectors of the Ethiopian economy. Eritrea has long been a destabilizing force in the region and the Eritrean regime apparently thrives on turmoil. Eritrea's direct occupation of Tigrayan territories as well as its cultivation of parallel, subnational relationships within Ethiopia are adding to the irresolvable nature of the country's worsening political crisis. Since the despotic regime in Eritrea sees peace as an existential threat, it has no compunction about using every tool at its disposal, including force, to impede efforts to bring it about. Absent a well-considered strategy to manage or marginalize this spoiler, the quest for peace will be elusive.

The final element adding to the country's woes is a central leadership that puts primacy on day-to-day crisis management, avoiding tackling hard issues. The present government's principal political success is persuading the international community that the current turmoil is normal. Consequently, members of the international community, including the United Nations, routinely resort to prescribing palliatives that provide temporary relief instead of treating the underlying factors that caused the ailment in the first place.

Mr. Secretary General, please do not make the mistake of believing that the current status quo is sustainable or that the international community's posture is saving the Ethiopian state. It is having the opposite effect.

In the final weeks of 2021, Tigray forces withdrew from a commanding military position on the basis of promises received that there would be credible and expeditious negotiations towards a peaceful

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settlement of the conflict, the provision of immediate, unfettered humanitarian aid to Tigray and an end to the blockade. These promises have yet to be fulfilled.

In fact, despite positive reactions to the recent 'humanitarian truce,' the international community generally, and some powerful actors particularly have failed to press the Abiy regime to follow up on its promise of facilitating unfettered humanitarian access to Tigray. The international community has once again failed to pressure the Abiy regime to capitalize on the limited window of opportunity generated by the temporary truce and facilitate the delivery of sustained aid consistent with the enormity of needs on the ground. Instead, the international community has chosen to praise the regime despite allowing only a mere 6 percent of the aid needed into Tigray. Thus emboldened, the authorities continue to make empty promises they have no intention of fulfilling. By reflexively taking seriously the regime's empty rhetoric, and refusing to hold it accountable for engineering a colossal humanitarian tragedy, the international community has effectively become complicit in the suffering of millions of people. After all, impunity begets further cruelty.

Perplexingly, the international community continues its reckless parroting of federal and regional authorities' endless conditions for fulfilling their humanitarian obligations. The Government of Tigray has always expressed its commitment to doing all it could to facilitate the provision of aid not only to the millions of Tigrayans in desperate need but also to all those in need in neighboring regions. Tigray forces' recent withdrawal from Erebti is indicative of this principled stance. Yet, instead of seizing this opportunity and pressing the Ethiopian authorities and their regional allies to build on the limited progress made, the international community and some powerful actors are unhelpfully linking humanitarian and political issues. Linking humanitarian aid to Tigray forces' further withdrawal from some areas they currently control to prevent repeated cross-border attacks against our people is an example of such a misguided approach to the current impasse.

This approach is all the more puzzling in light of the fact that the invading forces continue to occupy large swaths of Tigray. The Amhara region has forcibly annexed a constitutionally recognized Tigrayan territory; aside from providing the military muscle that underwrites this illegal annexation, the Eritrean army continues to occupy parts of North-Western, Central and Eastern Tigray. The international community's indifference to the forcible seizure of Tigrayan territories, on the one hand, and the persistent calls on Tigray forces to vacate their limited, defensive positions outside Tigray as a condition for the provision of humanitarian aid, on the other hand, are fundamentally at odds with basic fairness and rules and norms governing warfare.

The Government of Tigray is committed to a peaceful resolution of the current conflict. Our forces' presence in Afar has essentially been about neutralizing a clear and present security threat and in

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principle we are committed to further withdrawal of Tigray forces from Afar territory. At the same time, there are few critical steps that we believe the international community and the Ethiopian authorities must take. First, there must be secure humanitarian corridors for the delivery of vital humanitarian aid to the people of Tigray. Second, there must be system in place to facilitate the provision of sustained, unfettered, timely and adequate humanitarian assistance. The issue of humanitarian aid delivery should not be reduced to whether or not some trucks arrive in Tigray on a particular day. Rather, the issue is whether or not there is a system in place to facilitate regular, sufficient and unfettered aid flow into Tigray. The delivery of aid into Tigray should not be treated as an act of charity to be turned on and off according to Ethiopian authorities' whims. Third, the abhorrent blockade of Tigray must be lifted, and essential socioeconomic services restored. Finally, the implementation of these conditions must be verified by an impartial international entity, such as the United Nations, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

As we observe the international response to armed conflicts and humanitarian disasters in other continents, we are encouraged to witness the United Nations and its member states acting boldly and decisively in support of fundamental principles of international law and humanity.


Yet, we are disappointed that the international response to the unfolding tragedy in Tigray has not been infused with a fraction of the urgency with which the international community has acted in addressing humanitarian crises elsewhere.

Above all, we believe that the formula for resolving the Ethiopian crisis begins with an affirmation of the foundational principles of the United Nations and the African Union. The most fundamental of these principles is the practical affirmation of the right to life for the millions of civilians in Tigray who are facing starvation. Following this is the preservation of the country's sovereignty, which, among other things, entails the unconditional withdrawal of Eritrean forces. Only then can Ethiopians begin to address their political challenges free of malign foreign interference.

In conclusion, it should be clear that our preference is to bring this tragic conflict to an end through peaceful means. There has been enough death and destruction. However, absent a credible process to bring about peace, we cannot continue to watch our citizens perish from hunger and easily preventable diseases. Accordingly, if peaceful options are no longer viable, we will be forced to resort to other means to break the devastating blockade that has made Tigray hell on earth.

You, Mr. Secretary General, have considerable moral authority you can put to good use. We are calling on you to use your position to help arrest Ethiopia's descent into turmoil and bloodshed.

Please, Mr. Secretary General, accept the assurances of my highest consideration.


Debretsion G/Michael /PHD/
President