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Tigray External Affairs Office

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## **Statement on the Joint Report of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on Atrocity Crimes Committed in Western Tigray**

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The Government of Tigray is grateful to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) for highlighting a litany of atrocities that ethnic Amhara forces, with the full backing of the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies, committed and continue to commit against Tigrayans in Western Tigray. The findings of their joint investigation released on April 6, 2022 have rightly shocked the international community. The exhaustive report, entitled ““We will erase you from this land”: Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone” catalogues horrific violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). Nevertheless, these in-depth findings merely confirm what the people of Tigray have always known: that our adversaries have committed unimaginable atrocities against Tigrayans to create new demographic facts on the ground critical in reinforcing their baseless territorial claims and legitimizing their forcible annexation of Tigray’s constitutionally recognized territory.

It should be noted that despite the exhaustive nature of this joint investigation and the level of factual details and corroborating evidence included in the report, the vicious crimes committed against Tigrayans represent only the tip of the iceberg. Given the obvious obstacles to a genuinely independent and comprehensive investigation that have been erected by the invading forces, the report does not even begin to scratch the surface when it comes documenting the true scale of the barbaric crimes committed against Tigrayans. As long as occupying Amhara forces and their foreign backers continue to roam free in Western Tigray, grave violations of internationally recognized human rights will continue unabated, with even ferocious lethality.

Consequently, the Government of Tigray firmly believes that, given the systematic and widespread nature of human rights violations as well as the multiplicity of actors involved in all stages of the genocidal campaign against the people of Tigray, only a genuinely independent investigation can provide a full accounting of what transpired and continues to transpire. But the integrity of a comprehensive and credible investigation depends on the preservation of key forensic evidence to be dug up by mandated entities. In this regard, the international community must condemn in the strongest possible terms the Amhara regional government’s desecration of the remains of Tigrayans massacred by Amhara forces for the purpose of destroying evidence, rendering independent investigations extremely difficult, if not impossible, and evading accountability for its involvement in this genocidal campaign.

It is also worth noting that it has been more than a year since the U.S. State Department designated what Amhara forces along with the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies were doing to Tigrayans in Western Tigray ethnic cleansing, though such a designation was, sadly, not followed by robust remedial or punitive measures. Although the brutality and scope of these crimes have shocked the collective conscience of the international community, the world has by and large decided to dither as to whether genocide is taking place in Western Tigray, choosing to deploy euphemistic expressions that underplay the extent of Tigrayans' suffering. If the legal determination of genocide is to come after Tigrayans have been thoroughly wiped out, it would do the people of Tigray no good. But if the international community's pledge of "never again" is to mean something; if the enunciation of lofty humanitarian principles is to signify something; and if the notion that all lives, regardless of race, creed, and geography are equal is to remain true, then the international community must rise to the occasion and call what is happening in Tigray by its proper name: Tigray genocide. Sadly, despite their commendable efforts to highlight the despicable atrocities committed against the people of Tigray, Amnesty and HRW refrain from calling the murderous campaign against Tigrayans by its proper name: genocide.

All the same, still failing to act on these devastatingly exhaustive findings will be a colossal violation of ethical, moral, and legal obligations on the part of the international community. The Government of Tigray has from the get-go been communicating to the world that our adversaries were planning to exterminate the people of Tigray. However, our appeal for preventive diplomacy and early intervention went unheeded. In previous cases of genocide, such as the one in Rwanda, the international community expressed regret for its inaction, rationalizing away its refusal to intervene in terms of failure to see such crimes coming. In the case of Tigray, the warning signs have been flashing red from the beginning. The international community's pledge to never allow another Rwanda along with the well-documented nature of the ongoing genocidal campaign against Tigray makes the failure to intervene all the more disturbing.

Once again, the Government of Tigray urges the international community to seriously reconsider its approach, as all of these violations and abuses occur under its watch and, tragically, despite repeated early warnings that could have averted catastrophic human rights violations. Given the extensively documented genocidal campaign against the people of Tigray, including the current Amnesty and HRW report, and multiple early warning signs that went unheeded, the international community cannot continue to invoke ignorance as a defense against failure to intervene.

In spite of the failure to act thus far, it is never too late for the international community to prevent the rules-based architecture of global governance from being violated at will into obsolescence. Our adversaries have added the imposition of a cruel, inhumane and morally repugnant siege on Tigray to their list of atrocious crimes against the people of Tigray. With the siege on Tigray still intact and over seven million people cut off from humanitarian assistance and other basic necessities, the choice is stark: stand with humanity and prevent a full-scale extermination project by the Abiy regime and its allied partners, or make empty rhetorical gestures while cajoling those who planned, aided, and abetted the commission of some of the worst atrocities in human history. Even though the criminal intent of all invading forces to annihilate Tigrayans and their rightful properties has never been in doubt, the international community's passivity has only emboldened the perpetrators.

It is not mere coincidence that the supposedly independent Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) attempted to cast doubt on the latest report's credibility in its press release issued on April 6, 2022. As an appendage of the genocidal Abiy regime, the EHRC has echoed the regime's talking points. It has been the regime's dependable instrument in evading accountability by manufacturing fictitious narratives about rights violations, selectively emphasizing some alleged violations while ignoring others depending on the identity of the alleged perpetrators and victims. The people and Government of Tigray have consistently expressed their objections to the EHRC's involvement in any investigation of alleged rights violations on account of its lack of impartiality and independence—principles indispensable for a human rights body. The EHRC has essentially been serving as the propaganda arm of the genocidal Abiy regime, blaming Tigrayan victims while exonerating their tormentors.

What is more, the Government of Tigray has copious amount of evidence that the EHRC, through its Chairman, Daniel Bekele, is advising the criminal Abiy regime on how to evade accountability for massive human rights violations. The EHRC's tattered image confirms the idea that a state-appointed entity cannot be an independent and impartial adjudicator of disputes concerning crimes committed by the appointing state, and ensure a measure of justice for the victims.

A case in point is the EHRC's whitewashing of the regime and its Amhara partners' record in the massacre of Tigrayans in May-Kadra. The EHRC, fulfilling its mandate as the propaganda arm of the genocidal Abiy regime, made unconscionably false claims about Tigrayans brutally murdered for no other reason than their identity. Having had no ability or willingness to conduct independent investigations into the May-Kadra massacre, the EHRC was reduced to playing its role as an amateurish propaganda arm of the genocidal regime. By saturating the regime's media ecosystem with false claims, the EHRC legitimized the genocidal regime's mendacity, although the international community has subsequently found adequate evidence to counter the regime's manufactured narratives. Even so, the genocidal regime, along with its domestic partners, and the EHRC have, through the spread of lies, muddied the waters, thereby creating the impression that hundreds of Tigrayans viciously murdered are, in fact, the perpetrators of phantom crimes. In the Orwellian world in which these vicious criminals inhabit, up is down and down is up. Similarly, victims are criminals and criminals are victims. The EHRC has, in short, betrayed its foundational mandate, and fatally undermined its credibility and, thus, should not be taken seriously as an institution capable of adjudicating disputes with a degree of impartiality and independence that is the hallmark of its counterparts elsewhere.

Furthermore, despite the documentation of multiple heinous crimes in Western Tigray, the disturbing references to "contested areas" and "disputed territory" will surely incentivize the invading forces to ramp up their repression of Tigrayans as they seek to rid the area of any vestiges of Tigrayans ever having been there and legitimize their illegal annexation. In fact, in its April 7 response to the joint report, the Abiy regime sought to have it both ways. On the one hand, it made references to a constitutional process for adjudicating territorial disputes. On the other hand, it refers to Western Tigray as Wolkait, adopting the same name as the Amhara expansionist forces. Furthermore, in a sign of where its loyalties lie, the Abiy regime castigates Amnesty and Human Rights Watch for their putative reliance on the testimony of "some groups", which in their coded parlance is a clear reference to Tigrayans whom they hold in contempt. What this genocidal regime

is getting at is that people belonging to a community subjected to vicious mass murder should never be allowed to provide testimony about their ordeals, and that victims and criminals should be treated equally.

The Government of Tigray has been consistent in its insistence on an independent investigation to be conducted by an impartial international entity as the only viable mechanism for getting to the bottom of all atrocities committed during the war on Tigray. In this regard, unlike the genocidal Abiy regime, the Government of Tigray has fully accepted the mandate and legitimacy of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia established by the UN Human Rights Council. We urge the international community to compel the Abiy regime to allow the Commission to do its work without any hindrance. The genocidal regime and its criminal partners cannot continue to assert their innocence vis-à-vis alleged rights violations, levy countervailing accusations against Tigray, and still strenuously object to independent investigations. The international community should not fail the people of Tigray again and again. It has failed Tigrayans by not intervening early to prevent massive rights violations from being committed. It should not fail them now by not holding the perpetrators of heinous crimes accountable. In this regard, the international community should condemn the illegal exhumation of the remains of Tigrayans massacred by Amhara Special Forces, Amhara Militia, the vigilante group Fano, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, and the Eritrean Defense Forces in Western Tigray Zone as an act of evidence tampering.

