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 The Government of National Regional State of Tigray
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 Office of President

ዕለት 2, May, 2022
 Date

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 Ref No

Open letter from the Government of Tigray to the Chairperson of the African Union and President of Senegal

**To: H.E. President Macky Sall, Chairperson of the African Union and President of Senegal
 H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya**

Your Excellencies,

I am writing to express my profound concern about the looming danger posed by the current stance of the Government of the State of Eritrea to international peace and security in the Horn of Africa, a situation that the people of the region can ill-afford. I am also writing to reiterate the position of the Government of the National Regional State of Tigray with respect to steps that are critical to the resolution of the crisis in Ethiopia.

In 2009, the United Nations Security Council had imposed sanctions on Eritrea for its role in destabilizing its neighbors. You are also no doubt aware that those sanctions were removed in 2018 following the so-called peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The decision to lift the sanctions was made with the sincere hope of incentivizing Eritrea to cease acting as a rouge state; begin playing a constructive role in ensuring regional peace and stability; and undertake domestic reforms, including by adopting a constitution, setting up a representative government, in which various political parties would be represented, releasing political prisoners, ending indefinite military service, and introducing freedom of the press and freedom of worship. Sadly, all of these hopes have been dashed.

Subsequent events have proven that the State of Eritrea capitalized on its security pact with Ethiopia and its newly-rehabilitated international image to re-arm itself and to undertake military and security activities beyond its borders.

Since November 2020, the Eritrean army has been active inside Ethiopia, most particularly in Tigray, in accordance with a secret pact finalized with the Ethiopian authorities. Eritrean troops have committed, and continue to commit, egregious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law against civilians in Tigray. Although it is fully within its power to facilitate humanitarian relief to the starving civilian population of Tigray in areas under its occupation, Eritrea has willfully ignored its obligations under international law to permit the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance.

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In addition, Eritrean security and intelligence officers are roaming freely across Ethiopia, where they are engaged in illicit activities that imperil the country's economy. But it should be noted that Eritrea's malign influence extends beyond Ethiopia. In Somalia, Eritrea has been training special forces loyal not to the constitution but to the president, with alarming implications for the stability of the country and the integrity of the upcoming elections. In the Sudan, Eritrea has cultivated extensive links with elements within the government, with far-reaching ramifications for the success of the country's democratic transition.

In spite of Eritrea's long track-record of destabilizing the region, it has suffered few consequences. Thus emboldened, Eritrea continues to violate basic rules and norms governing state conduct with impunity. Neither the African Union Peace and Security Council nor the United Nations Security Council has condemned Eritrea's destabilizing activities. Shockingly, Eritrea is still represented on the UN Human Rights Council, tarnishing the image of this august body.

The record of the State of Eritrea speaks for itself. However, permit me to draw some conclusions about the rationale of this pattern of action by the Eritrean president and its probable consequences.

The system of governance in place in Eritrea can be sustained only if Eritrea is surrounded by countries in violent turmoil, which the government would then use to justify its despotic rule, peddling itself as the guarantor of peace and stability in a region otherwise rife with mayhem and destruction. Eritrea has only one export: providing the services of its army and security and intelligence officers to the highest bidder. The demand for this service is directly related to the prevalence of armed conflict and instability in the region. Stoking conflicts is, thus, in its interest.

The kinds of conflicts we are now witnessing across Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan are not confined to political disputes, in which contending elites deploy armed actors against one another. Such conflicts are dangerous enough. We are now observing something more disturbing, which is deep fissures within society and communal conflicts that threaten the very fabric of society itself. The passions of ethnic identity and faith are being turned to fratricidal bitterness. These are conflicts that cannot be resolved by ceasefires and political agreements among leaders. They will need processes of social healing among the communities themselves, which require wisdom, patience, and farsighted leadership.

This kind of deep societal schism is a widespread concern across our region. There are many reasons for these societal fractures. One of the reasons is that it is convenient for leaders to provoke these disturbances to distract attention and divert energies away from their own misdeeds and failed governance. Eritrean officers are especially capable in this regard. Irrespective of the origins of such dissension, these problems cannot be resolved in the absence of patient, and skilled leadership atop an inclusive and transparent government. Eritrea's style of governance is the antithesis of this.

The complete, comprehensive and verified withdrawal of all Eritrean military, security and intelligence forces from Ethiopia is a precondition for Ethiopia to take the necessary steps to address its national crisis.

The people and the Government of the National Regional State of Tigray are fully supportive of the concept of an inclusive, transparent, and internationally mediated national dialogue, to address all



aspects of the Ethiopian national crisis. Moreover, we are strongly supportive of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and are committed to fully cooperating with the Commission. Finally, we stand ready to bring to justice any and all persons implicated in the violations of international law.

The process of societal fragmentation and generalized conflict in our region is advanced. We fear that unless it is halted and reversed soon, through the steps identified above along with other necessary measures (including, *inter alia*, an end to hate speech, the lifting of censorship and restrictions on the press, and the nation-wide depoliticization of humanitarian programming), the consequences will be catastrophic. We worry that the African Union and the United Nations have no strategy for addressing this broader problem, and will realize its severity only when it is too late to arrest the inexorable journey to the abyss.

In Tigray, we face a more pressing deadline. It takes approximately sixty days for an adult human being to die of starvation. Seven million Tigrayans are facing semi-starvation, that is, a brutally insufficient diet. We will not all perish in sixty days, but there are limits to the endurance of a society under the pressure of a starvation siege. That siege currently appears to have no end. Although international law assures us that humanitarian assistance should be unconditional, every proposal for such assistance comes with a condition, and every week that condition is changed. Currently, the premise under which the humanitarian negotiations are conducted is that the victims of the crime need to prove their case before the obligations of the perpetrators are met. This is the converse of what we are entitled to expect, which is that humanitarian aid should flow to meet the needs of the innocent, with restrictions and conditions imposed solely on the basis of the reports of independent monitors.

We draw our conclusions about the goodwill of those who are shifting the goalposts and adopting the premise of forced mass starvation as the default option unless certain political objectives are achieved. Eritrea is fully informed of this state of affairs, because it is enforcing it. The Eritrean leadership is also well aware that no people will face collective annihilation by hunger silently. The Eritrean intent is clear. The president has stated that his objective is to ‘crush’ Tigray. That goal cannot be achieved by starvation alone and, if Eritrea is to prevail, another military operation is in the pipeline.

The immediate, unconditional end to the siege of Tigray is imperative. This includes the withdrawal of invading forces from all parts of Tigray, the provision of unfettered and sustained humanitarian assistance at the scale required to meet needs, as provided for under the Geneva Conventions, as well as the resumption of banking services and the cross-border commercial activities. As I have repeatedly asserted, this is an obligation under international humanitarian law and should not be subject to negotiations.

Your Excellencies,

My overriding concern is the survival of my people, who have entrusted me with taking every necessary measure in pursuit of that non-negotiable goal. I continue to hope that the international community can



do its share in protecting our right to survive as a people in line with fundamental international norms, and principles. However, if that hope is to be realized, Eritrea will need to act in a manner consistent with those norms and principles. Failing that, the people of Tigray will once again bear the sole burden of ensuring their survival as a people.

Looking into the future, the survival of Tigray and the Tigrayan people requires the creation of a political system in Ethiopia that accommodates diversity, and protects hard-won self-determination rights to the fullest. Furthermore, our survival as a people is also inextricably tied to the presence of a system of regional governance in the Horn of Africa that provides for the security, wellbeing and rights of all. We are committed to doing our share in realizing that goal.

In conclusion, let me reiterate our commitment to the resolution of the crisis engulfing Ethiopia through good faith negotiation. I once more call on Your Excellencies, representing the leaders of Africa, to expedite the process towards achieving that goal, which we all share.

Please, Excellencies, accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Debretsion G/Michael /PHD/
President



CC:

H.E. Antonio Guterres, Secretary General, United Nations

H.E. Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Ambassador David Satterfield, United States Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, President of the United Nations Security Council (May 2022)

Members of the United Nations Security Council