



Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (“GSTS”)

Congressional Testimony on the War against Tigray State in Ethiopia

Submitted to: Don Beyer, United States Congressman, Virginia Eighth District

Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Trade, Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures. Science, Space, Technology Subcommittee on Space, Subcommittee on Oversight and Subcommittee on Environment

The Ethiopia and Eritrean Invasion of Tigray

A full-fledged war is raging in the Tigray Regional State of Ethiopia. As of the 4th of November 2020, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared war on Tigray. Neighboring Amhara State troops have been amassing around Tigray partnered with Federal Mechanized Divisions. They started invading Western Tigray on the 5th of November. Civilian eye witnesses who fled across the Sudanese border of Humera, a critical Tigrian border town (sharing an intersect with both Eritrea and Sudan), say that shelling was coming from both the Eritrean side in the north and the Amhara state in the south. This was done as a coordinated attack.

The Ethiopian PM warned of aerial bombing of Tigrian towns. This soon became a reality. On the morning of the 16th of November, he bombed a school and St George’s Church in the capital of Tigray, Mekelle, killing 2 people and wounding many. The PM has claimed that this war is a “targeted strike of military installation”. However, this is clearly not the case, it is a definite move intended to terrify ordinary civilians. The indiscriminate bombing also targeted several other towns and vital infrastructure developments such as the Tekeze Electric Power dam and the Welkait Sugar Factory. This can only be described an inhuman barbaric act. It is astounding that a man who has waged what can only be called a genocidal war on the Tigrian people was only the Nobel Peace Prize less than a year ago!

Emergency assessment reports of the situation in Western and North-Western zone areas indicate a tragedy unfolding. It is estimated that about 1.35 million people have been displaced and the situation is worsening. It is reported that 11 mothers gave birth on their way to Shire. They were walking on foot to flee the incoming attacks. There has been heavy artillery shelling’s to the town of Humera followed by the separation of families. In the fog many are fleeing in different directions to escape the tragedies. Tigray is a drought prone area, having around one million PSNP looking for food support and about half a million emergency beneficiaries every year. This massive crisis is causing huge numbers of internally displaced people who can no longer access the food they have grown throughout the year. There is already a food shortage and a famine of



catastrophic level may follow. The grain reserves in Humera are totally destroyed by the Eritrean forces. Invading forces have destroyed homes and food supplies in many other areas in Tigray, leaving those who have survived to stare.

Even when electric power was successfully diverted from the Tekeze power plant to provide electricity to Tigray, the Ethiopian air-force subsequently bombed it to ensure the population wouldn't benefit from it. Disturbing news is now also emerging that the UAE is supplying sophisticated drones to the Ethiopian government for use in attacking its own citizens causing very severe damage on human life and property. The extra-regional actors have a military base in Assab, a port in Eritrea from where it has been conducting deadly drone attacks on the people of Yemen, and now helping this brutal axis of Eritrean and Ethiopian invading forces. To counteract these daily airstrikes Tigrian Defense Forces were forced to fire long range missiles targeting Gondar, Bahir Dar and Asmara (Eritrean capital) Airports, places where these sorties have originated. Tigray's President, Dr Debretsion Gebremichael had warned there would be a commensurate response.

Currently Federal forces are engaged in a military offensive from the south and coordinated Ethiopian and Eritrean (16 mechanized divisions) forces have been attacking on several fronts from the North. Several towns have fallen onto Abiy's forces. The Tigray President Dr Debretsion, in a televised address on the 18th of November described the heinous summary executions of Tigrian, non-combatant youth in Shire, and wide spread looting of not only government offices and buildings but also from ordinary households.

There are credible reports of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and elsewhere being ethnically profiled with many ending up in jails, bank accounts closed and homes raided. There has also been a distinct rise in the detention of journalists and reporters. PM Abiy has refused to a ceasefire and dialogue with Tigrian leaders or Ethiopian opposition party's prominent leaders the majority of whom are in jail in Addis.

The Eritrean president Issaias Afewerki and the Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Both leaders visited Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE receiving lavish gifts, in 2018.

President Isaias and his party were allies of the TPLF whilst Eritrea was part of Ethiopia, and indeed both fought the repressive military government of Col. Mengistu together (see below), eventually winning the war in 1991. Consequently, Eritrea became an independent country with full blessing from Ethiopia. Then relations soured again 1998 leading to a devastating Ethio-Eritrean war, and Isaias and the Ethiopia (specially Tigray) turned bitter enemies. Increasingly, President Isaias became envious of Ethiopia's emergence as regional power and its significant economic growth compared to that of



Eritrea that remains the fourth poorest country in the world.[1] Vowing in one public statement that he would return Tigray to the state it was in at the 1970s mark.

Internet shutdowns

According to the NGO NetBlocks, Politically motivated Internet shutdowns have intensified in severity and duration under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed despite the country's rapid digitalization and reliance on cellular internet connectivity in recent years.[135] In 2020, Internet shutdowns by the Ethiopian government have been described as "frequently deployed".[136] Access Now said in a statement that shutdowns have become a "go-to tool for authorities to muzzle unrest and activism"

Blockade of the main road linking Addis to Mekelle

The main road that links Addis Ababa to Mekelle has been sporadically closed over the last 3 years. This road is used to transport people, goods, food and other merchandise and has been in operation for over 80 years.

Political assassinations

High-Profile assassinations have been unheard of in Ethiopia for the past 30 years of EPDRF's rule until Abiy took over.

- First, soon after Abiy came back from a visit to Egypt, the charismatic Ethiopian engineer Simegnaw Bekele who was in charge of the \$4.8bn Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, was found dead on the 26th July 2018 at a major Addis square with a bullet wound behind his right ear. He was due to give a press conference that fateful morning. NO independent investigation took place and the government ruled it as a suicide without coronial evidence. However, hundreds protested, angry at the engineers' death as many suspect it to be a murder.
- Second, the Tigrian Ethiopian Army chief, a member of the TPLF, General Saare Mekonnen was gunned down on the 22nd of June by his own body guard in his own house. There has been no official investigation and General Saare's wife who witnessed the assassination hasn't been asked to give evidence in court of law.
- On the 29th of July 2020 a popular Oromo musician and activist Hachalu Hundessa was assassinated. His body was buried quickly without forensic examination. Oromo activists and politicians who raised concern that due process of the law had not taken place, including Jawar

Mohammed and Bekele Gerba were arrested on bogus charges and still remain in custody.

- *The jailing of all Opposition Politicians* : the aftermath of Hachalu's assassination has seen virtually all the main opposing political party leaders arrested, and although a few have been released since most remain in custody.
- *Barring of NGOs, International Experts and Journalists from flying to Tigray*: journalists covering the recent Tigrayan Regional election, NGOs and a Chinese expert engineering team have been stopped from travelling to Tigray.
- *The scapegoating of regional discontent on the TPLF*: virtually any political turmoil that had been erupting in the country since Abiy took over including mass killings and even the assassination of Hachalu were blamed on the TPLF without any credible evidence or investigation. This further eroded the fragile relationship of Abiy with the Tigrayan people.
- *The indefinite postponement of the general Election by Abiy against the constitution*: the final straw that severed any kind of working relationship Tigray Regional State came when Abiy indefinitely postponed the General Election illegally, against the constitution because of COVID 19, despite many countries conducting elections observing social distancing. Tigray perceived this as a delaying tactic as Abiy had lost core support following the jailing of Oromo leaders and the crushing of the Woliata and Benshangul Gumuz descents. His main support base is the Amhara elite (including many returned Derg affiliated Diaspora) who want to change the Federal System enshrined in the constitution. Their desire is to devolve Ethiopia into a unitary state with top-down central control, curtailing local self-rule, as evident from the formation of the single party leadership of the Prosperity Party.

Tigray Regional State refused to be part of this unconstitutional consolidation of power and has stuck with the constitution. Thus, they ran an independent and mandated 5 yearly regional election. This saw 2.7 million people voting in a dignified, free and fair election, in the presence of international observers and media. Tigray refused to recognize the unelected Abiy as PM after the 10th of October as this was the final date of

the official party's rule. The TPLF have maintained that the Ethiopian parliament as illegitimate, despite Abiy now stipulating he would have an election in 2021 after all. In response to these claims, Abiy froze Tigray's regional budget leaving government employees without pay. He detained medical supplies including masks and vaccines that were to be sent to the Tigray region. This is a violation of basic human rights. During the recent locust invasion in many parts of Tigray, he deliberately withheld aerial spraying of locusts for Tigray when this was provided to the neighboring Amhara region; worst still he confiscated a drone donated to disperse locusts from being sent to Tigray. There is little evidence to show that the \$64 Million USD given to Ethiopia (in May 2020) from the World Bank to deter locusts, was actually used for its endeavored purpose.

Chronological order of the current civil and international war in Ethiopia

- As of the 4th of November 2020, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared war on Tigray. Neighboring Amhara State troops have been amassing around Tigray partnered with Federal Mechanized Divisions. They started invading Western Tigray on the 5th of November. Civilian eye witnesses who fled across the Sudanese border of Humera, a critical Tigrian border town (sharing an intersect with both Eritrea and Sudan), say that shelling was coming from both the Eritrean side in the north and the Amhara state in the south. This was done as a coordinated attack.
- The Ethiopian PM warned of aerial bombing of Tigrian towns. This soon became a reality. On the morning of the 16th of November, he bombed a school and St George's Church in the capital of Tigray, Mekelle, killing 2 people and wounding many.
- As the fighting intensified in Western Tigray and other fronts with the Ethiopian Federal forces cut off the main road as the supply line to Sudan.
- Hundreds of thousands of refugees, including women, children and the elderly started the long route to makeshift camps in Sudan.
- The war has now intensified on many fronts surrounding Tigray, the latest being the Adigrat area where hundreds of civilians are killed from the artillery shelling.
- Currently Federal forces are engaged in a military offensive from the south and coordinated Ethiopian and Eritrean (16 mechanized divisions) forces have been attacking on several fronts from the North.
- There are credible reports of Tigrians in Addis Ababa and elsewhere being ethnically profiled with many ending up in jails, bank accounts closed and homes raided.

- govern the behavior of international organizations and aid agencies in their work related to IDPs. The Sphere Standards refer to the minimum standards required of non-state actors when they respond to disasters. These minimum standards include water, sanitation, food, nutrition, shelter, and health care. Access to these services ensures the right to life with dignity. Groups of humanitarian agencies developed the standards. They are anchored to the principles of humanity, impartiality, and the right to life.
- Proposal for an independent investigation by the UN and other entities on the assassination of prominent Oromo artist, Hachalu Hundeeassaa, and other political assassinations of several high-profile officials including the Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces General Seare Mekonnen, General Gezae Abera, President of Amhara Regional State Dr Ambachew Mekonnen, and the Engineer Simegnew Bekele is refused by the led by Abiy. In recent months, the reported gruesome killings of civilians in various parts of the country is a grave sign that peace and security in Ethiopia is non-existent. Instead of initiating a thorough, comprehensive and credible investigation on the dozens of high-level targeted assassinations, the Federal Government officials gave highly choreographed public statements that are usually signs of intrigue. The Federal Government has already announced the guilty without investigation, which also has led to widespread suspicion and public rejection.

With regards to the Statement on Amnesty International's Report on the Killings of Civilians:

1. Amnesty International released entitled "Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in a massacre in Tigray state", issued on 12 November 2020.^[2] In this report, Amnesty International indicated that "scores and likely hundreds of people were stabbed or hacked to death in Mai-Kadra town in the South-West Zone of Ethiopia's Tigray Region on the night of 9 November, 2020."^[3]

2. Amnesty International claims that based on few witnesses and confirmation by an independent pathologist commissioned by Amnesty International, the dead bodies "had gaping wounds that appear to have been inflicted by a sharp weapon such as knives and machetes." These witnesses are cited as also attesting that "there were no signs of gunshot wounds." GSTS appreciates Amnesty International's attempt to report abuses under such difficult situation amidst the war on Tigray, nonetheless, the GSTS is deeply concerned regarding the anomalies in the austerity rigour of the investigation; the



evidence on which the findings of the report rests, and thereof the impartiality of the conclusions.

3.The Amnesty International's report excessively relies on source of information is "witnesses who were providing food and other supplies to the Ethiopian Defence Forces (EDF), who visited the town immediately after the deadly attacks." We wonder how Amnesty International considered witnesses that are "providing food and other supplies" to one of the parties to the conflict as reliable to draw the conclusions it did. As the witnesses were not in the place of killing and did not provide an account of killings, and actually "visited the town immediately after the deadly attacks", we question the reliability of the information they can give. Further, in the absence of the views and positions of the other party to this conflict, the Tigray armed forces, how complete is a report and conclusions based on witnesses from one of the parties to the conflict?

4.Amnesty International admits that it "has not yet been able to confirm who was responsible for these killings". Yet, based on an incomplete and unsubstantiated evidence, Amnesty International implicates the responsibility of the killings to forces loyal to the "Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)". This self-contradictory statement by one of the biggest human rights organizations is not only anomalous in scientific attribution of criminal responsibility of extreme consequence but also a very low standard of investigation of war crimes.

5.In the same way, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has confirmed the same Amnesty International report but with contradictory attribution of responsibilities. Both Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International face serious questions on their independence. GSTS calls leadership of the Amnesty International to investigate if this report has passed through its established clearance protocols and standard of investigations for such complication.

6.Therefore, GSTS calls on the international community, in particular, the United Nations Security Council, and UN Human Rights Council (OHCHR), and other human rights bodies to conduct thorough, comprehensive and credible investigations on all killings of civilians, and human rights violations against people of Tigray origin.

Concluding Remarks

The conflict is advancing rapidly and there are reports of GENOCIDAL crimes perpetrated by federal troops. Abiy has refused any form of dialogue and stated that the war in Tigray will be over soon. However, history shows us such conflicts can't be sorted by brute force particularly when the Tigray people have embraced the fight for self-determination. As usual the main casualties of war are children women, the elderly and the sick. Efforts must therefore be made for immediate cease-fire of all forms of hostilities and commence

all-inclusive national dialogue for a peaceful resolution, free movement of people and essential supplies to the affected communities. The international community must demand that the Federal government restores basic services (electric power, telecommunication, internet, bank, roads, flights, etc.) as well as delivering life-saving medical, food and other supplies to the people of Tigray. There is an urgent need to establish alternative humanitarian corridors through Sudan for the immediate delivery of food, emergency medical supplies and other essential resources to millions of people in the Tigray region. Finally, organizations such as the Red Cross and World Food Programme should be allowed to start humanitarian operations urgently.

Proposed actions

1. Force Abiy's Administration to seek a political solution to the current crisis, in a manner that preserves democracy, stability, and peace, and promotes truth, all inclusive dialogue, justice and reconciliation among Ethiopians;
2. Enforce cessation of hostilities including war and media war and allow and facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid services in Tigray;
3. Force Abiy Ahmed lead government immediately, restore telecom and internet services in Tigray and reopen Tigrian bank accounts;
4. Stop incitement of hate and active ethnic cleansing against Tigrians and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, and the invasion and subjugation of the people of Tigray by armed forces, against the will of the people;
5. Intervene to uphold the responsibility to protect by ensuring respect of international human rights of the people of Ethiopia to live in peace, exercise their rights of freedom of expression, freedom of movement, self-determination and self-rule, and to respect the will of the people;
6. Force the immediate release of all political prisoners, opening access to the Internet, restoration of freedom of press and speech and announce a roadmap for election;
7. Conduct UN led investigation into all killings of innocent people, the assassinations of high-profile personalities, the kidnapping of university students, and serious human rights violations, arrests and abuses perpetrated on Ethiopians from various ethnic groups in various parts of the country;
8. Investigate all those involved in the ordering, implementing and propagating the ongoing ethnic cleansing including foreign-based and registered media, ESAT and similar media outlets that are spreading hate speech and genocidal incitements.



9. Ensure accountability of officials and individuals involved in civilian killings and potential crime against humanity, war crimes and incitement of hate killing and genocide.
10. Agree on clear consequences and measures for violators of peaceful efforts:
 - a. designation of intransigent armed groups as hostile forces.
 - b. Targeted individual sanction, regional travel bans and asset freezes.

GSTS Global Leadership

[1] <https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/the-poorest-countries-in-the-world>

[2] Amnesty International, Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in a massacre in Tigray state, 12 November 2020, available

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/ethiopia-investigation-reveals-evidence-that-scores-of-civilians-were-killed-in-massacre-in-tigray-state/>

[3] Ibid