

**The Honorable Members of the House of Representatives and Senate
United States Congress
Washington, D.C. 20515**

January 25, 2021

Re: URGENT Humanitarian Crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia

Dear Honorable Members of Congress:

It is with deep sadness that I kindly request your support in ending the humanitarian crisis in Tigray region, Ethiopia. Since the large-scale war on the people of Tigray started on November 4th, 2020, the humanitarian crisis has increased exponentially with no end to this crisis. United Nations members and many other organizations have called for an immediate ceasefire to allow humanitarian aid to reach areas in danger of massive hunger and death. However, the large-scale war continues and the lives of millions of people in the Tigray region remain at risk for an unimaginable crisis and death.

On November 4th, 2020, the federal government along with foreign forces declared a military heavy "law enforcement operation" to capture members of the Tigray region government and take control of Tigray. The national media, controlled by the federal government, informed the world media of this "law enforcement operation." The Tigray regional government assessment was the Ethiopian federal government was declaring a full large-scale war to eliminate the people and government of Tigray. At the same time of declaring "law enforcement operation," transitional Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared a six-month state of emergency in the region of Tigray and ordered a complete blackout for the entire region. Electricity, waterlines, internet, telecommunication, and food supply were completely cut off. Travel to and from Tigray was prohibited. Tigray was ordered to be in complete darkness.

The lack of respect for human life in the Tigray region is unimaginable. Those escaping to neighboring Sudan have painted a picture similar to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Between November 9th and 10th, a series of ethnic cleansing and mass murders took place in a small town, Mai Kadra, and refugees fleeing the town were interviewed by various media agencies including *Reuters*, *Financial Times*, *The New Humanitarian*, *Associated Press*, and others. They report the ethnic cleansing and mass murders were committed on innocent Tigray civilians.

At the start of the war, the Tigray regional government called on the African Union and neighboring countries to mediate a ceasefire. On November 9th,

2020, the African Union Chairperson called for immediate cessation of hostilities and requested both parties to respect human rights and ensure the protection of civilians. The Prime Minister of Sudan, Abdalla Hamdok, repeatedly tried to negotiate for peace, however, his request was denied by the federal government of Ethiopia. Despite countless efforts by the Tigray regional government, all attempts toward peace failed because the federal government of Ethiopia denied all cease fire requests.

Similarly, the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (U.N.) called for immediate cessation of hostilities and requested dialog between both parties. However, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed refused all requests stating, "the international community should stand by until the government of Ethiopia submits its request for assistance." Despite all of these concerns from human right and peace advocates, ethnic-targeted war on Tigray continues. The EU has subsequently suspended the annual \$110 million budgetary aid to Ethiopia.

On December 2nd, 2020, soon after capturing Mekelle and declaring victory and full control of Tigray, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed reached an agreement with the U.N. to allow unimpeded access for aid organizations in Tigray. A week later, on December 8th, 2020, the Associated Press reported "Ethiopia's security forces shot at and detain [four] United Nations staffers as they tried to reach part of the embattled Tigray region." An Ethiopian senior government official, Redwan Hussein, admitted the attack and said "they were told in some areas they were not supposed to move. But they indulged themselves in a kind of adventurous expedition. No entity, multilateral or unilateral, is supposed to supplant the government. We, the government, would call the shots." The four U.N. staffers were trying to assess roads, a key step before entry by larger aid convoys. Access to lifesaving food, medicine, water, protection, and other aid is of urgent and critical matter for Tigray. The Norwegian Refugee Council head, Jan Egeland, expressed his frustration stating the organization was "deeply concerned to find that humanitarian access to the region is still significantly constrained. These people can no longer be made to wait. Aid must not be left at a standstill. We have been standing ready to deliver food, emergency shelter and other essential materials for weeks, and we expected the deal with the federal government of Ethiopia to clear the way."

It has now been almost three months, and the humanitarian crisis has reached a new level of starvation and death. The *Washington Post* on January 17th, 2021, states, "the first humanitarian workers to arrive after pleading with the Ethiopian government for access describe weakened children dying from diarrhea after drinking from rivers. Shops were looted or depleted weeks ago." The report further states, nearly 4.5 million people need emergency food and unless aid reaches the people of Tigray, "hundreds of thousands might starve

to death," if not already dead. Due to fear, hunger, thirst, and trauma, more than 2 million people have been internally displaced in Tigray region and nearly 60,000 people have fled to Sudan as refugees. Mari Carmen Vinales, head of the emergency unit for Doctors Without Borders, told the Associated Press "there is an extreme urgent need- I don't know what more words in English to use - to rapidly scale up the humanitarian response because the population is dying every day as we speak." Hunger and thirst are of extreme concerns and in places like Adigrat, a city of 140,000 people, there are only 2 wells left out of 21. The Famine Early Warning System Network, funded and managed by the U.S., says "parts of central and eastern Tigray are likely in Emergency Phase 4, a step below famine." *The Economist* on January 23rd, 2021, states, "after two months of war, Tigray faces starvation." Over 30 years ago, drought, war, and government denial of basic human aid such as food and water caused famine in the Tigray region resulting in the loss of 1 million lives. Today, the complete blackout, desert locust destruction of crops, burning of crops by invading forces, and federal government denial of humanitarian aid into Tigray region is reproducing the famine experienced over 30 years ago.

Although transitional Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared victory on November 28th, 2020, fighting continues throughout Tigray region and destruction of public and private property and mass murder of men, women, children continue. The destruction and looting of ancient churches and mosque also continue. Burning of homes, crops, and killing of livestock continues. Factories, universities, and hotels have been destroyed and looted. Hospitals and other health centers are destroyed and abandoned. Over 90% of the ambulances in Tigray region are missing. Sexual violence of young girls and women continues. Banks are closed. Bank accounts opened in Tigray region are closed in all of Ethiopia. Tigrayans living and working in other parts of Ethiopia have been removed from work and subjected to hate and discrimination by non-Tigrayans. Without an actionable action by the U.S., many more Tigrayan citizens will die from hunger or gunfire in the upcoming short weeks.

From the start of the war, Tigrayans living outside of Ethiopia have peacefully protested against this war. It is clear these protests have not been enough. The European Union, United Nations and other humanitarian organizations have exhausted all avenues to stop the war and provide humanitarian aid, however, these efforts have not been enough. Several U.S. government officials have condemned the war on the people of Tigray and the associated extreme humanitarian crisis; however, these efforts have not been enough.

United States Congressman, Congresswoman, and Senators, throughout your careers you have been iconic leaders and have served and protected the

American people from domestic and foreign powers. We are all witness to your willingness to protect the American people from several crises including COVID-19 disease. We are all witness to your protection and support of men, women, and children regardless of race, class, gender, and citizenship status. I humbly and respectfully request all of you to use your platform and take an actionable stance to end the war on the people of Tigray and the greatest humanitarian crisis since the famine of 1980s.

Respectfully Request a call for...

1. Immediate ceasefire.
2. Immediate removal of all invading forces out of Tigray region.
3. Immediate and open access to all humanitarian aid agencies to all areas of Tigray.
4. Immediate restoration of electricity, internet, telecommunication, and water to all affected areas of Tigray.
5. Immediate and independent investigation of human rights abuses and violations against men, women, and children.
6. Immediate and independent investigation of all forces involved in the destruction and looting of public and private property including but not limited to schools, health centers, churches, and mosques.
7. Immediate and independent investigation of all forces involved in the mass murder of civilians, burning of crops, killing of livestock, and mass murder and displacement of Eritrean refugees.
8. Immediate monetary and non-monetary support to prevent famine, disease, and death.

Sincerely,

Dr. Woldu