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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL (UNSC)

&

**AFRICAN UNION PEACE AND SECURITY
COUNCIL (PSC)**

CRISIS

THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA

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“The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2019 to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali for his efforts to achieve peace and international cooperation ...”

October 11, 2019 press release by the Norwegian Nobel Committee

We have an old saying: “በሰላም እንድታደር ጎረቤትህ ሰላም ይደር” “yoo ollaan nagayaan bule, nagaan bulanni.” It is a saying shared in many African languages, which means, “For you to have a peaceful night, your neighbor shall have a peaceful night as well.” The essence of this proverb guides the strengthening of relations in the region. We now strive to live with our neighbors in peace and harmony.

December 10, 2019 Nobel Lecture by Abiy Ahmed Ali

“As Prime Minister and a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Abiy Ahmed has a special responsibility to end the conflict [in Tigray] and help to create peace.”

January 13, 2022 statement by the Norwegian Nobel Committee

Historical Background

The most recent conflict between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray region, beginning in 2020 with the onset of military operations against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), was only a chapter in the voluminous and sanguinary history of the region and its relationship with Ethiopia. From the eighteenth century until the ending of World War II, the Tigray region had experienced unstable and bellicose conditions due in part to the region's geographic position – in northern Ethiopia on the border of Eritrea – referred to as “the gateway to Ethiopia” for invaders such as the British, Italians, Sudanese, and Egyptians.¹ As so often happens, war brings famine, and Tigray was no stranger to its effects: seventeen different famines struck the region between 1889 and 1997.² The famine Tigray experienced between 1972 and 1974 was especially horrid, and it along with a longstanding resentment of the centralized power of the Ethiopian government gave rise to a revolution in Addis Ababa in 1974 deposition of the Ethiopian Empire and the establishment of military rule under the Derg military junta. It is hard to overstate the emphasis that Derg put on centralization, and saw any region vying for autonomy as a threat to Ethiopian interests.³ This was in part due to the junta's Marxist ideology and deep-seated connection with the Soviet Union which sponsored them militarily, leading to a proxy-war between them and the US-backed Somalians in 1977 over territorial disputes.⁴ In this political climate, seven university students met in 1974 to establish the Tigray National Organization (TNO) in response to the repression of Tigrayans and Ethiopians around the nation. The TNO soon evolved into the TPLF in 1975, a markedly more militarized version of its mother organization, and after sixteen years of guerilla fighting eventually took control of the Ethiopian capital in 1991.⁵

Between 1991 and 2012, Tigrayan leader Meles Zenawi ruled Ethiopia and – albeit perpetrating massive political and economic repression throughout the nation – facilitated development of infrastructure and of peace abroad, specifically during the secession of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011.⁶ After Meles' death in 2012, the TPLF showed its ability to outlive its leader, and continued to rule until 2018, when Abiy Ahmed Ali was elected prime minister and heralded as a peacemaker that could heal the scars of the years of ethnic-based violence. Confidence in and around Ethiopia was high as Abiy took office, and after quickly resolving border disputes with Eritrea, it seemed as though Ethiopians as a whole would enjoy relative stability and freedom under a non-military regime for the first time in recent history. The Nobel

¹ Aregawi Berhe, “The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front,” *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 569–92.

² John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 49.

³ Aregawi Berhe, “The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front,” *African Affairs* 103, no. 413 (2004): 569–92.

⁴ “Ethiopian-Somali War Over the Ogaden Region (1977–1978) •,” March 21, 2016,

<https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/ethiopian-somali-war-over-ogaden-region-1977-1978/>.

⁵ Jason Burke and Jason Burke Africa correspondent, “Rise and Fall of Ethiopia's TPLF – from Rebels to Rulers and Back,” *The Guardian*, November 25, 2020, sec. World news,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/25/rise-and-fall-of-ethiopia-tplf-tigray-peoples-liberation-front>.

⁶ “War in Ethiopia,” Global Conflict Tracker, <https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia>.

Committee agreed, awarding Abiy with the Nobel Peace Prize for “important reforms that give many citizens hope for a better life and a brighter future” enacted during his first hundred days in office.⁷ Not soon after Abiy’s international recognition for peacemaking would conditions in Ethiopia deteriorate and fall back into a pattern of armed conflict all too familiar to its citizens.

Ethiopia-Tigray Conflict

Nine days before officially receiving his Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway, Prime Minister Abiy and the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) agreed to disband the party and formed, in its wake, the Prosperity Party. The former EPRDF, a political coalition of four ethnic political parties, was led by the TPLF, which chose not to join the new ruling coalition.⁸ The sacking of TPLF officials from security posts, the arresting of TPLF generals, and structural changes that reduced the Tigrayan leadership of the armed forces contributed to the TPLF’s decision not to join the new and improved ruling coalition. In addition, TPLF officials “opposed the peace settlement with Eritrea in 2018, viewing it as a major threat” due to the several-decade history of conflict between Eritrea and Tigray.⁹ Ostracized from national leadership, Tigrayan officials decided, despite opposition from the Prosperity Party-controlled national government, to hold local elections in Tigray in September 2020, a move that the federal government viewed as a “provocation”.¹⁰ Tigray’s local elections were largely viewed as an assertion of regional rights in opposition to the perceived shift by the new government away from a federalist system to a unitary system.

Tensions between the regional Tigray government (led by the TPLF) and Ethiopian federal government (led by the Prosperity Party) rapidly deteriorated between September and November 2020. On November 4, 2020 the federal government initiated military operations in the Tigray region after Tigray Defense Forces attacked a federal military base, which the TPLF claimed was necessary to prevent a looming attack by federal forces.¹¹ However, reporting by the *New York Times* indicates a planned effort by the federal and Tigrayan governments to prepare for a conflict long-before the November escalation with the prime minister informing government officials of the probability of his likely military intervention in Tigray in mid-October while Tigrayan military officials looked for allies in Ethiopia’s military command in Tigray.¹² As federal forces invaded from the south and Eritrean forces invaded from the north,

⁷ Matina Stevis-Gridneff, “Nobel Peace Prize Awarded to Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopian Prime Minister,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/11/world/africa/nobel-peace-prize.html>.

⁸ Tom Gardner, “Will Abiy Ahmed’s Bet on Ethiopia’s Political Future Pay Off?,” *Foreign Policy*, January 21, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/21/will-abiy-ahmed-eprdf-bet-ethiopia-political-future-pay-off/>.

⁹ Heather Evennett, “Conflict in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia” (House of Lords Library: UK Parliament, November 11, 2022), <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/conflict-in-the-tigray-region-of-ethiopia/>.

¹⁰ Jason Burke, “Rise and Fall of Ethiopia’s TPLF – from Rebels to Rulers and Back,” *The Guardian*, November 25, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/25/rise-and-fall-of-ethiopias-tplf-tigray-peoples-liberation-front>.

¹¹ Lauren Ploch Blanchard, “Ethiopia’s Transition and the Tigray Conflict - Summary” (Congressional Research Service: United States Congress, September 9, 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46905/4>.

¹² Declan Walsh, “The Nobel Peace Prize That Paved the Way for War,” *The New York Times*, December 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/15/world/africa/ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-nobel-war.html>.

it became clear that the newly-formed peace alliance between Eritrea and Ethiopia shared a common enemy: Tigray.

AU & UN Actions

On November 2, 2022, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF announced a ceasefire agreement (which is discussed in detail below). Until then, the UNSC had taken no substantial steps to mitigate the conflict besides calling for an cessation of hostilities. This inaction was highlighted by Human Rights Watch in summer 2021.¹³ However, the UN published a key report on human rights violations during the conflict: the Human Rights Council’s Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (September 19, 2022). While key findings of the report are discussed below before a review of the ceasefire agreement, delegates are encouraged to read the report, which is linked in the resource review, for additional information.

Authors’ Note: The following paragraph discusses armed conflict, killing, and sexual and gender-based violence.

After shelling Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, on November 28, 2020, Ethiopian federal forces took control of the city and, as a result, Ethiopian federal forces “committed widespread extrajudicial killings, rapes and other forms of sexual violence, and looting.”¹⁴ The report indicates that Tigray forces, also, were responsible for killings that began in late July 2021 in the town of Kobo where Tigrayan forces, “[wearing] a mixture of military and civilian clothes” killed, beat, raped civilians. A woman described the attack to the Commission: “Two [Tigrayan] attackers entered our compound, beat me with a stick and shot my husband dead. He used to take care of me. I am now only left with the children. Whatever I find, I feed them with.”¹⁵ Additionally, the Commission indicated that Ethiopian federal forces were responsible for a drone strike on an internally displaced persons camp that killed “approximately 60 civilians.”¹⁶ The Commission also found that over 1,000 women and girls had been systematically raped or subjected to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by Ethiopian forces; Tigray forces also engaged in these criminal acts, but at a smaller scale; the report also found that men and boys were also targeted and subjected to SGBV.¹⁷

The Ethiopian federal government, as indicated by the Commission’s report, was responsible for a systematic isolation of Tigray preventing the importation of agricultural, medical, and other vital resources.¹⁸ As a result, a humanitarian crisis, already inflamed by the

¹³ See Human Rights Watch, “UN Security Council: End Inaction on Ethiopia,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 2, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/02/un-security-council-end-inaction-ethiopia>.

¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia” (United Nations Human Rights Council, September 19, 2022), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ichre-ethiopia/index>, 6

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-10

¹⁸ See *Ibid.*, 11

ongoing drought affecting Ethiopia, resulted in an estimated “5.3 million people in Tigray, around 90% of the population, ... in dire need of humanitarian assistance;”¹⁹ 3.8 million people in Tigray have been able to receive food assistance from the UN as of February 2023.²⁰

Despite the ongoing humanitarian crisis, the conflict has abated after the November 2, 2022 signing of a joint statement between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF. This agreement, brokered by the African Union and signed in South Africa, included, but are not limited to, the following provisions:²¹

- a ceasefire between Ethiopian forces and the TPLF;
- “a detailed program of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of the TPLF combatants;”
- methods to restore “Constitutional order in the Tigray region ... and a Transitional Justice Policy framework to ensure accountability, truth, reconciliation, and healing;”
- the Ethiopian government agreed to restore public services damaged during the conflict.

With this ceasefire agreement in place, the UNSC and AU can begin work to facilitate the restoration of political stability in Ethiopia while also ensuring that violations of international law are accounted for by all parties. It is imperative that delegates understand the ongoing humanitarian crisis occurring across Ethiopia as a result of the drought and the conflict, while also keeping in mind the need for truth and reconciliation in the country.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11

²⁰ See UN News, “Ethiopia: UN Refugee Agency Chief Calls for More Aid, New Long-Term Strategy,” *United Nations News*, February 8, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133287>.

²¹ Quotes in the following list are from “Joint Statement between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPFL)” accessible at <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/joint-statement-between-the-government-of-the-federal-democratic-republic-of-ethiopia-and-the-tigray-peoples-liberation-front-tplf>

RESOURCE REVIEW

Resources

UN and AU Documents

UN Human Rights Council. “Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia.” United Nations Human Rights Council, September 19, 2022. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ichre-ethiopa/index>.

A report detailing human rights abuses during the conflict.

UN News. “Ethiopia: UN Refugee Agency Chief Calls for More Aid, New Long-Term Strategy.” *United Nations News*, February 8, 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133287>.

Recent news from the UN about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Tigray.

Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Ethiopia - Situation Report.” February 2, 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-situation-report-2-feb-2023>

An overview of the humanitarian situation and drought affecting Ethiopia.

Secondary Sources

Heather Evennett. “Conflict in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia.” House of Lords Library: UK Parliament, November 11, 2022.

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/conflict-in-the-tigray-region-of-ethiopia/>.

Provides a detailed history of the origins of the conflict in Tigray.

Jason Burke. “Rise and Fall of Ethiopia’s TPLF – from Rebels to Rulers and Back.” *The Guardian*, November 25, 2020.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/25/rise-and-fall-of-ethiopia-tplf-tigray-peoples-liberation-front>.

A summary of the TPLF’s history in Ethiopia.

Guiding Questions

1. What steps has your member state taken to address crimes against humanity in conflict zones?
2. What policies can mitigate the negative effects of droughts in affected regions? ?
3. What statements has your member state made, especially at the UN, about the Tigray conflict?

Exhibit A



By The New York Times