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Mekelle University  
Institute of Population Studies

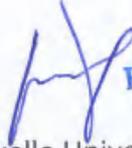
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To:

- The European Union
  - The European Commission
  - The European Parliament
- Brussels

From: Professor Dr. Kinfe Abraha Gebre-Egziabher  
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Subject: Timely Alert on the Regional and International Dimensions of Refugee and Humanitarian Crises

Ethiopia has a long standing history of hosting refugees, and the migration of people from Mecca to Aksum is one of the ancient irregular migrations that history has ever recorded. According to the traditional view, members of the early Muslim community in Mecca faced persecution, which prompted Muhammad to advise them to seek refuge in Abyssinia. When the apostle saw the affliction of his companions, Mohammed said to them: "If you were to go to Abyssinia (it would be better for you), for the king will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country, until such time as Allah shall relieve you from your distress." Thereupon his companions went to Abyssinia, being afraid of apostasy and fleeing to God with their religion; and this is recorded as the first hijra in Islam.

Though the government of that time has played the main role, in order the refugees to live and reside safely, different stakeholders that include the general public have also contributed their own shares – by giving their own lands for constructing their houses and the mosque - Nejashi. Since that time, the country maintains an open door policy for refugee inflows and allows humanitarian access and protection to those seeking asylum on its territory. But, in modern times this welcoming process of the refugees is highly institutionalized and is strongly supported by legal frameworks such as the refugee proclamation of Ethiopia. In 2004, a national Refugee Proclamation was enacted based on the regional and international refugee conventions to which Ethiopia is a part (1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention). Ethiopia's parliament adopted revisions to its existing national refugee law on 17 January 2019, making it one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa.

The Law provides refugees with the right to work and reside out of camps, access social and financial services, and register vital events registration, including births and marriages. Refugee protection in the country is provided within the framework of these international and national refugee laws as well as the core international human rights treaties that have been ratified by the country. Continued insecurity within neighboring states has resulted in sustained refugee movements, either directly as a result of internal conflict and human rights abuses or as a result of conflict related to competition for scarce natural resources and drought related food insecurity. But now, though the value systems of the people remain unchanged, there are significant changes on the government side.





Eritreans, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Yemenis and Somalis originating from South and Central Somalia are recognized as prima facie refugees; here in Ethiopia. Nationals from other countries undergo individual refugee status determination. The reports of UNHCR have shown that at the start of 2019, the nation hosted 905,831 refugees who were forced to flee from their respective home countries as a result of insecurity, political instability, military conscription, conflict, famine and other problems in their countries of origin. As a result, Ethiopia is one of the largest refugee asylum countries world-wide, and the second largest in Africa, reflecting the ongoing fragility and conflict in the region. Ethiopia provides protection to refugees from some 26 countries. Among the principal factors leading to this situation are predominantly the conflict in South Sudan, the prevailing political environment in Eritrea, together with conflict and draught in Somalia.

Ethiopia, a demographic giant country, with an estimated population size of more than 112 million people in 2020, is one of the major source countries for migrants and refugees in the Horn of Africa. It is also a destination for the refugees from the neighbouring countries mainly Eritrea, Somalia and South-Sudan. The overwhelming majority of Ethiopia's population is youth (15-34 years old) with an estimated two million people entering the labour market each year.

Recently, under the shadow of the US election, Abiy Ahmed of Addis Ababa and President Issayas Afewerki of Asmara have declared war against the people and the newly elected government of Tigray. They are doing so by bringing to a halt all sorts of services, including electric power, telecom and internet services. Of course, such acts were also practised against the peoples of the regional states of Oromia, Benshangul Gumuz, Southern Nations and Nationalities; and the Kimant people. But, consistent enough, since the time that Dr. Abiy Ahmed came to power, Tegreans have been treated as second class citizens in their own country; and this was reflected in so many different ways.

At the initial stages it was clearly demonstrated by systematically denying the basic rights that the people are entitled to as citizens, it cleansed Tigreans from all political and key civil service responsibilities of the country; criminalized and arrested many of its leaders using the legal system as a political weapon; launched an incriminating and genocidal media campaign and smeared the good name of the Tigray people and its leaders with the intention of isolating and victimizing them; attempted to economically and socially suffocate the Tigray people by blocking the main highway that connects Tigray with the surroundings; and applied covert and overt financial, administrative and other discriminatory tactics against Tigray owned business and in the process reduced them to bankruptcy.

Besides, the Team of Dr. Abiy Ahmed also conspired with a foreign enemy state i.e., Eritrea, against Tigray and put the security and peace of the Tigray people in Jeopardy; supported various political groups working to unconstitutionally topple the regional administration and trigger chaos and anarchy in the region; organized and supported groups who unlawfully claim territory that are historically, culturally and socially part and parcel of Tigray; took the Tigray media off air for the mere reason that it aired programs that didn't necessarily agree with the official policy and behavior of the regime; and denied Tigray the necessary support to its efforts in combating the recent locust invasion that has threatened the lives of poor Tigray farmers while discriminately supporting neighboring regional states.

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At the final stage of all his acts, Dr. Abiy Ahmed stopped budgetary support to a federally funded development projects like the Baeker Agro processing project and the rail way construction project connecting Tigray with the Capital and Djibouti port; discouraged and on many occasions stopped foreign investors, tourists, journalists, foreign dignitaries even Ethiopians from travelling to Tigray and in the process isolated the region from the rest of the country and international business; decided to stop budgetary support to the democratically elected regional administration of Tigray and ceased all types of governmental relations with the region; refused to deliver "safety net" aid to the destitute and most marginalized communities in Tigray; and then withheld masks meant for students returning to the classroom during the COVID pandemic.

Currently, the government of Dr. Abiy Ahmed has conspired and coordinated with a foreign state, Eritrea, and has since 3 November 2020 launched a full scale scorch to earth military campaign against Tigray. Almost three quarter of the Ethiopian army is mobilized against Tigray. Civilians have already started to suffer from the consequences of this senseless war and tens of thousands are displaced. In the last one week, persecution and imprisonment of Tigreans has reached a frightening level – and till now not less than 37,000 Tigreans are in a concentration center (an act related to what Hitler did during the Second World War). Thousands of civilians, military officers, civil servants of Tigray origin are thrown into prison. Business owners are extorted to pay millions of birr and with some even forced to empty their bank account and surrender their hard earned life time savings. Civil servants and people in the security and military institutions who faithfully served their country for decades are either fired or ordered to take forced leaves.

Tigrean Soldiers working in peace keeping operations are relieved of their duty. There are also disturbing news of people denied international travel for the simple reason that the name in their passports has a Tigrean resemblance. Dr. Abiy Ahmed is trying to divert the attention of the Ethiopian people from the real political problems that need to be addressed, into an anti Tigray dangerous narrative. Such dangerous political manipulation of ethnic animosity and hatred can easily escalate into an all-out genocidal campaign against the people of Tigray. There are also evidences showing that Abiy Ahmed is also lobbying six of the neighboring countries against the people and elected government of Tigray. Abiy Ahmed is also bombing Cultural heritages such as the oldest churches and compounds of a university. Part of the compound of the main campus of the Mekelle University was bombed by a Jet of the Ethiopian airforce. All these acts are weakening the people of Tigray, and also threatens the lives of the Eritrean refugees in Tigray.

It is in this context, that the institute of population studies calls upon to the European Union, European Commission, European Parliament; all members of the international community, both governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental agencies, to put all the

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necessary pressure on the administration in Addis Ababa; and also the dictator in Asmara to immediately halt carpet bombing of dense urban areas in Tigray (cultural heritages, universities, power stations and factories), resume banking, electricity, internet and phone services, stop the dangerous genocidal campaigns it has launched against Tigreans and to release all prisoners it has indiscriminately incarcerated.

The consequences of ignoring the aforementioned danger signs of large scale identity based atrocities, is too ignoble to imagine; and will have serious consequences on the Ethiopian people and the more than 905,000 refugees that are residing in Ethiopia. It is the sincere hope of the institute of population studies that the international community will act at the earliest possible time before the situation deteriorates to a genocidal crime.

Nowadays, the UAE seem to be joining the war initiated by the Amhara bigots, designed by Issayas Afeworki; and then officially declared by Dr. Abiy Ahmed. The Nobel-Prize winner Abiy Ahmed is inviting all parties and neighboring countries both from outside of Ethiopia and outside of the continent; to invade Tigray. This is a crime against humanity. Thus, all the international organizations, inter-governmental organizations and other stakeholders have to be proactive enough in resolving the problem; if not, then Africa will face problems that it has never faced in the previous five decades. Hence, if the European Union, European Commission, European Parliament and the international community at large could not intervene and then stop the war declared by Dr. Abiy Ahmed and Issayas Afewerki, no doubt that Ethiopia will be in a non-stop war and as the UN estimated more than nine million people will be displaced from Ethiopia only.

But, the realities on the ground also reveal that the war will affect not only Ethiopia but will also inflict a huge damage on Eritrea and other countries in the Horn of Africa. The studies conducted by the Center for Migration Studies at the Mekelle University reveal that:

- 1) If one part of humanity suffers, so does the other part. Ethiopia and Eritrea are suffering: millions of their citizens are getting exposed to different forms of deathtraps, exposing tens of millions at risk of irregular migration mainly pushed by the war that has already been declared on Tigray by Abiy Ahmed and Issayas Afewerki. Evidences show that if no intervention is made and the war continues, the entire Horn of Africa will be destabilized and not less than six countries neighboring Ethiopia and Eritrea will be in a crises—a crises leading to the death of hundreds of thousands of people, the internal displacement and irregular migration of millions of people.
- 2) As a result of this unprecedented war, it appears that tens of millions youths from Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Sudan, South-Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti will be pushed to flee out of their respective countries, and millions of them will manage to arrive in Europe. As an academic and research institute, we—at the Center for Migration Studies—clearly understand that such a huge youth migration to Europe will have both positive and negative impacts on both the places of origin and the places of destination but which one overshadows really matters. No doubt that such a migration trend negatively impacts not only the peace and stability but also the demographics (both short- and long-term) of the European countries. This unique movement of people from the Horn of Africa will entail

  
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women, men and children to leave their respective homelands and to seek residence in the European countries. Such a unique pattern of migration has never happened before, and will in the 21<sup>st</sup> century remain to be a major issue that will pose social, economic and political challenges for the European policy-makers engaged in areas of migration management and other social affairs.

- 3) As a result of the war declared by Abiy Ahmed and Issayas Afewerki, the lives of more than 905,000 refugees that are residing in Ethiopia and the overall refugee population in the Horn of Africa will remain at high risk, thereby forcing the refugees for secondary migration.
- 4) What will be more appalling is that the lives of more than 250,000 Eritrean refugees in Tigray (both in the four refugee camps namely Shimelba, Hitsats, May-Aini and Adiharush; and out of the camps) and the hundreds of thousands more Eritreans living in Ethiopia; is threatened by the government of Issayas Afewerki. It is to be recalled that Issayas Afewerki had ordered Abiy Ahmed to abolish the refugee camps in Tigray which forces the Eritrean refugees to go back to Eritrea. The refugees are still in the camps mainly because the international community, the UN organizations such as the UNHCR and mainly the people and government of Tigray refused to do so. However, presently, Issayas Afewerki and Abiy Ahmed have sent joint troops to the Western and North-Western zones of Tigray where the four Eritrean refugee camps are located and this will annihilate these camps. We have strong evidences that attacking the refugees that are in the camps of Tigray is one of the deriving forces for the joint operation between Abiy Ahmed and Issayas Afewerki.
- 5) The involvement of other countries is rapidly escalating the conflict so that it can result in destabilizing the Horn of Africa. Different international media have elaborated that the Drones of the UAE have departed from Assab and then bombed Tigray. This for sure will invite for the involvement of other more countries; and will most probably disintegrate Ethiopia; and this will again have a devastating effect in the Horn of Africa.

Thus, as an academic and research institute, it is our full responsibility to share this evidence based timely alert so that all stakeholders can act and intervene for the peace building processes through dialogue and open discussion among the parties; before it becomes too late to act. We, as an institute; also believe that the international community has to act timely and stop the war declared by Abiy Ahmed and Issayas Afewerki; before the humanitarian and refugee crises is escalated both at the regional and international levels.

Kind Regards!

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- UNHCR
- ILO
- IOM
- The International Community

