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Ethio Multinational Federalists Support Force (EMFSF)

Press Release

On the Deteriorating Political Situation in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Multinational Federalists Support Force*

In November 2015, impelled by the social protest movement that began in the Oromia region and then spread to other parts of Ethiopia, Ethiopia commenced a transition to democracy. In April 2018, a new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed Ali, took reform measures that enjoyed popular support across the country. Three years later, the promise of change has dissipated and the democratic transition has failed. The repressive actions of the ousted regime, which precipitated mass uprisings in 2015, mass arrests, lengthy detention without charge and other infringement of citizens' rights, including illegal searches, restrictions on assembly, expression and movement, physical beating, torture, and even extrajudicial execution, have now returned with vengeance. The period of Ethiopia ambling from crisis to crisis unimpeded by reason, law or self-restraint.

Hope to Crisis

Within months of taking power, Abiy Ahmed's "reformist" regime commenced a reign of terror. Under the pretext of law enforcement counter-insurgency operations against the fighters of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the very political party invited back into the political arena. Subsequently, regime established Command Post or martial law administrations in the Guji Zone in southern Oromia and the four Wallaga zones of Oromia region, unleashing murder and mayhem against civilians. Family members of a rebel group were subjected to scorched earth tactics, collective punishment, and guilt by association. For nearly two years, these regions were kept under a brutal state war.

Several assassinations were carried out against high profile politicians, military commanders and civil servants. Among these, Simegnaw Bekele, chief engineer of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), General Sa'are Mekonen, chief of staff of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) and leaders of the Amhara's regional state were killed under mysterious circumstances.

In the Amhara region, Amhara region's security forces turned against the Qemant for demanding self-rule. Qemant activist-leaders were rounded up, beaten, imprisoned and killed. Families were burned inside their homes, farmers were evicted, their properties destroyed and hundreds of thousands displaced, all for being Qemnat.

On the evening of June 29, 2020, a legendary Oromo artist and activist, Hacaaluu Hundessa, was assassinated in the capital. The next morning, the government rushed to bury the deceased without a coroner's examination and determination of the cause of death, giving rise to a suspicion that officials might be implicated. In the subsequent days, the brutality of the killing and dishonorable way the officials handled the artist's body sparked massive protests in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region.

Even before the artist was interred, thousands were arrested, including opposition party leaders and human rights activists such as Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba and Dejene Tafa of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and Michael Boran, Lemi Benya, Kenessa Ayana and Col. Gemechu Ayana of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The police crackdown, internment of about 5000 and leaving at least 177 dead and hundreds wounded.

Crisis to Conflict

On November 4, 2020, the government shifted its war to the Tigray region. Because of complete blackout of information, the extent of war damage in Tigray is hard to determine. The scanty evidence that trickles out indicates the human suffering in Tigray is incalculable. Thousands of civilians are reportedly killed, millions internally displaced Ethiopians, and over 60,000 refugees fled to the Sudan. Western governments and international organizations have reported evidence of crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and mass atrocities. They are now calling for an independent investigation. The Ethiopian government has thus far refused access to international humanitarian organizations and observers.

As soon as the Ethiopian government announced its Tigray operation was over, the police chief of the Amhara region asserted his special forces would enter the Metekel Zone of the Benishangul-Gumuz region to "teach a lesson to the cannibals in the zone." This is not the first time officials took actions or threatened to act against the Benishangul-Gumuz region. In June 2019, supporters of Brigadier General Asaminew Tsige, the leader of the attempted coup d'état in the Amhara Region, killed 37 people and wounded 18 in the Metekel Zone. In March 2020, the leader of an armed group called *Fano*, Solomon Atanaw, publicly stated that his group's mission would end only after the Metekel Zone is returned to the control of Amhara Region.

Despite the blatantly obvious instigators of conflict and perpetrators of crime, the Ethiopian prime minister and regional officials of the Prosperity Party, blamed their political opponents, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which the prime minister had claimed his forces had vanquished, and the Shane, an unidentified group officials have aligned with the OLF, for the massacres in Benishangul-Gumuz region.

Conflict to Collapsing Center

In December 2020, the Ethiopian Electoral Board announced that the national election previously postponed because of COVID-19 difficulties will be held in June 2021. According to its new national election schedule, political parties have two months to recruit candidates and commence election campaigns. This election, expected to be free, fair and competitive elections, is apparently designed to be an election whose outcome is preordained.

Protesting an election purposely made fraudulent, the indicated leaders of the OLF and OFC commenced a hunger strike on January 27, 2021. The leaders assert that they are prisoners of conscience thrown into prisons expressly to exclude them from the upcoming elections. Indeed, without the participation of the unlawfully detained Oromo political party leaders and the thousands of potential candidates incarcerated in various prisons and makeshift detention camps around the country, the scheduled election will not be considered legitimate. As such, it has no chance of solving the country's problems. Its only outcome would be putting Ethiopia on track to rather complex and irresolvable crisis.

The situation in Ethiopia is deteriorating precipitously. Reports coming out of the Tigray theatre of war require immediate attention. Technical and legal imprecisions aside, credible reports from Tigray indicate that the atrocity crimes perpetrated against innocent civilians by Ethiopian and Eritrean military forces exhibit all the hallmarks of genocide. The government's refusal to reinstate electricity, telephone, banking, and internet services in Tigray long after it declared the conflict over and restricting the local population's access to food and basic medicines can only constitute an intention to commit genocide. This interpretation is unlikely to go away unless the government grants access to independent media and human rights organizations to report on the vagaries of the war and the humanitarian situation in Tigray.

Lingering border conflicts between the Afar and Somali regions has resurged in the wake of the Tigray conflict. On 23 January 2021, violent clashes between the Federal Police and Afar security forces, and the Somali militia reportedly left up to 70 police dead and about the same number wounded. The conflict and natural disasters have resulted several thousand displaced persons. All this indicate that the federal government's approach of deploying the military to resolve political differences has diminished its capacity to address humanitarian crises in the country.

This week a nationwide protest is underway in the Oromia region against escalating human rights violations both by state and non-state actors. The government seems set on its course of militarization of politics rather than search for workable solutions through dialogue. Rather than responding to the hunger strike of Oromo political leaders in prison, the government has shown that the impending death of political prisoners is none of its business.

The militarization of Ethiopian politics has now engendered violent conflicts and ubiquitous atrocity crimes perpetrated by government security forces. essentially in all parts of Ethiopia, especially western Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz and the Afar-Somali regions.

Domestic Crisis to Regional Conflagration

The Tigray War has triggered regional conflict with the involvement of Eritrean and Somalia's forces. Ethiopia and Sudan are massing forces along the two countries borders. A protracted war in Ethiopia is likely to lead to regional conflict and calamitous humanitarian crisis. The international community has a responsibility to step in and prevent Ethiopia from descending into deepening conflict and violence in the region.

This is simply because the Ethiopian government stands accused of being the primary perpetrator of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide-in-the-making. It cannot receive recognition as the lawful government even after winning the upcoming elections. The only thing that can protect millions of Ethiopians from endless suffering and potential genocide and the Horn of Africa from descending into chaos, is an all-inclusive dialogue. If the international community fails to persuade the Ethiopian regime to come to the negotiating table to resolve differences through dialogue would have grave consequence for the country, the region and the world at large.

As such, we the members of Ethiopian Multi-National Federalist Forces Support Force (EMFSF), call upon the international community to:

- Intervene and save the lives of the prominent Oromo political prisoners on hunger strike since January 27, 2021 by calling on the Ethiopian government to immediately meet their demands;
- Urge the Ethiopian government to immediately release all political prisoners without any pre-conditions;
- Help establish an independent investigation of human rights abuses that the Ethiopian security forces continue to commit;
- Demand the Ethiopian Government to end the war in the Tigray and allow unfettered humanitarian access to the people;
- Demand the unconditional and urgent withdrawal of the Eritrean army from Tigray.
- Call for an independent investigation of war crimes in Tigray, Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regional states;
- Demand the United States and European Commission **to** impose sanctions on Ethiopian government if the indicated demands are not met.
- Urge the Ethiopian government unconditionally to allow urgent transitional arrangement where a national dialogue to discuss the future of the country with all stakeholders will be a priority.

* The EMFSF is a non-governmental, civil organization, established on November 8, 2020 by the Ethiopian nations and nationalities in the USA, Canada, Europe and Australia. The organization promotes democratization, peace, stability, respect for human rights and national reconciliation in Ethiopia through a dialogue.