



Excellency, Dr QU Dongyu

Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN-FAO),  
Rome, Italy

October 14, 2020

**Subject: Urgent call for the saving of lives and livelihoods in the Tigray National Regional State of Ethiopia**

Ethiopia is facing a massive Desert Locust invasion, the extent to which the country has not seen in the last 25 years. The situation is especially troublesome as swaths of crop and pasture have already been destroyed, and conditions continue to deteriorate because of recent successive breeding in Yemen and Afar Region of Ethiopia, risking millions of people in the subregion to hunger and famine.

We note with appreciation the endless efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Desert Locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA), and the international communities, in the fight against the devastating hopper band formations that have caused swarms of insects to form.

The locust plague is devouring crops and pasture throughout the Afar, Northern Wollo of the Amhara and Tigray National Regional states, a sub region already compounded by the sustained community transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread flooding, increasing insecurity and conflicts owing to the current political turmoil in the country. All shocks are hitting the most vulnerable population the hardest that may lead to societal calamity, famine and disastrous humanitarian crises.

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars (GSTS) is extremely concerned that the locust swarm in the country could be highly politicized due to the ongoing constitutional and political crisis in the country and compromise the regional and international control efforts that have to be put in place to avoid more damage. GSTS has also observed credible signs of irresponsible and discriminatory acts against the Tigray National Regional state by elements of the Federal Government in the fight against the locust swarm.

Lacking the timely support of the Federal government and international communities, the local communities in the subregion have been left to the use of their own local and traditional devices to combat the infestation. However, the locally available, risky, and traditional measures have been minimally effective, leaving the locust spread to inner lands of the Tigray Regional state.

Politicizing the locust plague and hindering of the Tigray Regional State of Ethiopia access to resources such as drones, chemicals and other tools to fight the plague by the Federal Government strategically and timely with all means, constitute a historical mistake tantamounting to committing crimes against humanity.

The GSTS is aware that FAO forecast that the locust infestations will persist across Ethiopia and Somalia through at least March 2021. We are also aware that Yemen and certainly Afar remains a reservoir for desert locust breeding, posing a continued threat to the Horn of Africa region; highlighting the importance of FAO's approach to tackling the plague at the source.



We are hopeful that Your Excellency will avail the emergency resources and support efforts not only to the Federal Government but also directly to the severely affected Regional states to prevent the current locust plague before it is too late. Failure to do so is, to leave millions at severe risk of food insecurity due to the destruction of crops and pasture for livestock. The international community needs to take more direct actions in order to make up for the national difficulties and ensure equal distribution of resources, information and other services.

Therefore, GSTS call upon the FAO and the international community to respond swiftly by directly deploying planes, helicopters, and surface sprays of chemicals to the affected regions.

More specifically, GSTS urgently call for:

1. Locust plague is best addressed at the breeding ground — in this case in Yemen and Afar, and we call on the international community to do its best to halt the plague at its origin through strengthening surveillance, sub regional coordination and related emergency response strategies.
2. FAO and the international community to aggressively act on the situation in Ethiopia and provide the required immediate action before the locust infestation escalates to a famine and humanitarian crisis, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, flooding and conflicts.
3. Urge the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the international community to act immediately, ensuring the timely and fair distribution of resources, control tools across all the regions of the country.
4. Allow technologies, resources and additional means of fighting the plague to enter into the Regional States, such as drones for immediate and local intervention, which at this time is neglecting from any federal support.
5. Urge FAO and other relevant organizations to strengthen the capacities of institutions in the Regions for forecasting, early warning, early detection, preparedness and response.

Leadership of the Global Society of Tigray Scholars (GSTS)

Cc:

- Excellency, Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN)
- Excellency, Mrs. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
- Excellency, Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael, President of the Tigray Regional State Government
- Excellency, Dr. Stephen Njoka, Director of Desert Locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA)
- Excellency, Mr. Moussa Faki, Chairperson of African Union Commission
- Excellency, Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, President of European Union Commission
- Excellency, Mr. David M. Beasley, Executive Director of United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)
- Excellency, Mr. Harry Bader, Acting Executive Director, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), USA
- Excellency, Sir Philip Barton, Head of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), UK
- Excellency, Bob Fu, President of China Aid
- Excellency, Mr. Peter Maurer, President of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- Excellency, Mr. Francesco Rocca, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
- The Media outlets