

# United States Senate

November 19, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our alarm at the deteriorating political and humanitarian situation in Ethiopia. The conflict in Tigray poses serious risks to Ethiopia and the broader region. We urge you to engage directly with Prime Minister Abiy and continue pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, the de-escalation of tensions, protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and respect for international humanitarian law.

Tensions between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal government, which had been escalating for months, erupted into military confrontation on November 4<sup>th</sup>, after the government alleged that TPLF fighters attacked an Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) position in Tigray. The conflict has already resulted in hundreds dead and thousands displaced. Airports and roads have been closed and phone and internet service to the Tigray region has been cut,<sup>1</sup> leaving families disconnected from their loved ones and seriously hampering humanitarian response efforts. There is a shortage of fuel and some shopping and banking services have halted, creating a cash shortage.<sup>2</sup>

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that “there is a risk this situation will spiral totally out of control, leading to heavy casualties and destruction, as well as mass displacement within Ethiopia itself and across borders.”<sup>3</sup> Reports indicate that bombs have struck non-military targets, including a hydroelectric dam—a charge the government denies.<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International has confirmed that “scores, and likely hundreds, of people were stabbed or hacked to death in Mai-Kadra (May Cadera) town in the South West Zone of Ethiopia’s Tigray Region on the night of 9 November,”<sup>6</sup> a massacre some witnesses attributed to the TPLF, which has denied involvement.<sup>7</sup> A report from Reuters indicates that Ethiopian police visited an office of the United Nations’ World Food Programme (WFP) with a list of purported

---

<sup>1</sup> Tom Wheeldon, “Tigray conflict threatens to ‘catalyze’ tensions elsewhere in Ethiopia,” France 24, November 12, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> “UN refugee agency: Keep borders open for fleeing Ethiopians,” UN News, November 11, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> “Ethiopia—Bechelet expresses alarm as Tigray conflict ‘risks spiraling out of control,’” United Nations Ethiopia, November 13, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> “Ethiopians fleeing Sudan describe air strikes, machete killings in Tigray,” Reuters, November 13, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> “Ethiopia Denies Bombing Tigray’s Tekeze Power Dam,” Reuters, November 13, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> “Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state,” Amnesty International, November 12, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Salem Solomon, “Thousands of Refugees from Ethiopia’s Tigray Region Fleeing Violence,” VOA, November 16, 2020.

TPLF operatives embedded with various local and international organizations, raising concerns that ethnic Tigrayans may be targeted by police.<sup>8</sup>

On November 14<sup>th</sup>, the conflict escalated further as media reported TPLF forces launched at least three rockets into Eritrea, striking the airport in capital of Asmara.<sup>9</sup> The next day, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy condemned the attack, describing it as an effort to internationalize the conflict.<sup>10</sup>

The ongoing violence is precipitating a humanitarian crisis. More than 27,000 refugees have crossed over into Sudan,<sup>11</sup> with as many as 200,000 expected.<sup>12</sup> The United Nations is now working with the Government of Sudan to ensure that they are granted refugee status and to establish a new refugee camp to accommodate them. The Sudan Red Crescent Society has deployed medical staff and essential medicines, and is conducting screenings for COVID-19.<sup>13</sup> The U.N. is also working to establish a humanitarian corridor in Ethiopia, but reports suggest that humanitarian access to Tigray is currently constrained, with implications for over 2 million people in need of aid there, including nearly 100,000 Eritrean refugees.<sup>14</sup> The conflict poses a direct threat to hundreds of American citizens, journalists, and aid workers in the Tigray region and surrounding areas.

We appreciate your statements calling for de-escalation and the State Department's responsiveness to inquiries from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We understand that the Department is engaged with the Government of Ethiopia, the TPLF, neighboring countries, the African Union, and the United Nations. We urge you to engage directly with Prime Minister Abiy and continue pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, the de-escalation of tensions, protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and respect for international humanitarian law. Once a ceasefire is achieved, all parties must commit to addressing outstanding grievances through a peaceful dialogue and work to stabilize Ethiopia's imperiled democratic transition.

Sincerely,



---

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



---

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

<sup>8</sup> "Ethiopian police seeking lists of ethnic Tigrayans – U.N. report," Reuters, November 13, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> "Ethiopia: Tigray leader confirms bombing of Eritrean capital," Al Jazeera, November 15, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy, Statement on Twitter, November 15, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Marks and Eric Nagourney, "As Fighting Rages in Ethiopia, Aid Groups Please for Access to Refugees," New York Times, November 17, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Wheeldon, November 12, 2020.

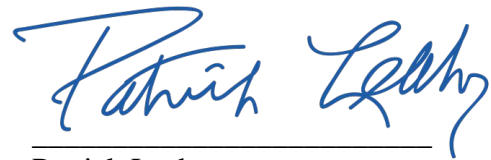
<sup>13</sup> UNHCR, November 13, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> "'Full scale' humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ethiopia's Tigray: UNHCR," UN News, November 17, 2020.



---

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



---

Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



---

Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/Tim Kaine

---

Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



---

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



---

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



---

Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



---

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/Christopher S. Murphy

---

Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



---

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator




---

Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/Robert P. Casey, Jr.

---

Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



---

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



---

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



---

Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

cc: Tibor Nagy, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs  
Amb. Michael Raynor, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia