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 The Government of Regional State of Tigray
 መተሓባበሪ ቤት ፅሕፈት ምሕዘነት ትግራይ
 Tigray Friendship Liaison Office

ዕለት 8-25-2020
 Date

ቁፅር MIM/T/21/2012
 Ref.No

H.E. Mr. Robert Malley
President and CEO, International Crisis Group
Brussels

Excellency,

The National Regional State of Tigray has looked into the International Crisis Group's recent report, entitled 'Toward an end to Ethiopia's Federal-Tigray feud' with keen interest. We appreciate your concerns about the fast deteriorating political and security situation in the country and the proposed ways out of this crisis. Your great effort to balance the competing versions of the reality is understandable. Like any balancing act, however, some facts may be blurred and truths a little twisted to accommodate competing narratives.

Excellency,

The downfall of the Dergue regime in 1991 heralded a new chapter in Ethiopian political history. In the first twenty seven years when EPRDF was at the helm of state power, Ethiopia made progress in addressing the age-old demands of its people for a just and democratic political system. EPRDF changed the organizing principles of the Ethiopian state in such a way that all Ethiopian nations and nationalities enjoy their inalienable right for self-determination and their equal right to participate in the central government. The constitution that was adapted in 1997 guaranteed the Ethiopian nations and nationalities their right of self-determination up to secession. Like any other solution for intractable political problems, it was not a perfect solution. But it was the only middle ground acceptable to the more than eighteen armed groups with a secessionist agenda and gave the Ethiopian state a second chance at

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survival. It was also the second-best solution to those political forces whose primary agenda was the maintenance of a centralized and unitary political system. This middle of the way political solution kept the country united and allowed the country to thrive over the next quarter century.

EPRDF had no illusion that such constitutional rights are the sole guarantee for peace and the continued existence of the country as a united nation. From the outset, EPRDF had realized that entrenched poverty and deep seated social ills could slowly but surely unravel the country. As a result, it launched an ambitious economic development agenda and uplifted millions of Ethiopians from abject poverty. A country that was synonymous with famine was turned to one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

EPRDF's success was not, however, without failings. The pace of democratization was not commensurate with the changing social and economic development in the country and the fast rising expectations of the public for good governance, justice and equality of opportunity. Even the fast rate of social and economic development did not meet the growing expectations of the rising and modernizing population. As a result, EPRDF exhaustively examined its deficiencies and decided to renew itself so as to be relevant and responsive to the changing times. The new administration led by Prime Minister Abiy is an outcome of this political awakening.

Excellency,

The mandate given to the new group in power was not to destroy the constitutional order but to renew and improve on it. It was not to take the country on a totally different domestic and foreign policy path but to faithfully implement the policy lines EPRDF had campaigned for and the Ethiopian people chose in the last election. But the new regime took unexpected turn. It degraded the constitution and undermined the multinational federal system. It abolished EPRDF and formed a makeshift party and effectively undertook a blood-less coup against the EPRDF government. It has

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also been engaging in suspicious and non-transparent foreign dealings that contravene the country's national interest. It has politicized foreign policy and diplomacy and turned it into a tool for undermining domestic political opponents and consolidating its hold on power. This is by all standards a treasonous misconduct and is inevitably pushing the country into a catastrophic precipice.

The Prime Minister has not yet appreciated the dangerous consequences of his dictatorial commissions. He has rather escalated the pace of deconstructing the constitutional order and the intensity of repression against the people and their leaders. His manipulative decision to postpone and later to indefinitely and unconstitutionally cancel the May 2020 is the last act of transgression that broke the constitutional order. Numerous political leaders who questioned the constitutionality of his decision have been thrown into jail and dissenting voices have been stifled.

The political divide in Ethiopia is now clearly drawn and recent events have revealed the true color and nature of the political question of the day. The Prime Minister's systematic attempt to present the political problem of the country as a feud between the federal government and Tigray is debunked by the war he declared against the Ethiopian people and more specifically against the Oromo people and its leaders. The true nature of the political crisis lies in the age old conflict between incompatible visions of Ethiopia. It is a conflict between federalist democratic forces that strive to maintain the multi-ethnic federal system and improve on it and the anti-federalist dictatorial forces who aspire to take the country back to an essentially unitary system.

The fundamental political question of the day isn't therefore limited to issues surrounding elections; neither is it an exclusively a federal government-Tigray confrontation. It is deeper than that. The issues are national and constitutional that touché upon every facets of the country's future. If the issues are wrongly put, it will help the usual stupefaction tactics of the Prime Minister and we will further stray from the real solution.

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Excellency,

The underlying concern of the Tigray National Regional administration surrounding the election is not whether or not the election will change the balance of power in the region in favor of or against TPLF. Our insistence on holding the election emanates from our belief that the constitution should be taken seriously. Politicians should not, at will, interfere with the rights of people to exercise their basic democratic rights to choose their leaders. Manipulating the constitution for political ends sets a dangerous precedent that can unravel the constitution and eventually the country.

TPLF may still have secured and a strong supportive constituency in Tigray. But this does not give it a license to indefinitely cling to power without renewing its mandate from the public. The principles of democratic accountability should be sacred and must be respected anywhere including in fledgling democracies like Ethiopia. It isn't, therefore, a matter of political expediency but a matter of loyalty to the constitution of the land that elections should take place on time as per the provisions of the constitution.

Excellency,

We fully agree with the report's proposition that the Prime Minister should put an end to his unilateralist style of managing politics. Democratic politics by its very nature requires a meaningful participation of all stakeholders and apply a give and take bargain to bridge political divides. A 'I know it all!' 'Follow me!' approach is an authoritarian modus operandi of running a country. Such despotic style of leadership has already complicated the already complex and fast deteriorating political environment in the country.



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Excellency,

The Prime Minister has now forsaken all the pretensions of a progressive reformer. He has laid bare his true dictatorial intentions for everyone to see. He has applied every single despotic tactic in the book to silence dissenting views and organized opposition groups. The trust of all political players in the person of the Prime Minister and government institutions has plummeted. The Tigray National Regional state shares your recommendation that an all-party, inclusive and comprehensive dialogue should be convened and address all facets of the political and constitutional problems ravaging the country. In this regard, I would like to assure you that Tigray National Regional State is ready to play a positive and constructive part in this very important process.

Sincerely,



Wondimu Asamnew
 (Ambassador)
 Director General

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