



Official Correspondence GSTS-O.C-2021-081  
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars  
and Professionals (GSTS)<sup>i</sup>

## OPEN LETTER

H.E. António Vitorino  
Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
Geneva

H.E. Filippo Grandi  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)  
Geneva

H.E. Jagan Chapagain  
Secretary General of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent  
Societies (IFRC)  
Geneva

H.E. Peter Maurer  
President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)  
Geneva

H.E. Mohammed Omer Mukhier-Abuzein  
IFRC's Regional Director for Africa  
Geneva

### **Urgent Call to Halt the Repatriation of Migrants of Tigrayan Origin in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia**

**Excellencies,**

1. The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS) would like to kindly request Your Excellencies to make all effort to halt the repatriation of Ethiopian migrants of Tigray origin from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to Ethiopia until arrangements are made to fly them directly to Tigray.
2. GSTS has been closely following KSA's widespread campaign aiming at detaining and deporting both documented and undocumented Ethiopian immigrants. It is to be recalled that the President of Tigray, H.E. Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael, wrote a letter to His Majesty Salman Bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, dated 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020, reaffirming Tigray government's readiness to accept its citizens and requested His Majesty's support to airlift them to Mekelle, the capital city of Tigray. The letter also noted that the Ethiopian government previously refused to accept the citizens despite His Majesty's generous offer. This



implies that the recent motive for the Ethiopian government to receive the repatriated Tigrayans is solely for the purpose of revenge and ulterior motives, following its military defeat.

3. GSTS is also aware of the planned and large-scale forced repatriation of the remaining tens of thousands of Ethiopians. Unfortunately, the repatriation of the migrants to Ethiopia has coincided with the genocidal war on the people of Tigray. Nearly into over ten months of genocidal war on Tigray, the combined Ethiopian National Defense forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and the Amhara Regional Forces have committed heinous atrocities and egregious war crimes, crimes against humanity and aspects of genocide in different parts of Tigray. The widespread crimes include ethnic cleansing, systematic sexual violence – including gang-rape and sexual enslavement, destruction, looting and pillaging of all vital infrastructure including health facilities and schools; burning of food and agricultural products, and destruction of heritage and places of worship. Tigrayans living outside Tigray in other parts of Ethiopia have also been systematic targets of ethnic-based arbitrary arrest, mass detention at concentration camps, torture, forced disappearance, and closure of their businesses for the past nearly ten months. These crimes have now intensified, especially after the hateful public speech by Mr. Abiy Ahmed, who equated Tigrayans to "cancer" and "invasive weeds" that need to be "exterminated". The safety and security of all civilian Tigrayans in Ethiopia, therefore, is at grave risk. These pronouncements are consistent with what Ethiopian leaders told the European Union special envoy to Ethiopia, H.E Pekka Haavisto, who stated "When I met the Ethiopian leadership in February, they really used this kind of language that they are going to destroy the Tigrayans, they are going to wipe out the Tigrayans for 100 years and so forth." Following these genocidal calls by officials and government media, ethnic-based attacks (including arbitrary detention, mass arrest, torture, harassment, ethnic discrimination and abduction) has dramatically intensified as also recently documented by the [Haman Rights Watch](#). Unfortunately, recent Tigrayan repatriates from the KSA has been at the heart of these brutal attacks by the Ethiopian regime.
4. GSTS has also been carefully monitoring the status and fate of those already repatriated Ethiopian refugees of Tigrayan ethnic origin. It is well known that there are thousands of irregular migrants stranded in various countries, including in KSA, and thousands have been repatriated in the last few months. Due to the closure of all forms of transportation to Tigray including air and land and ongoing intensified war, there is no possibility for these repatriated Tigrayans to join to their families in Tigray. Tigrayan repatriates from KSA are falling in the hands of the ruthless Ethiopian regime. Recent Tigrayan repatriates from the KSA have become prime targets of the intensified attack on Tigrayans by the Ethiopian authorities. They are detained upon arrival in Addis Ababa and taken to concentration camps in remote and uninhabitable parts of the country - makeshift internment camps that have been recently assembled for this purpose but lack basic facilities including drinking water, food, toiletries, and feminine hygiene products. The returnees from KSA and other countries have been subject to arbitrary detention, mass arrest, torture and are currently in detention centers and

concentration camps in Addis Ababa, Semera, Awash Arba and other remote areas. The congested places of detention and stay have inflicted and are endangering the lives of repatriated migrants. The encampment of migrants in hostile areas with no hygiene or access to humanitarian assistance has put the lives of the repatriated migrants under grave risk, including reported deaths. Some of the returnees are paraded on media as prisoners of war (POWs), in brazen falsehood. Some of those detained are underage children who have sadly been paraded or forcibly interviewed as prisoners of war for war propaganda. If migrants of Tigrayan origin continue to be repatriated from KSA and other countries, they will face even more danger, plight and gravity. The extremely hostile environment for Tigrayans in Ethiopia means that those who will be repatriated certainly face incarceration, torture and possibly execution.

5. GSTS notes that these atrocities by the Ethiopian government are part of the grand plan to decimate Tigrayans and we urge that the KSA should not contribute to this evil plan. Thus, the mounting crimes committed against repatriated Tigrayans provide clear and alarming evidence for the KSA to halt its repatriation. Thus, GSTS implores UN resident coordinators, IOM, UNHCR, ICRC, IFRC and other stakeholders to:
  - a. Pressure the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other countries to halt forcible repatriation and avoid detention; and instead consider regularizing of these migrants with temporary residence permits until such a time when situation permits for their safe return to Tigray;
  - b. Put all pressure and make use of all possible diplomatic means for the safety and proper handling, treatment and full respect of the international laws on the rights of migrants and prisoners in host countries;
  - c. Facilitate asylum protection of the Tigrayan migrants in KSA or elsewhere by facilitating resettlement in third countries including in America, Europe, Canada, Africa, Australia and others;
  - d. Facilitate the safe passage, humanitarian aid and protection to migrants.
  - e. Make public information on the whereabouts of these detained repatriated Tigrayans and release them from detention camps and prisons without any precondition



Sincerely,  
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars  
and Professionals (GSTS)  
30<sup>th</sup> August 2021



CC:

- ☞ H.E. Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State of the United States  
Washington DC
- ☞ H.E. Josep Borrell  
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign  
Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission  
Brussels
- ☞ H.E. Antonio Guterres  
Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN)  
New York, NY
- ☞ H.E. Nazhat Shameem Khan  
President of the United Nations Human Right Council (UNGRC)  
Geneva
- ☞ H.E. Janez Lenarči  
European Commissioner for Crisis Management, in charge of European Civil  
Protection and Humanitarian Aid. European Emergency Response Coordinator  
Brussels
- ☞ H.E. Michelle Bachelet Jeria  
Chief of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Geneva
- ☞ H.E. Kenneth Roth  
Executive Director of Human Rights Watch  
New York
- ☞ H.E. Agnès Callamard  
Secretary General of Amnesty International  
London

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<sup>i</sup> GSTS is 501(C), and 33/2011 legally registered non-partisan, not-for-profit, and autonomous Global Knowledge Network of over 3,200 Tigray Scholars and Professionals aimed at creating Knowledge-based economy and society in Tigray, and beyond. It stands for academia, multidisciplinary and cross sectoral research and applied policy development, human capital development, fostering and advancing science, technology, and innovation, technology and knowledge transfer, youth and gender development, migration and displacement, and other educational and development related endeavors. It also works in educational advocacy and collaborates with various stakeholders towards promoting peace, good governance, human rights, and humanitarian activities.