



Official Correspondence GSTS-O.C-2021-041
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)

HE Antonio Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN)
New York, NY

HE Michelle Bachelet
United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva

A call for transparency as regards the work of United Nations particularly the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights in the civil wars in Ethiopia

Excellencies,

1. The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)ⁱ acknowledges the letter (of 13th of April 2021) from the Chief of East and Southern Africa Section of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in response to our request to reverse the plans and preparations for a joint investigation of the atrocities in Tigray with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). GSTS appreciates the OHCHR for allowing us to present our submissions through a virtual meeting.

2. However, GSTS is disappointed to learn that the OHCHR has decided to continue with the investigation jointly with EHRC, disregarding the evidence presented against such a decision. Nonetheless, GSTS still maintains its strong opposition to the joint investigation as we firmly believe that any investigation that involves the Government of Ethiopia, a principal party and chief architect of the war, and the partisan and widely discredited EHRC is destined to fail to meet the minimum standard of an independent and comprehensive investigation of the massive and widespread atrocities committed in Tigray and on Tigrayans.

3. GSTS is also deeply concerned with the lack of transparency on the decision making and the work of the OHCHR. It is to be recalled that OHCHR had conducted a thorough and extensive investigation on mass atrocities committed in Tigray from the 2nd week of November 2020 through the end of December 2020, including interviewing victims and witnesses of the human rights violations of various kinds and gravity in refugee camps in Sudan. It is our understanding that the report was submitted to HE Michelle Bachelet in January 2021. However, for reasons that are not clear to the victims, witnesses and the public at large, the findings of the investigation are not yet made public. Victims and witnesses who gave their account with full confidence to the UN were and still are awaiting the release of the report.



4. GSTS is compelled but to ask as to why the findings are not released yet. GSTS believes that it is incumbent with the leadership of the United Nations to ensure that the voices of the victims and witnesses of atrocious crimes are heard loud and clear. If the findings are not released, victims and witnesses may assume that their effort and painful experience they narrated during the interviews were in vain. It would not be surprising if the same stance is taken by victims and witnesses within Tigray during the joint investigation. The public perception of the OHCHR will also be affected by the lack of transparency.

5. GSTS would like to inform the OHCHR that with the possibility of non-cooperation from the victims, their families and witnesses due to lack of trust in the joint investigation, the OHCHR takes responsibility for the potential harm to the victims and the obstruction of justice and accountability. Such a premature decision by the OHCHR would also undermine long term goals of peace, dialogue, and reconciliation in Ethiopia, which cannot be achieved without ascertaining the facts and truth behind the various atrocities and violations of human rights.

6. GSTS's grave concern regarding the joint investigation remains, and once again we call for a UN-mandated commission to conduct an independent, credible and international investigation into the egregious violations of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law committed against the People of Tigray.

7. We call on HE the Secretary-General of the United Nations to ensure respect to the core principles that govern international inquiries or international fact-finding missions including transparency, independence, impartiality, objectivity, integrity, credibility, confidentiality, professional competence, capacity, and the do no harm principle.

8. GSTS has also raised several questions to OHCHR that are yet to be answered openly. The questions include:

- a. On what basis did the OHCHR decide to jointly conduct the investigation?
- b. On what basis did the OHCHR assess the EHRC's independence and impartiality?
- c. What are the details of the Terms of Reference for the investigation? Why is the Terms of Reference not made public?
- d. Who are the investigators to be assigned for the joint investigation? How are they vetted and by whom?
- e. Why is joint investigation limited to Tigray, and why not also cover the atrocities in other parts of the country such as Benishangul-Gumuz, Oromia, and Amhara?

9. In the interest of transparency, we call upon Your Excellencies to consider the above listed questions and provide answers to victims and witnesses of atrocities being committed in Tigray and Ethiopia at large.

10. We also repeat our call for a UN-mandated commission of inquiry or an international fact-finding mission similar to the one set for Sudan (Darfur) to be deployed and to establish



facts and investigate grave crimes being committed in Tigray. We believe that anything short of that will not lead to justice and reconciliation and might end up doing more harm than good to the victims, the country and the region at large.



Sincerely
The GSTS
4 May 2021

CC:

- HE Antony Blinken
Secretary of State, United States Department of State
- HE Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield,
Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations
- The Members of the Security Council
- HE Amb Jeffrey Feltman
US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa
- HE Alexander George Rondos
EU Special Representative to the Horn of Africa
- HE Parfait Onanga-Anyanga
Special Envoy of United Nations Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa

ⁱ GSTS is a 501(C), and 33/2011 legally registered non-partisan, not-for-profit, and autonomous Global Knowledge Network of over 3,000 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.