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The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)

OPEN LETTER

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Banking Service As An Additional Instrument for Starving Tigrayans

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)¹ would like to alert members of the international community including International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Paris Club creditors, and donor countries with links to the Ethiopian National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE) and other financial institutions in Ethiopia that banking service is being used as an instrument of economic warfare and ethnic discrimination against ethnic Tigrayans in Ethiopia. Denying banking services is being deployed as an instrument to starve Tigrayans living in Tigray as well as other parts of Ethiopia.

Immediately after the Ethiopian government announced a so called 'unilateral ceasefire' in its 8-month long genocidal war on Tigray, the National Bank of Ethiopia alerted commercial banks on customers who opened accounts in branches in Tigray. The NBE then ordered banks to suspend all accounts opened in Tigray¹. This means that millions of people inside and outside of Tigray have had their personal funds frozen for no reason other than their ethnic affiliation.

Measures by the NBE have recently gone beyond closure of personal accounts to banning Tigrayans from receiving money sent to them even through international money transfers. There is ample evidence showing that the Ethiopian government is using banking service systematically as an instrument of ethnic profiling and discrimination.

Taken together with the ongoing arbitrary detention of tens of thousands of Tigrayans and closure of Tigrayan businesses in Addis Ababa and elsewhere in Ethiopia, this blanket banking ban reveals a very dark picture about the safety and security of Tigrayans in the country.

¹ [Central Bank Suspends Accounts Opened in Tigray State](#), *Addis Fortune*.



The use of banking service as an instrument of collective punishment has been a quintessential element of Ethiopia's ongoing genocidal war on the people of Tigray. As noted, when PM Abiy ordered a military attack on November 4, 2020, all basic services in Tigray were cutoff. The focus at that time was on the complete communications blackout that suddenly disconnected millions of people from the world in the 21st century. But among the crucial services that were cut off was banking². Farmers, teachers, doctors, businessmen and -women, college students, senior citizens and so forth that rely on remittance - everyone was denied access to their own money without any prior warning. Indeed, this was the first and one of the most important tools that heralded the use of starvation as weapon of war, which has now rendered 90% of Tigray's population in need of immediate humanitarian assistance and created the worst famine in the world for a decade. Millions of people in Tigray right now are suffering from hunger, including those having some money sitting in the Ethiopian banks. This includes farmers who have saved their meager resources in the regions fledging microfinance institutions and farmer cooperatives.

These acts are transgressions of the fundamental tenet of banking services and serious human rights violations.³ Tigrayans are dying from famine in Tigray and exposed to destitution in other parts of the country because the Ethiopian government is using banking service as an instrument of war to starve them.

GSTS calls members of the international community to denounce this blatant act of discrimination and take necessary measures to ensure that they do not contribute directly or indirectly to human rights violations. We particularly call international financial institutions and multilateral development banks that have active engagements in Ethiopia to send a clear and strong message to the Governor of The National Bank of Ethiopia for an immediate stop to the use of banking service as an instrument of collective punishment of the Tigrayan community.



Sincerely,
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)
19th July 2021

CC:
H.E. Antony Blinken

² [The National Bank of Ethiopia Decides to close all banks in Tigray](#), *Ethiopian Reporter*

³ [The categorical suspension of all bank accounts held in the Tigray region was illegal, discriminatory, and disproportionate. NBE must apologize and pay reparation to all Tigrayans](#), *Awash Post*



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President of the Security Council for the Month of July
New York

H.E. Antonio Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN)
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H.E. Michelle Bachelet
United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights Geneva
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H.E. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
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H.E. Josep Borrell
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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.