



Official Correspondence GSTS-O.C-2021-063
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)ⁱ

OPEN LETTER

H.E. Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière
Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations
President of the Security Council for the Month of July
New York

H.E. Antonio Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York, NY

Excellency, Dr QU Dongyu
Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome

H.E. Martin Griffiths,
The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief
Coordinator
Geneva

H.E. David Muldrow Beasley
Executive Director of the World Food Programme
Rome

H.E. Janez Lenarčič
European Commissioner for Crisis Management
Brussels

H.E. Samantha Power
U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator
Washington, D.C.

Call to Stop the Siege of Tigray and the Use of Starvation as a Weapon of War

Eight months into the genocidal war on Tigray, serious mass atrocities and breaches of international law have been committed in different parts of Tigray by the combined Ethiopian National Defense forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and Amhara Special Forces and militia. These egregious atrocities have been committed in the dark with telephone, internet, electricity, and transport including roads, completely blocked by the Ethiopian government. Systematic rape and sexual violence – including gang-rape and sexual enslavement; destruction of infrastructure including health services and schools; looting and pillaging of public and private property; the burning of agricultural means and products, and looting and destruction of heritage and religious sites have led to societal trauma, severe starvation, famine and loss of lives. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians have been brutally murdered by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers, and Amhara forces, and nearly two million have been internally displaced with more than 70,000 having fled into Sudan. These atrocities have now been recognized to amount to grave international crimes including: war crimes, crimes against humanity ethnic cleansing, and systematic genocide, by the international media and human rights organizations.



The use of starvation as a weapon has created the worse famine in the world in decades. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates around 5.2 million people out of 6.3 million in Tigray are now in need of emergency food assistance, of which 900,000 are in the famine stage (IPC Phase 5), and another 1.5 million people are at Phase 4 (emergency) and over 33,000 children are at grave risk of death.

Although the Federal Government of Ethiopia has announced a “unilateral cease-fire” in the Tigray war as of June 28th after it suffered major defeat, around a third of Tigray’s territory still remains under the control of the invading forces and fighting continues. Most worryingly, the so called “unilateral ceasefire” has developed to be a sinister continuation of the war on the civilian population of Tigray as Abiy’s government and its allies seem to be determined to keep Tigray under siege and aggravate the humanitarian crisis by a complete blockage of electricity, telecom, banking; destruction of bridges connecting Tigray to humanitarian hubs located in the Amhara Region; and the stubborn blockade of nearly 300 trucks of International Aid in Semera, Afar Region, for over two weeks after the declaration of the unilateral ceasefire. Some trucks carrying humanitarian aid have been blocked and redirected back to the Amhara Region. In its latest report, the head of the USAID has warned of the deliberate blockade and delay of the trucks carrying food aid (that have passed are enough to only 1% of the food aid needed). The ICRC has also re-iterated of its grave concern of the humanitarian crisis as market, social services, and banking been to a halt. Lately (On 18 July, 2021), the 10-vehicle World Food Program (WFP) convoy was attacked about 70 miles from the town of Semera while attempting to move essential humanitarian cargo into Tigray region, which has resulted to a total suspension of the WFP delivery efforts. It is now clear, Abiy’s declared unilateral cease-fire was a tactical retreat after his humiliating defeat in Central Tigray that has been followed by a massive military buildup of ENDF, EDF and Amhara militia and Special Forces in western, northern and southern Tigray for future intensified attack. Indeed, Abiy has now scrapped the ceasefire language and called for renewed attack.

The International Community has vehemently denounced such evil acts of collective punishment on the Tigrayan people. The UNSC has called on Abiy’s Government for immediate and unfettered access to humanitarian aid, removal of external forces from Tigray and an independent investigation and accountability for the horrendous atrocities committed in Tigray. The EU and US have rightly demanded for ending the humanitarian blockage and a negotiated ceasefire.

There is now substantial evidence that Ethiopia and Eritrea have utilized famine and starvation as weapons of war in contravention of the UNSC 2417 Resolution against such act, upon which, the UN Secretary General is authorized to table a motion to the security Council. Despite this and other serious and credible evidences of civilian atrocities, however, the international community and especially the UN and the AU have failed the people of Tigray monumentally as the blockade and suffering continues with impunity. Humanitarian aid delivery into Tigray has trickled down to almost zero with only one convoy allowed in the last two weeks, making up only 1% of the food needed for this month. Abiy’s government continues to deceive the international community by pretending to be supportive of international humanitarian aid whilst in practice using delay tactics and not allowing unfettered humanitarian access. Surely, the International Community and the media should note the track records of the government’s hostile, dishonest behavior and outright falsehoods during the past 8 months. To mention some, Abiy denied the involvement of Eritrean troops to the UN secretary general and openly said there was not “a single civilian casualty” that have proven to be false. Why should he be trusted when he is behind all the orders of blockades



and at the same time he now says he will comply with the UNs demands for an unfettered humanitarian corridor?

As it was, the aim of the “administrative guerrilla warfare” against humanitarian agencies -and the focus of the entire war- had narrowed down to the success or failure of deliberate starvation. If the siege on Tigray continues and blockade on the flow of humanitarian and other essential supplies sustains, millions will join the already 900,000 people under famine conditions, leading to a catastrophic situation. Disturbing news are also emerging regarding the arbitrary detention and mass arrest of tens of thousands of Tigrayans in concentration camps in major Ethiopian cities including Addis Ababa, and closure of Tigrayan businesses without due judicial process. All bank accounts opened in the Tigray region have been frozen by the National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE), denying Tigrayans across Ethiopia of access to their own savings. There are no electricity, telephone, internet and banking services all impacting aid activities in Tigray. Urgent action is required to stop this siege and avert further death and suffering from this man-made famine.

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS) calls upon:

1. The UNSC to invoke the necessary measures in accordance with the UNSC 2417 Resolution-enforce humanitarian flow through road access and direct international flights to Tigray to save the lives of millions; and carry out independent investigation of the atrocities, and bring to justice those responsible for planning and committing the ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide in Tigray.
2. The US and EU to consider all alternative measures and take concrete actions to avert the man-made famine and stop the ongoing genocide;
3. The USAID, WFP, FAO and other humanitarian agencies to consider immediate implementation of air-bridging of humanitarian food supplies ;
4. The African Union to review its failed stand on the war against Tigray and make corrective measures to uphold to the resolutions of the “Responsibility to Protect (R2P)” and prevail on Abiy’s government to condemn the atrocities of the allied forces of ENDF, EDF and Amhara special forces and militia; and hold those who engineered the atrocities to account;
5. The release of Tigrayans from concentration camps in Ethiopia and halting of ethnic profiling, arbitrary detention, mass arrest, discrimination and harassment of Tigrayans in Ethiopia, especially in Addis Ababa.



Sincerely,
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)
21st July 2021

CC:

- H.E. Antony Blinken
Secretary of State of the United States
Washington DC
- H.E. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Brussels
- 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. Michelle Bachelet
United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights Geneva
Geneva
- H.E. Félix Tshisekedi
President, the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Chairperson of the African Union for 2021
- H.E. Moussa Faki
Chairperson of the African Union Commission
Addis Ababa

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.