

## **An Open Letter to HE Mr. Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America**

Goitom Aregawi, MD, 05-21-21

*Tigray's grandkids shall not wait for a century to even get recognition of what their forefathers went through, like what happened to the generations of Armenian survivors.*

**Mr. President,**

I am writing this appreciating Your Excellency's historic decision to recognize the Armenian Genocide and appealing for Your administration to investigate and stop the ongoing Genocide in Tigray with distinctively similar features with the Armenian Genocide.

**Mr. President,**

In an extraordinarily bold move, after 106 years, Your Administration comes to officially acknowledge the gravest of all crimes – Genocide against the Armenians in 1915-1917 by the Ottoman Turks. This right the wrong done to all those Armenians who perished in the genocide a century ago.

We salute you for this historic declaration and for your principled position. This indeed is a historic move, and it is hoped that it will be a start of healing the wounds of the Armenians.

**Mr. President,**

Last year you promised Americans and the world that you will make human rights a central guidepost of your foreign policy. You said that you would pursue a values-based foreign policy. You also said that 'failing to call the atrocities against the Armenian people a genocide would pave the way for future mass atrocities. Calling the atrocities on Armenian's "Genocide" in the first 100 days in your office shows your commitment to human rights. Humanity, including myself from the Tigray amidst of the war, salutes you for keeping your promise. I hope this extends to all parts of the world. In fact, your action cannot be timelier than now when it comes to the ongoing genocide in Tigray, in the Horn of Africa.

**The** Armenian Genocide had distinctive similarities with the ongoing Genocide in Tigray.

Majority of the Armenians lived on the Eastern side of the Ottoman empire in Anatolia. The leadership of the declining Ottoman empire fell in the hands of

Turkish nationalist movement of young soldiers which formed the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), led by "three pashas". The CUP resolved to prevent any possibility of Armenians autonomy or independence in the empire's eastern provinces. The CUP developed what they called "a definitive solution to the Armenian Problem". It was total annihilation of the Armenian population in a well-planned, decreed, and well-executed manner.

First Armenian civil servants were dismissed from their posts in late 1914 and early 1915.

Then Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army were disarmed and transferred to labor battalions. Beginning in early 1915, the Armenian soldiers in labor battalions were systematically murdered by Ottoman troops, the first victims of what would become genocide. About the same time, irregular forces began to carry out mass killings in Armenian villages near the Russian border.



[On Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, Tigrayan Americans show their solidarity with the Armenian community, in front of LA Turkish consulate.]

On April 24, On 24 April 1915, the Ottoman authorities rounded up, arrested and later executed 250 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders from Constantinople (now Istanbul)). The purpose was to leave Armenians without a leader who can organize and lead the popular resistance. This date is marked

as the date on which the Ottoman government embarked upon a systematic extermination of ethnic Armenians.

What followed is a decision by the CUP led Ottoman government to forcibly remove the entire Armenian Civilian population. Most Armenian men, including boys above the age of twelve, were separated from the rest of the deportees during the first few days, and executed. Many of them were pushed by paramilitary units off the cliffs into valleys from which the only escape was into the lake. Many others were trapped in valleys of tributaries of the Tigris, Euphrates, or Murat River. Others were drowned by being tied together back-to-back before being thrown into the Tigris, Euphrates, Murat Rivers.

Estimated 800,000 to 1.2 million Armenian women, children, and elderly or infirm people were sent on death marches leading to the Syrian Desert in 1915 and 1916. Deportation was organized in manner to ensure no one survives; the Turkish authorities planned for and intended the death of the deportees. The deportees were subjected to hard marches through mountainous terrain. Those who could not keep up were left to die or shot. Some were forced to walk as far as 1,000 kilometers (620 mi) in the summer heat. Most Armenians perished along the roads. Driven forward by paramilitary escorts, the deportees were subjected to robbery, rape, and massacre. In the Syrian Desert, they were dispersed into a series of concentration camps. The Armenians were denied food and water during and after their forced march to the Syrian desert; many died of starvation, exhaustion, or disease, especially dysentery, typhus, and pneumonia. Aid organizations were officially barred from providing food to the deportees. Between 600,000 and 1,000,000 Armenians are thought to have perished on the death marches. Deportation was only carried out behind the front lines, where no active rebellion existed. Armenians who lived in the war zone were instead killed in massacres; thousands were rounded up across the empire and summarily executed in this manner. .



[In this 1915 file photo, Armenians are marched out of Turkey [AP]]

More than 200,000 Armenians who survived the death marches were executed between March and October 1916; only about 200,000 deportees were left by the end of 1916.

Historians tell, for Armenian's rape meant an irreparable transgenerational loss of self-esteem, or 'honor". Although Armenian women tried various means of avoiding sexual violence, often suicide was the only available means of escape.

The government had decreed that any Muslim who harbored an Armenian against the will of the authorities would be executed so that no Armenian sought a refuge in their Turkish neighbors.

The Armenian population of the Ottoman state was reported at about two million in 1915. An estimated 1 million-1.5 million had perished by 1918, while hundreds of thousands had become homeless and stateless refugees. By 1923 virtually the entire Armenian population of Anatolian Turkey had disappeared. Ottoman records show the government aimed to reduce the population of Armenians to no more than 5- 10 % in any part of the empire, both in the places from which Armenians were deported and in the destination areas. Some Armenians were allowed to convert to Islam and evade deportation, but where their numbers should not exceed that threshold.

According to some studies, by the end of the war, more than 90 % of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were exterminated. All traces of Armenian existence, including churches and monasteries, libraries, archaeological sites, churches, and animal and place names, were systematically erased.

The Armenian Genocide laid the ground for the more homogeneous nation-state that eventually became the Republic of Turkey.

The deserted homes and property of the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia were confiscated by the state and given to Muslim Turks immediately. Confiscated Armenian properties formed much of the basis of the Republic of Turkey's economy, endowing it with capital. The expropriation was part of a drive to build a statist "national economy" controlled by Muslim Turks. 100,000 to 200,000



surviving Armenian women and children were forcibly converted to Islam and integrated into Muslim households. These surviving women and children were often forced to give up their Armenian identities at all.

[Released by the Armenian Genocide Museum in Yerevan, this 1915 picture shows soldiers surveying the skulls of victims in an Armenian village]

The land mostly in Anatolia that they lived in was divided between Russia and Turkey.

Today, fewer than 60,000 ethnic Armenians remain in Turkey, mainly in Istanbul, and still are targets of sporadic hate crimes, such as vandalism of churches.

**Mr. President,**

As the House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said it, "History teaches us that if we ignore its darkest chapters, we are destined to witness the horrors of the past be repeated"; so, your declaration was an important milestone in history, and is hoped to prevent similar crimes from being repeated.

Unfortunately, the world has repeatedly failed to learn from its mistakes in the past, and repeating them time and again over the years.

Between 1941 and 1945, 6 million Jews were exterminated by the Nazi Germany and its collaborators, across German-occupied Europe in the Holocaust. Around two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population were exterminated.

In 1994, the world saw one of the most shocking human tragedies in Rwanda. Between 7 April and 15 July 1994(100 days), members of the Tutsi ethnic group and some moderate Hutus were slaughtered by armed militias. The world was 'bystander', very much reluctant to act on time and timely stop the Genocide. March 25, 1998, President Bill Clinton expressed "a deep regret" for failing to act on time and stop it, also saying that he didn't "fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which [Rwandans] were being engulfed by the unimaginable terror".

After the tragic Rwanda Genocide, the international community in one voice echoed "Never Again". Many of us hoped such horrors wouldn't happen again- Never Ever, again!

Tragically, 27 years later after Rwandan Genocide, and 106 years after Armenian Genocide, another Genocide is being committed under Your Excellency's watch in Tigray.



[Abrahaley Minasbo, a Tigrayan, now in Refugee camp in Sudan, was attacked by machetes in Mai-Kadra, Tigray, by the Amhara]

For more than 6 months now, Ethiopian and Eritrean armies, Amhara forces (Amhara Special forces, Amhara militias, Amhara Fano-an armed youth squad) are committing a well-planned, deliberate, well-executed act of genocide against ethnic Tigray. The international community once again appears to remain bystander, reluctant to decisively act and stop the genocide in Tigray. Many including your senior officials are issuing statements of concern, but there is no concrete action so far on the ground to prevent the atrocious genocide against Tigray.

So far, more than 150 mass massacre sites are compiled by a team at the University of Ghent in Belgium which were carried out between November and March. There are handful additional massacres since then. 70,000-150,000 innocent Tigrayans are estimated to have been exterminated in these massacres. The most notable few massacres are:

- The Mai-Kadra massacre which according to a report by Amnesty International took more than 600 lives;
- Axum massacre taking more than 800 civilian deaths, according to AP's Feb 18 report of witness accounts;
- Dengelet Massacre (a March 22<sup>nd</sup> report by the CNN put the figure at more than 100; Europe External Programme with Africa put the figure at 150; my witnesses put the figure to be 165)
- Mahbere-Dego(a leaked graphic Video and witness accounts collected by CNN and BBC Africa eye reveal 39-73 young men to have been killed

between Jan 15 and 16; my witnesses estimated 193 civilians to have been killed including on the subsequent days)

- Abi Adi- an April 7<sup>th</sup> report by The Telegraph shows that 182 civilians were killed on February 10 alone]
- Bora(more than 160 civilian death according a March 19<sup>th</sup> witnesses report by Los Angeles Times)
- The Zelambessa massacre, killing 56-72 civilians according to reports by Tigray Television, Tghat.com, and Jan Naysen,

Sheraro, Humera Dansha, Maykinetal, Selekleka, Irob, Debre-Abay, Idagahamus, Adwa, Shire, Humera, Idaga-Arbi, Adigrat, Hawzen, Edaga-Berhe, Miriena, Seglamen, Hagere-selam, Hitsats, Samre, Gijjet, Hiwane, Nebelet, Wukro, Workamba, Killele, Azeba e.t.c are also few of the more than 150 massacre sites where Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Amhara armies massacred civilians of all age groups (as young as 2 years and as old as 93).



[Young men rounded by Ethiopian military to be massacred, Mahbere-Degu, taken from a graphic video]

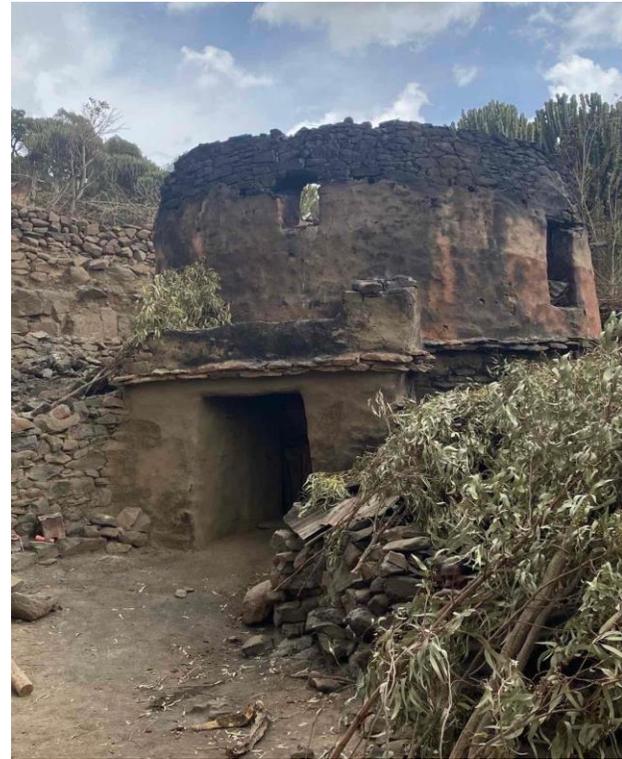
Thousands of women and underage girls (as young as 6 years old) in Tigray have been gang-raped, in an intentional use of rape as a weapon of war; in some cases, the rapists burn the victims genitalia and uterus with hot iron rods and insert foreign objects to make them infertile. Various media outlets, UN bodies, including the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in addition to other humanitarian organizations, have talked extensively about such acts of crimes on humanity. Ethiopia's government has even verified these claims.

Tens of thousands of Tigrayan members of Ethiopian Defense forces are disarmed and detained arbitrarily in various unknown concentration camps. Many among them are feared to have been executed. Likewise, Tigrayans throughout Ethiopia are profiled and indiscriminately arrested for months; Tigrayan civil servants in Federal government bureaus have been fired from their jobs; Tigrayan businesses have been shut. Tigrayans in Ethiopia are enduring all kinds of humiliation and harassment for who they are. On April 29th, the Associated Press released a report detailing this ethnic profiling, arbitrary detention, and purging of Tigrayans.

To induce mass starvation and destitution of Tigray, Ethiopian, Eritrean armies, and Amhara forces are burning crops, seeds, cutting trees, destroying agricultural tools, burning grasses (food for the cattle), killing livestock, especially targeting oxen and donkeys, as well as destroying small dams and irrigation canals in a systematic campaign of crippling the agricultural sector. The World Peace Foundation produced a 58-page comprehensive report about such targeted attacks. According to reports by UN agencies and Tigray's interim government, currently, more than 2.3 million people in Tigray are internally displaced and 4.5 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. 50-100 people have already died of hunger. Like the Turks, the Ethiopian government, the Eritrean Army, and Amhara forces have tried everything they can to block humanitarian aid from reaching the people that they have systematically starved, with the intent of decimating the entire Tigrayan population. Like the Turks, the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies as well as the Amhara forces are utilizing starvation as a weapon of war, and they want the effects to sustain for years to come if in case the international community steps up and provides life-sustaining humanitarian aid.

Like in the case of Armenian Genocide by the Turks, Ethiopia's government and Eritrean and Amhara allies are using rape, sexual slavery, starvation, destruction of civilian livelihood as weapon of war.

Ethiopian, Eritrean armies, and Amhara forces are destroying health facilities, clean water infrastructure, water pumps so that Tigrayans die of water-borne and other communicable diseases, gun inflicted injuries, non-communicable diseases; this is a damage maximization strategy to decimate Tigrayan Civilian Population. For months, Tigray was on the dark, with electricity and telecommunication services cut; Banking services stopped; business transaction stopped; roads blocked; much of the grave atrocities on humanity



hidden from the world. All these are committed most of these horrific crimes in the dark, by blocking access to the media and to rights organizations, for most of the time. The Internet remains cut, telephone service only limited; and most of Tigray was in the dark for most of the time. The Turks also tried to finish the Armenians in the dark.

[Eritrean troops burn down, destroy houses, animal foods, infrastructure in Debre-Genet, Central Tigray [Source Professor Kindeya Gebrehiwot, former president of Mekelle University]]

Ethiopian, Eritrean armies, and Amhara forces are destroying health facilities, clean water infrastructure, and water pumps so greater numbers

of Tigrayans will die of water-borne illnesses and other communicable diseases, gun inflicted injuries, and non-communicable diseases; this is a damage maximization strategy to decimate the Tigrayan Civilian Population. For months, Tigray was left in the dark, with electricity and telecommunication services cut; banking services stopped; business transactions placed on hold; roads blocked; with much of these grave atrocities on humanity hidden from the world. By blocking access to the media and to rights organizations, these horrific crimes have been successfully committed in the dark.

Ethiopia's government and its allies are destroying schools, roads, a variety of civilian infrastructures, heritages [including AlNejashi Mosque, Debredamo monastery, Dengolat St Mary monastery e.t.c], private houses, and factories for the sake of destroying Tigray, including its history and identity, and leaving it in indefinite destitution and humiliation. In order to erase Tigray, entire villages and small towns are indiscriminately shelled with heavy artillery<sub>7</sub> and bombarded with missiles from drones; private houses ransacked, systematically burnt<sub>2</sub> and destroyed; Some Villages and small towns are completely turned to ashes, erased.

Amhara militia, Fano, Amhara special forces are also committing ethnic cleansing and Genocide in Western Tigray. There is an estimated 1 million (A study by the Ethiopian Ministry of Health puts it at 1.2 million) Tigrayans who used to live in Western Tigray that are no longer there. They are either killed, forcibly displaced or kept in concentration camps. Some 700,000 Tigrayans accounted for so far have been forcibly evicted from their lands and homes empty-handed, now sheltered in many towns in Tigray and in Sudan. Tens of thousands are feared to be dying in concentration camps there. Their prosperities, their lands, their houses are confiscated by the Amhara regional forces.

After committing 100% Ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans in Western Tigray, which Secretary Blinken also repeatedly stated, the Amhara have brought hundreds of thousands of ethnic Amhara from Gojjam and Gonder, transferring them into the houses and places originally inhabited by ethnic Tigray for Generations, making Western Tigray a "homogeneously Amhara" land. Men are not spared no matter what; thousands of women and under 7 children are forced to take the Amhara identity in order to remain in their homes. The women must be willing to be a concubine to an Amhara militia, though. Tigrayan traces have been erased. Recently the Amhara Regional Government has started illegally (yet officially) leasing farmlands that belong to Western Tigray to Amhara investors.



- [A letter Written by Amhara National Regional State Bureau of Rural Land Administration and use on 02/09/2021(10/05/2021) calling Ethnic Amhara investors and farmers to take the newly annexed Tigray's land, and use it]

These are the same methods employed by to what the Turks on the Armenians 106 years ago.

[N.B: A Censuses 40 years back by Dergue Regime, and 20 years back by EPRDF showed 96.3-98.1 % of people in the various districts in Western Tigray spoke Tigrigna, so were Tigrayans);



[Tigrayan civilians crossing towards Sudan fleeing the flight]

Mr. President,

Today's genocide against Tigray is the same as the hundred-year-old genocide against Armenia.

Our kids and grandkids shouldn't wait 106 years to get recognition of what their forefathers went through, like what generations of Armenian survivors endured.

**Mr. President,**

With the cumbersome evidence on your hand, it must by now be clear to you and the international community that Ethiopia's government and allies are on a campaign of completely destroying the Tigrayan population, erasing Tigray altogether, just like what the Turks did against the Armenians.

The international community has repeatedly witnessed the untrustworthiness and the Genocidal appetite of Ethiopian and Eritrean governments and allies.

Unfortunately, what we have witnessed over the past six months is an international mechanism failing to do anything tangible to avert the situation in Tigray.

Mr. President,

While the courageous decision you took to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide is to be commended on its own, what is the use of acknowledging historical genocide if it can not stop an ongoing genocide under your watch.

I urge you, Mr. President, to name an investigation commission composed of the experts that studied genocides including that of Armenia and Rwanda and deploy these same experts to Tigray. I urge your administration and the Western world to name the Ethiopian and Eritrean states-sponsored Campaign of decimating Tigrayan population in Ethiopia with the proper descriptive name "genocide". In the meanwhile, Your Excellency needs to do everything in your capacity to stop the ongoing Genocide in Tigray before it is too late. The United States of America is more than equipped to stop it. What it needs is your attention and your strong leadership.

Mr. President,

Now that the war is in its seventh month, Tigrayans do not think a solution will come from the UN Security Council given China's transactional politics and Russia's soft heart for dictators. Over 6 million people in Tigray are in imminent danger of extinction due to a paralyzed international mechanism of dealing with grave situations. They Rather look into you, the free world you lead, and the institutions of the free world for a decisive action to stop it.

Therefore, I appeal to you, your Excellency,

- 1.** America and the Western world shall be bold enough to categorize the atrocities as "Genocide" and "famine" with regards to the crisis in Tigray.
- 2.** America shall mobilize the Western world to use all the leverage and the existing diplomatic, economic, and military machineries at its disposal to put palpable necessary pressure on Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to put a stop to the ongoing Genocide on Tigray.
- 3.**The United States government, and western allies including European Union, the UK government, the governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, shall sanction the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea for the continued Civilian massacres, use of Sexual violence, induced hunger, and destruction of civilian infrastructures and livelihood as weapons of war;
- 3.**A USA commission should be put in place to determine the genocide

committed against Tigrayans.

4. It is time for AFRICOM and NATO to militarily intervene (by triggering Art 5) in Tigray

A. To provide rapid, unconditional, unfettered, and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and items essential to survival, including establishing a "lifeline humanitarian corridor" from Sudan to Tigray under a demilitarized route designated for safe passage of humanitarian supplies.

B. To ensure the immediate and verifiable cessation of all forms of hostilities;

C. Ensure total withdrawal of all internal and external forces, including Eritrean armed forces and Amhara Special Forces and militia from all Tigray parts to their deployment lines before 4th November 2020.

D. Enforce "No fly zone" across the skies of Tigray.

5. An immediate joint UN-USA-EU independent investigation in the war crimes and grave crimes against humanity in Tigray; and for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

6. America and other great powers need to scale up the humanitarian aid to a point that is necessary to avert the impending humanitarian catastrophe.

7. America and other western powers shall press on the United Nations with all the leverage they have to put Tigray under a UN-mandated international interim civil and security administration (Using the Kosovo model).

I thank you, Mr. President.

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- Chairman of Seb-Hidri Civil Society Tigray
- Writer in local media outlets, Social influencer/Activist