

A Week in the Horn 13.11.2020

News in Brief

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Africa and the African Union

The African Union (AU) convened the Africa Forum on Women, Peace and Security on 10-12 of November 2020. The forum planned to integrate the actions of key actors in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS), to push for accountability, bridge the gap between the array of policies and the implementation of commitments that strengthen the role and leadership of women in peace processes. Organized by the AU Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, the forum sought out to accelerate the delivery of commitments of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and scale up actions for silencing the guns for a sustainable peace in Africa.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat said that he is following with concern the escalation of military confrontation in Ethiopia. In a statement issued on Monday (November 09), the Chairperson reaffirms the African Union's firm attachment to the constitutional order, territorial integrity, unity and national sovereignty of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to ensure stability in the country and in the Region. In this regard, the Chairperson appeals for the immediate cessation of hostilities and calls on parties to respect human rights and ensure the protection of civilians.

The UN Secretary-General spoke by phone on Saturday (November 07) with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia. They discussed the ongoing tensions in the Tigray region. The Secretary-General expressed condolences for the recent deaths in clashes and offered his good offices. The Secretary-General has also spoken with Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok of Sudan, in

his capacity as Chairperson of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development). He also spoke with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, as Chair of the African Union. In those conversations, the Secretary-General expressed the readiness of the UN to support IGAD and the African Union in any initiative to address the situation.

As of Wednesday (November 12), the confirmed cases of Covid-19 from 55 African countries have reached 1,918,932. Reported deaths in Africa have reached 46,283 and recoveries 1,620,746. South Africa has the most reported cases – 742,394, with deaths numbering 20,011. Other most-affected countries include Morocco (270,626), Egypt (109,881), Ethiopia (100,727), Tunisia (74,522) and Libya (70,885). The numbers are compiled by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University using statistics from the World Health Organization and other international institutions as well national and regional public health departments.

At the initiative of the African Union (AU) Commission, a high-level Ministerial meeting of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was held virtually on Tuesday (November 10) and chaired by H.E Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union Commission. The meeting expressed deep concern over the continued threat posed by Al Shabaab to Somalia and the region and its continued recruitment drive and acquisition of sophisticated weaponry

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced today (November 13) that Dr. Mulu Nega has been appointed as Chief Executive of Provisional Administration of Tigray National Regional State. The Chief Executive will recruit and appoint heads to lead executive organs of the regional state from political parties legally operating in the region, the premier underlined. The appointment of Dr. Mulu Nega is based on the decision of the House of Federation and the Council of Ministers Regulation concerning the Provisional Administration of the Tigray National Regional State, according to the Prime Minister.

“Verified” photos from Mai-Kadra, a town in Tigray region, indicate ‘scores of civilians’ were killed, says Amnesty. It’s the first reported incident of large-scale civilian deaths in the conflict. Amnesty International on Thursday

(November 12) confirmed reports of a “massacre” of civilians in northern Ethiopia’s Tigray region. “Scores, and likely hundreds, of people were stabbed or hacked to death in Mai-Kadra town in the South West Zone of Ethiopia’s Tigray Region on the night of November 9,” the rights group said in a report. Declining to identify who was responsible, Amnesty did however cite witnesses who alleged that Tigray special police members had used weapons such as knives and machetes, after a local defeat by Ethiopian EDF federal forces.

The Ethiopian Airlines Group has announced on Wednesday (November 11) that it has won the ‘Overall Excellence for Outstanding Crisis Leadership 2020 Award,’ of the Global Finance magazine. The award recognises companies that went above and beyond in responding to the global pandemic crisis and in assisting their customers, protecting their employees and providing critical support to society at large. Ethiopian Group CEO, Tewolde GebreMariam, remarked, “We are glad to have won the ‘Overall Excellence for Outstanding Crisis Leadership 2020 Award’, which recognises our distinct capabilities of successful management of multiple crises taking place simultaneously like a perfect storm.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said the National Defense Force has liberated the western part of Tigray Region in its operation being carried out to enforce rule of law in the region. Currently, the army has been providing humanitarian aid including food distribution, and medical services to the inhabitants in the area, Abiy said on his Facebook page on Thursday (November 11). Stating that brutality is the soul of this greedy junta group in the TPLF, the Premier said “when the national defense force liberated Shiraro in West Tigray it has discovered dead bodies of members of the army who are murdered by the forces of the group after their arms and legs are tied. “This brutal act is heartbreaking,” he added. “This will be the end of the Junta. We must hurry to rescue the survivors so that we will be able to expose the atrocities committed by the junta to the world,” PM Abiy stated.

The House of Peoples’ Representatives (HPR) has stripped members of the defiant TPLF lawmakers of their immunity from prosecution. The House passed the decision after it discussed the proposed resolution in its 6th year of the 4th regular meeting held on Thursday (November 12). Accordingly, Doctor Debretsion Gebremikael, Asmelash Woldesilassie, Abay Tsehaye, Ambassador Addisalem Balema, Getachew Reda, Atsibeha Aregawi and Gebregziabihier Araya were mentioned among the lawmakers whose immunity from prosecution was lifted by the House. It is to be recalled that

the tyranny TPLF clique had attacked the Northern Command based in Tigray Region on November 4, 2020. Last week, the House has also endorsed a six-month state of emergency decree on Tigray Regional State as proposed by the Council of Ministers.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated that the House of Federation, in its meeting held on Thursday (November 12), has adopted a regulation concerning the Provisional Administration of The Tigray National Regional State. The house adopted the regulation in accordance with the decision of the House of Federation for the establishment of a provisional administration that is accountable to the Federal Government within the Regional State of Tigray pursuant to Article 62(9) of the FDRE Constitution and Article 14(2)(b) of the Proclamation Governing Intervention of the Federal Government in the Regions”, the Prime Minister said.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has warned on Thursday (November 12) against the spread of misinformation in Ethiopia and Sudan Situation. UNHCR said that it is aware of a doctored image, presented as a Tweet from UNHCR’s official account in Sudan, being circulated via messaging services. This image is false and was never posted from our official verified Twitter account, said UNHCR on an official website. “UNHCR is alarmed about the spreading of false information. We urge all those posting on social media to verify information and exercise responsibility and care before publishing and sharing images,” UN Refugee Agency stated.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Demeke Mekonnen, and the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa, Naledi Pandor, have held a discussion over the phone on Thursday (November 12) about current situations in Ethiopia. Demeke briefed the current status of the ongoing operation of the federal government of Ethiopia in the Tigray regional state. He told his South African counterpart that the government of Ethiopia is committed to upholding the rule of law in the Tigray region. The government intends to neutralize the destructive forces of the TPLF gang, free the people, and rescue stranded members of the Ethiopian Defense Force, he said. He also reiterated that the operation in Tigray would end once the TPLF gang, the perpetrator of inhuman acts, is brought to justice.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Demeke Mekonnen, and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the state of Israel, Gabi

Ashkenazi spoke over the phone on Thursday (November 12) on issues of mutual interest. During the discussion, Demeke briefed his Israeli counterpart about the objectives of the Federal government of Ethiopia in engaging in the operation in Tigray regional state. The operation would maintain the constitutional order and ensure that the rule of law prevails in the region, he said. The culture of impunity should not be allowed to continue, he said, adding that the people of Tigray should also be free from the grip of the TPLF gang. He said the operation would neutralize the heavy and long-range weaponry of the TPLF gang, rescue survivors of the Ethiopian defense force members, and bring the criminals to justice.

A special Israeli locust fighters taskforce has arrived in Addis Ababa on Tuesday (November 10) to help Ethiopia address the impact of the desert locust. The members of the taskforce will join forces with their Ethiopian counterparts in fighting the spread of desert locust swarms in the country. During their two-week stay here, they will provide training to more than 200 Ethiopian experts.

State Minister of Minister Redwan Hussein received on Wednesday (November 11) copies of the credentials of the newly appointed ambassador of China to Ethiopia Zhao Zhiyuan. They have reiterated the importance of further expanding the extensive economic activities that the Chinese Government and private companies are currently engaging in Ethiopia. Ambassador Redwan commended China for understanding Ethiopia's stance not to internationalize the undergoing operation in Tigray regional state as the issue is a domestic affair of Ethiopia. The Chinese ambassador reaffirmed that China understands external power involvement in the Ethiopian government operation in Tigray is unnecessary since Ethiopia is capable of solving its own problems.

Ethiopian delegation led by State Minister of Transport Awol Wagais participated in the African Ports Forum which kicked off in Djibouti on Monday (November 09). Making its theme, "African ports in the Age of Alliance," the two-day forum is aimed at strengthening partnerships, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The forum is hoped to facilitate the necessary platform to ensure that essential operations and trade could continue in the realm of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The forum mainly covers rubrics like the intra-African exchanges for development, digitization, connectivity and logistics. **(See article)**

Concerns that Ethiopia will descend into chaos are unfounded, said Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. His comment comes following the law enforcement measures being taken against TPLF clique after they attacked the national defence force last week. In a tweet, the Prime Minister said “concerns that Ethiopia will descend into chaos are unfounded & a result of not understanding our context deeply.” “Ethiopia is grateful for friends expressing their concern,” he said, adding “Our rule of law operation is aimed at guaranteeing peace and stability once and for all by bringing perpetrators of instability to justice.” “Our rule of law enforcement operation, as a sovereign state with the capacity to manage its own internal affairs, will wrap up soon by ending the prevailing impunity.”

Eritrea

Eritrea’s delegation composed of Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab met in Khartoum on Wednesday (November 11) President of the Sovereign Council, Gen. Abdulfattah al-Burhan, as well as Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok and delivered a message from President Isaias Afwerki. The message and discussions between both sides centered on further enhancement of bilateral relations and regional cooperation. The two sides also availed of the opportunity to exchange views on current developments in their mutual neighbor, Ethiopia.

Kenya

Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary Macharia Kamau said on Monday (November 09) that the Kenyan government will make it easier for Somalis to obtain visas to resume trade ties between the two countries, which have been suspended in recent months. Secretary-General Macharia Kamau said a recent visit to Mogadishu had sparked plans for Kenya to facilitate visas for Somalis, which he said he had discussed with the Somali government to improve relations. He cited the example of Turkey, Ethiopia, Uganda and Djibouti, which direct flights to Mogadishu as part of trade relations between Somalia and those countries.

Somalia

The UN Security Council voted on Thursday (November 12) to prevent the sale or shipment to Somalia of components of improvised explosive devices if there is “significant risk” they may be used to manufacture the often deadly devices that are increasingly being used in attacks by al-Shabab extremists. It

also urged the Somali government to keep cracking down on the militant group's illegal financing methods that UN experts estimate raised over \$21 million last year.

A Jubbaland regional minister in Somalia on Thursday (November 13) survived a bomb attack that lobbed through the window of his residence in Kismayo, south of the capital Mogadishu. Speaking to local media, Jubbaland Tourism and Environment Minister Aidid Suleyman confirmed that the explosion killed three people in his residence, including two of his security personnel. The official said that he was unharmed in the attack and regretted the deaths of his bodyguards and a civilian who were in the section of his house at the time of the attack.

Somalia's federal state of Hirshabelle on Wednesday (November 11) elected its president and deputy in what is the start of a month-long electoral calendar that will culminate in the election of the national head of state. In Jowhar, representatives in the local legislative assembly elected Mr Ali Abdullahi Hussein, aka Guudlaawe, to be the third president. Out of 99 legislators, he received 86 votes while his competitor, Mr Abdurhman Jumale Osman, garnered 13 votes.

China is ready to work with Somalia to push forward bilateral relations to new highs, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said. Wang made the remarks in a telephone talk with Somali Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Ahmed Isse Awad on Wednesday night. China, Wang said, appreciates Somalia's adherence to the one-China principle and firmly supports Somalia's efforts to safeguard national sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity. In his part, Awad said that the two countries enjoy a profound traditional friendship, expressing gratitude to China for its valuable support and assistance to Somalia over the years.

Nearly 73,000 people have now been affected by the *deyr* season (October to December) flash floods, including more than 13,000 displaced and four suspected deaths, the UN announced in its daily noon briefings held on Wednesday (November 11). At least five states have been affected with extensive damage reported to infrastructure and farmland. The *deyr* floods come at a time when aid workers are responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a desert locust invasion and a residual caseload affected by *hagaa* season (June to September) flooding. This is likely to impact response capacity and resources. The UN and humanitarian partners are undertaking a rapid needs assessment and in the meanwhile have

mobilized pre-positioned stocks in support of the affected people. At least 6,000 people affected by the floods have been provided with shelter.

South Sudan

Sudan and South Sudan agreed on Thursday (November 13) to form a technical committee to demarcate the border between the two countries next January. The two sides resumed meetings in Khartoum after a series of meetings in Juba last week to discuss the border delimitation and demarcation process in accordance with the principle of the January 1956 borders. The two parties “will form an 80-member technical committee to demarcate the borders of the two countries next January,” said Muaz Tango the head of the Joint Border Commission (JBC) from the Sudanese side.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has welcomed a EUR 4 million donation from the European Union (EU) for purchasing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to ensure continuity of humanitarian operations in South Sudan during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Humanitarian workers in South Sudan will now be better protected from the virus and will be better equipped to fulfil their life-saving mission,” the EU ambassador, Christian Bader noted in a statement issued on Wednesday (November 11). “Health and humanitarian workers are a precious lifeline for all people of South Sudan,” he added.

Sudan

Prime Minister Dr. Abdallah Hamdok received at his office today (November 13) the UK special envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Robert Fairweather, in the presence of acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Omer Gammar-Eddin. The acting Minister of Foreign Affairs said in a press statement that the meeting discussed domains of the Sudanese-British cooperation besides the progress of implementation of Juba peace agreement between the Sudanese parties as planned. The two sides also discussed contributions of the Sudan in making the South Sudanese peace agreement a success besides developments in neighboring Ethiopia and its possible impacts on Sudan.

The Head of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, issued on Thursday (November 12) a general amnesty for all those who carried arms or participated in any of the military or war operations or participated in any act or statement related to combat

operations. The decree number (249) for the year 2020, excludes those against whom arrest warrants have been issued by the International Criminal Court or who are facing criminal charges or lawsuits for the crime of genocide and crimes against humanity.

President of the Transitional Sovereignty Council Lieutenant General Abdel-Fattah Al-Burhan has affirmed solidarity of the Sudanese government and people with the Ethiopian government and people in the face of the circumstances Ethiopia witnesses now. This came when Al-Burhan received at his office the envoy of the Ethiopian Prime Minister and national security adviser Gedu Andargachew, on Tuesday (November 10) who said he had conveyed greetings of the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, to the President of the Transitional Sovereignty Council. The envoy of the Ethiopian Prime Minister affirmed the importance of boosting the Sudanese-Ethiopian relations further. The Ethiopian Prime Minister's envoy presented a briefing during the meeting on the internal situation at the Tigray region, affirming the capability of the Ethiopian Government to resolve the situations as soon as possible.

The Russian government approved the establishment of a military naval base in eastern Sudan on the Red Sea, the last step before its ratification by President Vladimir Putin. TASS news agency reported on Wednesday (November 11) that Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin approved a draft agreement to build a logistics base for the Russian navy and directed to submit it to the President for signature. The draft agreement which is approved by the Sudanese side provides that the Russian Navy's logistics facility in Sudan "meets the goals of maintaining peace and stability in the region, is defensive and is not aimed against other countries."

Saving Ethiopia from Falling into a Cliff: The Rightful Act of its Prime Minister

The military operation launched by the Federal government in Tigray region is an act of self-defense against the treason of no proportion in the country's modern history. It is neither a conventional war nor a war of ideology. The National Defense forces stationed in Tigray were stabbed in a cowardly manner by the TPLF's Special forces, with evil intent, creating shock and disbelief within the army. This unexpected attack came with brutality, Ethiopians only saw during the Italian fascist invasion, who massacred

innocent people. What is grossly sad is the fact that the Defense Forces in Tigray were the same people who have rightfully executed their heroic duties of protecting Ethiopian borders for two decades.

The TPLF leadership is on public record with its repeated defiance of the Federal Government for quite some time. Statements in the name of the regional state against the Federal governments issued at a very close interval; letters of accusations of the Federal Government sent directly to many foreign states and the recent unlawful regional election are some of the evidences.

It took no time to launch an all-out attack on the stability of Ethiopia after TPLF was toppled from its central leadership. Its plot to assassinate the then new-elect Prime Minister in June 2018, heralded this junta knows no bounds in its evil act. In the last two years and half, the junta has masterminded and collaborated with militant groups in the killing of innocent people, in various parts of the country. Massacres occurred in different places and costed innocent lives for no reason, and many fled their village in fear and uncertainty. In the same vein, the junta's massacre in Mai-Kadra is its brand name although it never was in the wildest guess of any sane mind.

Over the course of the one-week law enforcement operation, echoes of issues are heard on the legitimacy of the military campaign, or other fringe issues. Primarily, the Federal Government's imposition of a state of emergency is an ABC of any government under war to safeguard the public, and pursue the criminals. If anything, all the state of emergency does is carrying on its duty of enforcing the law. Issues related to reorganizing its government, playing the role of commander in chief or securing the nation is the constitutional duty of the head of state, not because centralized power, as some critics claim.

The Ethiopian people have spoken loud and clear that TPLF's political manipulation is bankrupt and out of date. Therefore, reforming the old political order is nothing but the guarantee to see the nation continue and prosper as one. Fighting corruption and embezzlement is a burning agenda for Ethiopians, as PM Abiy rightfully embraced. These changes have been anathema to the TPLF junta who have prospered at the cost of the poor Ethiopians aspiring to see progress. Ethiopians of all walks of life want to see a fair progress, equality and secured life, not seeing this junta suck their blood.

Other cry wolf comments relate to Prime Minister Abiy's Nobel Prize. It is a very well-known fact that the prize was a well-deserved prize on the merits of the Prime Minister and will continue to be the pride of the nation. One thing that lingers in the minds of who doubt the nomination is whether the Prime Minister will cease to lead his nation for fear of allegations related to conflicts. This is like implying that the Nobel prize is to silence the winner and make them sing the gospel of peace, without enforcing law and order. That is farce. If Nobel Prize winners sacrifice everything for upholding peace, then the prize looks like a bribe for allowing anarchy and violence under their watch. Peace is not the absence of war or the absence of law enforcement, peace is in fact a cyclic journey of redeemed, maintaining and keeping. Making the headlines with sarcasm of the Peace Nobel Prize winner Prime Minister Abiy tells that bullying is not a school phenomenon but a much greater attack at the level of heads of states and world leaders.

All this reveals that there is a clear but deformed belief that TPLF is superior and above the constitutional order, rule of law or any polity. The cry wolf commentators on the current political development in Ethiopia should be principle based and balanced before they echo their sympathetic views of the TPLF. The following facts should resonate:

- When the same law enforcement operations were carried out in different parts of Ethiopia (Wollega, Sidama, Somali, Wolayta) there were no frenzy about covering any operation. Is this because certain regions of the country are more than the rest, or is it to say that the old hierarchical ethnic hegemony should continue as the hallmark of the Ethiopian society?
- The call for dialogue and negotiation, that have been tried and failed in the past, are being forwarded from both those who very well know about the situation or those who are naïve. However, this is about keeping law and order and should never be seen as a conflict between two equal parties. The notion of requesting the two parties to dialogue and resolve the issue is also an indication that deep inside the junta in TPLF is proportioned to have equal power with the Federal government. This is preposterous.
- All claiming to be concerned on the Ethiopian stability should be fair, balanced and well-reasoned before echoing the cry wolf tweets, or opinions in the manner that is acceptable by the standards of your idolized world. Please be daring to condemn the act of TPLF's treason, evil act and destabilizing intent. If there is anyone committed on

peacemaking in Ethiopia, where were you when the nation was embroiled with killings and massacres, time and again over the course of the last two and half years. If you think this law enforcement is a war waged on the Tigrean people, as misconstrued by the TPLF junta, there is no iota of truth. Ethiopia is on the right path of regaining its unity, by weeding out its evil once and for all.

This is one of the historical times Ethiopians are calling for ethical view of the case and a fair judgement. All they call is for upholding two fundamental rules: reversibility and universality.

Ethiopians have said in one voice no to oppression, exclusion, corruption, hegemonic rules, or economic subjugation. They realize the TPLF leadership is an agent of Ethiopia's disunity, ethnic war and division among peoples. Dismantling this age old tribalist minority party is a priority for Ethiopians, not because this would stop their heinous policy but herald the peaceful coexistence of the people of Ethiopia.

The PM said defined war as the "epitome of hell": true but terrorism is worse because it is actually "hell's fierce grasp" that lingers for generations to come.

Say no to terrorism! History will judge and solidarity pays.

On the political situation in Ethiopia and the latest developments in Tigray

Since the last two years, Ethiopia has embarked on a series of liberal political reforms aimed at widening the political space. These reforms paved the way for releasing political prisoners; inviting exiled political parties to return; revising laws and legislations related to elections, counterterrorism, and civil society participation, thus ushering in a new political dispensation in the country.

Furthermore, firm steps have been taken to institutionalize these reforms and address the huge gap in gender parity – including at the highest levels of government. These measures were indeed very much welcomed by Ethiopians across the length and breadth of the country opening a new chapter in the country's political dispensation. They were also lauded by the international community.

No doubt, the reform process over the past two years and a half has not been a smooth sailing, and the government recognizes the many challenges the country still continues to face. Managing a transition in a country like Ethiopia is by no means an easy fit and there is no illusion that the government will achieve the desired result in such a short span of time. It knows full well that building democratic institutions and political culture certainly takes time; it also requires tireless and dedicated efforts. Therefore, the Ethiopian government sees the reforms as work in progress. At this stage, there is strong conviction that the necessary foundation has been laid down for greater respect for human rights and better standards of governance in Ethiopia.

It is while Ethiopia is in the midst of these major reforms that the global health crisis struck. The pandemic has had multiple impacts, and the country is forced to postpone the national elections that were supposed to be held this year. Ethiopia is, of course, not an exception as many other countries also did the same. The relevant authorities in Ethiopia deemed it necessary to do so to protect the health and wellbeing of the people. But now, with the authorization of the competent authorities, the government is hoping to hold the elections next year with all the necessary precautionary measures against COVID-19. The government is aware of concerns raised about the reform efforts facing the risk of being reversed.

As Prime Minister has made it very clear, the government affirms “the importance of a free press, a vibrant civil society, an independent judiciary, a professional civil service, an open political space, and political contests based on ideas and clear policy options”. In this regard, it will continue to work tirelessly to fulfill the promise of a democratic and pluralistic political order based on the rule of law, respect for fundamental rights and the basic liberties of our citizens. Therefore, the Ethiopian government continues to count on the support and understanding of its international partners as it strives to build a peaceful, democratic, inclusive, multinational, and prosperous Ethiopia.

With regard to the events of the last couple of days in Tigray, it should be looked at in context. The Office of the Prime Minister has expounded at length on the chronology of events in relation to the situation in the region this yesterday (See the article from the Prime Minister office herein under). The ongoing operation is all about ensuring respect for the rule of law and maintaining the constitutional order of the country. The government is, of course, aware of the concerns being raised by some of the international

partners. It is taking the maximum care in protecting civilians and reducing casualties and collateral damage. The hope and expectation is that the operations will be completed in a short span of time, thus ensuring the rule of law and achieving lasting peace in the country.

Context for the Current Situation in Ethiopia — The Evolution of Criminality

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Following a wave of popular protests that swept across the country for almost two years, the reformist government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in April 2018. In his inaugural parliamentary address, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed promised to implement deep political and economic reforms in order to overcome the multi-faceted and complex socio-political and economic problems of the country. Within less than eight months after coming to power, he introduced profound changes that brought hopes to many in Ethiopians and beyond.

Amongst others, the government of Ethiopia released political prisoners and journalists and invited exiled political parties and armed groups to take part in peaceful political contestations. It repealed unjust laws and brought in several ground-breaking economic reforms. It restored peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia, for which Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was rightly recognized with the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize.

The beginning of TPLF's complaint

In as much as it was undertaking transformative reforms in political and economic arenas, the government of Ethiopia was also engaged in ensuring the rule of law, while advocating peace, reconciliation and healing to many of our ailments as a nation. In terms of ensuring the rule of law, the government of Ethiopia undertook several drastic measures. Some of these included arresting individuals suspected of involvement in serious crimes.

As a symbol of its commitment to peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia, the government established a new Ministry of Peace and set up a new Peace and

Reconciliation Commission. In contrast to the prevalent political culture in Ethiopia, peace, love, unity and reconciliation became new terms in our recent political discourses. TPLF's lexicon, on the other hand, is replete with ideologically laden labels such as "rent seekers", "narrow nationalists", "chauvinists", "parasitic elements". Ethiopians from all walks of life welcomed this peaceful and non-violent transition with great enthusiasm, except for those that wanted to maintain the status quo at any cost.

When the new reformist government came to power in April 2018, it did not take any retributive measures against TPLF as a vengeful punishment—and as some wrongly claim. The government brought to justice individuals who were involved in grave human rights violations and massive corruption scandals, some of them being members of the TPLF.

It is worth remembering that key ministerial positions were held by TPLF members until TPLF finally refused to join the then newly established Prosperity Party. Even after the merger of the four-member parties of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, several ethnic Tigrayans were discharging their responsibilities in the federal government in many key positions. In short, the federal government did not have an intention to marginalize the TPLF. Angered by the unexpected loss of the disproportionate influence and undue privilege they enjoyed, powerful figures within the TPLF led the clique into self-isolation and a senseless blame game.

TPLF brushed aside opportunity for change

Under TPLF, millions of Ethiopian men and women had suffered widespread political repressions, economic as well as social marginalization for two decades. These repressions eventually led to unending protests across the country and brought to power the incumbent. Despite the body of evidence showing the wrong doings of TPLF, however, the government did not want to repeat the same old mistake: destroying everything that came before and start anew. As some political commentators close to the TPLF have once remarked, TPLF was given a "golden parachute" by the new administration—not out of fear but in pursuit of the spirit of reconciliation rooted in the desire to direct the nation along the path of democratic progress and economic prosperity.

But these new conciliatory political shifts are anathema to TPLF as it wanted to maintain the status quo at any cost. It seemed it did not have the heart and

mind to understand it. Even today, three years after the reform began to take root, it seems adamant and kept its heart and mind closed to any notion of change and progress.

No sooner than the new administration began to take undertake reforms, TPLF began to accuse the federal government of targeting Tigrayans- a claim that suffered lack of concrete evidence and deep and correct context. TPLF hurled accusations at the federal government of displacing Tigrayans and harassing them because of their identity. But this was not true. Tigrayans, like fellow Ethiopian, are living in peace with other Ethiopians in many different parts of the country. Likewise, like many Ethiopians, they were victims of pervert political plots set by TPLF itself in many parts of the country.

The establishment of Prosperity Party and the fury of TPLF

When the establishment of Prosperity Party was announced in December 2019 after EPRDF was dissolved, it did not come out of the blue. The establishment of a nationally unified party was an idea long entertained within EPDRF party even when the late Prime Minister MelesZenawi was in power. Top officials of TPLF have, on several occasions, been expressing their wish to have a nationally unified party. The establishment of this party was just a realization of this long-overdue dream of EPRDF member parties. But this dream came to reality only after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power. TPLF however resisted the idea, as though it was a proposal that was being discussed for the first time.

In terms of political ideology and internal party functioning, EPRDF toed a rigid and undemocratic line for more than 27 years. The ideology of revolutionary democracy championed by TPLF became a mother of all political problems, as many political scholars in Ethiopia rightly argued. The ideology encouraged the culture of making an enemy out of one another for 27 years. TPLF's doctrinal system mobilized supporters and recruits in a dichotomous way by establishing 'an opposing reference group' and demonizing this other group. The unfortunate effect is that the binary party outlook tended to constantly divide the country into irreconcilable groups.

The internal functioning of the party was also undemocratic and exclusionary. Not all ethnic groups in the country were regarded equal within EPRDF. Among nine, only four regions were represented in the decision-making process of the party. Others were marginalized and humiliated for a

long time based on the claim that certain ethnic groups have not attained the socio-economic maturity and consciousness to shoulder a political program that is as sophisticated as revolutionary democracy. Furthermore, each of the four regions was not proportionally represented, tipping the power balance always towards the TPLF. The establishment of Prosperity Party ended this undemocratic culture within EPRDF. But it did not end the complex and multi-layered political tensions in the country. It increased the fury of TPLF and exposed its true colours even more.

Disinformation campaigns of TPLF

The first absurd accusation of TPLF against the government was thrown shortly after Prosperity Party was established in 2019. TPLF labelled the government as “anti-federalist” “unitary” desirous of bringing back the centralism of past authoritarian regimes. But this was all but an empty accusation. And it was a clear beginning of disinformation campaigns that have continued till today. Through its organized social media campaign, TPLF continued to falsely accuse the federal government of being a “dictator”, “neo-neftegna”, etc.

TPLF also made political allies of a few political parties and individuals that sought to trade integrity for transient political gains. Some of them contributed towards the escalations in the aftermath of the despicable assassination of the popular Oromo Musician Hachalu Hundessa. TPLF and these new friends found a common cause in distorting the image of the government and collaborated in destabilizing the nation. Thus, they have joined resources, including hundreds of social media pages to spread disinformation and to sow confusion.

Involvement in actual crimes on the ground

The government has been gathering evidence from its intelligence and other credible sources that TPLF has heavily been involved in planning and implementing violence and conflicts seen over the last two and half years in Ethiopia. Hidden hands of the TPLF were there in the killings of civilians in many different parts of the country including Guji and Wollega areas of Oromia Regional State. TPLF military officials trained the outlawed OLF-Shane group with the aim to wreak havoc on the region. Had it not been for the support of TPLF, this outlawed armed group would not have killed more than 1500 people in Wollega and Guji zones alone over the last two years.

The displacement of millions of Ethiopians from Somali Region in 2018 and 2019 did not take place without the blessing of TPLF. The Gedeo-Guji conflict, the death of civilians in BenishagulGumuz Region had TPLF conflict entrepreneurs behind them. The recent unrest and death of civilians in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region have not taken place without the knowledge of TPLF. At the beginning of its tenure, the government of Ethiopia never foresaw that TPLF would gamble in a shameful manner with the lives of thousands of Ethiopians for the sake of power- whose fair share it could have secured through fair and democratic engagement. Yet once again, TPLF have shown the world that if it does not maintain its grip on power entirely, it is ready to disturb the country at the cost of millions of innocent lives.

TPLF went unconstitutional

In its adamant refusal to adhere to values of unity, respect and togetherness we have as a country, TPLF began to openly transgress the supreme law of the country. When COVID-19 broke out in 2019 and became a universal health threat, the National Election Board of Ethiopia announced it is not in a position to hold a free and fair election within the remaining period due to the then unpredictable nature of COVID-pandemic. The board decided to postpone the election for an indefinite period. This created a constitutional gap that required interpretation by the House of Federation. The House of Federation, at the end of this process gave a constitutional interpretation and decision that mandated the postponement of the election. TPLF dismissed this democratic process as an “orchestrated drama” by the federal government to “unconstitutionally” extend its term.

Disrespecting the decision of the House of Federation to postpone the election until 2021, when the threat of COVID19 could become more manageable, TPLF defied the authority of the federal government by establishing a regional election commission – a clear violation of the Ethiopian constitution. It was clear from the beginning that a regional election commissioner hand-picked by TPLF itself cannot guarantee free and fair elections in Tigray. But TPLF would not refrain from flagrant violation of the constitution.

In the illegal election held in September 2020 in Tigray Region, TPLF announced a hundred percent control of the seats of the Regional Council. But the House of Federation dismissed it as “null and void”. The House further urged the government to take legal measures against the regional

government for violating the constitution. It authorized the federal government to take measures such as redirecting budgetary support to towns and local administrative units in Tigray.

TPLF, however, strongly opposed the move of the federal government. “This is tantamount to declaring a war,” several of its officials told the media. But this was not the first time they were talking about declaring a war. Earlier, TPLF officials were boastfully telling their foreign sympathizers that they would go for a war if “a blockage” is placed on their way to maintaining hegemony.

TPLF then said the region will not comply with laws, directives, and regulations, among others, to be enacted by the federal government after its current term in office came to an end on October 05/2020. It also openly called for the establishment of a transitional government replacing the constitutionally established government.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed expressed his deepest desire several times that the government did not want to hear a single gun-shot in Tigray. The people of Tigray do not deserve this, “We want to send to Tigray faces masks, not a bullet,” he said in an interview. This sentence has captured the whole conviction of the Ethiopian government until everything had to change on Wednesday, 4th November 2020.

TPLF crossed the redline

The government of Ethiopia has been persistently patient with TPLF’s illegal and reckless actions for several years now. Its patience came to an end last Tuesday when the special forces of Tigray, along with some members of OLF-Shene shamefully attacked the Northern Command of the National Defence Force and the Federal Police Force. In doing so, TPLF publicly declared that it had crossed the red line. Attacks on the national defense force amounts to destroying the last refuge of the Ethiopian people and sovereignty of the country. The government cannot tolerate this outrageous act without disregarding the constitution and its mandate to protect it.

The government of Ethiopia has been patient with TPLF because it had a firm conviction that we should leave behind the history of war and usher into the era of peace, development and prosperity. But now this is no longer possible to uphold. Attacking the defense force and the federal police force is not an action the government can tolerate.

It is not only the act by itself that is outrageous, but also the manner in which the attack was waged. Members of the National Defence Force had been part of the life of our citizens in Tigray for more than 20 years. They have been building schools, constructing roads, helping Tigrayan farmers plough their farmlands and harvest their crops. They recently helped the people of Tigray in the fight against heavy desert locust invasion and COVID-19 pandemic in the region and other regions. Many men and women in the army married locally and have settled there for a long time. They were not outsiders. Nor did the people of Tigray consider the army a stranger.

The early hours of Wednesday November 4, 2020 marked a very tragic day in the history of our country. The Tigray special force members surrounded and massacred their own brothers and sisters in several places in Tigray. This incident was painfully gruesome and inhumane. "I've never heard of such a cruelty on one's own people. This might be the first time this is happening in history," said the Chief of the National Defence Force, General BirhanuJula during one of his recent press-briefing sessions.

Conclusion

The government of Ethiopia wants to make it clear to all, that such a cruelty cannot be addressed or redressed by sitting at a table for a negotiation. Negotiation makes sense only when there is good faith and desire for peace. The federal government is determined to enforce the rule of law to the region. While TPLF is behaving like a criminal enterprise, negotiation is wrong in principle and is unlikely to result in peace. The Godfathers of corruption and terror within TPLF have to be held to account and the rule of law and the constitutional order have to be upheld before any talks could be considered.

Like yesterday, the government of Ethiopia has a great concern for our people in Tigray. As the government has made it clear time and again, during the current law enforcement operation, we will take maximum care to reduce civilians' casualties and collateral damage. Our modern airplanes and drones will hit targets with precision. This will greatly contribute towards protecting our civilian citizens in Tigray. The Ethiopian Defense Force will also make maximum effort to make sure that civilians are not targeted.

Some of our international partners, friends and people of good will have expressed a concern that this might turn into an all-out war. Once again, we want to make clear to you that this operation will end within a short time, and

we shall soon return back to our normal daily life. Within this view, the government echoes its position once again that, “There should not be any mistake made in treating the Federal Government as equals with a criminal group.” This operation is all about ensuring respect for the rule of law and maintaining the constitutional order of the country. We will, beyond any doubt, have a lasting peace in Ethiopia when the criminal force of TPLF is brought to justice. The government of Ethiopia will no longer allow impunity to prevail on our soil.

Ethiopia participates in the Forum for African Ports held in Djibouti

Following the first forum at Tangier, Morocco in 2019, the second edition of the two days long African Ports Forum was held on November 9-10 in Djibouti. Chaired by Djiboutian Prime Minister, Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed, the inaugural ceremony of the FAP 2020 brought together officials from Djiboutian government including the Minister of Housing and Transport, Moussa Mohamed Ahmed and his Ethiopian counterpart, Awwal Wagris Mohammed, Ethiopian Ambassador to Djibouti Berhanu Tsegaye, the president of the forum- Hassan M. Alaoui, the chairman of the authority of the ports and free zones of Djibouti, Aboubaker Omar Hadi, diplomats of friendly countries and representatives of UN organizations.

Prime Minister, Abdoukader Kamil emphasized the selection of Djibouti for the organization of this second edition of the FAP “embodies by its positioning in the world maritime routes a central role in inter-African and international trade.” “This forum comes a few months after the official launch of the megaproject at DAMERJOG, after the entry into service of the ports of DORALEH, TADJOURAH as well as the international free zone of PK23” added the head of the prime minister’s office.

Ethiopian State Minister of transport, Awwal Wagris Mohammed said, as the lion share of Ethiopia’s import/export goods and commodities passed via the Djibouti Port, his government will continue to commit itself to further bolster the strategic ties in road, railway, port as well as other areas deemed to help facilitate smooth and effective joint operations. The Minister named the efforts of the two countries to flatten the risk curve during the COVID epidemic quite commendable.

For the Minister of Equipment and Transport, Moussa Mohamed Ahmed, it is a question of finding the best way to capitalize on the opportunities that our continent offers to investors, especially in the area of the transport chain as a whole.

The Chairperson of the Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority, Aboubaker Omar Hadi noted, “The African Ports Forum 2020 aims to build on this success and provide a platform for all stakeholders in the African port sector to share their expertise and discuss ways to improve governance, competitiveness, connectivity and digitization.

In the two days forum discussions between the participants made it possible to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on maritime activity and African Ports, to draw the best scenarios to get out of the crisis to define the role of continuity plans activities and those of PPPs in the scalable model. Indeed, the fall in trade and the disruption of maritime traffic following the COVID-19 crisis have had a considerable impact on African port activity. The resilience of these ports is more than ever required to absorb the shock and get back on a solid footing.