Ethiopian Inter-Religious Council
North-America

PEACE - JUSTICE - HUMANITY

LETTER OF CONCERN

**Secretary of State Anthony Blinken**

Harry S. Truman Building

2201 C Street, NW

Room 7226

Washington, DC 20520

Secretary Blinken,

**The IRC-NA** is the largest North American Inter-Faith coalition of Ethiopians and Ethiopian-Americans in the United States. Its constituent members are:

1. The North American Archdiocese of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church (EOTC)
2. The North American Office of Ethiopian Muslims Affairs (EMA)
3. The North American Fellowship of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches (EECF)
4. The Ethiopian Catholic Church in North America (ECC)
5. The North American Fellowship of Ethiopian Pastors (EPA)

We, the board members and leaders of IRC- NA, at this moment state our grave concerns and call upon all relevant US government bodies and agencies for their impartial attentiveness to Ethiopia's cry for justice and action.

We are deeply concerned about the political and economic crisis that Ethiopia has found itself in since the start of the Tigray war on November 4, 2020.

The council deliberated on the genesis and dynamics of the conflict and has come to these conclusions.

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- The Global North, particularly the US, whose friendly diplomatic relation spans nearly 120 years since Robert Peet Skinner's visit in 1903, has failed to understand the evolution and the complexities of the current conflicts in Ethiopia. The country's multifaceted challenges require a nuanced understanding of the last 30 years' political development. It pitted one ethnic group against the other, sowed division and discord among various faith groups, embezzled public funds, violated human rights, jailed journalists and opposition party leaders. For Ethiopia's great majority, its rule represents oppression, neglect, and terror.
- The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – a coalition of four parties and its subsidiaries created by TPLF to facilitate its "divide and rule" policy in the nation rejected TPLF following the popular demonstrations and widespread oppositions against its hegemony.
- The party appointed Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister in 2018. TPLF abandoned its privileged position and refused a peaceful dialogue to settle differences with the Federal Government. For three years, it consistently and adamantly rejected all efforts for peace and reconciliation. Instead, it used the wealth it amassed and its networks within the military, intelligence, and diplomatic organs to stoke various ethnic and faith-based conflicts and derail the reform process.
- The attack on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) on November 4, 2020, triggered the current conflict. The Federal troops, stationed in Tigray for more than two decades, were providing security, public safety, and development work to the people of Tigray. This act was a bold attempt to overthrow the Federal Government by force.
- As stated by the Federal Government, it declared a unilateral ceasefire to allow the flow of humanitarian aid to civilians and enable farmers to use the rainy season for farming. However, it is evident that TPLF expanded the attack to the neighboring Afar and Amhara regions, causing the death and displacement of thousands of civilians. It also reportedly conscripted child soldiers, trained and deployed them in active combat under narcotic influence – a blatant violation of morality and international humanitarian law.

We urge all parties to the conflict to make sure all Ethiopians, who are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions, get the support they need.

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We want to acknowledge and extend our heartfelt gratitude to the US for its continued support in the much-needed relief aid.

As leaders of Ethiopia's ancient faith organizations, we insist on the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

We are highly concerned about TPLF's occupation of Lalibela in the Amhara region, which houses the historic Rock-Hewn Churches, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage. These sites are part of who we are as a nation and part of human ingenuity. They have to be revered and kept out of conflict.

While we insist on dialogue and political settlement, we are also aware that peace is not attainable while the TPLF continues to wreak havoc and destruction in the nation. Hence, we sincerely support the Ethiopian Government's decision to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ethiopian state.

We urge the United States Government to understand the evolution of the conflict and realities on the ground, which entails impartial listening, prudence in fact-checking on media coverage of the war that exonerates the TPLF and blindly blames the Ethiopian Federal Government.

We are highly concerned that more punitive actions from the US will further destabilize Ethiopia, the second-most populous nation in Africa with more than 80 ethnic groups. Maintaining Ethiopia's ancient territorial integrity is crucial for the Horn of Africa in particular and Africa in general.

We appeal to United States Government to recognize and appreciate Ethiopia's election outcome, since the people of Ethiopia have spoken and chosen their government. The fairness of the election has been recognized by the international third parties, most notably the African Union.

We strongly believe that Ethiopia's peace and stability are also in the interest of the United States. To witness the collapse of Ethiopia would usher in an era of death and displacement, warlordism, and instability. This would be a disaster for Ethiopia, the region and Africa, as well as a significant concern to the United States.

We, therefore, urge the United States to reconsider its plans to impose economic sanctions on Ethiopia, which will further push poor and vulnerable Ethiopians into abject poverty and weaken the state.

In conclusion, we, the leaders of Ethiopia's faith communities here in America, appeal to the United States Government to reconsider its current policy stance on the Ethiopian Government.

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And refrain from exacting undue economic and political influence, which, we believe, will not serve the best interests of both the United States of America and Ethiopia.

Sincerely,

His Eminence Archbishop Fanuel
Archdiocese of Washington DC, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware

Ustath Jemal Beshir Ahmed
Selam Foundation
Imam

Reverend Endalkachew S. Ayo
Senior Pastor
Four Corners Ethiopian Evangelical Church

Mr. Dagnachew H. Thomas
Vice Chairman
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