

**A statement with respect to the Joint Investigation Team Report of the
EHRC and UNOHCHR**

We take note of the report of the Joint Investigation Team (“JIT”) of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released into alleged human rights violations and abuses committed in the context of the conflict in Tigray region. I would like to extend my appreciation to the leadership and staff of these two institutions for their endeavor to conduct a professional and credible human rights investigation in very difficult circumstances.

Although we have some serious reservations concerning some aspects of the report, we recognize and accept the report as an important document that complements our on-going effort to provide redress to victims, ensure accountability, and take preventive measures. The report documents the harrowing suffering and pain that ordinary Ethiopians have endured since the onset of the conflict. The accounts of those whose dignity and humanity have been violated in the context of the conflict is heartbreaking.

Despite the concerns we communicated to the JIT, we are heartened by the fact that the joint investigation dispels some of the insidious and baseless accusations that have been leveled against the Government of Ethiopia. **The JIT findings have clearly established the claim of genocide as false and utterly lacking of any factual basis.** The report also concluded the often-repeated allegation that the Government used hunger as a ‘weapon of war’ is without merit. **Specifically, the report stated it did not find evidence to support the claim of “deliberate or willful denial of humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Tigray or the use of starvation as a weapon of war.”** We have always known these allegations were false but our enemies have worked tirelessly to mislead the international community.

The fact that these fabricated allegations were treated as fact and repeated around the world by news outlets is a sad commentary on the level of due diligence accorded to news reporting when it comes to African affairs. Sadly, a number of countries have relied on these false news reports to take foreign policy measures that greatly undermined our long-standing relations with them. Today, these sinister allegations are laid to rest as products of a well-organized and orchestrated disinformation campaign. We hope the report will cause these nations to reconsider and review policies enacted based on false information.

In many respects the findings of the JIT are consistent with our own investigation. As the report makes abundantly clear, the TPLF triggered the tragic conflict and committed some of the most egregious violations and abuses, many of which the international community has chosen to ignore or minimize. We are mindful that the temporal and geographic scope of the report is very limited and extends only to events that transpired in the Tigray region until the end of June 2021. As a result, the report does not include the horrific brutality that the terrorist group has committed against civilians in Afar and Amhara regional states. It does not address the campaign of massacre the TPLF’s proxies and allies have committed in places like western Oromia. However, the finding of the JIT, consistent with our on-going investigation, establishes the TPLF forces have committed horrific acts of human right violations ranging from “ethnic-cleansing,” torture, mass killing, sexual violence and attacks, and other atrocities prior to June 2021.

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Following the unilateral ceasefire and withdrawal of all government forces from Tigray region at the end of June 2021, TPLF chose to expand the conflict into neighboring Afar and Amhara regions and continued to commit similar acts of atrocities in these regions. These wanton acts of cruelty by the terrorist group and its affiliates underscore the need to neutralize its capability to wreak havoc and brutalize civilians.

I would also like to acknowledge the fact that the report provides troubling accounts of violations and abuses that have been committed by some of our troops and regional security forces. As has been communicated to the public previously, our government takes these allegations seriously and we are committed to bring perpetrators to justice. The report includes some of the measures that have been taken in this regard by our law enforcement agencies and the military tribunals. However, we acknowledge the need to redouble our efforts. Our investigation is on-going and we will continue to approach the matter in a comprehensive and concerted manner with a view to provide redress to victims, ensure accountability and undertake preventive measures.

To accomplish this goal, I am establishing a high level inter-ministerial task force, composed of the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Peace, the Minister of Social and Women's Affairs, a state Minister of Finance, and a state Minister of Foreign Affairs. The task force will have the mandate to craft, adopt, and oversee the implementation of a comprehensive strategy that would enable us to investigate the allegations included in the report, bring all perpetrators of serious crimes to justice, and provide the redress and the psycho-social support needed for victims of these violations, in particular, victims of gender-based atrocities. This task force shall also have the mandate to establish a specialized joint civil-military investigative and prosecutorial unit with the requisite operational autonomy to ensure accountability through a transparent and robust legal process.

We welcome the assistance and cooperation of our friends and allies as well as international institutions based on our needs and requests, as we continue to ensure the prevalence of the rule of law, the protection of human rights under democratic principles, and continue our political and economic reform to build a stable, peaceful, and prosperous nation.

November 3, 2021

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