



Voicing Support for African Union's Peace Efforts in Ethiopia, Security Council Speakers Urge Political Dialogue Between Parties to Prevent Disaster

Country Representative Insists 'We Honour and Respect' Call for Dialogue; Says Criminal Group Refuses to Let Go of Ill-Gained Privilege

Meeting today to discuss urgent action to de-escalate the potentially disastrous conflict in Ethiopia, speakers in the Security Council extended their support for the African Union's regional peace initiative and urged the Ethiopian authorities and the Tigray People's Liberation Front and its allied forces to enter a ceasefire, allow for unhindered humanitarian access and engage dialogue towards a political solution.

"The window of opportunity is very little and the time is short for any intervention," said Olusegun Obasanjo, African Union High Representative for the Horn of Africa region, as he briefed the 15-member organ on his efforts to secure support for peace from the international community and world leaders, as well as his efforts to bring the warring parties to the negotiation table.

With a focus to initiate meaningful discussions between those parties, de-escalate tensions and pave the way for dialogue and an amicable solution to the conflict, he highlighted a 4 November meeting with Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, as well as a recent visit to meet leaders in the Tigray region. All leaders are aware that their individual differences are political and, as such, require a political solution through dialogue, he stressed.

He then urged the Council to press the federal Government and the Front to engage in political dialogue without preconditions and to call for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire. Further, the Council must call for unhindered humanitarian access in the region, and for the immediate commencement of all-inclusive international dialogue and reconciliation, he said, asking the international community to rally behind the African Union-led peacemaking efforts.

Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, also briefed the Council, stating: "In a country of over 110 million people, over 90 different ethnic groups and 80 languages, no one can predict what continued fighting and insecurity will bring." The risk of Ethiopia descending into a widening civil war was becoming only too real, she added, citing the joint report of the Office of the United Nations High

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, which shed a light on the horrific suffering civilians endured.

The recently concluded elections in Ethiopia, she emphasized, demonstrated the people's commitment to the democratic process. Prime Minister Abiy spoke of his Government's commitment to resolve the ongoing challenges and his intention to launch a national dialogue. The urgency for such an inclusive initiative has never been greater, she said, urging Ethiopians to come together to build a shared, prosperous future before it is too late.

Council members broadly supported mediation efforts by the African Union and called on the Tigray People's Liberation Front to freeze the position of its forces and withdraw to pre-conflict positions. Several speakers called for credible investigations into crimes committed by all parties, including extrajudicial killings and sexual violence cited in the joint report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Other members expressed grave concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation, calling for removal of aid blockades by the Ethiopian authorities.

"We remained silent for far too long," said Ireland's representative, stating that the Council had the power to deliver change but stood idle as the crisis intensified over the past year. She then underlined the vital role played by regional leaders such as High Representative Obasanjo, as well as regional organizations, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, in finding a solution.

Norway's delegate called on the Tigray Defence Forces, the Tigray People's Liberation Front and forces from the Oromia Liberation Army not to attempt an attack on Addis Ababa. She also urged the federal Government to refrain from imposing any measures or restrictions upon civilians of specific ethnicities, including Tigray and Oromo.

Viet Nam's representative said the sharp escalation of military operations in the last few weeks has plunged Ethiopia and the region into more serious instability, "risking the parties to a point of no return". On the dire humanitarian situation in Tigray, Amhara and Afar, he called for the creation of favourable conditions for aid access, full observation of international humanitarian law, rapid restoration of public services and upscaling of assistance.

The United Kingdom's delegate cautioned that a state of emergency introduced by the Government must not be used as an excuse to ignore human rights and international humanitarian law. All parties should implement the recommendations contained in the joint investigative report by the human rights bodies.

However, Ethiopia's representative declared: "We honour and respect the call for political dialogue." Despite deep-seated political differences and grievances in Ethiopia's nascent democracy, no political group has raised arms or waged war. Diversity was not Ethiopia's problem. Rather, the problem was a criminal group that refused to accept equality and let go of ill-gained supremacy and privilege. The Tigray People's Liberation Front was

emboldened, threatening to unseat the Government and destabilize a nation of 112 million people, he warned.

He called on the Front's supporters to desist from providing the group with communications equipment, satellite information, weapons and fighters. For its part, the Government has repeatedly expressed its readiness for national political dialogue, entertained offers of support and accepted the African Union's High Representative for the Horn of Africa. The regional solution is best placed to support Ethiopia, he stressed, adding that the route to dialogue and a political solution will not be straightforward or easy.

Also speaking today were representatives of Tunisia (also for Kenya, Niger and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), China, France, India, Estonia, United States, Russian Federation and Mexico.

The meeting began at 3:04 p.m. and ended at 4:41 p.m.

Briefings

ROSEMARY DICARLO, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, said that the year-long conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has reached dangerous proportions. The fighting places the future of the country, its people and the stability of the wider Horn of Africa region in grave uncertainty. In recent days, Tigrayan forces have advanced southward through the Amhara region towards Addis Ababa acting in coordination with the Oromo Liberation Army. The Government of Ethiopia has declared a nationwide state of emergency and has stated it is fighting "an existential war". Elsewhere, insecurity in the Oromia region continues to worsen while the situation in parts of the Benishangul-Gumuz region remains tense.

"In a country of over 110 million people, over 90 different ethnic groups and 80 languages, no one can predict what continued fighting and insecurity will bring," she said. Stressing the need to avert further fighting while preparing for the worst-case scenario, she warned that "the risk of Ethiopia descending into widening civil war is only too real." That would bring about a humanitarian catastrophe and consume the future of such an important country. The political repercussions of intensifying violence in the wider region could be immense, compounding the many crises besetting the Horn of Africa.

On the humanitarian situation, she said more than 7 million people need aid in northern Ethiopia. In Tigray, more than 5 million people need food and an estimated 400,000 people are living in famine-like conditions. However, no aid trucks have reached Mekelle since 18 October and air strikes have continued. United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights have remained suspended since air strikes on 22 October forced a flight to return to Addis Ababa. The United Nations has been unable to move fuel into Tigray since August. It has been four months since the last major shipment of medicines and health supplies into Tigray. In the absence of essential inputs, humanitarian organizations have had to continue to scale back core, life-saving activities, including water

trucking, food distributions, mobile clinics and support for acutely malnourished children and mothers.

Recent weeks have also seen rapidly increasing needs and protection concerns in Amhara and Afar, with large numbers of people fleeing from their homes as the fighting has expanded, she continued. Despite significant progress in scaling up food assistance in Amhara since August, the latest phase of the fighting has resulted in a very serious reduction in access in the worst-affected areas of the region. As well, the situation in parts of Afar is also now quickly deteriorating. While needs are most acute in the north, across Ethiopia as a whole, more than 20 million people are estimated to be in need of some form of humanitarian support. More than 5 million people are internally displaced.

On the human rights situation, she said that the joint report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, covering the period between November 2020 and June 2021, shed a light on the horrific suffering civilians endured. The report concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict – including the Ethiopian National Defence Force, Eritrean Defence Force, Amhara Special Forces and allied militia on one side and Tigrayan forces on the other – committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, to include attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, indiscriminate attacks resulting in civilian casualties and extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, sexual and gender-based violence and forced displacement. The report also states that war crimes and crimes against humanity may have been committed.

There must be an immediate cessation of hostilities, she stressed, drawing attention to the call of the Secretary-General, African Union Commission Chair, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the president of Ethiopia's key neighbour Kenya and the Security Council. They have also called for negotiation of a lasting ceasefire and for the creation of conditions for an inclusive Ethiopian dialogue to resolve the crisis and create the foundation for peace and stability throughout the country.

She went on to say that the Secretary-General has been in frequent contact with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, urging restraint and dialogue and offering his good offices. Further, the Secretary-General has offered former President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo the full support of the United Nations to his efforts to resolve the conflict. The recently concluded elections in Ethiopia demonstrated the people's commitment to the democratic process. At the ceremony to mark his new mandate last month, Prime Minister Abiy spoke of his Government's commitment to resolve the ongoing challenges and his intention to launch a national dialogue. The urgency for such an inclusive initiative has never been greater, she said, urging Ethiopians to come together to build a shared, prosperous future before it is too late.

OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, African Union High Representative for the Horn of Africa region, pointed out that his appointment is the first ever by the African Union of a High Representative for the entire region, which comprises eight countries, each with its specific

context. He outlined steps taken to promote peace, stability, and political dialogue in the region, including visits last month to Europe and the United States to secure the support of world leaders, including the President of France and the Secretary of State of the United States, as well as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In addition, he briefed the Security Council on two occasions, once on 28 October, and the second time, just this morning, to describe the situation in Ethiopia, which has been drastically deteriorating in recent weeks. He was following the situation with keen attention and planned to visit the country to engage all stakeholders in an effort to de-escalate the situation, he said.

Following the reports of intense fighting in the north, a nationwide state of emergency had been imposed, he continued, adding that the Central Authority told its citizens to prepare to defend the capital on 2 October. Since then, a few demonstrations, including one on 7 October, have taken place in several cities in support of the Federal Government. He described efforts taken to initiate meaningful discussions between parties, de-escalate tensions and pave the way for dialogue and an amicable solution to the conflict, including a meeting on 4 November with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, as well as a recent visit to Mekelle to meet leaders in the Tigray region.

All leaders are aware that their individual differences are political and, as such, require a political solution through dialogue, which constitutes a window of opportunity to assist the people to find a lasting solution to the crisis, he emphasized. “However,” he added, “it is important to mention that the window of opportunity is very little and the time is short for any intervention in this regard.” With the deteriorating humanitarian situation impacting socioeconomic stability, collective action is needed to find a lasting solution to avoid further escalation of the crisis, which has a direct impact on the strategic region as a whole.

He urged the Council to press the Federal Government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front to engage in political dialogue without preconditions and to call for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, as well as a cessation of hostilities. Further, the Council must call for immediate and unhindered humanitarian access in the region, for all parties to ensure respect and compliance with international humanitarian law and practice, and for the immediate commencement of all-inclusive international dialogue and reconciliation. As well, he stressed that the international community must rally behind the African Union-led peacemaking efforts.

Statements

GERALDINE BYRNE NASON (Ireland) expressed shame and frustration that the Security Council had the power to deliver change but stood by as the crisis intensified over the past year. “We remained silent for far too long,” she stressed. Recalling the recent Council statement calling for an immediate ceasefire, she highlighted African leadership both in New York at the African Union Headquarters and on the ground where it matters most to the people of Ethiopia. She underlined the vital role played by regional leaders such as High Representative Obasanjo, as well as regional organizations, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, in finding a solution. She called for an immediate end to the fighting, stressing that civilians must be protected and all parties to the conflict must

embrace negotiations towards a lasting political resolution. Moreover, it is paramount that all parties must immediately facilitate the provision of life-saving humanitarian aid to those who desperately need it, in line with international humanitarian law. She also called for an end to the chilling hate speech, dehumanizing language and incitement to violence, underlining the need for an inclusive an Ethiopian-led national dialogue that includes all regions and stakeholders.

TAREK LADEB (Tunisia), also speaking for Niger, Kenya, Tunisia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, said the situation in Ethiopia is deteriorating dangerously, bringing the nation closer to a full-scale civil war, which could lead to destabilizing effects in the wider region. His bloc is especially concerned over the military escalation in northern Ethiopia, its expansion to the Amhara and Afar regions and humanitarian impact. The immediate priority is a ceasefire to allow for unrestricted humanitarian access in affected communities and re-establishment of public services in all conflict areas.

He stressed the importance of parties constructively engaging in discussions for a peaceful solution to pave the way for an inclusive Ethiopian-led dialogue and national reconciliation. Calling on all parties to also respect international humanitarian and human rights law, he urged supporters to abstain from acts of reprisal and refrain from hate speech, incitement to violence and divisiveness. Over the past year, violence has led to the loss of thousands of lives and millions of displaced persons, human rights violations, atrocities and a dire humanitarian situation, he said, adding that the African Union and neighbouring countries have a major role to play in helping Ethiopians find their way to peace and stability.

MONA JUUL (Norway) underscored that the development of the crisis in Ethiopia is threatening the very integrity of the country. It should be evident to all parties that there can be no military solution. Further escalation of fighting will not lead to victory. Expressing deep concern about a reported increase in ethnic profiling and discrimination, she said “divisive actions today, make peace more difficult tomorrow”. Urging Ethiopian leaders to recognize the need for a future, inclusive dialogue and reconciliation process, she went on to call on the Tigray Defence Forces, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front and forces from the Oromia Liberation Army not to attempt an attack on Addis Ababa. She also urged the Government of Ethiopia to refrain from imposing any measures or restrictions upon civilians of specific ethnicities, including Tigray and Oromo. Norway fully supports the African Union peace initiative, she stated.

DANG DINH QUY (Viet Nam) expressed deep concern over the deteriorating situation in Ethiopia, especially regarding continued fighting and increased hostilities in and around the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions over the weekend. The sharp escalation of military operations in the last few weeks has plunged Ethiopia and the region into more serious instability, he said, “risking the parties to a point of no return”. Only a sustainable ceasefire can pave the way for inclusive dialogue and a political settlement to long-standing grievances. Escalating hostilities threaten to worsen the already dire humanitarian situation in Tigray, Amhara and Afar, where millions of people need urgent humanitarian assistance. Adding that 5.2 million people are relying on food aid, he called for the creation

of favourable conditions for humanitarian access, full observation of international humanitarian law, rapid restoration of public services and upscaling of assistance.

ZHANG JUN (China), emphasizing that the current situation in Ethiopia is a result of a combination of political, historical, ethnic and other factors, underlined that solutions can only be found from within. The regional countries and organizations could play a leading role in the political settlement of the issue. Reiterating his support for African solutions to solve African problems, he welcomed the Secretary-General's offer of good offices to the country and called on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to provide necessary time and space to the African Union to carry out such efforts. Imposing limitation on trade and cutting off assistance would only interfere with the political settlement. Member States must help Ethiopia improve its humanitarian capabilities and scale up relief delivery while respecting the sovereignty and leadership of the country. All relevant parties in Ethiopia should fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law, protect the safety of civilians including foreign citizens, facilitate humanitarian assistance and prevent the humanitarian situation from further deteriorating, he stressed.

JAMES KARIUKI (United Kingdom) said a state of emergency introduced by the Government must not be used as an excuse to ignore human rights and international humanitarian law. The report released last week by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission documented violations in detail, including the widespread use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, torture, attacks on civilians and forced displacement. All parties should act to implement the recommendations contained in that joint report. It is vital that all parties stop fighting and start talking. Tigrayan forces need to stop their advances and return to Tigray. The humanitarian blockade needs to be lifted and hate speech and ethnic profiling must end.

NICOLAS DE RIVIÈRE (France) called for Ethiopia to immediately declare a ceasefire, institute political dialogue between the parties and refrain from internationalizing the conflict. The Ethiopian Government must withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, verify the withdrawal of Eritrean forces and refrain from labelling the Tigray Defence Forces as terrorists. Urging all parties to support African Union efforts towards peace, he cited the Union's hope that dialogue can silence the guns. Adding that the Council is committed to the peace, unity and territoriality of Ethiopia, he urged the parties to seize this opportunity for international support. Also urging the parties to respect international humanitarian and human rights law, he expressed concern over increased violence, forced disappearances, hate speech targeting ethnic origins, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence and the blockage of food and medical aid.

RAVINDRA RAGUTTAHALLI (India), noting that humanitarian efforts led by the United Nations have been stalled in recent weeks, said it is important that humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia resume at the earliest available opportunity. Stressing the importance of mutual trust, engagement, dialogue and reconciliation to address all issues related to the ongoing conflict, he called on all stakeholders to seize the opportunity provided by the appointment of the African Union High Representative for the Horn of Africa region. He also welcomed the engagement of countries from the region in the process and urged all sides to exercise restraint and work together to build trust and confidence that

could pave the way for dialogue. It is in the interest of the region that the current politico-military situation be resolved within the constitutional framework of Ethiopia. In that regard, it is important that regional initiatives led by the African Union are encouraged and actively supported by the Security Council, he said.

SVEN JÜRGENSON (Estonia) called upon the Tigray People's Liberation Front to withdraw its troops from Amhara and Afar and the Government of Ethiopia to refrain from air strikes on civilian targets. There is no military solution to this conflict and all parties must immediately end hostilities without preconditions, engage in negotiations for a lasting ceasefire and create conditions for the start of a political dialogue. Pointing to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions, he underscored that all parties to the conflict have an obligation to facilitate safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all areas affected by conflict and to restore basic services and the entry of fuel, cash and humanitarian supplies needed for aid operations. Voicing deep concern about reported human rights violations and abuses, including widespread sexual and gender-based violence, he called for full implementation of the recommendations of the joint report by OHCHR and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and for ensuring accountability for the perpetrators.

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD (United States), welcoming the press statement issued on Friday by the Security Council, urged all parties to cooperate with the African Union High Representative in his peace efforts. Noting the sad milestone of a full year of conflict, she said: "We remained silent too long." Widespread human rights abuses and atrocities have been committed, including the use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war. All parties are culpable and there are no good guys here, she added, deploring the current situation in Ethiopia, which was applauded as the fastest-growing economy in Africa just two years ago. Rejecting claims that the United Nations is biased in favour of one party, she said that the world body condemns violence and human rights abuses committed by all sides. She urged the Tigray People's Liberation Front not to advance to Addis Ababa and to withdraw to Tigray. She also called on the Government of Ethiopia to respect international humanitarian and human rights laws. Ultimately, only Ethiopians can bring peace, she stated.

ANNA M. EVSTIGNEEVA (Russian Federation) expressed concern about the clashes between Government forces and the Tigray Defence Forces and the Oromo Liberation Army, among others. The continuing violence has had dire humanitarian consequences and has led to a rise in refugees and internally displaced persons. She called for an increase in humanitarian aid in close coordination with the Government, noting that even before the present fighting as many as 7 million Ethiopians needed assistance. Divisions in the country run deep and have a complex historical context. Such instability has a potentially negative impact on the region. She called on all stakeholders and the media to act responsibly and avoid ratcheting international rhetoric, adding that threats of sanctions and the refusal of economic assistance are counterproductive and make conditions worse for ordinary citizens. She also underlined the need for national and regional efforts to end the confrontation and establish dialogue. Turning to mediation efforts by the United Nations and the African Union, which have not yielded significant results on the ground, she said she hoped Mr. Obasanjo will take urgent steps to reverse the momentum.

JUAN RAMÓN DE LA FUENTE RAMÍREZ (Mexico), Council President for November, speaking in his national capacity, expressed alarm over military advances of the Tigray Defence Forces and their allies and the escalation of hostilities, which are spreading to Amhara and Afar. If military hostilities persist, the conflict will spread to the entire country and will have devastating effects not only on Ethiopia but on the entire region. Adding that aerial attacks have compelled the United Nations to suspend flights to Tigray, cutting off money and fuel needed for contractors to deliver food and medical supplies, he urged parties to fulfil their obligations under humanitarian law and provide unfettered access without further delay. Highlighting reports of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, gender-based violence and arrests of journalists, he said these human rights violations must be investigated and punished, and he called on the parties to reach a ceasefire and establish conditions for a national dialogue, immediately and without preconditions.

TAYE ATSKESSE LASSIE AMDE (Ethiopia) said that, over the past year, the Government has reversed the military threat posed by the Tigray People's Liberation Front, made all efforts to provide food and other items to people in need in Tigray and signed a humanitarian-assistance agreement with the United Nations. Further, it spent close to a hundred million birr for assistance and reconstruction and had declared a humanitarian ceasefire and withdrawn its forces. "All this has proven to be in vain," he said. As a result of the Front's continued, widespread criminal belligerence, people in Tigray in need of urgent humanitarian assistance are not receiving aid. Those in the Afar and Amhara regions have been rendered vulnerable, cities and towns shelled and residents killed at their doorsteps. The trucks the Government sent to Tigray with food and medical supplies are transporting weapons and youth combatants "forced to fight against their brothers and sisters for no apparent public interest" except for the greed of a few.

"We honour and respect the call for political dialogue," he said, while spotlighting deep-seated political differences and grievances in Ethiopia's nascent democracy. Despite these grievances, however, no political group has raised arms against their brethren or waged war against the motherland. "Diversity is not Ethiopia's problem," he underscored; rather, the problem is a criminal group that refused to accept equality and let go of ill-gained supremacy and privilege. He also pointed out that Western media and some staff members and leaders of international organizations openly support the group. Even the Security Council was made to convene over false reports alleging heinous crimes, including the use of hunger as a weapon of war. Pleas for States and non-State actors to refrain from providing moral and material support went unheeded. Now, the Tigray People's Liberation Front is emboldened, threatening to unseat the Government and destabilize a nation of 112 million people, he said.

Against that backdrop, he called on the Front's supporters to desist from providing the group with communications equipment, satellite information, weapons and fighters, adding that what his country has gone through at the hands of this criminal group will require intergenerational effort to heal. For its part, the Government has repeatedly expressed its readiness for national political dialogue, entertained offers of support and accepted the African Union's High Representative for the Horn of Africa. The regional solution is best placed to support Ethiopia, he added. However, the route to dialogue and a political

solution will not be straightforward or easy. Because of that the Government is currently focused on halting the criminal group. “There are no two parties here” – there is a Government representing the will of the Ethiopian people and State, and there is “a group advancing its greedy and criminal cause through atrocity”, he stressed.