Forum: Human Rights Council

**Issue:** Addressing the situation in Ethiopia's Tigray region

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### Introduction

As Ethiopia's border dispute with Eritrea ended under the leadership of a Nobel Peace Prize Winning Prime Minister, many thought Ethiopia would finally be able to be at peace. However, Ethiopia would soon face another crisis around the Horn of Africa as tensions between the Tigrayan people and the rest of the Ethiopians(?) would begin to escalate, becoming the epicenter of a protracted conflict characterized by a myriad of political, ethnic, and humanitarian dimensions. The roots of the conflict trace back to historical grievances, power struggles, and the evolving dynamics of Ethiopian politics. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), once a dominant force, now finds itself at odds with the federal government led by Nobel Peace Prize winning Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. This conflict, which erupted in November 2020, has led to widespread displacement, reports of human rights violation, and a burgeoning humanitarian crisis. The intricacies of the Tigray conflict extend beyond regional borders, influencing the broader political landscape of the Horn of Africa. Understanding the complexities of this multifaceted crisis is essential for navigating the path to a sustainable resolution and fostering a future of stability and unity in Ethiopia.

# **Definition of Key Terms**

#### **Humanitarian Crisis**

An event or series of events that puts the health, safety, security, or well-being of a community or large group of people over a usually wide area under critical threat.

#### **Ethnic Federalism**

A system of government in which regions are divided based on ethnicity.

#### **War Crimes**

An act that violates international humanitarian laws and other applicable treaties (Ex: The Geneva Convention).

#### Ceasefire

An agreement between two or more parties to stop fighting either temporarily or permanently.

### **Extrajudicial Killings**

The deliberate execution of individuals outside of a legal framework.

#### Humanitarian Blockade

The action of purposely preventing humanitarian aid from reaching a civilian population.

# **Background**

## History

### The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

Although only 6% of the total Ethiopian population, the TPLF has had a history of success. As a part of a coalition of rebel groups known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the TPLF played a pivotal role in overthrowing the Marxist-Leninist Derg Milita in 1991. Following the fall of the Derg, the EPRDF, with the TPLF at its forefront came to dominate Ethiopian politics for nearly 3 decades. Specifically during the 200s, Ethiopia achieved significant economic growth. During a time led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, it implemented numerous policies that focused on the development of infrastructure, agriculture, and reducing nationwide poverty. This was especially visible with urban citizens having gone through transformational changes, turning into cities.

However, the TPLF was not perfect. The TPLF were often accused of being autocratic, corrupt, and favoring Tigrayan ethnic groups. This concern rose as people started noticing that all of the newly drawn leadership, whether they were key positions in the government, military, or economic sectors all

being predominantly Tigrayan. Believing that this was an act of favoritism, tensions between Tigray and other ethnic groups intensified, being fueled by a sense of exclusion and marginalization.

The TPLF was also criticized for its style of government, with claims that it curtailed political freedoms and repressed opposition. Obstacles faced by opposition parties prompted questions about the government's democratic legitimacy. Human rights organizations brought attention to problems with the treatment of political dissidents, arbitrary arrests, and press freedom.

The crack in the TPLF can be attributed to the death of Meles, forcing his handpicked successor, Halemariam Desalegn to take power. However, he would be too weak to manage rising tensions. Discontent with the political state of the nation, the 2 largest ethnic groups, the Oromo and Amhara would manage to outmaneuver the TPLF and bring forth Abiy Ahmed, a man of Oromo and Amhara heritage to power.

### **Abiy Ahmed**

Since taking over in 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed reshaped Ethiopia's political landscape and confronted its long-standing challenges from the EPRDF and the TPLF.

The pursuit of peace and reconciliation became hallmarks of Ahmed's leadership, highlighted by the historic 2018 peace accord with Eritrea, an action which won him a Nobel Peace Prize. However, this pursuit increased tensions with the TPLF as the Ethiopian government sought to dismantle the existing political structure, resulting in the TPLF's removal from influential positions. The introduction of political reforms aimed at fostering inclusiveness and expanding civic participation met resistance from the TPLF, viewing these changes as a direct threat to its long-held influence. This resistance exacerbated tensions and ultimately fractured Ethiopia's once cohesive political landscape.

Tensions only increased when the TPLF launched a number of attacks on federal army bases in Tigray (November 2020), which resulted in a military response from Abiy Ahmed. The retaliation, necessary in restoring order and preventing the TPLF from regaining control. However, due to this course of action, the long-standing legacy of the TPLF has now found itself isolated, facing allegations of insurrection, and grappling with consequences of a conflict exposing deep-seated issues within Ethiopia's political fabric.

Ahmed's leadership has undeniably reshaped perceptions of the TPLF, altering its status from a political powerhouse to a faction confronting isolation and accusations by shedding light onto actions that previously would've been unknown.

## **Government System**

Ethiopia has a federal parliamentary republic system of government. This system blends historical influences with modern structures. The constitution emphasizes ethnic federalism. This decentralizes power to regional states to address the diverse ethnic groups in the nation. Ethiopia has a multi-party political system. The Prosperity Party currently rules as the governing party. At the federal level, the government consists of the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of Federation. Each plays distinct roles in legislative decision making. Over time, the nation's governance model has evolved significantly. It transitioned from a monarchy to establishing the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991. This later led to adopting the current federal structure. While the system faces challenges such as regional tensions and economic disparities, it also embraces technology advances.

#### **Horn of Africa**

Figure 1: The Horn of Africa



The horn of Africa, as shown below can be located in the Northeastern part of Africa and includes countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and portions of Sudan and Kenya. Due to its proximity to key international waterways like the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, it is seen as a location of strategic importance. The Horn of Africa is full of diverse, cultural and ethnic composition but has also experienced political instability, border disputes and economic challenges. The impact of the Horn of Africa on the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region is huge. Neighboring countries, particularly Eritrea, have played crucial roles in the dynamics of the Tigray conflict. The Horn of Africa's complex geopolitics and historical tensions significantly contribute to the challenges and dynamics of the Tigray conflict, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the region and its influence on the broader political landscape.

## **Major Parties Involved**

#### The Federal Government of Ethiopia (FGE)

The current governing body of Ethiopia, the Federal Government of Ethiopia's stance on the Tigray conflict has been consistently against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) as they viewed them as a threat to the stability of Ethiopia. Despite numerous pieces of evidence depicting the Ethiopian government committing war crimes, the government has yet to fully acknowledge responsibility, downplaying the severity of such atrocities and attempting to justify its military actions.





In 2018, reform initiatives aimed at addressing ethnic tensions between different ethnicities were set into play, which received great levels of backlash from the TPLF, staining relations. The main conflict erupted in November 2020, when the TPLF attacked army bases within Tigray. As information regarding the situation in Tigray became more widespread, they were unable to continue denying their wrongdoings and proceeded to downplay their severity and blame them on rogue military operations. Although these military responses were conducted with the goal of restoring order, critics argue that the government's actions have worsened the humanitarian crisis and disrupted peace efforts. Despite international pressure to swiften diplomatic conversations between the FGE and TPLF, the government has been slow to address the root causes of the conflict and to engage in diplomatic discussions with the TPLF.

## **The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)**

Figure 3: The TPLF flag



Feeling underrepresented in Ethiopian politics, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was founded in 1975 and overthrew the Derg Militia to become a dominant force in Ethiopian politics and leadership coalition despite being an ethnic minority (6% of the total population.)

During the TPLF rule, Ethiopia experienced significant economic growth and infrastructure development due to the government having implemented multiple combinations of state-led and private-sector initiatives, focusing on agriculture, manufacturing, and infrastructure projects. However, the TPLF's rule would also be marked by human rights abuses, such as arbitrary arrests, killings, and suppression of dissent. Additionally, ethnic tensions between Tigrayans and other ethnic groups, particularly the Amhara, intensified during the TPLF's tenure.

However, the dominance of the TPLF would begin to wilt when the Prosperity Party, led by Abiy Ahmed took power in 2018. In 2020, tensions between the TPLF and the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) would escalate. Soon, this led to the war happening in the Tigray region, which has caused a humanitarian crisis, with widespread displacement, food insecurity, and allegations of war crimes.

## **Timeline of Events**

Date	Description of event
Sep, 2020	Tigray region holds a regional election defying orders from Addis Ababa
	(Ethiopian capital.)
Nov 4, 2020	Prime Minister (PM) Abiy Ahmed blames the TPLF for an attack on
	federal army camps (which were denied by the TPLF.)
Nov 9, 2020	A massacre in Mai Kadra causes 600 civilian casualties which intensifies
	the war. Telephone and internet communication lines get cut off, and
	information becomes increasingly harder to obtain and verify. Abiy asserts
	that the operation will soon be over.
Nov 14, 2020	TPLF fires rockets into Asmara (capital of Eritrea) and the conflict
	escalates beyond just Ethiopia's borders.
Nov 28, 2020	Abiy announces that the operations have been "completed", but fighting
	continues in parts of Tigray.
Jan 27, 2021	The US calls Eritrea to withdraw its troops in Tigray, which the Ethiopian
	government denies are in Ethiopia.
Feb, 2021	Eritrean soldiers accused of killing "hundreds" of soldiers in Axum, Tigray.
	A holy city.
Mar 10, 2021	Antony Blinken (US Secretary of State) calls for "full accountability" and
	the departure of troops from Eritrea.

Mar 23, 2021	Abiy admits the involvement of neighboring troops in Tigray.
Mar 26, 2021	Abiy announces Eritrea's agreement to withdraw forces from Tigray.
Apr 15, 2021	Mark Lowcock (a top UN humanitarian official) says forces Eritrean forces
	aren't leaving Ethiopia
Apr 22, 2021	The UN Security Council expresses deep concern, imposes sanctions on
	Ethiopia, and calls for a scaled-up humanitarian response in Tigray.
May 24, 2021	US imposes economic and security sanctions on Ethiopia
May 26, 2021	Biden calls for a ceasefire
Jun 10, 2021	Ethiopia declares a unilateral ceasefire in Tigray, but concerns persist with
	over 350,000 people facing famine.
Jun 21, 2021	A parliamentary election takes place in Ethiopia.
Jun 28, 2021	The TPLF gains control of the regional capital, Mekelle as the Ethiopian
	government declares a unilateral ceasefire in the Tigray region.
Jul 3, 2021	Ramesh Rajasingham (UN aid chief) says 400,000 people in Tigray are
	suffering the effects of famine and 1.8million are on the brink.
Jul 10, 2021	The Prosperity Party wins the parliamentary election, securing a second
	term for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.
Aug 10, 2021	Amid the ceasefire declared in June, Abiy calls for all eligible civilians to
	join the armed forces.
Aug 13, 2021	Biden's special envoy sent to the Horn of Africa in hopes of ending the
	increase in fighting and fears of a humanitarian disaster.
Aug 26, 2021	Over 210 people are killed in the Oromia region according to the Ethiopian
	Human Rights Commission.
Sep 30, 2021	The Ethiopian government orders the expulsion of seven senior UN officials
	from the nation for having "meddled" in its internal affairs.
Nov 2, 2021	Ethiopia declares a nationwide state of emergency, informing citizens to
	prepare to defend the capital from a possible Tigrayan march toward the
	city.
Nov 4, 2021	Immediate ceasefire called for by regional and Western powers.
Nov 17, 2021	Mainly made up of ethnic Tigrayans, at least 1000 people have been
	imprisoned across Ethiopian cities.
Nov 24, 2021	PM Abiy promises victory, going to the front lines to lead his troops.

Dec 16, 2021	Fighting intensifies as Ethiopian forces in the Amhara region are reported
	to have stepped up killings, mass detentions, and expulsions of ethnic
	Tigrayans around western Tigray.
Dec 20, 2021	Tigrayan forces announce the withdrawal from neighboring regions along
	northern Ethiopia.
Jan 7, 2022	The Ethiopian government announces the release of the highest-profile
	political detainees including the likes of Jawar Mohammed and other
	senior Tigray party officials.
Jan 13, 2022	WHO chief Tedros says blockades are preventing medicine and life-saving
	supplies from reaching the northern region.
Feb 15, 2022	The state of emergency is voted to end early by the Ethiopian parliament
	after just 6 months.
Mar 11, 2022	A minimum of 750 civilians killed or executed in the Amhara and Afar
	regions in Ethiopia.
Mar 24, 2022	An indefinite humanitarian truce is declared by the Ethiopian government
	in hopes of hastening the delivery of emergency aid into Tigray.
Mar 25, 2022	A cessation of hostilities agreed upon by Tigrayan fighters.
Apr 1, 2022	Aid-carrying trucks enter Tigrayan-controlled land for the first time since
	December 15.
May 17, 2022	A \$300-million grant is signed by Ethiopia and the World Bank to assist in
	the reconstruction and recovery in conflict-hit areas.
May 20, 2022	4000 prisoners of war released as part of an amnesty by the Tigrayan rebel
	forces.
Aug 2, 2022	The Ethiopian government urged by US and EU convoys for the Horn of
	Africa to resume essential services in Tigray.
Aug 17, 2022	In order to continue basic services to the northern region, the federal
	government proposes a formal ceasefire agreement.
Aug 24, 2022	Ceasefire ends and fighting between both sides erupts around Kobo,
	shocking UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres who appeals for an
	immediate ceasefire.
Sep 1, 2022	Ethiopian and Eritrean government forces launch an attack on Tigray,
	targeting rebel forces.

Sep 11, 2022	An announcement from the Tigrayan rebels shows that they are ready to
	take part in peace talks led by the AU.
Sep 20, 2022	Tigrayan forces announce that Eritrea has launched a full-scale offensive.
Oct 5, 2022	Both parties accept invites from the AU to participate in peace talks in
	South Africa.
Oct 25, 2022	Peace talks between delegates of the Ethiopian government and rival
	Tigrayan forces begin in Pretoria (South African capital.)
Nov 2, 2022	The parties agree on a "permanent cessation of hostilities."
Nov 7, 2022	Representatives of Addis Ababa and Mekelle discuss the implementation of
	the terms in the agreement in Nairobi (Kenyan capital.)

# **Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

In an attempt to solve the problem, entities such as the United Nations and African Union has taken numerous measures as steps of mitigation. These mainly included conducting diplomatic discussions, ceasefires, delivering humanitarian aid.

International concern about the Tigray War in Ethiopia has led diplomatic efforts to resolve the issue by both the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). The UN has played a vital role in mobilizing international support and increasing public awareness of the conflict's humanitarian effects. The World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are two UN organizations that have been actively involved in offering food, housing, and medical care to the impacted population. The UN has repeatedly demanded a peaceful end to the fighting, an immediate ceasefire, and unhindered humanitarian access.

As the regional organization, the African Union (AU) has also taken numerous steps in addressing the conflict in Tigray. The AU has called for dialogue and reconciliation among the federal government of Ethiopia, the TPLF, and other stakeholders to find a sustainable solution. The AU has continuously emphasized the importance of respecting human rights, preventing future displacement, and promoting an inclusive political dialogue. Furthermore, the AU has advocated for an African-led solution to the crisis and has sought to engage with the federal government of Ethiopia to encourage a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

#### **Possible Solutions**

The two main solutions that come to mind are the immediate ceasefire and humanitarian access in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, coupled with a comprehensive reform of the federal system, offer profound benefits for the country's stability and well-being. Firstly, a ceasefire would immediately alleviate the suffering of the civilian population, allowing for the delivery of crucial humanitarian aid, including food, medical assistance, and shelter. This would address the urgent needs of those affected by the conflict, mitigating the humanitarian crisis and fostering a more conducive environment for peaceful negotiations. Simultaneously, reforming the federal system to address ethnic tensions and promote inclusivity holds the promise of long-term stability. By revisiting the distribution of power between the central government and regional entities, it becomes possible to foster a sense of autonomy and representation for all ethnic groups. This reform could contribute to building a more equitable and united nation, addressing the root causes of the conflict and establishing a foundation for sustained peace and prosperity in Ethiopia.

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