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# SITUATION REPORT

July 2022

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It has been over 600 days since the genocidal war on Tigray was declared by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, endangering the lives of 7 million Tigrayans and resulting in one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. On June 14, 2022, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that "at least 33,000 children in inaccessible parts of Tigray are severely malnourished and face imminent death without immediate health." They added that weekly treatment admission for severe acute malnutrition increased four-fold in one month. The man-made famine in Tigray is exacerbated by the deliberate destruction and looting of health facilities and the targeting of health care workers, resulting in a total collapse of the Tigrayan health system. The genocidal war on Tigray is waged by the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, along with Amhara militias and vigilantes. It is estimated that as many as 500,000 people have died from war and famine in Tigray over 16 months. Invading forces have engaged in ethnic cleansing, deliberate blocking of humanitarian aid, weaponized rape, extrajudicial killings of civilians, and many other grave crimes against humanity and international humanitarian law violations that together would amount to genocide if investigated.

Presently in Tigray, it is the primary planting season, and there is a serious concern that farmers will be unable to sow their fields, further worsening food insecurity. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "with the rainfall outlook foreseen to be favorable, the season offers a crucial and cost-effective opportunity to improve food availability across the region" [1]. The call for seeds and fertilizers, and the threat posed to the planting season by the ongoing siege on Tigray, have been repeatedly mentioned by international partners with little gains achieved. The deliberate withholding of fertilizers and seeds should be understood as a feature of the ongoing man-made famine so that the people of Tigray perish by hunger now that active fighting has ended in most of the region.

The instability and violence across Ethiopia also continue. On June 19, 2022, over 200 Amhara civilians were killed in Ethiopia's regional state of Oromia. While there are disputes over who is responsible for the killings, it is reflective of a broader issue across the country: widespread violence that the Abiy administration has either facilitated or the administration's failure to exert control over allied forces and subnational actors. Additionally, on June 26, 2022, Sudan's military accused Ethiopia's army of capturing and executing seven Sudanese soldiers and one civilian.

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Despite widespread instability and the Ethiopian government preparing for war, Abiy speaks of peace in Tigray. During his June 2022 address to Parliament, Abiy revealed that his administration is ready to move towards negotiations with the Government of Tigray, announcing the creation of a negotiation committee to be led by Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen. The announcement of the talks follows the Government of Tigray's good-faith gesture in releasing over 4,000 prisoners of war and the Abiy administration's slight improvement in facilitating humanitarian aid into Tigray. While international partners are hopeful about the negotiations between the Abiy administration and the Government of Tigray, they must not prematurely rush to fully normalize relations until the Ethiopian government restores all essential services in Tigray and humanitarian aid is disbursed with fertilizers, seeds, and fuel guaranteed.

## **MEDICAL EMERGENCY: A COLLAPSED HEALTH SYSTEM**

Over the last 30 years since the end of the previous civil war in Tigray in 1991, Tigray rebuilt and strengthened its health system with investment from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Federation (EPRDF) government and Tigrayans in Tigray and around the world. According to Doctors without Borders, more commonly known as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Tigray's health system was "one of the best health systems in Ethiopia, with health posts, health centres and hospitals and a functioning referral system with ambulances transporting sick patients to hospital" [2]. The genocidal war on Tigray declared by the Ethiopian government on November 4, 2020, reversed all the progress made in the last three decades in a matter of months. In launching their genocidal attack, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara regional forces targeted and destroyed Tigray's health infrastructure.

### **Tigray's Health System Before the War**

Before the genocidal war on Tigray, the region had a three-tiered health system. There were health posts, health centers, and primary care hospitals at the primary care level. Secondary care was provided at general hospitals and tertiary care at specialized referral hospitals. Tigray had 712 health posts, 233 health centers, 29 primary hospitals, 16 general hospitals, and two specialized hospitals. Each health post was staffed with two health extension workers, providing health services to their community. The region also had a functioning referral system reliant on 280 functional ambulances.

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Health equity was a central component of the healthcare system, with healthcare financing options available, including a fee-waiver system allowing the poor to access care. Roughly 20,000 health care workers supported the health system, among them specialist physicians, general practitioners, nurses, midwives, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, health officers, public health specialists, and health extension workers.

The people of Tigray had a health system they could trust and rely on down to the village level. With the development and strengthening of Tigray's health infrastructure, Tigrayans' health improved. According to a government survey, 94 percent of people who gave birth in the preceding five years received antenatal care, while 73 percent delivered at a health facility, enabled by ambulance services. Sixty-three percent of these women also received post-natal care. In 2019, these health determinants were higher in Tigray than in the rest of Ethiopia. The same was true for the child mortality rate. In 2016, the child mortality rate in Ethiopia was 67 deaths per 1,000 births, while the same in Tigray was 59 deaths per 1,000 live births. Tigray was making steady progress in reducing maternal and child mortality. In 2016, the region had the second-lowest under-five infant and neonatal mortality rates in Ethiopia. Vaccine coverage was comparatively just as strong in contrast to national statistics. People had access to treatment for malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. Prior to the war, there were 43,000 HIV patients and 2,363 pregnant mothers on HIV prophylaxis in Tigray. While the incidence of non-communicable diseases in Tigray was increasing, Tigrayans had access to insulin and cancer treatment.

**“Nutrition indicators show that child malnutrition is still a challenge in Tigray. However, stunting and underweight rates declined twice as fast as the national rates between 2011 and 2016, thus Tigray is slowly bridging the gap.” [3] – UNICEF, 2019**

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Reductions in child mortality in Tigray between 2000 and 2016.



22-year-old health extension worker gives vitamin A supplement in Tigray in 2009.

## **Targeting of Tigray's Health System During The Genocidal War on Tigray**

Upon the Ethiopian government's declaration of war against Tigray's regional government in November 2020, a genocidal war ensued with the intent to destroy Tigray, its people, and all it had built. Tigray's health infrastructure was no exception. Tigray's health facilities were targeted for eight months when Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Somali troops and Amhara and Afari regional forces brutally occupied all of Tigray. Among the first to report on the destruction of Tigray's health system was MSF, which was on the ground until July 2021. Between December 2020 and early March 2021, MSF visited 106 health facilities. Nearly 70 percent of the facilities had been looted, more than 30 percent damaged, and only 13 percent functioned normally. Adwa Hospital's medical equipment, including ultrasound machines and machines, had been deliberately smashed. MSF described health facilities occupied by soldiers and ambulances seized by armed groups. Eritrean forces looted materials, equipment, and vehicles, including ambulances, across the border to Eritrea.



Looted and destroyed health facility in Tigray.

A study conducted by Gesesew et al. evaluated the status of health facilities between November 2020 and June 2021. Of the 40 hospitals assessed, 14 were non-functional, nine were partially functional though severely limited, and 11 were fully functional. The status of the remaining 6 was unknown, as they were in areas occupied by Amhara forces and militias. Additionally, none of the 712 health posts remained, the aforementioned health financing system collapsed, and only 11% of ambulances were functional.

The genocidal war on Tigray has displaced over 2 million people, among them healthcare professionals. Doctors and nurses have found themselves in internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugee camps, trying to provide care to those who have also been displaced. Healthcare professionals who have not been displaced remain in understaffed and under-resourced health facilities without salaries.

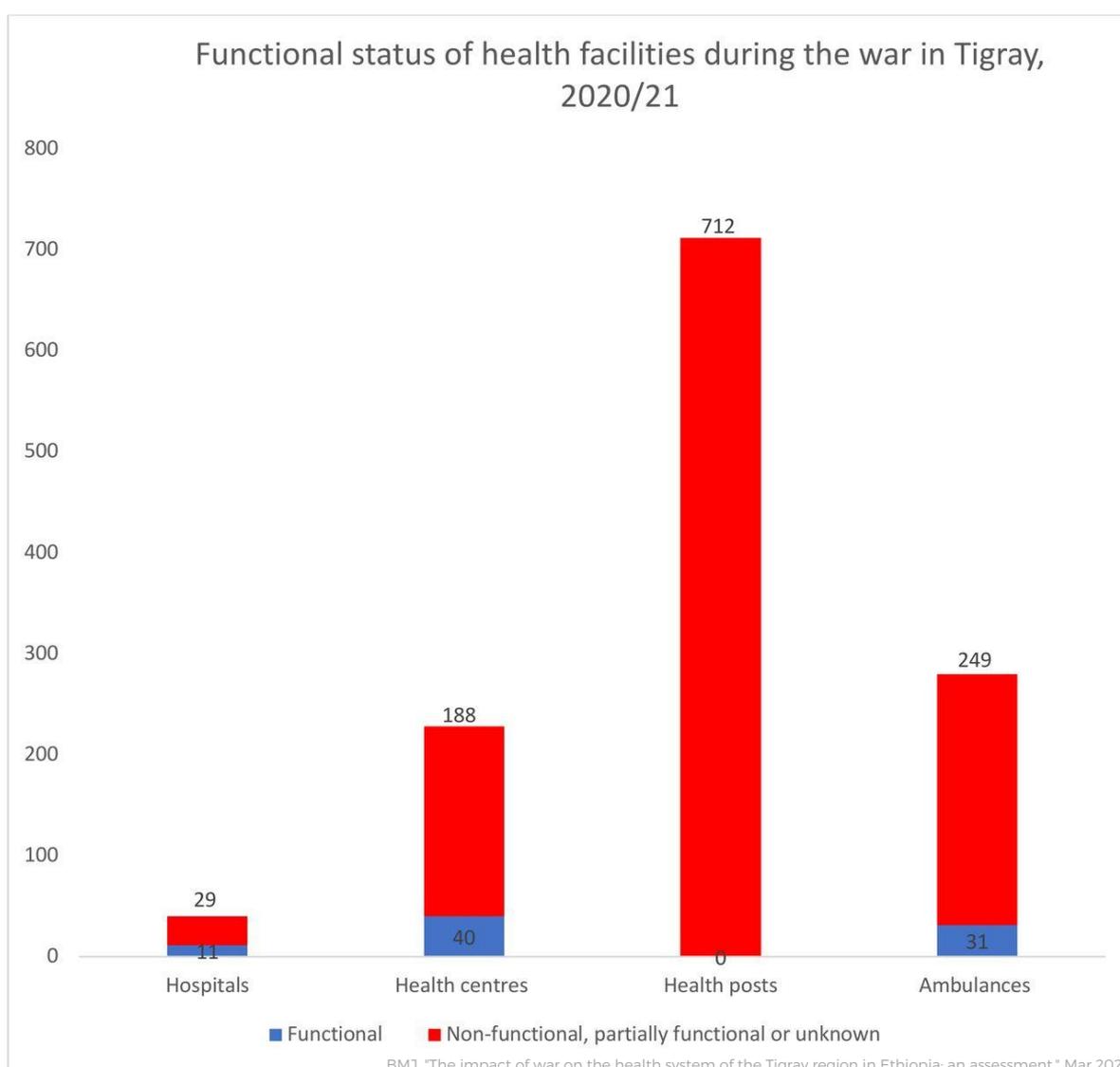
The physical destruction of Tigray's health system in liberated areas ended in June 2021. Starting in July 2021, the Ethiopian government imposed a complete siege, which has destroyed what was left of Tigray's health infrastructure. Although invading forces and the Ethiopian government have blocked unfettered humanitarian access since the start of the genocidal war, access became even more limited in July 2021. Not only has this resulted in worsening a man-made famine, but medical supplies, medicines, and equipment to replace what was looted or destroyed cannot enter Tigray. Hospitals were forced to use old cotton fabric to replace gauze and give patients expired medicine. There is also no food for patients at hospitals, forcing them to turn patients away. Healthcare workers are also going hungry, only having access to one piece of bread to sustain them all day. They also continue to go without salaries and access to their bank accounts, as is the case for everyone in Tigray. The result of the targeted attacks between November 2020 and June 2021 and the siege and humanitarian blockade that followed is the complete collapse of the health system.

Due to the ongoing siege, the lack of supplies, medicines, equipment, fuel, and electricity has forced hospitals to close their doors. In June 2022, Ayder Referral and Specialized Hospital, which once served over 9 million people in Tigray and from neighboring regions, was forced to stop providing routine services. Ayder's closure indicates how dire Tigray's medical and humanitarian crisis is. News of Ayder's closure was followed by news of Adigrat Hospital closing and then Quiha General Hospital.

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The reality is that these hospitals and, most if not all, health facilities across Tigray can no longer provide patient care. The implications of the total collapse of a health system during a man-made famine are catastrophic, significantly diminishing the likelihood of survival for civilians in Tigray. As such, the Ethiopian government is deliberately inflicting on Tigrayans conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction.

**“This isn’t like the 21st century anymore; it’s more like the 16th or 17th” [4] – New Humanitarian**



Statistics illustrating the destruction of the health system in Tigray.

## **Collapsed Health System: Implications of Destruction**

During the eight-month occupation of Tigray, Tigrayans could not access care because of security concerns and, in certain instances, were even prevented from accessing care. On June 22, 2021, the Ethiopian government bombed a marketplace in Togoga, Tigray, about 30 kilometers from Mekelle. Invading forces prevented ambulances from entering the area, leaving wounded civilians without care. Furthermore, the occupation impacted pregnant mothers, who were unable to reach hospitals to deliver their babies—leading many pregnant women to die from childbirth. Those suffering from chronic conditions reliant on life-sustaining medication were left without them.

**“People repeatedly tell us our just being here means something. They say it helps them feel less forgotten, like someone cares, a little bit safer” [5] - Joe Belliveau, MSF Executive Director, in Tigray in March and April 2021**

From the start of the genocidal war, invading forces have unleashed a systematic and widespread campaign of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Current estimates range between 10,000 to over 120,000 survivors of weaponized SGBV. Because of the attack on the health system and security concerns during the full occupation, survivors could not report the attacks nor receive the post-rape medical and psychosocial care they needed. Survivors did not have access to safe abortions and could not receive prophylaxis for sexually transmitted diseases. Unfortunately, this has not improved since invading forces left most of Tigray at the end of June 2021. Survivors remain without care today. Many have carried babies resulting from rape to term, while others without psychosocial support have succumbed to the psychological trauma of some of the most brutal sexual violence. Additionally, due to the weaponization of sexual violence during the foreign military occupation, some survivors were intentionally infected with HIV, while others acquired other STIs, most of which have gone untreated. The international community has largely ignored the thousands of women and girls who have survived weaponized SGBV since the outbreak of the war.

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Tigrayans live in constant fear of aerial bombardments. On numerous occasions, the Ethiopian government indiscriminately bombed cities and towns in Tigray, including IDP camps. The chances of survival for victims of these war crimes are slim, as hospitals cannot provide the emergency medical care trauma victims need. Tigrayans are left not only as sitting ducks to be bombed but also to starve. The nutritional gains achieved in the 2000s were starkly reversed, with malnutrition rates skyrocketing. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) estimates that in 2022, 454,000 children are malnourished, and 116,000 are severely malnourished. Lactating mothers and pregnant women are also malnourished, leading to low birth weights, stillbirths, and deaths during childbirth. Hospitals and other health facilities are not able to provide nutritional supplements to save these children. On certain occasions, when those severely malnourished could receive treatment, they went home to a lack of food, where they ultimately died. In addition to malnutrition, children in Tigray are at risk of early childhood diseases without vaccines. Unable to complete their immunization schedules with compromised nutrition, newborns are susceptible to measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, and more.

In addition to children and mothers, among the most vulnerable in Tigray are those affected by chronic conditions, including diabetes, cancer, and HIV/AIDS. Soon after the start of the genocidal war, those affected by these diseases had their treatments interrupted. People with diabetes do not have access to insulin, as pharmacies ran out; hospitals were providing cancer patients with expired medicine until all supplies were depleted. An assessment conducted by the Tigray government between July and September 2021 found that 81 percent and 90 percent of patients with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, respectively, have been lost to follow-up. Lack of medicine for these patients is essentially a death sentence.

Infectious disease outbreaks are also more likely given living conditions and interruptions in disease control programs. Screenings and surveillance systems have collapsed. Not only is COVID-19 a concern, but so too are diarrheal diseases, malaria, cholera, yellow fever, and meningitis, among others. Overall, the health situation in Tigray is dire, and healthcare professionals do not have the supplies required to save lives. The psychological toll on healthcare professionals not being able to save lives is another consequence of the siege imposed on Tigray.

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The targeting of health facilities or any medical unit in war is against international law established by the Geneva Convention, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2286. Resolution 2286 strongly condemns attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel, and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities. Per the International Criminal Court Article 8(2)(b)(ix) and (e)(iv) of the 1998 ICC Statute, "[i]ntentionally directing attacks against ... hospitals and places where the sick and the wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives" [6] constitutes a war crime in international and non-international armed conflicts. It is without a doubt that the Ethiopian government and its allies have committed this war crime in Tigray; however, it goes beyond that. The destruction of the health system is only one of the tools the Ethiopian government has implemented to commit genocide by "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" [7]. Though the European Commissioner, Janez Lanarčič, made an unprecedented visit to Tigray and visited Ayder Hospital, much more needs to be done. The international community must pressure the Ethiopian government to completely lift the siege to respond to Tigray's medical and larger humanitarian crisis.

## **FAMINE**

Tigray has been devastated by the war on its people for almost two years, resulting in countless fatalities, horrific abuses, ruined healthcare services, famine, and human rights violations. An estimated 4.6 million people require immediate food aid. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 83 percent of Tigrayan citizens reported having food insecurity, and 37 percent reported having severe food insecurity. Access to food has become a privilege for Tigrayans under siege. The country's rising inflation rate has exacerbated food insecurity. Agriculture, a key contributor to the region's food security, has been severely harmed by both the climate catastrophe and genocidal war.

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For the first time since mid-December 2021, supply convoys have been inefficiently making their way to Tigray since Abiy's administration declared a "humanitarian truce" in March 2022. However, progress has been limited. Even while assistance stockpiles are full, access to life-saving commodities has been substantially restricted due to fuel shortages imposed by government restrictions. Aid workers have been forced to transport medical resources and other essential supplies on foot. As a result, the European Union has warned that fuel scarcity is impeding the dissemination of humanitarian relief and encouraged Ethiopia's government to remove constraints on fuel supplies to Tigray.

The stockpiles sitting at distribution centers are not enough to meet the need in Tigray. The Ethiopian government and allied Afar regional government have only permitted a fraction of needed aid-carrying convoys to enter Tigray. In April 2022, a U.N. official stated that 2,000 trucks of food per week must enter Tigray to address the extreme food insecurity. According to UN OCHA, between April 1 and June 21, only 2,987 reached Mekelle, Tigray's capital. In 3 months, about one and a half weeks' worth of food has arrived in Tigray. Tigrayans continue to die of starvation every day.



Impact of the man-made famine in Tigray.

This crisis is not a natural calamity; rather, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Somali soldiers, supported by militia from Ethiopia's Amhara region and government-aligned forces, have imposed a siege that has closed Tigray's borders. As a result, millions of people in Tigray continue to suffer due to the weaponization of food and man-made famine.

Yet, despite clear evidence of the level of food insecurity amounting to famine, the United Nations (U.N.) has yet to declare it as such. On June 7, 2022, the former U.N. Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock explained this negligence. He stated, "At the end of my time in the U.N., it was clear to me that there was famine in Tigray, and the only reason it wasn't declared was because the Ethiopian authorities were quite effective in slowing down the whole declaration system [8]." Not only is the Ethiopian government starving an entire region to death, but the starvation is also facilitated by an international system not equipped to respond to a state-engineered famine as genocide.

## **DISPLACEMENT**

Being pressured to abandon your place of residence without traveling over internationally recognized borders is referred to as internal displacement. According to a report released from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, conflict and persecution caused over 5.1 million internal displacements in Ethiopia in 2021, more than three times the number reported in Ethiopia in 2020 and the highest recorded internal displacement for any country in a single year.

Militarized violence and targeting of civilian residences, hospitals, and schools in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray account for Ethiopia's staggering record. The genocidal war on Tigray and widespread violence across Ethiopia have resulted in an unprecedented number of new and recurrent displacements. Therefore, the 5.1 million figure takes several displacements into account, as the UNHCR spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo reports:

**"Civilians, including refugees and internally displaced people have been displaced, amid widespread reports of gender-based violence, human rights abuses, loss of shelter and access to basic services, and critical levels of food insecurity. [...] Several camps and settlements hosting Eritrean refugees have been attacked or destroyed, further displacing tens of thousands within Ethiopia" [9].**

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One of the biggest drivers of displacement is the mainly unseen campaign of ethnic cleansing that has occurred in Tigray. Women, children, and elders have been hustled aboard trucks and expelled from their hometowns and villages. In the first half of 2021, horrifying reports of rapes, murders, and forced displacement began to emerge, leading the U.S. to label what was taking place in Western Tigray as ethnic cleansing and demand the withdrawal of Ethiopian and Amhara soldiers from Western Tigray.

Despite the condemnation of ethnic cleansing by the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the U.N., regional authorities and security forces in the Amhara region, with the support of Eritrean forces, have continued to engage in a systematic crusade of war crimes and crimes against humanity. These crimes include murder, unlawful detention and torture, forcible displacement, sexual violence, eradication, and other atrocious crimes.

## **DOMESTIC AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT**

Prime Minister Abiy, during his June address to parliament, revealed that his administration is ready to move towards negotiations with the Government of Tigray, announcing the creation of a negotiation committee to be led by Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen. International actors, including the European Commissioner for Crisis Management and African Union Chairperson, welcomed the news, and the message that negotiations were underway was reported internationally and domestically. The pronouncement of the talks follows the Government of Tigray's good-faith gesture in releasing over 4,000 prisoners of war and the Abiy administration's slight improvement in facilitating humanitarian aid into Tigray.

While there is hope, domestic and international observers must remain cautiously optimistic and ensure that the Abiy administration's actions are meaningful and not performative. The Ethiopian government must immediately restore essential services in Tigray, including banking, telecommunications, transportation, fuel, and electricity. UN OCHA has reported that "humanitarian convoys have started to move much-needed lifesaving supplies to Tigray since 1 April, however, partners are struggling to distribute the supplies and reach vulnerable people outside Mekelle as fast and wide as possible" [10].

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The resumption of essential services and the successful distribution of humanitarian aid are interlinked; this must be understood by all of Ethiopia's partners and communicated by demanding an end to the siege on Tigray to bring relief to the millions in dire need. Further, international partners and donors must not prematurely rush to normalize the full extent of their relationship with the Abiy administration before humanitarian access is unfettered, including the necessary provisions of fuel, seeds, fertilizers, and essential services restored.

While the Government of Tigray has expressed its readiness for negotiations and a peaceful settlement to end the genocidal war on Tigray, the change in approach by the Abiy administration must be fully understood by examining the current predicament Ethiopia finds itself in. The Ethiopian economy is in shambles. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ethiopia has the third-highest inflation rate in Africa as of 2022 at 34.5 percent, and "multiple shocks hitting the Ethiopian economy have dampened growth, increased inflation, and created fiscal and external pressures" [11]. Additionally, conflict and instability are rampant across Ethiopia and along Ethiopia's borders. On June 19, 2022, over 200 Amhara civilians were killed in Oromia. While there are disputes over who is responsible for the killings, it is reflective of a more significant issue across the country, that violence is widespread and that the Abiy administration has effectively lost control of large swathes of the country. Additionally, on June 26, 2022, Sudan's military accused Ethiopia's army of executing seven Sudanese soldiers and a civilian who were captured, setting off intensified border skirmishes that have the real potential of heading into a full-fledged border war if effective peaceful mediation is not pursued.

Ethiopia's widespread issues will require all major actors to push the Abiy administration to end its siege on Tigray and engage in an all-inclusive national dialogue with prominent political actors. The international community must recognize Ethiopia's extremely fragile situation and that the violence and instability will not resign to one region or nation. The instability in Ethiopia has wide-reaching ramifications and is already being felt across the region, threatening global peace and security efforts.

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Though the Ethiopian government initiated a ceasefire at the end of March 2022 and reports of some progress on peace negotiations have emerged, Tigrayan civilians continue to experience state violence due to the ongoing siege. The siege on Tigray is still in full effect, severely limiting the amount of food, medicines, and agricultural supplies entering the region. The siege has created conditions of isolation, deprivation, and death that will have long-term, intergenerational consequences. On June 22, 2022, the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) stated, "The importance of supporting food production in Tigray cannot be overstressed. It is highly unlikely that the region will be able to produce sufficient food for its population without the appropriate seeds and fertilizers" [1]. Tigray remains without the seeds and fertilizer it needs. Food insecurity will only worsen in Tigray, where the man-made famine continues as an insufficient number of humanitarian convoys enter Tigray and fuel scarcity is hampering distribution.

Last month, doctors in Mekelle called on the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the Association of Cancer physicians in the UK, as well as the international community at large, to help save the lives of their patients. This month, in a European Society of Cardiology article on the Tigray siege's impact on cardiology services, doctors in Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Hospital's Cardiology Unit called on "all professionals and organizations to be the advocates of our patients and bring support to the patients in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia" [12]. Every facet of life in Tigray is affected by the siege. The international community must not let potential peace negotiations deter from pressuring the Ethiopian government to lift the siege completely. The life of every Tigrayan is at stake, as is the security of generations of Tigrayans to come.

As such, the international community must immediately work together to exert pressure on the Ethiopian government to lift its inhumane siege. To this end, we continue to call for the following:

- Implementation of Magnitsky Sanctions on the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara government officials to increase pressure to end the siege, as well as trade and investment restrictions in both countries;
  - Support for proposed U.S. legislation—H.R. 6600 and S.3199—so that they may pass through Congress to hold perpetrators of crimes committed accountable;
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- Support for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Ethiopians fleeing the ongoing war, as well as the welcome of refugees;
- Provision of sufficient resources, including financial, technical, and staffing resources, for the UN-mandated Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia.

So as to facilitate:

- Immediate humanitarian access into all of Tigray;
  - Immediate internationally monitored and verifiable withdrawal of Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces from all parts of Tigray and the restoration of pre-war territorial boundaries;
  - Immediate restoration of all essential services, including banking, electricity, telecommunications, transportation, and trade in Tigray;
  - Immediate protection of Tigrayans who are facing ethnic cleansing in occupied Western Tigray and an end to the state-sanctioned ethnic profiling and ethnically-motivated attacks against Tigrayans living across Ethiopia;
  - Release of all Tigrayans detained on the basis of their identity, including journalists, 22,000 Tigrayan ENDF members, and Tigrayans deported from Saudi Arabia;
  - An arms embargo and a limited no-fly zone that does not hinder humanitarian delivery;
  - A negotiated ceasefire and an inclusive, internationally-mediated national dialogue that includes the democratically elected and constitutionally mandated government of Tigray and other relevant stakeholders; and
  - Official recognition of the Tigray Genocide committed by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, Eritrean Defense Forces, Amhara Special Forces, and Amhara Fano Militia against the Tigrayan people.
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