

THE UNFOLDING CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

OF THE

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Thursday, December 3, 2020

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATIONS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:11 p.m., in via Webex, Hon. Karen Bass [chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Ms. BASS. The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Human Rights, and Internal Organizations will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the subcommittee at any point, and all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules. To insert something into the record, please have your staff email the previously mentioned address or contact full committee staff.

As a reminder to members, please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves, and please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking. Consistent with House Resolution 965 and the accompanying regulations, staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they are not under recognition to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum, and I will now recognize myself for opening remarks.

Pursuant to notice, we are holding a hearing on the unfolding conflict in Ethiopia. Today we are hearing testimony on the conflict in Ethiopia, and would like to hear recommendations on what the United States and the international community can do to help stabilize the region and decrease the tensions between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

There are several intra-ethnic conflicts regarding politics and social standing in Ethiopia covering decades. This highlights the country's long dispute over group and individual rights and whether centralized government is the way to true democracy for citizens of Ethiopia.

During my many visits to Ethiopia, I have expressed to leaders that the government must have representation for all ethnic groups, and most importantly, always protect its citizens. The current State of Ethiopia, not only has a ripple effect on its citizens, but neighboring countries such as Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea are negatively affected.

Ethiopia's instability and ethnic strife are producing security repercussions in Somalia. African Union forces depend heavily on Ethiopian troops to help combat violent extremism in the region.

Somalia has upcoming elections that may be tense, and the Trump administration is planning to withdraw U.S. Special Operation Forces from the country soon, which will strengthen Al Shabaab and weaken anti-forces.

Recent reporting noted that Tigray forces fired missiles toward the capital of Eritrea after Ethiopian troops pushed them from their regional capital. These actions certainly have political ramifications, but one of my major concerns is that far too often during conflict innocent civilians are the ones who are killed, injured, or displaced and have to flee across borders.

Another regional concern for Sudan, after 30-plus years of authoritarian rule, Sudan, which borders Tigray, is trying to peacefully transition to a democracy and strengthen its economy in the [inaudible] Tigray People's Liberation Front to have a continued peaceful dialog with the help of African Union mediation to resolve this issue once and for all.

Citizens on all sides of this conflict should have a right to be heard and peacefully protest, and there should be the freedom to disseminate what is going on in the country by journalists.

I appreciate and I am looking forward to hearing from Tsedale Lemma, who can give a firsthand report on what is happening in the country.

The Ethiopian diaspora is also critical in resolving this conflict. My office meets with and hears the concerns of this multiethnic community. We have taken meetings with groups representing the Amhara, Oromo, and Tigrayan, and other communities. We have heard from activists, journalists, political actors, and regular citizens who are concerned about their loved ones in the country. I hear you, my office hears you, and Congress hears you.

That said, I want you to know that the purpose of this hearing is to explore the deteriorating social and political situation in the country, the recent conflict, while attempting to find ways for the United States to be helpful and hear policy recommendations for how to resolve this conflict.

The purpose is not to provide a space for any one ethnic group to lay out their grievances. We understand various ethnic, religious, regional, and political communities have been affected, and we want to acknowledge that. That is the reason why we are holding this hearing. Each witness here will contribute to our understanding of the situation.

But you must know also that this is not the only source of our information. You know that the members present at this hearing today care about their constituents who are among the Ethiopian diaspora, recognizing the long-standing bilateral relations with Ethiopia and consider the country an important regional partner, but we must maintain a diplomatic posture and ensure that this hearing does not contribute to tensions back in Ethiopia. You will notice that we will raise your concerns and ask questions that you have raised in meetings or via email or written correspondence.

I hope that you trust that we will continue to be champions for human rights in Ethiopia. I recently led the bipartisan resolution

1183, supporting respect for human rights and encouraging continued democratic progress in Ethiopia and condemning the targeted violence and destruction of property directed against ethnic and religious minorities, the excessive use of force by Ethiopian forces against peaceful protesters, the arrest of journalists and peaceful protesters who exercise their constitutional rights, and hate speech and disinformation that fuel ethnic and political violence by groups raised in Ethiopia and in the diaspora. I heard from constituents that the language did not go far enough. We hear you, and we will consider this feedback as we revise and prepare the legislation for the new Congress.

I would like to thank our witnesses for participating in this important hearing. We all look forward to hearing your insight into the current situation in the country and recommendations for possible ways forward.

When we decide to have a hearing, it is with great consideration, and mainly the push to have this hearing came from the diaspora. Sometimes it is difficult for us, though, to make a decision to have a hearing because then when we do, people want us to represent one side or the other, and that is not the role for us to play here in Congress. So hopefully you will find this hearing productive, and you will understand that we are committed to the U.S. playing a productive role in assisting Ethiopia find its way to peace and unity. And this hearing is just—and the resolution—is just one step forward. It will not be the last.

Thank you very much, and I now call on the ranking member for his comments.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very, very much, Karen, Chairwoman Bass, for convening this very, very important hearing. And as you said, we are listening, and I think it is important that we do it. It is totally bipartisan, and I want to thank you for that. It has been a real joy to work with you as ranking member, and at one point you were my ranking member. So I think, you know, it just shows it is all about the issues and the concerns. And obviously what has happened in Tigray region is very, very serious. The loss of life has been horrific, and so I think it is very important that we have this hearing today. So thank you very much.

Indeed, it is my belief that Ethiopia is one of the most strategically significant countries in the middle of Africa; Nigeria, in my opinion, being the other one; and there are others that are very important as well. But what happens there is amplified throughout the region.

While I am hopeful that the Ethiopian Government, since they have captured the regional Tigray capital of Mekelle, coupled with the announcement just made, that the government will allow United Nations humanitarian assistance to flow into the region under their control, that hopefully that signals an end to armed conflict. But there is a concern, and I know you share it, Chairwoman Bass, that the fall of the capital does not necessarily mark the end of the armed conflict. It could be part of a stage, and we are very worried, all of us, about a protracted civil war characterized by guerrilla attackers, all the more reason why there must be a robust response by everyone.

This concern is based in part on the history of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, or the TPLF, and the geography of the Tigray region in Ethiopia. The TPLF, as we all know, came to rule all of Ethiopia following a successful guerrilla campaign against the Derg, a case of Marxist-inspired movement, overthrowing a Marxist government in the early 1990's. As guerrillas, the TPLF used the highland terrain of Ethiopia, including Tigray, to their advantage.

During the years of TPLF rule, the subcommittee was at the forefront of raising concern about human rights abuses. Following a critical hearing that I chaired in the spring of 2005, I traveled to Ethiopia, met with Prime Minister Meles that August, as well as with human rights leaders. I raised concerns directly with him in about a 2-hour meeting, especially the egregiously flawed election—national election—and the killing of dissidents that was occurring in the streets and the mass arrests.

In the next year, I introduced the Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights Advancement Act. And following the passing of Prime Minister Meles, domination by the TPLF continued, and this subcommittee again held another critical hearing: Ethiopia after Meles, and the future of democracy and human rights. And there was a resolution which I introduced, along with you, Chairwoman Bass, H. Res. 128, Supporting respect for human rights and encouraging inclusive governance in Ethiopia. It passed the House on April 10, 2018, and it laid out milestones for transition from rule by the TPLF.

Following Prime Minister Abiy's ascension, you and I met with him in Addis in August 2018, and we were encouraged by his words, by his actions, including the release of thousands of political prisoners.

The removal of the TPLF, as we all know, as the dominant power in Ethiopia, has brought a reform-minded Prime Minister Abiy to leadership in 2008, but it also unleashed protracted jockeying between other ethnic groups, most notably, the two largest, the Oromo and the Amhara, as well as intra-ethnic conflict.

Indeed, the prime minister's position among his own Oromo group is not completely solidified, and his pan-Ethiopian vision is challenged by Oromo separatists, just as the—or such as the Oromo Liberation Front and now jailed firebrand Jawar Mohammed.

These ethnic tensions are further exacerbated by a constitutional order bequeathed by the TPLF commonly called "ethnic federalism," which has led to the pitting of one group against another and fueled regional separatism and a desire to cleanse regions of other ethnicities.

While it may not be considered polite to discuss issues such as ethnicity and religion, one cannot understand the current crisis in Ethiopia without reference to the ethnic tensions which are often overlaid with religious ones. We in the Congress must be careful, however—and I think you pointed it out in your opening statement, Chairwoman Bass—not to inadvertently stir up further ethnicity-based division by taking the side of one group over another, but rather, urge a path of reconciliation and negotiation, which will

likely lead to no one being fully satisfied but will help reduce tensions.

Many individuals and groups can point to grievances, we know that—and they are well-founded grievances, whether historical or ongoing—and they are real. The war in Tigray threatens to exacerbate an already severe humanitarian problem. We have seen crisis upon crisis beset Ethiopia in this year alone. Not only did COVID-19 impact Ethiopia, as it did so many other countries including our own, but on top of that, there was a major locust plague which has created major food insecurity throughout Ethiopia, the Horn, East Africa, and beyond, and now armed conflict.

There needs to be a time for justice and accountability for the atrocities committed by all sides. No matter what the exigent circumstances, civil liberties—which Prime Minister Abiy Abiy to his credit helped restore in 2018—cannot be curtailed indefinitely. But first we need to stop the bloodshed and address the humanitarian crisis, and the anti-ethnic violence and hateful rhetoric must end.

As Secretary Mike Pompeo related in his call with Prime Minister Abiy on November 30, there should be a complete end to the fighting and a constructive dialog to resolve the crisis. He also stressed the need to protect civilians from further harm, including those fleeing the conflict, crossing the border into Sudan, and respect for the human rights of all ethnic groups, including Tigrayans.

Fortunately, it looks like an agreement has been reached between the Ethiopian Government and the United Nations to allow for unimpeded humanitarian access to areas of Tigray under government control. I hope that at a minimum the basic needs of those who have been displaced due to fighting, which some estimate to be a million people, can now be addressed while political issues remain to be resolved.

Ethiopia, as we all know, is a great country—a great country—a proud nation whose roots date back thousands of years, to the Old Testament. It retained its independence where others did not. It is the seed of the African Union and a world leader. Its soldiers help keep peace in other countries in conflict, and its cultural and artistic influence is widespread. It is, therefore, absolutely imperative that Ethiopia not succumb to internal division and ethnic hatred. Ethiopia is far too important, not just for the Ethiopian people, but for the entire Horn and Africa as a whole. It must overcome this year of crisis and crises and return to being an example, an inspiring example, to be followed.

Again, I thank you, Madam Chair, and I yield back.

Ms. BASS. And let me just thank you once again because you have always been, for so many decades, such an incredible champion for human rights. And I remember our visit to Ethiopia, and I just hope that we see peace, that the bombing stops, and that also full communication is opened up. I was encouraged that I know that humanitarian relief can go in, but obviously so much more needs to be done.

Before I introduce our witnesses, let me just mention that Members of Congress, whether on this panel today or not, represent many different Ethiopian communities, many different Ethiopian ethnic groups. And I suspect that some of the members that are

here today might, when it gets to their questions, reflect the questions from that perspective. That is one of the ways that we will try to handle the incredible amount of text messages, emails, phone calls that we have received from various sectors of the Ethiopian diaspora.

And as Congress Member Smith said, it is really important that we try to maintain a neutral position. As much as various diaspora groups would like for us to take one side or another, it is just not appropriate for us to do that as a Member of Congress.

So now I want to introduce our witnesses, and I will recognize each witness for 5 minutes. And without objection, your prepared statements will be made as part of the record. I will first call on witness No. 1 for their testimony, but before, let me read the bio of all of the witnesses.

Our first witness, Mr. Yoseph Badwaza, is a senior regional adviser at Freedom House, managing Ethiopia programs. Prior to joining Freedom House, he was Secretary General of Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Ethiopia's foremost human rights organization most known for monitoring and reporting on human rights violations. After systemic and persistent attacks in response to the Human Rights Council, Mr. Badwaza fled the country. Once relocated to the United States, he continues to be a leading voice for human rights protection and good governance in Ethiopia through advocacy, policy, and research. In 2010, he won the Human Rights Award for extraordinary activism.

Our second witness is Ms. Lauren Blanchard, is a specialist in African affairs with the congressional Research Service, where she provides nonpartisan analysis on African political, military, and diplomatic affairs, and on U.S. policy toward the region to Congress Members. Ms. Blanchard's portfolio has focused on East Africa, Chad, and Nigeria, and on security issues and military engagement on the continent. Previously, Ms. Blanchard managed democracy and governance programs in East and Southern Africa.

Ms. Tsedale Lemma began journalism in 2000 and worked until 2005 with three local newspapers, including as a senior reporter at the now defunct but prominent Addis Tribune. From 2005 to 2010, she served at the Ethiopian Embassy in Israel, focusing on communication, regional, political affairs, and media. In 2011, Ms. Lemma established the Addis Standard monthly magazine, and over the last 10 years, has made it one of the most influential magazines in the history of independent media in Ethiopia.

Our final witness, Ms. Susan Stigant, is the director of Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace, that last month established an Africa Center to deepen, elevate, and expand the Institute's commitment to stem violent conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. Ms. Stigant oversees the Institute's programming on strategic regional engagement in the Greater Horn of Africa, with the African Union, as well as constitutional reform and national dialog processes. She is also a co-convener of the senior study group on peace in the Red Sea arena, convened by the U.S. Institute of Peace.

I would now like to call on our witnesses for their testimony. And remember, each witness will have 5 minutes, and we will let you know when the 5 minutes are up. I will tap lightly on my gavel

at the 30-second mark, and then we will ask you to conclude. Thank you very much.

I would like to call on Mr. Badwaza.

**STATEMENT OF YOSEPH BADWAZA, SENIOR ADVISOR, AFRICA
FREEDOM HOUSE**

Mr. BADWAZA. Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before you today. I ask that my full testimony be admitted into the record.

The devastating developments of the past 4 weeks, have brought immeasurable human suffering and the destruction of livelihoods and appear to have returned Ethiopia to yet another protracted civil war, nearly 30 years after it emerged from its last. These tragic events have also dealt a deadly blow to what would have been one of the most consequential democratic transitions on the African continent, with significant repercussions for enduring peace and stability in Africa.

Hostility between the leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which ruled Tigray region for nearly three decades, and the Federal Government in Addis Ababa had simmered for 2-1/2 years prior to the dramatic escalation of tensions on the night of November 3. This animosity contributed to deepening rifts among communities and has caused profound damage to the prospect of an inclusive and democratic pan-Ethiopia project that could have been an inspiration to millions of across Africa.

With a communication blackout in the region since the start of the fighting in November, and the entrenched practice by both parties of using public communication tools to disseminate highly politicized propaganda messages, efforts to independently assess the situation have been difficult.

A series of missed opportunities in the last 2-1/2 years led to the tragic derailment of a promising democratic experiment. A half-hearted effort at implementing reforms by a ruling party establishment reluctant to shed its deeply authoritarian roots stands in the way of a genuine, inclusive political process. This is consistent with the core feature of the old EPRDF establishment, which has repeatedly failed to see a middle ground on anything throughout its tenure. The latest descending of political differences into an armed confrontation is a consequence of this winner-take-all delusions held by parts of the old EPRDF establishment, which have plagued Ethiopia's democratic progress for decades.

I now offer a few recommendations on how to get out of this political deadlock and return Ethiopia to a democratic transition.

While Ethiopia's political problems have complex, historical, and cultural roots, many of them can be addressed by adopting a political culture that prioritizes dialog as a means of managing different views. To support this endeavor and efforts to bring Ethiopia back to the democratic transition, the United States should take several steps.

One, the United States should urge Ethiopian Government and all political actors to engage in broad-based and comprehensive national dialog to address the core national issues and reach a political settlement ahead of the 2021 national elections. Significant resources have been spent on mainly State-led dialog initiatives.

None of them have succeeded, as they followed the same ineffective model of organizing large gatherings without clearly defined set of objectives and agreed-upon rules of engagement.

For dialog initiatives to be effective and get political process back to track, they should incorporate several steps. One, dialog should be preceded by an audit of political actors, conducted by independent groups, including civil society. And the dialog should be inclusive and reject the idea of what many call an elite pact, but should also be preceded by an audit of the political groups.

There are 170 political parties in Ethiopia, but very few have active membership. The audit would serve the purpose of determining which ones have—which ones represent legitimate views and have interest of communities at heart.

No. 2, dialog should be guided by rules agreed upon by all parties. Among others, the rules should identify independent facilitators and sanctions for noncompliance.

All parties must renounce the use of violence as a political tool and agree to refrain from inciting supporters to engage in illegal activity.

To foster the legitimacy and confidence in the dialog process, individuals in prison because of their political views should—and journalists and dissidents should be immediately released.

Independent civil society, community, and thought leaders should be represented at all levels of the dialog.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Badwaza follows:]



Ethiopia: Restoring Peace and Democratic Reforms

Written Testimony by Yoseph Badwaza
Senior Regional Advisor, Freedom House

US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and
International Organizations

December 3, 2020

Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before you today. I ask that my full written testimony be admitted into the record.

Recent events in context

The devastating developments of the past three weeks have brought immeasurable human suffering and the destruction of livelihoods, and appear to have returned Ethiopia to yet another protracted civil war, nearly 30 years after it emerged from its last civil war. These tragic events have also dealt a deadly blow to what would have been one of the most consequential democratic transitions on the African continent, with significant repercussions for enduring peace and stability across the Horn of Africa.

Hostility between the leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which ruled the Tigray Region for three decades, and the federal government in Addis Ababa, had simmered for two-and-a-half years prior to the dramatic escalation of tensions on the night of November 3. This animosity contributed to deepening rifts among communities and has ultimately caused profound damage to the prospect of an inclusive and democratic pan-Ethiopian project that could have been an inspiration to millions across Africa.

Federal troops entered Mekele this past weekend, and the federal government announced that it had “completed and ceased” military operations in the Tigray Region. However, many fear that the conflict could morph into a protracted civil war that could cause the loss of many more lives and worsen a humanitarian crisis. With a communications blackout imposed in the Tigray Region since the start of the fighting in early November, and the entrenched practice by both parties of using public communication tools to disseminate highly politicized propaganda messages, efforts to independently assess the situation have been difficult.

A troubled transition

Growing political differences between the federal government, led by the EPRDF, and the TPLF over how to manage the political transition since the beginning of 2018 have created a tense environment. The two parties failed to resolve these differences within the constitutional framework, owing both to the obstructionist stance the TPLF adopted toward Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s policies of political liberalization, and to the historically uncompromising positions of key segments of the EPRDF establishment, which have prevented democratic progress for decades. Yet the underlying challenges that impede Ethiopia’s efforts to step out of decades of authoritarian rule and build a democratic system are far more complex, and are structural in nature.

Throughout its nearly 30-year tenure, the EPRDF expressed hostility toward individual freedoms and a competitive political system in which citizens might freely elect their leaders and hold them accountable. This makes it very difficult for the government to usher in a genuine transformation of the political economy while this same political group seeks to remain the sole decision-maker overseeing the nature and direction of this transformation.

The EPRDF leadership was not on the same page internally as to the breadth and pace of reform when they decided to implement limited changes in the face of raging antigovernment protests in late 2017. Among the leadership, there were some who clearly

saw that nothing short of far-reaching and immediate reforms would satisfy the demands of the protesters. On the other hand, a sizable portion of the leadership and party rank-and-file wanted to use reform rhetoric to buy breathing space and advance the goal of self-preservation. This lack of a unified stance on the need and extent of reforms put the different factions within the party leadership at odds with one another at a time when mutual distrust among coalition members had also reached an all-time high. The absence of a shared perspective regarding the reforms led to a failure to come up with a coherent approach to addressing citizen demands or a clear path to manage the transition to democratic rule.

This disunity among the EPRDF leadership gave Prime Minister Abiy a free hand to push a vigorous set of changes without having to wait for the approval of the party. As a result, much of the extensive political and legal reforms undertaken in the first few months of the transition were invariably attributed to the singular focus Abiy Ahmed placed on thoroughly transforming the party into a democratic platform and altering the government's authoritarian policies.

As these initial reform measures drew massive support for Abiy's leadership, some of his comrades in the party begrudgingly fell into line while others continued to resent him. This very personalized approach to undertaking reforms was a stark departure from the highly centralized and often prolonged process of decision-making the EPRDF establishment had strictly adhered to throughout its tenure.

While Abiy Ahmed's approach of "shock therapy" was considered a fitting method of disentangling Ethiopia's political economy from decades of authoritarian rule, it had its own dangers. As would become clear, beyond the massive popular support Abiy enjoyed in the first few months of his tenure the approach did little to galvanize the political support he needed from his own party and other key political constituencies necessary to broaden the reformist base and put the transition on solid footing.

As a matter of fact, Abiy's inability to assert central government authority over swaths of the country as intercommunal clashes and political violence flared at unprecedented levels is in part attributable to this lack of consensus within an EPRDF establishment that retained strong control over all levers of government, including security, the civil service, and regional administrations.

Even as Abiy moved to dismantle the EPRDF and form the Prosperity Party in late 2019 by bringing together the ruling parties of all regional states except the TPLF, there was never a fundamental overhaul of the structures and the mindset of the federal and regional government bureaucracy and local security services that had enabled the EPRDF's near-total control of all aspects of public life. While Abiy's recent liberalization policies limited the state's reach to some degree, the administration has often relied on the preexisting structures to target real and perceived political opponents. The heavy-handed tactics that the government began employing in recent months—including the mass arrest of opposition supporters, imposing communication blackouts, and the use of deadly force against demonstrators—are all indications that these structures are once again being exploited to repress dissent.

Moreover, the loosening of political controls under Abiy has been accompanied by an increase in violence across the country, as different ethnic groups and regions push for greater autonomy and power. Many regional leaders and opposition politicians see the democratic opening and attendant reforms as a chance to grab more autonomy for their ethnic group and increase access to sources of rent and political clout at the center.

In furtherance of these goals, many of these regional political actors including those within the ruling party have spent enormously from state resources to beef up largely ethnic-based special forces and local militias. Reluctant to embrace a national political agenda that fosters a strong and unified central government, they often employ inflammatory rhetoric of historical injustices, and issue thinly veiled calls for attacks against members of other communities to pressure the government into submitting to their demands. The result of

this has been an unprecedented escalation of ethnic and intercommunal clashes, as well as targeted attacks on ethnic and religious minorities over the past two years that have killed thousands of people and displaced millions more.

Zero-sum politics

Despite these enormous challenges, hope for Ethiopia's transition to democratic rule slipped further away when the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the postponement of widely anticipated elections scheduled for August 2020. Following the declaration of a state of emergency in April, the House of Federation, the upper chamber of parliament with the power to interpret the constitution, adopted the recommendation of the Council of Constitutional Inquiry (CCI) to allow the current federal and regional governments to remain in office until elections are held within 9 to 12 months, once the government can declare that COVID-19 no longer threatens public health.

Many opposition groups including the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) reacted to the elections' postponement with understanding, reasoning that the additional time could be used to narrow differences among political forces on the trajectory of the transition and to formulate shared benchmarks to measure the progress of ongoing electoral reforms. However, other opposition parties rejected the government's unilateral decision to effectively extend its own term, and reiterated calls for the formation of a caretaker government to manage the transition and organize general elections.

As polarization deepened, in September the TPLF held elections in Tigray in defiance of the federal government's decision to postpone them. After declaring a nearly 100 percent victory, the TPLF declared the federal government to be illegitimate, and called for a caretaker government to be established. The federal government declared the elections null and void, suspended federal subsidies to Tigray, and halted direct engagement with the regional government. On the night of November 3, Abiy ordered the deployment of federal troops into the Tigray Region after TPLF forces attacked the Northern Command, which

was stationed in the region—presaging a conflict that has rights organizations warning of a humanitarian disaster, and which continues today.

In the meantime, the tense situation had escalated over the summer after a spate of political violence sparked by the killing of the Oromo singer Haccaalu Hundeessa in Addis Ababa in July. More than 300 people were killed, and the government imposed a complete shutdown of the internet that lasted for over two weeks. Security forces arrested more than 7,000 people suspected of involvement in the weeklong violence and looting that took place in different parts of the country, including prominent opposition political figures, journalists, and local government officials. Some opposition leaders are facing terrorism charges—a tactic of repression common during Ethiopia’s period of authoritarian rule.

The July violence and the government’s heavy-handed response to it marked the further erosion of human rights and democratic norms and a dramatic narrowing of the political space.

Recurring political violence and growing limits on freedoms of expression, assembly, and association also undermined efforts by civil society organizations and human rights groups that sought to take advantage of the improved policy and regulatory framework to enhance their work of monitoring and documenting human rights in Ethiopia, educating the public, and holding violators accountable.

What went wrong?

A series of missed opportunities in the last two-and-a-half years led to the tragic derailment of a promising democratic experiment. A half-hearted effort at implementing reforms by a ruling party reluctant to shed its deeply authoritarian roots stands in the way of a genuine, all-inclusive political process. This is consistent with the core feature of the EPRDF establishment, which has repeatedly failed to see a middle ground on anything throughout its tenure. The latest descending of political differences into an armed confrontation between the federal government and the TPLF are a consequence of the

winner-take-all delusions held by parts of the EPRDF establishment, which have plagued Ethiopia's democratic progress for decades.

For its part, much of the political opposition lacks a clear vision, and their failure to stand behind stated goals and hold their leaders to account has left these groupings without a solid support base. Instead of seizing and making maximum use of political openings that come along once in a generation, the opposition often engages in personal squabbles, spouts ethnic and territorial rhetoric and pursues parochial interests. They are often not clear-eyed about the immensely asymmetrical nature of the power relationship between them and the government, and fail to pursue political tactics responsive to that reality. They are overly focused on power-sharing arrangements with the government, rather than on efforts to secure institutional reforms that will ensure free democratic discourse and competitive elections.

Recommendations

While Ethiopia's political problems have complex historical and cultural origins, many of them can be addressed by adopting a political culture that prioritizes dialogue as a means of managing different views.

To support this endeavor and efforts to bring Ethiopia back to the path of democratic transition, the United States should take several steps:

Urge the Ethiopian government and political forces to engage in broad-based and comprehensive national dialogue to address core issues and reach a political settlement ahead of the 2021 national elections. Significant resources have been spent on mainly state-led dialogue initiatives. None of them succeeded, as they followed the same ineffective model of organizing large gatherings without a clearly defined set of objectives and agreed-upon rules of engagement. For dialogue initiatives to be effective and get the political process back on track, they should incorporate several steps:

- Dialogue should be preceded by an audit of political actors, conducted by an independent group of civil society, community, academic, and other relevant figures. It should be inclusive, and reject the idea of what many call an elite pact—but should also be preceded by an audit of all political groups in Ethiopia to determine which ones represent legitimate viewpoints and interests of communities. There are over 170 political parties; very few of these have an active membership.
- Dialogue should be guided by rules agreed to by all parties. Among other points, these rules should identify independent facilitators and sanctions for noncompliance.
- All parties must explicitly renounce the use of violence as a political tool and agree to refrain from inciting supporters to engage in illegal activities in pursuit of political goals.
- To foster legitimacy and confidence in the dialogue initiatives, individuals imprisoned because of their political views, journalists, and other dissidents should immediately be released, and charges against them dropped.
- Independent civil society, community, and thought leaders should be represented in all steps of the dialogue.

Urge the Ethiopian government to allow an independent investigation of human rights abuses committed in the context of the recent armed conflict, and during political upheaval in the recent past. The United States should provide independent human rights investigators with technical and financial assistance so they may monitor, document, and report on these abuses and pursue efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.

Adopt more consistent, coherent, balanced ,and principled messaging and policy concerning Ethiopia across all branches of government, effectively coordinate messaging with Ethiopia’s development partners, and ensure that messaging reaches the Ethiopian public. The United States should work to rectify the perceived bias toward Egypt in negotiations concerning the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), while at

the same time making clear that the United States prioritizes peaceful resolution of political differences and the protection of civilians. A positive view of the United States among the Ethiopian public can go a long way toward ensuring the success of US-led efforts to help resolve the current political crisis.

Increase support to democratic institutions and independent media outlets that promote a culture of dialogue and accountability. The United States should recognize and assist efforts by institutions such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to uphold principles of domestic and international human rights norms.

Use a rights-based approach to address the damaging effects of disinformation and dangerous speech that originate from diaspora communities. While some diaspora members are engaged in important peace-building efforts, others fan the flames of hatred and division, largely through social media.

Conclusion

There is no enduring solution to the underlying political problems that come out of a military engagement. It is even more terrifying to think of what comes after the conclusion of active military operations. Ethiopia cannot afford prolonged armed conflict and a protracted political stalemate. The longer this situation persists, the more it will cost human lives, deepen communal divisions, and create the conditions for human rights violations, mass atrocities, and humanitarian crisis. Deescalating conflicts and resuming a genuine and all-inclusive dialogue that will not preclude accountability for serious human rights abuses is the only viable way out of the current political deadlock.

Ms. BASS. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Thank you very much.

I would like to now move on to our next witness. Tsedale Lemma, the journalist, if she would please speak.

And witnesses know that when it comes to the Q&A period, you will have further opportunity to speak.

Ms. Tsedale.

**STATEMENT OF TSEDALE LEMMA, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
FOUNDER, ADDIS STANDARD MAGAZINE**

Ms. LEMMA. Thank you, Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and honorary members of the House subcommittee. I am honored to be here to testify about the tragicpolitical trajectory my beloved country Ethiopia is confronted with today. The timing for this hearing could not have come at the right moment, provided that the topic to be covered not only deals with the conflict itself, but its complex root cause and recommendations on how to address the crisis in order to help prevent the security situation further deteriorating in Ethiopia and the wider region on the Horn of Africa.

The source of the last 30 days' military conflict in Tigray is fundamentally political, and as such, inseparable from the cascade of other political crisis that rocked Ethiopia for the last 2-1/2 years and which have contributed to their astounding number of ethnic, religious, and political violence that continued threatening the country, weakening the State, and causing devastating suffering to Ethiopians across the country.

The conflict in Tigray, although alarming in the immeasurable amount of the suffering it has caused to civilians, especially Tigrayans, it should, therefore, be not viewed in separate, an one-off event. In my view, the conflict is a cumulative result of three major political failures.

The first one is the ill-timed and unceremonious collapse of the then ruling party, the EPRDF, over which TPLF had a monopoly.

The second is the ill-managed opening up of the political space in Ethiopia, which lacked a comprehensive and inclusive political dialog and political settlement aimed at charting out an agreed-upon transition and roadmap.

And the third is the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, which induced the postponement of the much anticipated elections in Ethiopia and how the government handled the postponement of the election. Instead of dealing with it with other political parties and reaching a settlement—agreed-upon settlement, the government has indefinitely postponed the election and caused an agitation of the political space, which has resulted in irreversible crisis that the country continued experiencing.

So these political failures were further compounded by political assassinations, the last one of which, the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa, being the most consequential, that has stirred the political landscape from that which failed to find the negotiated settlement to that which saw the government as a jailer and its formidable opponents as the jailed.

In light of this, I believe three things need to happen and need to happen fast. The first one is Ethiopia needs a U.N.-mandated team to investigate the war on Tigray, the assassinations of senior

officials and artist Hachalu Hundessa, as well as the killings of countless civilians and the displacement of millions since Prime Minister Abiy came to office. He has blamed the TPLF for it, which would further create more altercation in the ongoing war.

There are repeated recommendations, including one made by Yoseph now, for independent and transparent investigations from all corners around the world. But I do believe only a U.N.-mandated team should be empowered and enabled to commence such task. As a result of a deeply polarized society, no other institution from Ethiopia's Human Rights Commission to Amnesty International, to Human Rights Watch, earns the trust of Ethiopia's polarized society to conduct such important tasks the same way as a U.N.-mandated and a politically insulated investigation team should.

In a global human rights update delivered at the 45th session of the Human Rights Council on the 14th of September 2020, Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. Human Rights—High Commissioner for Human Rights, said her office was ready to support a thorough, independent, impartial, and transparent investigation of the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa and subsequent violence that really altered the political landscape in Ethiopia. This offer has not been taken up yet, and I do believe it is time we take Ms. Bachelet's offer and acted on it.

What is at stake in post-Tigray's conflict is not the same way what is at stake in post-Hachalu Hundessa's assassination in Ethiopia, nor can the U.S. afford losing Ethiopia, one of its staunch allies and a force of stability in the Horn and beyond, and wishes to get away with it like it did with Somalia.

Ethiopia's political crisis, which is haunting the government of Prime Minister Abiy, needs to find its root causes. A U.N.-mandated investigation team is the only place to start looking for in order to hold to account those who have wrecked havoc for the last 2-1/2 years and continue to find the closure.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Ms. LEMMA. Ethiopia must also commence an all-inclusive political dialog as soon as possible—

Ms. BASS. Excuse me.

Ms. LEMMA [continuing]. And that should be preceded by the release of all political prisoners.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lemma follows:]

“The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia”

**Testimony before the
House Subcommittee on Africa, Global
Health, Global Human Rights and Internati
onal Organizations**

**Presented by
Ms. Tsedale Lemma,
Editor-in-chief/Founder
Addis Standard
December 03/2020**

Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Smith and Honorable members of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, I am truly honored to be here today to testify about the tragic political trajectory my beloved country Ethiopia is confronted with today. The timing for this hearing could not have come at the right moment provided that the topic to be covered not only deals with the conflict itself, but its complex root cause and recommendations on how to address the crisis in order to help prevent the security in Ethiopia and the wider region of the Horn of Africa from deteriorating further.

As such, I am fully aware of the historical weight I carry with me on behalf of those who have lost their indelible right to life, their way of living and that of its meaning due to the unfolding conflict in Tigray and several other political crises that besieged Ethiopia in recent past. As an editor of a leading publication in Ethiopia that has been intensely covering Ethiopia's transition in the last two and half years and the protests that led to the transition itself, I will do my very best to accurately describe events in my personal capacity as an avid observer and highlight recommendations that I believe would help shape a better tomorrow.

But before that I would like to issue a disclaimer that the views expressed in my presentation are that of mine and do not represent the Addis Standard magazine I am working for.

Overview

In the wee hours of November 04, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed [announced that he has ordered](#) the National Defense Forces (ENDF), led by a command post, is given order to start military offensive against TPLF in Tigray regional state. PM Abiy said the decision was in response to TPLF's attack and acts "to rob the Northern Command." He also said the TPLF "opened a war through Dashlah." In various announcements made in subsequent days, the Ethiopian government said the "operations by federal defense forces underway in Northern Ethiopia have clear, limited & achievable objectives - to restore the rule of law & the constitutional order, and to safeguard the rights of Ethiopians to lead a peaceful life wherever they are in the country."

Nevertheless, it is now one month and the conflict has escalated into a significant military confrontation between the federal defense forces – most likely backed up by foreign forces - and Tigray defense forces, which continued until today. Owing to a communication blackout in the whole of Tigray, the full extent and the impact of this military engagement is hard to assess at this moment.

However, what should be assessed at this point by way of addressing the root causes of this conflict is the background which led to the conflict itself. This is a conflict that has all the ingredients bubbling in the last two and half years and as such one must look back at this period of transition overseen by the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

The genesis

Three critical and intertwined political trajectories made worse by multiple political assassinations have characterized Ethiopia's transition in the last two and half years; each of these feed into one another and have contributed to the current dangerous impasse between the federal government and Tigray, and an ever increasing and complicated ethnic, political and religious violence, which continued threatening the weakening of the Ethiopian state, and continued tearing the social fabric of the Ethiopian people apart with each passing day.

Three critical and intertwined trajectories are:

1 - Ill-managed opening up of the political space which lacked a compressive and inclusive political dialogue

In the advent of a sweeping reform that started in early 2018, the government opened up the country's borders to exiled political parties, both those who were actively engaged in military combat against the EPRDF government - most notably the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Patriotic Ginbot 7 - as well as those who were unarmed but were the system's fierce critics, including the nature and identity of the federation. Suddenly, everyone was in town but there was no rule dictating what should be the relationship between these political forces and the state and the ruling party. What ensued was a fierce and at times corrosive competition without the presence of a rule of the game and a proper referee. The advent of this scenario has contributed directly and indirectly to these vertical and horizontal violence during this period of transition while the lack of publically available information on the legal terms of agreements government envoys had signed with some of these political parties has added fuel to the fragility of the transition; particularly problematic were the lack of terms [on disarmament and reintegration](#) of formerly exiled rebel groups back in to the society. The lack of political settlement and inclusive dialogue, coupled with the absence of a legal framework on disarmament and reintegration of armed political groups has led to the brake up of a protracted, if low intensity, civil war in Oromia regional state which has significantly weakened the political order and has ripped the society apart.

2 – The collapse of an old system

In what could initially be seen as a justifiable desire to [reconfigure the old political dispensation](#), primarily by undoing the old political order spearheaded by the EPRDF, the newly formed political alliance called Prosperity Party (PP) was born at the expense and the imminent danger thereof of the exclusion of Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), one of the founders of the EPRDF and the party that had an uncontested monopoly for 27 years over the Ethiopian state and its political structure.

The deteriorating relation between TPLF in the north and Prosperity Party in the center that ensued after the dissolution of the EPRDF has cut the last umbilical cord between the two parties, and didn't only deprived both the opportunity of having a common platform where differences could be solved via dialogue between the leaders of both parties, but also has left a permanent

dent in the relations between Tigray as a regional state and the central government, eventually leading to the current military engagement. Since it broke out on Nov 04, this war has caused the death of unknown numbers of both civilians and men and women in uniform and has forced the displacement of tens of thousands. Sudan alone is currently hosting more than 43,000 displaced civilians, [according to the UNHCR](#).

3 - COVID-19 induced electoral deadlock

But despite the presence of these multiple factors discussed above and which have contributed to the mismanagement of the transition, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic which was reported in Ethiopia on March 31, 2020 has further complicated the political atmosphere. Subsequently, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) announced that it had [postponed indefinitely](#) the general elections scheduled on August 29/2020. NEBE's decision to postpone the elections, albeit justifiably, had [brought in the elephant in the room](#): Ethiopia's constitution stipulates legislative elections should take place every five years; any ruling party which overstays this electoral mandate is automatically rendered illegal under the rule of the land.

The postponement of the election has set in motion a fierce constitutional debate on how exactly the ruling party and its opponents should navigate through the impasse. Many Ethiopians, including some of the country's top constitutional scholars, have pleaded with the ruling party [to seize the moment and engage](#) in a constitutional based national dialogue with all the opposition parties and other stakeholders. Unfortunately, that didn't happen.

This in turn has led to the unprecedented move by the TPLF which held its own election at the regional level. The outcome of this election meant one thing, a destructive mutual delegitimization between the Tigray and the Federal governments. The speed with which the political fallout deteriorated between the center and Tigray region after it held the election can only be likened with a train wreck at full speed.

Political assassinations

If there is one thing that that can distinctly characterize the last two and half years is the astounding number of high profile assassinations and their resultant political turmoil. In June 2019 the army chief of staff, the president of the Amhara regional state and two other senior officials of the region were assassinated in a span of one hour in Addis Ababa and Bahira Dar, the capital of Amhara regional state, respectively. These assassinations have shaken the foundation of Mr. Abiy's political power and its alignment, but he was able to navigate through it largely unaffected.

But none of these assassinations had left a devastating impact and outright dangerous as that of the June 29 assassination of Hachaalu Hundessa, a prominent Oromo artist. For anyone closely following the dangerous political trajectory since the postponement of the elections due to COVID-19, it takes so little to comprehend that Hachaalu's assassination would unravel a dark chapter of a sort in Ethiopia's recent history. The assassination was the perfect storm in further agitating the deteriorating political atmosphere. In its wake, the government has waged a massive

crackdown against prominent opposition figures, such as Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, Lidetu Ayalew, Eskinder Nega and other senior and rank and file members of their respective parties. This unfortunate incident has made the possibilities of a negotiated political settlement impossible.

Recommendations: Three ways to break the spell

Ethiopia is at a dangerous trajectory. The government of Mr. Abiy has so far managed to sail through a vicious cycle of violence in the last two and half years. It may be possible to temporarily persuade a passionate and unquestioning audience in the center to justify the current political trajectory as viable; but that will fix neither Ethiopia's Tigray problem, nor will it help stabilize Oromia, the most agitated member of the federation at the moment.

In light of this, I believe three things need to happen and fast:

1 – Ethiopia needs a UN mandated team to investigate the war on Tigray, the assassinations of senior officials (and artist Hachalu Hundessa) as well as the killings of countless civilians and the displacement of millions since Mr. Abiy came to office and which he pointed his finger at the TPLF. There are repeated recommendations for “independent and transparent” investigations from all coroners around the world. But I believe only a UN mandated team should be empowered and enabled to commence such task. As a result of a deeply polarized society no other institution: from Ethiopia's Human Rights Commission to Amnesty International to Human Rights Watch, earns the trust of Ethiopia's polarized society to conduct such task the same way as a UN mandated, and politically insulated investigation team.

In her global human rights update delivered at the 45th session of the Human Rights Council on 14 September 2020, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said her office was “[ready to support a thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigation by the Government into the killing](#) and subsequent violence, and to support the Government's ongoing legislative reforms.” It is time the U.S. and the rest of the world took Ms. Bachelet's offer and acted on it.

What is at stake in post-Tigray's law and order operation cannot be jailed away as the crisis in Post-Hachalu Ethiopia. Nor can the U.S. afford losing Ethiopia, one of its staunch allies and a force of stability in the Horn and beyond, and wishes to get away with it, like it did with Somalia. Ethiopia's political crisis which is haunting the government of Mr. Abiy needs to find its root causes; a UN mandated investigation team is the only place to start looking for it in order to hold to account those behind it and to find a closure.

2 – Ethiopia must commence an all-inclusive political dialogue as soon as possible. This should be preceded by the release of all political prisoners. The crisis rocking this island of 110 million people is fundamentally political; it is a battle anchored in the desire to shape the nature of the state and the share of the diverse political actors in it. This cannot happen through the supremacy of the military, or by rallying a state force and its powerful allies in the media, the business and other non-state actors including religious institutions alone. Mr. Abiy's government cannot continue to

kill, jail, maim, and disappear its adversaries and expect to preside over a democratically stable state. It is doable, but only to usher in an authoritarian state and a dangerously unstable political order, if the country can be governed even by authoritarianism.

Inclusive dialogue, which is aimed at charting the path for a viable and accommodative state and a constitution where all its people feel represented is the only way to ensure that Ethiopia is not riding the same, vicious Hamster Wheel, and expecting a different outcome; it didn't work in 1974 and in 1991, it will not work now. A parallel undertaking of an inclusive dialogue while the UN conducts its investigations into these major crises that consumed Mr. Abiy's two and half years in office will play a paramount role in stabilizing Ethiopia until a proper transition to a stable political order is established notably through free and fair elections agreed upon by all its players.

3 – The government has declared the war in Tigray was over on Saturday 28 November. It is not over! As such an immediate cessation of hostilities should be imposed on all warring parties. With every passing day, an Ethiopian is dying in the hands of another Ethiopian, the scar of which will take generations to heal. No one should be intimidated or mob-criminalized for calling for an end to this tragedy. What should be equally imposed is also a gag on the media, including the state media both at the regional and federal level, which are flaming the rhetoric of war, as well as an immediate end to the rampant and alarming ethnic profiling of Tigrayans for discrimination of all sorts, humiliation and detention. What happened so far will remain a permanent badge of shame for the government and those who aided and abetted it; but an immediate stop to it will help to avert the worst.

The one month blockade on humanitarian supplies, including essential services such as medicine, is ripping the people of Tigray apart. The UN and the Ethiopian government have finally reached at an agreement to “allow “unimpeded, sustained and secure access” for humanitarian supplies to reach those in need across areas now under its control in Tigray.” Although a welcome news, the agreement doesn't extent reaching out to the needy people of Tigray in areas that are not under the control of the federal government. No government that punishes a civilian population collectively to this extent expects to get legitimacy from the same people, least by assigning a caretaker government.

The lifting of communication, mainly the internet and telephone, was effected yesterday, but only partially and in areas where some administrative changes took place; it should be implemented immediately across all parts of the region. There is nothing that can justify the continuous blockade of communication especially after the government has already declared the war was over. Tigrays who are not trapped in the region would like to know if their loved ones are alive or not. It is not too much to ask!

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity!

Ms. BASS. Excuse me. We are finished now. Excuse me. Let me move on to the next witness, please.

Ms. Blanchard? Is Ms. Blanchard with us?

Ms. BLANCHARD. Can you see me?

Ms. BASS. No, but keep talking. I think the camera will appear.

Ms. BLANCHARD. Okay. Sorry. I seem to be having a video problem. Can you hear me, though?

Ms. BASS. We can hear you fine. You just go right ahead.

**STATEMENT OF LAUREN PLOCH BLANCHARD, SPECIALIST IN
AFRICAN AFFAIRS, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICES**

Ms. BLANCHARD. Okay. Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting CRS to testify today.

While the Government of Ethiopia announced an end to its military operations last Saturday, the situation in Tigray remains serious, with fighting ongoing and a potential for this to become a protracted insurgency.

For context, Tigray has a population roughly equivalent to that of Maryland, around 6 million people. The Federal Government is now moving to install a provisional, regional administration in areas under its control, but it remains to be seen how they will be received. In my testimony today, I would like to highlight a few key points on the situation for congressional consideration and respectfully request that my written testimony be submitted for the record.

First, the communications blackout and access restrictions to Tigray have made it very difficult to confirm information on the conflict and humanitarian situation there. This allows misinformation to flourish amidst contested and very polarizing narratives.

Second, the conflict was not unforeseen. Tensions between Abiy's government and the TPLF had been simmering for months with saber-rattling from both sides. Opportunities to avert this conflict were missed, both by domestic and international actors.

Third, the conflict is ongoing, and there are reports of atrocities by militia associated with both sides.

Fourth, Tigray is not the only conflict zone in Ethiopia, and a protracted conflict there could undermine the government's ability to respond to unrest and threats to civilians in other parts of the country.

And finally, the conflict has implications for U.S. interests, not only in Ethiopia but the broader region.

First, on the information blackout, with phone and internet connections to Tigray down and journalists prevented from accessing most of the region, it is very difficult to know what is happening there. The extent of internal displacement and humanitarian need are still unclear. The press suggests that thousands have been killed, but there are no reliable estimates on the scale of the casualties.

Prime Minister Abiy says no civilians were killed in the government's operations, but some refugees are telling a different story. Human rights experts note that it is very difficult to verify responsibility for reported atrocities. Both sides have sought to shape the

narrative on the conflict, and there has been a serious rise of hate speech on social media platforms.

Journalists, meanwhile, are facing threats and intimidation. Ethiopian journalists are in a particularly difficult position, but foreign correspondents are also under pressure. Federal authorities have issued fact-check statements to disseminate positions and contradict what they characterize as misrepresentations in the international media. And 2 weeks ago, the senior analyst on Ethiopia from the International Crisis Group was expelled from the country ostensibly over a work permit issue.

Second, despite the Federal Government declaring victory, reports suggest that the fighting continues in parts of Tigray. U.N. officials and aid agencies have stressed serious concerns about the current humanitarian situation inside the region and the need for urgent access, particularly to the Eritrean refugee camps inside Tigray where over 96,000 Eritrean refugees are located.

An agreement reached this week between the U.N. and the Federal Government is an important development, but it isn't yet clear how civilians in areas beyond Federal control will be reached. Civilians have been caught in the middle of this conflict.

Refugees who have fled to Sudan have reported the shelling of towns and attacks on civilians by ethnically based militia. Some refugees have arrived with wounds from knives and machetes. The reports of ethnically targeted attacks underscore simmering ethnic grievances in the country that have fueled concerns for Ethiopia's stability in recent years.

U.N. officials have described ethnic violence in the country as having reached an alarming level over the past 2 years. They have noted that the stigmatization of certain ethnic groups, including the Tigrayans, Amhara, Somali, and Oromo peoples, among others, have significantly contributed to ethnic intolerance in the country. Human Rights Watch has noted the proliferation of official and unofficial armed groups operating with limited oversight and competing narratives of historic injustices among the country's ethnic communities.

Communal disputes over border lands have played out across Ethiopia. Some of the violence in Tigray reflects these tensions over territorial disputes. The town of Mai Kadra, where one of the worst known incidents of mass killings occurred since the beginning of the conflict in Tigray, is one of those contested areas. It has been administered as part of Tigray since the EPRDF came to power, but many Amhara consider it to be their traditional land.

The hostilities in Ethiopia threaten a range of U.S. interests in the country and the broader region. The level of humanitarian need in Ethiopia was already extremely high before the conflict began, with almost 12 million people facing food insecurity in a region that has been struggling with overlapping natural disasters and the impacts of COVID-19.

The conflict poses risks not only for Ethiopia's democratic transition but also potentially neighboring Sudan. The reported role of Eritrea in the conflict further complicates the situation.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Blanchard follows:]



Statement of

Lauren Ploch Blanchard
Specialist in African Affairs

Before

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and
International Organizations
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on

“The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia”

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Overview

The outbreak of hostilities in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November reflects a power struggle between the federal government of self-styled reformist Prime Minister Abiy (AH-bee) Ahmed and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a former rebel movement that dominated Ethiopian politics for more than a quarter century before Abiy's ascent to power in 2018.¹ The conflict also highlights ethnic tensions in the country that have worsened in recent years amid political and economic reforms. The evolving conflict has already sparked atrocities, spurred refugee flows, and strained relations among countries in the region. The reported role of neighboring Eritrea in the hostilities heightens the risk of a wider conflict.

After being hailed for his reforms and efforts to pursue peace at home and in the region, Abiy has faced growing criticism from some observers who express concern about democratic backsliding. By some accounts, the conflict in Tigray could undermine his standing and legacy.² Some of Abiy's early supporters have since become critics, accusing him of seeking to consolidate power, and some observers suggest his government has become increasingly intolerant of dissent and heavy-handed in its responses to law and order challenges.³ Abiy and his backers argue their actions are necessary to preserve order and avert further conflict. They blame the TPLF and militant ethnic nationalists for violence that has plagued Ethiopia since he took office. Many Ethiopians viewed the TPLF's rule as authoritarian, and abuses committed under its leadership fueled resentment in many communities.⁴

The Tigray conflict occurs alongside tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt over management of the Nile waters. The Trump Administration's attempt to mediate that dispute strained U.S. relations with Ethiopia, which viewed the effort as biased toward Egypt. The Administration has suspended a substantial amount of bilateral aid to Ethiopia over the Nile issue.

The hostilities in Ethiopia threaten a range of U.S. interests in the strategically important Horn of Africa, including regional stability, ensuring that Ethiopia remains committed to counterterrorism and stabilization operations in neighboring Somalia, maintaining a long-running development partnership with Ethiopia, and preventing a worsening humanitarian crisis. The conflict not only poses a potential threat to Ethiopia's political transition, but may also have implications for the fragile transition underway in neighboring Sudan.

Ethiopia's Political Transition

The election of Abiy by Ethiopia's parliament in April 2018 marked the beginning of a political transition in the country, 27 years after the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power following the collapse of a Marxist regime known as the Derg. Days prior, Abiy—a former military intelligence officer and deputy president of Oromia, Ethiopia's most populous regional state—had been elected chairman of the ruling EPRDF coalition in its first contested leadership election. Abiy was the first Oromo (Ethiopia's largest ethnic group) to lead the coalition, long dominated by the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), one of the EPRDF's four ethno-regional parties.⁵

¹ Under Ethiopian naming convention, individuals are generally referred to by their first name rather than their last name.

² See, e.g., David Pilling, "How Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed went from man of peace to a leader at war," *Financial Times*, November 6, 2020; "Ethiopia's democratic transition is in peril," *The Economist*, September 19, 2020; Nic Cheeseman and Yohannes Woldemariam, "Ethiopia's dangerous slide toward civil war," *Foreign Affairs*, November 12, 2020.

³ See, e.g., Abel Abate Demissie and Ahmed Soliman, "Unrest threatens Ethiopia's transition under Abiy," Chatham House, July 24, 2020; Jawar Mohamed, "The war in Tigray is a result of Ethiopia's mismanaged transition," November 2020.

⁴ Jason Burke, "Rise and fall of Ethiopia's TPLF – from rebels to rulers and back," *The Guardian*, November 25, 2020.

⁵ The TPLF was one of the groups that fought against the Derg, Soviet-allied military junta. It joined with an Amhara group to form the EPRDF in 1989. The TPLF clashed with another rebel group, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), after the Derg's ouster and fostered the creation of the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Front (OPDO) to represent the Oromo in the EPRDF. OPDO was renamed the Oromo Democratic Party in 2018.

Figure 1. Ethiopia at a Glance



Capital: Addis Ababa

Comparative area: slightly less than twice the size of Texas

Population, growth rate: 108 million, 2.56%

Median age: 19.8 years

Life expectancy: 67.5 years

Infant mortality: 35.8 deaths/ 1,000 live births

Total fertility rate: 4.41 children born/woman

Literacy: 49.1%

GDP: \$93 billion; \$960 per capita (2019)

GDP growth: 8.97% (2019), 1.95% (2020 est.)

Ethnic groups: Oromo 35%, Amhara 28%, Tigray 7%, Sidama 4%, Welaita 3%, Gurage 3%, Somali 3%, other 13% (2016 est.)

Religions: Ethiopian Orthodox 44%, Muslim 34%, Protestant 19%, traditional 3%, Catholic 1% (2007 est.)

Source: Map created by CRS. Data from the CIA World Fact Book and International Monetary Fund, 2020 data unless otherwise indicated.

Abiy's election came in response to growing pressure on the government after more than two years of protests that began in Oromia and were fueled by state violence and repression.⁶ The Oromo community's perceived marginalization by ethnic Tigrayan and Amhara political elites has historic roots, and tensions worsened under TPLF dominance.⁷ Oromo mobilization inspired protests by others, including some Amhara (the country's second largest ethnic group), whose grievances against the TPLF include a territorial dispute with Tigray that dates back to the EPRDF's division of Ethiopia into ethno-regional states in the 1990s.⁸ Human rights groups estimate that security forces killed over 1,000 Ethiopians during the 2015-2017 protests, and the government acknowledged detaining over 29,000 people, including opposition leaders, in the crackdown.⁹ Amid the protests and unrest, sporadic hate crimes and attacks on

⁶ The protests began in 2014 over the proposed expansion of Addis Ababa into Oromia region to accommodate the government's economic development plans. Oromo protested the lack of community consultation and perceived economic marginalization and dispossession. The protests resumed in 2015 and spread, spurred by a heavy-handed government response. See Margaux Pinaud and Clonadh Raleigh, "Data analysis: The roots of popular mobilization in Ethiopia," *The Global Observatory*, June 16, 2017.

⁷ Hassen Hussein and Mohammed Ademo, "Ethiopia's original sin," *World Policy Journal*, September 1, 2016.

⁸ The Amhara claim that the TPLF seized some of their lands during the campaign to depose the Derg and annexed it to Tigray when they took power, killing and evicting their farmers. For more on the disputes, see International Crisis Group (ICG), *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, June 12, 2020.

⁹ Amnesty International (AI), "Ethiopia: After a year of protests, time to address grave human rights concerns," November 9, 2016; "Ethiopia lifts emergency rule imposed last October after months of unrest," *Reuters*, August 4, 2017.

businesses owned by Tigrayan elites spurred fears that ethnically-targeted violence could escalate. In early 2018, then-Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, paving the way for new leadership to facilitate reforms that he asserted “would lead to sustainable peace and democracy.”¹⁰

Upon taking office, Abiy committed to opening the country politically and economically. In its first 100 days, Abiy’s government released tens of thousands of political prisoners, lifted the state of emergency, removed terrorist designations on opposition groups, closed a notorious detention facility, and granted amnesty to jailed dissidents. He replaced top security chiefs, fired prison officials, loosened press restrictions, and began a process to amend repressive laws. He also sought peace with domestic insurgent groups, initiated a rapprochement with Eritrea that brought a formal end to a decades-long border dispute, and pursued a peacemaker role in the region—efforts that earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. Abiy has sought to liberalize the economy, opening some sectors and state enterprises to foreign investors.

Rising Ethnic Tensions. Alongside Abiy’s reforms, ethnic conflicts increased across the country, driving displacement and spurring concerns about Ethiopia’s stability. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated in September 2020—prior to the onset of the current conflict in Tigray—that conflict had displaced more than 1.2 million Ethiopians since the beginning of the year, down from a peak of over three million in 2019.¹¹ U.N. officials say ethnic violence has reached “an alarming level” over the past two years and note that the stigmatization of certain ethnic groups, including the Tigray, Amhara, Somali, and Oromo, among others, has “significantly contributed to ethnic intolerance” in the country.¹² The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Early Warning Project has included Ethiopia in its list of countries experiencing ongoing mass killing since 2016.¹³ Human Rights Watch (HRW) has noted the “proliferation of official and unofficial armed groups operating with limited oversight” and competing narratives of historical injustices among the country’s ethnic communities.¹⁴ Beyond the arrests of some former high-level officials in late 2018, HRW assessed in early 2020 that there had been little progress on accountability for past abuses.¹⁵

Ethnic violence began to rise before Abiy took office, but some observers suggest a link to the rapid liberalization that he oversaw: “The lid was on things and now it is off. The problem is keeping the pot from boiling over,” explained a former U.S. ambassador.¹⁶ The political opening that allowed Ethiopians to vent grievances may also have created an environment conducive to score-settling and hate-speech. Experts have noted growing ethno-nationalism within some communities, and suggest that strains in the ruling coalition contributed to the tensions.¹⁷ Some Ethiopians have described the government response to communal unrest as insufficient.¹⁸ Abiy’s government has appeared to defer to the state governments, for example, on how to manage ethnic militias, including former rebel groups—with mixed success.

¹⁰ “Ethiopia PM Hailemariam Desalegn in surprise resignation,” *BBC*, February 15, 2018.

¹¹ IOM, “Ethiopia records more than 1.8 million internally displaced in 2020,” September 15, 2020. According to IOM, 1.8 million Ethiopians were displaced in 2020: 1.2 million displaced by conflict, over 350,000 by drought, and 150,000 by floods.

¹² U.N., “UN high-level officials express deep concern over escalating ethnic tensions in Ethiopia,” November 12, 2020.

¹³ Early Warning Project, *Countries at Risk for Mass Killing 2019-2020*, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, November 2019. The Project defines mass killing as 1,000 or more civilians deliberately killed by armed forces (government or non-state) over the period of a year or less, because of their membership in a particular group.

¹⁴ HRW Horn of Africa Director Laetitia Bader (@LaetitiaBader), Twitter, November 24, 4:57 pm EST; HRW, “To heal, Ethiopia needs to confront its violent past,” May 28, 2020.

¹⁵ HRW, “Ethiopia,” *World Report 2020*.

¹⁶ Quoted in Leake Tewele and Kulle Kursha, “Ethiopia uncorked,” *Ethiopia Insight*, February 12, 2019.

¹⁷ Nizar Manek, “Abiy Ahmed’s reforms have unleashed forces he can no longer control,” *Foreign Policy*, July 4, 2019; Tom Gardner, “Shadow falls over Ethiopia reforms as warnings of crisis go unheeded,” *The Guardian*, March 14, 2019; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Preventing Further Conflict and Fragmentation in Ethiopia*, July 19, 2019.

¹⁸ Tom Gardner, “Shadow falls over Ethiopia reforms as warnings of crisis go unheeded,” *The Guardian*, March 14, 2019.

Background on the TPLF, the EPRDF, and Ethnic Federalism

The TPLF, which launched an insurgency against the Derg regime in 1975, led the EPRDF's ascent to power in 1991. The EPRDF used ethnolinguistic differences as the basis for restructuring Ethiopia's administrative divisions in the 1990s, and enshrined in the 1994 constitution a system of ethnic federalism, which nominally granted self-rule and rights of self-determination to ethno-linguistic groups. Tigray is one of Ethiopia's ethno-regional states—inhabited predominately by ethnic Tigrayans and governed since 1991 by the TPLF. The aim of ethnic federalism was to address historic communal grievances by decentralizing authority. In practice, however, the EPRDF centralized decision-making within its leadership, which fueled grievances among some communities.¹⁹ The system also put ethnic belonging at the center of politics and linked it to territory, stoking competition and fragmentation along ethno-regional lines that some have compared to the ethno-nationalism in the former Yugoslavia.²⁰

When the EPRDF took power in 1991, its chairman, TPLF leader Meles Zenawi, became Ethiopia's head of state. Meles remained Ethiopia's leader until his death in 2012. He spearheaded policies that produced rapid economic growth and raised Ethiopia's development indicators, but critics accused Meles of suppressing dissent and ensuring that his minority Tigrayan ethnic group dominated government and senior positions in the security forces. His successor, Hailemariam, acknowledged a power struggle in the coalition after leaving office in 2018: "whenever I brought reforms before the EPRDF, these were always undermined by the TPLF, who felt that they owned the existing order."²¹

Hotly contested polls in 2005 were marred by violence and by the detention of thousands of opposition members, journalists, and civic activists. The government tightened political space in the aftermath. In 2010, the EPRDF won 99.6% of the votes in elections deemed unfair by Western election observers. (Abiy was elected to parliament that year.) The EPRDF and its allied parties won all the legislative seats in the 2015 polls, which African Union (AU) observers said were technically "satisfactory," while noting laws limiting civic participation. Western observers did not participate.

The EPRDF stifled dissent through laws and electoral regulations that gave it a decisive political advantage.²² Several laws enacted in 2008-2009 had a notably adverse impact on democratic space. The Charities and Societies Proclamation imposed stringent government oversight of civil society groups, severely limiting foreign funding. Human rights groups criticized the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation for its expansive definition of terrorism, harsh penalties, low standards for evidence, and the broad authority it gave to security forces. The government jailed numerous opposition activists and journalists on terrorism-related charges. Media laws also restricted the press; Ethiopia ranked as one of the world's most censored countries and among the top jailers of journalists worldwide until 2018, when Prime Minister Abiy commenced reforms.²³

Democratic Backsliding? While Abiy's political reforms drew domestic and international praise in the first years of his term, his government has since attracted concerns regarding democratic backsliding.²⁴ When the government revised the electoral laws in 2019, some opposition parties objected, saying the changes would make it more difficult for them to challenge the ruling coalition.²⁵ In December 2019, Prime Minister Abiy led a move to merge the EPRDF's component and allied parties into a single party, the Prosperity Party, bringing an end to the EPRDF and its coalition structure. The TPLF objected and refused to join, as did some in Abiy's own Oromo Democratic Party.²⁶ One of Abiy's most prominent critics, Oromo opposition politician Jawar Mohammed, described the Prosperity Party's formation as a shift away from multinational federalism to a centralized state, alleging that Abiy was steering the country back toward authoritarian rule.²⁷ Jawar was arrested in July 2020, during protests following the death of a popular Oromo singer, and now faces charges of inciting ethnic violence and terrorism. Jawar's

¹⁸ "Ethiopia's reforming prime minister runs into a roadblock of ethnic unrest," *Washington Post*, August 25, 2018.

¹⁹ Goitom Gebreluel, "Should Ethiopia stick with ethnic federalism," *Al Jazeera*, April 5, 2019.

²⁰ Florian Bieve and Wondemagegn Goshu, "Don't let Ethiopia become the next Yugoslavia," *Foreign Policy*, January 15, 2019.

²¹ Greg Mills, "Ethiopia's need for 'deep renewal,'" *Daily Maverick*, August 15, 2018.

²² See, e.g., HRW, "Hope for Revision of Ethiopia's Draconian Laws?" August 27, 2018.

²³ For more detail, see the State Department's annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

²⁴ See, e.g., Freedom House, "Ethiopia Working Group Statement: Ethiopia's path to a more stable and democratic future is increasingly at risk," August 12, 2020.

²⁵ "Ethiopia's Opposition parties criticize election law changes," *Reuters*, August 24, 2019.

²⁶ See, e.g., "Lemma Megerssa dismisses Medemer, Prosperity Party," *Addis Standard*, November 29, 2019.

²⁷ Jawar Mohammed, "How Ethiopia's transition to democracy derailed," *Addis Standard*, October 28, 2020.

supporters and some independent observers view his prosecution, and that of other opposition politicians arrested during the July unrest, as politically motivated.²⁸ The government shut down the internet for three weeks during the unrest, during which thousands, including journalists, were detained.

Elections Delayed. Ethiopia's election board announced in March 2020 that national and regional elections, then scheduled for August, would be postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The parliament (now dominated by the Prosperity Party), whose term was set to expire in October, subsequently extended its term, and Abiy's, drawing rebuke from the TPLF, which termed the move unconstitutional. The Tigray regional government, led by the TPLF, went ahead with its regional council elections in September, despite the federal government warning that the vote would be illegal. The TPLF won over 98% of the seats, with official turnout at 97%.

The brewing tensions between Abiy's government and the TPLF came to a standoff, with the Tigray government arguing that the federal government's term expired in October, and the federal government similarly terming the regional government unlawful and moving to cut federal funds to Tigray. The TPLF protested the budget cut as unconstitutional. The federal government's decision in October to reshuffle the leadership of the military's Northern Command, based in Tigray, exacerbated the tensions: the TPLF argued Abiy had no authority to make the changes, accusing Abiy's government of partnering with the Eritrean government—a decades-long foe of the TPLF—to “bring the people of Tigray to their knees.”²⁹ The Northern Command reportedly had more than half the Ethiopian military's personnel and mechanized divisions, a legacy of Ethiopia's long standoff with Eritrea. The command also reportedly had a large portion of Tigrayan officers.³⁰

The Unfolding Conflict in Tigray

In the early hours of November 4, Prime Minister Abiy announced the beginning of military operations in Tigray, accusing TPLF forces of attacking federal forces in the regional state. Abiy's government has described those attacks as high treason and termed the military's actions in Tigray “law enforcement operations.”³¹ The federal government has since accused the TPLF of seeking to instigate conflicts along ethnic and religious lines across the country to make it “ungovernable.” The TPLF denies initiating the conflict on November 4, accusing Abiy of starting a war “to consolidate his personal power.”³²

The conflict pits members of Ethiopia's security forces against each other, with the military reportedly divided along ethnic lines. The TPLF, supported by Tigray regional security forces and militia, seized heavy weapons from the Northern Command at the onset of the fighting.³³ The military, supported by militia from neighboring Amhara region, has carried out ground operations and airstrikes in Tigray, but denies hitting civilian targets. The TPLF has accused Eritrea of sending tanks and troops into Tigray to support Ethiopian forces, an allegation both governments deny. The TPLF has also suggested that the United Arab Emirates has supported Ethiopia with drones flown from the Eritrean cities of Asmara and Assab, where the Emirati military maintains a base.³⁴ (Abiy says Ethiopia has deployed its own drones for surveillance in the conflict.) The TPLF has launched several rocket attacks on installations in Eritrea's

²⁸ Simon Marks, “Ethiopian opposition leader appears in court on terror charges,” *VOA News*, September 21, 2020.

²⁹ Tigray Communication Affairs Bureau, Facebook post, October 25, 2020. See also “Once enemies, Ethiopia and Eritrea ally against Tigray,” *Deutsche Welle*, November 29, 2020.

³⁰ ICG, *Clashes over Ethiopia's Tigray Region: Getting to a Ceasefire and National Dialogue*, November 5, 2020.

³¹ Office of the Prime Minister, *The Ongoing Law Enforcement Operations in Tigray: Causes and Objectives*, November 14, 2020.

³² Jason Burke, “Ethiopian troops ‘liberate’ key town in Tigray, claim officials,” *The Guardian*, November 16, 2020.

³³ For more on the forces involved in the conflict, see “Factbox: The forces fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict,” *Reuters*, November 13, 2020.

³⁴ TPLF Spokesman Getachew Reda (@reda_getachew), Twitter, November 15, 2020, 2:20 am EST.

capital, Asmara, in what it says is retaliation for Eritrea's involvement in the conflict. (Some refugees have described indiscriminate artillery shelling and rocket fire that they say came from the direction of the Eritrean border.³⁵) The TPLF has also conducted rocket strikes against two airports in the Amhara region that it cites as being used to support military operations in Tigray.

The federal government has cut phone and internet communications with Tigray and restricted journalists' access to the region, making it difficult to verify information. One journalist permitted to visit a town in Tigray taken by government forces was denied access to the hospital to assess the number dead or injured.³⁶ Both sides have sought to shape the narrative through their respective media outlets. Federal authorities issue "Fact Check"³⁷ statements to disseminate positions and contradict "misrepresentations" in the international media.³⁷ The government has cautioned media outlets and international organizations "to thoroughly investigate and verify information" received from refugees in Sudan, accusing the TPLF of infiltrating the refugee community to spread disinformation.³⁸ Several Ethiopian journalists have been detained since the conflict began, including the senior editor of the *Addis Standard*, who has been charged with "attempts to dismantle the Constitution through violence" and "outrage against the Constitution."³⁹

The Humanitarian Toll and Mass Atrocity Risks. By some estimates, thousands have been killed and many more displaced during the first weeks of combat. As of November 30, over 45,000 refugees had fled into Sudan, where humanitarian agencies are struggling to rebuild facilities last used during Ethiopia's famine in the 1980s. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is planning for as many as 200,000 or more refugees over the next six months if the conflict continues. Aid agencies estimate conservatively that over a million people in Tigray and neighboring states could need aid due to the conflict, in addition to 850,000 pre-conflict aid beneficiaries in Tigray.⁴⁰ Humanitarians have struggled to determine the scale of displacement inside Tigray, given restricted access. They have raised alarm with the weeks-long disruption of access to existing aid beneficiaries, including 96,000 Eritrean refugees living in camps in Tigray. Ethiopian refugees fleeing from Tigray into Sudan have shared accounts from the conflict-affected region, but a precipitous drop in refugee flows the week of November 23 has fueled concerns that Ethiopian forces have moved to restrict their flight.⁴¹

U.N. experts warn that there is a high risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity in the country.⁴² A mass killing in the western Tigray town of Mai Kadra on November 9 is the worst-known incident to date, with some witnesses accusing Tigrayan youth militia and local security forces of killing hundreds of ethnic Amhara civilians.⁴³ Federal authorities cited the incident as another justification for their operations against the TPLF. Some Tigrayan refugees from Mai Kadra, however,

³⁵ Giulia Paravicini, "Rockets fired at Eritrean capital from Ethiopia, diplomats say," *Reuters*, November 13, 2020.

³⁶ Robbie Corey-Boulet, "Inside a Tigray town scarred by Ethiopian conflict," *AFP*, November 24, 2020.

³⁷ See, e.g., State of Emergency Fact Check (@SOEFactCheck), Twitter, State of Emergency FACT Sheet: Common Misrepresentations of Ethiopia's Law Enforcement Operation, November 28, 2020, 8:33 am EST.

³⁸ State of Emergency Fact Check (@SOEFactCheck), Twitter, November 24, 2020, 10:30 am EST.

³⁹ Simon Allison, "Blackout makes it hard to report on Ethiopia's civil war," *Mail & Guardian*, November 16, 2020.

⁴⁰ OCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update – Situation Report No. 6," November 26, 2020.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Will Brown, "After the bombs they attacked with knives, claim Ethiopians fleeing peace prize winner's war," *The Telegraph*, November 23, 2020; John Sparks, "Tigray crisis: No clothes, no money, no possessions. Ethiopian refugees flee ethnic persecution," *Sky News*, November 24, 2020; "Concern grows for civilians in Mekelle as Ethiopia battles Tigray rebels," *Africa News*, November 26, 2020.

⁴² United Nations, Note to Correspondents: UN High-Level Officials Express Deep Concern Over Escalating Ethnic Tensions in Ethiopia, November 12, 2020.

⁴³ Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state," November 12, 2020, *Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings*, November 24, 2020.

have implicated pro-government forces in the violence, suggesting that Amhara militia targeted Tigrayans after the military took the town from the TPLF, and that Tigrayan youth acted in self-defense.⁴⁴ Mai Kadra is located in a part of Tigray that ethnic Amhara claim as their traditional land, and a long-running territorial dispute over the area has fueled communal tensions.

In addition to the Mai Kadra killings, refugees from Tigray have reported ethnically-targeted attacks in other parts of the region against Tigrayans by security forces and Amhara militia.⁴⁵ U.N. officials have noted reports of arbitrary arrests, killings, discrimination, and stigmatization of Tigrayans across the country. Some Tigrayan civil servants and security forces have reportedly been detained, including peacekeeping troops deployed in South Sudan and forces deployed in Somalia.⁴⁶ The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has expressed grave concern that “security measures designed to apprehend certain suspected individuals overstepped their remit... thereby affecting a wider community.”⁴⁷ Human rights experts have warned of an increasing risk of retaliatory ethnic violence, and the prospect for violence to increase in other parts of the country due to opportunism or a heightened sense of grievance.⁴⁸

Control of Mekele. On November 22, Prime Minister Abiy issued a 72-hour deadline for the TPLF to surrender before a “final phase” of operations, aimed at removing the TPLF from Tigray’s capital city, Mekele, which is home to approximately 500,000 people. A military spokesman said the people of Mekele should “save themselves” before the government’s deadline expired.⁴⁹ U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet expressed alarm at the military build-up around the city, calling “the highly aggressive rhetoric on both sides” over a prospective fight for Mekele “dangerously provocative” and noting concern that it would lead to “further violations of international humanitarian law.”⁵⁰ She and other human rights experts warned that shelling the city would be a war crime, and could be considered a form of collective punishment.⁵¹ The TPLF declared that its people were “ready to die in defense of our right to administer our region” and pledged to “arm each and every civilian to defend Mekele.”⁵²

Within hours of the military launching its offensive on Mekele on November 28, Prime Minister Abiy declared military operations in Tigray complete, saying that federal forces had taken full control of Mekele and that police would henceforth pursue the TPLF leadership.⁵³ Abiy suggested that the government would now install a provisional regional government and focus on rebuilding the region and providing humanitarian aid. With access to the city and the wider region still restricted, however, the situation there remains unclear, and reports suggest that fighting continues outside the city and in various parts of Tigray. The International Committee for the Red Cross reports that Mekele’s hospitals have faced an influx of trauma patients.

⁴⁴ Robbie Corey-Boulet, “Questions linger among the corpses of an Ethiopian massacre,” *AFP*, November 25, 2020, Noé Hochet-Bodin and Elliott Brachet, “En Ethiopie, le mystère du village de Maikadra révèle la profondeur des conflits ethniques,” *Le Monde*, November 30, 2020.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Will Brown, “After the bombs they attacked with knives, claim Ethiopians fleeing peace prize winner’s war,” *Daily Telegraph*, November 24, 2020; Mohammed Amin, “Tigray refugees recount the horrors of Ethiopia’s new conflict,” *The New Humanitarian*, November 19, 2020.

⁴⁶ Colum Lynch and Robbie Gramer, “U.N. fears Ethiopia purging ethnic Tigrayan officers from its peacekeeping missions,” *Foreign Policy*, November 23, 2020.

⁴⁷ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Statement, November 30, 2020.

⁴⁸ Philip Kleinfeld, “Ethiopia’s other conflicts,” *The New Humanitarian*, November 23, 2020.

⁴⁹ “Ethiopia PM gives Tigray forces 72 hours to surrender regional capital,” *Reuters*, November 22, 2020.

⁵⁰ U.N., “Ethiopia: Threat of major hostilities in Mekelle seriously imperils civilian lives – Bachelet,” November 24, 2020.

⁵¹ Laetitia Bader (@LaetitiaBader), Twitter, November 22, 2020, 8:48 am EST.

⁵² “Tigray force: Ethiopia mechanized division ‘completely destroyed,’” *Al Jazeera*, November 24, 2020.

⁵³ Office of the Prime Minister, “Mekelle under command of the National Defense Forces,” November 28, 2020.

The communications blackout in Tigray makes it difficult to assess the respective claims of federal authorities and the TPLF regarding the state of the conflict, which appears to be shifting into an insurgency. While Abiy has declared victory, the TPLF says the war is not over, calling the federal and Amhara regional forces “invaders.”⁵⁴ Since withdrawing from Mekele, the TPLF has fired more rockets at Eritrea; it also claims to have shot down an Ethiopian fighter jet and detained some Eritrean soldiers. U.N. officials describe the conflict as ongoing, and have raised alarm with the reported abduction of Eritrean refugees in Tigray by Eritrean forces, calling on Abiy to address the issue “as a matter of urgency.”⁵⁵

Diplomatic Efforts to End the Conflict. In the early weeks of the conflict, several foreign governments, including the United States, called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and dialogue to resolve the conflict. The Interreligious Council of Ethiopia made a similar call. Abiy’s government resisted international efforts to mediate between the two sides, putting the African Union (AU), whose headquarters Ethiopia hosts in Addis Ababa, in a difficult position. The current AU chairman, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, nevertheless appointed three former African leaders—Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, and Kgalema Motlante of South Africa—as envoys with a mandate to mediate an end to the conflict. U.N., European, and U.S. officials expressed support for the AU initiative, despite Abiy’s refusal to negotiate with the TPLF. EU officials warned in late November that the conflict was already “seriously destabilizing the region,” stating that “dialogue is the only way forward.”⁵⁶

Implications for Ethiopia’s Transition. While the Government of Ethiopia has sought to portray its operations against the TPLF as swift and decisive, some analysts have warned since the onset of hostilities that the government’s actions could spur another Tigrayan insurgency (it would be the third since 1943).⁵⁷ While federal forces have taken various towns and cities in Tigray, the TPLF claims the military has suffered heavy casualties. “The TPLF’s historic capacity to wage guerilla warfare from the rural mountains of Tigray may not be definitively eroded by its losses in conventional warfare,” argues one analyst.⁵⁸

The International Crisis Group, among others, has described the conflict as “one symptom of a broader crisis,” attributing Ethiopia’s conflicts to tensions over the distribution of power and resources in the federal system.⁵⁹ Some from Abiy’s own Oromo community have expressed concerns that the conflict could further fragment the country. One describes the Tigray conflict as “a battle over the character of the Ethiopian state,” with Abiy and his allies pursuing their vision of a centralized and unitary state while others, including the TPLF and the Oromo opposition, seek greater ethno-regional autonomy.⁶⁰ A protracted conflict could threaten prospects for Ethiopia’s postponed elections, which the election board suggests will be held in late May or June 2021. Other conflicts in the country, including a simmering insurgency led by the Oromo Liberation Army in Oromia, could also affect the elections.

Regional Implications. Regional experts have raised concern over the potential for the conflict in Tigray to spread beyond Ethiopia’s borders.⁶¹ As noted above, Eritrea may already be involved. Sudan, in

⁵⁴ “Ethiopia’s Abiy relishes victory, Tigrayan leader says war unfinished,” November 30, 2020.

⁵⁵ “UN: Ethiopia’s victory claim doesn’t mean war is finished,” *Associated Press*, November 29, 2020; “Eritrean refugees cut off from aid, threatened by Ethiopia’s continuing conflict,” November 30, 2020.

⁵⁶ European Union, Ethiopia: Statement by High Representative/Vice President Josep Borrel on his meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Mr. Demeke Mekonnen, November 24, 2020.

⁵⁷ “As Ethiopia’s army declares daily victories, its people are being plunged into violence,” *The Guardian*, November 24, 2020.

⁵⁸ Aly Verjee, “Ethiopia’s problems will not end with a military victory,” U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), November 24, 2020.

⁵⁹ ICG, “Steering Ethiopia’s Tigray crisis away from conflict,” October 30, 2020.

⁶⁰ Awol Allo, “How Abiy Ahmed’s Ethiopia-first nationalism led to civil war,” *Al Jazeera*, November 24, 2020.

⁶¹ See, e.g., Aly Verjee and Susan Stigant, “What Ethiopia’s brewing conflict means for the country—and the region,” USIP,

the midst of a fragile transition of its own, now hosts a growing number of Ethiopian refugees. The conflict may also have implications for the participation of Ethiopia—a top peacekeeping troop contributor—in global peacekeeping operations. Reports suggest that Ethiopia has reinforced its Tigray offensive by recalling over 3,000 personnel from Somalia, where it has thousands of troops deployed, both bilaterally and as part of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), to help stabilize the country and counter Al Shabaab.⁶² Ethiopia has also reportedly detained 200 or more Tigrayan soldiers who were posted in Somalia. Some experts warn that a worsening conflict in Ethiopia could severely weaken the regional counterterrorism mission in Somalia and further worsen center-periphery tensions there.⁶³

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

The conflict in Tigray erupted as Abiy was engaged in a high-stakes standoff with Egypt (and to a lesser extent, Sudan) over the management of the Nile waters. Their long-running dispute flared in 2020, as Ethiopia moved toward completion of Africa's largest hydroelectric power project, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). For Ethiopia, where almost 70% the rural population lacks access to electricity, the GERD would significantly expand domestic power capacity and allow the country to sell excess electricity to its neighbors. The project has been a source of national pride for Ethiopians, and a rallying point amid its domestic troubles in recent years. For Egypt, which relies on the Nile for domestic hydropower, agriculture, and most of its water needs, the prospect of upstream countries controlling the river's flow has become an existential issue. For nearly a century, Egypt has been the main beneficiary of international agreements—to which the upstream countries were not party—apportioning shares of the Nile's waters. Roughly 85% of the water flowing into Egypt comes from the Nile's main tributary, the Blue Nile, which originates in Ethiopia and merges in Sudan with the White Nile.

In late 2019, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin offered to host negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan on the GERD, reportedly after a request from Egypt's President Sisi to President Trump.⁶⁴ The three countries made progress in subsequent meetings and reached consensus on how Ethiopia should fill and operate the dam during times of sufficient rainfall, but remained at odds over issues related to drought mitigation and dispute resolution. The talks broke down in February 2020, after the United States “facilitated the preparation of an agreement” on the dam.⁶⁵ Egypt initialed the document, which Secretary Mnuchin suggested addressed “all issues in a balanced and equitable manner.” He stressed that “final testing and filling should not take place without an agreement.” Ethiopia called his statement unacceptable and biased.

AU Chairman Ramaphosa offered to facilitate a new round of talks on the GERD in June 2020. Amid those negotiations, tensions increased when satellite imagery showed the dam reservoir's volume increasing. An extension of the AU-led talks defused a standoff over the initial filling, but there has been little progress in the talks since. In August, the State Department notified Congress that it was suspending some foreign assistance to Ethiopia, pending “more constructive engagement” by its government in the talks. The aid freeze affects non-humanitarian aid totaling over \$260 million, of which more than \$30 million was expiring and has since been redirected elsewhere. A majority of the suspended aid focuses on health programs, but democracy and governance and security assistance programs are also impacted.

November 12, 2020; Nizar Manek and Mohamed Kheir Omer, “Sudan will decide the outcome of the Ethiopian civil war,” *Foreign Policy*, November 14, 2020; Vanda Felbab-Brown, “What Ethiopia's crisis means for Somalia,” Brookings, November 20, 2020.

⁶² “U.N. fears Ethiopia purging ethnic Tigrayan officers from its peacekeeping missions,” *Foreign Policy*, November 23, 2020.

⁶³ Vanda Felbab-Brown, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ “U.S. halts some foreign assistance funding to Ethiopia over dam dispute with Egypt, Sudan,” *Foreign Policy*, August 27, 2020.

⁶⁵ Treasury Department, Statement by the Secretary of the Treasury on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, February 28, 2020.

U.S.-Ethiopia Relations

The U.S.-Ethiopia relationship dates back over 100 years. Successive U.S. administrations have described Ethiopia as an important development and regional security partner. U.S. officials have also expressed concern at times regarding democratic governance, human rights, and, since 2016, internal unrest. For over a decade, relations have centered on shared efforts to counter terrorism and instability in the region, and to alleviate endemic poverty and food insecurity. The United States is Ethiopia's top humanitarian donor.

The Ethiopian diaspora in the United States has encouraged Congress's engagement on U.S. policy toward the country. During the 115th Congress, the House agreed to H.Res. 128, which pressed for greater respect for human rights and inclusive governance in Ethiopia. A similar resolution was introduced in the Senate. The resolutions attracted significant attention from both the diaspora and Ethiopia's government.

Prime Minister Abiy's election and the political transition in Ethiopia presented an opportunity for the United States to improve and deepen its relationship with the country, make inroads for U.S. investment and trade, and advance several U.S. foreign policy objectives, including in a context of rising competition in the region with other global powers.⁶⁶ U.S. officials welcomed Abiy's efforts to promote reforms in the country and peace in the region, and promised support for several of his initiatives. His replacement of the long-serving heads of the military, intelligence service, and police in 2018 presented an opportunity to improve the U.S.-Ethiopia security relationship, which had been constrained by human rights concerns and other tensions. The State Department hosted the first Ethiopian Partnerships Forum in 2019, convening over 400 private sector leaders and public policymakers from the United States and Ethiopia to "raise awareness of Ethiopia's recent economic reforms and emerging business opportunities, accelerate American investments to transform Ethiopia's economy, and envision a new future of engagement between the two countries."⁶⁷ In March 2020, Ethiopia's finance minister announced that the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation was poised to facilitate as much as \$5 billion in U.S. investment there.

Bilateral relations cooled as the GERD negotiations faltered and the Trump Administration withheld aid. FY 2020 aid allocated for Ethiopia, including for health, development, and security assistance, totaled over \$435 million (not including emergency humanitarian aid). More than \$172 million of that bilateral aid total is affected by the aid freeze, which could have implications for the United States' ability to respond to the Tigray conflict and its potential impact on Ethiopia's transition.

State Department officials expressed deep concern with the onset of fighting in Tigray and urged immediate efforts to restore peace, de-escalate tensions, and protect civilians.⁶⁸ They condemned the TPLF's missile attacks on Eritrea and airports in Amhara, and urged Eritrea's "continued restraint." In contrast to their European counterparts, U.S. officials did not initially push for mediation, suggesting that

⁶⁶ For more, see, e.g., Jason Mosley, *Ethiopia's Transition: Implications for the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea Region*, SIPRI, March 2020; USIP, *Final Report and Recommendations of the Senior Study Group on Peace and Security in the Red Sea Arena*, October 29, 2020; and Zach Vertin, *The Gulf, the Horn, and the New Geopolitics of the Red Sea*, Brookings, August 8, 2018.

⁶⁷ State Department Office of Global Partnerships, "Ethiopia Partnerships Forum," May 15, 2019.

⁶⁸ Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, "Escalating Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region," Press Statement, November 4, 2020.

the parties were not receptive to it.⁶⁹ On November 23, though, the National Security Council issued a statement on Twitter calling for mediation and supporting the AU Chairman's efforts to end the conflict.⁷⁰ Secretary Pompeo subsequently underscored that message in a call with Prime Minister Abiy on November 30, reiterating "grave concern regarding the ongoing hostilities" and calling for a complete end to the fighting and "constructive dialogue to resolve the crisis." The Secretary also urged Abiy's government to ensure respect for human rights of Tigrayans and other ethnic groups, while highlighting continued U.S. support for Ethiopia's reform agenda.⁷¹

⁶⁹ State Department, Briefing with Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Tibor P. Nagy and U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Michael A. Raynor on the Situation in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, November 19, 2020.

⁷⁰ National Security Council (@WHNSC), Twitter, November 23, 2020, 2:03 pm EST.

⁷¹ State Department, Secretary Pompeo's Call with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy, Press Release, November 30, 2020.

Ms. BASS. Thank you. Thank you. We will come back to you during the questions. Thank you very much.

Our final witness is Susan Stigant.

STATEMENT OF SUSAN STIGANT, DIRECTOR OF AFRICA PROGRAM, UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

Ms. STIGANT. Thank you, Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your leadership on this issue. I am the director of the Africa Programs at U.S. Institute of Peace, although the views expressed here are my own.

Political transitions rarely move forward with consistent, one-directional progress. It is normal that there will be resistance to reforms. It is normal that there will be fundamental debates about the nature and shape of the State, and it is expected that the legacy of a system that was based on exclusion and repression over decades requires sustained generational efforts to forge a justice and genuine inclusion.

Amidst the escalating tensions that other witnesses have discussed and failed efforts of dialog, it is deeply concerning but unsurprising that Ethiopia's Federal Government and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front would view the exercise of force as logical, effective, and even necessary in the short term. However, all of our best thinking and practice and knowledge underlines that violence does not work. This knowledge has forged consensus about the imperative of prevention in U.S. policies and assistance, and this approach needs to be at the center of U.S. policy and partnerships with Ethiopia. The reverberations resulting from the violence have exacted intolerable costs—humanitarian, human, economic, food security, and Ethiopia's own regional leadership. And these have provoked core questions about the trajectory of the transition and should provoke a fundamental reassessment of U.S. policy.

In this spirit, I would like to focus my testimony on four recommendations for the U.S. administration and the continued leadership from this committee to end and prevent further cycles of violence.

First, the U.S. administration and Congress need to continue to send consistent private and public messages about the imperative to deescalate violence, also to actively discourage outside military engagement and pursue a political solution. The U.S. can and needs to underscore the long-term costs the conflict will have on Ethiopia's economy and international image. The U.S. can signal and galvanize broader coordinated support with global partners for the African Union's leadership to silence and to keep silent the guns.

Second, the U.S. administration and Congress can actively request and provide funding for an independent investigation. Allegations of incidents that could amount to war crimes have been reported by all parties. Investigation and documentation are needed to deter further violations, mitigate the risks of escalating rhetoric, and provide a path toward justice and accountability.

Preliminary reporting by Amnesty International and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission needs to be bolstered by investigations in other areas where fighting has occurred and with those

who have fled the country. Amidst the deep polarization, the competing narratives and potentially complex jurisdictional issues, the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights and other U.N. mechanisms are needed to bolster the existing efforts.

Third, the U.S. Government can safeguard space for inclusive conversations about the transition. In public and private messaging, the U.S. needs to strengthen its messages in support for freedom of expression, space for independent journalism, and they need to expand conversations to those who have diverging views. Existing assistance programs in support of the transition and democratic development can be activated to support conversations about what inclusion means and ways that confidence can be built toward dialog. Structures and mechanisms for inclusive conversations are needed to safeguard the broader democratic transition and to prevent backsliding. Conducting credible elections will eventually depend on fostering security, trust, and reconciliation. Ethiopians will need to feel confident that engaging in political debate and campaigning is possible. And eventually agreeing on changes to the Federal structure will require sensitive discussions and negotiations. Setting a precedent that such changes will be done through dialog, and not imposed, will be critical.

Finally, the U.S. can and needs to engage Ethiopia in the context of a new political and diplomatic strategy for the Red Sea arena that puts inclusive, legitimate governance at the center. A recent bipartisan senior study group convened by USIP determined that in recent years, the geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics of the Horn are increasingly tied to the Middle East, and yet the U.S. policy has not kept pace with these changes.

To overcome the bureaucratic seams, there is a need to designate a special envoy with responsibility, or the deputy secretary to bridge between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. There is a need to realign U.S. assistance to promote inclusive legitimate governance and economic growth, possibly by designating the Horn of Africa as a priority region under the Global Fragility Act.

And there is a need for sustained, active congressional engagement to strengthen the coordination between congressional bodies on a transregional and interdisciplinary basis and to encourage bipartisan congressional champions to provide particular support to the transitions in the Horn.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Stigant follows:]



United States Institute of Peace

“The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia”

**Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on
Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International
Organizations**

**Susan Stigant
Director of Africa Programs
United States Institute of Peace
December 3, 2020**

Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Smith and members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the unfolding situation in Ethiopia. The timing for this hearing is critically important given the serious deterioration in the country's internal peace and stability, the risks that recent developments pose to regional and international peace and security, and the potential dangers of both to U.S. interests. If Ethiopia spirals down into further violence and fragmentation, the entire region will be severely impacted.

I am the director of Africa Programs at the United States Institute of Peace, although the views expressed here are my own. The U.S. Institute of Peace was established by Congress over 35 years ago as an independent, nonpartisan national institute to prevent and resolve violent conflicts abroad, in accordance with U.S. national interests and values. The Institute's Africa Center leads the engagement in sub-Saharan Africa and deepens, elevates, and expands the Institute's commitment to stem violent conflict in a region vital to American interests and that have global impacts.

Overview

A military confrontation between the federal government of Ethiopia and the regional state of Tigray, in the country's north, began November 4 and quickly escalated. The ruling party of Tigray, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which once led the ruling party coalition that preceded the Abiy government, claims that it launched a pre-emptive attack on the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) Northern Command. The federal government responded with an operation to regain control of the regional state and apprehend the TPLF leadership, which now stands accused of acts of treason. More than 40,000 refugees have fled into eastern Sudan. There is little information about the death toll or internal displacement, but initial reports suggest heavy casualties and human suffering.

The conflict between the TPLF and the federal government was not unexpected, nor did it occur in a vacuum. Political transitions rarely move forward with consistent, one-directional progress. It is normal that there will be resistance to reforms, both from those who previously held power and those who see a path towards power under a new dispensation. It is normal that there will be fundamental debates about the nature and shape of the state. It is normal that the legacy of a system based on exclusion and repression over decades requires sustained, generational efforts to forge justice, genuine inclusion, and agreement on how communities can share a common future.

Amidst escalating tensions and failed efforts of dialogue, it is also unsurprising that both parties would view the exercise of force as the logical, effective, and even a necessary decision in the short-term. However, all of our best thinking, practice and knowledge underlines that violence does not work in the medium to long-term. This knowledge has forged consensus about the imperative of prevention in U.S. policies and assistance, and this approach needs to be at the center of U.S. policy and partnerships with Ethiopia. We know that violence is costly – in unquantifiable human consequences, economic losses, investments in humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping interventions, risks of radicalization, and opportunities lost. For Ethiopia, this is not an abstract, theoretical practice. It is grounded in the country's own history and the people's lived experience. These reverberations resulting from the violence have provoked core

questions about the trajectory of the transition and should provoke a fundamental re-assessment of U.S. policy.

Complex Roots of the Crisis

Disagreement over the postponement of the anticipated August 2020 elections set the stage for the crisis. The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) determined in March 2020 that voter registration and other critical steps could not be completed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That decision had broad support from political forces in Ethiopia. The decision by the House of Federation to extend the mandate of the prime minister and the parliament did not enjoy political consensus. When the Tigray region decided to proceed with organizing the state-level elections in defiance of the federal government and without the engagement of the NEBE, another step was taken towards November's violence.

The story is, of course, more complicated than postponed elections or COVID-19. The tensions between the federal government and the TPLF reflect broader, unresolved debates about Ethiopia's transition and federal arrangements. Past mechanisms for political dialogue were no longer fit for this purpose amidst rapid political reforms, and parties with diverging views or resistant to the reforms either opted out of or were not included in new forums. The federal government has detailed more than a dozen efforts to engage the TPLF through dialogue; however, none of these overcame fundamental obstacles. The tensions are also anchored in unaddressed reports, documentation and legacy of corruption, human rights abuses and state repression under the TPLF's leadership in the previous regime, along with allegations that the TPLF has been fomenting some of the disorder, violence and chaos during the transition period.

Solely focusing on what is going on today in Tigray risks obscuring broader concerns about violence, democratic backsliding, and repression elsewhere in the country. Even before the Tigray crisis, the International Organization on Migration recorded that more than 1.8 million people had been displaced in 2020. By July, Amnesty International had reported that at least 15,000 people had been arbitrarily arrested and detained as part of the government's crackdown on armed attacks, violence and following protests in Oromia. In the weeks leading up to the crisis, the federal government reorganized security institutions, including the ENDF, and several prominent political figures and journalists were jailed.

As a horrific example of the type of violence in Ethiopia that has become all too common, on November 1, ethnically targeted killings left at least 54 people dead in a schoolyard in the Wollega zone of Oromia state. Throughout western Ethiopia, communal violence has only increased since 2018. An attack on a bus in Benishangul-Gumuz in western Ethiopia left at least 34 people dead on November 14 and marked the latest in an unrelenting pace of violence. In southern Ethiopia, tensions remain high, as the consequences of the model of ethnic federalism continue to unfold.

The Ethiopian transition is taking place against the backdrop of a fundamental geopolitical shift in the Horn of Africa and stretching across the Red Sea, as outlined in a recent report by the Senior Study Group on Peace and Security in the Red Sea Arena convened by the U.S. Institute of Peace. In the last five years, the geopolitical landscape of the Red Sea arena has been

fundamentally reshaped. The Horn of Africa is now an integral part of and in fact the link among the security systems of the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific, and the Mediterranean. Middle Eastern states are asserting themselves in the Horn of Africa in ways unprecedented in at least a century, and the Red Sea arena is becoming increasingly militarized. The export of Middle Eastern rivalries into the Horn of Africa—with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Egypt contesting Turkey and Qatar for dominance—risks fueling instability and insecurity in an already fragile, volatile, and conflict-prone region.

Cost of Violence

The federal government announced on November 28 that it had completed military operations and would turn its attention to “rebuilding what has been destroyed, repairing what has been damaged and returning those who have fled.” For its part, the TPLF withdrew from Mekelle and vowed to “fight...to the last” asserting that “this is about defending our right to self-determination.” Given the TPLF’s experience in waging an insurgency from the mountains of Tigray, it is too easy to breathe a sigh of relief and move onto a “post-conflict” phase. Indeed, silencing the guns – on all sides -- needs to remain the priority in the short term to avoid the intolerable costs of war.

Amidst a communications blackout and lack of independent reporting, it is difficult to ascertain the full human and humanitarian impact of this conflict. More than 40,000 refugees fled Ethiopia into eastern Sudan. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has requested \$147 million to support the initial response. Access to nearly one million Eritrean refugees living in Tigray has been blocked over the course of the conflict, and it appears that large numbers of Ethiopians have been displaced internally and will require additional humanitarian support. This comes at a critical point in the harvest season and could have a ripple effect on food security for the months ahead, already exacerbated by the locust plague. In late November, the International Committee for the Red Cross reported that local hospitals and health facilities in Mekelle were running “dangerously low on medical supplies to care for the wounded as well as other mounting medical needs and conditions.”

The targeting of individuals or groups on the basis of ethnicity comes at a great cost. Amnesty International and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission have investigated and documented horrific violence in Mai Kadra in Tigray. Independent investigations are needed to document the experience of those who fled the country and violence. Early indications suggest that the patterns of violence are widespread and complex. Reports of targeting of ethnic Tigrayans through restrictions on travel and removal from civil service and military posts have raised alarm bells with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. An escalating narrative of dangerous speech and division risks continued cycles of violence and deep damage to the fabric of Ethiopian society.

Even prior to the fighting, the International Monetary Fund forecast a growth rate of 0% for 2021, down from 9% GDP growth in 2019. Under immense pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy will depend on expanding foreign direct investment and advancing discussions about debt relief. Ongoing violence will almost certainly distract from the economic imperatives that underpin the political transition. The violence also risks curtailing private sector

investment and may lead international partners to call into question large-scale partnerships with the World Bank or other institutions.

Ethiopia has and continues to play a central regional leadership role: a founding member of the United Nations and African Union, a leading contributor to peacekeeping, and the seat of the continental body for peace and security. Narratives – some false – about the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia are already fueling uncertainty in the lead up to Somalia’s elections and at a moment when the U.S. Administration has indicated that it will draw down its military engagement there. The flow of refugees into eastern Sudan adds stress to a fragile transition and region. The resort to violence by all parties without activation of the African Union’s own architecture missed an opportunity to exercise and underline the hard-won norms of peace and security. This may very well ripple into future conflicts. Attacks on the Eritrean capital by the TPLF and the allegations of reorganization of Ethiopian troops in Eritrea and even Eritrean troop involvement point to a regionalization of the conflict.

U.S. Policy Priorities to Advance Prevention in a Complex Transition and Interconnected Red Sea Arena

Ethiopia stands at an inflection point, and U.S. policy needs to be recalibrated to reflect that reality. The resistance to or disagreement with reforms by the TPLF and other parts of the political, social, and economic establishment is to be expected. Indeed, resistance and debate are fundamental features of democratic transitions. The challenge before the Ethiopian leadership is to develop a strategic approach to address that resistance without falling into the trap of continued cycles of violence. For the United States government, centering policy around the tenets of prevention, political inclusion and legitimacy enshrined in the Global Fragility Act as well as anchoring Ethiopia in the broader Horn of Africa and Red Sea Arena provide the best foundation to support the aspirations of the Ethiopian people for their transition.

Despite the escalation, I believe that there is a shared desire – by the federal government, the TPLF, the political opposition, the African Union and U.S. partners in the EU and beyond - to avoid the horrible costs of violence and support the possibility that a democratic, peaceful Ethiopia offers. Based on this, I would like to offer recommendations in three policy areas for the U.S. Administration and the continued leadership from this Committee:

- ***Do everything possible to prevent cycles of violence and mitigate the human consequences of the conflict.***
 - *Consistent, senior-level messaging.* The U.S. Administration and Congress need to continue to send consistent private and public messages about the need to prevent the spread and to de-escalate violence, actively discourage outside military engagement and fervently pursue a political solution. The U.S. can underscore the long-term costs that the conflict will have on Ethiopia's economy and international image. The U.S. can signal and galvanize broader coordinated support – diplomatic and perhaps technical or financial – for the African Union’s leadership to silence and keep silent the guns.

- *Humanitarian response:* Current efforts to secure unhindered humanitarian access to Tigray need to be sustained and operationalized with a clear-eye towards the evolving conflict dynamics and a conflict sensitive approach. Funds and resources to respond to the growing numbers of refugees in eastern Sudan need to be mobilized, as does contingency planning for the possibility of additional conflict-induced displacement in the coming weeks and months. Funding and resources are also needed to respond to the ongoing and unmet humanitarian needs resulting from the internal displacement even prior to the Tigray crisis.
- *Joint, independent investigations and mechanisms:* Allegations of incidents that could amount to war crimes have been reported by all parties. Investigation and documentation are needed to deter further violations, mitigate the risks of escalating rhetoric, and to provide a path towards justice and accountability. Preliminary reporting by Amnesty International and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission need to be bolstered by investigations in other areas where fighting occurred and with those who fled into eastern Sudan. Amidst the deep polarization, competing narratives and potentially complex jurisdictional issues, a joint independent investigation with the UN High Commission for Human Rights or the African Union could bolster the credibility of the EHRC's reporting and independence. The U.S. Administration and Congress can actively request and provide funding for such investigations.
- ***Safeguard the space for inclusive conversations about the transition.*** In the wake of the crisis between the federal government and the TPLF, there is an even greater urgency to safeguard space for inclusive conversation about the transition process. Difficult conversations will be needed about the redeployment of militias from Tigray and the ways that the military operation has shifted the relationship between Addis Ababa and the regional states. Conducting credible elections will depend on fostering security, trust, and reconciliation. Ethiopians will need to feel confident engaging in political debate and campaigning. And, eventually, agreeing on changes to the federal structure will require a sensitive set of discussions and negotiations. Setting a precedent that such changes will be done through discussion, and not be imposed, will be critical.

With the escalation of conflict, calls for dialogue have been deeply polarizing and civic space has closed. The federal government has expressed its concern that dialogue or negotiations with the TPLF would accord equivalence, promote impunity, and impose an unworkable power sharing arrangement. However, the need for dialogue extends beyond the Tigray crisis. Detention of journalists, political opposition leaders, and civic activists who have voiced dissent with the reform process fuel concerns that the country is sliding back into closed, authoritarian tendencies. As a November 5 statement by USIP's Senior Study Group on Peace and Security in the Red Sea Arena warned that neither an inclusive political dialogue nor free and fair elections can "be possible while many of the country's most prominent political leaders remain in prison."

Structures and mechanisms for inclusive conversations are needed to safeguard the democratic transition. Ethiopians need to discuss and agree what formats are needed and

ways to include those who agree and, more importantly, those who disagree. In other transitions, local and regional dialogue, peace committees and interparty advisory councils have helped to defuse tensions. Civic groups have forged coalitions to mobilize peaceful support for a reform agenda and bridge resistance by former and aspiring elites. The African Union envoys and the broader African Peace and Security Architecture can and should be called upon to support these dialogues.

The U.S. government needs to underline in public and private messaging the support for freedom of expression, space for independent journalism, and the need to expand conversations to those who have diverging views. The U.S. government can also express its strong interest in preventing violence through the activation of multiple, reinforcing mechanisms for inclusive conversations. Existing assistance programs in support of the transition and democratic development can be activated to support conversations about what inclusion means and ways that confidence can be built towards dialogue.

- ***Engage Ethiopia in the context of a new political and diplomatic strategy for the Red Sea Arena.*** Between May 2019 and September 2020, USIP convened a bipartisan senior study group to consider the factors that have reshaped the Red Sea arena. The Study Group determined that, in recent years, the geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics of the Horn of Africa have become tied to the Middle East and broader Indian Ocean in a manner unprecedented in the last century. However, U.S. strategy in this evolving environment has struggled to keep pace with these interconnected, complex, and transregional dynamics and to account for the region's increased relevance to U.S. interests. Three pillars of this new strategic approach need to be brought to bear in supporting the transition in Ethiopia and responding effectively to the current crisis:
 - *Overcome the bureaucratic seams between the Africa and Near East bureaus within the U.S. government* by designating a special envoy with responsibility for the Red Sea arena or designating the deputy secretary of state as the interagency lead for developing and executing an integrated strategy on the Red Sea arena. The special envoy or deputy secretary should ensure consistent, effective engagement with Gulf countries who have a stake and role in Ethiopia. A standing interagency policy committee (IPC) on the Red Sea arena, co-chaired by the National Security Council senior directors for Africa and the Middle East, can serve to coordinate overall policy approaches and priorities.
 - *Realign U.S. assistance to promote inclusive, legitimate governance and economic growth* by designating the Horn of Africa as a priority region under the Global Fragility Act, requiring a five-year Integrated Regional Strategy for the Red Sea arena encompassing the State Department, Defense Department, Department of Commerce, and USAID, and establishing a G20 working group on debt relief for the Horn of Africa to catalyze a dialogue among Paris Club and non-Paris Club creditors.
 - *Sustain active congressional engagement* by strengthening coordination among the relevant congressional bodies on both a transregional (i.e., Africa and Middle East) and interdisciplinary (i.e., foreign affairs, armed services, appropriations) basis,

establishing reporting requirements on the destabilizing actions by Middle Eastern states in the Horn of Africa, and encouraging bipartisan congressional champions to provide particular support to the transition in Ethiopia.

Let me conclude by elaborating on this last point in the specific context of Ethiopia. Congress provided clear guidance and leadership on the imperative of prevention through the adoption of the Global Fragility Act. This approach aligns with a broader consensus that a healthy state-society relationship, anchored in accountable, inclusive governance is the most consistent predictor of stability and peace. This all sounds rather theoretical in the abstract. But the crisis in Ethiopia highlights the very real human consequences, the implications for regional stability and the risks of violence and even extremism if we fail to support transitions in line with our own commitments and best practices.

While it is not for the United State to dictate to Ethiopia how to resolve fundamental questions of governance and its constitutional order, the United States does have an interest in ensuring the integrity and stability of the Ethiopia state, that the aspirations of Ethiopia's citizens for democratic reforms are channeled into a political discourse not suppressed through violence, and that Ethiopia contributes to the stabilizing rather than further destabilizing the volatile Horn of Africa. The United States can and therefore should consider its bilateral relationship with Ethiopia in a manner that accounts for the events of the last month and brings to bear the benchmarks, tools, and approaches in the Global Fragility Act.

Congress can play a vital role in laying out the principles that could form the basis for the new bilateral relationship between the United States and Ethiopia that must by necessity emerge—a bilateral relationship that minimizes the likelihood of state fragmentation and the further internationalization of Ethiopia's multiplying conflicts.

The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author and not the U.S. Institute of Peace.

AGH Subcommittee Hearing Remarks
“The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia”
December 3, 2020

Chair (countdown): Five, four, three, two, one.

[Pause for three seconds, bang gavel]

Chair: The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations will come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any point and all members will have five days to submit statements, extraneous material and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules. To insert something into the record, please have your staff email the previously mentioned address or contact full committee staff.

As a reminder to Members, please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the Chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves and please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking. Consistent with the H.Res. 965 and the accompanying regulations, staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they are not under recognition to eliminate background noise.

I see that we have a quorum and will now recognize myself for opening remarks.

Pursuant to notice, we are holding a hearing on The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia.

Today, we are hearing testimony on the conflict in Ethiopia, and would like recommendations on what the United States and the international community can do to help stabilize the region and decrease the tensions between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front.

There are several intra-ethnic conflicts regarding politics and social standing in Ethiopia covering decades. This highlights the country’s long dispute over group and individual rights, and whether centralized government is the way to true democracy for citizens of Ethiopia. During my many visits to Ethiopia, I have expressed to leaders that the government must have representation for all ethnic groups, and most importantly always protect its citizens.

I am and will always be a champion for human rights.

I recently led bipartisan Resolution H.R. 1183, supporting respect for human rights and encouraging continued democratic progress in Ethiopia; and condemning the targeted violence and destruction of property directed against ethnic and religious minorities; the excessive use of force by Ethiopian forces against peaceful protesters; the arrest and detention of journalists and peaceful protesters who exercised their constitutional rights; and hate speech and disinformation that fuel ethnic and political violence by groups based in Ethiopia and in the diaspora.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to consider supporting this critical bipartisan legislation so that we send the message that congress is aware and concerned about the increased in security in the country.

The current state of Ethiopia not only has a ripple effect on its citizens, but neighboring countries such as Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea are negatively affected. Ethiopia's instability and ethnic strife are producing security repercussions in Somalia. AU forces depend heavily on Ethiopian troops to help combat violent extremism in the region. Somalia has upcoming elections that may be tense, and the Trump administration is planning to withdraw U.S. Special Operations Forces from the country soon, this has the potential to strengthen al-Shabab and weaken anti-forces.

Reportedly Tigray forces fired missiles toward the capital of Eritrea after Ethiopian troops pushed them from their regional capital of Mekele. My concern is that far too often during conflict, innocent civilians are the ones who are killed, injured, or displaced and have to flee across borders. With regard to Sudan, after 30 plus years of authoritarian rule, Sudan, which borders Tigray, is trying to peacefully transition to a democracy and strengthen its economy, and the conflict is causing them to host a growing number of Ethiopian refugees.

I understand that this conflict developed long before Prime Minister Abiy's tenure, but at this moment, he is the person who can unite his country. I appreciate the steps taken to have a more inclusive government and society, but the current environment of democratic backsliding and ethnic and political violence threatens to reverse the progress made. I encourage both Prime Minister Abiy and the leaders of the Tigray People's Liberation Front to have a continued peaceful dialogue with the help of African Union mediation to resolve this issue once and for all.

Citizens on all sides of this conflict should have the right to be heard and peacefully protest, and there should be the freedom to disseminate what's going on in the country by journalists. I appreciate and am looking forward to hearing from Tsedale (Se-Da-Lee) Lemma who can give a first-hand report on what is happening in the country.

The Ethiopian diaspora is also critical in solving this conflict. My office meets with and hears the concerns of this intra-ethnic community. We have received correspondence from the Ethiopian Diaspora Human Rights Advocacy Group, Ethiopian Americans who are descendants from the Tigray region, as well as diaspora from the Oromo and Amhara communities, and other ethnic groups. Again, I encourage the Government of Ethiopia to have continuous peaceful dialogue with all ethnic groups in the country, and the diaspora to come up with a solution that is equitable for all citizens.

Therefore, my colleagues and I would like recommendations on how to help solve this conflict peacefully. I hope you can speak to the safety of American citizens in the country, how can we continuously engage diplomatically, and do you believe the African Union's team of skilled former presidents can eventually help mediate a solution?

I would like to thank our witnesses for being with us virtually today. Ethiopia is vital to U.S. foreign policy..... we are the country's biggest humanitarian donor.

But more than that, they are vital in the region and are a key player in the international community. I look forward to your remarks and analysis of what we can do legislatively to ensure a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

I now recognize the ranking member for the purpose of making an opening statement.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ranking Member.

I will now introduce Witness 1 (Yoseph Badwaza, Senior Advisor, Africa Freedom House) and Witness 2 (Tsedale (Se-da-Lee) Lemma, Editor-in-Chief, and Founder of the Addis Standard Magazine). Thank you for being here today.

I will now recognize each witness for five minutes and without objection, your prepared written statements will be made a part of the record. I will first call on Witness 1 for their testimony.

CHAIR: Thank you for your testimony. I will now recognize members for five minutes each and pursuant to House rules, all time yielded is for the purposes of questioning our witnesses. Because of the virtual format of this hearing, I will recognize members by Committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans. If you miss your turn, please let our staff know and we will circle back to you. If you seek recognition, you must unmute your microphone and address the Chair verbally.

I will start by recognizing myself.

[QUESTION FOR WITNESS]
[WITNESS 1 RESPONDS]

CHAIR: I will now call on members for questioning. I will start with Mr. Smith, our Ranking Member.

[RANKING MEMBER QUESTIONS FOR WITNESSES]

[WITNESS RESPONSES]

CHAIR: Thank you Mr. Smith. I will now recognize Members by Committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans.

CHAIR: Member questions are now concluded. I will now move on to my closing remarks.

I will now turn to our Ranking Member Smith for his closing remarks.

CHAIR: Thank you Ranking Member Smith. I want to thank our witnesses and the members who participated in this very important virtual hearing. The hearing is adjourned.

****Bang gavel****

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all of our witnesses for taking time to be with us today and also as we navigate this COVID virtual environment. We are used to having hearings in person, and so this is a bit challenging.

I now want to go to questions. I will recognize each member for 5 minutes. I will start with myself, then go to ranking member, and we will go back and forth, Democrat, Republican.

I would like to ask one, our witness that just finished testifying. You were talking about the relationship of the Horn and the Middle East, and I wanted to know if you could expand on that a little more, referencing specific countries and what aspects of the relationship were you referring to?

After that, I would like to ask Mr. Badwaza if he would talk about what are some of the minimum preconditions that have to be met for a genuine national dialog that could lead to an effective political settlement. I would also like to ask Mr. Badwaza if he would comment about the U.S. response so far, which has been to suspend aid. And oftentimes, that—well, not oftentimes, but with this administration suspending aid might be a tactic that is used, but I am just not sure whether that helps move the country toward peace.

So would you please begin? Ms. Stigant?

Ms. STIGANT. Thank you for that question. I think if we look at the recent transition that took place in Sudan, it has to point to a way where it is critical to involve Gulf countries. If we look back to the Ethiopia-Eritrea peace agreement and the role that the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia played in helping to convene and move forward that peace agreement, I think it points to the ways that the Gulf countries have a vested and strong interest going forward.

There have been some reports and rumors that there might be some level of involvement of the UAE, given its close relationship with Eritrea. I think that, along with the investigations that have been raised, probably needs some further understanding and information and documentation.

I think there is also an opportunity, not just in terms of potentially dangerous actions, but the ability of key partners to Ethiopia, including the Emiratis, to deliver similar messages to what the United States is delivering, that violence is not a sustainable path forward, that the stability and the integrity of the country is critical, and to use some of their diplomatic and financial and technical partnerships to drive in the same direction forward.

So I think this is—there is an increasing thought that ensuring that we think about the interconnectedness of the economic, political, and security aspects is important.

The other piece that I mention is that there have been efforts, and one of the priorities for the Federal Government of Ethiopia has been to forge a stronger relationship with Eritrea and Somalia. And if we look at the Red Sea coastline and the strategic positioning of the coastline, this will impact on the overall power dynamics and where the country goes going forward.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much.

Mr. Badwaza.

Mr. BADWAZA. Thank you, Chair Bass, for those questions. I think as I was reading earlier, in terms of for an effective dialog to take place and to move sort of the needle from the political stalemate that Ethiopia has found itself in, frankly, descended into an armed conflict, there should be a reset of how we understand the entire concept of dialog in a political context in Ethiopia.

Oftentimes, it is taken to mean having large gatherings with everyone that has a claim to be a political organization without even necessarily having their status updated or their membership testifying to them. So I think we should be able to clear that with a prior audit, so that we can identify which ones are the legitimate representatives of communities and have something to contribute to the political process.

I think it should also be based on rules agreed to by all parties, and there should be consequences for those who are not complying with these agreed-upon rules. And it should not be facilitated by one of the parties, one of the contending parties. There should be an agreed-upon independent facilitator of this dialog—

Ms. BASS. Excuse me. Let me ask you, when you say “independent,” independent in what way? Outside of the country, international, or how can it be internal?

Mr. BADWAZA. Not necessarily. There have been a number of institutions in Ethiopia that have reasonably wide respect and acceptance among the population. This could be from religious groups, interreligious groups. This could be from thought leaders in the academia where a reasonable agreement by all parties could be reached. Or if that is necessary and for, I think, mainly professional reasons and providing technical support, there should also be a room for international facilitators.

So it should be—it is a perception from the beginning, parties going into with this path, that this is going to be dominated by a certain group of actors that dooms a lot of these efforts at dialog so far. So there should be confidence on the facilitators, there should be confidence that there is consequences, and there should be rules that guide that.

And I think dialog in a type of environment that is the way the political space is gradually shrinking is not going to give us the results that we aspire. There should be some gesture of releasing all people that are in prison because of the political views that they were—they have espoused. This include journalists, political leaders, and other dissidents.

So there should be a broader approach and a systematic approach to what we have done, dialog in Ethiopia so far for it to be effective.

Ms. BASS. Thank you. Thank you, thank you.

Let me now turn to Ranking Member Smith for his questions. After all of the members have asked questions for 5 minutes, we will do another round if members would like that.

Mr. SMITH. Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Blanchard, in your testimony, you point out that the TPLF denies initiating the conflict on November 4, accusing Abiy of starting the war to consolidate his personal power. Could you—and I have a number of questions, and I want to stay within the time

limit. Is there any doubt that the TPLF was involved with going after munitions and going after the military in Tigray, No. 1?

Second, you also point out, you know, as maybe a precursor of some of this, that the Federal Government's decision in October to reshuffle the leadership of the military's Northern Command exacerbated the tensions. You might want to speak to that in connection with that first question.

In terms of dialog—and you have all made very good, good, passionate pleas for meaningful dialog and hopefully under some auspices, maybe the U.N. Is the best. But there are three envoys, including Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who have been deployed to try to find a way of getting all parties to speak. Would the African Union be, you know, the right institution to initiate this? What are those three envoys doing, you know, in order to encourage national dialog and to deconflict this problem?

The safety of humanitarian workers, we know that reports were there were about four people who were killed in refugee settings. They were helping Eritreans, but they were killed. We do not know the details. I have looked for them online and elsewhere, do not know it, maybe you know it. But what about the safety of humanitarian workers? You know, we know in so many conflict areas they get targeted, and unfortunately they often get killed, and that is a very, very serious protection that needs to be in place.

With regards to the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation of 2009, both Karen Bass and I noted that in H. Res. 128, as being, you know, an instrument that was so expansive, particularly as it relates to groups like Jerwaz (ph), and we know now that there is a new antiterrorism law of 2009. It seems to have some wide open language about punishing those who incite terrorism. I am not sure what the definition is, but, again, laws need to be well defined or else they could be easily breached and bad things can happen. I have got a lot of other questions, but that would be my time, please try to answer those.

Ms. BLANCHARD. Thank you, Mr. Smith. You have asked me a complicated question. The government's narrative—the Federal Government's narrative is that the TPLF attacked facility's Northern Command and killed soldiers and seized weapons. The TPLF debates that narrative, and it is very difficult to, you know, ascertain who is right and wrong on this. What we do know is that there was a lot of saber-rattling, and there were tensions that built up to this.

And I want to go back to the postponement of elections and the decision by the Tigray Government to go ahead and have their own elections. And basically what that resulted in was both sides declaring the other illegitimate, the government in Tigray saying that the government in Addis, the Federal Government, did not have the constitutional mandate to extend its own term and needed to have elections before its term expired in October. And then by the same token, the Federal Government declaring that the elections that Tigray went ahead and held for regional positions were illegitimate.

And so after that, when the Federal Government tried to change out some of the leadership of the Northern Command, which by most accounts is sort of one of the most heavily armed commands

in the country, as a legacy of the long border war and standoff with Eritrea, TPLF sort of considered that to be a threat.

There were reports by the TPLF before the conflict started on November 4 of troop movements toward the border with Tigray. And so by some accounts, the TPLF felt that it was going to be attacked and moved to respond in self-defense. So the narrative has competed, and CRS certainly isn't in a position to verify which is the correct story.

You know, the unfortunate aftermath is that you have a split within the military and the security forces in Tigray and elsewhere. There are reports that there has been some isolated fighting among forces, Ethiopian military forces, including in Somalia, that—one of the things I was going to mention, I ran out of time—Ethiopia's reported to have pulled back at least 3,000, if not more, of their forces from Somalia where they are fighting Al Shabaab and supporting regional stabilization operations. And there are reports of tensions within the forces. So that is, you know, I think something else of U.S. concern.

On the issue of the envoys, President Ramaphosa of South Africa, who is the current chairman, appointed these three former leaders to serve as envoys. The Federal Government in Addis has resisted the idea of mediation, of a negotiation with the TPLF. But those envoys did visit and held meetings in Addis Ababa. I do not think they were able to meet with the TPLF, and I do not know what the status of their engagement is. And there are a lot of, I think

[inaudible] Out there on how to move forward on a discussion that deescalates the conflict from here.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much.

Let me move now to Susan Wild.

Ms. WILD. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it. Thank you for conducting this hearing.

My first question is to Mr. Badwaza. Last year, on November 28, the Ethiopian Prime Minister declared victory over the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the end of the military operation in the Tigray region. Since then, however, reports of ongoing violence and unrest have continued. What, in your estimation, is the actual current state of the conflict with the People's Liberation Front? That is my first question, and then I have two subquestions to that.

Mr. Badwaza.

Mr. BADWAZA. Thank you for the question. As you mentioned, once the Federal Government declared the cessation of military operations on Saturday, there have been rocket launches to Eritrea. So that is, I think, an indication of the fact that there is still a TPLF force with a capability to engage some sort of military engagement.

On top of that, there have been daily reports from outlets that are affiliated with the TPLF talking about downing fighter jets and taking prisoners of war that belong to the Eritrean Army. So if the TPLF leadership explained that there is reasonable assessment, then there is reason to believe that at least some of their forces are fighting in some form or another.

So again I would reiterate that it is still difficult to come up with any independent confirmation of what is going on in the region, but

I am of the opinion that fighting has—I am of the opinion that the fighting has not yet completely stopped.

Ms. WILD. Do you have any thoughts on intermediate steps that could or should be taken by the United States to avert even greater loss of human life, a major humanitarian crisis and a major refugee crisis in the region?

Mr. BADWAZA. I think that there are opportunities and some gestures by the Federal Government that are being taken, one of them being the agreement that they reached where they are going to supply humanitarian assistance.

And I think that should be complemented by reiterating the call for—since the government has already declared that armed hostilities have stopped, the next step should be the start of how to engage in peacemaking. So I think these are opportunities for the United States to call for the continuation of dialog and engagement, particularly giving a chance to the initiative by the African Union, which the current chair, President Ramaphosa, has started.

Ms. WILD. And do you have any thoughts on a longer-range—or what the United States should do on a longer-range basis to encourage a political resolution to this conflict?

Mr. BADWAZA. I think one of it starts with getting the messaging right. I think there should be a consistent, coherent, balanced, and principled messaging from the United States concerning all actors in Ethiopia.

So, for example, the perception that Ethiopians have toward the United States' stand with regard to the Nile—the Great Renaissance Dam negotiations has to be rectified, in terms of enhancing the U.S.'s standing among the Ethiopian populations, without any efforts that the U.S. Government would be a part of, could be accepted by the Ethiopian population and have the desired effect.

So apart from getting a consistent messaging all across the branches of the U.S. Government, there needs to be a very thoughtful and deliberate approach to reaching the communities from both sides but the Ethiopian population in general directly. Because that is one of the challenges we are looking at, in terms of all parties taking a piece of that messaging and trying to use to further their stance.

So there should be a way of reaching the messaging to the Ethiopian population as well as Ethiopia's other development partners, including the African Union.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Let me now move to Representative Phillips.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And greetings to today's witnesses.

And a special welcome to my friends among the Ethiopian diaspora in my home State of Minnesota, who are surely watching today's hearing with both great interest and equally grave concerns.

And I want to reiterate the sentiments of Chairwoman Bass, of Chairman Engel, and Ranking Member McCaul, in that Ethiopia is a key ally of the United States of America, and we must continue our important work of preserving the democratic gains, the spurring of economic growth, and advancing peace and security for all.

With that said, I remain extremely concerned, gravely concerned, by the fighting in Tigray and the risk of internationalization of the conflict and the humanitarian impacts of the conflict as well.

I want to focus on human rights for my first question.

U.N. officials are saying that ethnic violence has reached, quote, “an alarming level over the past 2 years” and note that the stigmatization of certain ethnic groups, including the Tigray, Amhara, Somali, and Oromo, among others, has significantly contributed to ethnic intolerance throughout the country. Recently, Amnesty International as well as other NGO’s have reported a major uptick in ethnic and religious violence during the conflict, of which we are all aware.

So my first question is a very fundamental one. What should and can Ethiopia be doing to better protect civilians from ethnic and religious-based violence?

Perhaps we can start with you, Mr. Badwaza.

Ms. BASS. Actually, before you respond, Representative Phillips, I think your screen is blocked, or we are not sure what is happening with your screen.

Go ahead, Mr. Badwaza.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Is that on now?

Ms. BASS. No. But you can—do not worry about it if you cannot get it on.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Okay.

Ms. BASS. Okay.

Mr. BADWAZA. Thank you for those questions.

I think the escalation of the ethnic violence, intercommunal violence, in Ethiopia can be attributed in part to how wrongly the transition that started in 2018 has been managed so far.

One of the outcomes of this transition and the liberalization of the political space over the past 2–1/2 years in Ethiopia is the emboldenment of these local and regional actors and some with ethno-nationalist sentiments to use even government resources to organize and train ethnic-based militias and special forces and using those to settle political and territorial scores.

There have not been any constitutional foundations to some of these armed groups that every State in Ethiopia now seems to have, the militias. And then those, even by the government’s own admission, are being actively used to fuel and carry out some of these very violent intercommunal clashes.

So I think, for a resolution to be found in that regard and to return the political transition back to track, there should be, I think, a serious measure that the Federal Government should be taking, either to regulate these armed militia and special forces that every region seems to have and also put a political and legal framework that regulates political organization in Ethiopia—that is, in terms of regulating using ethnic and religious affiliation as a political organizing form.

So, with these measures and getting the legal and political framework and the regulatory framework right, I think there could be some relief, at least when it comes to the various atrocities that the country has witnessed over the past 2–1/2 years.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Okay. Thank you, sir.

I am so sorry about my video. I apologize for that.

I would like to ask—if I can continue questioning, Madam Chair, I would like to ask a question about the elections, of course.

As you all know, Ethiopia's election board announced in March 2020 that national and regional elections scheduled for August would be postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tigray regional government, led by the TPLF, of course, went ahead with its regional council elections in September despite the Federal Government warning that the vote, of course, would be illegal. The only exacerbated tensions between the Abiy government and the TPLF, of course, has since led to the conflict.

Ms. Stigant, if you could please answer, what can the U.S. do to support the coronavirus precautions while also ensuring that Ethiopia is able to safely hold free and fair elections next year?

Ms. STIGANT. Thank you for your question.

You know, part of the reason that the national election board postponed the elections was that, in March, they made a determination that they wouldn't have been able to put in place the necessary technical pieces in the roadmap. And so I think an important foundation point is to have a clear calendar that is regularly updated.

My understanding is that there are ongoing and existing programming to support this aspect of Ethiopia's democratic transition. I think it is important to protect those programs despite some of the restrictions and holds that were put on assistance in relation to the policies in the talks on the dam and the GERD.

But elections aren't just technical exercises, as you well know; they are fundamentally political exercises. And they are moments where, rather than a country most likely coming together, they can be deeply polarizing. And so I think as important as the technical preparations are ensuring, going back to your first question, that there is a space in the country for civic actors, for people who have different plural voices to be speaking freely their minds, that there is space for journalists to be covering, that there is space for political debate about fundamental questions about where the country heads. And the U.S. can support that through its programming; it can support it through its ongoing messaging.

And I think it is very important that there isn't a rush toward elections, that really finding an environment that is ripe is critical to avoid the potential to catalyze additional violence leading into that political milestone.

Mr. PHILLIPS. All right. Thank you.

Thank you.

Ms. BASS. And thank you, Representative Phillips. I certainly remember the visit to your district and the very brief meeting we had with diaspora in your area, and I am sure your questions reflect their concerns as well.

I did want to continue, though, with Ms. Stigant for another minute, especially talking about elections and wanting to know what you think the U.S. might be able to do in terms of supporting Ethiopia getting to the point where they can have the national elections.

Ms. STIGANT. Thank you for that question.

I think if we look to the experiences in other countries coming out of transition, creating space for the inter-political dialog that

needs to take place is a priority. And so my understanding is that there are existing programs through democracy assistance that are working to support political parties, that are working to support civic groups. I think that is going to need additional attention.

We often approach elections and peace-building as separated cones. And I think there is a particular need, coming out of this violence and what we see as the closing space, to interconnect these together more effectively. There will be, I think, a tendency for political leaders to mobilize their base. And finding ways to ensure that that remains nonviolent, if people are coming to the streets, will be absolutely critical going into the electoral period.

Ms. BASS. And it is an area where we have had a lot of cuts in terms of democracy and governance. Those two categories have had significant budget cuts.

And so, I think, looking at a new administration coming in, I wanted to ask Mr. Badwaza and also Ms. Blanchard, what advice do you have for the new administration? And then can you specifically comment on the impact that cutting foreign assistance has already had?

So I would ask both Mr. Badwaza and Ms. Blanchard to respond to that, and then I will go to Mr. Smith for any concluding questions that he has.

Mr. Badwaza.

Mr. BADWAZA. Thank you, Chair Bass, again.

I think, again, there is a lot of support by way of humanitarian assistance that goes to Ethiopia from the United States. And, over the years, the core principle that used to guide the relationship has been this cooperation over counterterrorism efforts in the region. That has, in the years past, I think, clouded some of the real human rights and political concerns that the Ethiopian population was having.

And the messaging, again, from the United States was not really to the satisfaction of a large majority of the Ethiopian population. As it has been mentioned earlier, there have been resolutions that needed to come out of the U.S. House of Representatives to highlight those concerns and to, sort of, chart a direction to a more democratic political process in Ethiopia.

So I would say the incoming new administration should be proactive in engaging voices outside of the government. I understand government-to-government relations should continue, but, in terms of getting a wider perspective of the developments and the core national issues on Ethiopia, I think there should be a focus on institution-building.

For example, there have been really encouraging work that is being done, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission over the past few months, in terms of investigating the human rights abuses all over the country and also trying to hold officials to account to their deeds.

So I think the United States should focus on encouraging institutions like this one and building independent media, which could force the culture of inclusive dialog and independent analysis of events, instead of the one we are seeing, based mainly on hateful practices, hate speech, and dangerous speech that is being particu-

larly, in many cases, produced by members of the diaspora and being imported to the conversation in the domestic political sphere.

I think there are measures that need to be taken in terms of trying to tame the impact of these harmful interventions from actors both inside and outside of Ethiopia. And the U.S. Government can support independent groups, independent institutions, including the media, to try and counter those harmful narratives and force the culture of inclusive political dialog.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Ms. Blanchard, if you could quickly respond, because I have actually run out of time.

Ms. BLANCHARD. Sure. Absolutely.

You asked about the U.S. assistance and how it has changed. And, of course, democracy and governance funding and programming in Ethiopia prior to the transition when Abiy came into office was limited, in large part because of the restricted political space in the country. It has since expanded, particularly with the aim of supporting democratic elections.

But that assistance has been impacted by the suspension related to the GERD negotiations. As you know, in August, the administration suspended roughly \$260 million in assistance to Ethiopia. Of that total \$260 million, at least \$30 million has been redirected elsewhere. It was expiring. And of what remains, by my tally, over \$20 million in governance and democracy and human-rights-related funding is affected.

Now, how much of an effect is a little bit difficult to tell, because a lot of that programming was also somewhat slowed by the COVID pandemic and partners' ability to program in the midst of that. And, of course, the election delay also had some impact. But I think there are concerns that the suspension of assistance may have an impact on U.S. and partners' ability to respond to the conflict.

With the prospect of elections coming up, there is so much work to do, if they are to be held—voter registration exercises and otherwise.

And, of course, you know, these outstanding questions about whether or not the conflict continues, that will impact the ability to hold elections in Tigray but potentially in other parts of the country. This was part of what had delayed the election processes, including a planned census, was the large amount of displacement from conflict in the years preceding.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Mr. Smith, would you like to close us out with a round of 5 minutes?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

A couple of questions on the antiterrorism law of 2019. Does it comport with human rights norms? Did it truly replace the proclamation of 2009, which we were very, very critical of?

The safety of humanitarian personnel, we did not have time to get an answer to that. Do you feel there will be enough assurances there?

Mr. Badwaza, you had talked in your testimony about an audit of political actors, and I am not sure what you meant. Is that for accountability, or is that to include them in a dialog? Maybe you

could just amplify or give some clarity as to what that audit would look like.

And, Ms. Tsedale Lemma, in your November 11 op-ed in The New York Times, you claimed that much of the blame for the Tigray conflict lies with Prime Minister Abiy. One of the pieces of evidence that you cite is that the Prime Minister dismantled the old political order and marginalized the TPLF through the creation of the Prosperity Party last year, which the TPLF did not want to join.

However, you did point out in the op-ed that, following massive protests by the Oromo and Amhara communities, which together make up nearly two-thirds of the population, you know, you point out that these protests were against the TPLF's dominance of the government, the TPLF coalition and their authoritarian rule.

So I am just—you know, when you have a true majority, shouldn't there be some restructuring of the old political order which had dominated Ethiopia for so long?

And, again, the massive human rights abuses over the years being committed by previous governments—and Don Payne, who was my ranking, and I was his ranking when he was chair—we went back and forth, like Karen and I have gone back and forth over the years—he, too, was very critical, you know, in terms of the massive human rights abuses. So maybe you could speak to that.

And the role of faith-based. Are the faith-based leaders, whether they be the Islamic community or from the Christian community, are they playing a positive role?

Ms. Blanchard.

Ms. BLANCHARD. Sorry. I did not know if you had directed that at me.

Let me start with your last question. The faith-based community in Ethiopia has been trying to engage to stop the fighting. The Inter-Religious Council has called for an immediate end to the fighting and called for dialog and echoed some of the sentiments that have been expressed by the AU leadership and others in the international community.

To your other questions, you know, I would defer to Yoseph and Tsedale on their thoughts on the revisions to the restrictive legislation. But, as you note, there was a major political opening in 2018 and 2019, and that cannot be discounted. You know, thousands of political prisoners released; opposition leaders and groups that had been in exile and accused of treason able to come back into the country; sort of a flourishing of press freedom.

But, by the same token, I think in the last year and a half or so there has been some sign of a tightening space. And that, I think, reflects some of the government's struggles in trying to figure out how to manage this simmering ethnic conflict, communal conflicts that are happening around the country.

The unrest that broke out in July, in which, you know, hundreds of people were killed, I think the government struggled with how to deal with that. But the 3-week shutdown of the internet meant that, you know, I think, ability for other voices to stem the violence and stem the disinformation that was spreading was very limited. And that was very difficult. And we are seeing the same with the situation in Tigray now.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Badwaza and Tsedale, if you could respond.

Mr. BADWAZA. Thank you, Ranking Member Smith. I will take the antiterrorism proclamation question.

I think, overall, it is a major departure from the 2009 really draconian law. I say this for a couple of reasons.

One, the level of effort that the drafting committee made to include different perspectives, including civil society, media professionals, and regional actors, was, I think, one of the very encouraging features that distinguishes the new antiterrorism proclamation from the 2009 one.

And in terms of content, second. I think the changes it made to the acts that were considered a terrorist deed and also the evidentiary provisions that it introduced by rejecting some of the very controversial aspects of the older law, I would say this is a much better piece of legislation as compared to the 2009 one.

The audit I mentioned of political groups is related to, I think, making the dialog interventions effective. What I am saying is that there are hundreds of political parties that have registration certificates from the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, and I think an actual audit would reveal that, once the registration criteria have been met by many of these political groupings, it is very questionable whether a lot of them have a functioning constituency that they represent.

Yet many of these groups get to a gathering that is named a dialog, and you see a venue full of people that are talking about different priorities of their own, sometimes individuals, sometimes a small group, mixed with political groups that have a genuine political agenda, economic plans, and socio-cultural policies to actually transform the lives of people for the better.

So my suggestion is to try and sift which ones are really working for the good of the population and which ones are just representing their own interests or they want to be staying in the political scene without necessarily having a viable policy framework to offer to the Ethiopian people. So that is what I meant by an audit should be conducted.

Ms. BASS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Badwaza.

Ms. Lemma.

Mr. SMITH. Yes.

Ms. LEMMA. Thank you.

Thank you, Ranking Member Smith. You have asked a very legitimate question. And we all know what led to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's ascent to office, is that there was a very, almost—after the 2015 election, the first thing that happened was a rejection of the result of that election, in which the EPRDF won more than 99 percent of the seats.

So there was that very legitimate rejection. It has lost its legitimacy. It has grown into a collection of some, you know, crony members of the elite, the top elite. So they deeper and deeper detest it, EPRDF. And, as such, there was a legitimate need to dismantle it.

It is not the question of dismantling it. It is the question of how it was dismantled that created no avenue for these parties to come and have a dialog to sort their differences. Because the EPRDF was the last, so to say, umbilical cord that kept these parties to-

gether. For all their differences, it somehow provided them the space to come and talk if they could manage to settle their differences there. With that dismantlement, the question became not only not having the space to discuss but also a question of power. Because when you dismantle it, you pushed away the people who held it together and who monopolized it.

This is one point. The second one is, for 27 years, the country did not have any other political order except for the EPRDF. So, when you dismantle that, you are unleashing a political force without having an alternative that could absorb the shock that would come as a result of dismantling. So, as I say, it was like hitting it with a blunt force. You know, it needed an unraveling that was carefully—that should have been carefully done.

And that is why I am holding the Prime Minister responsible for dismantling it unceremoniously and for creating that power vacuum in which disgruntled members of the EPRDF could come back and, you know, demand a seat in the table. Because then it is not only the lack of the avenue for discussion but also the power question, and that is what is leading the multiple crises in the country.

It also led to have no political viable force in the Southern Nations and Nationalities when the regional State was undergoing through an increasing number of questions for self-administration. The dismantlement of the SEPDM in the Southern Nations has led to the vacuum of a mediating force between these rising questions for self-administration and the central government.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Ms. LEMMA. So these self-administration questions have led to multiple violences that we have seen in the last 2-1/2 years.

Thank you.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Representative Phillips, you are recognized.

Mr. PHILLIPS. We will try this again. Thank you. Sorry for my AV problems. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Lemma, I would like to continue with you relative to the free press.

The Ethiopian Federal Government, of course, has cut phone service and internet communications with the Tigray region and restricted journalists' access, making it awfully difficult for the outside world to verify any information that we are hearing.

Of course, we are all seeing continued reports of detention of political opponents. And it is deeply troublesome.

So, please, very specifically, you know, what can the United States do to ensure access of the press and due process in Ethiopia during these trying times?

Ms. BASS. And, Ms. Lemma, I am going to ask—because we actually are over time for the hearing. So, if you could respond quickly, and then we will wrap up the hearing.

Ms. LEMMA. Thank you very much.

It is not too late for the government to allow independent journalists to travel to the area. However, to find out what exactly happened in the last 1 month, it would be even too overwhelming for even powerful media, independent media, to establish. And without establishing what exactly happened in the last 1 month, it would be very difficult to solve the problem.

Going forward, it remains very crucial that communication is restored and that Tigrayans that are living outside of the region have the right to find out what exactly happened to their family, not only for journalists—access to journalists, but they have the right to find out whether their families are dead or alive.

So the restoration of communication as soon as possible is immediate. And the United States can do that by having a conversation with the Federal Government, opening up all communication, allowing journalists to travel to the area, those who can travel to the area to travel to the area, and continue filing the reports from the ground and talking to other people. This remains very crucial, and it cannot wait a day.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I couldn't agree more. And I am grateful to you. And thank you for your time today.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. BASS. Absolutely.

Well, let me thank the ranking member, Mr. Smith, and the other members who attended and especially all of our witnesses. Thank you so much. We know this is such a crucial time in Ethiopia and in the entire region in East Africa.

And, in about 50 or so days, we will have a new administration coming in—which I think it is going to take some time for the new administration to get settled and functional and for all of the top officials to be confirmed. But I think that we need to look forward to see, what can the U.S. do, what kind of assistance can we provide.

Clearly, we need to make sure that the accounts for governance and democracy are well-funded and so that we can participate in whatever way possible in helping to bring peace to Ethiopia.

Thank you very much.

And I call the meeting adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:44 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International
Organizations
Karen Bass (D-CA), Chair**

December 3, 2020

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations to be held virtually via Cisco WebEx. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Thursday, December 3, 2020

TIME: 2:00 p.m., EST

SUBJECT: The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia

WITNESS: Mr. Yoseph Badwaza
Senior Advisor, Africa
Freedom House

Ms. Susan Stigant
Director of Africa Program
United States Institute of Peace

Ms. Tsedale Lemma
Editor-in-Chief, Founder
Addis Standard Magazine

Ms. Lauren Ploch Blanchard
Specialist in African Affairs
Congressional Research Services

By Direction of the Chairman

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations HEARING

Day Thursday Date 12/03/2020 Room Virtual

Starting Time 2:08pm Ending Time 3:44pm

Recesses 0 (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Karen Bass

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Executive (closed) Session

Stenographic Record

Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:

The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached.

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

Rep. Karen Bass, IFR

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or
TIME ADJOURNED 3:44pm

Naomia A. Suggs-Brigety
Subcommittee Staff Associate

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
*SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS*
COMMITTEE HEARING

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Karen Bass, CA
X	Susan Wild, PA
X	Dean Phillips, MN
	Ilhan Omar, MN
X	Chrissy Houlahan, PA

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Christopher H. Smith, NJ
	James F. Sensenbrenner, Jr., WI
	Ron Wright, TX
X	Tim Burchett, TN

CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE MAZANEC



December 3, 2020

Honorable Eliot L. Engel
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is pursuant to your letter of December 2, 2020, requesting Lauren Ploch Blanchard as a witness for a hearing held before the Subcommittee entitled "The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia." This hearing is scheduled for Thursday, December 3, 2020, at 2:00 p.m. via Cisco WebEx.

Congressional guidelines on objectivity and non-partisanship require that our staff confine their testimony to technical, professional, and non-advocative aspects of the matters under consideration, and limit themselves to questions within their fields of expertise. With the understanding that Ms. Blanchard's testimony will be prepared and delivered on behalf of the Congressional Research Service in accordance with the principles and limitations described above, I am pleased to confirm her appearance.

I appreciate the opportunity to be of service and hope that you will continue to call upon CRS in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary B. Mazanec".

Mary B. Mazanec
Director