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## **Tigray's Humanitarian Crisis and International Response**

**10<sup>th</sup> of August 2021**

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# Tigray's Humanitarian Crisis and International Response

## Introduction

November 2020, a conflict erupted in Ethiopia's Tigray region between the Ethiopian government and the regional government of Northern Tigray, leading to turmoil in the region. The conflict has left thousands of people dead with others in inhumane and deplorable conditions.

The conflict caused a massive humanitarian crisis whereby aid agencies have been unable to adequately respond to the crisis and deliver assistance. The international community quickly gained attention to the atrocities and human rights violations taking place on the Ethiopian territories. An estimated 4.5 million people, which is roughly two-thirds of Tigray's population, are currently in need of humanitarian aid. Violence against civilians has been widespread, with increasing reports of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the involved parties in the conflict. The conflict is still ongoing, and the situation continues to deteriorate, where the humanitarian conditions are extremely alarming.

The number of humanitarian agencies working in Tigray has increased in comparison to the first months of the conflict; yet, it is difficult to assess the situation of the conflict thus far and its consequences on the civilians, as relief agencies lack access to most rural areas.

The escalation of the conflict has pushed the Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue to raise the Tigray issue, and play a role in calling the international community to support and save the lives of the civilians and pressure the involved parties to implement a ceasefire. The paper focuses on the crisis of Tigray and the response of the international community, including states and humanitarian organizations.

The report is divided into four sections. The first section provides a summary on the contemporary conflict of Ethiopia's Tigray region. The second section reveals the main challenges faced by the Tigrayan population during the conflict, which is most evident in food insecurity, displacement and refuge, destruction of facilities, lack of humanitarian access, and violence. The third section identifies the response of the international community, including humanitarian organizations and regional actors, focusing on actors with most prominent role. The third section is subdivided; the first part tackles the role of humanitarian organizations in a broad manner, reveals their efforts in delivering assistance, and identifies the constraints placed on humanitarian agencies work. The second part

determines the positions and policies of neighboring countries namely, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, and Sudan, on the conflict of Tigray. The fourth section showcases the stances of both the United States and China on the conflict of Tigray, in particular, due to their active policy on the conflict.

### **Conflict Background**

The conflict started on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, when the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, ordered a military offensive to the regional forces in Tigray. The order came as a result of the central government accusation for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) attack on the Northern Command Headquarters, staffed by federal troops from the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF).

The conflict resulted after feuding months between Abiy Ahmed's government and leaders of Tigray's dominant political party. The rising resentment between the TPLF and the Prime Minister Abiy, prior to the conflict, was a result of Abiy Ahmed's implementation of a series of reforms that weakened the TPLF since he was inaugurated in 2018.

The Ethiopian government federal system is controlled by different ethnic groups who are responsible for the affairs of 10 regions. The TPLF played a dominant role in setting up the federal system. However, Abiy Ahmed's removal of key Tigrayan government leaders has led to increase of tension and criticism in Tigray, causing antagonism between the two parties. The Prime Minister's reforms were perceived by Tigray leaders as an attempt to centralize power and destroy Ethiopia's federal system.

The rift grew in September 2020, as Tigray defied the central government's election postponement decision, and held its own regional elections amid the restrictive measures of Covid-19, which led to the increase of tension and the central government's suspension of fund to the region and cut ties. The situation quickly escalated where both sides designated each other as "illegitimate", and the political crisis has erupted into war in November. Ethiopia has boosted its military forces by deploying militia fighters from Amhara, south of Tigray, along with the Eritrean troops fighting alongside the Ethiopian government forces.

The conflict is still ongoing, despite the vow placed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to end the conflict "soon" eight months ago. Recently, the Ethiopian federal government stripped the TPLF of its status as a legal party and in May, it labelled the group as a terrorist organization. Despite the Ethiopian government launching of a unilateral cease fire in June, the Tigrayan forces continued to launch new

offensive strikes in the northern region, and have managed to enter the capital, after the retreat of Ethiopian forces.

The Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers and belligerents in the conflict have completely dismantled the region's economy and food system, leaving the civilians to suffer the dire consequences of the ongoing conflict. The most severe and dire consequences of the conflict is evident in the food insecurity, displacement of people, destruction of facilities, and looming violence.

### **Conflict Implications**

The conflict has had horrific implications on the civilians of Tigray. International humanitarian organizations documented damage and destruction of homes, businesses, schools, places of worship, and hospitals. In addition to the mass atrocities committed by the involved parties in the conflict, including mass killings, rape, and destruction and looting of property, as reported by humanitarian agencies and United Nations officials. Tigray's population are being deliberately prevented from gaining access to essentials indispensable to their survival.

### **Food Insecurity**

The economy and the food system have been hardly hit by the hostilities and the consequent closure of banks, interruption of government resources transfers, and massive looting. These factors, combined with the impact of the covid-19 pandemic, and the low crop yields due to the armed conflict disruption of the harvest season in November 2020, have led to chronic vulnerability of the people.

The fighting disrupted the harvest season, and about 80 percent of people in Tigray has been affected as they rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. Reports reveal that farmers and food stocks have been deliberately targeted mainly by Eritrean forces. Forces have incinerated crops, looted farms and food stores, and killed livestock.

Additional reports reveal that Eritrean soldiers have also forbidden farmers from planting, and plowing their fields, all of which has exacerbated the current food crisis. The asset stripping, burning of crops, and looting have left Tigray people and households in hunger, and have reduced their ability to earn income or produce food.

In March 2021, The German television, ZDF, shared footage from Aksum, that revealed the military forces deliberate actions in starving the people of Tigray by asset stripping, burning of crops, looting

food essentials, taking truckloads of sugar, lentils, cooking oil, animal fodder, and flour from trading stores and killing cattle, and camels.

In most of Tigray, communities have been left without food. In January 2021, news agencies released leaked notes of an ECC meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January of an official from the interim administration of the central part of Tigray. The official said “food and non-food items or other livelihoods are either looted or destroyed. He also added, “if urgent emergency assistance is not mobilized hundreds of thousands might starve to death”. The increasing level of hunger is alarming, Emily Dakin, a top USAID official working on the ground in Tigray, said that “approximately 400,000 women and children suffering from malnutrition”. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report in May 2021, “nearly 11,000 children under the age of five were screened for acute malnutrition”.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), which is a humanitarian framework that uses five phase scale of severity to determine the food security status of geographic areas and populations and is also a system that releases warning about famine, has conducted analysis in Tigray and the neighboring zones of Amhara and Afar. The IPC has concluded that over 350,000 people are in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe) between May and June 2021, which is the highest number of people in IPC Phase 5 since the 2011 famine in Somalia. 350,000 people in phase 5 are suffering from famine conditions.

Despite the work of humanitarian agencies to deliver food, IPC reveals that as of May 2021, 5.5 million people, which is over 60 percent of the population, are facing high levels of acute food insecurity in these areas, with 3.1 million people are in IPC phase 3 (emergency) and 2.1 million people in IPC phase 4 (crisis).

The region is facing a catastrophic hunger emergency that sees no improvement. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, UN officials warned the Security Council that famine is affecting more than 400,000 people, and that another 1.8 million people were on the brink of famine. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) teams revealed in June that some villages in rural areas have “received only one or even no food distribution over the last seven months”. Additional concerns are rising as the rainy season is about to start, while fields have not been planted yet.

Tigray is facing the world’s worst hunger crisis since the Somalia famine in 2011. The Ethiopian federal forces, Amhara regional forces, and Eritrean troops’ coalition are deliberately committing starvation crimes on a large scale. Eritrean soldiers are accused for leaving the civilians in thirst and hunger, by

taking all food items, and burning plant crops. The UN humanitarian aid chief, Mark Lowcock, said in June that “Eritrean soldiers were deliberately starving Tigrayans and that “rape is being used to systematically terrorize and brutalize women and girls”.

## **Displacement and Refuge**

As the conflict rages, a growing refugee crisis is building. Hundreds are moving every day in search of safety, food, and humanitarian assistance. Of the rising grave concerns of the armed conflict implications is the displacement of the population, whereby nearly 2 million people have been displaced, and others seeking refuge.

Humanitarian agencies reported that primary and secondary schools in towns and cities across the entire region of Tigray became a center of displacement crisis, reaching hundreds of thousands. In March Oxfam revealed the poor living conditions of families in Tigray, with thousands crammed in small rooms in school or churches, which places additional risks on women and girls as these rooms and shelters lack gender segregation, which puts them of risk of sexual and gender based violence.

People of Tigray also face forcible evictions by military forces and belligerents. Recently, in western Tigray, tens of thousands of people have been forcefully evicted by Amhara militias.

The fighting prompted thousands of people to flee to safety and seek refuge, with Ethiopians crossing borders into Sudan, whereby more than 60,000 refugees have sought refuge in Sudan since the outbreak of the conflict. Most of the refugees in Sudan are living in reception areas, unused camps or with host communities, challenged with food shortage and lack of shelter items. The camps also lack adequate essential relief items and medical supplies. In June, MSF identified that Tigrayan refugees suffer from low hygiene services, and short supply of water in shelters. Medair (Swiss Non-governmental Organization) has also revealed the dire conditions of refugees in Sudanese camps, where they need shelter support, household items, and basic hygiene items. It also raises concerns to the urgent need to offer these items in the most rapid manner, as the rainy season is approaching and assistance will be further needed.

People fled towns and cities seeking humanitarian assistance and access to essential services indispensable for survival. The cross border movement and the internal displacement of the population will likely set to continue as a result of the ongoing conflict.

## **Destruction of Facilities and Lack Humanitarian Access**

Health facilities across Ethiopia's Tigray region have been deliberately looted, and destructed by military forces' operations, leading to the destruction of the health facilities in Tigray. Soldiers and troops' deliberate military operations have deflected harm not only on the agriculture of Tigray population and sources of food but have also rendered the health infrastructure, leaving most of the health facilities to be largely nonfunctional. According to MSF, "nearly 70% of health facilities in Ethiopia's conflict-hit northern region of Tigray have been vandalized and equipment looted".

In June, MSF mission in Tigray revealed that of 105 facilities assessed between mid-December and early march, 87 percent were no longer functioning. Humanitarian agencies reveal that only one facility in Tigray has the capability to provide full range of services for clinical management of rape survivors, while only 15 percent of hospitals and health centers are fully functioning. Additional reports also reveal that medical facilities have been occupied by armed groups.

The regional Health Bureau of Tigray and OCHA have confirmed that most hospitals either have been looted of their equipment and medications or have been bombed. The damage caused to the facilities leaves the region and its population with minimal access to healthcare and increases the risk of diseases.

International and national humanitarian agencies have reported severally their inability to provide humanitarian access since October 2020, due to the government severe restrictions. Despite that the UN and Ethiopia's Ministry of Peace agreed to establish aid access in December 2020, Ethiopian authorities continue to delay humanitarian supply and personnel clearances.

Aid access has been inconsistent, and in May the United Nations confirmed a CNN report that Ethiopian federal troops and allied forces were blocking humanitarian supplies from entering parts of Tigray, a charge the Ethiopian government has denied.

The war has caused stumbling blocks to the delivery of aid to the vulnerable communities, particularly in the rural areas, whereby UN officials' estimates reveal that only 20 percent of the region can be accessed by aid agencies and humanitarians due to government-imposed restrictions. UN also revealed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April that only 10 percent of the targeted population was reached by UN partners with shelter and non-food items.

In May, MSF was able to reach Adiftaw for the first time, where health post was found looted and destroyed. According to MSF, “Medical files, broken equipment and torn medicine packets were chaotically dispersed across the floors of every room; none of the beds had mattresses; and no medical staff was present”. Since November 2020, human rights organizations and humanitarian actors revealed that around 10,000 people living in and around Adiftaw have been unable either to see a doctor or be referred to a hospital.

In addition to MSF visit to Adiftaw, the joint OCHA, WFP and International Rescue Committee (IRC) that visited Zana Town in North-Western Zone revealed the dire humanitarian situation in the area. The area had food shortage, dysfunctional water system, lack of electricity and lack of health services. The town has also not yet been reached with basic provision of aid, including food. Most of the Central Zone, with a population of about 1.8 million people, remains largely inaccessible, the mission explains.

The destruction of facilities, lack of access to health care, and the inability of humanitarian agencies to reach all the vulnerable people created an environment of fear and exacerbated the health crisis.

## **Violence**

Increasing levels of violence against civilians in Tigray has been reported by humanitarian actors and agencies. Humanitarian agencies show persistent reports of human rights violations and abuses in Tigray. OCHR has held the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, Eritrean armed forces, and Amhara Regional Forces and affiliated militias responsible for the worst violations in the conflict and has named them as “culprits”.

Since November 2020, both government forces and allied forces have been charged of atrocities, including ethnic cleansing, and sexual violence. Reports reveal that hundreds’ of people have died in ethnically derived clashes in Amhara, Oromo, Afar, and Benishangul-Gumuz regions since the outbreak of the armed conflict.

Sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war in Ethiopia's Tigray, the U.N. aid chief told the Security Council on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April. More than 829 cases of sexual assault have been officially reported since the conflict began, while other reports estimate that the number of survivors of rape in Tigray has reached 10,000.

Reports continue to reveal horrific sexual violence by Ethiopian and allied Eritrean soldiers after fighting broke out in November; in March only, 500 rape cases have been reported by Tigray civilians. According to the top health official in Tigray's interim government, "Women are being kept in sexual slavery". In May 2021, more than 500 cases of gender-based violence, including rape, were officially reported.

Since the start of the conflict, women in Tigray reported many painful stories about being sexually assaulted, tortured, and raped by soldiers of the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies. Medical staff in humanitarian agencies reports the majority of cases to be women and girls who have been subjected to horrific sexual assault. Due to the rising number of sexually assault cases and rape, the Pramila Patten, U.N. special representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict, demanded on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April that the UN act at the highest level to apply Resolution 1325 to the crimes in Tigray, which calls for the warring parties to adopt special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.

The conflict has also resulted in killing thousands of people. Earlier this year, opposition parties in Tigray have said that death toll from the Tigray conflict reached at least 52,000. In February, humanitarian agencies revealed the war crimes committed by the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces during their military offensive on the town of Axum, whereby military forces have deliberately and systematically killed hundreds of civilians in cold blood, and recently, 50 dead Ethiopian bodies were found by Sudanese official authorities in Kassala province floating in the river on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August. Bodies were found with gunshot wounds and bounded hands.

Humanitarian aid workers have also reported being threatened by armed forces, often having their supplies and vehicles confiscated, and recently, three aid workers have been killed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July. The targeted violence and destruction of facilities by the central government military forces, militias, and allies have resulted in a massive humanitarian crisis with mass atrocities and war crimes. The escalation of the conflict and the widespread insecurity continue to worsen conditions.

### **International Community Response**

The crisis quickly gained international focus despite the Ethiopian government attempts to curb down the flow of information from Tigray. International humanitarian organizations along with a number of

states are currently scaling up their humanitarian assistance to Tigray; yet, additional assistance is needed.

## Humanitarian Organizations

Aid agencies and humanitarian organizations have been constrained in sending aid to the affected population due to the insecurity looming in the region. In the first month of the conflict, the UN and Ethiopia's Ministry of Peace agreed to establish aid access; however, Ethiopian authorities continued to delay humanitarian supply and personnel clearances. OCHA reveals that till the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, the flow of humanitarian supplies to the Tigray region remains blocked. In addition, humanitarians' access to vulnerable people is extremely restricted, whereby relief agencies are required to request approval from the federal government to gain access to the region.

Despite the introduction of the Ethiopian government of two separate approval processes for relief shipments and personnel, the process has been criticized for its slowness and many of the requests for relief shipments have been rejected. The UN office adds "humanitarian operations are constrained by the absence of fuel, banking services, telecommunications and electricity. Additional staff, supplies, and restoration of basic services are urgently needed for the continuity of humanitarian operations."

According to Core, a data programme developed by USAID, only a small number of organizations have been able to operate in the first months of the crisis. Compared with other severe crises, Tigray, in terms of the percentage of population, has the highest number of people in need, while having the lowest numbers of organizations responding.

The humanitarian assistance by aid agencies is unable to reach large parts of affected areas in Tigray. Till April 2021, only 22 organizations (including 10 INGOs, 3 national NGOs, 5 UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and two donor entities) were operational inside Tigray. The number of organizations working in the first 6 months of the conflict is considered to be relatively small in comparison to the populations' need and required assistance.

However, some organizations played and still have a pivotal and an important role in providing assistance to the people in need. In the first months, the Joint Emergency Operation for Food Assistance in Ethiopia (JEOP), consortium of INGOs led by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the National non-governmental organization of Relief Society of Tigray (REST) implemented food aid distributions in January, while the ICRC and other international NGOs have been able to provide some health care and essential services assistance.

Few months after the eruption of the conflict, the number of international organizations involved started to slowly gear up, reaching 32 NGOs in May, according to the data shared by OCHA. Yet, aid operations have remained largely limited to towns and main roads locations, while less aid reaching rural areas, where assistance is needed the most.

MSF mission in Tigray is working on both sides of the borders, to provide assistance to Tigrayn refugees in Sudanese camps and to the displaced and host communities within Tigray. It has also expanded its humanitarian activities and currently run regular mobile clinics in about 50 different locations. However, MSF explains the aid's failure to reach remote communities, where the impact of the crisis has been severe. According to MSF, many people have been unable to access healthcare and other basic services for the past six months.

In early January, United Nations High Commissioner for refugees (UNHCR), Sudan's Commission for Refugees (COR) and other partners have scaled up their humanitarian responses to meet the increasing needs of the Ethiopian refugee population. Humanitarian partners also in Sudanese camps increases their activities to assist and engage the refugee and host community with shelter, health, and food.

Several international non-governmental organizations such as Oxfam called for the effective application for ceasefire. Oxfam has also called for doing an air bridge with Tigray in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the famine hit the region. The UN has also called all parties involved in the conflict to ensure safe passage for the humanitarian workers and aid agencies to proceed with delivering supplies and their field work.

Relief agencies continue to deliver assistance to the most vulnerable. Recently on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, the first UN Humanitarian Air Service flight arrived in Mekelle. As of May 2021, there were 392 UN staff supporting the humanitarian response in Tigray. In addition, OCHA reveals that the numbers of NGO's have scaled up in Tirgay, with the total non-governmental organizations' (NGOs) staff in Tigray is approximately 1,850.

Despite the increase of humanitarian assistance, aid organizations continue to experience major challenges to access the region and deliver assistance. In July, OCHA identified that between 500 and 600 trucks with relief items are necessary every week in order to meet the populations needs; the last humanitarian convoy that entered Tigray only had 50 trucks. In addition, the Ethiopian government works toward halting and suspending the work of humanitarian agencies. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July, Ethiopian authorities have announced the suspension of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) all operations in

the country for three months, coupled with the suspension of Doctors without borders, a couple of days after.

The government blockage of assistance provided by international aid relief organizations will further increase the dire consequences in the region where access to aid was already limited.

### **Neighboring countries**

Since the eruption of the conflict in Tigray region, the neighboring countries of Ethiopia have raised their concerns about the volatile situation and of the possibility of conflict spillover, leading all concerned countries neighboring Ethiopia to call for the immediate end to all forms of military operations.

### **Eritrea**

After months of denial, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed confirmed in for the first time in March that troops from Eritrea entered Tigray region during the 8 months old conflict, after months of denials from both the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments.

Since the eruption of the conflict in November 2020, the Eritrean armed forces have been involved in military operations, supporting the Ethiopian federal army (ENDF) and the special forces of the Amhara region, in defiance of international calls for their withdrawal. Eritrea's involvement is driven by a set of reasons; to accelerate Ethiopia's internal strife, get rid of the TPLF, which was Eritrea's main enemy since the 1990's, and to recover Eritrean territories that were militarily occupied in 1998 war, known as Badme triangle. The Badme triangle was supposed to be handed over by Abiy Ahmed according to his agreement with Isaias Afwerki in 2018.

Eritrean troops have been accused for mass atrocities and war crimes, and killing hundreds of unarmed civilians, women, and children. Eritrean troops are conducting their military operations with total impunity and continues to block the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

### **Djibouti**

Djibouti was among the states that showed clear support for the Ethiopian government's operations in Tigray regional state. According to President Guelleh, "Ethiopia's prime minister has two options to choose from: one, he can negotiate with Tigray's government, with each party separate and on an

equal footing. This can only lead to the partition of Ethiopia, as it will set a precedent under which other regional groups will be able to assert their own secessionist claims. Two, he can restore law and order at the federal level, and punish those seeking to break up the country.”

Djibouti has also cooperated with the Ethiopian government in handing over the Ethiopian federal authority a number of figures from Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) as reported by state media, Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporate (EBC).

## **Somalia**

Like Djibouti, Somalia has also clearly supported the Ethiopian government in the Tigray’s conflict by taking hold in military operations. In June 2021, a new report by the United Nations human rights council has alleged that the Somali army fought in Tigray with Eritreans troops, despite the denials of the Federal Government of Somalia. The report reveals that the special rapporteur received information and reports that “Somali soldiers were moved from military training camps in Eritrea to the front line in Tigray, where they accompanied Eritrean troops as they crossed the Ethiopian border”. The Somalian government has later rejected the UN report and continues to stress on Somalia’s pursuit of the de-escalation of the conflict.

## **Sudan**

Having already tensed relations with Ethiopia due to the GERD dam controversy, Sudan expressed its concerns on the situation of Tigray. Sudan fears the transfer of the conflict to eastern Sudan, where it suffers from civil clashes that could reinforce internal divisions among Sudan's governing partners.

In the wake of escalating violence, the Lt. General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, the head of Sudan’s ruling Sovereign Council, has sent over 6,000 soldiers to the Ethiopian border, as part of an agreement between the two governments that Sudan would close the borders in order to prevent infiltration to and from Sudan by an armed party. Sudan closed its borders to prevent the infiltration of militias into the country, but has also opened borders to send aid and receive Ethiopians seeking refuge. However, following the disappearance of a Sudanese commander who was pursuing Ethiopian militias off on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, Sudan closed its border with Ethiopia.

The conflict has also spilled over the Sudan-Ethiopia border controversy on Al-fashaga area, where Sudan sees it as an opportunity to reclaim its territory.

The conflict had also created a challenge for Sudan as it has resulted into Ethiopians crossing borders. The fighting prompted thousands of people to flee to safety and seek refuge in Sudan. According to the United Nations Population Fund' May report, approximately 70,319 Ethiopian refugees have fled to Sudan and are camping in the eastern cities bordering Ethiopia.

Medair (Swiss NGO) reveal that more than 700 refugees arrive every day in Sudan since the conflict started. In order to accommodate their arrival and offer humanitarian assistance, the government of Sudan has established 5 refugee camps, Hamdayet, Village 8, and Wad Al Mahi (for new arrivals), and Um Raquba and Tunaydbah (for long term camps). Arrivals were victims of looting, forceful recruitment, sexual violence against women and girls.

### **Positions of International Powers**

International actors' policies have been restricted towards adopting a conservative approach to the conflict in Ethiopia, which has been reflected in repeated calls for the de-escalation of the conflict and the end of military operations in Tigray.

### **The United States**

The United States has a visible and a prominent role in the Tigray conflict, unlike many other international powers. US have repeatedly raised its concerns about the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region with special emphasis on the humanitarian crisis and human rights abuses. The US response to the conflict in the Tigray Region has been characterized by different distinct features: the first is related to US discourse on the conflict by issuing warnings and calling the Ethiopian government to allow full, safe and unhindered passage to humanitarian organizations. The US has also demanded the withdrawal of foreign forces.

US conducted several actions in align with its diplomatic efforts and political dialogue in resolving the conflict. In March 2021, the US sent a delegation to talk with top officials in Addis Ababa. On the 26th of May, 6 months of the ongoing conflict, President Joe Biden called on the parties to the conflict in Tigray to declare a ceasefire, "belligerents in the Tigray region should declare and adhere to a ceasefire, and Eritrean and Amhara forces should withdraw", he said. As the conflict continued, the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, has called the Ethiopian Prime Minister and stressed on the need "for all parties to commit to an immediate and indefinite ceasefire in the northern Tigray region".

The second feature of US policy toward Tigray is the US humanitarian stance by providing humanitarian assistance. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to lead the U.S. government's humanitarian response in Tigray, and in response to the growing and immense needs of the vulnerable population in Tigray, the US provided more than 149 million dollars in additional humanitarian assistance, making the US the largest single donor of humanitarian aid to Tigray, providing nearly \$637 million since the conflict began.

The third feature is implementing a firm approach by adopting sanctions against the Ethiopian government. US applied a set of sanctions on Ethiopia due to the increased reports on the atrocities committed in Ethiopia's Tigray region and the continued challenges facing aid organizations since the conflict erupted.

In May, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has described atrocities in the region as "ethnic cleansing," and the US senate has also passed a resolution condemning "all violence against civilians" in Tigray and calling for the withdrawal of troops from neighboring Eritrea, which joined the fight in support of Ethiopian forces. In the same month, the US imposed visa restriction policy to "any current or former Ethiopian or Eritrean government officials, members of the security forces, or other individuals -- to include Amhara regional and irregular forces and members of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) -- responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in Tigray."

## China

Unlike USA, China adopted a more muted approach, as interests intersect due to the strong economic ties between Ethiopia and China, as China is considered to be Ethiopia's primary economic partner. China opted to remain silent on the human rights violations and war crimes. China had rather supported the unilateral ceasefire adopted by the Ethiopian government and called for resolving the conflict through diplomatic efforts. China has also sent food aid as a part of its humanitarian assistance.

Dai Bing, Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, has clearly clarified China's policy and position on the conflict, by remaining an uninvolved party. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, Dai Bing said "Tigray issue is an internal affair of Ethiopia, and we believe in the wisdom and ability of the Ethiopian people to find a proper solution. The international community, while helping solve the Tigray issue, must fully respect the sovereignty and ownership of Ethiopia, as the purpose of such assistance is to work together to help the country overcome difficulties and maintain peace and stability both in Ethiopia and in the region". It is also in the interest of China for the conflict to ease, as the conflict has negatively impacted Chinese economic interests causing economic losses.

## Conclusion

The outbreak of the armed conflict is worsening the humanitarian situation in Tigray. The civilians are suffering the dire implications of the conflict that shows no signs of abating. 8 months after the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray, hostilities involving multiple parties including the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) and other foreign belligerents and militias continue to exacerbate the humanitarian needs of the civilians. The volatile and insecure conditions has negatively rendered the populations ability to access humanitarian aid and health services.

The conflict has resulted in famine, displacement, violence and mass atrocities. Civilians are suffering from emergency levels of food insecurity, with some areas lacking food essentials. The disruption of the harvest season, deliberate killings of camels and cattle, looting and burning of all food supplies by military forces have contributed to the starvation of the Tigrayan population.

The escalation of the conflict has also resulted in a refugee and displacement crisis, whereby hundreds of Ethiopians are crossing borders in search of safety, food, and humanitarian assistance, while many others making schools and destructed facilities their shelters .

People in Tigray are suffering from sexual violence, ethnic cleansing, and rape on a large scale, with the Ethiopian government turning a blind eye to such violations. In addition, the lack of access to health care has created an environment of fear and has exacerbated the health crisis. Humanitarian organizations also faces a set of challenges in delivering aid and assisting the most vulnerable, as the government alongside other military forces and militias continue to deliberately prevent and block humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian agencies have put in and exerted huge effort in delivering assistance and helping the most vulnerable despite the constraints placed by the government.

Given the central position of Ethiopia in the horn Africa, the Tigray' conflict held a set of repercussions on neighboring countries. Since the outbreak of the conflict, neighboring countries have feared the spillover of the conflict into their border or the possibility of militia's infiltration. Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia, have supported the federal government operations by sending military forces and militias. On the other hand, Sudan adopted a more neutral diplomatic approach by only offering humanitarian assistance to the people seeking refuge and protecting its own borders.

On an international level, the United States, unlike many other international powers, had a visible and a prominent role in the Tigray conflict, and is considered to be the most important country playing an

influential role in the conflict by offering assistance and taking a firm approach, while China have aligned with its interests and supported Ethiopia.

Yet, the role played by the aid agencies and the international community remains inadequate in resolving the conflict, by having a limited value. The alarming and raising concerns of the situation in Tigray needs a more strengthened and firm approach to be adopted by the international community. Thus, Preventing the ongoing mass killings, rape, deliberate hunger, killings and looting and responding to these grave human suffering in Tigray will require a concerted effort at all levels. The international community must implement effective and rapid response to save the people and support aid agencies to access inaccessible areas. Immediate mediation on a local, regional, and international level is needed to avert the catastrophic situation, to halt the fighting and save millions of lives.