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Bureau of African Affairs  
U.S Department of State

Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Hearing: “Ethiopia in Crisis: U.S. Strategy and Policy Response”  
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about Ethiopia – a country with a rich history but that today is wracked by inter-communal violence that threatens to undermine its national unity and destabilize the Horn of Africa. The United States is committed to building an enduring partnership with the Ethiopian people, and that only adds to the grave concern we all share about the crisis in the country, particularly in Tigray.

The violence in Tigray is horrifying. It shocks the conscience. Since the conflict began in November, thousands have died with thousands more injured. We estimate there are approximately two million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 63,000 refugees, and 5.2 million people in urgent need of assistance. The United States condemns in the strongest terms the brutal killings, sexual violence including gang rape, forced removals, and the wanton destruction of civilian property. We condemn all the human rights violations, abuses, and atrocities that have taken place in Tigray.

The atrocities have been committed by all the armed actors, including the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), Amharan regional forces, the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). In western Tigray, security forces belonging to the Amhara regional government are forcing ethnic Tigrayans from their homes in what Secretary Blinken has described as acts of ethnic cleansing. The Eritrean Defense Forces are undertaking a campaign of unremitting violence and destruction that amounts to the collective punishment of the people of Tigray. The violence, abuses, and atrocities are unacceptable. They must stop now.

Despite statements by the Ethiopian government that the conflict is over, the security situation has worsened in recent weeks, exacerbating the dire humanitarian crisis, and hindering an already difficult response. U.S. and UN analysis shows the continuing conflict has resulted in a situation close to famine. There are confirmed

reports of Tigrayans dying from malnutrition and starvation. Increased fighting, checkpoints, lawlessness, and harassment by the warring parties are blocking humanitarians' movements – and putting them at physical risk -- throughout Tigray. The killings of a USAID partner staff member and seven other humanitarian workers are tragic and we condemn them.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the U.S. government has worked with international partners to end it. We seek an immediate ceasefire; full and unhindered humanitarian access; protection of civilians; the withdrawal of Eritrean forces and Amhara regional forces; a political settlement of the crisis; and an independent, international investigation of human rights violations and abuses, and atrocities; and accountability for those responsible.

The Administration is using every available tool to alleviate suffering and end the conflict. We have coordinated with like-minded partners, regional governments, the African Union, and a wide range of other organizations and individuals. We have pressed the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council to put the situation in Ethiopia on their agendas and to act to end the crisis. And we have engaged directly with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments at the highest levels, pressing them to end the hostilities and to follow through on commitments for the withdrawal of Eritrean forces, as well as to protect civilians, and ensure unhindered humanitarian access. Multiple calls from the Secretary of State to Prime Minister Abiy and Senator Coons' travel to Ethiopia on behalf of President Biden resulted in some modest progress, but it is far from sufficient. Following his appointment, Special Envoy Feltman took a two-week trip to the region earlier this month in an intensive effort to find a durable solution to the crisis. He will return to the region next week.

While diplomatic efforts have been underway, the Administration has also taken stronger steps. In light of the human rights situation, we have restricted our foreign assistance to Ethiopia. We will, however, continue humanitarian assistance and other critical programs in health, food security, democracy, and human rights. We are withholding support for new lending from Multilateral Development Banks that does not address basic human needs and are asking our allies to do likewise. The Secretary of State has also taken steps to impose visa restrictions on Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials, Amhara regional and irregular forces, and members of the TPLF who are impeding resolution of the crisis, blocking humanitarian assistance, or committing atrocities. Should those stoking the conflict fail to reverse course, Ethiopia and Eritrea should anticipate further actions. It cannot be “business-as-usual” in the face of the violence and atrocities in Tigray.

Tragically, while Tigray is the worst of the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia it is only one of them. From attacks on ethnic Amharans and Gumuz in Benishangul Gumuz and ethnic Oromo and Amharans in Oromia to violence between people in the Afar and Somali regions to the multiple conflicts unfolding in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region, Ethiopia is at a turning point. The government's response of mass arrests, media restrictions, human rights violations, and declining political space is fueling inter-communal rivalry and imperiling the national elections now scheduled for June 21. Widespread insecurity, mass displacement, and logistical challenges raise serious questions about these elections and the United States has made the decision not to deploy observers to monitor them. We urge the Ethiopian government to begin an inclusive dialogue of reconciliation to end the deep-rooted conflicts and find a shared, democratic path forward. The United States is prepared to support such a dialogue.

Finally, there are the ongoing challenges around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the al-Fashaga border area between Sudan and Ethiopia. On the GERD, the United States believes Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan's concerns over water security can best be addressed through serious negotiations among the parties under the leadership of the African Union. Both problems pose risks to regional peace and security and the U.S. government is working hard with partners to help resolve them.

As I said at the beginning, the United States is committed to a partnership with the Ethiopian people, the country's national unity, and stability in the Horn of Africa. But, Mr. Chairman, Members, alarm bells are ringing in Ethiopia. The risk of protracted and wider conflict is growing and the time for action to prevent it is now. In that regard, I want to thank Congress for the strong resolutions and statements that have been issued. They are important and they help. The State Department will continue to work closely with you to address the crises in Ethiopia. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.