

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 29, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520-0099

Dear Secretary Rubio,

I write to inform you of a dire humanitarian food pipeline break that will take place in Ethiopia in the coming months. Due to funding cuts and the restructuring of U.S. food assistance programs over the past year, particularly the transfer of Food for Peace to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), key programs for life saving food assistance funded by the Department of State and previously funded by USAID will come to an end in June 2026. Without the necessary funding and commodity procurement, a humanitarian catastrophe for up to 3.1 million acutely food insecure people is anticipated, including over a million internally displaced in Ethiopia.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been the primary implementer of the Joint Emergency Operation (JEOP) that serves internally displaced people and others in Ethiopia's Tigray, Amhara, Afar, and other regions where food insecurity is the highest. During the armed conflict between Ethiopia's Federal Government and the northern regional state of Tigray, CRS was funded by USAID to provide acutely food insecure people in Northern Ethiopia, including IDPs who fled what the State Department determined to be ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray. As result of U.S. funding cuts, however, neither commodities nor market-based food assistance will be available to support the acute needs of Ethiopia's most food insecure people once the JEOP program ends this summer. The break in food assistance will coincide with the lean and rainy seasons of June, July, August and September when the number of food insecure people will double and heavy rain will make it extremely difficult to transport aid.

I agree that the U.S. should not provide emergency assistance to IDPs indefinitely. However, after U.S. diplomats brokered the COHA to stop the war, the United States has not provided the resources or sufficient diplomatic energy to facilitate the implementation of the agreement. Among the key provisions of the COHA are the withdrawal of Eritrean and Amhara forces from Tigray, and the Ethiopian government facilitating the return of IDPs from Western Tigray to their homes. Sustained diplomatic pressure on Prime Minister Abiy to ensure safe repatriation has been lacking, leaving IDPs in limbo as humanitarian resources dry up. In the absence of COHA implementation, both sides are moving closer to another armed confrontation, which would be a humanitarian and regional calamity.

I respectfully urge you to provide the JEOP with funding for market-based assistance for IDPs in Northern Ethiopia for the upcoming lean season to avert a catastrophic humanitarian disaster in Tigray. I further urge that the State Department reassert the U.S. commitment to the COHA and instruct the Africa Bureau to use all diplomatic tools to work toward a de-escalation of tensions between Tigray and the Federal government to implement the COHA.

I look forward to your prompt and timely response to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeanne Shaheen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath it.

Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on
Foreign Relations