



Briefing Note on the Latest Developments in the Tigray Region

2 MARCH 2021

I. INTRODUCTION¹

1. It is becoming all the more clear that pressure is building up against Ethiopia in the diplomatic front. In Geneva, the EU Member States mobilizing additional countries from Asia, including Japan and the Republic of Korea had delivered a joint statement to exert maximum pressure against Ethiopia during the ongoing 46th regular session of the United Nations Human Rights.
2. On the other hand, the Americans have issued a strong statement clearly indicating their intention to act against Ethiopia. They went also overboard in making unnecessary pronouncements on Ethiopia's internal affairs. They have made the situation in Tigray one of their priorities during their UNSC Presidency this month and they lobbied members of the Council in general and the A3 in particular to garner the necessary support for their planned course of action.
3. It should be absolutely clear that the coming few days are going to be extremely critical to forestall any action against Ethiopia and ease the

¹ *This is an internal document which is not meant for circulation.*

diplomatic pressure. This is easier said than done and it requires enormous mobilization both at the headquarters and in the Ethiopian Embassies abroad. It should be clearly understood that the challenge at hand will not be managed with the prevailing business as usual approach. Time is not on our side and we need to be engaged with the sense of urgency that the situation demands.

II. RECENT POLICY SHIFTS

4. The two major requests of the international community to the Ethiopian government have been to provide unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and allow independent investigation into the alleged human rights violations and crimes committed in the Tigray region.
5. In this connection, it is absolutely important to explain and clarify the two major policy decisions taken by the Ethiopian government recently. *With the significant improvement in the security situation in the region, the government has now allowed unfettered access to humanitarian actors.* It has also put in place an expedited clearance system to remove the

bureaucratic hurdles in securing the necessary permits to operate in the region.

6. It is unfortunate that many development partners continue to lament about the dire humanitarian situation in the region, in spite of the progress made in delivering humanitarian assistance to more than 3 million people. What is even more puzzling is that they are not responding to the appeal to contribute resources to help scale up the ongoing relief operations. The Ethiopian government is so far covering 70% of the assistance from its resources, while the remaining 30% is shared by development partners and NGOs. This should be made emphatically clear to all.
7. On the other hand, the Ethiopian government has also made its position unequivocally clear concerning human rights abuses and crimes allegedly committed in the Tigray region. That is why it expressed full commitment to undertake thorough investigations to get to the bottom of the issue and bring perpetrators to justice. In this regard, *the government not only welcomed the support of international human rights experts but also signaled the possibility of*

collaboration on joint investigations with the relevant human rights bodies.

III. CHALLENGES OVER THE COMING DAYS

8. A number of upcoming events are happening one after the other, which could be leveraged by the international community to exert maximum pressure against Ethiopia.
9. Kenya assumes the Chairmanship of the African Union Peace and Security Council this month. It will start its work on 4 March 2021, with a discussion on the role of the African three (A3) members of the UNSC and how the PSC's position could be adequately reflected in the decision making of the UNSC on African peace and security issues. In light of the latest dynamics in the UNSC, A3 members could raise the situation in Tigray and how to go about it in the upcoming UNSC open Debate (See below).
10. Kenya is also planning to convene a High-Level PSC Summit on 9 March 2021, which will be dedicated to a discussion on sustainable peace in Africa. Although the meeting will focus on

climate change and its impact on peace and security in the continent and follow up on the decision of 14th AU Extraordinary summit on the western Sahara issue, its broad theme could potentially allow the Council to pronounce itself on the situation in the Tigray region. This is possibly the reason for the high-level engagement by the US with Kenya and the DRC.

11. The outcome of the AUPSC meeting could then feed into the planned High-Level Open Debate in the United Nations Security Council on 11 March 2021 under the US Presidency. This will be a thematic discussion on conflict and hunger based on resolution 2417 (2018)², which deals with the link between armed conflict and food insecurity.
12. The resolution, among others, strongly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access. The US is trying to use this as an entry point to discuss the situation in the Tigray region.

² https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2417.pdf

13. It is to be recalled that the UNSC has been holding informal discussions on the situation in the Tigray region under “Any Other Business” and in the monthly UNSC lunch with the Secretary-General. This month, for the first time, the issue will be taken up in the formal session of the Council in the context of a broader thematic discussion on conflict and hunger together with other crisis situations like Yemen.
14. As highlighted in the Security Council Report monthly forecast³, *“Council members may apply ideas raised at the debate to their consideration of country-specific situations. Members could call for invoking resolution 2417 to respond to warnings about the growing hunger crisis and challenges to humanitarian access in Ethiopia’s Tigray region.”*
15. The report explains that elected members have been playing an important role in advancing the discussion on conflict induced hunger. Currently, Niger and Ireland are the ones chairing members’ briefings on food security in countries in conflict. Furthermore, it indicates

³ https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/2021_03_forecast.pdf

that there was indeed an informal meeting of like-minded Council members last month under the UK Presidency.

16. However, the report also points out that any move by the Council to invoke resolution 2417 may not likely receive the support of important members like Russia, which opposes the consideration of conflict and hunger by the Council as a thematic item. Its argument is that “multiple factors contribute to hunger crises in conflict-affected countries and that the Council is not the appropriate mechanism to deal with the problem”.
17. In the meantime, ahead of this UNSC Open Debate, six members of the Council, namely, Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, United Kingdom and United States have once again requested for an informal discussion on the situation in the Tigray region under Any Other Business on Thursday, 4 March 2021. Like previous discussions, the Head of UN OCHA, Mr. Mark Lowcock could possibly brief the Council on the latest developments in terms of the humanitarian situation in the region. He was said to be in the White House this past weekend

to discuss the matter. He has been overly critical of the situation in the region and his briefing will likely influence the views of most if not all UNSC members. His Deputy Director for Eastern and Southern Africa was already on the ground recently to assess the situation. She travelled to most of the main cities in the region to observe the ongoing relief efforts.

18. On the other hand, the 46th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council is underway in Geneva. The situation in Tigray was raised under item 2 of the Agenda of the Council when the High Commissioner for Human Rights presented her report. It will likely be raised again on 11 March 2021, when the Council considers item 4 of its agenda on human rights situation that require the Council's attention. Eritrea will be considered under this agenda item and this will be another opportunity for the European members and others to hammer their points.
19. Furthermore, the EU Council will adopt its conclusion following its meeting on 22 February 2021. It is to be recalled that the Council, among others, discussed the situation in the Tigray region following a debriefing by the Finnish

Foreign Minister Pekka Havvisto who visited Ethiopia as the EU Special Envoy.

VI. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

20. In light of the above, there is a need to actively engage diplomatically over the coming days with particular focus in Europe and America as well as in the capitals of UNSC members. Embassies and missions are expected to be impactful in their diplomatic engagements. They should do everything possible to demarche the appropriate officials in their host countries, possibly at the highest level, to explain the progress made in the relief efforts and the new policy departures in terms of unfettered access and joint investigation into alleged human rights abuses to garner the necessary support.
21. This needs to be done in the coming two to three days given the urgency of the matter. Embassies and Missions are required to submit daily reports of their engagements, focusing not on what they delivered as a message to the officials in the respective host countries, which are obvious and their job to do, but on what feedback and reactions they got out of these encounters.

They should also include in their daily submissions to HQs their own views and analysis on trends and directions that their host countries might decide to take in the coming days regarding the issue at hand.