



BRIEFING NOTE ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TIGRAY REGION



1 APRIL 2021

I. INTRODUCTION

- Important steps taken by the Ethiopian government in relation to the situation in the Tigray region are being noticed.
- The introduction of the notification system has allowed greater humanitarian access to the region facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- Media representatives are also allowed to visit and do their work.
- In relation to human rights abuses and crimes allegedly committed in the region, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have agreed to conduct a joint investigation into the human rights violations allegedly committed in the Tigray region for an initial period of three months.
- There is also intense campaign against the conduct of joint investigation agreed between EHRC and OHCHR.
- Following the visit of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to Asmara and the discussions with President Isaias Afwerki, the government of Eritrea has agreed to withdraw its forces out of the Ethiopian border. This was welcomed by bilateral and multilateral partners.

- What the Spokesperson of the Ministry, Ambassador Dina Mufti, has spoken in his recent weekly briefing to the media in relation to Eritrea is his personal view; notwithstanding the extreme overreaction by our Eritrean partners to the innocuous comments made by the Ambassador, it does not represent the position of the Ethiopian government. He has already apologized for the confusion caused because of his remarks.
- Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister H.E. Demeke Mekonnen has also offered his apology to the people and government of Eritrea, and this should suffice. Any more attempt to dwell on the Spokesman's mishap to appease the Eritrean diaspora and foreign missions will project weakness in a regional context. There is no need to blow it out of proportion.

TALKING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Explain the improvement of the security situation on the ground.
- ✓ Most areas of the region are now accessible and the government together with partners has been able to reach out to more than 4.2 million people.

- ✓ A notification process has been put in place to allow humanitarian actors to travel to the region and operate without much difficulty.
- ✓ Accordingly, Humanitarian partners, diplomats and others are now travelling to the region without going through the clearance system.
- ✓ UN agencies operating on the ground have confirmed the improved access. International partners operating on the ground have already attested to the important progress being made in this regard.
- Mention that the government organized a trip for Addis Ababa based Embassies to visit the region to be briefed by the regional interim administration. The Embassies are also conducting visits to the region independently to assess the situation on the ground and talk to the regional interim administration and other relevant stakeholders.
- Indicate that the issue of visa and communication equipment that partners raise is being duly considered by the relevant agencies and will be addressed in due course.

II. THE DYNAMICS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

- Following the visit of Senator Chris Coons, the approach by Washington, D.C. appears to be to wait

and see the commitments made during the discussion with Prime Minister Abiy translated into concrete action. The briefing by the Prime Minister to the House of People's Representatives as well as the outcome of his visit to Asmara were very much welcomed in this regard.

- This noted, what will happen over the coming days will continue to depend on the evolving situation on the ground. It is important to understand the issue of possible action by Washington, D.C. is still in the cards, even though things have somewhat cooled down following the visit of Senator Coons.
- The Senate resolution adopted on 24 March 2021, is also indicative of what would likely come in the form of a draft security council resolution if decision were to be made to push for possible action. The Senate resolution, among others, urged the Secretary of State and other US Departments and Agencies to maintain close coordination with international allies and multilateral organizations regarding efforts to address the conflict in the Tigray Region and bring attention to the conflict in international fora, including the United Nations Security Council.
- Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken held a virtual meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres this week to discuss U.S. priorities at the United Nations. According to his Spokesperson, he

discussed, among others, “efforts in Ethiopia to secure greater humanitarian access across the country, the necessity for Eritrean forces to withdraw from Tigray, and the need for independent, international investigations into human rights abuses, noting the recent travel of Senator Christopher Coons as President Biden’s emissary”.

- It is also important to note that there is push for another resolution on Ethiopia to be adopted by the House. The text was introduced by Congresswoman Karen Bass who serves in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and Chairs the Sub Committee on Africa, Global Health, and Global Human Rights. The text calls on the United States Government to consider application of existing United States sanctions authority, including as provided for in the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.

WAY FORWARD

- It is important to understand the issue of possible action by Washington, D.C. is still in the cards, even though things have somewhat cooled down following the visit of Senator Coons.

- All efforts must be made to use every means to stop another resolution on Ethiopia to be adopted by the House.
- Accordingly, the Embassy in Washington, D.C. and the Permanent Mission in New York and the Consulates in Los Angeles and Minneapolis in close coordination with the Diaspora Networks should explain the significant progress made recently to allay some of the concerns raised in the Senate Resolution based on the Explanatory Memorandum sent this week.
- It is also absolutely critical to do the same in trying to water down the text introduced in the House and make sure that it reflects the significant progresses made recently.

III. THE DYNAMICS IN BRUSSELS

- The EU Foreign Affairs Council held its meeting on 22 March 2021 and decided to impose restrictive measures on eleven individuals and four entities, which it says were responsible for serious human rights violations and abuses in China, North Korea, Libya, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Russia.
- Even though Ethiopia was not on the agenda of the Council's meeting, the High Representative Josep Borell is said to have briefed ministers about

the situation in Ethiopia and reports of alleged human rights violations in the country. Mr. Borell said the EU will continue to increase pressure for humanitarian access to be allowed, independent investigations on human rights abuses to be launched, and Eritrean troops to be withdrawn.

- Particularly, the High Representative stressed that the EU stands ready to activate all its foreign policy tools against those responsible for human rights violations. He also indicated that he has mandated the Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto to go back to the region for a second mission.
- Although the High Representative has been very vocal about the situation in the Tigray region, it is also important to note that the High Representative is responsible for the conduct of EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy as stipulated in Article 18 of the Lisbon Treaty. He is the one who presides over the Foreign Affairs Council and represents the Union for matters relating to the common foreign and security policy, conduct political dialogue with third parties on the Union's behalf and expresses the Union's position in international organizations and at international conferences.

WAY FORWARD

- Continued engagement with the High Representative and the Office he leads - the European External Action Service - remains absolutely critical.
- Explain the progress that has been made since the last visit of the EU Special Envoy Pekka Haavisto is key.
- Intensify efforts not only in Brussels but also in the other European capitals in a coordinated manner to actively engage with influential European members of Parliament to explain our case.

IV. GREATER COORDINATION BETWEEN WASHINGTON, D.C., AND BRUSSELS

- It is important to note that there has been enhanced coordination between the new US Administration and the EU on the situation in the Tigray region. Both Washington, D.C., and Brussels have been trying to make sure that they convey the same message to Addis Ababa. Perhaps, the only major difference is in relation to the call by the US for the withdrawal of the Amhara Special Forces, which the EU believes is an internal matter.
- During his recent visit to Brussels for the NATO Ministerial, Secretary Blinken met with EU High Representative Josep Borell and discussed a wide

range of issues, including Ethiopia. According to the Press statement following their meeting, the two shared utmost concerns about the humanitarian tragedy and the human rights violations in Tigray and requested unhindered humanitarian access, cessation of hostilities, an investigation of human rights violations, and an immediate withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopian territory. They also said they will continue their close cooperation and coordination and encourage both Sudan and Ethiopia to look for solutions to their differences through peaceful means.

- Other recent indication of close coordination between the US and the EU is the unilateral sanctions they imposed recently on China, Russia, and others. It is important to note that the EU adopted in December last year a decision and a regulation establishing a global human rights sanctions regime. This is similar to the US 2016 Global Magnitsky Act, which has been used to sanction more than 100 “human rights violators” from a wide range of countries.
- The aim of the EU human rights sanctions regime is also said to be to equip the EU with “a framework that will allow it to target individuals, entities and bodies – including state and non-state actors – responsible for, involved in or associated with

serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide, no matter where they occurred”.

- Even though things seem to have relatively cooled down a bit lately, both the US and EU could possibly activate these sanctions mechanisms if they eventually conclude there is no sufficient progress in terms of some of the issues, they have been raising in relation to the situation in the Tigray region. What is stated in the draft resolution introduced in the House calling for the invocation of the Magnitsky Act should be a cause for serious concern.
- In fact, Representatives Gregory W. Meeks and Michael McCaul, Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, sent a bipartisan letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 30 March 2021, urging “the Administration to utilize all available tools, including Global Magnitsky authorities and other targeted sanctions, to hold parties accountable for their actions and bring an end to this crisis”

WAY FORWARD

- What High Representative Josep Borell said in terms of the EU’s readiness to activate all its foreign policy tools against those responsible for human rights violations should be taken seriously and efforts should be made to stop the activation.

- A greater coordination between and among our Embassies and Missions in Europe and America should be established to make every possible effort to explain the important steps taken on the ground to respond to the concerns raised by the US and the EU. Time is of the essence.
- Efforts should be made over the coming days in Europe and America to effectively mobilize the diaspora networks. It is through these network that members of the US Congress as well as members of Parliament in individual European countries and members of the European Parliament can be effectively engaged.
- It is important that Embassies and Missions provide the necessary guidance in close coordination with the HQs to these networks.
- It is important to make sure that members of the Diaspora are not hamstrung by parochial interests and unite themselves in pushing the common agenda.

