

April 29, 2021

Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman
U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa
United States Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Ambassador Feltman:

Congratulations on your appointment as U.S. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa. It is a critically important region faced with many complex challenges. We trust that your experience and leadership will enable the United States to respond in a strategic, coordinated manner.

We write to share our perspective on the ongoing, interconnected crises in Ethiopia, which we hope you will take into consideration as you prepare to travel to the region. We are all deeply disturbed by the humanitarian and human rights consequences of the conflict occurring in the Tigray region since early November 2020. In addition to the estimated 1.7 million internally displaced,¹ 62,000 forced to flee as refugees, and 4.5 million in need of urgent food aid,² numerous credible reports have emerged of serious human rights abuses committed by security forces against civilians, including the widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence.³ We encourage you to use all diplomatic tools available to ensure that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed fulfills his commitments to provide unfettered humanitarian access to the region, to secure the withdrawal of Eritrean and non-state troops from Tigray, to allow independent investigations into human rights violations, and to hold perpetrators accountable. These immediate steps are critically needed to curb the growing threat of famine and to stop systemic human rights abuses against civilians throughout the region.

At the same time, we are also very concerned about the increase of ethnic violence in other parts of Ethiopia. For example, in December 2020, in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, at least 200 Amhara, Oromo, Shinasa, Agaw, and other ethnic minorities were killed by assailants.⁴ Similar attacks have since taken place in the Oromia region, as well.⁵ It is estimated

¹ Besheer, M. (2021, April 15). UN: Hunger, Rape Rising in Ethiopia's Tigray. *Voice of America*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/ethiopia-tigray/un-hunger-rape-rising-ethiopia-tigray>

² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2021, April 27). Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update. Retrieved from <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia/>

³ Clark, H., & Kyte, R. (2021, April 27). In Tigray, Sexual Violence Has Become a Weapon of War. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/27/in-tigray-sexual-violence-has-become-a-weapon-of-war/>

⁴ Armed group takes control of county in western Ethiopia - rights commission. (2021, April 22). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-rights-commission-said-armed-group-has-taken-control-county-2021-04-21/>

⁵ Amnesty International (2020, November 2). Armed group attacked village killing ethnic Amharas, destroying homes. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/ethiopia-over-50-ethnic-amhara-killed-in-attack-on-village-by-armed-group/>

that clashes in March and April 2021 in the North Shewa Zone and Oromia Special Zone of the Amhara region, which prompted the Ethiopian government to declare a local state of emergency,⁶ left upwards of 400 people dead.⁷ And on April 22, 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported that the Sedal Woreda (county), which is home to about 25,000 people and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, was “under near full control” of a non-state armed group.⁸

This spate of violence has devastated communities. In addition to the displacement in Tigray, more than 655,000 Ethiopians in other parts of the country have been displaced by violence in 2021 alone.⁹ The Ethiopian government has left the victims of these attacks without sufficient support, protection, or justice, triggering mass protests across the Amhara region.¹⁰ We must be unequivocal in stating that violence against civilians anywhere, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or politics, is a threat to Ethiopians everywhere and will not go unanswered.

The destabilizing potential of these trends should not be underestimated, especially in light of the national elections planned for June 5, 2021. These planned elections are not currently on track to meet international standards for freedom, fairness, and transparency. Already, several opposition political parties in Ethiopia have announced plans to abstain from the elections¹¹ due to a lack of faith that they will be conducted credibly.¹² This fear is based in part on the government’s detention of thousands of opposition leaders and supporters, some of whom have been deprived of due process, tortured, or even summarily executed, according to Amnesty International’s May 2020 Report.¹³ We worry that, if elections move forward without the reforms required to earn the trust of the Ethiopian public, growing ethnic and political tensions across the country will boil over into even greater violence.

For these reasons, in addition to your advocacy surrounding the Tigray conflict, we urge you to advocate for peace, reconciliation, and tolerance throughout Ethiopia. In the immediate term, this means pushing Ethiopia’s leaders to curtail violence against civilians by state and non-

⁶ Amid violence, Ethiopia declares state of emergency in Amhara. (2021, April 19). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/19/ethiopia-declares-state-of-emergency-in-amhara-amid-violence>

⁷ Scores Killed In Ethiopia Ethnic Strife: Official. (2021, April 23). *Barron's*. Retrieved from <https://www.barrons.com/news/scores-killed-in-ethiopia-ethnic-strife-official-01619164214?refsec=afp-news>

⁸ Armed group takes control of county in western Ethiopia - rights commission. (2021, April 22). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-rights-commission-said-armed-group-has-taken-control-county-2021-04-21/>

⁹ International Displacement Monitoring Center: Ethiopia. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/ethiopia>

¹⁰ Protests Happening in Multiple Cities in Amhara Region Denouncing Reports of Targeted Attacks Against Amhara Community. (2021, April 20). *Addis Standard*. Retrieved from <https://addisstandard.com/news-protests-happening-in-multiple-cities-in-amhara-region-denouncing-reports-of-targeted-attacks-against-amhara-community/>

¹¹ OFC, OLF Call for Dialogue, National Consensus before Elections; OLA Calls for Ceasefire and Preconditioned National Dialogue. (2021, April 29). *Addis Standard*. Retrieved from <https://addisstandard.com/news-ofc-olf-call-for-dialogue-national-consensus-before-elections-ola-calls-for-ceasefire-and-preconditioned-national-dialogue/>

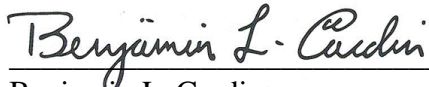
¹² ONLFOfficial. (2021, April 19). #ONLF, #FEP and EZEME #Somali Sections and representatives of independent candidates joint statement regarding suspending election activities in the #Somalystate until a credible election process is put in place. [Tweet]. <https://twitter.com/ONLFOfficial/status/1384037920462446595>

¹³ *Ethiopia: "Beyond Law Enforcement," Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia* (Publication). (2020, May 29). Retrieved <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/2358/2020/en/>

state actors throughout the country and to lay the groundwork for truly democratic elections. Over the longer term, we hope that you will support the independent investigation of human rights abuses committed in Oromia, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Tigray, and other regions, with full accountability for those found responsible. We also encourage you to promote a process of national dialogue that brings together all of the country's ethnic and political groups to chart a more stable, harmonious, and inclusive future for Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has long been an important partner to the United States and plays a significant role in the broader East Africa region. It is in the interests of Ethiopia, the U.S., and the international community to resolve the major challenges afflicting Ethiopia today. Simultaneously, we must encourage peaceful, negotiated solutions to points of rising tension between Ethiopia and its neighbors, such as the operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. No one of these challenges can be addressed in isolation; we need holistic strategies that reflect the interwoven nature of these crises. We stand ready to help you develop and execute those strategies, and look forward to working with you to advance human rights, democracy, and prosperity in Ethiopia and the entire Horn of Africa.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



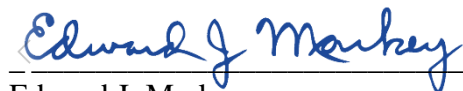
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator