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Tigray External Affairs Office

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## **Statement on the Appointment of Members of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia**

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The Government of Tigray expresses its appreciation to the President of the Human Rights Council for appointing Fatou Bensouda of the Gambia, Kaari Betty Murungi of Kenya, and Steven Ratner of the United States of America to serve as the three members of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, which was created to undertake independent investigations into any and all atrocities committed in Tigray and elsewhere during the ongoing war on Tigray.

The existential threat to the people of Tigray posed by the Abiy regime's declaration of an all-out war on Tigray, viciously prosecuted in collaboration with Amhara regional forces and the Eritrean military since November 2020, has dramatically increased since the convening of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Special Session the UN Human Rights Council on December 17, 2021 that resulted in the passage of Resolution S-33/1 establishing an International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia.

At the moment, there does not appear to be an end in sight to the Ethiopian Federal government's enforcement of a "de facto humanitarian aid blockade" of Tigray, which is characterized by the aggressive obstruction of humanitarian aid delivery, the denial of life-saving medical supplies and fuel, and the suspension of basic services, such as banking, electricity, and telecommunications, among others. Various aid agencies have established and categorically stated the fact that the Abiy Ahmed government has imposed a vicious siege designed to starve the people of Tigray into subjugation and/or out of existence. As a result of this deadly siege, hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans have already perished from starvation and, with the chokehold continuing unabated,

millions are at an elevated risk of perishing. In short, the Abiy regime continues to violate the core tenets of applicable International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL).

Unfortunately, the international community's response to this manmade calamity has been incomprehensibly inadequate. Indeed, the UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, had as far back as late September characterized the international response to the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe as woefully inadequate, describing the failure to act as "a stain on our conscience." In the face of this staggering humanitarian crisis, shying away from doing what is necessary to save the people of Tigray from a genocidal assault is an abdication of moral and legal obligations. A coordinated, targeted and robust package of measures is indispensable to compel a change of course on the part of the Abiy government and its domestic and foreign allies, and stem the tide of this unfolding humanitarian tragedy. Continuing to appease a regime that is determined to starve the people of Tigray into submission by taking seriously its deceptive promises to do better will never bring about meaningful changes for the better on the part of the Abiy regime. In fact, authoritarian regimes around the world seeking to punish "nettlesome" ethnic minorities within their borders through mass starvation would see the international failure to come to the aid of Tigrayans while they are being subjected to sustained genocidal assault as a greenlight to act with impunity.

By contrast, holding the Abiy regime and its domestic and foreign allies accountable for the atrocities committed against the people of Tigray would reaffirm the principle that no state is above international law, and that starving and bombing one's citizens into submission are not acceptable state conducts in this day and age. In so doing, it would prevent massive human rights violations by making would-be genocidaires think twice about setting about to exterminate their own citizens. Silence and appeasement in the face of such devastating rights violations would surely lead to the unraveling of the architecture of global governance.

The Abiy regime continues to unleash a campaign of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other systematic measures to exterminate the people of Tigray, such as through starvation, airstrikes and drone attacks, and arbitrary mass arrest of Tigrayans across Ethiopia solely on account of their identity. In the context of these shocking atrocities, the appointment of members of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia is a necessary first step in the

international community's attempt to stop the commission of further atrocities as well as hold the perpetrators of these heinous crimes accountable.

Given the distinguished pedigree of the newly-appointed members of the Commission in the legal and human rights arena, the Government of Tigray is confident that they will discharge their responsibilities with the utmost integrity, in accordance with the Council's established working methods and procedures.

As the legitimate representative of the People of Tigray, who have borne the brunt of the Abiy regime's ongoing genocidal campaign, the Government of Tigray appreciates the necessity of meaningfully engaging all parties to the conflict. For its part, the Government of Tigray has established a high-level taskforce with full authority to manage all pertinent issues on this matter. The people and Government of Tigray are committed to cooperating with the Commission, as it fulfils its mandate.

Finally, the Government of Tigray joins the international community in strongly urging the Ethiopian Government to reverse its opposition to an independent investigation and accept, without reservations, the legitimacy and mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, which was created pursuant to Resolution A/HRC/S.33/L.1 of the UN Human Rights Council passed on December 17, 2021. If the Abiy regime persists with its unjustifiable objection to the Commission and, by extension, the very of idea of independent investigations into atrocities committed throughout the conflict, the international community should interpret this intransigence as an admission of guilt on the part of the Abiy regime. The international community should not allow the Abiy regime to levy baseless accusations against the Government of Tigray for rights violations, whitewash its own criminal record in Tigray and still strenuously object to independent investigations.

