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Press Statement

On the Deteriorating Situations in Ethiopia and the Imperative of Solidarity

(For Immediate Release)

The situation in Ethiopia continues to deteriorate. While the humanitarian truce agreed upon between the regime in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa) and the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) has allowed for some kind of ‘talk about peace talk’, there is hardly a genuine commitment to peace as a strategic goal on the part of the regime. Using the language of peace with regard to Tigray as a method of lulling the international community to their side (mainly to secure aid and loan), the regime continues to conduct war in Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Derashe, Konso, and other areas in the wider South of the country. The regime seems to have commissioned the Amhara Special Forces and Fanno militia to prosecute war on the Wallo Oromo as it has in Wallagga and other parts of the country.

Although the guns have been tentatively silenced in most parts of Tigray, the siege is yet to be lifted completely. Access to humanitarian aid is arriving in bits and pieces, rather irregularly. The absence of telecommunication and internet network, the closure of basic social and financial services, the unavailability of fuel, etc, continue to exacerbate the humanitarian crisis that has exposed millions to death from famine and lack of medicines. It looks like the regime is using the language of ‘peace talks’ as a tactic of biding time for another military offensive while also prolonging the human suffering in Tigray, apparently in the hope that the suffering will cause a popular protest against the State Government. Under these circumstances, the hope of finding a negotiated political settlement is becoming more and more elusive by the day.

Although Oromia has been subjected to barbaric military operations, mass atrocities, and ‘emergency measures’ (under Military Command Post Administration) since 2019, the regime has once again turned its focus from Tigray to Oromia to launch a full-fledged war. Consequently, war is now raging in Oromia, especially in the Southern (mainly Gujii Zone), Western (Wallagga and its four Zones), and Central (North, West, and South-West Shoa Zones) parts of Oromia. Massacres of civilians have been committed in various towns. Rape of women and children is routinely used as a weapon of war. Towns have been razed to the ground. Farms have been burnt along with the harvests. Properties are looted and vandalized. Houses (or huts) are burnt down. Cattle are either slaughtered or unlawfully herded away from the areas. Tens of thousands of people are rendered homeless, most of them seeking refuge in

the forests or fields far out in the countries. Young people are targeted for arbitrary arrest, detention, and extra-judicial killing (most often in public). Families of young people are killed, tortured, or abused otherwise on the assumption that their absent child is a member or a sympathizer of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).

Just as in Tigray, most of these raided towns are cut off from networks, services, and aid. Death from starvation or illness in droves has become a daily experience. Thousands are suffering from starvation in Eastern Gujii Zone (where children are found dead along with their mothers to whom they clung for breast-feeding). Thousands more are out in the forests in Gindabarat (Western Shoa) and Jillee-Dhummugaa (Wallo) Districts because their villages are burnt down. In what seems to be part of the regime's strategy of 'draining the sea in order to kill the fish'), the regime leaves the affected people completely unattended to (often by disconnecting all networks, services, and access to basic needs). This pattern sees to be endlessly repeated in all other places the regime is engaged in war (in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, as well as the Southern region).

The repressed demands of several nations for their own statehood as independent units of the Federation in what is known as the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional States (SNNPRS) continues to threaten a tumultuous rupture. The regime's arbitrary creation of States (such as the South Western Region) in order to dissolve these demands for self-government is only exacerbating the situation. Similarly, the ghosts of the unfinished (and unfulfilled) revolution of 2014-2018 in Oromia continues to haunt and beleaguer the country.

The expansionist wars (and at times, wars of ethnic cleansing) of Amhara extremists in Benishangul-Gumuz (e.g Metekel), aided and abated by the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) Government and the regime in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa), have caused and continue to cause thousands of deaths, massacres, and displacements. Similar patterns of violence have been in full display in Gambella as recently as June 2022.

The language of peace the regime deploys in relation to the war on Tigray has not extended to cover these areas of massive violence and atrocities. To date, the regime is unwilling to negotiate peace with the OLA and the insurgents in Gambella, Benishangul_gumuz, Somali, Sidama, Agaw, Qemant, and Afar. It is not even willing to set up an independent, impartial, international investigation into the horrendous crimes, atrocities, and violations in any part of the country.

Tens of thousands of people are arbitrarily arrested and detained in concentration camps. Key political leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and hundreds of young leaders who took part in the popular mobilization for self-governance in Sidama, Wolayta, Kambata, Dawro, Tambaro, Hadiya, Guraghe, Derashe, etc, are still in jail.

The people of Qemant have long been subjected to repressive campaigns that led to the massacre of hundreds and displacement of thousands. The attacks on Qemant, conducted and orchestrated by the Amhara Region's Security Forces, were initially intended to silence their demand for distinct identity and their own self-government. The extreme brutality of the atrocious crimes committed on Qemant civilians (e.g.,

setting houses ablaze so that families perish in it; burying several people in a mass grave after executing them brutally; torturing them severely before executing them; etc) has now proved to be the foretaste of the genocidal campaigns conducted against Tigrayans. The attacks on Qemant have their own ebbs and flows, recurring episodically, albeit unpredictably, thereby constantly threatening the people and making their lives utterly precarious to date.

Similarly, the Agaw are targets of endless military campaigns by the ANRS and, more recently, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). The Agaw, like Qemant, have long been struggling to have their distinct identity recognized. Having stayed in the ANRS under conditions that suppress their local self-government, they have been demanding the right to set up their own National Regional State independent of the ANRS. The population has been subjected to all forms of cruelties in the hands of the ANRS Security Forces. The attacks have been intensified, this time enlisting the ENDF as well, especially after the start of the war on Tigray as they (like the Qemant and the Wallo Oromo) are accused of supporting or sympathizing with the TDF. They continue to suffer an onslaught of attacks even as they are putting up a still resistance.

Tens of thousands of Tigrayans (most of whom are illegally purged from their work places because of their Tigrayan identity) are still languishing in known and unknown centers of concentration.

The regime's rejection of a Court Order to release the OLF leaders this past week, while not unusual in Ethiopia, is another confirmation of the widespread view that the regime is not interested in peaceful resolution of political problems in the country.

The National Dialog Commission (NDC) the regime set up lacks legitimacy and neutrality to broker peace among various parties to conflicts. In deciding to have the regime as the convener of the peace process and in excluding the major warring forces (TDF, OLA/OLF, etc), it has but ignored the most important parties needed for such a dialog with the prospect of a Comprehensive Peace Settlement. At the core of all these conflicts is the regime's insistence on military solution to all political problems.

Reports from international and national sources indicate that the economy is in shambles. The regime relies on loans to finance the war. The amount of international debts is rising by the day. Inflation continues to rise. Food prices and living cost have skyrocketed.

Geo-politically and diplomatically, Ethiopia has lost its status as the anchor state for stability in the Horn of Africa region. Part of its western border is currently occupied by Sudan. There are reports that Al-Shabab is encroaching into its eastern border thereby occupying parts of the Somali National Regional State of Ethiopia.

Abiy Ahmed's regime, which was initially supported uncritically by the western countries, has quickly run out of favor in the West. As a result, it is relying more and more on Russia, China, Turkey, and some of the Middle Eastern States--for finance, weapons, training, and technical assistance--to continue its genocidal wars on its peoples. Its prosecution of the wars with the support of Eritrea (and, to an extent, Somalia) has already given the war a transnational dimension and has further complicated matters in a region that has no lack in complications and entanglements.

Having understood that they have made a strategic blunder in supporting Abiy Ahmed in 2018/9, the West (mainly the US and the EU) have since imposed a range of sanctions to put pressure on the regime to stop the war. However, their fear of China, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and some of the Middle Eastern States involving “to fill the void” in this geo-strategically important region seems to have forced them to soften their tones lately and find rapprochement with Abiy’s regime. They are now seen using the mere “talk about peace talk” as an excuse to extend financial loans, development aid, and fund for ‘reconstruction’ to Abiy’s regime (as if the war is over and we are in what is known as the stage of post-conflict/post-war reconstruction).

Moreover, the West seem be in support of “a multi-track negotiation” with various groups in Ethiopia, apparently more as a way of shoring up legitimacy for Abiy peiece-by-pieece than as a way of securing a broader, more comprehensive, and more durable political settlement that can bring about transformation in the relationship among all the parties concerned. They still consider Abiy Ahmed (who, we believe, is the very cause of all the problems) as a partner to work with in their quest for peace and stability in the region.

We, at Solidarity of Nations in Ethiopia (SONE), insist that what is needed, instead, is an all inclusive and comprehensive Peace Process, mediated, brokered, observed, and monitored by an impartial international (preferably UN) body, not a multi-track pieece-by-pieece negotiation. We believe that whoever is keen on bringing about a lasting peace in Ethiopia and the wider Horn region ought to focus on the peoples (and their States) at the sub-national level in order to address the concerns that, when neglected, disrupt and subvert the international and national efforts towards peace.

In particular, they should pay attention to the needs and demands of the peoples that are ‘othered’ and oppressed by the governments of the Ethiopian State, past and present. If the West wants a stable region anchored in Ethiopia, it is a must that they attend to the concerns of the Oromo, the Tegaruu, the Somali, and the numerous other groups of the wider South that have long inhabited the margins of the Ethiopian political, socio-cultural (and geographic) imaginary. In particular, these peoples’ fear of de-recognition (by abolishing the right to national self-determination and the multinational federal framework in the Constitution) must be assuaged. Their aspirations for self-determination and democratic self-government must be taken seriously and taken into the peace account. It is imperative, we maintain, that the West’s quest for an anchor in the Horn and for a more reliable partner in Ethiopia cannot be achieved if they continue to ignore--as in the past--the needs, voices, aspirations, and concerns of these peoples.

We, at the Solidarity of Nations in Ethiopia (SONE), are observing these harrowing developments with a lot of concern.

We therefore call upon all concerned political forces in Ethiopia to collaborate in the spirit of solidarity in order to:

1. Stop the wars and take measures to protect and rescue vulnerable minority groups across the country;

2. Arrest the mass atrocity crimes being committed by Abiy's regime and his associates;

3. Secure humanitarian access to the needy in Tigray and every other corner of the country;

4. Free all political prisoners and other civilians put in concentration camps on account of their identities;

5. Reconnect areas that have been disconnected from telecommunication, internet, financial, and social services;

6. Work out a scheme of transitional justice framework that can ensure internationally backed investigation into, and accountability for, the mass atrocity crimes (especially of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing);

7. Demand the removal of all foreign elements, especially the Eritrean military and security personnel, from all parts of the country;

8. Prepare a road-map for transition that also allows for expression of the aspirations for self-determination and democratic self-governance.

We also call upon the international community (i.e., the UN, the US, the EU, the AU, and the UK) to make a more robust and a more concrete set of measures in order to discharge their *responsibility to protect* the peoples victimized by Abiy Ahmed's regime (especially the peoples of Tigray, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Wolayita, Sidama, Afar, Agaw, Qemant, Derashe, Konso, Dawuro, Kambata, Tambaro, Hadiya, Guraghe, Somali, and numerous others in SNNPRS) from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.

We stress, in this connection, that the regime, being the architect of the war and the atrocious crimes thereof, has already failed to protect its citizens whom it has othered as the enemies of the State.

We hope that the international community works in unison to see the emergence of a an all-inclusive negotiation that will result in a Comprehensive Peace Settlement that they will dutifully, monitor, enforce, and sanction under the auspices of the UN (or its specific agencies).

In Solidarity for Peace, Justice, and Self-determination.

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