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# Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

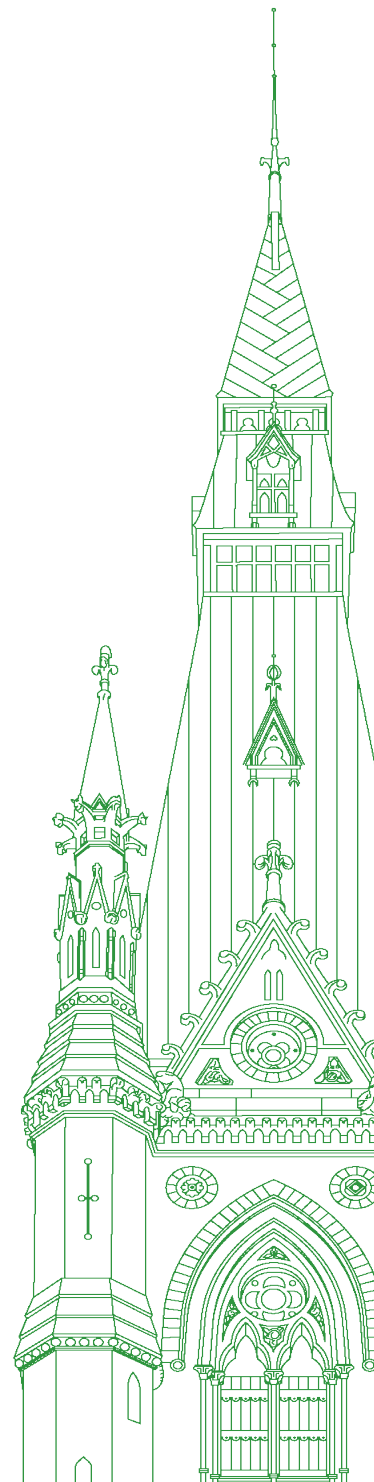
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Chair: Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury





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Tuesday, June 11, 2024

• (1700)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 53 of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Before we begin, I would like to ask all members and other in-person participants to consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. Please take note of the following preventative measures in place to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. Only use a black approved earpiece. The former grey earpieces must no longer be used. Keep your earpiece away from all microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, place it face down, on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

Pursuant to our routine motion, I wish to inform the subcommittee that all witnesses have completed the required sound tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the subcommittee on Tuesday, April 30, the subcommittee is commencing its study of the current situation in Ethiopia.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses. We have, by video conference and as an individual, Yonas Biru, former interim chair of the Ethiopian Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and former deputy global manager of the International Economic Comparison Program at the World Bank. We also have, by video conference and as an individual, Meaza Gebremedhin, independent researcher and human rights defender. From the Canadian Amhara Societies Alliance, we have, by video conference, Wosen Yitna Beyene, president of the Amhara International Movement. In person, from Ethio-Canadians for Human Rights, we have Semaneh Jemere, chairperson, and Yohannes Berhe and Aserdew Kebede, members. Finally, in person, from Security and Justice for Tigrayans Canada, we have Kidane Gebremariam, former chair and current board member.

The witnesses will have approximately four minutes for their opening remarks, after which members of the committee will ask their questions.

[English]

I would like to ask members if I have unanimous consent to go beyond 5:30 until six o'clock. If you would like to go beyond even that, I would like to have your unanimous consent for that, too.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your understanding.

Now, I would like to invite Mr. Yonas Biru to take the floor for four minutes. I'll ask you to respect the time, because we have restrictions today.

Please, go ahead. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Yonas Biru (Former Interim Chair of the Ethiopian Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and former Deputy Global Manager of the International Economic Comparison Program at the World Bank, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In November 2022, the Ethiopian government and the TPLF signed a ceasefire in Pretoria. Sadly, the humanitarian crisis has not improved. The prime minister has launched a new war in the Amhara region on top of an already raging war in the Oromo region. These two regions account for 61% of the nation's population and 87% of its food production.

Furthermore, in April 2024, Tigrayan forces opened a new war against Amhara forces, leading to the displacement of 50,000 people. TPLF is preparing to start another war on a second front. The international community has humanitarian and geostrategic reasons to intervene. In the past, its interventions have been focused on Tigray. Two factors explain this. First, the TPLF has a robust international public relations campaign, and second, TPLF's digital army terrorizes foreigners who oppose their narratives. The head of the Tigrayan government is on the record stating, "We don't care (what their nationality is). We will hunt them down."

Hunt they have done. Some of the hunted are Canadians. Today, two international witnesses are testifying confidentially to avoid the wrath of the digital terror group. TPLF has effectively silenced foreign experts. As a result, its narratives dominate international attention.

There is no question that the people of Tigray have suffered unimaginable atrocities; so have the people of Amhara and Afar. The international community must not become an arbiter of genocide claims and counterclaims. It must learn from Amnesty International.

In 2021, Amnesty International issued what it characterized as compelling evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Their report was based on 41 survivors and 20 eyewitnesses. Two weeks later, a senior Amnesty International official admitted the evidence was false. When 61 witnesses repeat the same false story, it's obvious that the story was scripted and asserted to boost TPLF's genocide allegations.

This did not stop the New Lines Institute from referring to the proven false evidence 11 times.

Further, the report extensively used material compiled by TPLF's foreign advocates. Three such advocates were referred to in the genocide report a total of 124 times. Meanwhile, prominent foreign experts with differing views were completely shut out.

The New Lines Institute's report on genocide in Tigray is based on unverified information at best. At worst, it fails to pass the test of impartiality and ethical integrity. In the best of circumstances, its utility does not go beyond making a case for unfettered international investigations.

This committee can have an enormous positive impact on the lives of all Ethiopians by advocating for such investigations of an international investigation by credible and mandated UN agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you for respecting the time.

Now, I would like to invite Ms. Meaza Gebremedhin to speak.

Ms. Gebremedhin, you have the floor for four minutes, please.

**Ms. Meaza Gebremedhin (Independent Researcher and Human Rights Defender, As an Individual):** Thank you so much, Chairperson. I appreciate the committee's inviting me to provide an update on the dire circumstance in Ethiopia, and particularly in Tigray.

While the world's attention has moved away from the conflict in Tigray after the 2020 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, the state-led genocide against the people of Tigray persists. The Ethiopian government has the people of Tigray in a chokehold with Amhara and Eritrean forces continuing to commit crimes against humanity and what we believe is a state-led genocide in occupied parts of Tigray.

Forty percent of Tigray to date remains under the illegal occupation of Amhara and Eritrean forces. In the areas where these forces are present, human rights violations continue, as do grave violations, particularly in the border area between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Eritrean forces continue being sexually violent to women in order to further terrorize the community. This also puts a very critical risk on the minority groups of Irob and Kunama, who are very small in number and are facing real extinction.

We call upon the Canadian government not only to put pressure on the Ethiopian government but also to impose sanctions on the Eritrean government so that the people who have continued to suffer gross violations of human rights can get relief.

We also want to bring your attention to the fact that the Ethiopian government, alongside members of the international community, has been putting immense pressure on the fact that there needs to be disarmament while ignoring the fact that 40% of Tigray remains under the illegal occupation of the Amhara and Eritrean forces.

It is to be remembered that the Pretoria agreement outlines that disarmament needs to happen side by side with the full withdrawal of all foreign forces from all parts of Tigray. However, like I said, the fact remains that the Ethiopian government has allowed Amhara forces and Eritrean forces to continue brutalizing the people of Tigray in the occupied parts of the region.

Particularly in western Tigray and Eritrea, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and others have provided conclusive evidence that violations of human rights continue to persist to date. It is upon the international community, particularly member states of the EU, the United Nations and particularly Canada, to ensure that human rights are respected no matter when or where.

In Tigray, human rights have become a tool to push a political agenda by the Ethiopian government. What's happening in Tigray is a catastrophe, a genocide that has been laid and orchestrated by the Ethiopian government alongside its regional, international and local actors, particularly the Amhara militia and the Amhara forces.

It is incumbent on the Canadian government, again, to put human lives first and to enforce and push for the Eritrean government to leave the territories of Tigray, and also for the Amhara forces alongside the Ethiopian government to be held accountable using international mechanisms.

The circus that the Ethiopian government is leading under the guise of transitional justice does not have legitimacy nor acceptance by the people. Survivors of the conflict have related sexual violence, massacres, man-made famine and other atrocities in Tigray, and they continue to call for internationally mandated justice and accountability mechanisms so that they can have a chance at getting redress.

The world, particularly countries like Canada, has failed the people of Tigray in averting genocide, but the people of Tigray have a chance to ensure that they get justice for the crimes they suffered at the hands of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara militias.

Thank you very much.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Thank you. Also, thank you for respecting the time.

Wosen Yitna Beyene from the Canadian Amhara Societies Alliance, you have the floor for five minutes. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Wosen Yitna Beyene (President of International Amhara Movement, Canadian Amhara Societies Alliance):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the committee members for inviting the Amhara voice to this hearing.

Speaking of the current situation in Ethiopia.... There is only one war conducted under the state of emergency, which is the war on the Amhara people that started in April 2023 and was launched in a coordinated manner by the Abiy regime; the Tigray People's Liberation Front, TPLF; and the Oromo Liberation Army, OLA, following the war in north Ethiopia.

For more than 13 months, the Abiy regime subjected the Amhara people throughout Ethiopia to an unlawful state of emergency and put them under siege. As a result, thousands have been arbitrarily killed; have been subjected to weaponized rape, collective punishment, hate speech and profiling; or have been arbitrarily imprisoned and held under cruel, inhumane and degrading conditions. Civilian infrastructure, as well as religious and cultural sites, have been deliberately targeted, including those protected as world heritage sites. The use of schools as military camps has forced over 4.1 million children out of school. Millions in need are not receiving humanitarian relief. In a clear violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement that it signed on November 2, 2022, the TPLF has launched attacks in the Raya and Tselemt areas since April 12, 2024, committing ethnic cleansing where scores of civilians are killed and young children are burned alive.

The ethnic-based attacks have continued in Oromia region. On May 31, 2024, the Oromo Liberation Army militants killed and abducted Amhara civilians in the West Shewa zone. All these coordinated attacks by the Abiy regime, the TPLF and the OLA demonstrate a pattern of deliberate acts that have the hallmarks of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Considering the imminent existential threat, and after exhausting all peaceful venues in response to the ongoing genocide, the Amhara people had no other option but to exercise their human and legal rights to self-defence, led by the heroic Fano movement. The Amhara Fano represent a diverse cross-section of Amhara society, including farmers, business people, civil servants, medical doctors, engineers, university professors and school teachers. In less than a year, the Fano movement has gained control of 90% of the Amhara region, has established democratic interim administrations and has brought peace to areas under its control.

Here is our recommendation: We urge the Canadian government to explicitly condemn the Abiy regime for its atrocities against the Amhara people and take the following urgent measures.

One, demand that the Abiy army and TPLF forces leave the Amhara region immediately.

Two, demand the end of the telephone blackout, including of the Internet, in the Amhara region.

Three, allow aid organizations in the Amhara region to provide humanitarian assistance.

Four, pressure countries, such as the United Arab Emirates and Turkey, to stop supplying weapons, including drones, to the Abiy regime.

Five, refrain from supporting the so-called national dialogue and transitional justice process promoted by the Abiy regime to prolong

its stay in power and avoid accountability for the heinous crimes it committed.

Six, impose sanctions, including economic and diplomatic, against the Abiy regime.

Lastly, refrain from funding the Abiy regime, the TPLF and the OLA, directly or indirectly.

It is worth noting that, last month, the Canadian Minister of International Development, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, announced \$14 million to support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The TPLF proudly uses such funds to re-invade the Amhara region.

As Canadian citizens and taxpayers, the Amhara diaspora strongly opposes Canada's promoting double standards in its policy toward the Amhara people. Instead, we urge Canada to make a meaningful shift in its policy, to—

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Please wrap it up. The time is up.

**Mr. Wosen Yitna Beyene:** —stop genocide and war on the Amhara people, and to promote genuine peace, democracy and justice in Ethiopia.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Semaneh Jemere, president of Ethio-Canadians for Human Rights.

You have the floor for five minutes, sir. Go ahead.

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere (Chairperson, Ethio-Canadians for Human Rights):** Ethio-Canadians for Human Rights makes a special reference to human rights violations in the Amhara and Oromia regions. Ethiopia's crisis stems from the 1995 constitution, which changed the administrative borders from a unified republic to a federation of ethnic regional status drawn on ethnic fault lines.

Unlike Canada's democracy, Ethiopia's constitution grants rights to ethnic groups over individual rights. Ethnic federalism is troubled with inconsistencies as ethnic communities are drawn to live in discrete homelands. Ethnic homelands have had endless conflict as some 85 ethnic groups have co-existed for centuries. After three decades of experimenting with ethnic federalism, Ethiopia is fed up with it.

In 2018 Ethiopia and the international community welcomed Prime Minister Abiy with euphoria. Hopes for change and reform were further emboldened when the Prime Minister received the Nobel Prize in 2019. Regrettably, the unfortunate Ethiopians got neither peace and security nor political reform. Between 2018 and 2023 there were 5,000 clashes indicating 1,060 conflicts a year as reported by the BBC, of which 58% happened in the Amhara region alone. Conflict has crippled government functions as 65% of the country is out of the regime's hands. Land transport to regional capitals is risky or closed to traffic. Due to the state of emergency, in the Amhara region atrocities are committed against Amharans, particularly in schools, churches and mosques.

Drone attacks have been a hallmark of government campaigns. The state of emergency has subjected activists and journalists to disappearances, executions and detentions. Amharans who have lived in harmony in all parts of the country for centuries are brutally killed, demonized, labelled and displaced, leading to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Human rights abuses are appalling in the Oromia region where Amharans are “slaughtered like chickens”, as reported by the Guardian. Such killings and wanton human rights violations are concocted and acted upon by government authorities, as chronicled by the State Department's 2023 human rights report on Ethiopia, in violation of international humanitarian law and the Ethiopian constitution itself.

Human Rights Watch reported that Ethiopian national defence forces massacred scores of Amharan civilians in the Amhara and Oromia regions, in what the European Centre for Law and Justice called the Merawi, Finote Selam, Burayu, Shashemene and Metekel massacres, and so forth.

Amhara farmers, the historic breadwinners are being denied fertilizer, a method that is being used to starve the people by political fiat. This is happening as the United Nations has reported over 30 million people are in urgent need of food assistance.

The intent of genocide is amplified by the government of Ethiopia threatening to “slaughter...thousands of people overnight” and warning its opponents of a consequence deadlier than the Red Terror of the 1970s”, when the African Union reported over 700,000 people were killed at the time. The fighting, anarchy and genocide may soon be internationalized.

Cognizant of the dire human rights situation in Ethiopia, we recommend that the over 100,000 Ethiopian-Canadian taxpayers who call Canada home call on the government of Ethiopia to release Amhara and Oromia parliamentarians arrested unconstitutionally. For example, Christian Tadele, Yohannes Buayalew, Mr. Taye Denda and Dr. Kassa Teshager should be released. As well in Amhara and Oromia, all political prisoners, journalists, activists and opinion leaders should be released, and the state of emergency in the Amhara region should be lifted and an all-inclusive transitional government should be established. They should stop meddling in religious affairs and guarantee citizens' right for religious freedom.

Canada should unequivocally condemn the government of Ethiopia's despicable killings, rapes and marginalization of Amhara women, girls and mothers. Canada must immediately work to save lives by providing emergency humanitarian assistance to the Amhara people who have suffered more than any other region.

Canada that helped—

**The Chair:** Can you wrap it up, please?

Your time is over.

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Gebremariam, former president and current member of the board of directors of Security and Justice for Tigrayans Canada.

[*English*]

You have four minutes, please.

**Mr. Kidane Gebremariam (Former Chair and Current Board Member, Security and Justice for Tigrayans Canada):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My opening statement focuses on the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

During the two-year war, from November 2020 to November 2022, in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, about one million civilians have been killed; more than 120,000 women have been raped; about two million people have been internally displaced, and more than 100,000 persons have been externally displaced.

Socio-economic infrastructure, including health facilities and educational institutions, factories—

• (1720)

**Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC):** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, we have a point of order.

**Hon. Mike Lake:** Just so that it's not distracting, the bells are going, during which we would normally pause.

I move that we continue, and we can just vote on our apps.

**The Chair:** Do we have consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay. Let's go on.

Thank you, Mr. Lake.

Excuse me, you can continue, sir.

**Mr. Kidane Gebremariam:** Thank you.

More than 100,000 have been externally displaced. Socio-economic infrastructure, including health facilities and educational institutions, factories and small industries have been destroyed by the joint forces of Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Amhara region.

It is reported by the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, New Lines Institute, and the U.S. Department of State that war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and gender-based violence have been committed by the joint forces. I believe that the degree of atrocities, massacre, rapes and drone attacks, sieges and blockades of basic services that the people of Tigray faced was unprecedented, so horrific and amounts to genocide.



According to the genocide convention in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, article 6:

...“genocide” means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group...

And so on.

Atrocities committed in the Tigray region of Ethiopia clearly meet the above definition of genocide. Tigrayans have been killed and massacred based on their ethnic identity. Tigrayan women and girls have been raped and gang-raped, causing them physical and mental harm, and denied access to all basic human needs, including food and medicine. Conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction have been deliberately inflicted on Tigrayan children, women, girls, boys and elders. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed incited hate propaganda that Tigrayans are daylight hyena, cancer and weeds. Also, Daniel Kibret Birhane, who is an adviser of Abiy Ahmed, cited that Tigrayans are evil and ghosts and must be exterminated from the face of the earth and erased from our mind.

During the rapes and gang rapes, the rapists put unimaginable objects with the intention to damage Tigrayan women and girls' reproductive organs to prevent them from giving birth. As reported by Human Rights Watch, Tigrayans in western Tigray were told by Colonel Dameke Zewdu, who is the head of security in western Tigray, and his allies, “We will erase you from this land.”

Pekka Haavisto, the European Union's special envoy—

**The Chair:** Excuse me. Your time is up.

Can you take a few seconds to wrap it up, please?

**Mr. Kidane Gebremariam:** He said that Tigrayans will be wiped out for 100 years.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks to all the witnesses. Thank you for your good intervention.

Now, I would like to open the floor for a questions and answers. We start with Mr. Majumdar.

Mr. Majumdar, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you all for describing what is obviously a very complicated conflict affecting many communities.

Let me start with Yonas Biru, if I might.

You have been a long-time author on the Horn of Africa and the issues therein. You have been warning for years about the kind of violence we have seen unfolding. What would you say is the strategic asset that is Ethiopia in the Red Sea region?

The conflict in this country has the potential to spill out with much larger consequences for the region geopolitically and geoeconomically. Could you perhaps take a step back and give us a

picture as to what's really on the line here and who some of the players might be?

• (1725)

**Mr. Yonas Biru:** Thank you so much.

Yes. I think about 10% of global trade goes through the Red Sea, and about 40% of the the trade between Asia and Europe is channelled through the Red Sea. Ethiopia is an anchor nation, because of its size and population, to the entire Horn of Africa.

I believe the European Union representative for the eastern African countries once said that Ethiopia is not like Yugoslavia: It doesn't implode in. If Ethiopia collapses, the whole region would collapse, so this is really a very serious catastrophe in the waiting.

Beyond that, and beyond the threats, 128 million people are facing a threat of genocide. What we are hearing here, unfortunately, from my Amharan and my Tigrayan friends, is that you hear the Tigrayans saying that everything has been done to them, but they say nothing about what they have done. It is the same thing with my Amharan friends. They talk about the atrocities they faced, but they do not say what the Amhara have done.

If you look at international reports, no one is a victim here: Each is a victimizer and a victim. Until this kind of mentality from our compatriots stops, particularly in Amhara and Tigray, this crisis will continue and, at the end, it is the people of Tigray and the people of Amhara who are suffering.

We have seen the Amnesty International reports. We have seen that all have been condemned of crimes against humanity. We have heard each group using “genocide” like a common word.... The only organizations that came close to announcing genocide were in the last report by the new institute, and anybody who has read it can tell, as I said, that it reads like a TPLF document.

How the Canadian government and the world can help is perhaps by not inviting us to come and complain about what happened to our people, but maybe to find common ground: How can we move away from these claims and counterclaims of genocide and solve the problem with help from the international community?

Thank you.

**Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar:** Do I have a minute or two?

I have one minute, so I'll be brief, Yonas Biru. You used to be the deputy global manager of the international economic comparison program at the World Bank. You have tools to think about different models of governance.

You have a minute. The origin story of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism lasted for 27 years and then it broke. What broke?

**Mr. Yonas Biru:** Well, it broke because it moved sovereign power from “we, the people of Ethiopia” to “we, the tribes of Ethiopia”. After three decades, or 30 years, Ethiopians started to think as ethnic groups or tribal groups, and that’s exactly what we are witnessing here today. Our Amharan friends are talking about only Amhara. Our Tigrayan friends are talking about only Tigray.

We have federalism in Canada and in many parts of the world. The Ethiopian federalism is unique in the sense that it treats the people of Ethiopia as peoples, as if they are different, so that created this animosity across ethnic groups. We have now come to a point where we cannot solve this process by ourselves, because we are locked in a permanent kind of political equilibrium from which we cannot correct by ourselves because—

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Thank you. The time is over.

Now I invite Mr. Ali Ehsassi to take the floor for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for your testimony.

I think it would be fair to say that we had all hoped that the agreement in 2022, the Pretoria one, would put an end to the suffering throughout Ethiopia, but that unfortunately has not been the case.

To start off, could I ask Mr. Beyene, why is it that the Amhara did not participate in those peace negotiations?

**Mr. Wosen Yitna Beyene:** Thank you very much. That’s a very important question.

The Amharas made a lot of effort to be part of the agreement and the discussions, but they were refused. They were systematically excluded from participating in that Pretoria agreement. That’s exactly why the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement has failed. It failed, and it was doomed to fail from the get-go, because it excluded the Amharas and other key partners.

It was an agreement between the Abiy regime and the TPLF. The western world, including Canada, has to take full responsibility in that role. Had it been all-inclusive, it might have brought a better outcome.

The war on the Amharas that we’re witnessing now is a mere reflection of the failure of the COHA.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** If I could go to Mr. Jemere, is it your contention that the Amharas were excluded as well? To the extent that that may be your response, is there an opportunity for a sequence, where there would be discussions between the central government and the Amharas?

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere:** Are you asking me whether there is a discussion between the Amharas and the central government?

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Yes. Why did they not partake in the peace negotiations that led to the secession agreement of 2022?

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere:** This is a very interesting question. I think we have to put this question to the government of Ethiopia and the TPLF.

The reason they did not invite their Amhara colleagues is that they think they are very contentious, and they think they are the oppressors. They want to exclude them because they have been excluding them from time immemorial, since the TPLF government—

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Before that peace agreement with the central government, the Amharas got along. Is that correct?

**Mr. Aserdew Kebede (Member, Ethio-Canadians for Human Rights):** We’re on the same team.

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere:** I’m sorry. [*Inaudible—Editor*] to compare it.

**Mr. Aserdew Kebede:** I’ll take it up.

As Mr. Beyene said, the Amharas were not included in the discussion. After all, who said the Amharas should be participating in the discussion and the Tigray group must be participating? If it’s a peace agreement, it must have involved all parties and all stakeholders who have participated in one way or another in the conflict in northern Ethiopia.

The Amharas were affected because of the war. The Afar region, another region adjoining the Tigray region, was affected. Neither the Afar group nor the Amhara group was invited. It’s because the Abiy government wanted to take advantage of the international pressure so that it could make a backdoor deal without even further discussing the—

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** You’re saying there was no invitation and you couldn’t partake in that.

**Mr. Aserdew Kebede:** Yes.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** If someone were to say the Abiy government should enter into negotiations, what would the preconditions be?

**Mr. Aserdew Kebede:** I can’t speak on behalf of the Amharas. I’m here representing Ethiopians.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Just generally. You follow what is of concern—

**Mr. Aserdew Kebede:** What would have been the best forum for the peace deal is bringing all of the stakeholders in the country, including the Oromo Liberation Army—there are different factions of the Oromos—the TPLF or other Tigrayan groups, all Amhara groups and the Afar region together. Even in Gambela and Benishangul, there are some groups.

All those stakeholders should have been put together to discuss the national issues. That would have been an Ethiopian solution and a win-win solution.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you.

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere:** If I can add to that, we don’t understand why the Amharas were excluded. It’s not only the Amhara region that was excluded, but the Afar region, because the northern war affected both the Amhara and Afar regions, as well as Tigray.

The reason the government of Ethiopia and the TPLF people excluded the Amhara and Afar regions is beyond us. We can’t begin to understand the reason.

• (1735)

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Fair enough.

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere:** If you don't bring both, there is no reason for any negotiation at all.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Mr. Biru, I'll go to you. To ensure that these discussions move forward and that the hostilities we have seen over the course of the past two years do not continue, what is required? What is the path forward?

**Mr. Yonas Biru:** I think Ethiopia's political problem lies with three tribal groups—the Amhara, Tigray and Oromo—but Ethiopia has 84 different tribes or ethnic groups. The only way this process can move is to move the centre of gravity of the political process away from the Amhara-Oromo-Tigray nexus. Historically, these groups have animosity, and in particular, the animosity has become worse over the last 30 years and since the Tigray, or the northern, war. What we see, when we bring these groups together, when now we say, “The Amhara should have been involved in the process,” I don't think that would have made any difference. The platform needs to change. The paradigm needs to change outside of the current tribal issue so that the people we bring to the table are not talking about, “My people...”.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, the time is up. Can you please wrap up? I'm sorry.

Now I invite Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. There are opposing views, and I think that's obvious today.

We've heard little from the Tigrayans' representatives so far, Mr. Gebremariam. Since the beginning of this meeting, we've been hearing that it is not the Tigrayans who are suffering a genocide, but rather the Amharas. How do you respond to that? I would like to hear your views on that.

[English]

**Mr. Kidane Gebremariam:** I'm sorry, but can you repeat that, sir?

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Chair, my time will not be affected by the need to repeat, will it? Thank you.

Ms. Gebremedhin, I see you want to say something.

[English]

**Ms. Meaza Gebremedhin:** The Tigray people have indeed been under the state-wide genocide since November 2020. However, we do recognize the fact that there is no peace and stability across the country, including in Amhara. We do understand that civilians across the country are being targeted by the federal government alongside different political actors in the country, which is why we continue to call for an internationally mandated justice and accountability mechanism that would not only look into the crimes that are being perpetrated across the country but also hold the actors accountable. That is why the Tigray people, alongside our academicians and intellectuals, have been pushing for the mandate of

the ICHREE to be extended. However, fellow Ethiopians have been working against that.

It's really encouraging to hear people being interested in justice and accountability because I do agree with the fact that people in Amhara, Oromo and Tigray are suffering. Let's not confuse the fact that the people of Tigray have faced a genocide that resulted in the massacre, in days, of over half a million people, and the people of Tigray still continue to be under the illegal occupation of all warring actors.

I also want to bring to your attention the fact that Tselemti and Raya are indeed parts of Tigray. They do not belong to the Amhara region. Hence, why there isn't really any proof that there is a continued massacre laid against people who are not from Tigray in those particular areas, but all of this can be settled if there is an internationally mandated independent mechanism that will look into the crimes that are being alleged here today.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** The floor is yours, Mr. Gebremariam.

[English]

**Mr. Kidane Gebremariam:** I think it must be understood that the people of Tigray were under a 360° siege. Tigray was under siege. That must be clearly understood. During that siege, from every direction in Ethiopia, the Amhara, Oromo, Afar, Eritrean, Somali and, of course, Ethiopian forces—all of them—were against Tigray, and Tigray was under siege. It was blocked: The Internet and all basic services were blocked completely, so that's why the situation in Tigray is very different in terms of the intensity and the degree of atrocities. Also, it is only in the Tigray that foreign forces came to fight, to commit genocide against the people of Tigray—not in Amhara, not anywhere—but I agree, I sympathize, that there is no peace. I have sympathy for the Amhara and Oromo peoples, but the thing is, it must be understood that genocide was committed against the people of Tigray.

• (1740)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Gebremariam.

Mr. Biru, you mentioned a New Lines Institute report that you think is wrong. You said it was based on false testimony or, at least, testimony that did not necessarily appear to be true.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department have also produced reports. Do you think those entities' conclusions are wrong as well?

[English]

**Mr. Yonas Biru:** No. To be clear, what all of the other international organizations have said is that when it comes to atrocities in Tigray, Tigrayans, the Eritreans, the Amhara and the federal government have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, crimes of starvation and war as war tools.

In the meantime, the same institutions have said that the Eritrean forces did exactly the same. Actually, Amnesty International says that Tigrayan forces do not have an iota of humanity.

**The Chair:** Can you wrap it up, please?

**Mr. Yonas Biru:** Okay. When it comes to genocide, no credible report has come claiming there is a genocide in Amhara or genocide in Tigray.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I have one last question: Are all stakeholders equally at fault, or is one people or nation more deeply affected than another?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Please be quick.

**Mr. Yonas Biru:** This is why I say that the international community should not be in the business of arbitrating genocide and counter-genocide claims. What we need is an international investigation.

Now what we see is Tigrayans and Amhara activists claiming genocide was committed to their people. No credible international organization has come and claimed, except for activists of this group. This doesn't help the country.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your answer.

Mr. Johns, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you to all of the witnesses for your important testimony, your courage and for representing so many people who have been subjected to terrible human rights violations and atrocities that are happening in Ethiopia.

Mr. Berhe, you haven't had a chance to speak yet. Your group, the Ethio-Canadians for Human Rights, represents a true cross-section of Ethiopian ethnolinguistic groups.

We heard about the failure of the Pretoria agreement on the internal conflict. We're really hoping at this committee today to find how we can best support getting peace and stability in Ethiopia.

Maybe you can talk about your view of the situation in Ethiopia that is so dire.

What is the best way forward to resolve the country's political ills?

**Mr. Yohannes Berhe (Member, Ethio-Canadians for Human Rights):** First of all, I share the same heritage with Ms. Meaza and Mr. Kidane. From what I see, the claim about genocide in Tigray or any other place sometimes misses the point. First of all, they are entitled to their own opinion, but they are not entitled to their own facts.

The facts on the ground are completely different. At this time, there is a cessation of conflict in Tigray. The TPLF has total control in Tigray, yet there is famine in Tigray and they still accuse the other parts of Ethiopia, like Amhara or Afar.

The sole responsibility, when it comes to Tigray at this moment, is with TPLF. As a matter of fact, TPLF is with the Abiy government. They are the deciding factor now.

This is what disappoints me. They don't talk about what is happening now to Tigrayans, who are suffering now from the famine.

TPLF, for the last 30 years, was in power. For 27 years, they were in power in the central government. The sole power for the last 30 years, plus in Tigray, has been the TPLF. Are Tigrayans better off now than 30 years ago? No. They are worse off now and the sole responsibility is with TPLF.

Also, they are not partners in peace. If we want peace, we have to make sure that.... First of all, the Tigrayans in Amhara share culture. They have been living together for centuries. Most Tigrayans go to other parts of Ethiopia to make a living. My family went from Tigray to other parts of Ethiopia and they lived peacefully.

• (1745)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I appreciate that.

Mr. Kebede, can you talk about the Ethiopian constitution of 1995? Is that the root of the problem in Ethiopia? If so, what needs to be done?

**Mr. Aserdew Kebede:** Well, the root cause of the current crisis in Ethiopia is the constitution that was adopted in 1995. As Dr. Biru said, it entitles nations and nationalities to full rights, while denying rights to individuals. Can you tell me in what part of the world a constitution begins with “We, the Nations [and] Nationalities of” this country? Our own country, Canada, says, “We, the people of Canada”. It does not grant rights to groups or communities.

Individual rights are violated because of the constitution. In no other country can you find a constitution that grants secession or independence to ethnic groups. It's only in Ethiopia. Article 39 grants full independence to any ethnic group. We have a country with a population of 120 million and 80-plus ethnic groups, but the constitution grants regional statehood to nine regions. Does this mean we can have 80-plus provinces or 80-plus regions? What would those nine regions do?

The current crisis is because the constitution violates individual rights. Individual rights have been removed from the constitution.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you.

I have one more quick question for Mr. Jemere.

You know that Canada provides substantial aid to Ethiopia. The Prime Minister just met with Prime Minister Ahmed.

Given the situation in the country now, should Canada stop aid to Ethiopia? In a very short response, what can Canada do?

**Mr. Semaneh Jemere:** Thank you very much. This is a very interesting question and I can answer it very easily.

In my own opinion, and in our opinion, I don't think the Canadian government has to stop aid to the Ethiopian people and the Ethiopian government. However, we have to differentiate between humanitarian aid and development aid. In our opinion, development aid has to be stopped, whereas humanitarian aid has to be enhanced, because we are interested in saving lives, not killing people.

That's how I see it.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. On behalf of committee members and all of the staff, we would like to thank you for your pres-

ence. Thank you for sharing good ideas and opinions. If you think you have additional values, ideas or opinions to share, you could always write to the clerk.

I would like to suspend in order to go to a vote.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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