

Wednesday, November 9, 2022 (Tikimit 30, 2015 EC)

**Statement from the Amhara People's Negotiations Delegation (APND) Regarding the Announcement of Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Prosperity Party (PP) and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) Brokered by the African Union (AU)**

The Amhara People's Negotiations Delegation (APND) welcomes news of a permanent cessation of hostilities agreement announced by the African Union (AU) on Wednesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 to end the devastating war in Northern Ethiopia. With this being said, the APND strongly believes that this process was flawed and will not bring lasting peace and stability to Ethiopia. The participants of the flawed AU-mediated negotiations process failed to uphold principles of inclusivity and justice which could have been avoided if Amharas, the largest stakeholder in the war were represented. After all, bilateral peace talks between the Prosperity Party (PP) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in a multilateral conflict cannot possibly resolve the complex issues underlying the fighting. Therefore, including Amharas is not just beneficial to this process but essential to its success.

***The primary error of the AU-led peace talks was in failing to finally provide a formal acknowledgement of restoration of the Welkait and Raya areas (ancestral Amhara lands) back to Amhara administration and instead proposing the matter be resolved through constitutional means.***

Approaching the problem in accordance with the constitution is an insult to Amharas who tried to resolve the matter through this process for the last 27 years and faced killings, arrests, torture, and marginalization. Cognizant of this and the culture of impunity and absence of rule of law in the country, the agreement to resolve the identity and border questions of Welkait and Raya is largely taken by Amharas as yet another attempt to reimpose the same brutal apartheid administration which led to decades of Amhara Genocide on the lands of Welkait and Raya. The scars from this era are still fresh as today marks the 2-year anniversary of the November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Mai-Kadra massacre in which over 1,700 Amhara civilians were killed in Mai-Kadra town, making this the single worst atrocity of the war. The Mai-Kadra massacre was a continuation of decades of Amhara Genocide which has been documented. According to research from Gonder University, over 60,000 Amharas are estimated to have been killed in TPLF's concentration camps in the Welkait area from 1983 to present. Families of victims and survivors never received justice or restitution for their suffering over this period. However, these documented genocidal acts by TPLF against Amharas in Welkait, Raya and beyond explains the consensus among Amharas that residents of Welkait and Raya should never again be denied freedom to express their true identity nor be forced to live under apartheid rule. The crimes of the past were not prevented, and the victims of these crimes never received justice but at the very least they should never again have to face those horrors.

The APND would also like to recognize the agreement's failure to lay the groundwork for eventual constitutional reform in Ethiopia. ***Aside from normalizing ethnic apartheid in Ethiopia and contributing to recurrent conflict in the country, the current constitution is not legitimate because it was imposed onto the Ethiopian people by elites from the TPLF and the Oromo Liberation Front in the 1990s.*** The war and the subsequent discussions offer a chance to reckon with the problems and dangers the current constitution has created to pave a better path to the future for all Ethiopians. Thus, the exclusion of Amharas - one of the largest communities that historically rejected the constitution, and as a result - the absence of discussion on reimagining a new constitution is a regrettable waste of an opportunity for lasting peace and stability in Ethiopia and the wider region.

***At the core of the demand for Amharas to be represented in peace talks and the rationale for the formation of the APND was mistrust and rejection of the PP regime negotiating on behalf of Amharas.***

The ruling party has been complicit in Amhara Genocide throughout the country which predated the war and is responsible for mass arrests of more than 15,000 Amhara journalists, opposition politicians, activists and Fano veterans. These issues, combined with others, prompted region-wide anti-government protests in the Amhara Region in 2021 and 2022. Since the introduction of the APND, dozens of Amhara organizations across Ethiopia and abroad have voiced their overwhelming support. This is unsurprising as the APND is critical to ensuring the interests of the Amhara people, the largest stakeholders in the war in Northern Ethiopia, are represented. It is resoundingly clear that the ruling party lacks the mandate, acceptance, or legitimacy to negotiate on behalf of Amharas.

***The APND firmly believes that the agreement also failed to implement transitional justice for atrocities committed by the TPLF and their partners the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) against civilian populations in Amhara and Afar Regions through the course of the war.***

The TPLF and OLA perpetrated numerous war crimes targeting civilians in Amhara and Afar Regions including ethnic cleansing, genocidal massacres, weaponized gang rape, blockade of humanitarian assistance and industrial-scale razing of entire vicinities - looting and destruction of property and civil institutions. The pattern of genocidal acts has claimed thousands of lives both during the war and prior, cleansing hundreds of thousands of civilians from their homes. This has emboldened perpetrators to use violence against civilian populations as a strategy for political leverage. Therefore, APND believes that an independent investigation should be undertaken into genocidal acts committed against civilians in Amhara and Afar Regions so victims can receive justice and survivors can receive restitution. This would not only be constructive but necessary to breaking the cycle of impunity.

***In closing, the APND warns that any bilateral agreement between the PP regime and TPLF which compromises the interests of the Amhara people will not have acceptance among Amharas, the largest stakeholders in the war in Northern Ethiopia.***

And the agreement's failure to acknowledge Amhara administration of ancestral lands of Welkait and Raya, and to revisit the apartheid constitution indicate early fault lines which if left unaddressed, will inevitably lead to more pain and suffering for the greater people of Ethiopia. Therefore, the peace talks process in its current form will not foster lasting peace and the only real path to peace and stability in this conflict is to revisit the peace talks in a manner which is inclusive and transparent. If this is not done, Ethiopia and its people will be pitted in an endless cycle of conflict which will devastate and destabilize the country and the wider region. Through courage, leadership and forward thinking from all stakeholders, these peace talks are an opportunity for Ethiopians to prevail and move forward towards a promising future.

*Include Amharas for lasting peace and stability in Ethiopia and the wider region*

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