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January 03, 2024

Ambassador Katherine Tai  
United States Trade Representative  
600 17th Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20006

**Re: U.S. Should Deny Ethiopia's Request to be Reinstated to AGOA**

Dear Ambassador Tai,

Lobbyit represents the Amhara Association of America (AAA)<sup>1</sup>; an organization that represents the political and humanitarian interests of the Amhara people of Ethiopia. I am submitting this letter on behalf of AAA and the Federation of Amharas in North America (FANA), an umbrella organization for major Amhara civic organizations in the United States, to ensure that Ethiopia is not restored as a beneficiary country under the *African Growth and Opportunity Act* (AGOA) until they end their human rights abuses against the Amhara people. This letter is in direct response to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's letter dated March 2, 2023.<sup>2</sup>

Ethiopia was terminated from the AGOA trade preference program by the U.S. government on January 1, 2022.<sup>3</sup> On November 2, 2021, President Biden released a statement that Ethiopia was not in compliance with the terms of AGOA due to "gross violations of internationally recognized human rights"<sup>4</sup> due to the human rights violations committed by the fighters of the Abiy regime and the Tigray People's Liberation

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<sup>1</sup> Amhara Association of America (AAA) <https://www.amharaamerica.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Ellison, Bradford. 2023. "Subject: Ethiopia Out-of-Cycle Review Petition." <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/2165-Informational-Materials-20230303-234.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Press Release, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, U.S. Terminates AGOA Trade Preference Program for Ethiopia, Mali, and Guinea (Jan. 1, 2022), available at <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2022/january/us-terminates-agoa-trade-preference-program-ethiopia-mali-and-guinea>

<sup>4</sup> "A Message to the Congress on the Termination of the Designation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Ethiopia) under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)," The White House, November 2, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/11/02/a-message-to-the-congress-on-the-termination-of-the-designation-of-the-federal-democratic-republic-of-ethiopia-ethiopia-the-republic-of-guinea-guinea-and-the-republic-of-mali-mali-as-beneficia/>.

Front (TPLF). On the same day, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) released a statement that provided “clear benchmarks for a pathway towards reinstatement”<sup>5</sup> with direct ways to address the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia. Since the signing of The Agreement for Lasting Peace Through Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the Abiy regime and TPLF, both have been inaccurately portraying improvement of the initial condition that led to the termination of AGOA while the Ethiopian government has been engaged in lobbying for reinstatement of Ethiopia to AGOA through an out of cycle review.<sup>6</sup>

The COHA established the “immediate and permanent cessation of hostilities” between the government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).<sup>7</sup> Due to the exclusion of Amharas from COHA, legitimate concerns of Amharas, such as longstanding demands for an international mechanism for accountability in the ongoing Amhara Genocide in the Oromia region and recognition of Amhara identity in Wolkait and Raya, were disregarded. Nonetheless, the COHA outlines specific requirements to which the Ethiopian government must adhere. The requirements include: protection of human rights; resumption of unfettered access to humanitarian aid throughout the country; restoration of telecommunications, electricity, and banking; ending sexual- and gender-based violence; and a transitional justice program to ensure accountability and reconciliation.<sup>8</sup>

While the fighting in Tigray has ended, the Ethiopian government and TPLF have not upheld the terms of the peace treaty they signed on November 2, 2022, and the human rights situation in the country has continued to deteriorate following Abiy's declaration of war in the Amhara region on April 2023.

Ethnic profiling enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests of ethnic Amhara civilians in the Amhara region, the Oromia region, and the city of Addis Ababa have intensified with high profile opposition figures, journalists, civil society leaders, professionals, and human rights activists detained since May 2022. Hundreds have died from communicable diseases like cholera in remote detention facilities in Awash Arba, Tulu Dimtu (Sheger city), Fiche Condominiums, and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> The state of emergency declared in the Amhara region in August 2023 has been used to justify a total communications blackout that has restricted information from coming out of the Amhara region.<sup>10</sup> Yet, media and human rights organization reports show that violence against the Amhara people has increased in frequency and intensity. For Instance, the state-funded Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) shows the Abiy Ahmed regime has resorted to

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<sup>5</sup> See #3

<sup>6</sup> Ellison, Bradford. 2023. “Subject: Ethiopia Out-of-Cycle Review Petition.” <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/2165-Informational-Materials-20230303-234.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Staff, Al Jazeera. 2022. “Five Key Takeaways from the Ethiopia Peace Deal.” [www.aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/4/five-key-takeaways-from-the-ethiopia-peace-deal). November 2, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/4/five-key-takeaways-from-the-ethiopia-peace-deal>.

<sup>8</sup> “Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF).” 2022. African Union, Peace and Security Department. November 2, 2022. <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/cessation-of-hostilities-agreement-between-the-government-of-the-federal-democratic-republic-of-ethiopia-and-the-tigray-peoples-liberation-front-tplf>.

<sup>9</sup> “Amhara Region: Concerning Human Rights Violations in the Context of the Armed Conflict.” 2023. Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. September 18, 2023. <https://ehrc.org/amhara-region-concerning-human-rights-violations-in-the-context-of-the-armed-conflict/>.

<sup>10</sup> “News: Global Network of Human Rights Organizations Urge Ethiopia to End Internet Shutdown in Amhara Region.” 2023. Addis Standard. September 13, 2023. <https://addisstandard.com/news-global-network-of-human-rights-organizations-urge-ethiopia-to-end-internet-shutdown-in-amhara-region/>.

mass arrests, widespread extrajudicial killings, drone attacks on civilians, sexual- and gender-based violence, cutting off aid, and shutting off the internet completely.<sup>11</sup> The EHRC reports that Abiy regime forces carried out direct attacks against civilians in Debre Markos and Merto Lemariam in East Gojjam Zone, Jiga in West Gojjam Zone, Adet and Merawi in North Gojjam Zone; Debre Tabor in Southern Gondar Zone; Delgi in Central Gondar Zone; Majetie, Lemi, Shewa Robit and Antsokiya towns in Northern Shoa Zone.<sup>12</sup> Illegal detention of civilians and journalists is also widespread. The EHRC report discovered illegal detentions in “Bahir Dar, Debre Tabor, Debre Markos, Finote Selam, Gondar, Kobo, Lalibela, Mekaneselam, and Shewa Robit towns of the Amhara Region; in Sheger city of the Oromia Region; and in Addis Ababa.”<sup>13</sup>

Particularly alarming is the increased targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure by drones. The Amhara Association of America’s tracking of confirmed drone attacks shows at least 22 drone attacks have killed hundreds of civilians in Amhara region. While the UN Human Rights Office has put out a statement in November about their concerns of increased drone strikes in Amhara region,<sup>14</sup> in a recent media appearance,<sup>15</sup> the Ethiopian military Chief of General Staff, Field Marshal Berhanu Jula, justified civilian killings and outlined plans to continue deploying such tactics against civilians.

On September 23, 2023, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention published their first Active Genocide Alert (AGA) for Ethiopia’s Amhara region. The AGA was updated on December 10 and was prompted by continued killings of ethnic Amharas by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), and the Oromia Special Force (OSF), including an increase in military drone attacks against civilians, and the continued state of emergency in the Amhara region.<sup>16</sup>

Despite claims of humanitarian aid resumption, reports from humanitarian organizations indicate ongoing restrictions on access in the Amhara region, leading to famine. On November 27<sup>th</sup>, in a testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, the Deputy Assistant Administrator for USAID, Mr. Tyler Beckelman testified aid organizations are not able to reach Amharas beyond the border due to ongoing conflict.<sup>17</sup> The EHRC has also recorded instances of road blockades to hinder “delivery of humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Amhara region.”<sup>18</sup> These blockades have left IDPs in the region in precarious situations without food and water. The EHRC continues to urge the government

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<sup>11</sup> “Amhara Region: Concerning Human Rights Violations in the Context of the Armed Conflict.” 2023. Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. September 18, 2023. <https://ehrc.org/amhara-region-concerning-human-rights-violations-in-the-context-of-the-armed-conflict/>.

<sup>12</sup> “Amhara Region: Concerning Human Rights Violations in the Context of the Armed Conflict.” 2023. Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. September 18, 2023. <https://ehrc.org/amhara-region-concerning-human-rights-violations-in-the-context-of-the-armed-conflict/>.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/11/ethiopia-violence-amhara-region>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVEL9ldIB7E> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MULXIm4gUU>

<sup>16</sup> “Active Genocide Alert - Ethiopia in Amhara Region 2023. Lemkin Institute. December 10, 2023. <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/active-genocide-alert-1/active-genocide-alert---ethiopia-in-amhara-region---update-1>.

<sup>17</sup> “Ethiopia: Promise or Perils, the State of U.S. Policy.” Committee on Foreign Affairs, [foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/ethiopia-promise-or-perils-the-state-of-u-s-policy/](https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/ethiopia-promise-or-perils-the-state-of-u-s-policy/).

<sup>18</sup> “EHRC Reports Human Rights Violations in Amhara; Calls for Immediate Ceasefire and Improved Detention Conditions.” 2023. Addis Standard. August 14, 2023. <https://addisstandard.com/ehrc-reports-human-rights-violations-in-amhara-calls-for-immediate-ceasefire-and-improved-detention-conditions/>.

to “immediately cease all violations and abuses of international human rights law,” agree to an immediate cessation of hostilities, and “put an end to widespread detentions, grant regular and unconditional access to the EHRC and other oversight bodies to all detention facilities for effective monitoring, release all arbitrarily arrested or detained individuals, and review the legality of their detention through a competent judicial authority.”<sup>19</sup>

The overwhelming evidence shows that internationally recognized human rights violations continue to be committed by the Abiy regime. Ethiopia was not granted reentry into AGOA at the annual conference in South Africa in November and according to Constance Hamilton, Assistant US Trade Representative for Africa, their membership would only be reconsidered if Ethiopia makes progress towards a “peaceful settlement of the conflict and facilitating conditions for the smooth flow of humanitarian aid to affected communities.”<sup>20</sup> Reinstating Ethiopia to AGOA while the country is engulfed in war and committing gross human rights violations would send the wrong signal and could be taken as support for the genocidal war against the Amhara people. Thus, on behalf of the civic organizations represented below, I plead with your office that Ethiopia’s AGOA reinstatement is not considered until the government of Ethiopia ends its war and human rights violations against Amharas and all Ethiopians and accountability for serious crimes committed by regime forces is guaranteed.

I appreciate your unwavering commitment to upholding the values of justice, democracy, and human rights. Your thoughtful consideration of this matter is crucial for the well-being of those affected by the ongoing war and human rights violations in Ethiopia.

Sincerely,



Cameron Wheeler  
Director of Government Relations  
Lobbyit, LLC

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<sup>19</sup> Id.

<sup>20</sup> “US Official Reveals Ethiopia’s Request for AGOA Eligibility ‘Still Pending’, Decision Unlikely at Upcoming Forum.” 2023. Addis Standard. October 27, 2023. <https://addisstandard.com/news-us-official-reveals-ethiopias-request-for-agoa-eligibility-still-pending-decision-unlikely-at-upcoming-forum/>.

FANA Member Organizations:

1. Amhara Association of America
2. Amhara Association of Arizona
3. Amhara Association of Chicago
4. Amhara Association of Colorado
5. Amhara Professionals Union
6. Amhara Association of Los Angeles
7. Amhara Association of Michigan
8. Amhara People's Civic Organization (Dallas, TX)
9. Amhara Association of Seattle
10. Amhara Community Sioux Falls, SD
11. Amhara Association of Oregon
12. Amhara Association of Nevada