



ENCDC



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RSADO



ENSF-HIDRI

December 16, 2020

Mr. Filippo Grandi
High Commissioner
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
Geneva, Switzerland

Subject: Urgent call to protect and save Eritrean refugees in the Tigray Region and other Parts of Ethiopia from abduction, killing, and forced repatriation to the war zone

On behalf of the undersigned Eritrean Political Forces (EPF), we are writing this open letter to you to express our grave concerns about the physical security, dignity and the wellbeing of Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers in the Tigray region and other parts of Ethiopia.

For the last two decades, Eritreans have been fleeing persecution, human rights violations, and oppression in search of safety, protection, freedom, security, and sanctuary within and outside the East African sub-region. During the last three difficult decades in Eritrea, Ethiopia generously offered safety, protection, security, and shelter to more than 173,000 Eritreans with the hope of returning to Eritrea when the killing, imprisonment and gross human rights violation that caused them to flee their country ceases to exist. Unfortunately, more than half of these vulnerable refugees were hosted and protected in the Tigray Region which has recently become a war zone.

Ever since November 4,2020, when the Federal Ethiopian Forces launched military offensive in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia, refugees, the most vulnerable people, have been caught in the crossfire where they have been subjected to killing, abduction and humiliation by the Eritrean forces. It is important to note that, an unjustifiable repatriation of war-escapees to the war zone by the Ethiopian government without protection, security, food, or medical supplies has added to the misery and risk to the lives of the refugees in a major way.

These unprecedented acts of human rights violations that continues to take place in the Tigray Region in particular, is a major violation of international law, International

Conventions and Norms; the UN Convention of 1951 and the 1967 Protocol, the principle of *non-refoulment and the 1948 UN Declaration of human rights*.

There are confirmed reports that around 10,000 Eritrean refugees have been kidnapped from the refugee camps in the Tigray Region by soldiers of the Eritrean Government; and they were forcibly returned to Eritrea; where they would face persecution, indefinite imprisonment without due process, torture, and death. Many of the refugees were wounded in the conflict, four are confirmed to have died in Glass Hospital, Eritrea.

Although Eritrean refugees are still stranded in the conflict zone, many traumatized refugees had managed to flee from the Tigray Region in search of safety in Gondar and Addis Ababa. Sadly, the Ethiopian government has been rounding them up and forcibly returning them to the war zone, where their lives, and safety will be at risk. This is an unprecedented dereliction of the Ethiopian government's legal duty, and moral failure to safeguard the vulnerable who sought refuge under its jurisdiction.

Therefore, we hereby express our genuine concern about the abduction, killings, and the serious violation of the rights of refugees by repatriating refugees to the war zone that has exposed the Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers to grave danger and insecurity.

We, therefore, hereby call upon the Ethiopian government to abide by International Law and International Conventions and Norms by respecting the rights of the refugees, and by ensuring the protection and safety of refugees in the Tigray Region and in Ethiopia in general. As you know, the Principle of Non-refoulment is central to the 1951 UN Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

We also call upon the Refugee Agency and the international community to act with the highest levels of urgency to pressure the Ethiopian Government and offer an alternative safe zone to ensure safety, security, and dignity of Eritrean refugees.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Official Representatives

1. Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change (ENCDC)
2. Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO)
3. United Eritreans for Justice (UEJ)
4. Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP)
5. Eritrean National Front (ENF)
6. Organization of Unity for Democratic Change (UDJ)

7. Eritrean National Salvation Front-Hidri (ENSF-Hidri)

This Letter has been copied to the Following government leaders of countries and Organizations:

- Mr. Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
- Mr. Joseph R. Biden, President-elect of the United States of America
- Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission
- Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, President of European Commission
- Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of European Commission
- Mr. Kebede Chane, Director General of ARRA
- Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Mr. Mohammed Abdelsalam Babiker, Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea
- Mr. Antonio Vitorino, Director General of the International Organization for Migration