



## SECURITY AND JUSTICE FOR TIGREANS IN ETHIOPIA

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This weekend, a number of international and local news correspondents were prevented from boarding their flights from Bole Airport to Mekelle, Tigray. The debacle at Bole Airport in Addis Ababa Ethiopia is an extension of the aggression Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government continues to inflict towards the Regional State of Tigray.

The constitutional mandate of the current government of Ethiopia comes to an end on the first week of this October, 2020. The ruling party chaired by PM Abiy Ahmed has, however, used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to resort to a constitutional manipulation and has extended its rule indefinitely beyond the five year limit that the Ethiopian constitution clearly provides for. Article 9 (3) of the constitution states "It is prohibited to assume state power in any manner other than through election." Article 54 (1) says: "Members of the House of Peoples' Representatives shall be elected by the People for a term of five years on the basis of universal suffrage and by direct, free and fair elections held by secret ballot." Article 67 (2) of the constitution reaffirms the same point.

In line with the Ethiopian constitution, Tigray is holding its National Regional State Government Election on September 9<sup>th</sup> 2020. On September 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Upper House, a branch of Federal Parliamentary Assembly convened at the last minute to pronounce the upcoming election illegal and the results null and void. This pronouncement was not accompanied by any legal restrictions preventing the media or private citizens from traveling to Tigray. In fact, the statement from the House of Federation included language guaranteeing that there would be no reprisals from the Federal Government against the people of Tigray for the actions of the government in holding the elections. Contrary to this statement and the existing laws guaranteeing free movement throughout Ethiopia, citizens of Tigray, local and international media are now being unofficially banned from traveling to Tigray. Local and international correspondents also reportedly had their laptops, cameras, and passports confiscated.

Since ascending to office on a wave of anti-Tigray political sentiments, Abiy Ahmed's government has prevented investors and Nongovernmental Organizations from going to Tigray on several occasions. Notably, the very public incident on 20<sup>th</sup> of December, 2019 when Chinese officials were recalled and made to disembark from their flight to Mekelle, Tigray.

There are five political parties running for offices throughout Tigray. The election in Tigray is a constitutionally sanctioned right that the government of Tigray has chosen to defend for its residents while the federal government chose to abandon the democratic rights of the remainder of the country to hold election. This exercise in electoral democracy should be monitored, observed and reported on freely, which would guarantee a free, fair and transparent election.

Ethiopian Foreign Correspondents Association and Committee to Protect Journalists too have published their statement urging the Federal Government of Ethiopia to immediately "uphold the country's constitution, which guarantees the existence of the fourth estate as a key pillar of democracy."

We, Security and Justice for Tigreans in Ethiopia call for the Ethiopian Federal authorities to respect the rights of citizens, journalists and investors for free movement to and from Tigray.