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Open Letter and Petition to President Putin and the Government of the Russian Federation

Subject – The War on Tigray and the Imperative and Urgency of Taking Concrete Actions to Avert a Full-blown Famine and the Genocide of an African People and Nationality in the 21st Century

1. We, concerned citizens and residents of the UK of Tigrayan Ethiopian origin, organised under Mekete Tigray UK, are writing to President Putin and the Government of the Russian Federation to protest against the Government's obstructionist role in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) regarding the crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia, and its complicity in the genocidal acts, war crimes and crime against humanity being committed against the people and nationality of Tigray by the regimes of Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia, Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea and the revanchist armies of the Amhara Regional Government.

“A Pogrom is happening in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is killing its own citizens wantonly. That is chilling, but true: by attempting to extirpate Ethiopia of Tigrayan ethnicity and heritage, Ethiopia's military and government stands accused of purposeful ethnic cleansing, a precursor to all-out genocide, as outlawed by the UN Convention against Genocide”

(Professor Robert Rotberg, Former President of the World Peace Foundation; 28 January 2021)

2. The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Abune Mathias, has spoken publically about the ongoing genocidal war being waged against the people and nationality of Tigray. He said:

“It is not the fault of the Tigray people. Many barbarisms have been conducted in Ethiopia, but what is happening in Tigray is of the highest brutality and cruelty. This is genocide of an entire people. They want to wipe-out the people of Tigray from the face of the Earth. I have said a lot of things but no one allows the message to be shared. Rather, it is being stifled and censored. The whole world should know it. The World must act now including all religious organisations to make their voice to stop the genocide.”

(The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Abune Mathias, 8 May 2021)

3. The War on Tigray has resulted in one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st Century, where there is credible and verifiable evidence from multiple sources of ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed over the last eight months by the regimes in Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Amhara Regional State as well as by drones and war armament provided by the United Arab Emirates. In the war on Tigray hunger and famine, and gender-based violence and rape are used systematically and on industrial scale as stratagem of war. The barbarity of the war in Tigray has escalated, when according to the The Telegraph report from Tigray on

24.05.2021, the Abiy and Isaias regimes began to use a chemical agent, **White Phosphorus**, against civilians inflicting horrific burns. This is also a clear example of war crimes being committed in Tigray.

4. The horrors and aftermaths of the war are catastrophic. 92% of the population of Tigray, 5.2 million people, are on the verge of famine, already 900,000 people are in famine conditions according to Mark Lowcock, UN Humanitarian Chief's briefing to the UN Security Council Secretariat on 5 June 2021. The imminent famine is expected to be equal in scope and magnitude to the 1984/85 Ethiopian famine where over a million people perished and where the main victims were from Tigray. This man-made famine is made possible by the barbaric and total war being waged where 100% of the farmers' harvests are looted or burnt; 100% farm animals and cattle are looted or killed. Furthermore, farmers are prevented from tilling their lands so that the hunger and starvation continues into the next season. The horror is further compounded by the deliberate and systematic hindrance of the flow of international humanitarian assistance; the near-total destruction of health facilities, educational, cultural and religious institutions; and the wanton destruction of vital civilian infrastructure in order to tear down the economic and social fabric of Tigray.

"The United Nations humanitarian chief has warned that famine is imminent in Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region as well as the country's north and there is a risk that hundreds of thousands of people or more will die. Mark Lowcock said the economy has been destroyed along with businesses, crops and farms and there are no banking or telecommunications services. "We are hearing of starvation-related deaths already," he said in a statement released on Friday. "People need to wake up. The international community needs to really step up, including through the provision of money." "The conflict has destroyed livelihoods and infrastructure ... brought about mass killings, abductions and sexual violence," Lowcock told Al Jazeera before adding that there was evidence pointing towards Eritrea using "starvation as a weapon of war", a violation and breach of humanitarian law. "There are now hundreds of thousands of people in northern Ethiopia in famine conditions. "That's the worst famine problem the world has seen for a decade. There is now a risk of a loss of life running into the hundreds of thousands or worse."

(Aljazeera; 5 June 2021)

5. The most heinous aspect of the war on Tigray is the mass rape of Tigrayan women and girls, over 22,000 to date. This is unprecedented in the world since the Second World War. This is as a strategy of ethnic cleansing and destroying the blood-line of Tigrayans through forceful demographic change.

"We must stop barbaric crimes against women. Gang rapes and mutilation are being carried out in the Tigray conflict but the world prefers to look the other way. Innumerable witness accounts leave no doubt that war crimes are being committed on a huge scale in Tigray, the region of Ethiopia where a military offensive against rebels was launched last November. Often committed by the armed forces of neighbouring Eritrea, working alongside Ethiopia's own army, these actions include mass sexual violence against women and girls. Such reports are terrible enough but it is only when you go into the details that you can fully appreciate that these crimes are against the very core of humanity. The accounts from Tigray include women being repeatedly raped next to the bodies of husbands or brothers who had tried to protect them; being told the men in uniform raping them are deliberately selected for being HIV-positive; assaulted with...."

(Lord William Hague, The Times, 31 May 2021)

Yet, Abiy Ahmed completely downplayed the essence of the heinous war crime being committed by his army when he remarked: *"What is the fuss about Tigrayans women being raped, our soldiers are being killed!"* (Abiy Ahmed's Response to Sexual Violence and Rape in Tigray; House of Representatives Session, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; EBC, 23 March 2021).

6. It has been very clear for many months now that a catastrophe is unfolding in Tigray equal in proportions to that in Rwanda or Darfur. Yet the Government of Russia has played a deliberate obstructionist role by preventing, through its veto power, the UN Security Council from taking positions and actions that prevent the making of genocide, the weaponisation of man-made famine and unprecedented level of sexual violence and rape being committed in Tigray. This is under a false pretence and argument of non-interference and of safeguarding Ethiopia's sovereignty. It is high time for the Russian Government to stop appeasing the tyrants Isaias, Abiy Ahmed or the Amhara Regional Government.

“I vividly recall the shocking images back in 1984 of a million emaciated Ethiopian men, women and children, many of them from Tigray, who had fled the country in the midst of a massive famine caused by prolonged drought, widespread food shortages, and discriminatory government policies. Today, the people of Tigray are being subjected to human rights atrocities on an appalling scale, and they are being denied urgently needed humanitarian aid – aid that is being blocked by the Ethiopian and Eritrean militaries as well as other armed groups. The terrible reality today is that famine, crimes against humanity and genocide are occurring in Tigray, and they are occurring for one reason: the complicity of government officials in Addis and in Asmara. In fact, there are reports that the situation in Tigray could be worse than in Darfur.”

(US Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, Press Statement on Tigray; 6 June 2021)

7. Ethiopia under Abiy Ahmed is heading towards disintegration in many fronts. Over the last three years he has demonstrated his capacity to turn the country from a promising future, relative peace and security and economic development into a failing and pariah state, a complete throwback to the eras the Monarchy and the dictator Mengistu Hailemariam. The Troika - Abiy Ahmed, Isaias Afewerki and Mohammed Farmajo - have destabilised the Horn of Africa as never before with grave ramifications in terms of regional insecurity and instability; increased risk of inter-state wars; the abandonment of multilateralism; the weakening of regional institutions, such as IGAD; the spread of irregular immigration; and the fermentation of violent extremism in East Africa.

8. The world and Russia, however, have been very late and have done very little to end the war and stop its horrendous aftermaths for more than eight months. It is in the nature of the regimes that they do not respond when they feel they are being appeased, or when the sanctions are superficial. The indications are that they will continue to pursue their genocidal war until it is too late to avert a famine or to stope genocide, which are both extremely time-sensitive. They have not been stopped for eight months and will therefore continue to think and behave the same by lying, misinforming, misleading, protesting, prevaricating, stalling and threatening - modus operandi and tactics mastered by Isaias Afewerki and his pupil, Abiy Ahmed. The tragedy is governments and international agencies have been in limbo to effectively confront the issue by taking concrete measures, including punitive economic and financial sanctions, or the threat of military actions in order to avert a famine, widespread sexual violence and rape and the making of genocide.

“Every now and then, East Africa breaks into world consciousness. It happened in the mid-1980s, when Ethiopia underwent a terrible famine. Teams of pop stars made two hit “Charity Singles”: “We are the World” and “Do they Know it is Christmas?” Today, Ethiopia is again in the news, for War in Tigray, a region in the country's north. What is happening there is worse than war, if such a thing is possible. Tigray is a theatre for war crimes and crime against humanity. To make it more interesting – if that is the word – Ethiopia's head of state is the 2019 Nobel Peace Laureate, Prime Minister of Ethiopia.”

(Jay Nordlinger, National Review; 22 March 2021)

9. We say to the Government of the Russian Federation:

- The Abiy Ahmed sham unilateral ceasefire is, in fact, a Medieval Strategy of Siege Warfare in order to militarily, economically and politically strangle and subjugate Tigray.
- The Abiy regime is against the unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. He is a disintegrative political actor.
- Ethiopia's sovereignty does not mean condoning or being complicit in the genocidal war in Tigray
- Abiy and his mentor Isaias are proven threats to the peace and stability of the Horn of Africa.
- Do not be associated with Genocide of an African people, or allow famine and rape as weapons of war.
- Do not play great power rivalry or hegemonic politics at the expense of an African people. Africa cannot afford another Rwanda or Darfur in Tigray.

10. We demand the Russian Government to urge the Abiy and Isaias regimes through the UN for:

- 1) *The full, unconditional, and immediate withdrawal of the Eritrean Military and Amhara Special forces and Militia from Tigray.*
- 2) *Unhindered access to humanitarian aid.*
- 3) *The beginning of all-inclusive negotiations for a durable peace.*
- 4) *Resettlement of the most vulnerable sections of refugees and displaced people.*
- 5) *Repatriation of refugee and displaced people to their homes in Tigray in safety and security.*
- 6) *Investigation of all human rights violations including the crime of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.*
- 7) *Prosecution of the perpetrators of heinous international war crimes.*
- 8) *Return of looted property and reconstruction of Tigray's war-ravaged infrastructure.*

11. Finally, we plead and call upon the Government of Russia and the international community to act urgently to stop this barbaric war and its horrendous aftermaths, including hunger, starvation and famine. The war on Tigray has the hall mark of the genocide in Rwanda and Darfur, which occurred while the world looked the other way. As Lord William Hague put it, the World is looking the other way in so far as they have failed to take meaningful and decisive action to stop the making of genocide of an African people in the 21st century. The responsibility and burden of history rests on world leaders including *President Putin and the Russian Government* and the International community. Moreover, the war in Tigray is a harbinger to the disintegration of Ethiopia and the spread of insecurity and instability in the Horn of Africa with devastating ramifications. These are compelling regional security and strategic reasons why the Russian Government act now concretely and decisively. We implore Russia and contend that action delayed is action denied. The struggle continues, Tigray shall and is prevailing. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

**Mekete Tigray UK;
Tigrayan Youth Network;
World-wide Association of Tigrayan Women; and
The Global Tigrayan Ethiopian Diaspora**