

Annex I – Background and context

1. Modern Ethiopia was established after a period of expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century, although it has roots going back many centuries. Between 1855 and 1898, a succession of Tigrayan and Amhara emperors moved to centralize their authority, and large areas to the south (including several independent kingdoms/emirates) were brought under the control of the northern state. This process was competitive with European colonial conquest of neighbouring areas.
2. By the end of the expansion, Ethiopia included populations speaking more than 80 recognised languages, many of them followers of Islam or of traditional religions. Over the last century, adherence to Protestant and evangelical Christianity has grown. In addition to the majority highland subsistence farmers, Ethiopia's citizens now include fast-growing urban populations, large numbers of lowland pastoralists (especially in Afar and Somali Regional States in the east), transhumant cultivators and hunting minorities (especially to the south and west). Its demographic, cultural and economic patterns are diverse.
3. Ethiopia has been subject to periodic cycles of violent political conflict. It began the twentieth century as a relatively prominent global power but ended it as one of the world's poorest countries. Emperor Haile Selassie I was crowned in 1930, and briefly exiled during the Italian occupation (1935-1940). Despite attempts at modernization and centralization, in the final decades of his long reign, dissatisfaction with the pace of change increased. In 1974 he was overthrown by a committee of the armed forces, known as the *Derg*, a Soviet-aligned military regime that ruled until 1991. The *Derg* moved against opponents in a brutal "Red Terror" crackdown, and in a series of civil wars with insurgents in Eritrea (then part of Ethiopia), Oromia, Tigray and elsewhere.
4. The politicization of ethnicity is highly controversial because of the country's complex history and the diversity of its people. 'National-' or 'ethnic-' based groups began to move against the centralised government of the *Derg*. By the end of the 1980s, as Soviet support waned, a pragmatic coalition of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) joined forces to defeat the regime. The EPRDF had been established by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and a multi-ethnic partner organisation in 1989. In 1991, it established a Transitional Government with other groups. Eritrea seceded after a popular referendum (1993). Ethiopia's constitution was redrawn as a federation of "nations, nationalities, and peoples" in 1995.
5. EPRDF rule saw the formal decentralisation of government structures to federated "Regional States" (initially 9, now 11). It also saw strong moves to institutionalise anti-poverty and food security architectures, limited economic liberalisation and (especially after 2003) very high growth rates. However, the EPRDF's political

competitors were gradually outflanked, and several (including the OLF) returned to armed opposition. Relations between the EPRDF-led government and the new government in Eritrea deteriorated, and a brutal border war (1998-2000) was followed by a standoff. The Eritrean government bitterly blamed the TPLF for its military defeat, and began actively to host, support and train opponents of the Ethiopian government across the Horn.

6. In 2005, a coalition of Ethiopian political parties opposed to the EPRDF's system of federalism polled strongly in national elections. Its leaders claimed they were cheated of a national victory and refused to take up their seats in parliament. Protests in June and November of that year were harshly repressed and descended into violence, with many killed. Opposition leaders were arrested and prosecuted. Many of those later pardoned left the country, and some headed to Eritrea to pursue more militant opposition. EPRDF consolidated political control and expanded party membership. In 2009, the Eritrean government was subjected to UN sanctions for its support to several Somali groups.
7. In 2012, the powerful TPLF/EPRDF Chairman died unexpectedly. A new Prime Minister (PM) from the South sought to lead EPRDF by consensus but faced new opposition. Within the ruling party, recrimination and tension over the balance of power between the EPRDF's Amhara, Oromo, and Tigrayan member parties grew. Each front began to consolidate its authority at the level of the Regional State it governed. An overtly competitive ethnic edge (previously taboo) crept into ruling party relations as politicians jockeyed for power. It spilled over into Oromo and Amhara protests. The government eventually declared a state of emergency, but protest grew.
8. After four years of anti-government protests and rising ethno-nationalist sentiment, in April 2018, the EPRDF chose a new PM from its Oromo wing. Dr Abiy Ahmed took office promising political and economic reform, amid great optimism and with strong international support. He was lauded for quickly making peace with neighbouring Eritrea. A comprehensive amnesty saw a wide range of EPRDF's opponents return to Ethiopia from exile, including in Eritrea, or released from jail. Among them were politicians opposed to federalism, supporters of pre-1991 governments who favoured a more centrist arrangement, and others who had supported federalism but felt themselves marginalised or excluded.
9. Opponents' resentment focused on the TPLF. Tigrayans had continued to occupy key leadership positions in federal military and security from 2012-2018. After the April 2018 change, TPLF leaders were widely seen as having been displaced from the centres of power. The new PM appealed to some of the TPLF's strongest critics and espoused their centrist rhetoric. These included both the Eritrean government (which blamed the TPLF for Ethiopia's refusal to accept an international boundary ruling in 2000, and for the international sanctions it faced in 2009); and also several of the returning armed opposition movements it had hosted.

10. There are two accounts of what followed. Federal government spokespersons and their supporters (including in Eritrea) allege that TPLF veterans masterminded a series of violent attempts to sabotage or undermine the government, charges they deny. Others trace the growth of vigorously anti-TPLF and ethnicised sentiment in government statements, and government-aligned media. Narratives drew on anti-Tigrayan ethnic slurs that had surfaced in Eritrean propaganda during the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998-2000), in Ethiopian nationalist rhetoric around contested elections (2004-2006), and in Oromo (and Amhara) activism during anti-government protests (2014-2018).
11. Hate speech demonising Amhara and Oromo communities also proliferated in a newly competitive and ethnicised political environment. Political conflict erupted in inter-communal violence and religious tensions, particularly in Oromia (Guji and Wollega), in Benishangul Gumuz and its borders with Amhara and Oromia, and in parts of the Southern Region. In 2018, some returning Oromo and Amhara militants refused to demobilise. In January 2019, the National Defence Force (ENDF) launched a counterinsurgency against the emerging Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Western Oromia, in a conflict that has since escalated and spread under an internet blackout.
12. New leaders were installed in several of the federation's States: Somali (August 2018), Gambella (October) and Afar (December) with reshuffles in Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia, and Amhara (where the State President was assassinated in July 2019). When the PM launched a new single national Prosperity Party in December 2019, the TPLF (and some ruling Oromo politicians) declined to join.
13. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the federal government postponed elections scheduled for May 2020. Influential Oromo opposition leaders were arrested after further ethnicised violence when a popular singer was assassinated in mid-2020. The TPLF pressed ahead with elections in Tigray in September 2020, ignoring federal decree. Federal and Tigray regional governments declared one another's actions 'unconstitutional,' and fighting erupted on 3-4 November 2020. Again accounts differ. Tigrayan forces moved to take over ENDF Northern Command personnel and equipment in what the federal government described as a "treasonous attack," which Tigray authorities saw as "pre-emptive defence."
14. Action by Ethiopian federal and Eritrean forces, supported by Amhara Regional State Special Forces, was immediate and coordinated. What the government called a 'law and order operation' was launched against what it termed TPLF 'terrorists,' and by the end of the month had captured Mekelle and main towns of Tigray. In a second phase of the war, Tigrayan forces regrouped. By June 2021 federal and allied forces had left much of Tigray, with the exception of Western Tigray and some areas along the northern border with Eritrea. During the second half of 2021, Tigray-allied forces fought south into parts of Afar and Amhara. They came within 150kms of Addis Ababa by November, before abruptly withdrawing north in the

face of a federal counter-offensive, including attacks from armed unmanned combat aerial vehicles or drones.

15. Since the beginning of 2022, active fighting between Tigrayan and federal government forces had been limited to some skirmishing, although there was significant violence in Afar in the early months of the year. Tension escalated as food and medical supplies to Tigray continued to be interrupted, and essential services (banking, telecommunications, electricity and trade) continued to be cut. Modest humanitarian flows resumed in April 2022 but were interrupted in August 2022 as heavy fighting erupted again, on four fronts in and around Tigray's borders.
16. In Oromia, since April 2022 the federal government has intensified its counterinsurgency against the OLA. Like the TPLF, the OLA was also proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the government. It is active in 8 of Oromia's 21 zones. Large numbers of civilians were killed in Western Oromia in June and July 2022, and again at the end of August 2022. In April 2022, Muslims were attacked and killed in in northwest Amhara.