

ROBERT MENENDEZ, NEW JERSEY, CHAIRMAN

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND  
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE  
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, CONNECTICUT  
TIM Kaine, VIRGINIA  
EDWARD J. MARKEY, MASSACHUSETTS  
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON  
CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY  
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII  
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND

JAMES E. RISCH, IDAHO  
MARCO RUBIO, FLORIDA  
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN  
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH  
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO  
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY  
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA  
JOHN BARRASSO, WYOMING  
TED CRUZ, TEXAS  
MIKE ROUNDS, SOUTH DAKOTA  
BILL HAGERTY, TENNESSEE

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 17, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

I write with grave concern about ongoing conflict in Ethiopia. I continue to assert that Ethiopian officials have committed genocide in Tigray and I strongly urge the administration to make its own assessment as soon as possible.

You responded to the crisis early in your administration, including by dispatching Senator Chris Coons as your Special Representative to engage with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and appointing a Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa to sustain diplomatic efforts. Your administration also announced visa restrictions, a pause in some assistance, and in September of last year you issued an Executive Order putting in place a framework for sanctioning those responsible for, or complicit in, various activities prolonging the conflict in Ethiopia. All of these actions have had an impact. After months of negotiations, hundreds of American citizens trapped in Tigray have been given safe passage to the United States. Prominent opposition figures have been released from prison. The Ethiopian federal government's State of Emergency has been lifted, and thousands of the Tigrayans rounded up during the State of Emergency have been freed from detention.

However much more work remains to be done.

As United States Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power pointed out last week, the Government of Ethiopia continues its humanitarian blockade of Tigray. Thousands of political opponents of the regime remain in prison, seemingly for no reason other than expressing support for opposition political parties, along with those who were detained during the State of Emergency and are slated to be charged and prosecuted. And reports of conflict and abuse continue in northern Ethiopia and beyond. On Monday, Reuters reported on a video that surfaced on social media showing men—some of whom were wearing Ethiopian military uniforms-- burning civilians to death in the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

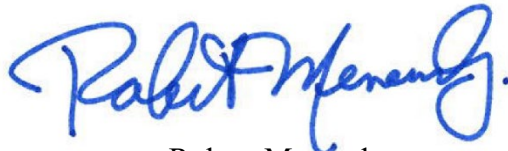
It is clear that all parties to the conflict have committed abuses. Just over a week ago, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that from late November 2021 to the end of February of this year, the human rights and security situation in the country significantly deteriorated significantly. More than 300 people were killed in air strikes, carried out by the federal government in Tigray. Tigrayan forces in the Amhara region stand accused of 300

incidents of rape. Many more incidents have occurred during the course of hostilities that the OHCHR has pointed out may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity.

At a hearing I convened in May of last year, I asked if the administration had determined whether war crimes or crimes against humanity had taken place in Tigray. I was assured that the State Department was “acutely aware of the need to determine whether the conduct meets the legal standards for atrocity crimes.” However, nearly a year later State Department officials have indicated that it is no longer working on such a determination. It appears that the Department of State decided not to pursue this question so as to avoid stating publicly what we have all witnessed: the atrocities that have taken place in Ethiopia bear the hallmarks of war crimes or crimes against humanity. I believe that the actions taken by the Ethiopian federal government amount to genocide, and I urge you direct the Secretary of State to assess whether war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide have taken place. I also ask that you carefully consider whether Prime Minister Abiy should be invited to participate in the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit that you announced for later this year, even absent such a determination.

We have strategic interests in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea Corridor more broadly. A strong and enduring partnership with Ethiopia would help us pursue those interests. However, the pursuit of our strategic interests at the expense of the Ethiopian people and a clear statement of fact flies in the face of core American values, and is ultimately unsustainable. Accountability for atrocities must be pursued, regardless of how high ranking those responsible may be. I stand ready to partner with you on this and other matters related to the region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez  
Chairman