

**ETHIOPIA IN CRISIS: U.S. STRATEGY
AND POLICY RESPONSE**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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ETHIOPIA IN CRISIS: U.S. STRATEGY AND POLICY RESPONSE

THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:09 a.m. in room SR-301, Hon. Robert Menendez, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Booker, Risch, and Romney.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Let me thank our colleagues and our witnesses for their patience. The ranking member and I were discussing a couple of items.

We have a vote going on as we speak. So I think what we will do is I will have myself and the ranking member do our opening statements. We will recess for—it is one vote at this point—for the vote, and then we will come back and begin our witness statements.

So let me start by thanking today's witnesses for testifying about the ongoing crisis in Ethiopia. For decades, Ethiopia has been a key security partner for the U.S. and the Horn of Africa and Red Sea corridor, a region of tremendous strategic significance.

New Jersey is also home to a proud Ethiopian Diaspora community that remains actively engaged with current events. Until recently, many of us were hopefully watching a country that appeared to be in the midst of a historic transition to democracy after years of authoritarian rule.

Now, a brutal war in Tigray internationalized by Eritrea's participation, violence, and insecurity in other parts of the country and rapidly closing political space have given rise to the possibility that Ethiopia is instead on a trajectory towards state collapse.

On Tigray, let me be blunt. I see echoes of Darfur. There are reports of extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and forced displacement of Tigrayans. Armed actors have looted and destroyed health and education installations, attacked refugee camps.

CNN recently reported that armed actors are blocking food aid. Aid workers have been murdered. As a result, Tigray now appears to be on the brink of famine. All sides are guilty of abuses.

The fragmentary reporting we have indicates that Ethiopian, Eritrean, and allied militia have disproportionately been responsible for targeting civilians in a manner that is both reckless and sinister.

We appear to be witnessing war crimes and crimes against humanity. While the conflict in Tigray is the most alarming and graphic illustration of insecurity and ethnic violence in Ethiopia, it is far from the only place in the country where civilians, including members of Ethiopia's two largest ethnic groups, Amhara and Oromo, and other communities are being targeted and killed in significant numbers.

A major force behind much of the unrest gripping the country is rapidly closing political space as a result of a failed democratic transition. The Prime Minister initiated laudable reforms early in his tenure.

However, momentum has shifted. His government has jailed opposition leaders and their supporters, denied them due process. On his watch, journalists have been intimidated and even killed, and dissent and free speech have been suppressed.

Unfortunately, the Ethiopian Government has refused to pursue the kind of political dialogue that could lead to a political consensus about how a new Ethiopia should be governed.

In this environment, there is little hope that Ethiopia's June 21 elections can credibly reflect the will of the people.

I applaud the Administration's focus on this crisis. The appointment of Ambassador Feltman as Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa sent that important signal. Although we do need to have a broader conversation about Special Envoys in general, I appreciate this effort thus far.

Prime Minister Abiy has met our diplomatic initiatives with stonewalling, broken promises, and unfilled commitments.

The Government has failed to provide unfettered humanitarian access, secure the withdrawal of Eritrean troops, or commit to a political solution to the conflict, and throughout it has engaged in misrepresentation and disinformation, including on the origins of the crisis in Tigray, the human rights and humanitarian situation on the ground, and the active involvement of foreign troops in the conflict.

It has become abundantly clear that events on the ground call for a robust response from the U.S., the region, and the international community, one that conveys an unequivocal message.

We will not tolerate war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic violence. We must pursue accountability no matter how high up the chain of command responsibility lies.

I support the Administration's announcement of visa sanctions and a pause in some assistance. We should also impose targeted financial sanctions on individuals perpetrating conflict, use our voice and vote at international financial institutions to oppose all funding that does not directly support the basic needs of the Ethiopian people, and ensure that Ethiopian troops currently operating in Tigray who may be implicated in war crimes are not deployed as U.N. peacekeepers.

In addition, the Administration should begin marshaling international support for arms embargoes so that the weapons of war fueling this disastrous crisis can be taken off the table.

We have strategic interests in partnership with Ethiopian, and its leaders will not be pleased by these actions.

The pursuit of our strategic interests at the expense of the Ethiopian people flies in the face of core American values and is, ultimately, unsustainable.

With that, let me turn to the distinguished ranking member, Senator Risch, for his statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ethiopia is a vital and strategic, security, economic, and regional partner whose relationship did improve significantly with the United States under Prime Minister Abiy's Government.

The historical political transition in 2018 that ushered Abiy into power was initially met with great optimism, not just from the United States but also the world.

The promise for Ethiopia's democratic transition is still possible, but recent events in both Ethiopia and the wider region, as well as global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic shocks, have complicated Ethiopia's journey.

In particular, the ongoing war in Tigray, which began last November, has not just eroded U.S. optimism in Ethiopia's democratic future but has instilled deep concerns that Ethiopia's economic and political transition is not for every Ethiopian.

This war and its aftershocks have exposed deep divisions in Ethiopian society, and worse, has reignited possibilities of our greatest fears for this vital country, anchoring the Horn of Africa region.

I am horrified by what we are witnessing in Tigray and what was initially termed by the Ethiopian Government as a law enforcement operation.

This operation has displaced millions and left millions more in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The war has inflamed inter-communal violence, seen mass killings, widespread use of rape as a weapon, targeted destruction of livelihoods, and other horrifying cases of human rights abuses.

It has also caused a large displacement of persons, which has led to a massive refugee flow, primarily into Sudan.

This conflict has also impacted peacekeeping missions in Sudan and Somalia, inflamed tensions on Ethiopia's borders, and forced regional states to pick sides, not just regarding the Tigray war but also the crisis over the filling of Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, also known as GERD.

The war in Tigray is a threat to not only the future of the Ethiopian state and the wider region, but also to the strategic, economic, and security interests of the United States.

Increased instability on the Horn of Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, further aggravates what is already a volatile region wracked with crisis in countries undergoing fragile transitions.

Such instability also undermines vital U.S. counterterrorism efforts. Countries like China, Russia, Turkey, and others in the Gulf

are actively scrambling over access to resources in security, influence, and power centers on the Horn of Africa and elsewhere on the continent, of course.

At the end of the 116th Congress, I introduced a resolution with Senator Cardin calling for a peaceful resolution to the Tigray conflict.

We reintroduced an updated version of the resolution this Congress, which passed this committee in late March and moved unanimously out of the full Senate just last week.

While Ethiopia's transition faces significant challenges, passing this resolution sent an important bipartisan signal to Ethiopia, our allies, and our own Government that the withdrawal of Eritrean forces, the cessation of hostilities in Tigray, and getting Ethiopia back on track with its democratic transition are priorities for the United States Senate and the United States Government.

Every day we learn of new details reflecting the true horror and violence occurring throughout Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Government has either dismissed such reports as false or provided assurances to our diplomats and officials that the situation is not as bad as it seems.

Sometimes the Government will even commit to conducting investigations and holding accountable anyone found to have committed a crime. That is a commitment only.

We have seen this script before in places like Rwanda, Darfur, and Zimbabwe. Leaving matters of accountability up to one of the participants in this conflict will not stop the atrocities and suffering.

The United States and its allies must continue to transition and do so quickly from a position of hands off diplomacy, like encouragement, engagement and talking to the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to hands-on action.

Even though it took longer than I would have liked, I am pleased by this Administration's recent actions to impose visa sanctions on those carrying out those atrocities and thwarting vital humanitarian assistance.

I am also glad to see limits placed on foreign aid and using our voice and vote at multilateral financial institutions to send a clear message to the Ethiopian Government that what is happening in their country is unacceptable.

I encourage the Administration to continue exploring every option to end the war in Tigray, to continue building a coalition of like-minded allies, to pursue justice and accountability, including Global Magnitsky sanctions, and to work with Ethiopian people to help get their democratic transition back on track, starting with salvaging their upcoming general elections on June 21.

I look forward to a robust discussion on these issues. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch. So there is one vote. The committee will recess subject to the call of the chair, and when we return we will introduce our two distinguished witnesses, and I look forward to their testimony.

With that, this hearing is subject to recess.

[Recess.]

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order once again.

With us today on behalf of the Administration is Ambassador Robert Godec, the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs, who has a long and distinguished career in the Foreign Service.

Ambassador Godec previously served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary and as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau. Prior to these assignments, the Ambassador was Deputy Commandant and International Affairs Advisor at the National War College and Ambassador to Kenya.

Ambassador Godec also served as the Principal Deputy Coordinator for counterterrorism in the Bureau of Counterterrorism at the Department of State and our Ambassador to Tunisia.

Ambassador Godec is joined this morning by Ms. Sarah Charles, the Assistant to the Administrative USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.

Prior to that, Ms. Charles was the Senior Director for policy and advocacy for the International Rescue Committee where she led efforts to reform the humanitarian aid system and promote policies to improve the lives of refugees and other conflict-affected people.

Her previous positions include several stints on the White House National Security Council, including as Director for Humanitarian Affairs, acting Senior Director for Strategic Planning, and before joining the NSC, Ms. Charles covered the Middle East for USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives.

Welcome to both of you. Thank you for the insights I think you will provide the committee. Your full statements will be included in the record. We ask you to summarize it in about 5 minutes so we can have a conversation with you.

Ambassador, you will be recognized first. Please proceed.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROBERT F. GODEC, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, BUREAU OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador GODEC. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Ethiopia, a country with a rich history, but that today is wracked by inter-communal violence that threatens to undermine its national unity and destabilize the Horn of Africa.

The United States is committed to building an enduring partnership with the Ethiopian people, but that only adds to the grave concern that we all share about the crisis in the country, particularly in Tigray.

The violence in Tigray is horrifying. It shocks the conscience. Since the conflict began in November, thousands have died with thousands more injured. We estimate that there are approximately 2 million internally-displaced persons, 63,000 refugees, and 5.2 million people in urgent need of assistance.

The United States condemns in the strongest terms the brutal killings, sexual violence including gang rape, forced removals, wanton destruction of civilian property. We condemn all of the human

rights violations, abuses, and atrocities that have taken place in Tigray.

The atrocities have been committed by all of the armed actors including the Ethiopian National Defense Force, Amharan Regional Forces, Eritrean Defense Forces, and to some but a lesser degree by the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

In western Tigray, security forces belonging to the Amhara regional Government are forcing ethnic Tigrayans from their homes in what Secretary Blinken has described as acts of ethnic cleansing.

The Eritrean Defense Forces are undertaking a campaign of unremitting violence and destruction that amounts to the collective punishment of the people of Tigray. The violence, abuses, and atrocities are unacceptable. They must stop now.

Despite statements by the Ethiopian Government that the conflict is over, the security situation has worsened in recent weeks, exacerbating the dire humanitarian crisis and hindering an already difficult response.

U.S. and U.N. analysis shows that the continuing conflict has resulted in a situation close to famine. There are confirmed reports of Tigrayans dying from malnutrition and starvation.

Increased fighting at checkpoints, lawlessness, and harassment by the warring parties are blocking humanitarian movements and putting them at physical risk throughout Tigray. The killings of a USAID partner, staff member, and seven other humanitarian workers are tragic and we condemn them.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the U.S. Government has worked with international partners to end it. We seek an immediate ceasefire, full and unhindered humanitarian access, protection of civilians, the withdrawal of Eritrean forces and Amharan Regional Forces, a political settlement to the crisis, and an independent international investigation of human rights violations and abuses and atrocities, and accountability for those responsible.

The Administration is using every available tool to alleviate suffering and end the conflict. We have coordinated with like-minded partners, regional governments, the African Union, and a wide range of other organizations and individuals.

We have pressed the U.N. Security Council and the U.N. Human Rights Council to put the situation in Ethiopia on their agendas and to act to end the crisis.

We have engaged directly with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments at the highest levels, pressing them to end the hostilities and to follow through on commitments for the withdrawal of Eritrean forces as well as to protect civilians and ensure unhindered humanitarian access.

Multiple calls from the Secretary of State to Prime Minister Abiy and Senator Coons' travel to Ethiopia on behalf of President Biden resulted in some modest progress, but it is far from sufficient. Following his appointment, Special Envoy Feltman took a 2-week trip to the region earlier this month in an intensive effort to find a durable solution. He will return to the region next week.

While diplomatic efforts have been underway, the Administration has also taken stronger steps. In light of the human rights situation, we have restricted our foreign assistance to Ethiopia.

We will continue, however, humanitarian assistance and other critical programs in health, food security, democracy, and human rights. We are withholding support for new lending from the multilateral development banks that does not address basic human needs and are asking our allies to do likewise.

The Secretary of State has taken steps to impose visa restrictions on Ethiopian and Eritrean Government officials, Amhara regional and irregular forces and members of the TPLF who are impeding the resolution of the crisis, blocking humanitarian access, or committing atrocities.

Should those stoking the conflict fail to reverse course, Ethiopia and Eritrea should anticipate further actions. It cannot be business as usual in the face of the violence and atrocities in Tigray.

Tragically, while Tigray is the worst of the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, it is only one of them. From attacks on ethnic Amharans and the Gumuz in Benishangul Gumuz, ethnic Oromo and Amharans in Oromia to violence between people in the Afar and Somali regions to the multiple conflicts unfolding in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, Ethiopia is at a turning point.

The Government's response of mass arrests, media restrictions, human rights violations, and declining political space is fueling inter-communal rivalry and imperiling the national elections now scheduled for June 21.

Widespread insecurity, mass displacement, and logistical challenges raise serious questions about these elections, and the United States has made the decision not to deploy observers to monitor them.

We urge the Ethiopian Government to begin an inclusive dialogue of reconciliation to end the deep-rooted conflicts and to find a shared democratic path forward. The United States is prepared to support such a dialogue.

Finally, there are the ongoing challenges around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the al-Fashaga border area between Sudan and Ethiopia.

On the GERD, the United States believes Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan's concerns over water security can best be addressed through serious negotiations among the parties under the leadership of the African Union.

Both problems pose risks to the regional peace and security, and the United States Government is working hard with partners to help resolve them.

As I said at the beginning, the United States is committed to a partnership with the Ethiopian people, the country's national unity, and stability in the Horn of Africa.

Mr. Chairman, members, alarm bells are ringing in Ethiopia. The risk of protracted and wider conflict is growing, and the time for action to prevent it is now.

In that regard, I want to thank the Congress for the strong resolutions and statements that have been issued. They are important and may help. The State Department will continue to work closely with you to address the crises in Ethiopia.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you very much.
[The prepared statement of Ambassador Godec follows:]

Prepared Statement of Ambassador Robert F. Godec

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about Ethiopia—a country with a rich history but that today is wracked by inter-communal violence that threatens to undermine its national unity and destabilize the Horn of Africa. The United States is committed to building an enduring partnership with the Ethiopian people, and that only adds to the grave concern we all share about the crisis in the country, particularly in Tigray.

The violence in Tigray is horrifying. It shocks the conscience. Since the conflict began in November, thousands have died with thousands more injured. We estimate there are approximately 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 63,000 refugees, and 5.2 million people in urgent need of assistance. The United States condemns in the strongest terms the brutal killings, sexual violence including gang rape, forced removals, and the wanton destruction of civilian property. We condemn all the human rights violations, abuses, and atrocities that have taken place in Tigray.

The atrocities have been committed by all the armed actors, including the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), Amhara regional forces, the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). In western Tigray, security forces belonging to the Amhara Regional Government are forcing ethnic Tigrayans from their homes in what Secretary Blinken has described as acts of ethnic cleansing. The Eritrean Defense Forces are undertaking a campaign of unremitting violence and destruction that amounts to the collective punishment of the people of Tigray. The violence, abuses, and atrocities are unacceptable. They must stop now.

Despite statements by the Ethiopian Government that the conflict is over, the security situation has worsened in recent weeks, exacerbating the dire humanitarian crisis, and hindering an already difficult response. U.S. and U.N. analysis shows the continuing conflict has resulted in a situation close to famine. There are confirmed reports of Tigrayans dying from malnutrition and starvation. Increased fighting, checkpoints, lawlessness, and harassment by the warring parties are blocking humanitarians' movements—and putting them at physical risk—throughout Tigray. The killings of a USAID partner staff member and seven other humanitarian workers are tragic and we condemn them.

Since the beginning of the conflict, the U.S. Government has worked with international partners to end it. We seek an immediate ceasefire; full and unhindered humanitarian access; protection of civilians; the withdrawal of Eritrean forces and Amhara regional forces; a political settlement of the crisis; and an independent, international investigation of human rights violations and abuses, and atrocities; and accountability for those responsible.

The Administration is using every available tool to alleviate suffering and end the conflict. We have coordinated with like-minded partners, regional governments, the African Union, and a wide range of other organizations and individuals. We have pressed the U.N. Security Council and the U.N. Human Rights Council to put the situation in Ethiopia on their agendas and to act to end the crisis. We have engaged directly with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments at the highest levels, pressing them to end the hostilities and to follow through on commitments for the withdrawal of Eritrean forces, as well as to protect civilians, and ensure unhindered humanitarian access. Multiple calls from the Secretary of State to Prime Minister Abiy and Senator Coons' travel to Ethiopia on behalf of President Biden resulted in some modest progress, but it is far from sufficient. Following his appointment, Special Envoy Feltman took a 2-week trip to the region earlier this month in an intensive effort to find a durable solution to the crisis. He will return to the region next week.

While diplomatic efforts have been underway, the Administration has also taken stronger steps. In light of the human rights situation, we have restricted our foreign assistance to Ethiopia. We will, however, continue humanitarian assistance and other critical programs in health, food security, democracy, and human rights. We are withholding support for new lending from Multilateral Development Banks that does not address basic human needs and are asking our allies to do likewise. The Secretary of State has also taken steps to impose visa restrictions on Ethiopian and Eritrean Government officials, Amhara regional and irregular forces, and members of the TPLF who are impeding resolution of the crisis, blocking humanitarian assistance, or committing atrocities. Should those stoking the conflict fail to reverse course, Ethiopia and Eritrea should anticipate further actions. It cannot be "business-as-usual" in the face of the violence and atrocities in Tigray.

Tragically, while Tigray is the worst of the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia it is only one of them. From attacks on ethnic Amharans and Gumuz in Benishangul Gumuz

and ethnic Oromo and Amharans in Oromia to violence between people in the Afar and Somali regions to the multiple conflicts unfolding in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region, Ethiopia is at a turning point. The Government's response of mass arrests, media restrictions, human rights violations, and declining political space is fueling inter-communal rivalry and imperiling the national elections now scheduled for June 21. Widespread insecurity, mass displacement, and logistical challenges raise serious questions about these elections and the United States has made the decision not to deploy observers to monitor them. We urge the Ethiopian Government to begin an inclusive dialogue of reconciliation to end the deep-rooted conflicts and find a shared, democratic path forward. The United States is prepared to support such a dialogue.

Finally, there are the ongoing challenges around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the al-Fashaga border area between Sudan and Ethiopia. On the GERD, the United States believes Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan's concerns over water security can best be addressed through serious negotiations among the parties under the leadership of the African Union. Both problems pose risks to regional peace and security and the U.S. Government is working hard with partners to help resolve them.

As I said at the beginning, the United States is committed to a partnership with the Ethiopian people, the country's national unity, and stability in the Horn of Africa. Mr. Chairman, Members, alarm bells are ringing in Ethiopia. The risk of protracted and wider conflict is growing and the time for action to prevent it is now. In that regard, I want to thank Congress for the strong resolutions and statements that have been issued. They are important and they help. The State Department will continue to work closely with you to address the crises in Ethiopia. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ambassador.
Ms. Charles.

STATEMENT OF SARAH CHARLES, ASSISTANT TO THE ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. CHARLES. Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the crisis in Ethiopia, the life-saving assistance that USAID is providing, and the ongoing challenges that impact our response.

I also want to thank the committee for its continuous engagement, not least of which Senator Coons for his recent travel to Ethiopia at the request of President Biden.

Many of us first learned the word famine in relation to Ethiopia nearly 40 years ago. I want to be clear. Without an immediate cessation of hostilities, improved humanitarian access, and a scale up of assistance, we could again see widespread famine in Ethiopia this year, the first time since the 1980s.

In Tigray, after more than 6 months of hostilities, approximately 5.2 million people are in need of assistance out of a total population of 6 million. Approximately 2 million of them are children. As striking as these numbers are, even more striking are the lived experiences of people in the region. I want to take a moment to share one of their stories.

Mariam, a pseudonym for a person receiving assistance from one of our partners in Tigray, lost 25 members of her family, her brother, and recently her 5-month-old baby boy who succumbed to malnutrition. Mariam now suffers from extreme mental distress due to the trauma she has experienced.

The grim reality is that there are, roughly, 2 million other stories of displacement like Mariam's. In Tigray and across the border in

Sudan where 63,000 refugees have fled, the scale of need is staggering, and averting famine will require more than just food assistance. It requires health, nutrition, and water and sanitation services to help malnourished bodies fight off illness.

The ongoing fighting has destroyed critical water and hygiene infrastructure and caused Tigray's health system to collapse. Just 16 percent of hospitals and health centers are fully functioning.

We have also heard devastating reports of abuse by armed actors across Tigray. The reports not only speak to widespread incidence of rape and other gender-based violence, but of systematic attempts to dismantle society and destroy families.

Some perpetrators are targeting the wives of priests, abusing women in front of their families, or using a level of violence so brutal that women are left with organ damage.

The severity of abuse is among the absolute worst I have seen in my nearly two decades of humanitarian work. We at USAID condemn these abuses in the strongest possible terms.

In the face of staggering need, the United States has responded with significant support and advocacy. We are the largest donor to the humanitarian response, providing nearly \$305 million in humanitarian assistance since the conflict began.

USAID is providing enough food to feed 4 million people and treat more than 400,000 women and children suffering from malnutrition for 3 months. Our partners will run nearly 60 mobile health and nutrition units across Tigray and support the operation and rehabilitation of 300 health facilities.

To respond to the egregious use of gender-based violence in this conflict, we are providing safe spaces for women and girls, training for social workers, psychosocial support and case management for survivors.

However, our assistance will not be enough to avert famine in Ethiopia if the parties to the conflict continue to obstruct access. Currently, over 1 million people in need are out of reach of humanitarian assistance.

The response is plagued by access constraints imposed by the Government of Ethiopia, including restrictions on visas and communications equipment for humanitarian staff, both of which are critical for our partners' security and ability to sustain and expand operations.

Our biggest challenges are the ongoing hostilities and the continued blocking of access by Eritrean Defense Forces, Ethiopian National Defense Forces, Amhara Regional Forces and others.

Our partners also report increased hostility and targeting of humanitarian workers. By blocking food assistance and preventing farmers from planting and harvesting, these actors are actively exacerbating the risk of famine in Tigray.

Lastly, the Tigray response is underfunded, and we continue to urge other donors to scale up their assistance to meet unmet needs.

I am honored to be here today to discuss our work and underscore the United States' commitment to the people of Ethiopia. While our humanitarian assistance can help alleviate urgent needs, it will not address the root causes of the conflict or ongoing human rights abuses.

Despite the heroic efforts of local communities and humanitarian workers, the trajectory of the crisis in Tigray is clear—widespread famine unless the parties to the conflict provide unhindered humanitarian access and allow the people of Tigray to once again plant.

We owe it to women like Haben, who was a sesame farmer in western Tigray before she was forced to leave her home with her husband and three children. She now lives in an overcrowded school room with 24 other women and their families.

She told our partners that without assistance, she and her family would have starved. We owe it to Haben’s neighbors, a million of whom continue to be out of reach of assistance, to demand better from the parties to the conflict.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I welcome your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Charles follows:]

Prepared Statement of Sarah Charles

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for this opportunity to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia, how the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is providing life-saving assistance, and the ongoing challenges that impact our response efforts. I also want to thank the committee for its attention to and continuous engagement on this crisis and, in particular, Senator Coons for his travel to Addis Ababa at the request of President Biden and his continued advocacy on behalf of the humanitarian community and the people of Ethiopia.

The gravity of the situation is clear. It is also time sensitive. Without an immediate cessation of hostilities, improved humanitarian access, and an immediate scale-up of life-saving humanitarian assistance, we could see widespread famine occur in Ethiopia later this year—a situation the country has not faced since the 1980s.

OVERVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Over the years, Ethiopia has struggled with a confluence of recurring acute shocks: drought, seasonal flooding, pest and disease outbreaks, and above-average food prices. These ongoing challenges have led to chronic and sustained humanitarian needs, which are further exacerbated by ongoing conflict.

In this year alone, nearly 24 million Ethiopians will likely require humanitarian assistance—more than 20 percent of the country’s population—with 13 million needing emergency food assistance through July due to ongoing conflict and displacement, the compounding effects of severe drought, desert locust infestations, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Escalating violence in southern Amhara, along the Afar-Somali border, and in parts of Oromiya in recent months has resulted in significant population displacement and hundreds of civilian deaths.

TIGRAY

The scale of humanitarian need in Ethiopia’s Tigray region is particularly staggering. After more than 6 months of hostilities between multiple armed actors, including the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), Amhara regional forces, and others, approximately 5.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, out of a total population of around 6 million. The food insecure population is spread over hundreds of rural communities across rugged terrain that is larger than the state of Maryland, with significant clusters of displaced people among peri-urban and urban centers seeking assistance.

As striking as these numbers are, even more striking are the lived experiences of the people in the region. I want to take a moment to share some of their stories. When the conflict started, Elias’s office was looted and most of his belongings were taken. He made the decision to flee with his wife and children to find safety. They arrived in Mekelle with only what they could carry in a single bag. Mariam tragically lost 25 of her family members and friends since the conflict broke out, includ-

ing her brother and her 5-month-old baby boy who succumbed to malnutrition. Mariam now suffers from eating disorders due to the trauma she experienced. Elias and Mariam both found shelter and refuge in centers supported by U.S. partners. The grim reality is that there are almost 2 million other stories of displacement like Elias and Mariam's.

AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOODS

In early April, USAID completed a rapid agricultural livelihoods assessment and found that the conflict has severely impacted rural communities by eliminating many primary sources of food and income. The majority of poor households feed their families through at-home crop production, purchasing food at local markets, and the Government of Ethiopia's (GoE) Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). However, our analysis shows that conflict is preventing people from accessing markets, farmland, and many services, which limits their ability to feed themselves and their families. Traditional casual labor opportunities that many people rely on for income, such as on farms or construction sites, are virtually non-existent, and income-generating activities, like the sale of crops, milk, and livestock, have been severely disrupted. The bottom line is that millions of Ethiopians cannot feed their families.

Additionally, because the ongoing conflict has had a devastating impact on the agriculture sector more broadly (including through the loss of animals for plowing and destruction of nurseries for seeds and stores for agricultural inputs), we fear those families will be without food for years to come. We are in the middle of the traditional planting season. However, many farmers are not able to obtain seeds and tools, or have been driven from their land and will not be able to plant before the rains come. If the upcoming season is lost, the more than 5 million people currently in need of food assistance will need help until the October 2022 harvest. Providing this life-saving food assistance could cost the humanitarian community upwards of \$1 billion.

DISPLACEMENT

Conflict in the Tigray region has also forced almost 2 million people from their homes and communities. Around 2 million people are displaced within Tigray, and some 63,000 people have fled across the border as refugees into Sudan. Many internally displaced people are relying on host communities for basic necessities like food and water, further straining already limited resources. One of the cities experiencing the biggest influx of people displaced by the conflict is Tigray's capital city of Mekelle. During recent visits to Mekelle, USAID staff noted overcrowded conditions where these displaced populations were living, and irregular and uncoordinated assistance. Some sites did not have any food, health, gender-based violence prevention and response, other protection, or water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Many of the centers that did have these services were experiencing shortages of medicines, food, and supplies due to the sheer volume of people in need. If hostilities continue, and available food and jobs remain absent in rural areas, we fear that even more people will be displaced and need help.

FAMINE

Earlier, you heard me note how food security and resources in Ethiopia have been long-term challenges. The recent conflict has pushed the people of Tigray to desperate levels of hunger. Many areas of Tigray are currently facing Emergency—Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) 4—levels of food insecurity, and at this level we not only expect but are also hearing confirmed reports of Tigrayans dying as a result of food insecurity, malnutrition, disease, and starvation. USAID analysis, in line with U.N. reporting, suggests that the crisis is at a critical tipping point: Famine—IPC 5—could occur in 2021 in areas of Tigray if sustained, large-scale, multi-sector humanitarian assistance does not reach people in time, and if conflict between armed actors continues to disrupt agricultural production and livestock and labor markets, which are critical for poor households to make ends meet. IPC 5 may in fact have already begun, but the lack of access has limited the data collection necessary to make an accurate assessment.

However, let me be clear that food assistance alone will not avert a famine in Tigray. Famine prevention requires integrated public health, nutrition, and WASH services. Without enough food, clean water, and access to basic health and nutrition services, malnourished bodies are not able to effectively use nutrients or fight disease. The international response must be multi-sectoral and robust if it is to be truly effective against the threat of famine.

As I sit here with you today, people in Tigray do not have those life-sustaining resources they need. Due to the ongoing conflict and looting, Tigray's health system has collapsed, with only around 16 percent of hospitals and health centers functioning fully. The rest of Tigray's health facilities were looted or occupied by armed actors, denying people the basic care they need. This lack of health resources not only heightens the risk of famine, it also gravely impacts the ability of people in Tigray to receive treatment for illnesses and limits health officials' ability to control the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

In addition to the significant impact on the Tigrayan health infrastructure, the conflict has also resulted in the destruction of critical safe water and community hygiene infrastructure. Relief actors estimate that around 250 motorized water pumping systems in towns are out of order due to lack of fuel and electricity, damage, looting, or vandalism. The status of approximately 11,000 hand pumps in various rural areas is unknown because of ongoing access constraints. As a result, many people lack access to clean water and adequate sanitation services.

In addition to lack of food, medical care, and clean water, we have also heard devastating reports of abuses by armed actors across Tigray. The severity of abuse is among the absolute worst I have seen in nearly two decades of humanitarian work. The reports not only speak to widespread incidents of rape and other gender-based violence against women, but of systematic attempts to dismantle society and destroy families. For example, some perpetrators are targeting the wives of priests, abusing women in front of their families, or using a level of violence so brutal that women are left with organ damage.

We at USAID condemn these abuses to the strongest degree possible, and we are prioritizing support to survivors in our humanitarian response. While the full scale of abuses and GBV incidents in Tigray may never be truly known, Ethiopian health officials recorded at least 950 cases of reported sexual assault in the region in March and April alone, according to Save the Children, while the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) projects that approximately 22,500 survivors of sexual violence in Tigray will seek clinical care in 2021. Unfortunately, the actual numbers are likely far higher than those recorded by health authorities due to persistent barriers to accurate reporting, including scarce health and legal services, limited staff capacity to dedicate to reporting, fear of stigmatization, and risk of further harm.

These terrible attacks and their long-lasting effects underscore our particular concern about the negative effects of the conflict on women and children writ large. Women are facing increased safety risks, loss of livelihoods, and restrictions on their movement. As the number of female-headed households rises and social support networks break down due to the conflict, women are also facing increased childcare responsibilities. Children are also experiencing rising levels of violence and abuse as part of the conflict, suffering from higher rates of malnutrition and other health concerns, and around 5,000 of them have been separated from their families.

SCALING UP THE U.S. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

USAID's longtime and robust presence in Ethiopia implementing one of the largest and most complex portfolios in Africa has enabled a swift response to this crisis. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, USAID provided a total of \$716 million in assistance to the people of Ethiopia across sectors like agriculture, education, global health, and women's empowerment. USAID funding also supports programming to protect human rights; promote accountability; counter disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech; mitigate conflict in Tigray and other at-risk areas; prevent gender-based violence, and promote inclusive governance and political processes. However, the crisis threatens the gains that Ethiopia has made across these sectors in the last 20 years.

In the face of staggering humanitarian need due to recurrent acute shocks and conflict, the United States has responded with significant support and advocacy. In FY 2020, USAID provided more than \$650 million in humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia, and we anticipate that the FY 2021 figure may be more than 40 percent higher due to needs stemming from the Tigray crisis and ongoing conflict within Ethiopia.

As soon as the conflict in Tigray started, USAID immediately began providing life-saving assistance. The United States is the largest humanitarian donor to the Tigray response, providing nearly \$305 million since the conflict began, of which \$193 million is for food and nutrition assistance. We used our existing programs, including rapid response mechanisms, while also adapting to access and logistical constraints by pre-positioning in-kind commodities and working with our partners to pivot other resources as needed. However, the sheer level of the needs and ongoing nature of the crisis necessitated a scale-up and additional resources.

On March 1, USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to scale up the U.S. humanitarian response efforts to the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray Region. This expert team has been building upon existing USAID humanitarian programs that were in place prior to the conflict, and is focused on rapidly scaling our life-saving efforts to reach even more people. The DART works with other humanitarian organizations, international donors, and local community groups to assess needs and coordinate assistance to those who need it most. USAID's robust and holistic response has focused on nine priority sectors: food assistance; WASH; health; nutrition; protection; shelter and emergency supplies; emergency agriculture and livestock interventions; humanitarian coordination; and logistics support.

In response to acute food needs across Tigray, USAID is supporting the Catholic Relief Services-led Joint Emergency Operations Program (JEOP), the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), and other humanitarian partners to provide emergency food assistance (including U.S.-sourced agricultural products like cereals, pulses, and vegetable oil) and U.S.-made specialized emergency nutritious products to vulnerable people across the region. USAID has ramped up food assistance and is providing more than 206,000 metric tons of food—enough to feed 4 million people and treat more than 400,000 women and children suffering from malnutrition for 3 months.

As I noted earlier, the continued conflict impacts the children of Tigray in the most acute and heartbreaking ways. Since February, our partners' health facilities have admitted more than 3,400 children suffering from wasting—a life-threatening form of malnutrition. As of mid-April, WFP and its sub-partners reached more than 51,000 children and pregnant and lactating women with emergency nutrition assistance. With USAID support, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is also distributing nutrition commodities to displaced populations—including High Energy Biscuits and ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTFs). These specialized high-calorie foods are sufficient to meet the daily needs of up to 27,000 children younger than 5 years of age who are at risk for malnutrition.

In an environment of ongoing conflict that has devastated all basic resources and services, our response must utilize integrated, flexible, and mobile service delivery. Over the next 9 months, our humanitarian health partners (FHI360, GOAL, IRC, Samaritan's Purse, and World Vision) will operate nearly 60 mobile health and nutrition units that can be deployed to populations in need throughout Tigray. They will also support the operation and rehabilitation of 300 static clinics, many of which were damaged or looted during the conflict. We are also providing hygiene kits with soap, toilet paper, and sanitary products, and supporting hygiene promotion campaigns to help prevent the spread of diseases, including COVID-19. FHI 360 programming will also promote community organization and outreach focusing on disease prevention and other key health messaging.

Safe shelter and places for displaced families to live are critical issues as the conflict continues. Our partners, such as IOM and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, are constructing emergency shelters for displaced people. On April 12, USAID airlifted 1,500 rolls of heavy-duty plastic sheeting from our warehouse in Dubai to contribute to emergency shelter efforts. This plastic sheeting will be used to create needed walls and roofs of temporary structures, keeping more than 18,000 people safe from the elements, rather than sleeping outside or in crowded community shelters. USAID's partner, the Relief Society of Tigray or REST, also provided sleeping mats, blankets, and basic household items, including kitchen sets with pots, pans, and cooking utensils to assist displaced populations.

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been one of the most egregious weapons of this conflict. USAID has been attuned to this need and prioritized protection from the initial days of our response. Our current programs include funding for four partners to implement protection programming in the region, including GBV prevention and life-saving response services to survivors and vulnerable women and girls. Specifically, our funding provides psychosocial support for women and girls, safe spaces for women and girls, case management for survivors, and training for social workers and community case workers. We also include programming to address other protection needs brought on by the conflict, including community-level psychosocial support to address widespread distress and loss, family tracing and reunification for separated children, and support to first responders.

Despite the extensive assistance and resources provided to date, the ongoing fighting means that we cannot access many areas where we know the needs are the greatest. When security conditions allow and armed actors withdraw, USAID is ready to respond to identified needs. Our decades of working in Ethiopia, experienced partners and staff on the ground, significant assets in the region, and deep relationships underpin our readiness and ability to respond. Although the humanitarian response resources remain at the ready, the problems of unending conflict,

proliferation of armed actors, and restricted access make the work incredibly difficult. This crisis highlights the need to get ahead of the recurring humanitarian crises in Ethiopia—whether caused by conflict, climate, or disease outbreaks—and compels us to work with our partners on the ground to anticipate, plan for, mitigate, and respond to disasters, but also to address the grievances and triggers that can lead to violent conflict.

CHALLENGES REMAIN

In the last 6 months, USAID has scaled up its response and reached millions with live-saving assistance. However, this expansion will not be enough to avert famine if insecurity and access restrictions continue to significantly hinder our partners' ability to reach people in need, and the ability of people in Tigray to resume the activities on which they rely for their livelihoods.

The U.S. Government and its partners recognize the severity of the situation. This is why unhindered humanitarian access to populations in need has been at the center of ongoing engagement from Senator Coons, Senator Van Hollen, Special Envoy Feltman, Secretary Blinken, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Thomas-Greenfield, and other Administration Leaders, as well as Ambassador Pasi's leadership in-country. It has also underpinned our discussions with the GoE, humanitarian partners, fellow donors, and other like-minded countries. However, many challenges remain.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Currently, over 1 million people in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance are inaccessible to humanitarians.

The biggest challenges to reaching people in need are the ongoing conflict between armed actors, and obstruction of humanitarian operations by armed actors, especially the Eritrean Defense Forces. Our implementing partners are also reporting increased hostility toward and requirements for humanitarian actors at checkpoints run by EDF, ENDF, and Amhara regional forces. For example, we have recent reports of armed actors blocking key roads to main population centers like Shire town, which hosts nearly half a million internally displaced people. Not only are these armed actors preventing assistance to towns like Shire, but also further impeding access to more isolated rural areas as well. The decrease in the number of food distribution points has resulted in people having to travel greater distances to get food, with some people walking up to 25 miles to receive food for their families.

By blocking food assistance deliveries and preventing farmers from accessing their agricultural land to plant and harvest, the armed actors are actively exacerbating the risk of famine in Tigray. The U.S. Government continues to call for an end to these abuses, unimpeded humanitarian access, and the full withdrawal of Eritrean and Amhara forces from the area. These incidents highlight the need for improved civil-military coordination across federal, regional, and local levels of Ethiopia, which is key to enabling the safe movement of humanitarian supplies and personnel on the frontlines—and getting life-saving aid to the people who need it most.

The GoE's recent designation of the TPLF as a terrorist organization is expected to further negatively impact already challenging humanitarian operations in TPLF areas, even if the GoE grants full exceptions for humanitarian activities. Already, our partners have reported security incidents where armed actors have accused them of providing assistance to the TPLF. Targeting humanitarian workers providing life-saving aid is unacceptable, and we fear that our partners will have to limit operations in order to protect their staff. USAID is particularly concerned for the food security impacts of this decision, especially in remote inaccessible areas that are already at greater risk of famine.

Other access constraints for scaling up the response are due to bureaucratic restrictions. The GoE is currently only granting 1-month visas for humanitarian workers. This is a major challenge because humanitarian staff require extended visas in order to serve in a sustained response scale-up. Furthermore, the multiple military actors have each implemented their own authorization letter requirements, decreasing our partners' ability to get through check-points and easily operate across regions. When responding in such rural and insecure environments, humanitarian operators require telecommunications equipment (including satellite phones and VSATs) to communicate with one another, establish distribution sites, or call for help in an emergency. Despite 5 months of requests, the GoE has not permitted humanitarians to import their own equipment, despite a significant shortage in-country. Reliable telecommunications equipment is critical for our partners' security and ability to safely expand operations into insecure and rural areas, where humanitarian needs are likely to be the greatest. Communications across Tigray continue

to be poor, which limits actors' ability to obtain real-time information and increases insecurity for everyone.

FUNDING

Despite growing humanitarian need across sectors, the Tigray response continues to be underfunded by the international community. We project that there are hundreds of millions of dollars in unmet needs. The United States funds a majority of the humanitarian response in Tigray. USAID is working with the Department of State to urge other donors to rapidly scale up their assistance to support a multi-sector response to prevent famine. USAID welcomes recent steps to scale-up operations and is further advocating for the United Nations (U.N.) to commit additional funding and expert staff to lead and coordinate for the duration of the response.

CONCLUSION

I am honored to be here today to discuss our work and underscore that the United States remains committed to helping the people of Ethiopia. However, while our humanitarian assistance will help alleviate urgent needs, it will not address the root causes of the ongoing conflict and human rights violations and abuses in Ethiopia. Rather, in order to stop the suffering in Tigray, we need an immediate end to armed actors obstructing humanitarian access, a cessation of fighting, and establishment of dialogue, reconciliation, and accountability measures.

We owe it to women like Haben, who was a sesame seed farmer in Western Tigray before she was forced to leave her home with her husband and three children due to the conflict. She now lives in an overcrowded room within a school with 24 other women and their children, with no privacy whatsoever. She told our partners that without food donations from individuals and local churches, she and her family would have starved.

Despite the ongoing heroic efforts of the international humanitarians and the local communities, the trajectory of the crisis in Tigray is clear: current extreme levels of food insecurity and malnutrition could turn into widespread famine later this year. This can be prevented with an immediate cessation of hostilities, an increase in humanitarian access, and the immediate scale-up of more life-saving humanitarian assistance. The people of Ethiopia can wait no longer for the international community and the GoE to scale up assistance and provide unhindered humanitarian access to people in need immediately.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I welcome your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. We will start a round of 5-minute questions.

The conflict in Tigray has taken a horrific toll on the population, as we have spoken about and heard here, and the implications for international peace and security are significant.

Secretary Blinken, at a House Foreign Affairs hearing on March the 10th, said there had been "acts of ethnic cleansing" in western Tigray.

So, Ambassador, are we witnessing war crimes or crimes against humanity in Tigray?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States, as I said, is horrified by the reports of brutal killings, the sexual violence of gang rape, the forced removals, wanton destruction, and the acts of ethnic cleansing that Secretary Blinken referred to.

We condemn all of these in the strongest possible terms. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has warned that the international community is seeing atrocities that may well amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity.

The patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has termed the conflict a genocide against the Tigrayan people, and the Department of State takes those warnings extremely seriously and is pressing all parties to end the conflict.

The CHAIRMAN. So the State Department is not ready to call it war crimes?

Ambassador GODEC. Mr. Chairman, we are acutely aware of the need to determine whether the conduct meets the legal standards for atrocity crimes—

The CHAIRMAN. We are acutely waiting for that determination—

Ambassador GODEC. We have indicated—

The CHAIRMAN. —because for many of us we believe, in fact, these are war crimes and crimes against humanity. So, and I understand the concerns of such a designation. We cannot turn blindly away when such things happen in the world.

So I look forward for the State Department's determination. I hope they will come to the right one.

In addition to visa restrictions and pausing assistance, what other measures is the Administration prepared to take to respond to the continuing human rights abuses?

Ambassador GODEC. Mr. Chairman, let me just add on the previous question that we do have a fact-based review underway that is being conducted very quickly, and the Secretary of State has the final determination on this.

With respect to the other actions that we are prepared to take beyond the visa restrictions, as I noted in my statement, we have suspended much of our assistance, certainly, related to economic growth and security assistance.

We are looking at a range of other sanctions to include Global Magnitsky Act sanctions, other potential sanctions that would be targeted and directed at individuals or institutions that are supporting the ongoing conflict, impeding resolution, impeding an end to the conflict or otherwise obstructing humanitarian access or committing human rights abuses and violations.

We have made very clear in the secretary's statement and previously that if we do not see immediate progress on these fronts that we will be imposing additional sanctions—Ethiopia and Eritrea can expect further actions.

The CHAIRMAN. Give me a sense and the committee a sense of what are the implication for U.S. strategic interests in the Horn of Africa should instability in Ethiopia become more widespread?

Ambassador GODEC. Obviously, the risk at this moment is very large. If the conflict in Ethiopia spreads, it will destabilize the entire region. Ethiopia has been a critical anchor in the region. They supply peacekeeping troops to some missions there in Somalia.

I think if Ethiopia continues down the road that it is going, there is a risk of a massive humanitarian crisis, a refugee crisis, and it poses a risk to the wider region as well.

Obviously, the Red Sea area is a critical thoroughfare for commerce, and it is potential for a wide area that would be destabilized and pose a significant risk to the interests of the United States and, obviously, the people of the region.

The CHAIRMAN. Finally, Ms. Charles, your testimony is rather riveting. What is the scope and scale of the sexual and gender-based violence in Tigray?

Is the Government trying to suppress information about the extent of the use of rape as a weapon of war and what efforts are

we making to respond to the needs of survivors, given the gaps identified by NGOs?

Ms. CHARLES. Thank you for that question, Senator Menendez.

What we are seeing is widespread and systematic targeting of women using gender-based violence in ways that really are quite horrific, and as I mentioned in my testimony, some of the worst instances of gender-based violence I have seen in my 20 years of humanitarian work.

We are providing support services for victims of gender-based violence, including psychosocial care, safe spaces for women and girls, training of social workers.

The U.N. estimates that 22,000 women could seek treatment for gender-based violence this year in Tigray. We anticipate that that is a significant underestimate of the number of women who have suffered from gender-based violence, not least of which because of the steps that the parties are taking to block access.

We feel like as much as we are supporting protection and support for victims of gender-based violence, the ability of our partners to be present and sustain presence throughout Tigray, not just in urban centers, is necessary to ultimately help provide protection services.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Godec, I, like lots of people around here, have been visited by all of the parties involved in the GERD and the failing of the dam negotiations and the concerns surrounding that.

What are your thoughts as to what the current conditions on the ground have done as far as the negotiations to try to come to some resolution to that?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Senator.

So, obviously, there is a substantial effort underway to get all of the parties to come to a resolution, to an agreement. We do believe that there are like solutions, technical solutions, to the concerns that the parties have and it would allow, frankly, a resolution of this problem.

Senator RISCH. I am assuming—we talk about the different parties involved and have not mentioned the Egyptians, but I assume if they get offended by this and get somehow engaged, that is going to complicate the situation even worse in the area. Am I right or wrong on that?

Ambassador GODEC. I am sorry, Senator. If they—

Senator RISCH. If they get involved—

Ambassador GODEC. Militarily?

Senator RISCH. —militarily or whatever, I guess, is that going—I assume that is going to complicate things worse there. Is that right?

Ambassador GODEC. Absolutely. Obviously, Senator, you know, that would be catastrophic if there were some sort of military engagement over this.

You know, the United States supports an African Union process to resolve this dispute. We support the negotiations, which are being undertaken by the African Union.

We are prepared to provide significant support. Special Envoy Feltman has already been engaged on this matter. We believe, again, that there are solutions to this problem and, really, in the first instance, what we would be looking for is sort of a two-stage process.

So, initially, some sort of agreement around the immediate concern about the filling that would be likely to happen in July, and around which, certainly, the Egyptians and the Sudanese have a lot of concerns. Then a second stage that really provides a longer-term solution around the water and its use and the dam.

So we are working very hard on this, but it does need to be a peaceful resolution.

Senator RISCH. My sense is in listening to the parties, some are more enthusiastic about the African Union involvement than others. Also, some of them seem to be begging for our assistance to get more engaged in this than what we are. Am I correct on that?

Ambassador GODEC. Yes, you are correct on that. I think what I would say, Senator, is the challenge is that, again, there are kind of technical solutions to the issues that the parties raise, but there is an absence of political will.

These differences can be bridged, but the parties, all of them, have to be prepared to come to the table to reach a reasonable agreement.

There are differences in the view, obviously, between the various parties about our involvement, about the African Union involvement, and—

Senator RISCH. Do you think more involvement on our part would be helpful or not?

Ambassador GODEC. I think our involvement is very important, Senator. I think that, you know, we can provide both technical expertise, for example, on best ways to operate dams or water use or other things that would be helpful, and so we have sought to do that.

Also, we have, frankly, sought to provide some support to the African Union in its mediation efforts. So I think our involvement is important.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Ms. CHARLES, the elections that are supposed to take place late in June, we, the United States, has been pressing to see that they are held and held appropriately.

Having said that, listening to what I hear about what is going on, particularly in the countryside, do you think that those elections are going to have the kind of credibility that are needed after the fact?

Ms. CHARLES. Thank you, Senator Risch.

I will let Ambassador Godec speak to the credibility of the elections.

Ambassador GODEC. Senator, we are very seriously concerned about the upcoming elections. There are a number of logistical issues around the conduct of them.

Frankly, in many respects, they are not prepared logistically. There are also concerns about the political space that the various parties, that others in Ethiopia, have had to carry out the elections.

We have expressed our concerns quite clearly to the Government. You know, many of the specific logistical concerns I will just mention were quite well documented, I think, in the IRI NDI report that just came out.

Our view is that what really is critical here is that there be an inclusive dialogue started in Ethiopia to address the underlying issues. One election is not going to resolve these problems.

There are serious doubt about its credibility and what we need to see is a long-term effort to address the underlying tensions between the communities, and without that, I think the problems will continue and worsen in the country.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch.

I understand we have Senator Cardin virtually with us.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank both of our presenters for their incredible service. I know this is extremely difficult and I know it is very challenging just to be a witness to what is happening in Ethiopia.

So, Mr. Ambassador, you talked about the United States expressing its objection in the strongest possible terms to the violence that is taking place, but I think action speaks louder than words and I think Senator Menendez's point about the determination of war crimes or crimes against humanity is a clear position for the United States.

So I would just urge the Administration as quickly as possible to complete its review, and I hope the outcome is very clear to the international community about the atrocities that are taking place in Ethiopia.

I want to drill down on your statement about documenting and holding accountable those that are responsible for these atrocities. Too often, we allow the documentation to be lost and too often we compromise accountability in the sake of getting parties together to communicate.

Obviously, the number-one priority is to end the atrocities, to end the violence, and to provide humanitarian assistance to the population.

For this circumstance to not repeat itself as often as we have seen around the world we do have to have a full documentation and there needs to be accountability.

So what assurances can you give this committee that the United States will use its influence to make sure we have a full accounting, full transparency, and accountability?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Senator.

I can assure you that the United States Government is going to use its voice and the tools that are available to it to hold everyone responsible for atrocities, prolonging the conflict, interfering with humanitarian supplies to account. We have been very clear about that, not just through statements but now, obviously, taking steps, for example, the visa restrictions that the secretary has imposed.

It is good and we welcome the fact that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the U.N., and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission have undertaken a review and are

going to prepare a report on the human rights violations that have taken place.

Their work has begun. They are on the ground in Ethiopia. That project will take about 3 months. It is not going to be, ultimately, a criminal investigation.

It is going to be a documenting of what has happened. It is critically important and it is a critical first step toward holding people to account for what they have done, holding those who have committed crimes to account.

What will be important is another step on transitional justice to really, again, hold those people responsible to account, and that is something we will also commit to working on and it is important.

Ultimately, the only way to stop these things from happening, whether it is in Ethiopia or anywhere in the world, is to hold those responsible accountable. So we are committed to doing that.

Senator CARDIN. Oh, I agree with that statement. It is chilling. Ms. Charles, your testimony is chilling that we may have, again, a conflict-induced famine in Ethiopia in which people are going to die as a result of the activities of those that are abusing the rights of others.

So is there a time schedule in regards to the review on either war crimes or crimes against humanity? That is a term that the international community fully understands and recognizes, and U.S. leadership here is going to be critically important.

Do we have a time frame as to when we can expect that review to be completed?

Ambassador GODEC. Senator, the review is ongoing even as we sit here today. The final decision on that is the Secretary of State's. I cannot give you a specific timeline. I can promise you we will continue the review and make a decision.

Senator CARDIN. Can we have your commitment that you will keep this committee informed as to that process and the likely timeframe in which a decision will be made?

Ambassador GODEC. I do commit to that, Senator.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Risch, and I just want to open by saying how appreciative I am for your personal active engagement to have a full committee hearing on this topic, to have clear and forceful public statements and active diplomacy from the Administration, and your editorial, jointly with the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was very forceful and very clear about the path forward and challenges Prime Minister Abiy and the leadership of Ethiopia to take steps now to change course and lays out what might happen if that is not the case.

Ambassador Godec, great to see you again. I have enjoyed serving with you, knowing you for many years, and greatly appreciated the chance to travel to Ethiopia with you and Ms. Charles. Thank you for your service at USAID and your work to address the humanitarian crisis in Tigray.

As has been remarked, I traveled to Ethiopia in March 18 to March 22 as a personal emissary of our President to speak with

Prime Minister Abiy and to convey President Biden's grave concerns about the conflict in Tigray and other regional challenges—the GERD, al-Fashaga, border disputes, and the situation within Ethiopia, violence in other areas but, in particular, the humanitarian crisis in Tigray, the presence of Eritrean troops, the lack of accountability for human rights violations, and the urgent need for a ceasefire.

Then 3 weeks ago, I traveled with fellow committee member Chris Van Hollen to Sudan as well as to the UAE and had very constructive meetings in Khartoum but also visited the Um Rakouba refugee camp at the eastern border of Sudan, a refugee camp filled overwhelmingly by Tigrayan refugees and heard first-hand about the horrors this conflict has inflicted on the Ethiopian people.

Now in its seventh month, this conflict is estimated to have killed thousands and left as many as 6 million in desperate need of aid, and as we have heard from the witnesses, rape and other forms of sexual violence are widespread and systematic.

After months of intense diplomatic efforts, I support the Biden administration's decision to apply visa restrictions on all who are fueling the violence in Tigray.

So, Ambassador, I want to talk, if I can, with you about the status of Ethiopia's transition. Many of us were very encouraged by Prime Minister Abiy's initial rise and initial opening of space for civil society, the release of political prisoners, the allowing of banned political parties to participate, and his rise to power was facilitated by years of widespread protests against government policies and brutal repression.

He shared an inspiring vision of Ethiopia that inspired people in his country and around the world. The protest movement that, largely, brought him to power was led by young men in Oromia, many of whom are now in prison or who have joined armed groups.

How would you assess Prime Minister Abiy's vision of the transition compared with its current reality on the ground?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Senator, and it is a pleasure to see you again as well.

We, certainly, share the view that when Prime Minister Abiy came to power he presented a vision that was attractive and hopeful of opening up the country, of expanding democracy, of giving people more rights.

Unfortunately, the implementation of that has not met, I think, all of the hopes. We are deeply concerned about the closing of the political space, the reality that many politicians have been arrested, some are in prison, that there have been—while there was some opening of the media that there continues to be significant issues with reporters being jailed, international reporters, such as Simon Marks, being expelled from the country.

There are significant issues in the implementation of this vision, which is why we believe, at this point, the only path forward is an inclusive dialogue that involves all the parties.

This election, which is sure to take place, is one thing, but we need the dialogue to make progress.

Senator COONS. Two more questions, if I might, given my limited time.

Ms. Charles, in your assessment, is the humanitarian situation in Tigray getting better or worse, and are Ethiopian authorities becoming better or worse partners in addressing the ongoing humanitarian crisis?

Ms. CHARLES. First of all, thank you for your continued engagement on this and your travel in March. I think after your visit and high-level engagement from others in the Administration, we did see some progress, including the lifting of regulations that required our partners to get permission to travel in Tigray.

We continue to see access restrictions from the Government, critically, around visas and importation of communication equipment that is necessary for our partners to scale and maintain operations in a very insecure environment.

Senator COONS. Thank you. Last question.

Ambassador Godec, in March, I met a Prime Minister who was charismatic and compelling, who had a forceful vision, and who reassured me, made a commitment to me and to our President, that Eritrean troops would leave Ethiopia and Tigray and, in fact, he promptly flew to Asmara, met with Isaias, and said that he had demanded that Eritrean troops leave.

It is now nearly June and there has been no progress I am aware of towards meeting that commitment, and reports just broke this week that, jointly, Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers have forcibly rounded up and detained more than 500 young men and women from IDP camps in the area of Shire.

What is your assessment of how closely Ethiopian and Eritrean security forces are coordinating, and what accountability would you expect if those detained folks are harmed and not released?

Ambassador GODEC. Our assessment, Senator, is that the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces are cooperating very closely up in Tigray, and it is, obviously, a source of serious concern.

This latest report that people were detained—IDPs were detained—is extremely grave. We have already raised this with the Ethiopian Government. The U.N. has raised it with them.

Obviously, if these individuals are harmed it is unacceptable. It is absolutely unacceptable and, you know, we will continue to be very forceful on this point.

Senator COONS. Mr. Chairman, your editorial lays out a clear series of next steps that might well be taken if this situation continues to deteriorate.

It is my real hope that Prime Minister Abiy will yet hear the offers of the world community and the United States to work together, to declare a ceasefire, to resolve the humanitarian crisis, to deliver accountability for crimes against humanity that have been committed by a range of parties and step back from a conflict that, I think, threatens the entire future of Ethiopia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, and thank you for your good work in this regard.

Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to both of you for your work and appearing before the committee today.

Ambassador, let me thank you for raising in response to Senator Coons' general question the specific issue related to press freedom.

Senators Cardin, Leahy, and myself have raised this in several different ways and, of course, we all around the world stand for the idea that no government should curtail the right of the press to be able to tell objective stories about what is happening on the ground but, in particular, in Ethiopia and Tigray.

We depend on the ability of journalists to be able to translate to the world what is happening and to be able to inform us as to the extent of the atrocities. Appreciate you continuing to focus on that question.

I wanted to drill down, Ms. Charles, on one specific issue, and I do not know if it has been raised—forgive me if it has been—on the humanitarian front, and that is the Ethiopian Government’s refusal to provide visas to international humanitarian staff and parties that are trying to get into Tigray.

Just wanted to get an update as to whether we foresee any progress in getting more aid workers into Tigray and what are the roadblocks that are standing in the way of these requests?

Ms. CHARLES. Thank you for that question.

We continue to ask for extended visas for humanitarian workers—6-month visas—as well as allow for the importation of critical communications equipment.

Both of these items are very important when operating in such a difficult and complex environment, as we see in Tigray, and we have not yet seen any progress from the Government of Ethiopia on either of those requests, in spite of it being raised at the highest levels and consistently over the last several months.

Senator MURPHY. What are the consequences of not being able to get a greater flow of willing humanitarian organizations? I mean, what a triumph that there are organizations that are willing to go into these areas and help people despite the risks. What are the consequences of these visas not being granted?

Ms. CHARLES. Well, the consequence of continued obstruction by all parties, including the Government of Ethiopia, is that we will be facing the first widespread famine in Ethiopia since the 1980s.

We need the Government of Ethiopia to cooperate with our humanitarian partners, to allow for the scale up of assistance that is necessary to avert the worst.

Senator MURPHY. Mr. Godec, I just was hoping that you might talk to us a little bit about the influence of Gulf nations, the UAE, and the Saudis. Obviously, the UAE has been an important player, probably highlighted by the 2018 normalization agreements.

Some, you know, talk has recently been centered around their withdrawal militarily from some of their basing operations. I would just note that open source reporting suggests the UAE is at the same time building up a fairly substantial capacity on an island off of Yemen, purpose to be determined.

What can you say about, in particular, the UAE but, more broadly, the Gulf’s influence, their ability to be a partner or a obstruction to the path to peace that we are seeking?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

Since the early days of the conflict in Tigray, we have been speaking with both the UAE and Saudi Arabia officials about the crisis, about the conflict.

We have asked them to intervene, to use their influence. Both countries have both personal connections and commercial connections, and they do have influence, particularly the Emirates, and they have expressed to us their concern as well about what is happening in Ethiopia and in Tigray.

We understand they have raised these concerns. We have a continuing discussion with them and are hopeful that they will continue to press our concerns forcefully.

I would note that Special Envoy Feltman, when he travels next week, will be one of his stops. One place he will be going is the Gulf, so he will be stopping in the Emirates and Saudi for conversations.

Senator MURPHY. Yeah, I note it was not likely coincidental that Senator Coons made a stop in the UAE recently.

Listen, I think we have plenty of equities at play with the UAE right now. Their security—our security partnership with them is important to us but it is more important to them, and to the extent that they continue to have leverage this is a moment that we should press them on this case.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Kaine.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member Risch, and thank you to our witnesses for your service in a very difficult circumstance. It is depressing to contemplate the atrocities in Tigray, the upcoming election, which is of questionable legitimacy and could lead to more strife and violence.

The dispute between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt over the dam project, that in and of itself—that could also lead to military action in an extreme situation.

Ms. Charles, tell us about the USAID partner worker who was killed.

Ms. CHARLES. First of all, I thank you for raising that. I want to send my condolences out to his colleagues, to his family. This was the first time that we have lost a partner in Tigray where it was clear that they had identified themselves as a humanitarian worker, and we believe that they were targeted as such, and it marks, really, a quite concerning and tragic turn in the crisis.

Senator Kaine. You know, sometimes, despite the best intention and the best effort, we cannot find the path forward to fixing situations that are so deep rooted in cultures that are not our own.

Even when we cannot make headway sometimes in solving these seemingly intractable problems, we do stand for American values by delivering humanitarian aid.

So the targeting of a humanitarian worker that is the one thing that we can do that shows that we care and we are there and we are consistent, even if other efforts are not bearing fruit. That means the protection of humanitarian aid workers becomes paramount.

With your previous experience and now at USAID, what can we do to provide better protection for our humanitarian workers in Tigray, but using it as an example of—in other dangerous situations as well?

Ms. CHARLES. We have, certainly, worked to scale up the security focal points that we have on our Disaster Assistance Response Team, I will say back here in Washington, that are working very closely with our partners on their security planning.

I want to be very clear, it is the parties to this conflict that are making our partners less safe. It is their decisions to block and obstruct and harass humanitarian workers, and it is one of the reasons why we continue to press on the Government of Ethiopia both to send the message to their troops about the importance of humanitarian access but also to allow for the importation of communication equipment, allow us to bring in the right kind of staff and coordination structures to provide the kind of security that our partners need.

Senator KAINE. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

I want to tell Ms. Charles that I expressed the sympathies of the committee to our USAID Administrator, Ambassador Powers, on behalf of all. I think following up on Senator Kaine's questioning, the death of anyone is something that we are concerned greatly about.

The death of an aid worker, an American aid worker, from my perspective is a high crime, and at the end of the day, it will only make it more difficult for us to do what is necessary to try to help Ethiopia out of the path that it is in.

In that regard, let me ask you how should the fact that the Government of Ethiopia is a party to the conflict change how the international community engages with it relative to both protection needs and the delivery of aid in Tigray?

Ms. CHARLES. Thank you again for that, Senator Menendez.

I do want to just quickly clarify while there—it makes the death no less tragic—it was a local Ethiopian staff member, not an American aid worker, that was killed. No less—

The CHAIRMAN. Equally as tragic.

Ms. CHARLES. No less tragic, and we, certainly, are working, again, with our U.N. partners, with our NGO partners, to develop independent humanitarian—independent programs driven by humanitarian need and, really, demanding from the Government of Ethiopia and all parties to the conflict that they allow for that unhindered humanitarian access.

The CHAIRMAN. So how—but how do we—well, okay, so we are actively engaged in urging the Ethiopian Government to do this, but if the Ethiopian Government continues to be part of the challenge in the delivery of aid, is there any efforts—is there any ways in how we deliver that aid to circumvent them or is that impossible?

Ms. CHARLES. I think we, certainly, are pursuing any number of methods to deliver assistance. We do not deliver assistance in Tigray through or with the Government of Ethiopia. We deliver it independently.

Of course, the Government of Ethiopia has a lot of control in Tigray over our ability to move freely, our ability to bring the right staff and equipment in, and we continue to press for them to do that unhindered.

The CHAIRMAN. Ambassador Godec, Tigray is, rightly, the focus of a lot of our attention at the moment, but I am also worried about violence and atrocities in other regions of Ethiopia.

Civilians, some communities, but not limited to Ethiopia's two largest—the Amhara and Oromo have been a target of violent attacks in recent months and years.

What accounts for this specific violence?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So there is inter-communal, inter-ethnic violence in many areas across Ethiopia. There is a number of drivers of this conflict. Some of them are boundary disputes. Some of it is related to conflict over pastoral lands, areas.

There is a number of drivers to this. We do have a number of programs run mostly through USAID and OTI to help address some of the conflicts that are out there.

Frankly, the lifting of—you know, in the recent years of some of the restrictions that were in place have had the perverse effect of, like, allowing some of this to boil up, and what is critical is that the Government itself take steps, again, to address the conflicts between these communities.

We can, through our programs, help. A broader effort does need to be really initiated and it needs to be real and it needs to be serious if these conflicts are going to be brought to an end to address these long-standing disputes.

The CHAIRMAN. I understand that Senator Booker is with us virtually.

Senator BOOKER. Yes, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Please proceed.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you so much. I am grateful for this hearing and for the time the State Department has spent with me on Horn of Africa issues.

If I could just jump right in. It has been really horrific the reports that I have been reading and hearing about violence and sexual violence against women and girls, girls as young as 8 years old.

It has been gruesome to hear and, frankly, it is coming from a number of different forces, not just the Eritreans, these accusations at least, but the NDF as well as Amhara.

I just want to know from both of you, if I can, what are your thoughts about our ability to deal with this, the trauma and violence and the survivors of this trauma and violence?

Obviously, we talk a lot in this hearing about food aid and other humanitarian aid, but the scale of the accusations makes me believe that our Government and aid agency should be thinking about that as well.

Ms. CHARLES. Thank you for that question, Senator Booker.

It is a top priority of our humanitarian response to respond to the—what you rightly characterized as just horrific incidents of gender-based violence as part of this conflict.

So we are working with partners to train social workers, provide safe spaces for women and girls, psychosocial support and counseling for survivors of gender-based violence.

Senator BOOKER. Ambassador, would you please give me some input as well?

Ambassador GODEC. Senator, let me just say that, certainly, from my perspective as well these reports are horrifying. The Administration does raise the reports of gender-based violence, rape, gang rape, regularly and at top levels with the Government.

I would note that Ambassador Pasi was recently in an IDP camp in Tigray and personally spoke with some of the victims of this violence. She took their graphic and horrible stories back to the Prime Minister and other officials in the Government just to stress the importance of addressing this really terrible situation.

So it is something we are very much focused on and working to, hopefully, stop.

Senator BOOKER. Ambassador, if I could stay with you for a second. I know one of my previous colleagues asked a bit about the influence of the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, in the region, and I am wondering if you can just take a couple steps with more detail for me about, in general, are our efforts and theirs in conflict?

Do you see them as a force that is making a greater positive influence or making the situation more difficult? Obviously, these are some of our allies, and I am just curious of your overall take on coordination and influence in the region.

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Senator. I do think that they have significant influence in the region, given their, again, personal connections, the commercial connections, that they have got, the investments that have been made.

Certainly, the Emiratis have, you know, been involved in negotiations, for example, previously, to some degree successfully. They have also sought to engage on the al-Fashaga border dispute, although in the last few days they have indicated they are pulling back from that.

So they have played an important role. What is critical, I think, is that they use all of the influence that they have got in order to help to bring the Tigray conflict to an end and, hopefully, also to address the other challenges that Ethiopia faces, that they are clear in their communications with Prime Minister Abiy and other officials in the Government about the concerns that we have, and I just assure you that we are talking with them in detail constantly at this point about doing that.

Senator BOOKER. Ambassador, just if I can keep you in my column for a little bit longer just to ask you, we are heading into this period where it seems to me, unless you give me more information, that the June 21 elections in Ethiopia are going to go forward, even though there is credibly a lot of concerns with the ability for those elections to be done, and I know in the Tigray region that is not going to happen.

I guess I am wondering, besides just calling for free and fair elections is there anything we can do in these—in this run-up—3- or 4-week run-up—to better ensure that there would be credible elections taking place?

Just can you give me some of your general assessments of your concerns that you might have about the elections as well?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you for the question, Senator.

We do have many concerns about the elections. They are going to take place in an environment where there have been significant

political limitations. Also, there are big logistical challenges around the elections.

As I mentioned earlier, the IRI NDI report lays those out. I think we have been clear in our communications with the Government, with the national election board, about those concerns.

There are specific steps that could be taken in a logistical sense that might help in the next 4 weeks. I think it is going to be very difficult to really get all the way that the country needs to get and to hold fully free, fair, and credible elections.

That said, again, we—you know, withholding judgment and we will continue to urge progress on those challenges that are out there before the elections.

Let me just emphasize, again, what is really critical here is that there be an inclusive dialogue, ultimately. One election is not going to solve the problems of Ethiopia.

If there is not a understanding reached among the various communities about the way forward, a democratic way forward, there is going to be real trouble, in our view.

Senator BOOKER. I want to say thank you. My time is expired.

Just two points I want to make. Number one, one I just appreciate the State Department's willingness to meet with me and brief me independently on these issues. We are in the midst of—there is just a lot of strike points in this area that concern me.

I know the ranking member already asked about the dam, the GERD dam, and, clearly, all the way to what is going on in Tigray.

I think the most stunning thing that was said during this hearing is the prospects for the first time since, I guess, the eighties, to have us have widespread famine should we not be able to get humanitarian aid into the region.

We are really teetering on the verge of just a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in the region from Sudan, South Sudan to Ethiopia to Eritrea. We are just—and Somalia. This is a lot of challenges in this area.

So I am just—hope that—I know that with Senator Menendez we will continue to focus on this area, and I am just really hopeful that I can continue the dialogue with the State Department to see ways that this committee could be doing more to keep focus on that area of the world and see some—a way out of what could be a true nightmare for all of humanity.

Ambassador GODEC. Senator, we certainly agree that Ethiopia is teetering on the brink at the moment, that alarm bells are going off and that we need all hands on deck to address the challenges.

On behalf of the State Department, you know, I am, certainly, happy—I know my colleagues are—to remain closely engaged with you, personally, Senator, any member of this committee, either, again, individually or the committee as a whole. You have a critical role to play, and we look forward to working with you.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you, Ambassador. Thank you, Senator Menendez.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Booker. My understanding is I have no colleagues on either side who are with us virtually. Is that correct?

[No response.]

The CHAIRMAN. As I am not hearing anybody, I assume so. I just have then two final questions.

Ambassador, do we have a regional strategy for the Horn of Africa that no longer hinges necessarily on a close partnership with the Ethiopian Government, even as we continue to support the Ethiopian people?

Ambassador GODEC. Senator, the Horn of Africa is, clearly, an increasingly significant region and its stability and security really critical, obviously, to the people who live there, but there are implications throughout the Red Sea region.

There are implications even up to the Mediterranean and across the Indo-Pacific area. Ethiopia has long been a kind of a lynchpin, a central with its 110 million people and it is been an important partner.

It is at the heart of the region. Its stability is essential to peace and security, which is, obviously, one of the reasons why we are so focused on trying to address the challenges there.

Now, the Administration, obviously, has been hard at work trying to address the challenges in Ethiopia, but also looking at the entire region and how progress can be made, what the linkages are between the various conflicts, what the issues are across boundaries.

We are still early in the Administration. I want to assure you that there is a robust conversation going on about how to bring all of this together in a way that makes sense.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I appreciate that. Here is our problem, and it is not only unique to the Horn of Africa. Very often we pursue our strategic and national interests vis-à-vis a country and that country does not pan out to be what we aspire and expect it to be, and if we wait until it is no longer the country we hope it to be, then we are in a world of hurt.

So while I am not for abandoning our aspirations for Ethiopia, I am for being strategic in planning to think about what will happen if that falls apart for a short or longer period of time, and I think we have enough challenges in that regard. I commend that to your attention. When I speak to the secretary I will do the same.

Now, Ethiopian contributions to U.N. and A.U. peacekeeping, they are important, but we need to ensure that those who are implicated in atrocities are not rotated into peacekeeping missions.

How do we intend to address that issue?

Ambassador GODEC. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

We are in full agreement that it is very important that Ethiopian troops who are implicated in atrocities not be participating in peacekeeping operations. We are actively looking at that issue and we are working to address it. It is a serious concern, and we are on it.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, part of the process of being able to address it is to identify those who have been involved in such atrocities and to name them so that we do not have their atrocities extend beyond Ethiopia and other parts of the world, and I think that is critically, critically important.

Then, finally, I will make a comment. It is not a question. I have spoken to the Egyptians on more than one occasion on this issue at their behest.

I have a real sense that if the GERD issue is not dealt with in a way that assures them of their concerns about the Nile flowing into what would be the heart of their water supply in Egypt that they will do what is necessary.

I do not like red lines, but they have suggested that they have red lines and I take them at their word that they have red lines. Not that they are desirous of doing that. They also have a very strong expression that they hope to have a resolution peacefully, but that they have their own red lines.

I hope that we are engaging in that very robustly because the last thing we need, in addition to everything that is going on in Ethiopia, in addition to the possibility of a famine, to the sexual violence that is taking place, is to then have a military conflict over the GERD.

So I just seriously hope we are fully engaged and understand where the parties are and how serious some of them are of purpose.

Ambassador GODEC. Senator, I can assure you that the Administration up to the President are engaged on this matter, very concerned about it, and doing everything we can to resolve it.

We certainly agree that any sort of conflict over the GERD or al-Fashaga would be catastrophic for the region and it must be avoided. We are working hard to prevent any such conflict.

The CHAIRMAN. All right.

Well, this hearing record will stay open to the close of business tomorrow.

With the thanks of the committee for your testimony and your service, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:44 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT F. GODEC TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BEN CARDIN

ETHIOPIAN ELECTIONS

I wrote to Ambassador Feltman last month—along with Senators Kaine, Markey, and Booker—expressing our serious concern over the current trajectory of Ethiopia's election process given the massive internal displacement, rising ethnic tensions, closure of political space, and technical delays. The response that we received from the State Department said that "the Administration agrees there needs to be peace, reconciliation, and tolerance throughout Ethiopia in advance of that process."

Question. What are the specific reforms that need to happen in order to facilitate a credible election in Ethiopia, what are we doing to help achieve them, and can they realistically take place by the new June 21 election date?

Answer. The Ethiopian Government should take immediate steps to ensure a more open environment that is conducive to robust political competition and address several serious logistical challenges if the country is going to achieve elections that approach a level of credibility acceptable to the majority of the Ethiopian population. Given the short time frame, we assess these elections are unlikely to be free and fair by international standards. On the political front, the Ethiopian Government will have to end its restrictions on the media and opposition political party activities and put a stop to the partisan activities of regional and local governments that prevent fair political participation. Logistically, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) is under-resourced and behind schedule to organize elections. Additionally, Ethiopia will need to work quickly to heal the ethnic divisions that have significantly worsened in recent years, partly as a result of the Ethiopian Government's own policies to close political space.

We have stressed to Prime Minister Abiy the urgent necessity of beginning a broad-based, inclusive dialogue with civil society, political parties, and other stakeholders to develop a consensual way forward for Ethiopia. We have been clear both publicly and privately about our serious concerns about the political environment in which these elections will take place. We have also provided significant support to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) to help them hold these elections.

Question. Should Ethiopia hold elections in a manner that does not meet international standards for freedom and fairness, is the Administration prepared to publicly reject their credibility?

Answer. During meetings with Prime Minister Abiy, Special Envoy Feltman and other senior U.S. officials informed the Ethiopian Government that the United States will be watching these elections closely. Both in the lead-up to and after these elections, we will be looking at every option to continue to support Ethiopia's democracy and social cohesion, including by coordinating with like-minded governments in Africa and around the globe. This will include continuing to push for a broad-based and inclusive national dialogue to address the nation's challenges as well as highlighting concerns and deficiencies in the electoral process that the Government of Ethiopia must address to meet international standards in future electoral cycles.

Question. What is our plan for addressing likely unrest and violence surrounding and following the elections?

Answer. We are deeply concerned by the escalating violence and the hardening of regional and ethnic divisions in multiple parts of the country. President Biden's May 26 statement reinforced points we have raised with the Ethiopian Government on several occasions. We are urging the Ethiopian Government to ensure political space for all parties and are clearly conveying that voter, political party, and civil society suppression, or intimidation will not be tolerated. In particular, we have stressed the need to refrain from violence and protect human rights during the elections and for all of Ethiopia's political and ethnic groups to work toward dialogue. Following the national elections, we will press Ethiopia's leaders to work quickly to start an inclusive dialogue with civil society, political parties, and other stakeholders to develop a consensual way forward for Ethiopia. We also plan to lead international efforts to engage regional governments, like minded partners, and multi-lateral organizations to increase pressure on the new Government to support this effort.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN ETHIOPIA

Like Special Envoy Feltman has said, the crisis in Tigray is symptomatic of broader challenges to Ethiopia's democratic transition. Over the last year, I have been closely following reports of ethnically-targeted massacres, security force abuses, political repression, and internal displacement across Ethiopia. The letter that I received from the State Department in response to my outreach to Ambassador Feltman acknowledged that "if left unaddressed, these divisions will continue to undermine the stability of Ethiopia and the broader Horn of Africa."

Question. Investigations are an important tool for reconciliation, but we can't rely on the Ethiopian Government to investigate allegations in which it is implicated. What steps is the Administration taking to promote the independent investigation of human rights violations throughout Ethiopia?

Answer. Ethiopia will not be able to overcome its ethnic divisions without justice and accountability for the terrible crimes committed by all parties to the conflict, increased rule of law, and dedicated efforts to promote reconciliation, a cohesive national identity, and a common collective memory about the violations and atrocities that have taken place. We have prioritized support for a transparent and independent investigation of human rights abuses. This has included assistance to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Our support has helped scale up the capacity of this organization and its work, including by providing equipment and salaries.

Ensuring the independence of these human rights investigations has also been an important part of our diplomatic messaging to the Government of Ethiopia. Ethiopian officials who stand in the way of the work of the joint investigation between the EHRC and the U.N.'s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) would likely fall into a category of those who would "be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in the Tigray Region" and thus, potentially face visa sanctions, as announced by the Secretary of State on May 23. We are in regular communication with OHCHR regarding access and cooperation

by the Government of Ethiopia, as well as steps the international community can take to promote the independence of the joint investigation.

Question. As continuing human rights abuses across Ethiopia come to light, including mounting attacks against ethnic Amhara and security force abuses against ethnic Oromos, how will we strive to hold their perpetrators accountable?

Answer. President Biden's May 26 statement noted that we are deeply concerned by the escalating violence and the hardening of regional and ethnic divisions in multiple parts of the country. The President's statement reinforced points we have raised with the Ethiopian Government on several occasions, including the need for all of Ethiopia's political and ethnic groups to end ethnic-based violence and work toward reconciliation. We have also been in close contact with political and ethnic leaders in the Amhara, Oromia, and other regions to stress the need for their leadership to stop ethnic-based violence in Ethiopia. We also continue to call on Eritrean and Amhara forces in the Tigray region to adhere to a ceasefire and withdraw. We have urged the Ethiopian Government to hold perpetrators of violence accountable through a transparent and strong legal process.

Additionally, we have pushed for an inclusive national dialogue that provides a voice for civil society, opposition parties, and other stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process. This process, if successful, is the best path towards a more peaceful Ethiopia where all people are protected from human rights abuses regardless of ethnicity or where they are in the country. We are also looking into ways to support comprehensive transitional justice that addresses victims' needs, acknowledges harm, and promotes accountability and reconciliation.

Question. I appreciate the Administration's commitment to supporting a national, inclusive dialogue to resolve political and ethnic tensions in Ethiopia. How will we ensure that this process commences swiftly and that all the relevant stakeholders are at the table?

Answer. President Biden's May 26 statement underscored the need for all stakeholders to commit to an inclusive dialogue. To ensure this process takes place, we will continue to press political, ethnic, religious, and civil society leaders to participate in this process. We stand ready to support dialogue processes, provided they are credible and have the necessary participation to ensure outcomes that can help Ethiopia begin to heal from the ongoing conflicts in various parts of the country over the past several months, while promoting accountability for human rights violations and addressing long-standing historical grievances.

RESPONSES OF SARAH CHARLES TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BEN CARDIN

Question. Humanitarian Access in Tigray: Humanitarian access has evolved over the course of the Tigray response, but seems to be deteriorating again despite halting gains in the spring. Specifically, we've heard extremely disturbing accounts of aid deliveries being blocked and diverted, and aid workers being harassed, attacked, and even killed.

What does the Ethiopian Government have to say about these impediments to humanitarian access? In particular, what are they doing about the obstruction and diversion of aid?

Answer. The Government of Ethiopia (GoE) continues to deny that humanitarian access issues exist. In March, the Ministry of Peace and the Tigray Regional State Interim Administration issued letters to humanitarian organizations to facilitate their passage at checkpoints. These access approval letters were not recognized by Eritrean or Amhara Regional armed actors at many checkpoints, and failed to resolve access issues. As of May, the GoE only requires notification from humanitarian organizations to access Tigray region; Amhara Regional Authorities stated these access letters are no longer required for movement in disputed areas under Amharan Regional control. Despite these access commitments, Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) and Amhara Regional Forces continue to impede access by blocking humanitarian workers and cargo at armed checkpoints on an ad hoc basis. Harassment continues at checkpoints throughout the Tigray region with humanitarians facing searches of vehicles and personal belongings, verification of paperwork, intimidation, threats of violence or detention, and occasional demands for local taxes to be paid to gain entry.

Question. What is the justification supplied by the Ethiopian Government for refusal to grant 6-month visas and communications equipment like satellite phones to humanitarian aid workers in Tigray?

Answer. The GoE initially issued 1-month visas to humanitarian workers and Government officials have made varied and sometimes contradictory claims regarding the possibility of extension, including that extensions will be issued on a case-by-case basis or specifically to USAID partners. The GoE has also stated that extending visas for 6 months is against the law and thus not possible.

The GoE has also stated that the issuance of satellite phones outside the control of the GoE would create national security risks for them. The GoE denies reports that it is obstructing telecommunication equipment. After months of complaints that the Government was restricting the import and use of communications equipment by humanitarian organizations, the GoE issued new guidance in April requiring relief actors to utilize an online customs registration portal to obtain clearances for the importation of communications equipment. This new system effectively stalled the telecommunications process for most applicants.

Question. What has been the role of the United Nations in securing humanitarian access in Tigray, and how are we engaging with the U.N. to improve that process, especially with regards to ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers?

Answer. The U.N. plays a critical role in ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers through advocacy at the highest political levels to push humanitarian protections, civil-military coordination on the ground in Tigray, and by leveraging its institutional resources and perceived neutrality to support humanitarian workers. The U.N. has established the Humanitarian Access Working Group that discusses real-time movement and access issues and coordinates actions to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian goods and services.

The U.S. is engaging with the U.N. on advocacy efforts by continuing to push for a rapid system-wide scale-up to ensure sufficient leadership and civil-military expertise on the ground, including a strengthened role for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in planning and communicating movement in the region. USAID leadership is also coordinating closely with U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock to ensure alignment of messaging to key stakeholders around the need for humanitarian worker safety.

U.N. civil-military coordination infrastructure in Tigray supports humanitarian partners by coordinating, deconflicting, and communicating the movement of humanitarian assistance with relevant local actors. The U.S. supports these efforts through the placement of a civil-military coordinator on USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), who liaises with key national and regional stakeholders, and by providing funding for the full implementation of the U.N. Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) Saving Lives Together Framework.

The U.N. is positioned to mobilize resources and leverage its presence to support humanitarian protections. For example, as checkpoints and roadblocks manned by armed actors have increasingly become flashpoints for aggression and harassment of humanitarian staff and drivers, OCHA has helped organize UN-NGO convoys to facilitate 'safety in numbers' in support of humanitarian NGO staff. Additionally, given the horrific accounts of gender-based violence and significant protection concerns, international U.N. staff in the region afford a positive secondary effect of protection by presence. The U.S. Government continues to advocate for a rapid scale-up of U.N. coordination in the region, including increasing numbers of qualified international staff, to increase protections for humanitarian workers and civilians alike.