ETHIOPIA WATCH Civil Society Monitor of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

Summary of Key Findings July 2023

Eight months since the 'Cessation of Hostilities Agreement' was signed between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front on November 2nd 2022, the situation of security, humanitarian access, and protection of civilians has vastly improved, however many gaps threaten a fragile peace.

We reviewed the Agreement's provisions and assessed progress. Read the full report here.

What has been achieved:

- Active conflict between warring parties resulting in the killing and maiming of civilians has largely ceased in areas not occupied by military forces and militias.
- The flow of humanitarian aid has resumed, road access has been gradually restored and four corridors were opened, although the Gondar and Kombolcha corridors have not been consistently accessible in the last few months.
- Some infrastructure and services including telecoms, banking and commercial flights are being gradually restored, starting in December 2022.
- Heavy weapons relinquished by the TPLF as part of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes, starting in December 2022.
- The African Union's official monitoring mechanism (the AU-MVCM) has been established headed by senior military with 10 experts, which has overseen roll out of DDR processes progressively from December 2022.
- A national transitional justice policy is being elaborated, circulated in February 2023.
- The Interim Administration of Tigray was appointed in late March/early April 2023.

Gaps in implementation impacting the protection of civilians:

- Attacks on civilians have continued in areas occupied by armed forces (notably in regions bordering Eritrea), including of non-ENDF (non-federal forces), namely Eritrean forces and Amhara special forces.
- Food aid and assistance has been found to have been systematically diverted by both the TPLF and the Federal Government despite an explicit commitment under the Agreement not to do so, resulting in the suspension of aid by WFP and USAID in April 2023.
- Lack of medicines and surgical, obstetric, trauma and anesthesia care due to lack of physicians has left state healthcare facilities in the region unable to meet the needs of patients of both acute and chronic conditions, whilst the halt of childhood vaccination programmes is resulting in outbreaks of previously well-contained diseases such as measles, pertussis, meningitis, and polio, reported as of March 2023.
- 2.3 million children were still out of school in April 2023, and despite school re-openings in May 2023 they are not fully able to return due to many barriers (such as the presence of IDPs sheltering in schools who are unable to leave without durable solutions).
- Although salaries were resumed in 2023 for federal, and then regional staff by mid-April, there is no clarity on back pay, pensioner salaries are unpaid, and key sectors health workers were reporting non-payment for salaries for two years in March 2023, which is impeding work.
- Large areas of Tigray (defined by this monitoring along pre-war boundaries) remain off limits to independent Civil Society Organisations (CSO), monitors, journalists, and humanitarian organisations. This means that the fate of civilians in those regions cannot be fully assessed, nor their humanitarian needs met.
- Women and children remain vulnerable to gender-based violence by armed forces still on the territory, and are also at risk in overcrowded, ill-governed IDP camps. Parties have not systematically condemned such violence despite an Article 4 commitment.

Gaps due to the shortcomings of the agreement:

- Conflict has persisted in the neighbouring region of Amhara, intensifying in 2023, and also in neighbouring Afar in part due to those parties not being included in a peace agreement and therefore not bound by it.
- The fate of politically contested land – a key to lasting peace – remains unaddressed by the agreement yet is a driver of alleged ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray* and instability and conflict in the neighbouring region of Amhara.

- IDPs with homes in contested territories are afraid to return and the agreement does not grant them certainty or durable solutions, including legal status, which IDPs across Ethiopia lack.
- DDR processes are limited in scope to relinquishing of weapons and are not adequately linked to the mental health and psychosocial services required for rehabilitation, so that the population can begin to recover from trauma and loss.
- Communities disproportionately affected by the war – including women and young people – stand to be further disenfranchised because they were, and are still, cut off from the peace process.
- The AU-MVCM has not been mandated or empowered to report publicly on violations of the CoHA which means it cannot hold parties to account publicly and little is known about its work in resolving disputes; at the same time it does not have adequate staffing or resources to cover the territory.

What is needed now: recommendations

Targeted support for civilians to recover:

- All parties to the conflict should provide unfettered humanitarian access to affected populations according to customary International Humanitarian Law (IHL).
- Unrestricted and constant flow of medical supplies, medications, vaccinations, food assistance, and humanitarian support into Tigray should be restored, and guaranteed by the parties.
- Legal status should be granted to the hundreds of thousands of IDPs who have little prospect of returning to their homes, so they can access services and find durable solutions.
- Banking restrictions should be eased so that banks have adequate liquidity to support civil society activities and the wider business community.
- Survivors of human rights violations, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and all children, must have access to necessary survivor-centered health care.
- School feeding mechanisms should be a priority investment to enable students to go back to school in a context where farmers and families have difficulty feeding their children.
- The payment of civil servant salaries should be guaranteed as a priority by federal and regional authorities.

To implement the agreement:

- The AU-led peace deal must be fully implemented and resourced, and the AU must extend the peace process to include other key conflict actors in other parts of Ethiopia such as Amhara, Afar and elsewhere. It must also expand it to include full civilian participation including of women and young people in the peace process.
- Civil society, humanitarian workers, monitors, investigators and journalists must be granted access to all parts of Tigray, as well as other Ethiopian conflict regions.
- The status of the CoHA should be continually discussed by the AU and international community, taking into account both what it has achieved and where it has fallen short.
- International development funding to health and education should use a rights-based approach.
- Public reporting by the AU-MVCM on the situation and the challenges faced in its work must be more transparent and involve civil society organisations to support efforts in monitoring the CoHA.
- AU capacity and resources for mediation and monitoring should be scaled up, including by appointing civilian human rights and gender experts to the AU-MVCM.
- The Ethiopian Government and the AU should condemn at the highest level any efforts to stymy the AU-MVCM's work.
- CSOs on the ground should be included in the post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation process.
- CSOs seeking justice and accountability of entities responsible for the atrocities and destruction in Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia should be supported politically and financially and civilians should be provided with mechanisms for redress.

It is dangerous to claim Ethiopia is now at peace.

The publicly available data and key informant interviews, lack of access to monitors on the ground, and large data gaps limit our ability to state categorically that the CoHA is succeeding in protecting civilians.

Further information and access to the full report can be found here.

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