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**Alarming trends in the Horn of Africa needs more efforts form the Summit**

17 February 2022

The Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum (HoACSF)[[1]](#footnote-1) would like to attract the sixth European Union - African Union summit, 17-18 February 2022**,**  to the egregious human rights situations in the region where the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression remained severely limited, especially in Ethiopia and Sudan. In Sudan, we are calling for the restoration of civilian rule, and respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance. In Ethiopia, we call for permanent cessions of hostility, peace restoration, and the unrestricted delivery of humanitarian assistance for those in need.

**The situation in Ethiopia**

In Ethiopia, the rise of Abiy Ahmed as Ethiopia’s Prime Minister in 2018 and his vision to open-up the country has had a positive impact on civic space in Ethiopia. Political prisoners were freed and opposition political parties were allowed to operate, civil society was able to organize events and there were reforms to the civil society law. The entry of Ethiopian activists into the government also facilitated this reform process. For example, in 2019, a well-known human rights lawyer was appointed to head the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Most importantly, in 2019, the very repressive law governing civil society was [amended](https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/interviews/4312-ethiopia-for-civil-society-2019-has-been-a-new-beginning) to grant local organizations access to foreign funding and to allow international organizations to operate at a greater scale.

In 2020 an increasing armed ethnic and regional tensions in many parts of the country (i.e Oromia, Afar, Benishangul Gumuz, Somali region) as well as the conflict in Tigray means that civil society space in Ethiopia is once again narrowing as PM Abiyi Ahmed is increasingly relying on security solutions that are only exacerbating grievances. Communication blackouts in Tigray and other conflict regions are an attack on the freedom of speech, the right to information and an impediment to the humanitarian response. On 21 June 2021 Ethiopia held a general election. Originally the election was to take place in August 2020, but it was postponed due to COVID concerns. The postponement heightened tension between PM Abiyi and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). These tensions have escalated resulting in the refusal by PM Abiyi to recognise the Tigray regional elections of September 2020 and finally the current conflict in Tigray that started on 4 November 2020. Intense fighting continued in 2021, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, sworn in on 4 October after his party’s election win, launched a federal offensive in the north.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Despite the reduction in large-scale fighting since December 2021, airstrikes and skirmishes continued notably in western Tigray, the security situation in the region remains unpredictable and volatile. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in January 2022, “an estimated 9 million people across Ethiopia’s Tigray, Afar and Amhara regions need food aid. Nearly 40% of people in the Tigray region are suffering from an extreme lack of food.” “[[3]](#footnote-3) The UNHCR also added, there are “3.5 million people are internally displaced in Ethiopia; 1.2 million people were internally displaced in just the first half of 2021.[[4]](#footnote-4) As of 31 December 2021, a total of 51,081 Ethiopian refugees are present in eastern Sudan (Kassala & Gedaref).[[5]](#footnote-5)

**In the context of the Ethiopia situation, we urge the participants in the sixth European Union - African Union summit to:**

* Encourage the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the State Government of Tigray to step up diplomacy, stop all military and political provocations and engage in dialogue to resolve any differences by peaceful means.
* Remind other states that international law prohibits States from interfering directly or indirectly in the other state [Ethiopia] internal conflict where such interference threatens that State’s sovereignty, its territorial integrity.
* Encourage all parties concerned to refrain from inflammatory and hate speech.
* Encourage and support Civil Society and Faith-Based organisation to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the dispute.
* Remind all parties of their obligations under international and humanitarian law and that they will be held accountable for escalation to war and for any human rights and war crimes committed.
* The parties to the conflict must ensure justice and reparation for the civilian victims of violations of international humanitarian law and their families
* Remind all parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance of civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction.

**The situation in Sudan**

Following four months of widespread protests across Sudan started in December 2018, high ranking military officers removed President Omar al-Bashir and his regime from power on 11 April 2019 and formed the Transitional Military Council (TMC) to govern the country. The TMC then began negotiations with the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC)- a coalition of Sudanese civil society and political opposition groups that was leading the protests. Following 3 June massacre, where Sudanese security forces committed egregious human rights violations including unlawful killings and other uses of excessive force, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and detention; and sexual violence and enforced disappearances. [[6]](#footnote-6)

Then a political arrangement brokered by the African Union (AU) and based on the Constitutional Declaration in which TMC and FFC agreed to form a transitional government to lead the country for 39 months. They also decided to establish a Sovereign Council composed of 11 members, six civilians and five military officers. However, the uneasy political arrangements, since August 2019, between TMC and FFC has collapsed on 25 October 2021.

The Sudan armed forces announced it had succeeded in preventing a military coup 21 September 2021.[[7]](#footnote-7) Tension escalates between the ruling civilians collation and the military.[[8]](#footnote-8) On 26 September, another FFC faction was declared, including eight signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement.[[9]](#footnote-9) On 15 October, the Prime Minister proposed a road map for dialogue and the de-escalation of tension, including in Eastern Sudan, the resumption of transitional institutions, but many actors rejected his proposal.

On 16 October, anti-civilian government, and pro military FFC faction organized a sit-in near the Republican Palace demanding a take over by the military. On 25 October, Lieutenant-General Al-Burhan, the head of Sudan armed forces, dissolved the Transitional Government and arrested and detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, his wife, several top civilian cabinet members, and one member of the Sovereignty Council. He declared a state of emergency and shut down the internet services, mobile networks, and some private TV and FM Radio stations.[[10]](#footnote-10) On 25 October, thousands of protestors took to the streets immediately after the news became public calling for a return to civilian rule.[[11]](#footnote-11) On 11 November, Lieutenant General Al-Burhan announced the formation of a reconstituted new Sovereign Council. [[12]](#footnote-12)

Following myriad of international and internal mediation initiatives, on 21 November, Lieutenant General Al-Burhan and the Prime Minister signed an agreement stipulating, among other things, that the 2019 Constitutional Document would continue to form the basis for the transitional period. Political detainees released. The government restored the internet and mobile networks. The coup's most salient impact is heightened political polarization in the country. Most political actors, FFC, rejected the agreement between Burhan and Hamdok and continued to organize protests in November and December. Insecurity incidents such as intercommunal violence escalate, especially in Darfur and South Kordofan. The World Bank paused the disbursement of its funding. The United States of America suspended $700 million in emergency assistance.

Since 25 October, about 79 protesters have been killed, and hundreds/or thousands injured in the protests organized against the coup. Also, since25 October, more than 100 activists, journalists, and civilian officials have been arrested, and hundred civilian officials were dismissed from positions in government. On 2 January 2022, the Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has resigned after he failed to form a government.[[13]](#footnote-13)  The political tension between civilians and the military persists. More human rights violations were committed post the prime minister resignations.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Meanwhile, the perpetrators of past crimes in Darfur continued to evade justice and accountability, and the government failed to surrender former President Omar al-Bashir and two other men to the ICC. Recent reports about the situation in Darfur, from 25 October 2021 until 31 January 2022 highlight continued deadly indiscriminate violence against civilians, and the government failed to protect civilians in the region.

**In the context of Sudan situation, we urge the participants in the sixth European Union - African Union summit to:**

* Unequivocally condemn the coup and demand the full restoration of the civilian-led government.
* Stand in solidarity with the people of Sudan, their peaceful resistance against tyranny and their aspiration for a democratic transition to civilian rule.
* Urgently demand the Sudanese authorities to respect human rights, and in particular the right to freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and the right of Sudanese people to organize and participate in the management of public affairs in the country, especially at this point in time of the momentous democratic transition.
* End the use of lethal and excessive force against peaceful protestors, adhere to the guidelines in the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.
* Immediately release all those arbitrarily detained merely for taking part in the protests or for their political views.
* Establish an independent investigation committee fully mandated to conduct a transparent, thorough investigation into all violations committed since 25 October 2021.
* Hold accountable all those who committed these egregious human rights violations in fair trials in accordance with international human rights law.
* Handover to the International Criminal Court all suspects of human rights violations in Darfur, including former president Omar al-Bashir.
* Ensure the priority of protection of civilians, especially internally displaced persons and hold accountable all those who committed human rights violations in Darfur.

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1. The Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum (HoACSF) is a regional network of civil society organisations that monitors the shrinking civic space in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Somaliland, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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