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November 8, 2020

To: H.E. Mr. Filippo Grandi
High Commissioner, UNHCR, Geneva

Subject: An appeal for the protection of Eritrean refugees in Tigray and Afar regions of Ethiopia

The Eritrean Political Forces are deeply saddened by the rapid escalation of the conflict between the Federal Ethiopian Government on the one hand and the Regional Administration of Tigray on the other. In particular, the air strikes and ground attacks directed to the Tigray region is occurring at a challenging time; as the people struggle to contain the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, a massive locust infestation overwhelming the region, and only weeks before the annual harvest season.

We are deeply concerned that armed conflict will have a devastating effect on the livelihood and economy of the people as well as a lasting negative impact on peace and security of the entire region leading to a catastrophic humanitarian crisis that will generate a wave of refugees of epic proportion.

We are particularly worried about the fate of the 172,000 Eritrean refugees most of them in the Tigray and Afar regions who have fled forced military conscription, indefinite national service, lack of freedom of speech and movement, and political persecution and imprisonment. The Eritrean refugees are totally dependent on the support of UNHCR, and the now defunct Ethiopian Federal Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs, for food, medicine, clean water, sanitary, fuel and other supplies. The Ethiopian Federal Government's blockade of food and other aid facilities to the Tigray region has directly affected the Eritrean refugees that hardly have any reserve capacity.

The rapprochement and peace deal between the government of Eritrea and Ethiopia has led to the refusal of Ethiopia to accept Eritrean asylum seeker as *prima facia* refugees. The Ethiopian government has also declared its intent to dismantle some of the refugee camps in Tigray and relocate the refugees to other parts of Ethiopia. We know that the government of Eritrea wants the deportation

of the refugees while its agents continue, in broad daylight, to harass, intimidate and threaten urban refugees living in Ethiopia's major cities.

We would like to express our concern for the wellbeing of the Eritrean refugees and appeal to your excellency to:

- Find ways of providing emergence food, water, and medical and sanitary supplies;
- Guarantee that forced repatriation is stopped;
- Ensure that the safety of Eritrean refugees in the refugee camps is secured; and
- Pressure the Ethiopian government to guarantee the protection of Eritrean refugees in the Tigray and Afar regions as well as in urban centers in Ethiopia and allow the UNHCR continue providing its services.

We hope and trust that UNHCR will do everything within its power to provide full protection for the Eritrean refugees in the region.

Sincerely yours,
Eritrean Political Forces