

# The Tigray People's Liberation Front Executes Its Longstanding Promise

EBAC Press Statement

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Long before taking political power in 1991, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) core founders had promised to the Sudanese government led by their friends Gaafar Nimeiry and Omer al-Bashir that they would abrogate the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian Border Treaty signed by the then colonial power, Great Britain, and Emperor Menilik of Ethiopia and defended by successive Ethiopian governments and cede immense fertile and potentially mineral and water endowed land resources to the Sudan. This land mass span 1,600 kilometers in length and 20 to 60 kilometers in breadth. All of the country's ethnic groups will be affected by this treachery. Good and mutually beneficial neighborly relations between the Ethiopian and Sudanese people will be affected for generations to come.

The promise to cede Ethiopian territory to the Sudan offered the TPLF a strategic hub in Khartoum; and the rest is history. Ethiopians remember that the group was able to take political power by mobilizing financial, technical, intelligence and logistics support from numerous Arab countries, most notably Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Syria and others. Egypt and Sudan have consistently shown fierce determination to control the Nile and undermine Ethiopia's rights to harness its own rivers for its own people. Ceding Ethiopian lands makes this possible.

As a consequence of the ceding of Ethiopian lands to the Sudan, its territorial integrity, security, sovereignty and the long-term interests and well-being of its 100 million people is being compromised as we write this commentary. The TPLF has, once again, committed a treachery that succeeding generations of Ethiopians will never forget and must reverse. In short, the ceding of Ethiopian lands is a black mark in the annals of Ethiopia's long and remarkable history. The current Ethiopian regime is accountable for this national tragedy.

We therefore call on all of the Ethiopian people to reject this national betrayal. In this regard, we want the world community and especially the Ethiopian people to know the following.

Over the past several weeks, an unprecedented 70 Ethiopian religious, civil society, political, media, professional and other organizations unified their efforts to express their outrage and opposition to Ethiopian government's decision to cede lands to the Sudan. The Ethiopian Borders Affairs Committee (EBAC) is grateful for this unconditional support and effective engagement by this vast network that represents our country's rich diversity. This unprecedented support prompted more than 20,000 Ethiopians and people of Ethiopian origin to sign a petition that will be presented to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in few days.

This unprecedented, illegal and unacceptable transfer of border land is occurring against a

background of civil unrest and peaceful resistance that has resulted in state-sponsored wanton killings, disappearances, maiming, torture and imprisonment of thousands of innocent Ethiopians. The government's deliberate policy of land grab, sales and leases has resulted in the dispossession, displacement and marginalization of millions of indigenous people in Gambella, Beni-Shangul Gumuz, Ogaden, Oromo and other regions of the country.

The ceding of Ethiopian territory by the TPLF that exercises supreme control over the ethnic-coalition government of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) undermines Ethiopia's territorial integrity, national security, sovereignty and the long term interests of its people.

Sadly, the fact of secret negotiations and the reality that is taking place behind closed doors is not known to the Ethiopian people. There is no independent media. Civil society has been decimated. Opposition parties have been disabled. As a result, information concerning the border, demarcation and transfer of lands to the Sudan comes from one source only, namely, the Sudan and the Arab media. Nothing being said by the government of Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn stands to public scrutiny. Among other things, the Prime Minister mimics his predecessor Meles Zenawi by blaming past governments and Ethiopia's indigenous people for transgressions and other illegal activities in the borders. We know of no government in Africa or the rest of the world that blames its own people for protecting and defending their lands.

Given the inflammatory rhetoric by both the Ethiopian and Sudanese governments—blaming Ethiopians, accusing Ethiopian opposition groups for misdeeds etc, EBAC has warned the global community and the government of the Sudan that this irresponsible and illegitimate act by the Ethiopian government led by the TPLF aggravates the situation even further. It compromises peace, stability and friendly relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan. It will certainly contribute to the volatility of the entire Horn of Africa for decades to come. Sudan will pay a huge price for implementing a deal that is illegitimate and illegal.

It is unfortunate for Ethiopia and Ethiopians that Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn has followed and is in the process of implementing the strategic guidance on the Ethiopian-Sudanese border articulated by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Meles was the leader of the TPLF and not of the entire population of Ethiopia. His promise was to package a deal in secret and to cede Ethiopian territories to the Sudan without the consent of the Ethiopian people. Hailemariam's denial to his own Parliament that his government has not ceded Ethiopian territory turns out to be untrue.

EBAC wishes to summarize what is at stake by relying heavily and exclusively on credible information disclosed by Sudanese officials and the Sudanese media, especially Sudan Tribune. On January 17, 2016, Sudan Tribune provided a clear picture of demarcation process under the title "Sudan, Ethiopia to Complete Border Demarcation this Year." It opined as follows:

1. Prime Minister Hailemariam and President Bashir had agreed in November 2014 that the border shall be demarcated and had instructed their technical ministers to implement the deal
2. "The head of the technical committee Abdalla al-Sadig told the semi-official Sudan Media Center (SMC) that the border demarcation between Sudan and Ethiopia doesn't face any problems."
3. By excluding the area bordering Southern Sudan, Abdalla al-Sadig intimated that "the length of

the border with Ethiopia is about 725 km, saying the process of demarcation is proceeding properly." No mention is made of objections by EBAC, Ethiopian opposition groups and the indigenous population that has been defending the border and Ethiopian lands for decades. This objection still stands. The TPLF dominated government does not have legitimacy to transfer an inch of Ethiopian territory without public discourse and consent.

4. "Farmers from two sides of the border between Sudan and Ethiopia used to dispute the ownership of land in the Al-Fashaga area located in the south-eastern part of Sudan's eastern state of Gedaref."

5. This specific reference suggests that, contrary to claims by Prime Minister Hailemariam, the Ethiopian government has effectively ceded specific territories that belong to Ethiopia. According to the Tribune "Al-Fashaga covers an area of about 250 square kilometers and has about 600,000 acres of fertile lands. Also there are river systems flowing across the area including Atbara, Setait and Baslam rivers." The specificity of the lands and river basins claimed and gained by the Sudan reinforce our contention that Prime Minister Hailemariam has misinformed and misled the Ethiopian people that no secret deal has been negotiated and no Ethiopian land has been ceded or will be ceded to the Sudan and formalized by the Ethiopian government.

6. "On Saturday, Sudan's foreign minister Ibrahim Ghandour told the Qatar-based Aljazeera TV that Sudan and Ethiopia are working together to curb the activities of Ethiopian gangs inside Sudanese territory. He stressed that Al-Fashaga is a Sudanese territory, saying the government allowed Ethiopian farmers to cultivate its land as part of the cooperation between the two countries." Ethiopian farmers who use Ethiopian lands, protect and defend their national border at huge costs in life and property are "not gangs." EBAC is not aware of any member of the indigenous farming population crossing Sudanese borders in violation of the 1902 Agreement and the border lines recognized and defended by successive Ethiopian governments.

7. The reference to Ethiopians as "gangs" reinforces an unwarranted and irresponsible and demeaning characterization by both Meles and Hailemariam. It is tragic that Sudanese officials treat their own citizens with respect and dignity; while Ethiopian officials demean, persecute, marginalize and impoverish their own citizens, all for political gain.

8. We have offered a plethora of evidence from historical, legal, occupation and land use, personal and family account, security and continuity perspectives that the lands ceded are Ethiopian territory. The contention on the part of the Sudanese that their government gave Ethiopian farmers permission to use Sudanese lands is ridiculous and not true. The Sudanese found a willing and ready partner, TPLF, to claim Ethiopian lands as theirs. This documentary evidence will be finalized and presented to the Ethiopian people and future Ethiopian governments that lands are being granted to by the TPLF to the Sudan as payment for hosting the rebel group in Khartoum. This is why the Sudanese official said that "Ethiopia is committed and acknowledges that [Al Fashaga] is a Sudanese territory." It is not the Ethiopia under Emperors Menilik and Haile Selassie or the Ethiopia under President Mengistu Hailemariam that "acknowledged Al-Fashaga" as Sudanese territory. It is the TPLF and the TPLF is hardly representative of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people.

9. It is true that, both Meles and his successor Hailemariam have exceeded their authorities to negotiate this treacherous deal and to transfer Ethiopian lands to the Sudan. This would have been unthinkable under previous Ethiopian governments. Former President Mengistu Hailemariam

testified that his government never accepted Sudan's outrageous claim. He is a living witness. "Ghandour pointed to joint meetings between the two countries at the level of the presidency to discuss borders issues."

10. The Sudanese government makes an outlandish argument that the problem emanates from the rigidity on the part of the "Amhara regional administration". EBAC does not make a distinction between the Ethiopian "federal" and "Amhara regional administrations" with regard to the border. Ethiopia's border is a national matter and not a regional matter. The issue mainly affects the regions of Gondar, Gojam, Wolega, and Ilubabor. In stating the outlandish, the Sudanese are trying to create a wedge between the Amhara nationality and the rest of Ethiopians. "Sudan's Gadarif and Blue Nile states border Ethiopia's Amhara region. The borders between Sudan and Ethiopia were drawn by the British and Italian colonizers in 1908."

11. It is true that Ethiopia and Sudan are bound by the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian Border Treaty that provides a clear process by which each country would designate Commissioners to demarcate the border in line with international legal norms and protocol and respecting continuity of the boundaries and land use by the respective populations. In this regard, successive Ethiopian governments have rejected the demarcation unilaterally and arbitrarily made by the British representative Major Charles Gwynn without the knowledge and participation of Ethiopia. Redrawing the border must, therefore, adhere to successive Ethiopian government positions and the utilization of affected lands by Ethiopia's indigenous population. Any other protocol is null and void and unacceptable to the Ethiopian people and succeeding generations.

12. The assertion that "the Ethiopian opposition accuses the ruling party of abandoning Ethiopian territory to the Sudan" is true. This should remind the Sudanese government that there is absolutely no guarantee that giving a seal of approval to an illegitimate deal entered to by the TPLF will stand. It won't stand. It won't bind Ethiopia and future generations. Wisdom suggests that the Sudanese and the Ethiopian regimes stop the charade now.

13. When 70 religious, civil societies, political, media, professional and other organizations sponsor a letter of appeal and petition the United Nations to reject the deal, the Sudanese and Ethiopian governments cannot afford to ignore and dismiss it as empty rhetoric. One theme that binds Ethiopians together is their well-tested determination and unity in defense of their country's independence, territorial integrity, security and sovereignty.

Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity will be defended by her sons and daughters as our forefathers did in the past!

Long live the unity of the Ethiopian people! Long live Ethiopia!

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