



## Can – Go Afar Foundation

*Empowering the Afar people in the Horn of Africa to build a brighter future*

---

20 April 2020

Mr. Filippo Grandi  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Case Postale 2500  
CH-1211 Genève 2 Dépôt  
Suisse

Dear Mr. Filippo Grandi:

We are writing as legal counsel to the Afar People, as humanitarians, and as Afar elders.

The Afar People are an ancient, traditional and indigenous people who have occupied their territories in what is now Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti for centuries.

A matter of grave concern has come to our attention. It has several components which we describe herein.

First, Eritrea's mistreatment and persecution of the Afar People, including the commission of crimes against humanity in a widespread and systematic manner, continues unabated. We have recent compelling evidence of this, including direct eyewitness testimony, that we shared on 15 April 2020 with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea. The Eritrean military cleared the Afar population from their traditional villages around the Colluli area where significant potash resources have been discovered in order to give that area to the Eritrean National Mining Company (ENAMCO) and its development partners.

The clearances crushed the Afar economy and traditional livestock husbandry and made refugees out of the Afar people. Under the pressure of military orders, threats and other intimidations, Afar People and families scattered. Many fled Eritrea, and crossed the border into Ethiopia, where there are UNHCR refugee camps that are operated by the Ethiopian **Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA)**. Two (2) such camps are known to us; Asaiyita and Barahle. These camps comprise 100% Afar populations and registrants. We have visited both. Our visits have been made to investigate conditions as well as to gather the depositions of the refugees.

Our second grave concern arises from what we learned from recent interviews of Afar arrivals in Ethiopia. They tell us about the circumstances noted above which forced them to flee. They also tell us about more troubling information. Representatives of **ARRA** are refusing to register the recent arrivals, and are also refusing them basic amenities including shelter, food, water, medicine and more.



## Can – Go Afar Foundation

*Empowering the Afar people in the Horn of Africa to build a brighter future*

We also learned that **ARRA** representatives are telling recent arrivals to go home to Eritrea – a shocking and illegal revelation.

Moreover, we have information that rations have not been delivered/distributed to the registered camp populations during the last two (2) months. In addition, there is no soap for COVID-19 hygiene practices. Foreign aid is not being allowed to reach the intended beneficiaries in the refugee camps because **ARRA** officials are blocking it.

Of course these matters deserve your immediate attention. The **UNHCR** cannot, under their mandate, allow refugees to be refouled.

We have also learned that the Ethiopian government is planning to close the Hitsats refugee camp located in the northern Tigray Region, and to transfer its population of approximately 26,000 refugees to other camps which the **UNHCR** already consider to be full. The Ethiopian government is suggesting that such planned closure is part of a consolidation scheme. Our underlying concern on this point is that we oppose any such closure of the Hitsats camp, as well as the camps of Asaiyita and Barahle, and the relocation of Afar refugees anywhere, internal to Ethiopia as well as return to Eritrea, which is already threatened.

The Peace Agreement of 2018 between Ethiopia and Eritrea brought great hope that reform inside Eritrea could be coming. However, we have reliable and credible information that Eritrea is every bit as harsh on its opponents and minorities as it was prior to the Agreement.

We respectfully request:

- That the UNHCR immediately send representatives to the Afar Region of Ethiopia to investigate the mistreatment by **ARRA** of the Afar refugees from Eritrea;
- That the UNHCR take immediate steps to provide the recent arrivals from Eritrea now surviving on the streets of Asaiyita with food, shelter, water, medicine and other necessities; and
- That the UNHCR take steps to ensure that foreign aid be able to reach the Afar arrivals in Asaiyita and Barahle as intended.

We look forward to hearing from you in regard to the specific statements contained in this letter, and your plans for intervention.

---

Warren L. Creates  
*President*

---

Joseph Magnet  
*Special Legal Counsel to the Afar People*



## Can – Go Afar Foundation

*Empowering the Afar people in the Horn of Africa to build a brighter future*

---

---

Ahmed Mohamed  
*Afar Elder*

cc.

- Mr. Abiy Ahmed, *Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*
- Mr. Awol Arba, *President of the Executive Committee of the Afar Regional State*
- Mr. Marc-André Blanchard, *Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations*
- Mr. Roger Nkodo Dang, *President of the Pan-African Parliament*
- Mr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, *Director-General of the World Health Organization*
- Mr. Antoine Chevrier, *Ambassador of Canada to Ethiopia*
- Ms. Nasise Challi, *Ambassador of Ethiopia to Canada*
- Ms. Michelle Bachelet, *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*
- Ms. Daniela Kravetz, *Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea*