



Can – Go Afar Foundation

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

9 December 2020

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

Dear Mr. Filippo Grandi:

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

The United Nations Commission on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea and the two United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Eritrea have determined that Eritrea has engaged in widespread and systematic persecution of the Afar population on an ethnic basis, sufficient to amount to crimes against humanity.

As a result of that persecution, there are now 53,703 registered Eritrean Afar refugees in two camps and settlements located in the Afar Regional State, Ethiopia, and an additional 1,133 out of camp refugees. There are an equal number of unregistered Afar asylum seekers in this area of Ethiopia as well.

Afar refugees and asylum seekers currently located in or near Berhale, Ethiopia are in very close proximity to the fighting in Tigray. The Berhale refugee camp is approximately a 20 minute drive to the Tigray border with Afar State; it is 70 km from Mekele. A concentration of Eritrean soldiers is currently encamped close by at the Eritrean border town of Bada.

We are in regular contact with the Afar people in this area despite the communications shutdown. We have independent, verifiable information about what is going on there. The refugees have reported to us that Eritrea, for some time, has pressured the Afar refugees and asylum seekers to return to Eritrea.

We are aware of reports that Eritrean refugees have been kidnapped from refugee camps in neighbouring Tigray by Eritrean soldiers and forced to return to Eritrea. Their fates are unknown.

The Afar refugees and asylum seekers have expressed to us their fear that the same will happen to them. This, of course, would be a severe violation of the Refugee Convention and human rights.

The Ethiopian government has not followed through on its promise to open a humanitarian corridor into Tigray, thus blocking any humanitarian aid and leaving countless refugees, Afar included, without critical supplies.



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Between the threat of being abducted and forced back to Eritrea, and the dwindling supplies of food, water, medicine and other critical necessities of life, the 100,000+ Afar refugees and asylum seekers are in a desperate situation.

We respectfully request:

- That the UNHCR investigate and report on the allegations of the forced return of Eritrean refugees by Eritrean soldiers acting unlawfully in and near established refugee camps in Tigray, Ethiopia;
- That the UNHCR promptly station UNHCR officers to observe and report on any Eritrean activity that interferes with the safety and security of Afar refugees and asylum seekers in and around the Afar refugee camps at Berhale and Asayita, Ethiopia; and
- That the UNHCR promptly deliver humanitarian aid to Afar refugees in and around the two Afar refugee camps, and work with NGOs to deliver same to all Afar asylum seekers in need.

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

Ahmed Mohamed

Afar Elder



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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*
- Ms. Juliette Stevenson, *Senior External Relations Officer for Ethiopia, UNHCR*