



Saving and enriching lives in Ethiopia



Update on the situation in Ethiopia: Dec 2021

Still hoping for better times...

Dear WellWishers,

This is not an easy Newsletter to write, and it is not one full of good news. Apologies for not writing sooner. We know many of our supporters will be very concerned about the situation in Ethiopia, so here is our understanding of what is happening.

The war in Ethiopia has been raging for over one year now.

The war began when the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed dissolved the ethnic-based coalition of ruling parties, and formed one political party for the whole of Ethiopia. This was contentious because the 1995 Constitution was constructed around the idea that unity in Ethiopia could best be achieved by recognition of its very diverse regions.



REST and community well repair work continues.

Present day Ethiopia was formed as an empire in the late 19th Century and the succession of kings, then the military dictatorship between 1974 and 1991, had sought to homogenise the country through one language and a highly centralised system of government.

Recognising the diversity in Ethiopia the new government in 1991 worked on the Constitution for four years before its adoption. While the process of decentralisation was perhaps too slow, the country made world-breaking records in economic development over the next 25 years.

In 2019 the Tigrayan party to the coalition, the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), refused to join in the new national party, the Prosperity Party, saying the dissolution of the Coalition of ethnic parties was illegal and counterproductive.

When the five-year period of the Federal Parliament finished on 5 October last year, the Prime Minister called for a delay in elections. The Tigrayans went ahead and held their own elections for the Tigray Region and for their members to the National Parliament.

The National Parliament declared these elections to be illegal and the Regional Parliament in Tigray to be unconstitutional. The federal government cut off all funds to the Regional government saying they would only work with district administrations. Preceding this the Ethiopian Prime Minister had signed a peace agreement with the unelected Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki, ostensibly to bring an end to the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. All disputed border areas are along the Tigray-Eritrean border. The Ethiopian Prime Minister was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the agreement. Interestingly it was not jointly awarded with the Eritrean President.

Tigrayans saw this agreement as a threat to their survival – caught in a potential pincer movement between the Federal Ethiopian government and Eritrea, particularly when the Ethiopian army moved to build up its base on the edge of the Tigray capital, Mekelle. Together with defecting national soldiers, the Tigray militia took control of a number of Ethiopian command bases in Tigray on November 4, 2020.

The Prime Minister responded by declaring a State of Emergency, sending in more national troops, inviting the Eritrean army in to participate in retaliation. The national authorities shut down electricity, telephone and internet services throughout Tigray, and declared the TPLF a "terrorist organisation". He instituted what he called a "law and order" operation. Although the stated objective was to find and apprehend or kill 61 named senior Tigrayan politicians or military, the destruction and killing was extensive.

Not only was there physical destruction of buildings, institutions, farming and manufacturing capacity but the cost in human lives has been enormous. Tens of thousands of civilian Tigrayans, especially young men, were slaughtered. Over 100,000 Tigrayan women are said to have been raped. Hospitals, clinics, schools, factories, shops and homes have been destroyed, farming equipment and seeds stolen. Our partner The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) lost vehicles and office equipment. 18 staff from our partner REST were gunned down at their work places in rural areas. Most of these killings - and they still continue in western Tigray - were carried out by Eritrean forces at the invitation of the Ethiopian Government.

The blockade of Tigray by the Ethiopian Government still continues. People who were waiting to harvest crops last December had them burnt and so for the last 11 months have been left in famine conditions. The government until December had not permitted the entry of food aid trucks into Tigray. Communications and banking have been cut since June. Statements by the Prime Minister, senior Ethiopian Army personnel and the head of the Amhara Region include descriptions of Tigrayans as "a weed" and "a cancer". In Addis Ababa thousands of Tigrayans have been summarily evicted from their homes, many rounded up and taken to internment camps. It is clearly a case of ethnic profiling, and at worst, genocide.

The only response Tigrayans felt possible was to fight their way out of this crisis. They have proved to be a formidable force using arms captured from their enemies. Apart from western Tigray, Tigray is now clear of any occupying force and the Tigrayans have now fought their way south into the Amhara Region. They have now formed an alliance with eight other local anti-government movements, the Oromo Liberation Army being the main one.

The key figure causing continuation of this conflict has been the Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed. Tigrayans have continued to say that their current precondition for peace negotiations was the opening up of the food routes and the restoration of communications and banking. These conditions have been put clearly to the US and African Union negotiators. The response on the part of government has been to reject negotiations with any group they have labelled "terrorist".

So much distrust of the federal government now exists, and so much bad feeling has been created between some ethnic groups, that it is difficult to see Ethiopia remain a united country. Any future government which does not recognise and respect ethnic diversity within the country will have difficulty ruling. The 1995 Constitution does provide a way forward, but it will take skillful negotiation and leadership to bring peace.

What of our wells program, especially in Tigray?

There has been serious destruction or disabling of wells in Tigray by Eritrean troops as they moved across the Tigray Region. We are pleased to be getting reports from our partner REST via a satellite system from Tigray about well rehabilitation already happening. Tigrayans are a very innovative people. They have rebuilt the bridge (bombed by the Ethiopian Air Force) across the Tekeze River with meagre resources. They will keep supply trucks going held together scavenged spare parts. Villagers will have saved a few grains of food to plant as seed.

From the November report from REST via satellite email:

Even though the operating environment to provide humanitarian assistance in Tigray has been constrained by number of factors: mainly lack of access to cash or banking services to effect payments and/or procure key inputs, lack of fuel that limited our field operation significantly and lack of communication (no phone or internet service within the region) - thus limiting our communication and coordination of activities with our field staff - REST is doing its best to continue its operation. Best regards. Dawit. REST Mekelle. Tigray

Let's rebuild!

WellWishers is committed to provide support for the rebuilding of Tigray. We cannot just walk away from these rural communities and their reconstruction. We did not walk away from rebuilding a devastated Europe after World War 2. War is horrible, and in Ethiopia this war has been senseless. The 1995 Constitution worked well in terms of providing a political structure for peace and development for 27 years. The government until recent times made plenty of mistakes but addressing these mistakes by dismantling the very essence of partnership at the heart of the Constitution and then forcing a new unitary order by military means was just crazy.

We have been unable to deliver the majority of funds for our water program in Tigray planned for 2021 and into early 2022 because of the suspension of banking in Tigray by the Federal Government. But the funds are still in safe keeping and will be released for rehabilitation as soon as the system opens up. We are confident we will find a way to get your support through to our partner soon. We will of course augment these saved funds with our next agreed program with REST. There is an enormous need for support as you can imagine

For those of you following this incredibly distressing story in the press, we can understand your concern that so much of our effort in previous years has been wasted and rendered pointless. But we are pleading with you not to give up just yet! Some of our WellWishers supporters have been working on this water partnership with REST since its inception in 1984 and watched it grow and flourish even during the previous civil conflict. The program has been a world leader in village water supply. We are not giving up on it, or the marvellous people we work with. Many REST staff have been killed in the conflict. All staff are now working unpaid to do their best to restore services – and hope.

This summary of the situation does not do justice to the sacrifice thousands of Ethiopians have made in this senseless war. There will be books written about this conflict – some may have perspectives different from the above.

This is just a plea. WellWishers support has changed the lives of over 300,000 villagers since we started in 2002. Your support through WellWishers will continue to change and save lives. Thank You. To our WellWishers community – please remember our friends in Ethiopia and their long-term needs during this festive season.

More reading for a couple of views on Ethiopia (you can copy these links to your browser):

<https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/11/08/what-next-for-ethiopia>

<https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/10/20/we-must-end-the-civil-war-to-save-ethiopia/>



Some encouraging fundraisers!

\$575 appeared in the WellWishers account this week as a result of an emerging Melbourne potter selling some of her creations to friends for WellWishers (sample in photo). Thank you M!

One of our long-term supporters held his annual African Trade Bead sale in December, with all sales going to his favourite charities. Another well for Tigray! Thanks!

We have been encouraged by donations continuing to come in during this difficult period. Thank You!

A reminder that all donations over \$2 to WellWishers are tax-deductible.



DONATIONS

- \$6800 will cover the cost of one well for an entire community, providing clean, accessible and permanent water for about 225 people
- \$2400 will cover the cost of restoring a war-damaged well
- \$150 will provide permanent water for a family
- Donations of any amount are most welcome for our village wells or emergency support!

Name:

Postal address: Postcode:

Email (if you have one).....

My Donation is enclosed: \$. (Cheques or Money Orders made out to WellWishers)

OR Debit my Visa / Mastercard - donation amount: \$.....

Name on card:

CARD NUMBER: Expiry...../..... CCV.....(last 3 numbers on the back of card)

Signature..... Date:.....

OR Donate online (Secure site): www.givenow.com.au/wellwishers

OR Donate direct to WellWishers account at the Bank of Queensland:
BSB: 124048 or 124001 (either are OK) Account No: 21658949

Please leave your name and postcode as reference.

Name for Tax Deductible Receipt purposes if different from bank account or card

Name:.....



QR code for GiveNow

Please tick if you are happy for us to use your donation for (non-water) emergency support in Tigray (next 12 months only).

Any other comment:

Please send me information about making a Bequest to WellWishers

MEMBERSHIP:

Membership of WellWishers is for the calendar year

To become a member of WellWishers please complete the form below with the Annual Membership of \$2.20 (payable with unused postage stamps). Your email address would be very helpful for contact purposes.

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