



Saving and enriching lives in Ethiopia



I trust everyone had some sort of a break over Christmas and the New Year. I apologize for the long delay since our last Newsletter. We have been waiting for some good news, and it has arrived!

IN SUMMARY..

To end a war in which over 500,000 Tigrayans have died, a Peace Agreement was signed between the Tigray authorities and the Ethiopian authorities. Problems still remain, as not all parties invading Tigray were part of the agreement. For over two years Tigray has been systematically isolated: communications cut off, humanitarian aid and essential supplies blockaded.

In the midst of conflict our water wells partner The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) has struggled on repairing and building over 6000 wells. A brave and innovative team effort which we applaud.

Today, with supplies and funds flowing again, REST is ready to get on with rebuilding. WellWishers and other international organisations are ready to support REST. We will immediately send what funds we can. Your urgent support is vital to increasing our funding and for REST's planning during 2023. **Please dig deep now to help REST dig deep for Tigrayan villagers in 2023!**

It is hard not to be depressed by events in Tigray over the last two years - loss of friends, thinking about a war which caused the loss of over 500,000 lives. I believe it was fundamentally because the leadership of two groups of people – one to the south of Tigray (the Ethiopian leadership) and the other to the north (the Eritrean leadership) felt an existential threat from Tigray and determined to wipe out an entire ethnic group. Others may have a different view on the cause of this terrible suffering, but everyone agrees that the impact on ordinary people and their communities will be felt for many years. The apparent - and sometimes stated – determination to wipe out 6 million Tigrayans has been described by many as an act of genocide.

PEACE AT LAST

Finally in November, under pressure from the international community, and because the Tigrayans could not endure the thought of even more suffering, the Ethiopian government and the Tigrayan leadership met in Pretoria, South Africa, and signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA). It was an enormous gamble on the part of the Tigrayans. I think that they realised that defending themselves from attacks by the Ethiopian Army (with ongoing supplies of armed drones from Turkey and China), the Eritrean Army and the Amhara militia was just too costly in human terms. Unlike Ukraine, Tigrayans had no external support to conduct a defence. They possibly could have maintained a 'liberated' Tigray for years to come, but the cost would have been enormous.

While everyone welcomes the initiative for peace, there are serious problems with COHA - the Eritreans have been slow to leave Tigray and are still looting and killing and western Tigray is still occupied by Amhara militia. Both the Eritreans and Amhara militia were not part of the agreement.

SOME SERVICES RESTORED

Nevertheless, Federal police have now come into Tigray to take charge of federal institutions such as the airports. Telecommunications and power have been intermittently restored, limited banking permitted and some restricted flights to and from Addis Ababa allowed. Tigrayan members of the Ethiopian army are still languishing and dying in concentration camps, key Tigrayan leaders are still in jail in Addis Ababa.

MILITARY MOVEMENTS

Under the agreements signed November 2022 between Addis Ababa and Mekelle, all foreign troops are to withdraw, humanitarian aid should proceed unhindered, and the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) should hand over heavy weapons. The TDF has handed over many heavy weapons, and it appears some Eritrean troops have actually left the towns of Shire and Axum. Humanitarian aid is coming at a reasonable rate. Western Tigray is still completely occupied by Amhara militia. Tigrayans handing over all weapons while external forces are present is a big risk.

REBUILDING BEGINS

We are relieved that a level of peace is being maintained, and Tigrayans are beginning the rebuild. Difficult political and constitutional discussions remain ahead. Whether long-term peace can be established while the atrocities of the last two years are glossed over and external threats exist remains to be seen.

CONFLICT CONTINUES ACROSS ETHIOPIA

The situation across Ethiopia still remains fragile. It is estimated that there are 4.6 million people displaced from their homes. Aid workers say that famine conditions are serious in western Oromia, Benishangul, Tigray and Somali regions. Conflict between the Oromo Liberation Army and the Ethiopian Army and Amhara militia in western and northern Oromia continues to create displacement and suffering. We can only hope for further agreements to seek peace.

SOME GOOD NEWS FROM OUR PARTNER IN TIGRAY

We have spoken at length with Getachew Kalayu, the head of programming and acting Director at The Relief Society of Tigray (REST). Getachew informs us that the water team is now ready to operate at full capacity, as is the agriculture team, and the food distribution team.

They are now able to purchase equipment they need from Addis Ababa - including handpumps and the required handtools.

For two years it has been difficult to get funds into Tigray for our partner REST, with banks closed down in Tigray. Recently REST has been able to draw from the banks in Addis Ababa and transport significant amounts of Ethiopian Birr on the OCHA (UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) flights each week. This means they are able to repay many of the IOUs incurred in scrounging equipment in Tigray over the last two years, plus some back pay for staff who have worked without salaries. .

Getachew assures us REST is now on track to complete the 2022 program by the end of February. REST is obviously keen to know what level of support WellWishers might offer in 2023. Our Trustees met this week and decided to initially provide our usual annual grant of USD200,000 (approximately Aust\$300,000) for 2023. We can make this grant because our generous supporters have stuck with WellWishers during these difficult and uncertain times. Thank you!!

HOWEVER WE WOULD LIKE TO SEND MORE!

Some weeks back we received a brief general written report from REST about the situation. In part it said:

"Emergency and security conditions in Tigray remain serious, however some improvements are noted with the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA).

*Food aid distributions have resumed, albeit after a long break due to the siege. Estimated total emergency food needs in Tigray remain at approximately 5.2 million people. Of this caseload, 3.1 million people are allocated to JEOP (Joint Emergency Operations Program led by Catholic Relief Services with USAID funding for the last 15 years) of which **2.1 million is allocated to REST**. Approximately 2.1 million people are supported by WFP.*

*REST's work in WASH (Water Sanitation and Hygiene) has been one of its key strengths in Tigray, built up over the last 35 years. Under our WASH Emergency, **we were able to maintain or restore over 6,100 wells and build 78***

new water points in 2022, restoring access to clean and safe water to over 1,438,353 people. WellWishers Australia is one of our main water partners.

Other key areas that REST has successfully been involved in are unprecedented levels of seed and fertilizer provision to help improve agricultural productivity among war-affected households. Virtually no other organization was able to provide such levels of agricultural support needed to foster recovery. Because of its vast networks, REST has also been able to distribute many Non-Food-Items to IDPs (internally displaced people) during the first, and part of the second year of the war.

We believe REST is best placed to support the recovery process in Tigray because of our capacity (most Woreda (District) Coordination Offices have remained open regardless of the damages and security threats); and connectedness and commitment to the Tigray people who trust REST more than others."

OUR THANKS TO REST STAFF

We are just so grateful to, and we honour, the brave REST staff who remained at their posts during this war and kept on working with their communities. That over 6000 wells and other village water supplies were repaired and maintained is a credit to their dedication. Now the work can continue with some external resources coming from WellWishers and other agencies. We also welcome the ongoing support of REST's USA partner **charity:water** which has been a major funding partner with REST in Tigray over a number of years. It has enabled REST to expand from the hand-dug wells program initiated by Australians with REST in the 1980s to a borehole program using sophisticated boring machinery where appropriate. Our hand-dug wells program still remains most suited to remote villages where equipment has to be carried in by hand or on the back of a donkey – and those villages are where so many Tigrayans live.

In recent weeks charity:water staff have been able to visit Tigray and inspect some of the devastation caused by the war on thousands of water supply points, but also see the amazing work carried out by REST staff in restoring and repairing wells and pumps.

A CHANGE OF PLANS

In 2021 and 2022, REST planned to complete new wells in over 80 villages with WellWishers funding. The war changed those plans – difficulty of access, shortage of materials and transport, security of staff and local village labour. Restoring access to water and the need to repair damaged wells became the priority. A daunting task – lack of cash for spares (lots of IOUs), lack of fuel and transport (lots of walking carrying tools), shortage of food. Risking lives. Spirits and bodies fuelled only by a desire to get life-saving water going again for village folk. We salute these brave REST workers and villagers. Their efforts go unsung on the international stage. We are grateful for the sacrifices they have made, and for their continuing partnership with WellWishers.

Graham Romanes, February 2023



Broken pump and destroyed well wall (charity:water)



Borehole repair (charity:water)



REST food distribution at Adwa town (REST)

WELLWISHERS PLAN FOR 2023

The needs in northern Ethiopia are enormous.

War has left more than 2 million people displaced from their homes in Tigray, over 5 million in need of food assistance. Over 500,000 people have perished. All too hard for us to imagine. But Tigrayans will get on with recovery.

Prior to the conflict, 60% of rural Tigrayans and 57% of urban dwellers has access to safe water. Damage to water points during the war has been extensive. 71% of water wells were rendered non-functional at some time, due to a lack of spares, tools and labor or inaccessibility for repair. Local Water and Sanitation Committees (WASHCOs) have been unable to function.

Hygiene related education and advice services have disappeared – 82% of hospitals and 80% of health posts were made non-functional due to looting and destruction.

Millions of people in Tigray are in need of WASH related humanitarian response to meet its basic need in terms of water, hygiene and sanitation

Our partner REST's priority focus for 2023

REST is planning to continue working in rural areas as its priority area of focus. Major priority Water and Sanitation response activities, *in rural Tigray*, include:

- Rehabilitation and/or maintenance of damaged or non-functioning water supply schemes
- Re/strengthening WASHCOs (with refresher training on scheme operation and management, provision of key tools and spare parts to undertake minor maintenance within their capacity)
- Re-engagement of local government offices with provision of key/basic tools and materials
- Hygiene and sanitation behaviour change communication: re-engaging Health Extension Workers and mobilizing community promoters to educate communities about better hygiene and sanitation practice.

WellWishers is very keen to get on with supporting these important and urgent initiatives. We will not be able to fund all this work, but we can make a significant contribution. We can only do it with the help of our generous donors. **THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT!**

The following links may help with a deeper understanding of the situation in Ethiopia.

IF you are reading these links on a printed version of the Newsletter, unfortunately you will have to type the link onto a computer or phone to open it.

www.responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/01/31/ethiopia-dangerously-adrift-after-tigray-war/

www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2023/1/11/as-peace-begins-in-ethiopia-tigray-opens-up

www.reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/after-agreement-ethiopias-tigray-region-what-stands-way-lasting-peace

www.garoweonline.com/en/world/africa/icrc-healthcare-in-ethiopia-s-tigray-region-completely-destroyed

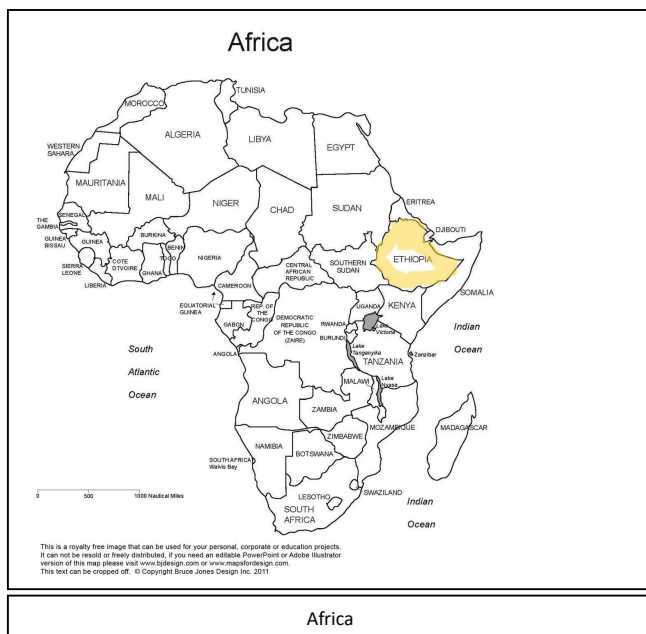
A reminder that all donations over \$2 to WellWishers are tax-deductible.

WellWishers: Bank of Queensland BSB 124048 or 124001 and Account no. 21658949

Contact: Graham Romanes, WellWishers PO Box 27 Brunswick South VIC 3055 (new PO Box!)
Phone 0419 559 138

Email: info@wellwishersethiopia.com Website: www.wellwishersethiopia.com

ABN: 20438857300



Africa



Regions of Ethiopia



Tigray



Tigray (photo charity:water)

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wellwishers

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:.....

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.

Name:

Email: