


**wellwishers**
*Saving and enriching lives in Ethiopia*


## A look back, and looking forward



REST workers and villagers repairing the damaged well at Endaba Giray village, Debre Genet district, Tigray

### Conflict and peace: rebuilding lives

Some background reminders: In 1991 the Russian-backed military dictatorship of Col. Mengistu Hailemariam was overthrown by a coalition of ethnic-based militias. Under a new Constitution in 1993, Ethiopia became a federation of ethnic-based Regions, allowing the use of local languages and cultural practices. Each Region and the Federal government were allocated powers similar to shared responsibilities in Australia's federation. There was a perception however that the Tigrayan party was too dominant nationally. In 2018 the newly appointed Prime Minister espoused the concept of 'medemer' (መደመር) (English 'togetherness') and moved to 'outlaw' the ethnic nature of politics. In January 2020 he met with leaders of neighbouring Eritrea and Somalia. and it seems one

key agenda item was to eliminate Tigray's 'power'. Leaders in Tigray were concerned with subsequent troop movements to Tigray's border, the flights of military cargo planes from Ethiopia to Eritrea and the mass military training of Somali youth in Eritrea. Tigray held elections in September 2020, against the wishes of the federal government. In mid-October the Prime Minister said he would intervene militarily to oust Tigrayan leadership. On November 4, he launched a military offensive "to restore law and order and reinstate federal control".

Tigrayans were not ready for the scale of the attack unleashed on them, and many leaders were captured or killed. Over the next two years Tigrayans mobilised and fought back, regaining much 'lost' territory. Together with the Eritrean army from the north, Amhara militia from the south and the use of newly supplied armed drones from Turkey and China, enormous damage was wrought. The Region of Tigray was blockaded – no fuel, power, telecommunications, or food allowed in for the six million Tigrayans. Banks were closed and the vaults cleared of cash. Crops, factories, schools, hospitals, water sources, churches and homes destroyed and looted. But the biggest toll was human. An estimated 500,000 Tigrayans were killed or died of hunger or wounds during the next two years. Thousands died because of the blockade on medicines and simple treatments such as for diabetes. The legacy of the rape of over 100,000 women continues to have dire consequences.

### Peace agreement

In November 2022, just over a year ago, a ceasefire agreement was reached between the Ethiopian government and the Tigrayan movement. It required (amongst a long list) disarmament, opening up humanitarian access, border enforcement and safeguarding by federal authorities, reintegration of internally displaced people.

### So, what has happened?

Sadly, the agreement has not been fully implemented in Tigray by the federal government. While active military engagement between Tigray and Addis Ababa has stopped, Eritrean forces still occupy tracts of Tigray on the northern border area and continue with killing and rape. Western Tigray is still occupied by the Eritrean army and Amhara militia. One million internally displaced people are still in camps. Thousands of Tigrayans dismissed from the national army, the federal police and public service have not been re-employed. International food aid from the USA and the UN World Food Program to Tigray and many other Regions has largely ceased, ostensibly because of misuse by federal government agencies. Starvation and deaths have been ignored in Tigray. Statistics are sparse, but a study by the Tigray Health Group of 140,000 under 5-year-old Internally Displaced children found that 50,000 toddlers and babies are slowly starving to death. Dozens of deaths are being reported daily across Tigray.

Our partner the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) is using all the capacity they can muster to combat the disastrous fallout from the war and subsequent neglect of the region. REST has had to take an important role in combatting starvation with limited emergency supplies of flour, salt and edible oils, funded by its donors. REST's funds are insufficient, but carefully and wisely targeted. The REST Water Team has not stopped working, building, rehabilitating and maintaining vital village water supplies.

### **REST has kept working**

We at WellWishers are grateful to our donors that we have been able to keep our promise to provide \$350,000 during 2023 toward vital village drinking and washing water supplies. Many hundreds of village wells were the target of destruction or damage by invading forces during the two years of war.

### **Construction and Rehabilitation of wells**

Your support has funded the construction or rehabilitation in 2023 of clean accessible water supplies for 12,000 villagers in 56 locations across Tigray. An amazing effort. Thanks to everyone from our WellWishers Trustees, from the staff at REST and especially from communities in Tigray who now have access to life-saving water.

### **More challenges ahead**

Our challenge in 2024 will be just a bit greater. REST, along with every other NGO and business has had access to foreign currency to purchase goods abroad greatly restricted by the Ethiopian authorities (funds we send to Ethiopia must be immediately converted to local currency – the Ethiopian Birr). The country is close to bankrupt and supplies of pumps and parts must now be locally sourced. With the exchange currency rate about to go sky high, the cost of our wells will escalate. But the urgent need remains, so please dig deep into your generous pockets and see what we can do.

### **The future?**

I am optimistic about the future for our friends in Tigray. The Peace Agreement, though not yet fully implemented, has established a good basis for progress. REST's unflagging work in village water supplies continues to be complemented by its work in irrigation, land management, health education, food aid and food for work programs. REST is deeply connected to its communities and have very committed staff. Tigrayans have shown they know how to rebuild!



**Hadush Adi village, Maynebri district:** Alem Teka collecting water from the slime covered soak, her only water source after her village well was damaged. Alem at the pump repaired by REST, funded by WellWishers

**All donations over \$2 to WellWishers are tax-deductible.**

**WellWishers: Bank of Queensland BSB 124048 or 124001 (either are OK) and Account no. 21658949**

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Your critical support needed at this traditionally giving time in Australia. Please include us! We have an enormous task of rebuilding in front of us.

### **A generous offer to match donations: Ross and Marianne**

Many of our donors will remember Ross and Marianne Allan who founded WellWishers 21 years ago.

We are delighted they still strongly support the WellWishers program. Their generous support to WellWishers continues, but they are also making an offer we hope our supporters can take up:

For every donation of \$2500 - the cost of getting a village well operational again - they will match with another \$2500, up to a total \$60,000.

Every \$2500 will ensure clean water for 50 families. What a fabulous opportunity to provide clean water for rural Ethiopians in the new year.

Of course, every dollar you can send will make a difference. Our friends in Tigray have been through hell, let's help them on their journey to a better place.

**THANK YOU!**



REST is distributing food aid – grain, cooking oil and salt from its limited resources. Some small cash grants to families are also being made.



A farmer at Endamanam village near Adwa in Tigray. Her crop of chickpeas and maize made possible by REST's rebuilding of a damaged irrigation system.

### **Season's Greetings from our WellWishers Trustees.**

WellWishers has once again enjoyed your generous support, and we look forward with hope to a peaceful and productive year in 2024 – in Australia, the world, and specially for our friends in Ethiopia.

Gena, or Ethiopian Christmas falls on January 7, 2024 (in line with the Orthodox Calendar). A bigger celebration in Ethiopia is Timket, or the Epiphany, celebrated on January 20.



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## DONATIONS

- \$7500 will cover the cost of one well for an entire community, providing clean, accessible and permanent water for about 225 people
- \$2500 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: .....

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

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

**OR** Donate online (Secure site): [www.givenow.com.au/wellwishers](http://www.givenow.com.au/wellwishers)

**OR** Donate direct to WellWishers account at the Bank of Queensland:

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Please leave your name and postcode as reference.

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### MEMBERSHIP:

Membership of WellWishers is for the calendar year 2024

To become a member of WellWishers please complete the form below with the Annual Membership of \$3.00 (payable with unused postage stamps). Your email address would be very helpful for contact purposes.

Name: .....

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