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Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 13 September to James Duddridge MP on behalf of a number of Parliamentary colleagues about the appalling situation in the north of Ethiopia. I apologise for the delay in responding, but I hope you noted our reply to the IDC of 16 November and my comments in the Westminster Hall on 4 November. A lot has moved on since your letter. The conflict has spread southwards towards Addis Ababa and east towards Mille and may yet impact other parts of the country and possibly the wider East Africa region. The stakes could not be higher for Ethiopia.

Both James and I have appreciated the spirit in which our debates in the Westminster Hall have been carried out. I am struck by the clear consensus about the conflict. It is apparent to me that all members have been rightly appalled by the scale of suffering and the gravity of the unfolding situation. I agree that it continues to demand critical attention. My first call with a London Ambassador was with the Ethiopian Ambassador, Teferi Melesse. I have also spoken to AU High representative Obasanjo, AU Commissioner Bankole and Ethiopian State Minister Redwan in the last month. And of course, I am in regular contact with the UK ambassador to Ethiopia.

My overriding message to Ethiopian interlocutors has been that the situation is desperate and there is urgent need for unhindered humanitarian access, that there cannot be a military solution, that all parties should cease their military campaigns and seek a political solution. We continue to deliver these clear messages at all levels, to all parties of the conflict. Our Ambassador in Addis Ababa met with the Prime Minister and the TPLF leadership in Mekelle in recent weeks to deliver these messages. We have also appointed a new envoy for the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, Philip Parham. He is already engaging partners, with the conflict in Ethiopia one of his priorities.

The operating context for relief agencies has been extremely challenging since the outset of the conflict. Since November 2020, twenty-three humanitarian workers have been killed in Tigray. We are also aware that three NGOs had their licenses temporarily suspended for three months and 11 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were reportedly placed under investigation in August. We have supported the NGOs concerned through quiet diplomacy (at their request) and some have now been reinstated.

We were more vocal in asking the government of Ethiopia to reverse their decision to

expel seven UN officials. At the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council on 4 October, the UK Ambassador to the UN issued a joint statement on behalf of over 40 countries. We also raised this at the UN Security Council (UNSC) briefing on Ethiopia on 6 October. Our Ambassador to Ethiopia raised our concerns about ongoing detentions with President Sahle-Work on 12 November.

These are concerning developments, which reduce the capacity and capability of a humanitarian response already severely impeded by conflict and obstruction. The UK's top priority is securing humanitarian access, which we continue to raise at the highest levels. Less than 15% of required aid has reached Tigray since July. Without a drastic improvement in the ability of humanitarians to access Tigray, large-scale loss of life is likely, as is a region-wide famine. Access impediments to Tigray serve as a motivating factor for the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front and their advance.

In addition to our financial support to the UN and the provision of technical expertise via secondments of staff, we are also leading efforts to help strengthen the UN response. Officials at the British Embassy in Addis Ababa are working closely with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other UN entities to drive UN performance. We continue to deliver messages about contingency planning, about prioritisation of logistical assets, about better coordination on advocacy and public communications.

Since November 2020, the UK's Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, Nick Dyer, has visited Ethiopia three times. The Director General for Africa has also visited Addis Ababa. Officials from the UK embassy in Ethiopia, despite the levels of insecurity and logistical challenges, continue to travel to Tigray as regularly as possible. FCDO staff remain closely engaged and have lines of communication with all parties to the conflict.

The UK has provided over £76m to the Tigray humanitarian response, making it the second largest donor. We continue to lobby other donors to increase their own commitments. The crisis in northern Ethiopia comes at a time when the international community is struggling to keep pace with needs due to violence elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. Globally a record 235 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection next year, a near 40% increase on 2020. It remains to be seen whether key donors will be able to continue to provide major finances to Ethiopia given pressures in other contexts.

We welcome the engagement with African Union High Representative Olusegun Obasanjo in Ethiopia, and fully support the efforts of the AU to address the humanitarian situation and push for an end to the conflict. We have continued to raise the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict at the UN Security Council, the G7 and the Human Rights Council. The Foreign Secretary discussed Ethiopia with the US, France, Germany, the EU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Chair (Sudan) and Obasanjo on 12 October. She discussed it again at the G7 Foreign Ministers Meeting in December. The Foreign Secretary also spoke to Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister Demeke on 5 November. We remain in close contact with Obasanjo and others working for a political settlement.

We deployed an expert from the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative to

identify actions for the UK to scale up the response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and recruited a specialist adviser at post to take forward recommendations. This includes supporting the deployment of a CRSV specialist to the UN to improve coordination. Our humanitarian and human rights programmes in Tigray provided essential services to survivors of sexual violence. We also provided capacity-building support to women's rights organisations and women-led organisations to provide support to those most at risk of sexual violence. We are contributing nearly £500,000 to provide emergency mental health training to women affected by violence. Programmes will recommence when the prevailing conditions allow.

We strongly supported a resolution on Ethiopia at the 47th session of the Human Rights Council in June. This allowed for an interactive dialogue on Tigray at the 48th session on 13 September. We welcomed the report from the Joint investigation of the OHCHR and the Ethiopian Human rights Commission at an intersessional briefing on 22 November. We have called for the report's recommendations to be implemented and for all those responsible for the horrific human rights abuses identified to be held to account. We will be pressing for further action in the Human Rights Council. The UK is also supportive of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Commission of Inquiry on Tigray and the Council also received an update on this Commission.

The report makes clear that Eritrean forces have been complicit in atrocities. We have consistently called for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray. The UK will consider the full range of policy tools at our disposal to protect human rights and deter violations of international humanitarian law. However, it would not be appropriate to speculate about future sanctions targets as to do so could reduce their impact. The UK Government is committed to a more integrated approach to conflict and instability, placing greater emphasis on addressing the drivers of conflict, atrocity prevention and strengthening fragile countries' resilience to external influence. Diplomatic engagement, development and programmatic support, and support from our armed forces are all tools that can be deployed in helping to halt or prevent the recurrence of atrocities in conflict and non-conflict settings.

I believe the FCDO has accredited itself well in this crisis. The new joined up approach of bringing the political and humanitarian lead under one decision maker has meant judgements were taken with all available information to hand, and that both tracks are mutually reinforcing. I share your concern regarding the acute suffering of the Ethiopian people and the instability of the country, which echoes across the region. The UK continues to be at the forefront of the international effort to de-escalate the very grave humanitarian situation. All fighting needs to cease. Only an inclusive political settlement, that accommodates all interests in Ethiopia, can avoid further bloodshed and deliver lasting peace. It is a matter of absolute priority for this Government to support such efforts towards peace and humanitarian relief.

Yours sincerely,



Vicky Ford MP
Minister for Africa