October 26, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520
Dear Secretary Rubio:

Subject: Response to Secretary Rubio's Remarks on Ethiopia and Eritrea

We write concerning your recent remarks on C-SPAN regarding Ethiopia and Eritrea, particularly your characterization of certain opposition forces as "separatists" and your description of the Ethiopian government's actions as a response. We are concerned that this framing risks oversimplifying a complex political and security crisis and may inadvertently obscure important distinctions among the actors involved. Given the significance of U.S. engagement in the Horn of Africa, we believe it is important that assessments of the conflict reflect its full political and humanitarian dimensions.

These concerns arise against the backdrop of a deepening political, humanitarian, and security crisis in Ethiopia. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, Ethiopia has experienced widespread violence, mass displacement, severe humanitarian crises, and serious allegations of human rights abuses, including crimes against humanity, conflict-related gender-based and sexual violence, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Political polarization and fragmentation have intensified, while public confidence in state institutions has eroded. The resulting instability has imposed enormous costs on Ethiopian society and poses growing risks to regional peace and security.

It is within this context that the Ethiopian Peoples' Forces Alliance for Survival emerged. The Alliance describes itself as a coalition committed to pursuing an inclusive democratic transition rather than a separatist movement seeking to dismantle the Ethiopian state. For this reason, we believe it is important that the Alliance be evaluated on the basis of its stated political objectives, conduct, and available evidence, rather than by broad characterizations that may not accurately reflect its purpose or composition.

The Alliance's formation should therefore be understood as a response to Ethiopia's ongoing political and security crisis and to the perceived absence of meaningful avenues for peaceful political change. While reasonable observers may differ in their assessments of the Alliance's strategies and actions, it is important to distinguish opposition to the current federal government from separatist objectives. Conflating these distinct political positions risks obscuring the underlying causes of the conflict and narrowing opportunities for constructive engagement.

The Alliance maintains that its military operations are directed against government military targets and are undertaken in the context of armed resistance and self-defense. Such claims, like

those of all parties to the conflict, should be assessed according to established principles of international humanitarian law and on the basis of verifiable evidence. Actions should be judged by their targets, methods, and consequences rather than by political labels alone.

At the same time, serious concerns have been raised regarding the conduct of government forces. Reports by international human rights organizations, humanitarian agencies, and independent observers have documented allegations of attacks againstcivilians and civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, religious institutions, and humanitarian operations. These allegations warrant continued scrutiny and accountability. The principles of civilian protection and respect for international humanitarian law must be applied consistently to all parties to the conflict.

The selective application of labels such as terrorism risks delegitimizing political opposition while diverting attention from broader questions of accountability and governance. Durable peace cannot emerge through narratives that assign responsibility exclusively to one side of a multifaceted conflict. Rather, lasting stability requires an honest assessment of the political conditions that gave rise to the conflict and a commitment to consistent standards of accountability.

In this connection, we would like to note that the consequences of Ethiopia's crisis extend beyond its borders. As one of Africa's most populous nations and a historically important partner in regional security, Ethiopia plays a critical role in the stability of the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea region, and the Nile Basin. Continued instability within Ethiopia risks exacerbating regional tensions at a time when the broader region can barely afford additional conflict.

We, the undersigned former Ethiopian diplomats, share the view expressed inthe U.S. Department of State’s recent press release that neither Ethiopia nor the region needs another war. Accordingly, we respectfully urge the United States to adopt a balanced, principled, and constructive approach that supports a peaceful resolution of Ethiopia's political crisis. Specifically, we urge the Department of State to:

- Distinguish separatist objectives from opposition to the federal government and assess the Alliance on the basis of its stated political aims,demonstrated conduct, and available evidence.
- Apply consistent standards of civilian protection, accountability, and respect for international humanitarian law to all parties to the conflict.
- Broaden diplomatic engagement with relevant Ethiopian stakeholders in support of an inclusive political process and a credible path toward democratic transition.

A durable peace cannot be secured by treating any single narrative as sufficient to explainEthiopia's crisis. It requires addressing the underlying political grievances that sustain conflict, upholding consistent standards of accountability, and engaging the full spectrum of relevant stakeholders. We respectfully encourage the United States to use its diplomatic influence in support of these objectives, in the interests of the Ethiopian people, regional stability, and lasting peace.

Sincerely,

Signatories

1. Dr. Gedu Andargachew,
   Former Minister for Foreign Affairs and Advisor on Foreign Relations to the Prime Minister
2. Berhane GhebreChristos,
   Former Minister-Advisor to the Ethiopian Prime Minister/ Ambassador to the U.S. and the EU
3. Fesseha Asghedom
   Former Ambassador
4. Hailekiros Gessese
   Former Ambassador
5. Mulugeta Zewde
   Former Ambassador
6. Dr. Addisu Gebregziabher
   Former Ambassador
7. Berhane Fesseha
   Former Ambassador

CC:

The Honorable Jim Risch,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations,
United States Senate,
Washington DC, 20510.

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen,
Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Relations,
United States Senate,
Washington DC, 20510.

The Honorable Brian Mast,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington DC, 20515.

The Honorable Gregory Meeks,
Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs,
U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington DC, 20515.