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Position paper – for presentation by Akinyi Walender

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Tigray Joint Response (ETJR)

Background and Situation in Ethiopia, Tigray:

- Historical background: Ethiopia has about 80 ethno-national groups. The major ones are the Oromo (the largest), the Amhara and the Tigrayans. The last ones, grouped as TPLF, controlled Ethiopian government for 27 years, until the current Abiy Ahmed government took office.
- Pre-crisis conditions until Nov 2020: Tigray has an estimated population of more than 5 million people, predominantly rural. Tigray has the highest poverty rate in the country. A decrease in rainfall and increase in the occurrence of droughts due to climate change has had a significant negative impact on livelihoods and food security in the region. There is a high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Tigray. Over 6,000 cases of COVID-19 had been registered in Tigray until October 2020, although significant underreporting is likely. Nearly 100,000 Eritrean refugees have been living in camps in Tigray. They fled political persecution and compulsory military service in Eritrea, long before the current conflict.
- In September 2020, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) held regional elections in the Tigray region, northern Ethiopia. Elections in Tigray were held despite the constitutional postponement of the national elections due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, tensions between the TPLF and the national government escalated, and eventually resulted in a conflict, following an alleged attack on a major Ethiopian Army base. All parties to the conflict have been accused of committing atrocities.
- The conflict has now led to an estimated 2 million people being internally displaced. An estimated 60,000 people have fled across the border to Sudan, where they are now refugees.
- In Tigray, an estimated 2 million people are internally displaced and an estimated 5.2 million people are still in need of humanitarian assistance (Tigray HRP Plan, May 13).
- Shelter, hygiene services, clean water and especially food are all in short supply. There's also need for MHPSS especially for SGBV victims.
- Armed conflict and intercommunal violence remain a critical concern across Ethiopia, from Tigray, to Benishangul Gumuz, to Oromia and Amhara regions. All of this is happening in a context of COVID-19 pandemic with a severe socio-economic impact, compounded by recurrent climate-related shocks such as floods and droughts, locust invasion, intercommunal conflicts, and an alarming deterioration of the food security situation across the country (UNOCHA May 17).
- The parliamentary elections in Ethiopia originally planned on June 5 have been postponed allowing more people to register to vote. It is unsure how the elections will impact the humanitarian situation in the country.

Work Dutch Relief Alliance Ethiopia Tigray Joint Response:

- Since February 2021, the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, started a DRA Acute Joint Response of 6-months in Tigray to respond to the crisis. The DRA members active in Tigray are ZOA, SOS, Stichting Vluchteling/IRC, Save the Children,

Tearfund and Cordaid as lead organization. The DRA members are directly implementing themselves, through family members or through (local) partners: Caritas Ethiopia, EOC-DICAC, SOS CVE, FHE and EHKCDC.

- We are operating across Tigray in Southeast zone, Northwest, and South zone. More specifically in Enderta, Mekelle, Shire, Mai Tsebri Town, Alamata and Endamekoni districts.
- The key objective of the Acute Joint Response in Tigray is to provide life-saving assistance to people affected by the crisis facing severe acute needs. The intervention targets the most vulnerable households, aiming to improve direct access to food, WASH, health including (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, nutrition, and shelter, as well as protection. We aim to reach a total number of 111.961 people in need with a budget of 3 million euro.
- For instance, Stichting Vluchteling, through their partner IRC, is providing three rounds of cash transfers to 1,560 conflict affected households, Cordaid through their local partners is supporting 2000 individuals in Enderta and Alamata with house repairing materials, and 666 individuals with Shelter Items such as mattresses, blankets and kitchen items and SOS CVE is rehabilitating damaged health facilities including WASH and medical disposal facilities. The health centers will also be provided with medical supplies and equipment, as well as medicines, including Covid-19 supplies and PPE materials.

Challenges:

- Access has been granted by the state authorities and international assistance has arrived over the past month, however the humanitarian response has been slow and huge gaps remain; it remains difficult to reach people outside the major towns due to continuing conflicts.
- The security situation remains volatile, especially in rural areas. Worryingly, there are increasing reports of violence against civilians, including sexual violence. Clashes continue to be reported in Central, Eastern, North Western, South Eastern and Southern Zones of Tigray. Besides many thousands of civil and military casualties, so far seven aid workers have been killed since the start of the conflict in Tigray (UNOCHA, May 14).
- Communication breaks, due to intermittent electricity and limited internet access. Internet service had been limited over the past months. Positively, internet has been restored last week for charitable organizations and government offices in the regional capital, Mekelle, however it remains down in much of the rest of the region. Communication between DRA members working in various locations across the region is therefore still challenging. The DRA field coordinator therefore travels regularly to all locations to coordinate and monitor the DRA Joint Response.
- Limited financial resources compared to the huge immediate and longer-term needs of the affected populations. E.g. The number of Internally Displaced people (IDPs) is increasing and with 71% of hospital and medical facilities partially or fully damaged, with many across the region looted during the conflict, medical supplies are scarce.

Recommendations:

- Support an inclusive dialogue between all parties involved to prevent Ethiopia from further destabilizing. Coming to a peaceful inclusive dialogue about Tigray is essential for the stability of Ethiopia and the wider Horn of Africa.
- Humanitarian access remains a huge challenge. Invest in humanitarian diplomacy, with the aim to urgently allow complete access to all parts of Tigray, to offer life-saving humanitarian assistance to reach all Tigrayans who need it. Only through full access the catastrophic humanitarian impact of the conflict on civilians can be averted.

- While the immediate humanitarian needs are still our top priority, we should simultaneously address the longer-term needs. Health facilities and hospitals are (partially) unfunctional, markets have collapsed, and livelihoods are destroyed which will negatively impact people to get back on their feet. We want to urge you to allocate extra means to alleviate humanitarian suffering but simultaneously contribute to longer term peace and development. This shows that the multi-dimensional complex crisis in Ethiopia asks for a Triple Nexus Approach.