

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

Ethiopia Monthly Briefing October 2023

Ethiopia Summary 24 October 2023

The European Union (EU) on 3 October pledges \$680m in development aid to Ethiopia with intentions to normalise relations. This is the first EU aid package since the bloc cut budgetary support over atrocities committed during the Tigray War. The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) publishes its final report on 13 October regarding human rights violations in Ethiopia during the Tigray War. United Nations (UN) under-secretary general and special adviser on the prevention of genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, warns about ongoing indicators of genocide. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (2018-current) declares that access to the Red Sea is of national interest for Ethiopia's economy as it seeks to diversify port access and reduce dependence on Port of Djibouti. Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia reject any discussions over the subject.

EU and Ethiopia sign multi-year development deal

The **European Union (EU)** commissioner for international partnerships **Jutta Urpilainen** signed a €650m (\$680m) development deal with finance minister **Ahmed Shide** on 3 October in **Addis Ababa**. The EU's multi-year spending plan, the **Multi-annual Indicative Program (MIP)** for the period 2024-2027, distributes funds across three priority areas of cooperation: €260m (\$275.4m) to support Ethiopia's green transition; €228m (\$241.5m) for human development and supporting reconstruction and delivery of key basic services to the population; and €156m (\$165.3m) for economic governance, democratic governance, and peacebuilding.¹ Speaking to the press, Urpilainen referred to Ethiopia as a "key regional partner" and commended Ethiopia's ongoing engagement with the peace process, transitional justice, and reforms:

"My presence today in Addis demonstrates the importance of these efforts. Together, the EU and Ethiopia aim to gradually normalise relations through structured political dialogue and rebuild a mutually reinforcing partnership."²

Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** (2018-current), who was also present at the signing, said that the aid would support Ethiopia's post-war recovery and facilitate necessary economic reforms. He also added that Ethiopia's "strategic partnership" with the EU was "back on track."³ However, Urpilainen emphasised that the resumption of EU direct budgetary support to Ethiopia's government, which was suspended in January 2021, was contingent on political conditions in addition to Ethiopia coming to an agreement with the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** for a reform programme.⁴

While in Ethiopia between 25 September and 3 October, IMF Ethiopia mission chief **Alvaro Piris** noted the positive steps taken by Ethiopia to reduce inflation and stabilise the economy and stated that discussions were ongoing to reach an agreement on a set of reforms for Ethiopia's requested loan programme.⁵

Although the signing of the MIP is a positive development for EU- Ethiopia relations, the conditions for direct government support may require intensive monitoring and will likely take time to

¹ www.international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu, 3 Oct 2023

² www.international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu, 3 Oct 2023

³ AP News, 3 Oct 2023

⁴ Reuters, 3 Oct 2023

⁵ Reuters, 12 Oct 2023

implement. While Urpilainen did not specify the political conditions that Ethiopia needed to meet, when the MIP was previously discussed in 2022 with earmarked funding of €1 billion (\$1.05 billion), the signing of the deal was conditional on improved humanitarian access, the cessation of hostilities, and accountability for human rights violations.⁶

Although the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** and the **World Food Programme (WFP)** has resumed food assistance to refugee populations in Ethiopia, violent conflict has not ceased and the Ethiopian government has not taken accountable actions for the role of state actors in committing human rights abuses in the **Tigray War**.⁷ As the above conditions have not been met, it is unclear how the EU determined that Ethiopia qualified for the MIP at this time, however, it is unlikely that the EU and the **European Commission (EC)** will ignore Ethiopia's human rights violations for too long. The EU may also believe that by signing the MIP and offering future funding, Ethiopia might be more inclined to follow through on necessary investigations and actions towards accountability.

Final report shows all sides committed atrocities during the Tigray War

The **International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE)** published its final report at the 54th session of the **United Nation's (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC)** on 13 October. The HRC established the ICHREE in December 2021 with the mandate to investigate human rights violations in Ethiopia from the start of the Tigray conflict in November 2020.

The report presented ICHREE's detailed findings of human rights violations committed in the **Tigray, Amhara, Afar, and Oromia** regions and concluded "*with reasonable grounds*" that all parties, including the **Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)**, and allied regional special forces and militias to the conflict committed serious violations and abuses. The report says the violations and abuses include mass killings, widespread and systemic rape, sexual violence such as sexualised slavery, deliberate starvation, forced displacement and large-scale arbitrary detentions.⁸ The report found further evidence that despite the signing of a **Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA)** in November 2022 serious violations of international law continued to be committed by the aforementioned parties.

The UN under-secretary general and special adviser on the prevention of genocide, **Alice Wairimu Nderitu** issued a statement expressing "*grave concern*" over the ongoing presence of risk factors for genocide in Ethiopia and said that the peace agreement had largely failed considering ongoing violent confrontations in Ethiopia's northern regions.⁹ She further called out the Ethiopian government over reports that they had failed to effectively prevent, investigate, and prosecute violations, choosing instead to initiate a "*flawed transitional justice consultation process where victims remain overlooked.*"¹⁰

In a response circulated through the foreign affairs ministry, the Ethiopian government implored Nderitu to retract her "*inflammatory, irresponsible and reckless*" statement and called her allegations about the peace agreement "*contrary to the consolidation of peace in the country.*"¹¹ The government further criticised ICHREE's report for lacking on-the-ground investigation and claimed that its evidence was compiled remotely from unreliable sources.¹² This accusation holds some merit as the government repeatedly denied the ICHREE's requests for meetings, information, and access to the country. In the report, the ICHREE expressed regret that it was not able to visit Ethiopia for the

⁶ Devex, 11 Jul 2022

⁷ Office of Press Relations, USAID, usaid.gov, 5 Oct 2023; World Food Programme, wfp.org, 9 Oct 2023

⁸ 'Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations,' International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, ohchr.org, 13 Oct 2023

⁹ United Nations Africa Renewal, 11 Oct 2023

¹⁰ United Nations Africa Renewal, 11 Oct 2023

¹¹ ENA, 12 Oct 2023

¹² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, press release, 11 Oct 2023

purpose of in-country fact-finding and subsequently relied on on-ground interviews with Ethiopian refugees in **Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda), and Kigali (Rwanda)**.¹³

Despite petitions from civil society and human rights organisations calling on the HRC to extend the ICHREE for a further term, the deadline to renew the mandate expired on 4 October.¹⁴ Its termination represents a victory for Ethiopia, who had objected to the investigation since its inception.¹⁵ On 15 February deputy prime minister **Demeke Mekonen** unsuccessfully requested support from the **African Union (AU)** to present a resolution to the HRC for the early termination of the “*unwarranted*” ICHREE mandate and to block the publication of its findings.¹⁶

ICHREE chair **Mohamed Chande Othman** called the end of ICHREE’s work “*premature*” in light of continued human rights violations in the Amhara region. He told the HRC that failure to continue would be “*an abdication of the Council’s responsibility*” and would “*send a devastating message to the victims and survivors of this conflict*” given the lack of confidence investigators had in the government’s legitimate investigations and trials of perpetrators.¹⁷

Although the ICHREE report found the Ethiopian and **Eritrean** states responsible for the violations of international law committed by their relative state organs and groups acting under their instruction, they have repeatedly denied responsibility for systemic abuses and instead blame other parties.¹⁸ Throughout the war, Ahmed denied that there was any hunger, famine, or starvation in Tigray, which was a farfetched statement considering the alleged government-sponsored diversion of international aid.¹⁹ The lack of accountability for the government’s role in atrocities is likely to remain a risk factor in Ethiopia’s engagement with Western democratic countries.

Ahmed asserts that access to the Red Sea is vital to national and economic interests

In a televised speech on 13 October, Ahmed told his **Prosperity Party** ministers that Ethiopia has “*historical, geographical, ethnic, and economic*” grounds to reclaim access to the **Red Sea**, emphasising that access to a port is an “*existential matter*” for Ethiopia and that the countries growing population could not survive in a landlocked “*geographic prison*.”²⁰ Ahmed also warned that the country’s lack of sea access could be a potential source of conflict and that it should be in neighbouring states’ interests to address the issue to ensure regional stability.²¹ In June, Ahmed gave a similar speech, stating that “*Ethiopia will secure direct access to a port, either peacefully or, if necessary, by force.*”²²

Ethiopia’s access to the Red Sea has changed multiple times. Ethiopia had unfettered access to the Red Sea from 1962, when Ethiopian Emperor **Haile Selassie** annexed Eritrea, until 1993 when Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia. Since then, the country has been landlocked and access to a seaport has been at the forefront of strategic and economic national interests. **Djibouti** has been Ethiopia’s primary port for international trade with over 95% of Ethiopia’s import-export trade volume channelled through the **Port of Djibouti** and then via road or rail into Ethiopia.²³

Remarking on Ahmed’s recent comments, Djiboutian president **Ismail Omar Guelleh**’s (1999-current) senior adviser **Alexis Mohamed** noted that Djibouti was already hosting Ethiopia’s navy and

¹³ ‘Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations,’ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, ohchr.org, 13 Oct 2023

¹⁴ The Guardian, 4 Oct 2023

¹⁵ The Reporter, 18 Feb 2023

¹⁶ Reuters, 27 Feb 2023

¹⁷ Al Jazeera, 21 Sep 2023

¹⁸ ‘Comprehensive investigative findings and legal determinations,’ International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, ohchr.org, 13 Oct 2023

¹⁹ Reuters, 8 Jun 2023

²⁰ The Reporter, 14 Oct 2023

²¹ Bloomberg, 17 Oct 2023

²² Al Jazeera, 26 Jul 2023

²³ World Bank, 20 Jul 2023

“will wait for Ethiopia to propose a peaceful means to access the Red Sea.”²⁴ He emphasised that Djibouti’s “territorial integrity is not questionable, neither today nor tomorrow.”²⁵

Other neighbouring states were similarly unreceptive to Ahmed’s call for dialogue in pursuit of sea access. **Somalia**’s foreign affairs minister **Ali Omar** held that “*Somalia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity ... is sacrosanct and not open for discussion*”²⁶ and Eritrea’s information ministry called Ahmed’s request “*excessive*” and that it had “*perplexed all concerned observers.*”²⁷

While **Sudan** and Ethiopia have signed several agreements over the years to enhance trade and transportation ties including Ethiopia’s use of **Port Sudan**, the lack of infrastructure development in road and rail links has remained a significant challenge to efficient transportation between the countries.²⁸ In Ethiopia’s southern neighbour **Kenya**, the planned **Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor project** aims to provide a new transport route connecting a new Kenyan port in Lamu with Ethiopia and **South Sudan** which would significantly boost Ethiopia’s economy, however, progress has been slow with planning and funds still to be finalised.²⁹

Sweden’s Ethiopian Institute for Public Diplomacy president **Yasin Ahmed** stated that Ethiopia has a legitimate ambition to diversify port access as being landlocked can constrain the country’s economic growth, development, and ability to provide for its large population.³⁰ Ethiopia is the second most populous country in **Africa** with a projected population of 150 million people by 2030.³¹

Ahmed emphasised that Ethiopia’s lack of direct access to the sea limits its international trade and having coastal access would support Ethiopia’s aspirations to become a powerhouse in the continent’s strategically located **Horn of Africa**. However, although Ethiopia sees access to the sea as a matter of vital importance, it depends entirely on its relationships with coastal neighbours and whether the government can find agreeable terms of cooperation through diplomatic exercises rather than through veiled demands and threats of force.

Planner

25 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** Global Startup Awards Africa Summit
 16 - 18 Nov 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** African Economic Conference
 21 - 24 Nov 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** Fifth Conference on Land Policy in Africa (CLPA)
 4 Dec 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** Second Africa Trade and Investment Summit (ATIS)
 7 Jan 2024 **(Ethiopia)** Ethiopian Christmas Day (national holiday)
 6 – 9 Feb 2024 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** 20th African Fine Coffees Conference & Exhibition
 April 2024 **(Ethiopia)** 11th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa
 2024 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** Africa Union (AU) – Canada Forum
 2024 **(Ethiopia)** Horn of Africa heads of state summit

Chronology

²⁴ Bloomberg, 17 Oct 2023

²⁵ Bloomberg, 19 Oct 2023

²⁶ Bloomberg, 17 Oct 2023

²⁷ Ethiopia Observer, 16 Oct 2023

²⁸ African Development Bank, 10 Jun 2020

²⁹ The East African, 19 Aug 2023

³⁰ The Conversation, 29 Aug 2023

³¹ UNDP Working Paper Series, ‘Ethiopia 2030: A Country Transformed?’ undp.org, 2022

23 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. Ethiopia signs the **Africa Union's (AU) African Risk Capacity (ARC) Treaty** which enables participating governments to strengthen their disaster risk management systems and access rapid and predictable financing in the case of extreme weather events and natural disasters;

23 Oct 2023 **Cairo (Egypt)** *Ahram Online*. The third round of negotiations between **Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia** on the long-running dispute caused by the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** commences;

22 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. A **World Health Organization (WHO)** delegation arrives for a working visit aimed at strengthening Ethiopia's rehabilitation programme for regions affected by conflict;

21 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. Members of parliament (MPs) task a standing committee to review an agreement to ratify a military non-disclosure agreement between **Ethiopia and Russia**;

21 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Women, children, and youth affairs office says that more than 30,000 children were separated from their parents during the **Tigray** conflict which has contributed to the growing number of street children in the region;

21 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Xinhua*. The **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)** reports that Ethiopia has recorded over 85,800 crossings as the humanitarian crisis in **Sudan** enters its sixth month;

20 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. **Sidama Regional Security Bureau** discloses that 148 government officials, including a regional security chief, have been sacked and are being investigated for the theft of an estimated 25,000 quintals of fertiliser worth \$683,236;

20 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Ethiopian Monitor*. **China's HBM Group** announces plans to set up a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant at **Kilinto Industry Park** in **Ethiopia** with a capacity to produce a million syringes per day;

20 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Labour and skills state minister **Nigussu Tilahun** says that unemployment is a national problem and encourages stakeholders to participate in finding solutions;

20 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. Ethiopia and **South Korea** sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on trade promotion to facilitate trade exchange and establish joint businesses between the two countries;

20 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. **Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)** reportedly kidnaps 11 employees at **Debre Zeit Agricultural Research Centre** for ransom;

18 Oct 2023 **Kampala (Uganda)** *ENA*. **Ethiopia** participates in the 31st **Nile Council of Ministers** meeting and the 7th **Nile Basin Development Forum (NBDF)**;

17 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Ethiopia Monitor*. Trade and regional integration ministry announces that fuel prices will remain unchanged from its September adjustments for the next 30 days; a litre of petrol will cost ETB 77.65 (\$1.39) and a litre of diesel ETB 79.75 (\$1.43) until 16 November;

18 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Government arrests 41 officials, including **Tamiru Gembeta**, deputy director of immigration, nationality, and vital events agency over alleged corruption;

17 Oct 2023 **Beijing (China)** *Xinhua*. China and **Ethiopia** release a joint statement announcing the elevation of bilateral ties to an "*all-weather strategic partnership*";

17 Oct 2023 **Dubai (United Arab Emirates)** *Mshale*. The **2023 World Travel Awards** names **Ethiopian Airlines** Africa's leading airline for 2023, Africa's best business class and leading airline brand for 2023;

17 Oct 2023 **Nairobi (Kenya)** *The East African*. Kenyan police find 23 **Ethiopian** nationals in a house in **Nairobi** and arrest the owner, Kenyan national **Mohamed Isack**, on charges of human trafficking;

16 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Africanews*. Prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** is set to hold talks with **Chinese** premier **Li Qiang** during the **3rd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation**;

15 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Government is working on legislation to impose restrictions on the import and export of some information technology products, citing national security concerns;

14 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Capital*. Government communication services minister **Selamawit Kassa** reports that desert locust swarms have been detected in **Afar, Amhara, Somali, Tigray** and **Oromia** regions as well as in **Dire Dawa** city administration which is causing a drop in crop yields and damaging farmers' livelihoods in affected areas;

14 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Report Ethiopia*. **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** executive board confirms that Ethiopia's pursuit of debt treatment through the **G20 Common Framework** is dependent on Ethiopia and the IMF reaching a staff-level agreement;

12 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *IMF*. **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** concludes a staff-level visit to Ethiopia to discuss Ethiopia's request for IMF support for a reform programme;

10 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *AfricaNews*. Education minister **Berhanu Nega** reveals that only 3.2% students passed the university entrance exam, declining 0.01% points compared to the previous school year; The **United Nations (UN) Children's Agency** states the quality of education is a major challenge with "90% of 10-year-olds unable to read or understand a sentence from a simple text";

10 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *RFI*. **World Food Programme** says it has partially resumed distributing food aid in Ethiopia after halting assistance four months ago over diversion of supplies;

9 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. President **Sahle-Work Zewde** reports that Ethiopia is in the final stages of completing the civil engineering aspect of the **Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)** and that it will be completed at the end of the current Ethiopian year, which ends 11 September 2024;

5 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Bloomberg*. Ethiopia's sole **Eurobond** yield falls as investors increasingly anticipate a debt default, eroding the progress in the bond rally following the announcement of the peace process;

5 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Mining Weekly*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered **Kefi Gold and Copper** nears a funding package completion for the **Tulu Kapi gold project**, Ethiopia's first new mine in 30 years;

4 Oct 2023 **Khartoum (Sudan)** *The East African*. The Ethiopian embassy in **Khartoum (Sudan)** comes under fire and suffers massive building damage as the **Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)** and the paramilitary **Rapid Support Forces (RSF)** blame each other for the attack;

2 Oct 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *International Civil Aviation Organization*. Ethiopia signs a new capacity development and implementation support agreement with the **United Nations (UN) International Civil Aviation Organization (IACO)** that includes the sharing of expertise, project management, the delivery of training packages, and support with procurement.

30 Sep 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter Ethiopia*. **Tigray** officials accuse the **African Union (AU)** of walking away from the implementation of the **Pretoria Peace Agreement** which was

signed in November 2022 between the **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** and the federal government to end their conflict;

29 Sep 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Tass.* Ethiopia's ambassador to **Russia, Cham Ugala Uriat** announces that Russian state-owned automaker **Avtovaz** has entered a partnership with Ethiopian company **Bazra Motors** for the local production of 5,000 ladas annually for domestic use and regional export;

28 Sep 2023 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *AFP.* **United States (US)** secretary of state **Anthony Blinken** tells prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** that the US is increasingly worried about the situation in **Amhara** region where the **United Nations** has said human rights violations are taking place.