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Statement

By

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Ministry of Justice of the Federal Democratic
Republic of Ethiopia**

**At the 76th Meeting of the Human Rights
Commission**

**May 3, 2023
Geneva, Switzerland**

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman (Claude HELLER),

Distinguished Vice Chairs, members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning!

It is indeed a great honor and privilege for me to represent the Government of Ethiopia in addressing such an esteemed audience; please accept my warm greetings on behalf of the people and Government of Ethiopia. As Head of the Delegation, I and my whole team are here to brief you on the progresses we have made in promoting and protecting human rights in Ethiopia, and particularly in our efforts to prevent torture and ill-treatment.

First, Mr. Chairman, please allow me to introduce the members of the Delegation; I am Alemante Agidew WONDIMENEH the State Minister of Justice and the Head of the Delegation of Ethiopia and the following are members of the delegation who are here with me:

1. H.E. Mr. Tesfaye Daba WAKJIRA - Cabinet State Minister, Office of the Prime Minister
2. H.E. Ambassador Tsegab Kebebew DAKA - Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organisations in Switzerland
3. H.E. Commissioner Zelalem Mengestea DEGENE - Head of Investigation Bureau of the Federal Police Commission
4. Mr. Tesfahun Gobeza KINFIE - Director General of Refugees and Returnee Service
5. Mr. Meseker Tariku YIREFU - Chief of Staff Ministry of Justice
6. Mr. Henok Tesfaye TEFERA - Director General, Civil Justice Administration, Ministry of Justice,
7. Mr. Yesuf Jemaw SEIDE - Director, International Cooperation on Legal Affairs, Ministry of Justice,
8. Ms. Mekdelawit Taye ALEMAYEH - Director, Human Rights Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
9. Mr. Awel Sultan MOHAMMOD - Director of the Press Secretariat, Ministry of Justice,
10. Mr. Kibrom Mekonnen HAILE - Senior Prosecutor, Human Rights Action Plan Coordination Office, Ministry of Justice,

11. Mr. Andualem Yalelet TESSEMA – Third Secretary, Permanent Mission of the FDRE,
Geneva

Excellencies, as you well know, Ethiopia ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) in 1994; our engagement today reads on the 2nd and 3rd combined periodic report of Ethiopia prepared according to Article 19 of the Convention.

To give you a bit of a context regarding the background setting, the report is prepared by an inter-ministerial group of experts led by the Ministry of Justice. Accordingly, experts from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Skills, Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, Ministry of Peace, the Central Statistics Agency, and the Authority for Civil Societies Organizations have participated in preparing the report. I also seize this opportunity to extend our gratitude to the East Africa Regional Office of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for providing technical assistance in the preparation of the report. We would also like to acknowledge receipt of the list of issues and concluding observations shared by this esteemed committee and look forward to providing you with all the necessary clarifications.

Excellencies, before I delve into further details, I would like to inform that the Government of Ethiopia remains firmly committed to meeting its reporting obligations under all international and regional human rights instruments through its newly established institutional set-up called the National Implementation, Monitoring, Reporting, and Follow-up Mechanism (NIMRFM). We are also working with the UN-Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish a national human rights data collection mechanism. We believe that such arrangements will greatly contribute to the follow-up and monitoring of human rights implementation at the national level and enhance our ability to meet reporting obligations to the various human rights bodies.

Excellencies,

My country Ethiopia has undergone immense changes over the past few years. In spite of the multifaceted challenges, our government has taken significant steps to transform the political, social, and economic landscape in tune with our commitment to human rights values and sustainable development goals.

In this regard, I can state confidently that we have made progress across many areas, particularly in our efforts to promote and protect human rights. In specifics, we have adopted several measures to ensure that individuals are protected from torture and other forms of ill-treatment, including women, children, and minorities. We had initiated and are implementing several programs to provide extensive awareness creation to the general public on human rights, including the right to be free from torture and ill-treatment. Most of the legal and institutional reforms we operationalized over the years also have direct bearing on the implementation of our commitment to upholding international human rights norms and standards, including torture, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Excellencies, allow me please to reiterate that our presence in this session is informed by Ethiopia's long history of productive and constructive engagement with international human rights mechanisms as well as our economic, social, and political realities. As complex as our socio-political realities, recent developments and ages-long deficits are, we cannot give a false impression that our journey has been an easy ride, or that the sailing was nor met by serious obstacles. Ethiopia is a "nation" of "nations", a country wrecked by and managed to sustain through centuries-old conflicts; a country with a wide range of diversities in terms of unsettled differences and unclosed historical chapters of communal disagreements. Inability to handle these differences has been the cause of tremendous suffering and hardship to our people. Many have suffered inhuman and ill-treatment at the hands of authorities and perished in to the annals of history and, forgotten. But the suffering remains real in our collective memory and, so long as these chapters are unclosed, the suffering will remain present and continues to darken the future. As such, the progresses I am about to present to you are, by and large, brought about and significantly shaped by the dynamics in these realities.

Excellencies, Ethiopia is now at the cusp. Despite the enormity of the challenges, my country is now ready, more than ever before, to close these chapters and forge a new beginning. As such, it undergone immense changes over the past few years. Our government has taken significant steps to transform our political, social, and economic systems in line with our commitment to human rights and sustainable development goals. We firmly believe in the value

of reconciliation, dialogue, good governance, and the empowerment of our citizens, including women and other marginalized groups, in this endeavour. We understand it is important to remain vigilant and committed to these values and to never lose sight of the ultimate goal of creating a society that accommodates differences and respects human dignity.

During the reporting period, Ethiopia adopted and implemented its 1st and 2nd National Human Rights Action Plans; the latter remained in effect until the year 2020. The preparation and adoption of the third National Human Rights Action Plans is now in its final stages. The third National Human Rights Action Plans prioritizes civil and political rights as its main focus areas, with a significant emphasis on the rights and humane treatment of persons deprived of their liberties. To follow up implementation of the action plan, a high-level National Coordination Board has been established; the Board is composed of seven senior officials of the federal government and national human rights institution and headed by the Minister of Justice.

Furthermore, focused reforms have been implemented to enhance cooperation between institutions in the justice sector. This facilitated a quicker and more efficient deployment of prosecutors across each police station and investigation center to oversee the whole investigation process. Prosecutors are authorized to visit persons under custody and take legal measures where there is any violation of human rights, including torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. Further strengthening this scheme, the Ministry of Justice is now legally mandated to lead, supervise, follow up, and coordinate the criminal investigation function of the federal police.

Additionally, the National Human Rights Action Plan Coordinating Office at the Ministry of Justice conducts frequent monitoring visits to places of detention to look into the human rights situations of persons deprived of their liberty. The Office also coordinates the implementation of specific activities of the National Human Rights Action Plans that are aimed at improving detention conditions in the country.

Again, too further ensure the humane treatment of prisoners, the Prison Commissions have developed built-in mechanisms to receive and entertain transfer applications from prisoners to prison facilities proximate to the domicile of their families.

On the other hand, to shorten pre-trial detention and thereby reduce the potential for abuse in detention conditions, Ethiopia has adopted and implemented the Real-Time Dispatch (RTD)

model of criminal justice in 2010. As a result, suspects indicted of flagrant as well as non-complicated offenses have been able to appear and be tried before a court of law in expedited manner and with due regard to the principle of due process of law. Of course, the practical application of this model has not been wholly consistent, but we are continuously endeavouring to remedy the gaps witnessed in this regard.

Excellencies, I would also like to bring to your attention that Ethiopia has witnessed a major political transformation during the reporting period. After years of long public protests and resistance against the previous government, a new leadership came to power in 2018 which initiated and carried out sequences of deeper reforms. Among others, the reform involved the liberalization of the political environment, the release of opposition political leaders, and the pursuit of legal and institutional overhauls to better guarantee the fulfilment, respect, and protection of human rights across sectors.

In this tune, from the onset of its tenure, the new government acknowledged the gross excesses committed by the security apparatus, took full responsibility and apologized for the violations. The government also investigated and brought charges against top officials and members of the security and law enforcement agencies who had been suspected of overseeing and perpetrating some of the worst forms of human rights violations in Ethiopia's recent history. Secret places of detention and physical sites notorious for gross human rights atrocities committed by the security and law enforcement agencies were identified, publicly exposed, and closed for good.

In the interest of a smoother political transformation and transition, the government also granted pardons and amnesties to thousands of citizens - especially targeting those who were previously charged and convicted under the former Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. Among others, subsequent investigations proved that several of the persons who were charged under this legislation were subjected to torture and ill-treatment. On behalf of my Government, I am pleased to inform this esteemed committee that the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation is now repealed and replaced with a new and more human-rights friendly legislation - adopted through a participatory and consultative process.

A closely linked manifestation of the government's commitment in this regard was also showcased through the delisting of multiple opposition political parties who were pronounced under the previous Anti-Terrorism Proclamation as terrorist organizations. The importance of

this critical measure in promoting political transformation, understanding and the widening of the political space in Ethiopia was evinced by the return to Ethiopia and active participation in of leaders and members of the political parties after decades of forced exile.

On the other hand, appreciating the great importance of a vibrant and informed civil society and recognizing the need for strengthening independent democratic and judicial institutions for full enjoyment of human rights, my government has taken significant legal, administrative, and institutional measures. Among others, the measures taken include the opening up of the civil society space and the protection of human rights defenders by adopting a more progressive legislative framework and a new institutional set up. If anything, our recent past has thought that the stifling of the civil society space leads to the perpetuation of inhumane and ill-treatment of a greater number of individuals and dissenters without voice and accountability. These reforms and the new government's human-rights friendly policy predisposition prompted exiled journalists, writers, politicians and media establishments to return to the country and operate in freedom. The bans, suppression, and blockade of blogs, websites, and satellite TV stations were also lifted in the immediate aftermath.

To further entrench and institutionalize these reforms, the government established a Justice Sector Reform Council composed of the President of the Federal Supreme Court, the Attorney General (now Ministry of Justice), the Federal Police, and the Federal Prison Commission. The Council oversees the implementation of reform initiatives that, among others, targets the improvement of conditions of arrested persons and convicted prisoners. The sectoral reform currently being implemented has resulted in significant changes that are paramount to the full enjoyment of the human rights of our people, including in relation to torture and inhuman treatment.

In this line, of particular interest are reforms undertaken by the Federal Police Commission and the Ethiopian National Defence Force; they were able to establish robust disciplinary committees to receive complaints from or on behalf of detained persons. A stronger mechanism is also put in place to ensure administrative and criminal accountability in cases where members of the Federal Police or the National Defence Force violate individuals' rights and human dignity, in particular the right to be protected against extra-judicial killing, bodily harm and inhuman treatment, in the course of their active duty. This procedure proved extremely vital to initiate investigations and prosecute excesses committed by members of the National Defence Force for offences committed in the context of the conflict in northern Ethiopia.

This piece of reform was reinforced through measures taken by federal and regional police and prison commissions who incorporated the right to human dignity and the prohibition against torture and inhuman treatment in the curricula of their respective training institutions. In addition, the institutions also continued to provide regular pre-service and on-the-job training to their members to ensure that members or third parties do not commit violations.

Furthermore, we are taking significant measures to support the criminal investigation process with technology. The 10 years sectoral plans of both the ministry of justice and the federal police explicitly acknowledge the need to expand and strengthen the use of technology in the criminal investigation process. Work has already begun to implement state of the art technologies that will help crime prevention and investigation. In addition to preventing human rights abuses that occur during an investigation process, this increases our capability to investigate and take corrective measures when or if such violations occur.

Excellencies, as you may well recall, in 2018, the Ministry of Justice also established an independent professional body, the Justice and Legal Affairs Advisory Council. The Council was mandated to provide advice concerning legal and administrative reforms in the justice sector. Members of the Council included renowned legal scholars, jurists, and private practitioners. Indeed, with the facilitation and serious engagement of the Council, several laws that had in the past undermined the enjoyment of fundamental rights, such as the Anti-terrorism law, the charities and societies law, the media-law, and the election laws were fully overhauled and revised to ensure maximum compliance with the relevant human rights standards and best practice experiences.

As a result of the policy decisions, the post-2018 period witnessed increased mushrooming of the print and electronic media; these platforms proved very instrumental in following up and reporting on human rights violations, particularly in detention and prison facilities – which, in return, helped the government to take measures towards ensuring accountability and to prevent further abuses.

Furthermore, acknowledging the important role that an independent judiciary and national human rights institutions play in the full enjoyment of human rights in general and the protections afforded under the convention in particular, Ethiopia has introduced amendments to the establishment proclamations of the federal judiciary and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

Under the revised proclamation, the EHRC is afforded full autonomy in a manner that is consistent with the standards enshrined under the Paris Principles. This, among others, could be seen in the improved international standing and legitimacy which the Commission has garnered in the past few years in the eyes of the international community and the public. Functionally, the Commission has been mandated to visit and monitor without prior notice any correction center or prison, police detention center, or any place where people are held in custody or otherwise detained anywhere in the country; the Commission is also granted a power to visit and monitor any public services institution including schools, hospitals, shelter camps, and market centers. Furthermore, the new law afforded EHRC's investigators immunity which enables them to discharge their functions free of intimidation and interference. The Commission is also empowered to investigate complaints, summon and inquire any public officials relevant to its investigation, and put forward recommendations and remedial measures. All these measures enabled the Commission to discharge its functions professionally and wholly independently - measures which facilitated the opportunity for the publication of hundreds of public releases, requests and investigation reports just in few years – in response to violations committed by various actors.

Concerning the judiciary, the Revised Federal Court's Establishment Proclamation introduced significant changes ascertaining the institutional and financial independence of the federal courts. Moreover, the amended proclamation added a new jurisdiction to the federal high court allowing them to entertain cases brought on the basis of alleged violations of human rights protections, including protection from torture and ill-treatment guaranteed under chapter three of the constitution. To implement this in concrete setting, a Fundamental Rights Bench has been established at the Federal High Court – a first of its kind in the country.

Ethiopian courts also have established special benches to entertain cases involving children in conflict with the law. Articles 52-56 and 157-168 of the Criminal Code of Ethiopia provide special procedures and measures to be taken in cases of children in conflict with the law including that they should be kept separately from adults.

Courts have likewise established special benches to entertain cases of human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants. Judges assigned to benches working on these thematic areas have taken special training on the adjudication of such cases.

Not least, excellencies, despite the overwhelming security challenge posed by the conflict, in 2021, my government proceeded to hold a free and fair national election for the first time in its history. This was made possible largely due to the widening of the political space, the re-establishment of the National Election Board as an independent and empowered institution, and above all, our people's ever-present yearning for a peaceful and democratic Ethiopia. I am proud to re-state at this point that the national election held in 2021 was lauded by both local and international observers for its democratic character. In summary, these measures resulted in significant progress in the realm of human rights protection, including in preventing, abating and punishing acts of torture and inhuman treatment.

However, as is the case in any political system in transition, the new government's audacious political reforms were neither flawless nor received with olive branches by all persons or stakeholders. A few groups and individuals who had been disgruntled by the pace or form in which the reform was proceeding, had continuously labored to undermine the new government and national reform agenda through economic sabotages, negative media campaigns, and incitement of violence and ethnic strife. Nevertheless, the government remained steadfastly focused on the reforms and on avoiding distractions, and has always endeavoured to resolve the issues and disputes with a sense of responsibility by promoting a peaceful settlement of political differences.

Excellencies, I am quite certain about the Committee's full understanding of the scenarios that the updates we present to you in this session are achieved in the face of such daunting challenges and, in recent years, against the background of insurmountable security predicaments. Therefore, in the interest of providing a full context to our dialogue in relation to the most recent developments, I feel it would be imperative to offer more information about the recent conflicts in Ethiopia, and particularly the conflict in the northern part of our country which had led to an unimaginable scale of violations of fundamental rights.

Excellencies, the political transition in Ethiopia that took place in 2018 was not merely a change in government. It also marked the end of an era – an era where political power was single-handedly dominated by one political group for nearly three decades. It was an end of an era characterized by authoritarian rule, the politicization of the security and justice apparatuses, and control of the economy by groups politically affiliated with the ruling party. Moreover, as I tried to highlight earlier, grave human rights violations were committed during this period in an attempt to stifle dissent and opposition. The coming to power of the new government in

2018 ushered a new epoch of reform that promised democracy, justice, equality, and accountability. Predictably, those who were used to employing political power to stifle dissent, engage in unchecked abuses and escape accountability were threatened by the promise of the political reform. This resulted in some of such groups exerting maximum effort to undermine the new government, derail its course, and regain political power by all means, including violence.

Excellencies, during these trying times, my government remained steadfast in its belief that all political differences should be settled through dialogue alone. Unfortunately, the repeated calls by the government to resolve political differences in a civilized manner and through the established constitutional mechanisms had fallen on deaf ears. The government's positive gestures and measures for peace and sustainable democracy – including those that engaged various interlocutors, proved unsuccessful.

Regrettably, the government's hands were forced into an armed conflict in November 2020 where TPLF forces attacked, killed personnel and took control of the Ethiopian National Defence Force's Northern Command in Tigray region. As a result, the government had to resort to the use of force to repel the threat posed against the sovereignty and integrity of the nation. The government, like any other government elsewhere in other parts of the world, has the responsibility to ensure peace, security, and order within its territory; in this line, the government took measures that are deemed necessary to achieve these goals – while also being cautious in ensuring the protection and well-being of civilians and guaranteeing criminal accountability when any excess is committed.

As the distinguished members of the Committee may have learned by now, the conflict in the northern part of my country resulted in the extrajudicial killings, grave sexual violence, degrading treatments, mass destruction of properties and means of livelihoods, and displacements of hundreds of thousands of our citizens.

Taking due cognizance to the destructive effect of the conflict and the favourable condition it had created for gross violations of human rights, the government created an enabling environment for the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to fully discharge its responsibilities and, complement the government's effort at ensuring human rights through a proper and comprehensive investigation of the crimes committed in the context of the war. The same commitment was also extended to international human rights mechanisms with legitimate

concern for the protection of the human rights of our people. Ethiopia not only welcomed the monitoring of the human rights situations in all conflict-affected areas by the UN High Commission for Human Rights; it also facilitated the conduct of human rights investigation jointly between the OHCHR and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Ethiopia also undertook and continued to implement the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Joint Investigation Team.

To such end, the Inter-Ministerial Task Force (IMTF) was established by the government to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Investigation Team; the IMTF is currently working on the investigation and prosecution of various human rights violations, the rehabilitation of victims, and reforming of legislations in line with the reform goals of the government and recommendations of the Joint Investigation Team.

Just to highlight some of the achievements of the IMTF, the Investigation and Prosecution Committee (IPC), established under the IMTF, designed an investigation strategy that focused on three tracks and timeframes. These are Track-1 investigations of violations committed in Amhara, Afar and Tigray regions; Track-2 investigations of violations committed in Wolqayit-Tsegede-Humera areas; and Track-3 investigations focusing on violations allegedly committed by members of the National Defense Force and regional forces in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray regions.

The IPC carried out Track-I investigation in Amhara and Afar regions and publicized its findings in September 2022. Track-I investigation was conducted across nine carefully clustered areas of the Afar and Amhara regions. These areas were: North Shewa Zone, Oromo Nationality Zone, Kombolcha City and its environs, Dessie City and its environs, Jamma-Were'ilu and its environs, North Wollo Zone, Lalibela town and its environs, Wag Himra Zone, and Afar Region. Under Track-I, the IPC investigation documented gruesome incidences of gang rape, rape, sexual slavery, and intentional communication of sexually transmittable diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. On this, the IPC gathered data demonstrating that at least 2,212 women, girls, boys, and men were subjected to these crimes. The next phase in this proceeding is prosecution of the investigated crimes – which, to a large measure, is also to be implemented in closer reading with the new scheme on transitional justice initiative adopted by the government of Ethiopia. Investigations in other tracks, and especially in Tigray, have not been pursued in the past owing to security concerns in the region.

Still focusing on works of the IMTF, in collaboration with partners, the Government has taken limited measures to compensate and rehabilitate SGBV victims, prevent recurrence, and facilitate humanitarian access. In this respect, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, had coordinated the provision of psychosocial and medical support to some victims of SGBV; this had mainly involved community sensitization and referral of survivors to sectoral services, and the training to SGBV front-line service providers. Emergency-phase expansion of very limited number of facilities was also carried out in the conflict-affected regions. On the other hand, the IMTF's resource Mobilization Committee allocated 74 million Birr to address the needs of SGBV survivors in the Afar and Amhara regions - mainly focusing on rehabilitating or establishing rehabilitation facilities.

Excellencies, as it is widely known, my government had on several occasions declared a humanitarian truce during the course of the conflict. The government's most sincere commitment to protecting fundamental rights through the promotion of the peace agenda was more specifically demonstrated on 28 June 2021 - when the federal government declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew its forces from the Tigray region. The GoE again declared a unilateral ceasefire in March 2022. These decisions were motivated by genuine humanitarian concern and had aimed at easing the suffering of our people living in the conflict areas. As a testament to the authenticity of the Government's desire and unwavering will for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, I am very happy to report that the phase of active hostilities in Northern Ethiopia has now been put to a halt, and all parties are ceaselessly working on full implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement signed in Pretoria in 2022 under the auspices of the African Union.

Excellencies, since the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, my government is aggressively working to extend the reach of its activities to areas that were formerly inaccessible due to the conflict. So far, the government has resumed the provision of all essential services in Tigray - including banking and telecommunication, land and air transportation, humanitarian assistance, and proactively working on the rehabilitation of health, school and other infrastructure and the resumption of public services.

Furthermore, the Ethiopian Government has formally invited the UN-OHCHR and EHRC Joint Team of Investigation to conduct a follow-up mission to monitor the human rights situation in areas of the region previously rendered inaccessible due to the prevailing conflict. This is

facilitated mainly by the signing of the Pretoria Peace Agreement and the conducive environment its successful implementation has created. As things stand, the joint team has already finalized its preparation to monitor the condition of human rights in the conflict affected areas.

In the same fashion, the government is tirelessly working at the peaceful resolution of the conflicts in western and other parts of Oromia region. A successful completion of the peace negotiation with the armed group in the region is hoped to bring to an end to an armed struggle that lasted for years.

Additionally, the government is undertaking comprehensive studies and reforms to fully ensure that all essential elements of war crimes and crimes against humanity as defined under the relevant international instruments are also legislated in Ethiopia.

Excellencies, my government recognizes that the transition from a conflict-affected society to peace and post-conflict society is not a seamless sail. The road to peace is often long, daunting and painful. It is a journey that requires the commitment and involvement of every single person in governance and the community. It requires a deep understanding of root causes of the conflict, and the willingness to apologize, forgive, heal, and move forward together. It also requires the development of strong and inclusive leadership that is dedicated to the greater common good, as well as an active civil society that is vigilant and committed to ensuring accountability and transparency.

We recognize that the lack of comprehensive accountability for past human rights violations and systematic abuses perpetrated, including during conflicts, can obstruct lasting peace and justice efforts. We are firm in our beliefs that the promotion of human rights and the rule of law are essential to building a peaceful and democratic nation. This involves the establishment of institutions that are transparent, accountable, impartial, and responsive to the needs of the people. This also includes a fair and impartial justice system, police and security services that respect human rights, and effective governance mechanisms that facilitate public participation and ensure transparency and accountability. My government's reform activities are geared towards achieving these ends and, with the peaceful conclusion of the conflict, it is our strong belief that we are in a much better position to realize these goals. But we also realize that addressing accountability and redress also require thinking outside of the box and taking much bolder moves and decisions.

Hence, in the hopes of achieving these concrete objectives and aspirations of our people, fulfilling the Joint Investigation Team's recommendations on transitional justice – which are also reinforced by the recent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement my government has now embarked on a new Transitional Justice initiative. As a first step in this endeavor, a draft 'Policy Options for Transitional Justice for Ethiopia' has been prepared and publicized in January 2023. The document will be used as a basis for gathering input from the public, including victims, affected communities, political parties, civil societies, media, youth, women, elderly, IDPs, refugees, and traditional and religious leaders – mainly through national, regional and international consultation workshops that will be conducted in 66 different locations.

The whole process will be organized and implemented by the Transitional Justice Working Group of Experts (TJWGE) – a body of independent experts which the Ministry of Justice established for the purpose. As we speak, nine consultations have already been conducted in Addis Ababa and regional towns. The transitional justice working group of experts has already held productive consultations with the President and high-level officials of the interim administration of Tigray Region and consensus is reached on the importance of the initiative. Additionally, the interim administration of Tigray region has expressed its full commitment to the successful implementation of the transitional justice initiative.

At the end of the consultations process, a National Transitional Justice Policy will be adopted by the government - based on the findings and recommendation of the Working Group of Experts. We believe that the Policy, when adopted, will provide a clear framework for ensuring criminal accountability for past violations, reparations, amnesty, truth finding, reconciliation, and justice and security sector institutional reforms. The policy will provide a basis to foster reconciliation among aggrieved parties and, provide victims and their families with the necessary closure they require to continue with their lives peacefully. It also allow victims to participate in truth finding processes, and to tell their stories and have them documented; Not least, it will promote good governance and rule of law by promoting accountability and investigation of past human rights abuses, and, help in preventing the recurrence of violations of human rights and conflict.

As distinguished members of the committee would agree, reconciliation cannot be imposed by any external force. Instead, it must come from within. It is for this reason that my government is embarking upon this locally-owned and nationally driven Transitional Justice initiative based on international best practice and AU Policy Framework on Transitional Justice.

Parallel to these efforts, Ethiopia is also pursuing a national dialogue initiative and set up a Commission fitted for this purpose. The commission is tasked to mend historical discords, which have challenged Ethiopia's existence, in a public dialogue and bring national consensus and sustain the country's integrity. We believe the successful conduct of the National Dialogue will help to realize the new Ethiopia – a nation of nations, where differences can be the building blocks of a stronger and prosperous nation rather than fault-lines that allow recurrence of atrocities of the past. Hence, through the national dialogue, my country has embarked on a journey of reconciliation and peace-building that seeks to address the root causes of conflict and create a more inclusive and harmonious society. A journey with the willingness to acknowledge the historical injustices and grievances that have fuelled so many conflicts. A genuine attempt at facing the past and engaging in a frank and honest dialogue about the root causes of the conflicts. A journey towards building a just and equitable society that upholds human dignity and respects the rights of all citizens regardless of their background.

Excellencies, we recognize that there is still so much work to be done. We will continue to work with civil society organizations, the human rights community, and international partners to strengthen our efforts to eradicate torture and ill-treatment, along with its root causes.

We pledge to continue our efforts to prevent torture and ill-treatment in Ethiopia and uphold our commitments to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We firmly believe that a society that respects human rights, including the right to be free from torture and ill-treatment, is a stronger, more resilient, and prosperous society.

Thank you for your attention, and we are looking forward to engaging in a constructive dialogue with the Committee.