

GSTS' Public Statement on Priorities and Actionable Recommendations Based on Relevant Studies and Stakeholder Engagement¹ (Mission Report)²

Prelude

This mission report is the result of GSTS' recent engagements and deliberations and is aimed primarily to provide actionable recommendations that help Tigray overcome the current social, economic, and political deadlock. However, it is necessary to remind ourselves that the past three decades were not only ones of failure and disappointment that led to the current crisis but also various successful achievements, strengths and assets that will help build upon in order to bring the necessary change.

The Success and Challenges of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in Ethiopia: A Brief Retrospective

The TPLF played a pivotal role in Ethiopia's modern history, particularly in organizing a popular resistance and the successful struggle against the military dictatorship of the Derg regime. Over a span of 17 years, the TPLF, along with other movements mobilized the masses, established responsive local governments in liberated areas, promised a peaceful, just, and prosperous system, garnered mass support, and controlled swathes of areas one at a time and finally defeated the military junta. In the wake of this monumental victory, the TPLF along with other partner movements established a coalition, the EPRDF. TPLF played an irreplaceable role in the creation of EPRDF and thus its subsequent notable success stories. Since then, EPRDF embarked on an audacious endeavor: the enactment of a federal constitution that gave new and sovereign rights to ethnic groups, characterized by decentralization and member-state autonomy.

Under the stewardship of the EPRDF, the government delivered on its promises of peace in the region, preventing famine, economic development, and empowering ethnic groups. Ethiopia bore witness to an era of unparalleled stability in the Horn of Africa, and economic progress and prosperity spanning 27 transformative years of development. EPRDF championed an array of initiatives aimed at catalyzing economic growth through massive infrastructure development nationwide. Ethiopia emerged as a beacon of economic dynamism, being one of Africa's fastest-growing economies and achieving global recognition for its remarkable strides.

¹ Please note that some recommendations have been withdrawn from this report for confidentiality reasons.

² Please note that these are high-level, actionable recommendations, and technical details and an implementation plan for each recommendation will be addressed separately.

Moreover, the EPRDF made significant investments in vital social sectors, most notably education and healthcare. The expansion of access to universal primary education, multifold increase in girls' education and high school enrollment, scores of new universities and hundreds of private colleges, democratized access to higher education and empowering Ethiopians from all corners of the nation. Concurrently, the innovative Health Extension Program brought essential healthcare services, including maternal and child health, to remote rural communities, catalyzing a notable reduction in mortality rates, increasing life expectancy by more than 20 years, and reducing poverty by half.

However, amidst these triumphs lay simmering challenges, particularly in the realms of democratization, human rights violations, state-party separation, the concentration of economic and political power in Addis, broken promises of regional autonomy and unrealized constitutional frameworks for the separation of power and co-equality of the branches of government. Moreover, some of the political reforms were not satisfactory. Inadequate democratization processes and the flawed execution of the federal framework posed existential threats to the sustainability of socioeconomic gains. Escalating anti-Tigray sentiments, fueled by perceptions of Tigrayan hegemony and ethnic federalism, sowed seeds of discord that would later erupt into a devastating conflict.

Although Tigrayans paid dearly during the 17-years struggle to end Derg's' military dictatorship and reign of terror and contributed to Ethiopia's overall prosperity during the EPRDF era, the political and economic gains were not commensurate as such. Contrary to unchecked propaganda disseminated against Tigray and its people, the level of democratization and independence of critical institutions, economic development, poverty reduction, media freedom, etc. were much worse in Tigray, making the people of Tigray vulnerable to man-made and natural disasters.

Tragically, after the dissolution of the EPRDF, these tensions reached a fever pitch, culminating in the declaration of a genocidal war on Tigray in November 2020. Exploiting deep-seated animosities anti-Tigrayan factions orchestrated a brutal campaign of violence and atrocity, plunging the region into darkness.

In conclusion, the EPRDF's legacy is characterized by commendable yet short-lived accomplishments juxtaposed against enduring and deep-rooted challenges. Despite successfully guiding Ethiopia towards a period marked by peace, prosperity, and development, the persistent issues of insufficient democratization, fusion of state and party, large-scale corruption and escalating ethnic tensions marred its achievements. As Ethiopia grapples with ongoing conflicts and struggles to find avenues for reconciliation and rejuvenation, the future of Tigray hangs precariously in the balance. The instability within Ethiopia, compounded by the intricate geopolitics surrounding Tigray, poses grave threats to its survival and vital interests, stability, and prosperity. External factors notwithstanding, Tigray needs to navigate through this precarious landscape, rallying collective efforts towards meaningful dialogue, inclusivity, and genuine reconciliation.

1. Background

The situation in Tigray following the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) is unprecedented and extremely precarious. Seventeen months after the signing of the Pretoria

Agreement, about 2 million forcefully displaced persons (IDPs) and victims of state-sponsored ethnic cleansing still live in camps, tents, and schools with minimal to no support. Additionally, over 40% of the land which serves as a source of livelihood for half of the population of Tigray remains under the occupation of Amhara and Eritrean forces. Tigrayans in the illegally occupied areas continue to endure harassment, mass expulsion, and gross human rights violations, with little or no access to basic services and humanitarian assistance. Despite external impediments, the internal political situation remains extremely worrisome, to the extent that no significant progress has been made towards prioritizing the interests and future of the Tigray people. Some highlights of the untenable situation in Tigray include:

- State functions have been and continue to be paralyzed, from the higher echelons of the Tigray Interim Administration (TIA) down to the *Wereda* and *Tabia* levels, mainly due to an ongoing power struggle within the TPLF and lack of core leadership within the TIA, compounded by various external factors. Given the TPLF's predominant presence in the TIA cabinet and nearly all lower-level governmental bodies, its protracted and closed-door party meetings, spanning over two months, have prioritized internal power dynamics at the expense of critical pressing public issues such as safeguarding territorial integrity; the return of over one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees facing unprecedented suffering; continued large-scale human rights violations on Tigrayans in the illegally and forcefully occupied Tigray territories; famine; and commencing relief, recovery, and reconstruction efforts. This state of paralysis and disregard for pressing public issues has sparked public outrage and created a pervasive sense of despair and hopelessness among the Tigray population;
- Massive physical and psychological trauma of IDPs and refugees, survivors of gender-based violence; and demobilized, wounded and Tigray Defense Force (TDF) veterans and their families, exacerbated by the lack of comprehensive support and rehabilitation packages;
- The humanitarian crisis exacerbated by systemic corruption, which also served as a pretext for the suspension of emergency aid for almost a year. This contributed to a famine crisis resulting in reported deaths in *Aberegle* and other *Weredas* compounded by an inadequate response from the state and other stakeholders;
- Political confusion and standoff in addition to political leadership bankruptcy - Tigray is facing from lack of strategic political vision, direction and roadmap that articulate and center on the survival and vital interests of Tigray and its people;
- The deterioration of law and order due to a lack of confidence in the state system besieged by widespread systematic and structural corruption and statelessness that has tarnished the image of members of the TPLF, TDF, and government leadership;
- Mass migration of the youth from rural areas to towns and their exposure to migrant smugglers and human traffickers dealing in illegal immigration including trekking to Libya and Yemen through dangerous routes. Reports also show that highly skilled professionals and academicians, including physicians and university professors, who withstood the 3 years siege and blockage, are now frustrated and leaving the state in droves to Eastern and South Africa, Europe, and elsewhere;
- The worsening political and security crisis in the rest of Ethiopia and the region, and the propensity of adversaries to exploit Tigray's vulnerability to further degrade its standing, rightful claims, and the overall danger of relapsing to siege and subjugation;
- The emergence of new antisocial behaviors including alcoholism, prostitution, propensity to violence, breakdown of law and order etc. - severely affecting the social fabric, norms, and cohesion of the people of Tigray; and

- Indicators of an escalating sense of hopelessness encouraging mass migration of youths and human capital, the feeling of isolation, coupled with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.

GSTS fully believes that the people of Tigray have every right to be informed about the policies, practices, and intentions of their political leaders and policymakers, and agreements made on matters directly impacting their lives, and the present and future of Tigray. Considering the sacrifices made by the people of Tigray over the last six years, particularly after enduring a genocidal war resulting in the loss of more than a million lives and displacement of over a million from their homes; the people of Tigray deserve full access to all information, deliberation, decision, and agreement affecting their lives and the future of Tigray including:

- how the genocidal war transpired, the tell-tale signs ignored, the catastrophic failures of political leadership during the war;
- the current political and security status and preparation to prevent another war and tragedy;
- any serious effort, or lack thereof, to maintain the CoHA and the fragile peace they so cherish; and
- any serious effort, or lack thereof, in the preparation to bolster humanitarian assistance; resettle millions of IDPs and refugees; restoration of the administrative and territorial integrity of Tigray; and launch relief, recovery, and reconstruction (PW3R).

Recognizing the critical issues at hand, GSTS has demanded immediate and decisive action after thorough deliberation. In response to current humanitarian, political, security, economic, and social crises, GSTS has resolved to directly engage with the people of Tigray. This engagement includes reaching out not only through intermediaries such as civil society organizations, political parties, the Government of Tigray, and the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) but also by directly involving several segments of the general public via various mechanisms. With a deep understanding of the context and extensive consultations, GSTS has undertaken rigorous studies and scholarly reviews to draw lessons from global experiences, which are adaptable to Tigray's context. Following a six-month stakeholder engagement process, GSTS decided to dispatch a mission to Tigray to engage with the Tigray Interim Administration (TIA), political entities, civil society organizations, Tigray security forces, and other relevant stakeholders. As an independent and non-partisan entity dedicated to the survival and vital interests of the people of Tigray, GSTS' decision to commission a mission team underscores its commitment to catalyzing, facilitating, and contributing to solutions for the unprecedented challenges facing Tigray and its people.

The reader needs to note that this is not a stand-alone document, but a concatenated version of a more comprehensive document presented, in person, to numerous stakeholders (and the presentation itself is a condensed version of numerous standalone as well as connected documents in each topic area of interest). It is a succinct presentation of various documents including years of discussions on Tigray's past and present socioeconomic standing, political journey, and history of war, famine, and genocide; as well as the core document which summarizes the six-month stakeholder engagement. Those interested in digging deeper into specific areas of this press document can request supporting documents from GSTS.

2. Stakeholder Consultations and Research Studies

In the past few years, especially after the genocidal war was declared, GSTS - through its various research teams and platforms - has been engaged in a series of studies and dialogues regarding Tigray's interests, predicaments, and the possible solutions not only to mend the broken institutions and capacities but also to help prevent the vicious cycles of genocide, famine, and socio-economic calamities. However, Tigray's challenges call for wider engagement of all stakeholders. That is why a decision was made to engage those in the list below via consultation platforms. Two levels of consultations were held – prior to the trip to Mekelle and during the mission. The consultations carried out prior to the engagement with the key stakeholders in Tigray were aimed at gathering information on: 1) Tigray's current situation 2) why we are here – the root causes, 3) potential solutions to Tigray's current and cyclical political failures, and 4) the role of the various stakeholders, especially scholars and professionals. This approach was used to establish a common/shared understanding of the current status, the reasons that led us to where we are, and rally Tigray's capacity to resolve the challenges.

The following organizations and entities were consulted prior to the mission travel and upon arrival in Mekelle, all before the mission team's engagement with key stakeholders with presentations: Tigray Political Parties (*Baytona*, *Salsay Woyane*, *Wudib Natsnet*, and *Arena*), Leaders of Tigray Defense Force (TDF)/Army, Representatives of Scholars & Professionals to TIA, Representatives of Tigrayan communities and CSOs in the Diaspora and Ethiopia, Tigray Scholars & Professionals in the Diaspora and in Ethiopia, Groups/Associations - Youth and Women Associations (in Tigray), Influential/Veteran Tigrayan Political leaders, Tigray Public Diplomacy, *Gheraelta* Institute, Representatives of IDPs and Refugees from Western Tigray, Representatives of IDPs from *Sheket (Afar)*, Wounded TDF members, and Friends of Tigray conversant in Tigray's politics across the world. In addition, opinions from various Tigrayans of the general public in Tigray and the Diaspora were consulted prior to mission deliberation. Unfortunately, despite repeated requests and scheduling, pre-mission meeting was not possible with TPLF (primarily due to its about two months of meetings).

3. Data Gathering and Analysis Process

a) Current Situation (Where are we?)

Despite the apparent post-genocide status of Tigray, there were both agreements and a diversity in understanding among Tigrayans regarding the situation (in terms of its degree of severity, and pattern) and its challenges and consequences, prompting the need for engagement with all key stakeholders to help identify areas of collective agreement (convergence) and difference (divergence, and help narrow those when necessary). Once began, participation in the consultative process exceeded GSTS' expectations. Responses were organized and categorized into Political, Economic, Sociocultural, and Institutional/Leadership/Governance aspects. Internal factors were prioritized due to the internal political deadlock being a major concern. Addressing internal issues and maintaining unity based on purpose among Tigrayans is vital in order to effectively manage external pressures undermining Tigray's rights, survival, and its vital and strategic interests.

The following leading questions were used to gather insights during consultations.

Where are we now? What is your understanding, insight, perspective, or reading of the key challenges (e.g., IDPs and refugees, territorial integrity, Tigrayans under invaded territories, picking up from war ruins, rebuilding infrastructure, economy, sociocultural, governance and leadership, institution building, and politics (broken down to internal & external posture))?

Stakeholders indicate that Tigray faces unprecedented challenges: genocide, existing situation with IDPs and refugees, territorial integrity, humanitarian and economic crisis, political bankruptcy, lack of good governance, systematic and structural corruption, worrying sociocultural shifts and developments, and inadequate institutional capacity, all necessitating serious political commitment and reform for transformative change.

b) Why does Tigray find itself in the current situation (Why are we here?)

Following the description of the current situation, each stakeholder was then given another leading question: **Why are we here? What do you think are the main root causes** (real or perceived) of the current and the vicious cycle of genocides, famine, and political failures?

Stakeholders provided various reasons for Tigray's political failures which have been tallied and organized under four categories - political, economic, sociocultural, and institutional / leadership/governance, considering both internal and external driving factors.

c) Solutions and Roles of the Various Stakeholders

As the main objective of the consultation is to provide possible actionable solutions built on understanding of the current situation and the reasons behind it, the following questions were then presented to each stakeholder consulted.

How do we get out of this? What kind of forward-looking, innovative, lasting, and strategic solutions (as opposed to firefighting) and strategies do you suggest to effectively address these pressing issues?

What do you think should be the roles of the various segments of the Society including the civil societies, the intellectuals, the diaspora, and others?

In a similar manner, the inputs and answers of the consultative engagements were tallied, analyzed, and produced in a report and summarized for the face – to - face presentation to major stakeholders in Tigray.

4. General Outcomes of the Mission

As discussed above, the process involved various actors including the public and experts whose contributions led to the outcomes. GSTS acknowledges the dedication of consulted stakeholders and their shared vision for Tigray's transformation into a strong, cohesive, inclusive, and democratic state. Recommendations stem from Tigray's economic, social, and political history, detailed in sections such as "Situation Analysis," "Root Causes," "Tigray's Survival and Vital Interests," "SWOT and Scenario Analyses," and "Possible Solutions" within the core document.

5. Actionable Recommendations (Proposed Solutions)

Stakeholders unanimously acknowledge that Tigray is at a crossroads - facing extraordinary challenges - and requires exigent political, social, and economic transformation to properly heal and thrive. Diagnosis to Tigray's current challenges demands extra-ordinary approach via implementing comprehensive and enduring solutions that ensure the breaking of repetitive and vicious cycle of failures, as opposed to quick fix/firefighting. The diverse range of recommendations underscores the depth of reforms required and the determination of the people to reverse the situation in Tigray to find sustainable solutions. These results were also informed by three years of reflection and studies conducted by GSTS, and from its regular deliberations such as those conducted in the over 80 members Strategic Deliverables for Action (SDA) and Research and Consultative platforms, and various dedicated working groups.

After collecting, tallying, and summarizing the results, a report document was drafted and reviewed with relevant expertise and experience to generate a final draft. This document was finally reviewed by different teams and task forces within the GSTS. A traveling mission to Tigray was necessitated, and a team was established. The mission team then prepared presentations in Six major categories: 1) **Background and methodology** – highlighting the approach and process used, 2) the **situation analysis** (where are we?), and the **root causes** of the problems identified (why are we here?); 3) **Tigray's survival and vital interests**; 4) **SWOT analysis** and **scenarios**; 5) **Post-war relief, recovery, and reconstruction (PW3R)**; and 6) **Actionable recommendations** or **strategic options** (solutions). The post-war relief, recovery, and reconstruction (PW3R) were exclusively made for TIA.

While the first three provide the background information, the main goal is to identify and reach a shared understanding of Tigray's survival and vital interests; Strength - Weakness - Opportunities - Threats (SWOT) analysis and possible scenarios (within Tigray, Ethiopia, the Horn and beyond) and suggested actions for Tigray; and an outline of key actionable recommendations and strategic options for implementation by TIA, with stakeholder support.

The proposed solutions shall have different implementation timelines. These presentations were conducted with various key stakeholders including the cabinet of Tigray Interim Administration (TIA); heads and deputies of TIA bureaus, commissions, agencies and other institutions; Tigray Alternative political parties (*Salsay Weyane, Arena, Baytona, Wunat, and Assimba*), TPLF Office Bureau, Generals of Tigray Defense Forces/TDF, TDF middle and senior leaders (more than 300, only summary and actionable recommendations), and representatives of different segments such as representatives of civil society organizations, universities, etc.

The following proposals, aimed at addressing immediate challenges while laying fertile ground for recovery and rebuilding of Tigray, and fostering an inclusive, open, and democratic political and vibrant economic system, ultimately leading to a prosperous and resilient Tigray, were presented, and thoroughly discussed with a diverse range of stakeholders listed and described above.

Note: While the recommendations below are not listed in order of priority or urgency and are all of vital importance, it has to be underlined that the return of IDPs and refugees to their

habitual homes and properties, restoration of Tigray's administrative and territorial integrity should be a top priority while executing others in parallel.

5.1. Restoration of Administrative and Territorial Integrity; and IDP and Refugees Resettlement

The most pressing and challenging task for any administration of Tigray, including its defense forces, is the safe and dignified return of millions of IDPs and refugees to their homesteads and the restoration of territorial and administrative integrity of Tigray to prewar status as stipulated in the CoHA, Nairobi Executive Declaration, and the 1995 Ethiopian constitution. From the wider stakeholder consultations and engagements during the mission, the main recommendations emphasize the crucial importance of effectively implementing the Pretoria agreement and Nairobi Exclusive Declarations to sustain peace and restore territorial and administrative status quo ante in Tigray. This includes the return of occupied territories, restitution of displaced Tigrayans, and ensuring effective governance.

Among displaced Tigrayans, the delay in returning has created widespread feelings of mass grievance, betrayal, desperation, hopelessness, marginalization and discrimination, and a sense of "We" and "Them". Unless this is not urgently solved, it has grave implications from various perspectives including triggering inter-group tension, real or perceived feelings of marginalization and discrimination, challenges related to integration, possible social rift and violence, undermining peace-building efforts etc. The immediate priority of Tigrayans should be the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their places of origin and access to and restitution to their homes, land, properties, business, and other entitlements, with packages and instruments that ensure their physical, legal, and psychological protection, and reunification of separated families.

Thus, GSTS urgently recommends: 1) all Tigrayans and other stakeholders support the Tigray Interim Administration (TIA) and exert pressure on the Ethiopian Federal Government, African Union, US, EU, UK, and the international community to implement the CoHA and Nairobi Declaration as well as respect the 1995 Ethiopian constitution, and restore Tigray territory and facilitate the safe and dignified return of Tigray IDPs and refugees; 2) TIA lead and rally all stakeholders by formulating a comprehensive roadmap for the implementation of the CoHA, revitalizing diplomatic efforts, implementing effective communication strategies, strengthening regional engagements, and effectively engage with the Tigray Diaspora to resume advocacy efforts; 3) TIA, TDF, Tigray political parties, civil societies and the larger population provide due focus and all rally on the implementation of CoHA with high priority on the restoration of Tigray administrative and territorial integrity, and return of IDPs and refugees to their home, land and properties; and 4) in addition to direct representation in the proposed interim council, the GSTS strongly recommends the establishment of an **independent Desk for Western, Southern and Eastern Tigray** (a non-political DESK consisting of representatives of IDPs and Refugees) that follows up and monitors the daily situation of IDPs and refugees (including their living conditions, needs, rights, and their priorities) as well as Tigrayans in the forcefully occupied territories. This body will also work on ensuring timely, safe and voluntary return, resettlement and integration of IDPs and refugees; and the restoration of areas under occupation.

5.2. Supporting and Strengthening TIA

After the signing of the CoHA, the immediate establishment of an interim administration as stipulated in the agreement was the implementation of all elements of the agreement - including maintaining peace and stability, resuming emergency humanitarian assistance, return of IDPs and refugees, beginning regular commerce and state functions to deliver basic services, etc. GSTS provided specific and priority recommendations for establishing the interim administration with emphasis on inclusivity, representation, transparency, and democratization. Unfortunately, due to power struggles within the ruling party, precious time was wasted, and GSTS's recommendations were only partially followed, resulting in the establishment of a TIA dominated by one party.

However, GSTS continued and will continue its support of the TIA around the above-mentioned priority areas, and others including preparation for post-war relief, recovery and reconstruction, and other critical reform agenda and needs.

Despite encouraging progress, it is imperative to underline that the TIA has been partially paralyzed due to various internal (power struggle within TPLF and TIA, and lack of core leadership within TIA), and external factors including indifferent Federal Government at best and exploitative at worst, resource limitations etc. However, TIA is now the only civil state political and administrative body to safeguard Tigray and its people; and ensure Tigray's survival and vital interests.

Thus, GSTS strongly recommends that the people of Tigray, particularly political entities and stakeholders rally behind, support, and strengthen the TIA. In addition to calling all Tigrayans to rally alongside the TIA, GSTS specifically recommends the TIA take three action points: a) establishing a checks and balances system to strengthen its legitimacy through the formation of an active interim council (see below for details); (b) strengthening its core leadership through cabinet reshuffling when necessary, and deploying practical mechanisms to strengthen its function at the *Tabia* and *Woreda* levels supported by administrative mechanisms, legal provisions and monitoring tools; and 3) rallying all Tigrayans and stakeholders to develop all the capacities needed to safeguard Tigray's survival and vital interests.

5.3. Functional Interim Council

We take note of the fact that TIA has already promulgated the establishment of an advisory council, despite GSTS' recommendation for a council with a meaningful and substantive authority.

However, GSTS still believes the interim council should fulfill the following criteria, among others.

- a) **Representation:** immediately after the signing of the COHA, there was an urgent need to establish a reasonably representative transitional cabinet and council to protect people's rights and ensure legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the constituents. Though it took more than a year and had serious setbacks as a result, the need to form such an interim council has become front and center in the growing public demand for direct and fair representation in a statewide body that determines or shapes the fate of Tigray and its people;
- b) **Break deadlock ensuring continuity of services:** Internal power struggles within the TPLF over who leads the interim cabinet have paralyzed the state apparatus, hindering

the cabinet's ability to effectively function at all levels including the zones, woredas and Tabias. This was primarily precipitated because the party and the state have become one and the same in almost all organs of the state. The paralysis made apparent that there is an immediate need for the separation of the state and the party, particularly in the day-to-day function/operation of the state. It became evident that establishing an interim council is crucial for ensuring continuity of services despite political deadlock within the party;

- c) **Nurturing hope:** A representative and functional state entity offers hope to the people who survived a genocidal war and lost confidence in the political leaders' ability to address the crisis;
- d) **Ensuring stability:** a representative and functional interim council brings stability to the state institutions and facilitates the normalization of economic and social activities; and
- e) **Providing a cushion:** given the precarious and tenuous nature of the interim cabinet, a representative council serves as a safeguard against external and internal actions that may undermine its authority and legitimacy.

Thus, a representative and all-inclusive council, incorporating diverse voices from members of the former elected council, political parties, civil society organizations, Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), border communities disproportionately affected by the war, women, minorities, IDPs and refugees, scholars and professionals, eminent personalities, the diaspora, representatives of communities in the rest of Ethiopia such as Addis Ababa, representatives of trade unions, and other segments of the population needs to be promptly established. It should possess authority, ensuring no single party holds a monopoly and is not subject to power struggles. Moreover, nominees from entities other than political parties should not be members of political parties.

Note: Further details are provided in a separate document, a proposal on the establishment of an Interim Council prepared by GSTS.

5.4. National Reconciliation and Salvation

The people of Tigray are a politically conscious, mobilized, and empowered community. Hence when demanded for the protection of the community and/or when rights are not met or violated, it can and does organize a people's resistance including armed struggle. Around the fall of the monarchical regime and the dawn of the Derg era, these resistances were organized around a number of movements led by TLF, TPLF, EPRP, EDU, *Teranafit* etc. Vying for support and political territory, these movements clashed with one another and invariably ended violently, with TPLF emerging as a dominant force within Tigray, and EPRDF-led Ethiopia. Consequently, the political history of Tigray over the last several decades has witnessed violence and serious divisions among Tigrayans. The internal divisions within TPLF, particularly the split of its core central committee in 2001, is one example that has significantly impacted Tigray's political landscape. These regrettable divisions have not only widened among individual leaders and their followers but have also deepened mistrust and resentment among communities. Across Tigray, many people and families feel victimized by these divisions and other actions at different times. Those divisions and feelings of victimization have had and will continue to have a serious impact on Tigray's social fabric and cohesion, alienating those with critical and different opinions and perspectives, nurturing an echo chamber of 'yes' persons, and inculcating conformity, thus endangering the potential to advance forward as a political community. Consequently, the

development of independent institutions and mechanisms for checks and balances to power has been hindered, weakening the region's leadership, and encumbering the emergence of a new generation of leaders, all leaving the people of Tigray poorly and ill-prepared in the face of the devastating genocidal war, and diverse man-made and natural crises. There is a growing public outcry for accountability for the disastrous preparation to the war, and failed leadership, partly attributed to the legacy of absolute power monopoly, outright secretive behavior, and limited political space. The prewar preparation, or lack thereof, the conduct of the war, the road to Pretoria, the poor implementation of Pretoria agreement etc., continue to deepen divisions among political leaders, the public in general, the younger generation in particular, as the implementation of the Pretoria agreement has become more elusive and divisive. There is also a perceptible growing demographic rift (between the 'new generation' and 'older' generation) on the aspiration (*Bahgi*) and future of Tigray. There are similar but nuanced rifts along geographic areas, and other persuasions as well. Unfortunately, the absence of organized collective platforms for airing diverse ideas and facilitating reconciliation has allowed these problems to persist. Establishing independent institutions and platforms, including an elders' council, is essential to address these challenges, help heal wounds, facilitate reconciliation, and foster unity of purpose and understanding in Tigray.

Thus, it has become increasingly critical to convene a platform aimed at addressing and building national consensus on the overarching issues. GSTS believes and recommends the first step towards this noble and necessary goal is national reconciliation and salvation. The elites that were active in the political space of Tigray need to engage in a process of open discussion to ultimately denounce the wounds inflicted in the past five decades and agree to close the chapter of toxic political engagement where the only way to resolve differences was by the barrel of a gun and solemnly resolve to engage in peaceful approaches that ultimately leaves the final say to the people of Tigray on the ballot box. Such a process is expected to lead the families affected by division, alienation, victimization, and other factors to healing, and to address and mend unaddressed/ignored old wounds and rifts that resurface when poked with fresh injuries (flashbacks).

Through truth-finding, truth-telling, and drawing lessons from other nations that went through similar tragic paths: such as Ireland, Chile and others, old wounds must heal, and rifts need to be bridged. The chapter of winners and losers, victims and victors, and the path of ghosting, victim blaming, and retribution must be transcended, allowing the new generation to move forward in strong unity and cohesion.

Reconciliation entails recognizing victims, providing redress, fostering remorse and forgiveness, and ultimately paving the way for a national conference that can clarify vital interests, foster unity of purpose, and shape a political vision and roadmap for Tigray's future as a united political community.

5.5. Fact-finding/Truth telling-based immunity to Political Leaders

The recent political history of Tigray/Ethiopia has been characterized by a "winner takes it all" approach, where those out of office and out of favor either face persecution or are subtly undermined, along with their families, perceived supporters, and communities. Such targeting of political leaders has serious repercussions on stable governance, smooth power transfer, a culture of respect for public service and use of state of power while in office. It can also exacerbate the risk of backlash, lack of cooperation, social division, and resentment. The will of the people of Tigray has been suppressed, and their fate has been dictated by a vanguard

party, its cadres, and its apparatus - often determined by a few selected political leaders - with little space for dissenting voices. Thus, a political immunity mechanism is necessary to redress previous wrongs and help put the past to rest, address the current leadership crisis and political impasse, and recognize that political decisions and mistakes are inadvertently committed, either deliberately, involuntarily, or due to a lack of capacities to cope with the situations. Removing the threat of retribution and designing to be forward-looking, specific immunity (including incentives, providing public recognition for their services and dignified retirement packages) needs to be considered particularly for decisions/actions of a political nature. Such endeavors will enable Tigray and its people to nurture true democracy. However, granting immunity to political leaders does not set them free from being accountable for criminal offenses. Actions of a criminal nature (including human rights violations, if there are any) are not considered for this initiative.

Thus, drawing lessons from other countries and tailoring them for Tigray's context, GSTS recommends the following: 1) Formulate and implement truth-finding/truth-telling-based immunity packages supported by legal provisions and monitoring mechanisms; 2) design term limits and succession planning of political leadership - establish an independent oversight committee or Ombudsman; and 3) develop incentive packages and rewards for leaders who voluntarily step down when they finish their term and when it is in the best interest of the state by considering various benefits such as advisory roles in the highest state leadership and institutions, continued involvement in special mega projects, honorary positions etc.

5.6. State and Party Separation

State and party separation is a vital aspect of democracy observed and practiced globally. In democratic countries, it is common for an elected ruling party to appoint executive leaders to key positions within state organs to ensure the implementation of its policies and agenda. However, these positions should be limited, established by law, and made known to the public. Political appointees are individuals appointed by the party or the President, with or without the state confirmation, to positions in the executive branch. For instance, among 1.8 million federal employees in the US, only 4000 are politically appointed. The UK and Japan, respectively, have 150 and 50 political appointees among hundreds of thousands of their federal employees.

Even though the global democratic practice indicates that the number of political appointees should be a small fraction of the total workforce of the state, this is not the case in Tigray and is alarming when seen in terms of per capita. Over the last three decades, the practice in EPRDF-led Ethiopia, and particularly in Tigray, has been contrary to this. The indistinguishable intertwining of the state and party resulted not only in the party interfering in the day-to-day running of the state but where the party entirely operates with and from state offices and its cadres, and operatives are enrolled on the state's payroll. This resulted in a scenario where the party superseded the state, party appointees' rule over elected officials (despite being TPLF members), and account to the party headquarters (HQs) as opposed to the electoral constituents, i.e., the Tigray people. In addition, the almost uncontested reign of EPRDF over three decades resulted in a complete sense of complacency with no checks and balances whereby even party cadres and community activists (often the eyes and ears of the party at the grassroots level) turned into petty bureaucrats feeding the leadership figures and stories they would like to hear. Eventually, the state and party, across the entire country in general but, in Amhara and Oromia in particular, failed to prevent widespread unrest,

conflicts, ethnic cleansing against Tigrayans and other minorities, and massive preparation for war against Tigray. The above-cited reasons eventually led to the demise of the EPRDF and catalyzed the war on Tigray. Tigray still accommodates tens of thousands in the state payroll where TPLF party membership and loyalty are considered for both employment and promotion. These appointments often prioritize party affiliation over qualifications or necessity, resulting in a situation where key positions at the *wereda*, zonal, and regional levels are predominantly held by TPLF appointees. Consequently, the lack of distinction and separation between the roles of government and party hindered impartial governance resulted in diverse malpractice such as favoritism and cronyism (including nepotism and quid pro quo), corruption; undermining meritocracy leading to inefficiency, incompetence; subverting good governance and democracy by concentrating power in the hands of a few and undermining the checks and balances; essential for democratic governance; loss of public trust by weakening the social contract between the government and its citizens; policy distortion by overshadowing public interest by party interests etc. Abusing state resources and structure by political parties paralyzes the state and presents an obstacle to justice, accountability, openness, and informed democratic decision-making and space. Thus, political positions must be identified and publicly declared to the people of Tigray. Other than these political appointees, the remaining workforce should be filled through the civil service system, which is based on merit, qualification, and relevance to the offices and positions.

Henceforth, to ensure the separation of party and state, the following and related actions must be implemented: 1) **Politically appointed positions** need to be immediately identified and made public, 2) **Financial declaration** - All political parties in Tigray should present financial declaration and ensure high level transparency including disclosure of funding sources (including contributions from individuals, corporations, unions, and other entities), 3) **Officials contesting and holding public office**, including those with political appointments, need to declare their finances and make it public, 4) **Adoption of specific laws or constitutional provisions** - clear and comprehensive legal frameworks and regulations which evidently outline the obligations of political parties to separate the duties of state and party, and regarding their financial disclosure and transparency, and the consequences for non-compliance should be in place, and 4) **Independent Institutions** – reform and transform, strengthen and establish when necessary independent institutions such as judiciary, electoral commissions, civil society organizations, media, and other watchdog groups.

5.7. The Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT)

EFFORT was initially established with the good intention of facilitating economic development using public resources, which otherwise a fragile and infant private sector could not handle. EFFORT's showcasing of the possibilities of undertaking large and complex projects within Tigray and Ethiopia is to be commended. Over the years, EFFORT facilitated the establishment of key industries and spurred robust economic activities. However, the party/state/EFFORT intertwining became its albatross, with EFFORT primarily serving the interest of party leaders, its management and affiliates falling at the whims of the party and party leadership. Inevitably, it became the primary target of criticism of the entire political-economic system by the private sector across Ethiopia and international agencies such as the World Bank and other partners such as the EU and the United States. It also became the caricature of party-state excess and state corruption and an easy target for the Federal Government, Ethiopian opposition parties and 'private press' which conveniently used it to target their toxic and vile propaganda against the people of Tigray. As witnessed in consecutive TPLF conferences, it fueled power contests and control over resources and

influence. Alarmed by this, the public and other stakeholders began to push for reform. Public demand for reforming EFFORT has been there and at the core of this public demand are its ownership and management structure, and issues of transparency and accountability. Its ownership structure not only hinders its growth but also makes it prone to corruption and the maintenance of unearned power influence, which is both anti-democratic and anti-social progress. And its unprofessional management structure has made it a bankrupt business, with many of its companies usually operating at a loss. Although there have been recent movements to remove the Party's control over EFFORT by making it answerable to the Tigray parliament before the genocidal war, no meaningful progress has yet been made to materialize on the ground.

Henceforth, EFFORT ownership and management structure need to be free of any political party and should be legally transferred to the people of Tigray by: 1) putting it under the **oversight of Tigray's Transitional Council**, and later the **Council** that will be established by election; 2) Then, after an elected government is formed in Tigray, a **Full Audit** by an independent firm or professionals must be conducted and made public; 3) **Reform** - It needs to be meaningfully reformed to ensure ownership of the people of Tigray is clearly defined and legally guaranteed and in a way that helps the economic recovery and development and social security efforts of Tigray. This step beyond clearly defining public ownership structure, it will create additional wealth and reinvestment for Tigray, and 4) **Leadership** - EFFORT's corporate culture and management structure (including its organization, leadership, management, business practices, professionalism, etc.) needs to be reformed to ensure its profitability, shoulder its social responsibility, and transform into a key entity that plays a vital role in the prosperity of Tigray.

5.8. Political and Economic Reform

One of the major shortcomings of the TPLF/EPRDF has been its **one-size-fits-all** political and economic platform across the entire country not attuned to the unique features, needs, challenges, and opportunities of Tigray. In addition, its inability to adapt to global developments and its rigid and adversarial posture against Western countries led to it being alienated and without any friends. The TPLF/EPRDF has created one of the most centralized political economies in the world, making the state the dominant rent distributor and provider of resources, leaving citizens powerless and helpless. Tigray and its people have been the main victims of such economic centralization and state monopoly as witnessed in its worst since 2018, the prelude to war, and after all economic infrastructures, commerce, power, transportation, and related services got cut off.

An economic policy that does not empower citizens and the private sector is not only unsustainable but also dangerous. Among others, monopolized economic policy poses detrimental risks including lack of flexibility and thus failure to respond promptly to economic crises or shifts in market dynamics; stifling economic innovation; corruption and cronyism – including rent-seeking, and inequality – potentially leading to political instability, social unrest, breakdown of social cohesion, lack of accountability to the broader population, misallocation of resources through prioritizing political objectives over economic efficiency etc.

The political sphere was even worse. A growing dissatisfaction with the TPLF/EPRDF rule, the domineering one-party system, the full control of all state organs at all levels, the lack of political space, deteriorating and poor human rights record, all combined precipitated the downfall of the EPRDF regime. Unfortunately, after retreating to Tigray, the TPLF failed to

learn any lessons from these mistakes and wasted precious time to introduce meaningful political reforms.

Henceforth, it is imperative that Tigray introduces a political and economic reform that not only addresses the needs and aspirations of the people of Tigray but also builds confidence and improves relations with donors who are expected to finance the post-war recovery program. GSTS recommends such reform is framed with the following key features: (a) **Politically** - Tigray needs to build a democratic system that is open, inclusive and multi-party electoral-based governance system, a pluralistic platform (where different opinions and groups including minorities have a seat and a say), with robust pillars of democracy such as media, CSOs and judiciary system becoming truly independent, vibrant institutions serving as both watchdogs and advocates for good governance, and a credible democratic order; and (b) **Economically** - An economic policy that considers the region's context and aspirations of the people of Tigray and that takes into consideration the dynamics of an international economic system. Tigray should adopt an economic policy that is outward-looking, market-oriented and promotes healthy competition and cooperation that would be more conducive to unlocking Tigray's potential and empowering its people. At the core of any economic policy, it is highly recommended that Tigray must take high priority for the empowerment of Tigrayans (whether individually or collectively as businesses).

5.9. Emergency Response Council

One of the costliest in human lives, and the reason for public frustration, has been the lack of robust mechanisms to minimize humanitarian crises and the inability to respond immediately and adequately when they occur. Denying access to all means of food, including the blockage of humanitarian assistance, has been the main feature of the genocidal war. The stealing and massive leakage of food aid demonstrated an indifference to the plight of IDPs and millions of other vulnerable groups of the Tigray people with precarious food security status and living under famine conditions. The fact that the party leadership spent months embroiled in power contention and paralyzed the interim administration, prioritized party affairs during the height of the humanitarian crisis demoralized the public and caused a loss of confidence in its leaders and trust in the system. Even though the Interim Administration made modest attempts to organize a multi-stakeholder initiative (including civil society and opposition parties), the people's confidence to channel support and donation through a system where the government is seen as the main driver is still low. This is fueled by public grievances related to the lack of clarity and accountability on resources mobilized for *Mekete* during the past three years.

Henceforth, GSTS proposes a response structure that addresses the prevailing issues, provides the opportunity to restore public confidence, and rallies all Tigrayans and other donor organizations to respond to the crisis. An emergency response system relies on proper information, coherence of action and the existence of clear and appropriate roles, responsibilities, authorities, and capacities of partners to ensure the most effective use of resources and execution of activities. Given the gravity of the situation, the fact that the assistance will require not only food assistance, but also a means of recovering and rehabilitating the victims until they harvest from the next rainy season, the response organization should restore public confidence through professionalism, proper accountability structures, and clear communication strategy and feedback loops. The institutional innovation built in this process can thus serve beyond the present emergency and have a lasting impact

in mobilizing and galvanizing Tigrayans for a lasting common cause of winning over poverty and misery. Given the prevailing circumstances discussed so far, the GSTS proposes the establishment of an overall organizing and executive body the “Tigray Emergency Response Council - TERC” responsible for informing the public, resources mobilization, and monitoring and evaluating the timely, effective, and equitable distribution of emergency resources. TERC coordinates and complements the works of the formal government emergency response structure and the efforts of international humanitarian agencies. TERC shall have a Core Leadership (Executive Committee) – Communication - Public Awareness - Campaigns and Resource Mobilization - Scenario Planning and Early Warning Systems and Technology - Review and Evaluation among others. Further details are provided in a separate document developed by GSTS on the establishment of TERC.

5.10. Independent Consultative Political Forum

Although the need for a political forum is widely recognized, the actual implementation has been minimal, mainly manifested during election seasons, and primarily driven by the whims of the ruling party. The need for a political forum where diverse ideas on a wide range of issues, including the survival and vital interests of Tigray are debated is not only in the interest of political parties, but the public also has an overarching need to hear directly from these parties on controversial, yet paramount issues organized and conducted civilly. In general, a consultative political forum serves as a vital instrument for fostering a democratic culture, promoting, and nurturing good governance, ensuring that policies and decisions are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the wider population, and help bridge divides and foster social cohesion. This need can be met if the forum is run by an independent entity, not prone to the whims or goodwill of one or a few parties.

Henceforth, GSTS proposes the establishment of an independently run interparty Consultative Forum of Political Parties with the aim: 1) to transform the political space in Tigray via consensus-building based on the unity of purpose, shaping public image, improving the relationship between parties, etc.); 2) create a conducive political environment that fosters political dialogue, consensus building, national cohesion, consensual democracy, and creating a multi-party system; 3) political parties present their policies and strategies to the public freely so that the people make informed decision during elections and other interventions; and 4) collectively safeguard Tigray’s vital interests, strategic direction/roadmap, and other common agendas based on shared understanding and agreement.

5.11. Independent Judiciary System

The judiciary system is one of the pillars of a democratic system that helps to maintain checks and balances between the legislative and executive faculties of a state and serves as a guardian of the constitution - by interpreting and safeguarding the constitution, guaranteeing fair and impartial justice for all citizens, upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights, and ensuring the proper functioning of institutions. Unfortunately, Tigray has been dominated by a party state where the judiciary has been stifled with no freedom to play its checks and balances role. It has been abused to the extent that judges are evaluated more by criteria and metrics to party loyalty, than their fidelity to their profession, the rule of law and the state. Therefore, any meaningful reform in Tigray must prioritize establishing a free, effective, and independent judiciary system. This urgent task is essential for ensuring justice, and accountability, upholding the rule of law, democratization and good governance, and state-building initiatives in the region.

Among others, establishing an independent judiciary in Tigray is crucial to 1) **Promote Rule of Law** - upholding the rule of law fosters stability, predictability, and accountability within society; and it guarantees that all citizens are treated fairly and equally under the law; 2) **Apply the Law**: to interpret and apply laws to specific cases, establishing legal precedents that guide future decisions and promote consistency in the legal system; 3) **Interpret and Uphold the Constitution**: the judiciary ensures that laws and government actions comply with the constitution, protecting citizens' rights and liberties; 4) **Ensure Justice**: to adjudicates disputes and ensures fair and impartial resolution of conflicts, promoting societal harmony; 5) **Maintain checks and Balances**: to act as a check and balance on the executive and legislative branches, ensuring they adhere to legal principles, operate within the limits of the state constitution and do not abuse their powers; 6) **Protect individual rights**: to safeguard individual rights and freedoms against infringement by the government or other entities; 7) **Guard against Tyranny**: independent judiciary acts as a safeguard against authoritarianism and arbitrary exercise of power, ensuring that all individuals are subject to the same laws and standards, and 8) **Trust and Confidence**: this endows acceptance and legitimacy, respect for the Rule of Law and abiding by the law by the society.

Henceforth, GSTS recommends that the judicial system of Tigray is urgently reformed in a way to operate independently and effectively, free from political interference, or direct or indirect intimidation of the executing their judicial duties. Mechanisms for monitoring such infringements and interferences should be reinforced by fostering through free media, CSOs and other watchdog groups and institutions.

5.12. Post-War Relief, Recovery and Reconstruction (PW3R)

The genocidal war on Tigray will go down in history as one of the deadliest wars in modern history with devastating impacts on various aspects of the Tigray region and its people. The destruction of Tigray's institutional capacity, economic infrastructure, religious and cultural heritage, and environmental resources that have been nurtured over many decades, will have profound short and long-term effects on the people of Tigray. As a result, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Tigray will be crucial but will certainly be a complex undertaking. It requires a timely and well-thought-out strategy, integrated planning, large amounts of resources, effective human capital and institutional capacity, and streamlined coordination efforts to holistically design programs and projects and implement and install monitoring interventions and apparatuses. PW3R requires overhauling restrictive procedures and economic policies and bottlenecks to facilitate timely and effective implementation processes that may slow, hinder, or compromise the quality of the PW3R. PW3R also requires a new organizational structure consisting of competent and accountable persons with experience in similar work. As PW3R programs are generally considered emergency responses that need to be addressed with a sense of urgency, the PW3R structure calls for designated power of execution, appropriate systems, and structures that warrant swift implementation, but with accountability.

Henceforth, GSTS recommends: 1) Immediate launching of the PW3R through an executive official decree or a series of decrees issued by the president of TIA including clearly defining the powers and responsibilities of relevant government bodies that are responsible for overseeing the relief, recovery, and reconstruction; 2) Urgent release of estimates on damage and loss; need assessment and cost of the reconstruction; 3) Following a decree, the execution of the PW3R should be immediately initiated by the establishment of Tigray Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (TRRA), to lead the PW3R process, and Establish

Reconstruction Coordination unit in each priority sector bureaus and offices; and 4) develop an Integrated and Sectoral Marshal Plans etc.

Note: A complete PW3R Framework document has been developed by GSTS and shared with the TIA.

5.13. Specialized Mega Program on Food-Energy-Water-ICT (FEWI) Nexuses

Tigray has been beset by a vicious cycle of war; drought; man-made and natural hunger, and famine for the last consecutive centuries. This has, in turn, cost the lives of millions of Tigrayans, and needs to come to an end. Besides, being far from the capital of Ethiopia has made Tigray vulnerable and dependent on Addis Ababa as has been clearly seen during the genocidal war. One of the disruptive measures to break such a vicious cycle is moving Tigray towards Ensuring Food Security and decentralized infrastructures that lead to self-reliance and removing the impetus to depend on the goodwill or the blessing of the politics and leadership in Addis Ababa. The Food (F)-Energy (E)-Water (W) nexus along with ICT (I), forming a quadruple nexus, FEWI, has a huge potential to bring to fruition Tigray's self-reliance and should be placed at the top of Tigray's priorities and agenda. Creating self-reliance in these sectors will also lead to the advancement of other fields and services that are essential for Tigray's prosperity. For instance, decentralized, i.e. full and semi-off grid energy systems should be urgently pursued at various scales ranging from domestic to commercial, industry and community-scale for different applications including electricity, irrigation, food (production, processing, and transportation) and others.

Hence, the GSTS strongly recommends the Government of Tigray take a decisive determination to 1) establish FEWI as a special Mega Project/Plan; 2) develop a holistic roadmap with viable and implementable action points, deliverables and monitoring mechanisms with the help of practitioners and scholars in the areas of food, agriculture, natural resources, energy, water, environment, climate, ICT, economics, health, industry and other relevant fields; and 3) Launch FEWI program by executive declaration or official decree along with enabling policies, administrative structures, legal provisions etc.

5.14. Independent Experts Advisory Councils

Tigray's political leadership has been accused of prioritizing ideological and political agendas over the effective use of professional and expert advice and resources. In order to facilitate Tigray's revival, it is imperative to fully utilize its full capacity and seek advice from diverse professionals and practitioners who have proven and adaptable expertise and experiences, and regional and international exposures. Specifically, expertise in economics and science and technology, and other relevant fields are critical to formulating policies; innovative strategies cascaded into short, medium, and long-term implementable goals; and roadmaps that effectively address the region's critical challenges. GSTS recommends establishing an independent advisory council comprised of distinguished individuals from various sectors, including academia, research, industry and other sectors by executive order or state decree. These councils would provide valuable expertise and perspectives to address the region's critical challenges effectively.

5.14.1. Economic Advisory Council

The Independent Panel of Economic Advisers is expected to play a key role in Tigray's economic reform and recovery efforts by carrying out several critical functions. First, it will engage in a policy dialogue on key economic policy issues and provide guidance and

expertise to facilitate the necessary economic reforms as outlined in previous recommendations. Second, the Panel will provide essential support for Tigray's post-war relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction activities. In addition, the economic advisory council assists in economic coordination, promoting cross-fertilization and synergies among different sectors to maximize impact. It also continuously scrutinizes government policy options and strategies to ensure the best options are implemented and ensure equitable benefits for the people of Tigray. Finally, the advisory council provides advice and assistance in incubating long-term economic projects and plans that contribute to sustainable growth and development in the Tigray region.

Henceforth, The GSTS recommends the establishment of an Independent Panel of Economic Advisors with a background in economics, development, and finance, with proven research and advisory experiences and international exposures. The Economic Advisory Council shall report directly to the president of the TIA.

5.14.2. Science and Technology Advisory Council

The independent Science and Technology Advisory Council shall serve as a critical resource in advancing Tigray's science, technology, research and innovation, and thus catalyzing its overall socioeconomic development. Its primary focus will be on implementing cutting-edge technology to drive rapid transformation in various aspects of sectors, services, and life within Tigray. This includes ensuring that socioeconomic initiatives leverage the latest scientific and technological tools, and standards to uplift the lives and livelihoods of the Tigray people. Additionally, the advisory council shall play a vital role in addressing ongoing humanitarian crises by identifying and deploying existing technologies with sustainable implications. By harnessing innovative solutions, the council shall aim to alleviate the suffering of affected populations and promote long-term resilience. It will also prioritize building strong research and development cooperation with universities in Tigray and abroad. By fostering collaboration, particularly with the Tigrayan diaspora and friends of Tigray, it will seek to leverage expertise and resources to tackle the socioeconomic challenges facing Tigray. This involves reaching out to learning and research institutions, as well as engaging international donors and stakeholders to support its efforts. Furthermore, the council shall advocate for evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation within Tigray's political leadership and overall governance. By promoting the use of scientific evidence in policymaking, it will aim to ensure that major socioeconomic endeavors are grounded in rigorous research, scientific innovation, and analysis, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes for the region.

Hence: the GSTS recommends establishing an Independent Science and Technology Advisory Council comprised of experts with proven experience and contributions to the fields of science, technology, invention/innovation, entrepreneurship, and related areas. These advisors will bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the table, with a focus on advancing the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) field and fostering innovation and science driven solutions within Tigray. Its role will be multifaceted, including providing guidance on leveraging scientific advancements and technological innovations to address key challenges facing Tigray. It will offer insights into best practices, emerging trends, and cutting-edge solutions that can drive socioeconomic development and improve the quality of life for Tigrayans and beyond. Additionally, the council will play a crucial role in promoting research and development initiatives, fostering collaboration with local and international institutions, and encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems within Tigray. By

harnessing the expertise of these advisors, Tigray can tap into the transformative power of science and technology to build a more resilient and prosperous future. The Science and Technology Advisory Council shall report directly to the president of the TIA.

5.15. Diaspora Grand Homecoming

The Tigrayan diaspora has proven to be not only a 24/7 advocate of Tigray and its interests, often the only voice, but also an economic lifeline during the brutal siege. The war trauma has affected each household and each Tigrawai/ti at home or abroad, requiring time and opportunity to grieve and heal both individually and collectively. For years, the diaspora across the globe has made significant contributions to thousands of households across Tigray, and they still do. Religious and cultural pilgrimages and festivals, such as *Ashenda*, draw thousands who spend millions and help spur the local economy.

Henceforth, GSTS recommends a grand diaspora homecoming for the coming summer (July-August 2024) to encourage the diaspora to visit Tigray and physically witness the aftermath of the war, grieve, and begin to collectively heal as well as contribute to stimulating a war-devastated economy of Tigray. Shortly, the proposed grand homecoming summit aims to reconnect the diaspora with their motherland and fully leverage diaspora resources for healing, peacebuilding, rehabilitation, and post-war reconstruction.

Note: A complete concept note on the diaspora grand homecoming has been developed by GSTS and shared with TIA.

6. The Cost of Inaction

Everything has a cost, and inaction or delay to the current political, security and humanitarian crisis has serious ramifications. Given the gravity of the situation in Tigray and the sufferings of the Tigray people (the fact that a political solution has not been sought to resolve the issue that led to the genocidal war and the possibility of going back to full or partial war and siege still hovers and the continued political crises and malpractices in Tigray), inaction will cost Tigray dearly.

Some of the likely, but avoidable undesirable outcomes are: 1) The political leadership has already lost its moral authority to lead Tigray but attempting to maintain the status quo will further degrade the integrity and intention of the leadership; 2) The cost of not changing or reforming the political system, space, governance, judiciary system and inclusiveness is unacceptable to the people of Tigray as it perpetuates impunity, injustice, and one-party domination; 3) The status quo is untenable (frustrated and desperate constituent, migration of thousands of youth and skillful labor with severe demographic consequences resembling Eritrea and other failed states, precipitated by a state collapse); 4) Undermines Tigray's collective political posture within Ethiopia and beyond; 5) Failure to rally Tigrayans' collective capacity for PW3R and other demanding interventions; 6) Risk of not regaining of Tigray's territorial integrity and safe return of Tigray's IDPs and refugees to their home and properties; and 7) Tigray's civil associations (including GSTS) cannot remain silent anymore, giving way to further division and discontentment that may lead to unpeaceful means.

7. Mission Trip Presentation and Stakeholders' Response

After completing the preparations for the mission trip, the engagement plan was sent a month ahead of the arrival of the GSTS delegation so that the stakeholders could have adequate time to prepare. Each organization was advised to avail the whole leadership team, for instance, the whole cabinet in the case of TIA, TDF leadership, and central committees in the case of political parties to get diverse views.

A GSTS delegation from the diaspora arrived in Mekelle during the week of February (3/4th) and met with the members of the Tigray team to discuss the rundown of the mission trip and responsibilities. On February 5th, the mission team kick-started its mission by addressing the media highlighting the engagement objective and plan for the three weeks.

The feedback from the stakeholders on the content presented - current situation (response to the question “where are we?”), the root causes of the current and cyclical challenges, Tigray’s vital interest, SWOT and scenarios, and proposed solutions were overwhelmingly positive. Most of the organizations consulted demanded that GSTS follow up to see if the recommendations are implemented as soon as possible. Furthermore, they asked GSTS to take such platforms to the wider Tigray population through various mechanisms.

The mission concluded its trip to Tigray on February 26th with a media brief to main outlets.

8. Next Steps

Following such overwhelming consensus on the proposed solutions and strategic options, TIA shall take the lead and establish an implementation commission/agency, comprising TIA, and representatives of TDF, political parties and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). GSTS will prepare a detailed technical implementation description of the recommendations, support in preparing a detailed implementation plan, follow through and provide all the needed support during the preparation and implementation process by providing technical assistance. Moreover, GSTS in collaboration with stakeholders will conduct wide-range consultations with the people of Tigray via various cascaded platforms and engagement modalities.

8.1. Working with TIA

TIA is the current government established to implement the Pretoria Agreement. Hence, it is imperative political parties, TDF, CSOs and other organizations work with TIA to support and facilitate the successful implementation of CoHA. It is on this basis GSTS made the above-mentioned recommendations and will continue to engage and make all its resources available in support of this collective endeavor, both on a demand and supply basis.

8.2. Working with Political Parties

As described in many sections of this document and many other relevant documents, GSTS, keeping its core impartiality principle and establishment pillars, is determined to work with the aforementioned political parties along the vital and strategic interests of the people of Tigray. Building on the existing consultative process, GSTS will continue to engage with all political parties to help improve their participation in building a pluralistic political system in general and currently in the implementation of the CoHA, maintaining peace, in the PW3R, and the overall reform and democratization process. In addition, GSTS will facilitate, and /or provide

technical expertise, training and capacity building endeavors, and related support to help the political parties develop their overall capacity.

8.3. Working with Civil Society Organizations

GSTS as a non-partisan civil society organization identifies with both the opportunities and challenges the nascent civil society organizations of Tigray face. GSTS will partner with CSOs to promote peace, democracy, and justice, economic and human development for the people of Tigray. GSTS will continue to engage, individually and collectively, in the implementation of the CoHA, maintaining peace, in the PW3R and the overall reform, transformation and democratization process. In addition, GSTS will facilitate, and /or provide technical expertise, training, and related support to help CSOs develop their capacity to advocate, and or implement shared social, economic, equity, and other related issues.

9. Implementation Follow-up

A group of GSTS members based in Mekelle (Ethiopia) and abroad will join the implementation follow-up and technical groups to support the development of relevant documents and the implementation of the recommendations. The relevant GSTS thematic areas and working groups will also be charged with the responsibility of providing technical support to specific recommendations in their respective areas of expertise.

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)

7th April 2024