

Ethiopia's Political Crisis: Navigating the Pretoria Agreement and Future Prospects

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Ethiopia's political landscape is currently marked by a series of contradictory actions that have intensified an already fragile situation. Central to this crisis is the Pretoria Agreement, which was initially celebrated as a breakthrough in ending the genocidal conflict in the Tigray region. However, the implementation of the agreement has since sparked significant contention and confusion. This article explores the challenges that have arisen post-agreement, the underlying issues fueling the crisis, and potential pathways toward a sustainable resolution.

The Pretoria Agreement and Its Complex Aftermath

In November 2022, the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) signed the Pretoria Agreement, aiming to end the brutal war that had devastated the Tigray region for two years. This agreement was designed to lay the groundwork for peace by addressing critical issues such as territorial integrity, the return of displaced persons, humanitarian access, human rights, and political representation, along with establishing a ceasefire.

Despite the initial optimism, Ethiopia's actions following the agreement have raised serious concerns regarding the government's commitment to its terms:

- Cancellation of TPLF Registration: The Ethiopian government's decision to require the re-registration of the TPLF was perceived as a direct contradiction to the agreement, which had recognized the TPLF as a legitimate party to the negotiations. This move not only undermined the agreement but also fostered instability and uncertainty within the region.
- Establishment of a Non-Inclusive Interim Regional Administration: Following the cancellation of the TPLF's registration, the Ethiopian government set up an Interim Regional Administration in Tigray, predominantly composed of TPLF members. This has led to questions about the government's true intentions and whether it is genuinely committed to implementing the agreement's provisions. The decision to include TPLF members in the administration appears to

be an attempt to balance political interests between the Tigray Interim Regional Administration and the TPLF.

Institutional Conflicts and Growing Divisions

The Ethiopian government's handling of the Pretoria Agreement has led to significant institutional conflicts and divisions:

- **Division Between Institutions:** The approach taken by the government has created a rift between the TPLF and the Tigray Interim Regional Administration, which, despite being predominantly composed of TPLF members, are treated as distinct entities. This division has led to a lack of clarity and consistency in implementing the agreement's provisions.
- **Focus on Re-registration Rather Than Re-institution:** The Ethiopian government's emphasis on re-registering the TPLF instead of reinstating it highlights a superficial approach to resolving deeper issues. This move suggests a lack of genuine commitment to reintegrating the TPLF into the political process, despite its role as a signatory to the agreement.

Challenges Complicating the Situation

The crisis in Tigray is further complicated by internal and external challenges:

- **TPLF's Premature Congress:** The TPLF has faced criticism for holding a congress prematurely, before the full 21-day implementation period specified in the re-registration document had elapsed. This action, along with the TPLF's failure to adhere to the agreement's terms, has raised doubts about its commitment to the peace process, signaling a potential disregard for the peaceful existence of the people of Tigray.
- **Ethiopia's Renewed Warmongering:** The Ethiopian government's declaration that the Pretoria Agreement has been nullified, combined with its failure to implement the agreement's provisions, has intensified fears of renewed conflict and humanitarian crises. This pattern of behavior suggests an underlying intention to undermine the peace process.

Key Issues at Stake

Several critical issues are at the heart of the current crisis:

- **Territorial Integrity:** The territorial integrity of Tigray remains under threat, with ongoing forceful and unconstitutional occupations by Amhara and Tigrayan forces. Although the Pretoria Agreement includes provisions for territorial integrity, the Ethiopian government's recent actions have cast doubt on its commitment to upholding these terms.

- Return of Displaced Persons: The genocidal war in Tigray has displaced a large number of people. Ensuring their safe and dignified return is a key priority outlined in the Pretoria Agreement, but the uncertainty surrounding the agreement's status makes this increasingly unlikely.
- Justice and Accountability: There is an urgent need for justice and accountability for the atrocities committed during the war by Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces. Holding perpetrators accountable and providing redress for victims are essential steps toward building trust and achieving lasting peace.
- Ceasefire and Humanitarian Access: Implementing a ceasefire and ensuring humanitarian access are critical for alleviating the suffering of those affected in Tigray. The government's nullification of the Pretoria Agreement threatens these fragile gains, placing security and peace at risk.

Pathways to Resolution

Addressing the current crisis requires a multi-faceted approach:

- Inclusive Governance: Establishing an inclusive government that represents all parties and stakeholders is essential for effectively implementing the Pretoria Agreement. Such a government would need to address the core issues and pressing needs of Tigray, laying the foundation for long-term stability.
- Commitment to Peace Agreements: The Ethiopian government must demonstrate a genuine commitment to implementing the terms of the Pretoria Agreement. Without this, any hope for a peaceful resolution remains elusive.
- International Support and Pressure: The international community has a crucial role to play in pressuring Ethiopia to adhere to its peace commitments. This includes applying diplomatic pressure and offering support to ensure the agreement's full implementation.

The path to resolving Ethiopia's political crisis hinges on inclusivity, adherence to agreements, and sustained international support. Only through a committed and collaborative approach can the region hope to achieve lasting peace and stability.

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