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**VISIT TO MEKELLE OF THE ETHIOPIAN  
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, AND THE  
ASSOCIATION OF DEFENCE ATTACHÉS  
IN ETHIOPIA**

**MEKELE, 19-20 MAY 2023**

**STATEMENT BY DR. ALHAJI SARJOH BAH, DIRECTOR OF  
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE**

**Excellencies,  
Generals and Senior Officers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

On behalf of the Chairperson and the Commissioner for Political Affairs Peace and Security, I wish to welcome you to Mekelle for this two day visit in support of the continuous efforts to consolidate the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement COHA that brought an end to the two-year war.

The main objective of our visit along with you the Defence Attachés is to engage with the Interim regional administration of Tigray on recent developments, and to obtain a briefing from the African Team of Experts, under the auspices of the AU Monitoring Verification and Compliance Mechanism, on key developments on the ground.

These interactions will give us a better picture of the political and security situation in the region and highlight areas in which we can strengthen our support for the Protection of civilians, return of IDPs and consolidation of the DDR process outlined in the COHA.

Since the deployment of the Team of Experts, we have continued to observe sustained positive gains in the region, driven by the overall goodwill of the parties and the broader population who have embraced peace and are working assiduously to rebuild their region

As you will observe during the visit, the population is busy going about with normal socio-economic activities, with businesses and the transport services more available and reliable. Although more remains to be done, the restoration of banking services, electricity and the ongoing reopening of schools in some areas, have truly brought renewed hope not only to Tigray but Ethiopia in general.

The women, elderly and children of Tigray paid a high price during the war, so it is particularly heartwarming to see the images of children going back to school; the school children need our collective support to catch up on time lost as a result of the war. In this vein, we will continue to urge local and international stakeholders to support the process of rebuilding Tigray, with an urgent focus on its schools and other educational facilities, the medical sector and the industries required for generating economic activities and income through gainful employment.

For this to be viable, the next critical phase of the DDR process must focus on small arms and light weapons, the clearance of unexploded ordinances, and the full reintegration former combatants.

**Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Although the gains made are tangible and numerous, it is important to also keep sight of the emerging and remaining challenges along the path to lasting peace. We commend the steps taken to put in a place a transitional Justice framework to address issues of accountability, reconciliation and healing.

In this regard, it is imperative that we continue to provide the necessary support to the Federal Government and the recently established the interim regional administration to address the outstanding issues related to the implementation of the COHA.

I wish to reiterate once more, the African Union's availability and commitment to continue supporting the Government and people of Ethiopia in their journey towards lasting peace, reconstruction and sustainable development.

At this point, I would like to commend the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the recently established interim administration of Tigray for their steadfast commitment to the restoration of peace, security and stability to this region and Ethiopia as a whole.

I would like to commend Members of the AU MVCM and the Liaison Officers for their commitment and professionalism in accompanying the implementation of the COHA. The MVCM continues to play a critical role in the implementation of the COHA thereby ensuring that the guns are silenced forever.

Our gratitude also goes to IGAD, UN, EU and international partners for their respective roles in the peace process.

I thank you for your kind attention.