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Statement by Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the continued deterioration of the situation in Ethiopia

(New York, 30 July 2021) The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, expressed alarm at the continued deterioration of ethnic violence in Ethiopia and at the strong allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the Tigray region as well as in other parts of the country, including in Afar, Somali, Oromo and Amhara regions. The Special Adviser also reiterated concerns expressed in her 5 February 2021 statement on the situation in the country.

Since the beginning of the conflict in the Tigray region, the Special Adviser has continued to receive reports of serious human rights violations and abuses, including alleged sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, arbitrary arrests and ethnic based targeted killings committed by all parties, which have now escalated to other parts of the country. She also deplored the erosion of rule of law and echoed the recent call by the Human Rights Council for an immediate end to the violence and human rights violations in Tigray.

The Special Adviser also condemned inflammatory statements used by top political leaders and associated armed groups. The use of pejorative and dehumanizing language like “cancer”, “devil”, “weed” and “bud” to refer to the Tigray conflict is of utmost concern. Hate speech, together with its propagation through social media is part of a worrisome trend that contributes to further fuel ethnic tensions in the country. “Such dynamics in the current socio-politico context, characterised by deep-seated ethnic tensions across the country, constitute a dangerous trajectory in the direction of further pulling communities apart” the Special Adviser added.

“We have seen, in many places around the world that the commission of atrocity crimes along identity lines has been preceded by hate speech and incitement to violence.” the Special Adviser stated. She stressed that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence is prohibited under international human rights law, as well as under national legislation.

All Heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit acknowledged their responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement. “I urge the Government of Ethiopia to fulfil its responsibility and enhance efforts to prevent further escalation of violence and tensions among communities, which have reached an unprecedented level. This responsibility includes working towards a cessation of the ongoing hostilities” said the Special Adviser. “It is imperative that the rights of all populations of Ethiopia are respected, irrespective of ethnicity or political affiliation.” In this regard, she again reiterated her 5 February call on Ethiopian authorities to establish national mechanisms to address the root causes of ethnic violence, build national cohesion and promote reconciliation including by addressing hate speech.

The Special Adviser stressed that those found responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable. Failure to do so will only increase the risk of very serious international crimes that Ethiopia has an obligation to prevent under international law.

The Special Adviser also called on regional actors and the international community at large to strengthen efforts for the protection of vulnerable populations in the country. She particularly urged the African Union to provide the necessary assistance to end ethnic violence and enhance efforts to mitigate all possible risks of atrocity crimes.

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