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## Lessons Learned Report from the AU-Led Peace Process for the Tigray Region of Ethiopia





# **Lessons Learned Report from the AU-Led Peace Process for the Tigray Region, Ethiopia**



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# Acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
AUEOM	African Union Election Observation Mission
AU-HLP	African Union High-Level Panel
CMD	Conflict Management Directorate
DCMD	Director, Conflict Management Directorate
COHA	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
CPAPS	Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defense Force
EU	European Union
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
AU PSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front



# Foreword



I have the honour to present this Lessons-Learned Report on the African Union mediation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, which I had the privilege to oversee on behalf of the AU. This report, with a focus on lessons learned, is an important initiative of the AU Commission to help document the experience of the successful mediation in the AU-led process, hosted by the Government of the Republic of South Africa in Pretoria.

This Report on the peace process in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, is a critical endeavour led by the AU Commission. In pursuing sustainable peace and stability in Ethiopia and across Africa, the Commission rigorously examined its peacemaking efforts in Tigray to distil invaluable insights that can guide future African mediation initiatives.

The peace process in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has garnered considerable regional and international interest, recognising its significance not only for the people of Ethiopia but for the broader stability of the Horn of Africa. Against complex historical, ethnic, and political dynamics, the AU has been deeply committed to promoting peace and stability in Ethiopia through peacemaking and consolidation initiatives.

This Report serves as a testament to our commitment to learning and improving our approaches to facilitating peace on the continent. It seeks to comprehensively analyse the challenges encountered, the achievements, and, most importantly, the lessons learned during the AU-led Peace Process. We aim to contribute to the broader discourse on conflict resolution, fostering an environment where our collective efforts result in lasting positive change.

This Report delves into critical themes, including inclusivity, international collaboration, and implementation modalities. It provides a holistic view of the multifaceted nature of peacemaking, recognising that effective strategies must be comprehensive, context-specific, and adapted to the dynamic realities on the ground.

The compilation of this Report would not have been possible without the unwavering dedication and cooperation of various stakeholders, including the Ethiopian government, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), AU Member States, regional and international partners including the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the United Nations (UN), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and local communities such as Afar and Amhara regions. We express our gratitude for their transparency, openness, and willingness to share their experiences, both triumphs and challenges.

My gratitude also goes to the Department of Political Affairs Peace and Security for their professionalism and deft management of the peace process.

As we reflect on the lessons learned, it is imperative that the insights captured in this Report inform future policy decisions, shape diplomatic engagements, and guide the design and implementation of mediation initiatives across the continent. Lessons from the recent peacemaking efforts in Tigray are a reminder that pursuing peace requires continuous adaptation and a commitment to understanding the nuanced complexities of each conflict.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to this Report. May the lessons learned from this process guide us towards a future where Africa is characterised by enduring peace, prosperity, and unity. The African Union remains steadfast in supporting Member States on their path to Silencing the Guns and sustainable peace, security and development.

**Moussa Faki Mahamat**  
**Chairperson, African Union Commission.**

# Preface

With a deep sense of collective responsibility, we are honoured to have spearheaded the AU-led peace-making efforts in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The African Union Commission's (AUC) leadership and management of this mediation process is widely recognised as a resounding success. We, therefore, endorse this critical exercise to examine and document valuable insights from this dynamic and multi-dimensional peacemaking and mediation process. This Report encapsulates the experiences, challenges, and triumphs of a journey that has been as complex as it has been enlightening.

Some critical lessons learned include African ownership of the mediated process, strategic interactions, and the management of confidentiality, given the tremendous interest from the continent and the diaspora. The AUC's three-pronged approach to managing third parties and stakeholders in a mediation process is also elaborated, as is its use of strategic focal persons. The ready availability of funds, ensuring consistency in sustaining the trust and confidence of the parties in the mediation process, is also highlighted. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the peace process's context, initiation, negotiation, and implementation phases, highlighting the successes and areas where challenges persist.

The insights gathered here are not merely a recounting of events but a reflection of our collective commitment to peace, stability, and the well-being of the people of Ethiopia. It is a testament to what can be achieved by working together in a strong partnership towards a common goal.

As we look to the future, we hope these insights will inspire and guide ongoing and future peacemaking efforts, contributing to a more peaceful and stable Africa.

## Members of the AU High-Level Panel on the Ethiopian Peace Process:



**H.E Olusengun Obasanjo**  
Former President of the  
Federal Republic of Nigeria



**H.E Uhuru Kenyatta**  
Former President of the  
Republic of Kenya



**H.E Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**  
Former Deputy President of the  
Republic of South Africa

# Acknowledgement



The peace process in the Tigray region of Ethiopia has been a landmark endeavour involving a myriad of stakeholders whose dedication and efforts have been crucial to its success. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front demonstrated remarkable resilience and willingness to engage in constructive dialogue. Their commitment to the implementation of the COHA laid the foundation for rebuilding confidence and trust, two critical ingredients for reconciliation and healing. We extend our deepest gratitude to these parties for their pivotal roles in advancing peace. Likewise, the active role of

the Government of the Republic of South Africa, as host of the peace talks in Pretoria, is well acknowledged. A key lesson here is that national and regional leadership, mobilisation of critical mass of actors as well as institutional resilience are crucial in conflict management and avoidance of state failure.

The AU is grateful to Ethiopia for the two separate award ceremonies to honour the lead actors in the peace process, first by H.E Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister to honour the Chairperson of the Commission and the Panel as well as the three observers at the Pretoria Talks; and second, by the then Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to recognise the supporting efforts of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security and his team.

We are profoundly grateful for the exceptional efforts of the AU High-Level Panel comprising former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, and former Deputy President of South Africa Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. Their rich experience, expertise and unwavering commitment were instrumental in mediating the peace process and navigating its complexities.

The support of the international community has also been indispensable. Observers from the IGAD and the UN as well as the Government of the United States of America, played a critical role in assisting the African Union Commission throughout the process.

Special appreciation goes to Dr. Akinwumi Adesina and the AfDB, for the financial and logistical support that was so crucial for the mediation process. In this regard, mention must be of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) who also contributed to the success of the peace-making efforts.

We commend the governments of Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, for their unwavering support, reflecting the importance of African solidarity and cooperation.

The staff of the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, especially Director Alhaji Sarjoh Bah and the rest of the technical team, who worked diligently and professionally to support the AU Management and the Panel of Mediators. The AUC will continue to accompany Ethiopia appropriately in the ongoing implementation of the Peace Agreement towards its full implementation. Ethiopia showcased that silencing the guns, premised on African Solutions to African Problems, is achievable.

**Ambassador Bankole Adeoye**

**Commissioner for Political Affairs Peace and Security**

# Executive Summary

In November 2020, the conflict broke out between the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia. Initial efforts by the African Union to broker peace involved the deployment of three Special Envoys, namely, H.E. Joaquim Chissano, former President of Mozambique, H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, former President of Liberia, and H.E. Kgalema Motlanthe, former President of South Africa, to engage the parties to facilitate de-escalation of the situation and pave the way for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict peacefully.

After almost a year of hostilities and the worsening humanitarian situation, the Chairperson of the AU Commission appointed H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as the AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa in August 2021. The Chairperson subsequently appointed H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, former President of the Republic of Kenya, and H.E. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, as members of the AU High-Level Panel on the Ethiopian Peace Process in September 2022. After fourteen months of sustained efforts to assist the Parties in finding a political solution to the conflict, mainly through shuttle diplomacy, the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the (TPLF), convened their first direct Talks under the auspices of the AU, from 25 October to 2 November 2022, in Pretoria, South Africa.

Negotiations in Pretoria, South Africa, culminated in the signing of the Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA), paving the way for an immediate cessation of hostilities, unfettered humanitarian access to all affected populations and several confidence-building measures, including restoration of essential services to Tigray region and respect for the Federal Government's authority. The signing of the COHA was welcomed as a significant step towards restoring security and stability in the Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia. The Agreement continues to hold with remarkable progress in silencing the guns, restoring services and commencing the disarmament process.

The AUC leadership, the High-Level Panel, and the team which managed the mediation process have been commended for the outcome of the Agreement. Consequently, in October 2023, the Conflict Management Directorate set out to comprehensively examine the process to distil valuable insights from the complexities of a dynamic and multifaceted peace-building initiative. The primary objectives were to identify critical achievements and successes in the peace process, analyse challenges faced during the peace process, curate critical lessons learned for future mediation endeavours and provide actionable recommendations based on the identified lessons.

Several key lessons have been identified from the AU's process management. As a member-state-constituted organisation, concerns were raised about the AU's neutrality in mediating a conflict involving one of its members. Consequently, at the onset, the AU assured the parties of its commitment to accompany them in their quest for a pacific resolution of their differences through several confidence-building measures. This prevented disruptions and helped the AU retain control of the process.

Ownership is crucial to any mediated process's success, as demonstrated throughout the AU's intervention, which led to the phrase "AU-led and Ethiopian-owned" process. Through the Panel's intervention, the AU also ensured that opportunities for ownership were adequately and effectively harnessed. This included allowing the disputing parties to lead the process in setting the agenda and the mediation trajectory, thereby reinforcing ownership of the process. Establishing the High-Level Panel was also deemed a critical guarantee against any perception of bias, ensuring that neither disputing party felt marginalised or structurally disadvantaged throughout the mediation process.

With the conflict attracting overwhelming interest from the continent and the diaspora, there was a high degree of attention to the mediation process. To manage confidentiality and ensure that external factors, including public opinion and media scrutiny, did not influence the mediation process, the AU adopted a media strategy that left little or no room for discrediting the process. Only the Chairperson of the Commission or the Panel engaged the media through press statements or interviews.

The AU's three-pronged approach to engaging observers was also identified as a key lesson in managing third parties and stakeholders in the mediation process. First, it engaged the parties in the conflict on the importance of accepting the 'friends' of the other group. The AU's second priority was keeping important observers apprised of developments, and its third was to use the influence of some of those observers to bolster the peace process. Its insistence on one representative for the UN introduced a leaner model against a broader model envisaged by some parties. The lean model facilitated more focused decision-making by reducing possible layers of bureaucracy and enhancing the agility of the mediation team. It also fostered deeper relationships and trust among the parties and the mediators, as it was easier to build or activate personal connections while managing confidentiality, ensuring that the correct information was shared with the right people at the right time.

The AU was sensitive to the link between financial independence in a mediation effort and susceptibility to external pressures. Its partnership with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and its commitment provided the AU with the financial autonomy needed to manage the process. The ready availability of funds also ensured consistency and was crucial in sustaining the parties' trust and confidence in the mediation process.



The selection of the venue for hosting the peace talks underscored the importance of confidentiality. After the deliberate leaks from *Le Monde* compromised the initial venue, further efforts to safeguard information about the new location became essential, adding a layer of security to protect the integrity of the process. The requirement for valid passports, visas, and COVID-19 tests for all visitors entering South Africa posed challenges, as some representatives of the TPLF lacked valid passports and had not been vaccinated due to the blockade of the region during the conflict. The issue of travel documents was critical and had the potential to hinder progress towards the negotiating table. However, following the AU's engagement with the Government of South Africa, immigration and vaccination issues were resolved in a timely manner. Through the facilitation of the AU, the Government of the FDRE issued eleven passports to the TPLF negotiating team, enabling their delegation to travel to Pretoria. The commitment of the governments of the FDRE and South Africa to resolve immigration to enable participation in the talks was note-worthy, marking a pivotal moment in the entire process. Another key lesson was the imperative for flexibility by countries hosting mediation processes during health emergencies, as was the case with COVID-19 during the conflict in the Tigray region. There is a fine balance that needs to be maintained between enforcing public health regulations and fostering peace efforts.

The AU's approach to the mediation process also involved using strategic focal persons. This involved identifying key persons who would act as central contact points for communication between different parties involved in the mediation. The benefits of this approach included a speedy feedback loop between parties that allowed for real-time adjustments to the mediation strategy and the management of confidentiality relating to sensitive details of the process. The approach also helped reduce the risk of miscommunication by ensuring that messages were conveyed accurately and promptly.

Another lesson learned revolved around the functional delegation of responsibilities, allowing space for AU experts to support the process. At the first level of delegation, the leadership of the Commission and, in particular, the Bureau of the Chairperson, delegated the responsibility for managing the process to the Commissioner

for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (CPAPS). At the second level, the Commissioner delegated the responsibility of managing the process to the Conflict Management Directorate (CMD). The CMD also reciprocated the investment of authority and control by ensuring regular and full briefing for the Commissioner for PAPS, who in turn ensured that the Chairperson of the Commission was adequately briefed. This system proved robust in dealing with the complexities arising from managing the mediation process.

Two lessons were also curated from the coverage of the COHA. The first was the issue of overloading the Agreement by combining immediate, medium and long-term objectives. The second lesson was the absence of guarantors. While the AU's deployment of monitors has been largely applauded by the parties to the conflict, the lack of impartial guarantors deprived the COHA of an extra layer of oversight that would have been useful in the event of non-compliance. Nonetheless, the AU Commission and the High-Level Panel have filled that gap through regular monitoring and the launch of the Strategic Review sessions; two have been held so far where deliberations contributed to unlocking areas of divergence between the parties.

In conclusion, the AU mediation of the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia between the FDRE and the TPLF has been reasonably successful. The AU's leadership and management of the mediation process have been widely praised, and key lessons have been identified from this complex and dynamic peacemaking initiative. The focus on neutrality, ownership, confidentiality, and engagement with stakeholders has proven critical in managing the mediation process effectively. As the AU continues to play a pivotal role in peace efforts across the continent, the lessons learned from the Tigray region, Ethiopia peace process will undoubtedly contribute to informing and, hopefully, shaping future mediation endeavours.



# Introduction

The AU's leadership and management of the mediation process involving the FDRE and the TPLF have been lauded as successful. Consequently, the Conflict Management Directorate within the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department set out to comprehensively examine the process to distil valuable insights from the complexities of a dynamic and multifaceted peace building initiative. The primary objectives are to identify critical achievements and successes in the Tigray region, Ethiopian Peace Process, analyse challenges faced during the peace process, curate critical lessons learned for future mediation endeavours and provide actionable recommendations based on the identified lessons.

The process employed various methodologies, including interviews, meetings, document reviews and after-action reviews, and end-of-assignment reports to identify key lessons, best practices and critical achievements for mediation initiatives across the continent. Data was collected through engagement with critical stakeholders involved in the process, including all members of the High-Level Panel, namely, the Former President of Nigeria, H.E Olusegun Obasanjo, the Former President of Kenya, H.E Uhuru Kenyatta and the Former Deputy President of South Africa, H.E Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka as well as the leadership of the Commission, most notably the Chairperson of the Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye and the Director of Conflict Management, Dr. Alhaji Sarjoh Bah. The process primarily sourced views from representatives of the parties to the conflict, namely; the FDRE and TPLF, the AU High-Level Panel (HLP), as well as key observers, including the United Nations, IGAD, and the USA.

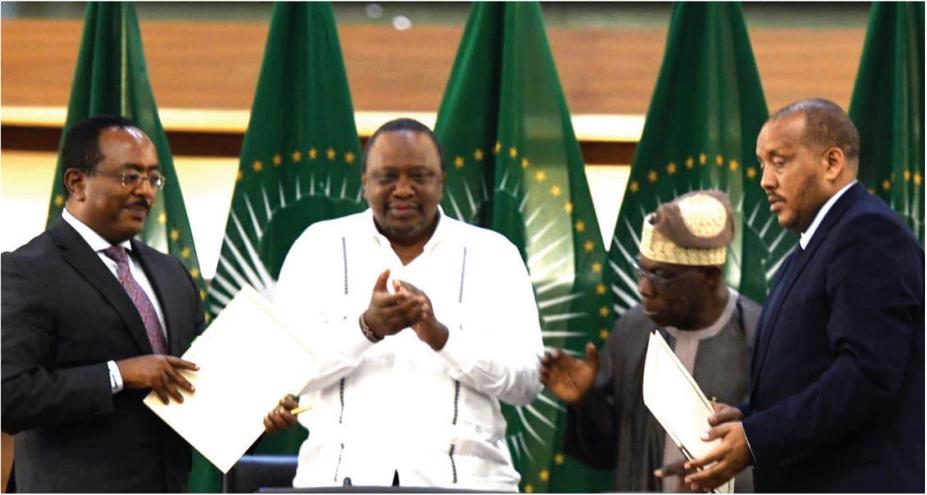


# Context and Background

In November 2020, the conflict erupted between the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia. The conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is rooted in political power struggles, new state administration, historical conflicts, political differences, and differences in dialogue processes. This complex interplay of political issues drove the conflict.

The AU responded with a multi-layered intervention strategy, considering the conflict's evolving political dynamics and the regional context. At the onset of the conflict in 2020, the then Chairperson of the African Union, H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa, deployed three Special Envoys to engage the parties. These envoys were H.E. Joaquim Chissano, former President of Mozambique; H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, former President of Liberia; and H.E. Kgalema Motlanthe, former President of South Africa. Their mission was to facilitate de-escalation and pave the way for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict peacefully. These initial engagements laid a crucial foundation for subsequent AU intervention initiatives.

On 26 August 2021, the Chairperson of the AU Commission appointed H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo as the High Representative of the African Union for the Horn of Africa. In a Press Statement, the Chairperson explained the AU's decision to appoint a High Representative for the Horn of Africa as a necessary step in fostering political dialogue, stability, security, and peace in the region. The appointment was deemed necessary due to the "persistent security and political-related tensions at intra and interstate level" in the region. The High Representative for the Horn of Africa was therefore tasked with intensifying engagements with all relevant political actors and stakeholders in order to promote and entrench durable peace and stability within the Horn of Africa, as well as to provide support to AU-led strategies and diplomatic interventions in the region by facilitating inclusive political dialogue, reconciliation, and social cohesion processes. Although the High Representative's appointment was part of the AU's commitment to fostering longterm peace, security, stability, and political discourse in the whole region, the AU leadership agreed during President Obasanjo's inaugural visit to the Commission that his primary focus should be resolving the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. This was predicated on other geopolitical dynamics in the Horn of Africa.



## Overview of the Peace Process

### Commencement of Shuttle Diplomacy Missions

The work of the High Representative for the Horn of Africa began with often discreet and direct engagements through shuttle diplomacy. These engagements were focused on the parties involved in the conflict and key political actors in Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and the international community. These included the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the President, H.E. Sahlework Zewde and leaders of the TPLF. Within the region, the High Representative consulted with leaders of Djibouti and Sudan to gauge their orientation on regional specificities and how to resolve the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. H.E. President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh of Djibouti acknowledged the High Representative's appointment by the AU as the best decision in addressing the Tigray region of Ethiopian con-

flict. Following productive diplomatic engagements in the region, the need for deescalation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia was deemed crucial to the overall stability of the Horn of Africa. The High Representative consequently dispatched two emissaries to Mekelle, inviting the leadership of the TPLF to join the AU-led peace process. This marked the commencement of the shuttle diplomacy between Addis Ababa, Mekelle as well as the Amhara and Afar regions of Ethiopia. In his engagements with the parties, the High Representative advocated three main positions and immediate and unconditional comprehensive ceasefire and cessation of hostilities by all parties, immediate and unhindered humanitarian access, and political dialogue without any preconditions. These messages underlined his briefings to the

AU Peace and Security Council, the UN Security Council, bilateral partners and relevant international bodies.

In a Briefing to the Chairperson on 7 November 2021, the High Representative communicated the disposition of the parties in Addis Ababa and Mekelle to the reality that their differences were political and, therefore, required a polit-

## **Technical Support to the AU High Representative and the First Ceasefire**

With hopes high for a negotiated settlement, the AU Commission constituted a technical support team under the leadership of the Director of CMD to backstop the High Representative and subsequently, the High-Level Panel. The team consisted of political, mediation and ceasefire experts. The team's key actions in their supportive role included political, security, and legal analysis, performing thorough assessments to inform decision-making; delivering detailed advisory notes and briefings to keep all stakeholders well-informed; crafting and disseminating statements essential for conveying important messages and updates; and facilitating seamless logistical and administrative functions to aid efforts for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. These efforts by the team proved effective as they discharged their responsibilities with the required political finesse, tact, and professionalism. The team's ability to maintain confidentiality even under extreme pressure was invaluable to the overall success of the peacemaking efforts.

ical solution through dialogue. This major turning point constituted a window of opportunity for peace intervention. The High Representative communicated this to the AU Chairperson advising for speedy action, bearing in mind the dire humanitarian consequences on the population and its impact on socio-economic development and stability.

## **Establishment of the High-Level Panel and Preparations for the Talks**

Given the devastating nature of the conflict, pressure mounted on the African Union and its High Representative to bring the parties to the negotiation table to end the war.

Building on the progress made by former President Obasanjo, in September 2022, the Chairperson established a High-Level Panel, appointing H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, former President of Kenya and H.E. Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Deputy President of South Africa and member of the Panel of the Wise, to reinforce the High Representative's efforts.

As the convener of the Talks, in collaboration with the Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa as the host, the AU Commission, through PAPS, undertook the necessary planning and facilitation for the talks, including aspects related to travel documents, visas, vaccinations, transport and accommodation of the parties, factoring in the required security considerations. The Government of the United States of

America (USA) played a critical role in facilitating the movement of the TPLF delegation from Mekelle to Pretoria, South Africa supported these efforts.



## Structure and Process of the Talks

As envisioned in the process design, the High-Level Panel facilitated confidential direct negotiations between the parties through a few representatives. Regular plenary sessions were held to monitor progress, highlight and confirm areas of convergence, and identify issues requiring further discussion or the Panel's reflection and guidance. Adhering to the AU's mediation principles of consent, relevance, and ownership, the Panel adopted a facilitative approach throughout the process, allowing the parties to drive the agenda and structure of their negotiations.



## Timeframe of the Talks

The timeframe of the Talks was primarily driven by the parties, with the Panel consistently providing guidance and encouragement. The Panel persistently urged the parties to remain focused on the task at hand and prioritise reaching an agreement urgently. Although the actual talks lasted for ten days, the initial planning was projected to last seven days, with the flexibility to adjust based on progress.

While having a projected timeframe posed the risk of creating undue pressure and a perception of haste, it also reinforced the parties' commitment to the peace process. Timeframes are essential for tracking progress, particularly when established in relation to specific milestones or stages of the process, such as defining the agenda or reaching agreements on issues, whether individually or as a package.

## Preparatory Consultations

Prior to the official opening of the Talks on 24 October, the engagement between the AUC Chairperson and the Panel concluded with an agreement on the necessity for a more inclusive and constructive interaction with the international community. This engagement was based on principles of complementarity, comparative advantage, and common purpose. Subsequently, a briefing was conducted for the international observers participating in the process, including H.E. Dr Workneh Gebeyehu, Executive Secretary of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development; H.E. Ms Hanna Tetteh, UN Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa; and H.E.

Mike Hammer, United States Envoy for the Horn of Africa. The primary objectives of this briefing were to outline the principles governing the process, clarify the expected roles of the observers, and provide them with an opportunity to share their insights, nuanced perspectives, and expectations of the process.

Following the Chairperson's briefing, the Panel advised the Commission, through H.E. Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for PAPS, to engage directly with the parties prior to the commencement of the Talks. The aims were to reaffirm the AU's commitment to the process, discuss common principles and ground rules for the Talks, underscore the importance of impartiality and ownership, and collaborate with the parties to reflect on potential agenda items for the Talks. This approach facilitated a shared understanding and strategy for the opening and conduct of the Talks, further solidified through the Panel's consultative engagements held separately with each party on 25 October 2022, shortly before the official opening.

Based on these pre-consultations, the parties expressed a shared interest in focusing the Talks on three key agenda items: silencing the guns in the Tigray region of Ethiopia through a negotiated cessation of hostilities, ensuring the facilitation of unfettered humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas, and committing to a longer-term political process to address the underlying causes of the conflict comprehensively.

## Opening The Talks

Following separate consultations on the agenda and shared principles underpinning the process, thus establishing the parameters of the Talks, the Panel convened the parties for a plenary opening session on the afternoon of 25 October 2022. Dr. Naledi Pandor, the Honorable Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, delivered the welcome remarks. The Chairperson of the AU Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, delivered the opening remarks. At the same time, the Chair of the High-level Panel, H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, set the stage for the deliberations through his opening remarks. H.E. Amb. Redwan Hussein, Head of the FDRE delegation and Getachew Reda, Head of the TPLF delegation, also

delivered statements.

These statements reflected a shared optimism and encouraged the parties to engage in good faith, consolidate points of convergence, and work collaboratively to address outstanding issues. This sentiment was further reinforced by goodwill messages from H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, former President of the Republic of Kenya; H.E. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa and member of the AU Panel of the Wise; and the Executive Secretary of IGAD, H.E. Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, representing the observers.

In the opening plenary, the Panel emphasised the principles and rules of engagement guiding the process.

## The Actual Negotiations



Following the opening session, the parties convened a closed plenary where they agreed to adopt a committee approach to the Talks. In this approach, smaller working groups were formed to identify discussion points, areas of convergence, and issues requiring further reflection and negotiation. Unresolved issues were referred to the Panel for guidance.

By Day 4, the parties had progressed to a framework strategy. After agreeing on the overall parameters, they adopted a common base document as the working draft and collaboratively fine-tuned it through text-based negotiations. The Panel maintained regular contact with the leaders of each delegation, consistently guiding the process, helping the parties remain engaged and focused on substantive issues, and providing technical and political guidance as needed. When necessary, the Panel conducted proximity talks to reaffirm the parties' shared understanding, agreement and commitment to the agenda and principles of the Talks and address any deadlocks that arose.

From the onset, to enhance efficiency in executing the objectives of the peace process, the parties agreed to base their negotiations on a shared recognition and respect for Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the Constitution of the FDRE. They also decided that, as outlined in the Constitution, there can only be one federal defense forces in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). Based on these shared principles, efforts were focused on reaching a consensus on (a) an immediate, permanent cessation of hostilities; (b) facilitating humanitarian

access; (c) restoration of services, (d) commitment to disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR); and (e) the monitoring, compliance, and verification mechanisms (MVCM).

On 2 November 2022, the Parties signed the Agreement for Lasting Peace Through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities, wherein they, amongst others, undertook to i) disengage forces or armed groups under their control and design and implement a comprehensive DDR program in line with the Constitutional order of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; ii) facilitate humanitarian support to conflict-affected people and areas; iii) ensure protection of civilians; iv) prioritise and ensure transitional justice; v); restore Federal Authority in the Tigray Region including control of federal institutions and agencies; vi) ensure and facilitate the representation of the Tigray region in federal institutions, including the House of Federation, and House of Peoples' Representatives; vii) undertake specific confidence-building measures and viii) establish relevant monitoring compliance and verification mechanisms to implement the agreed actions fully.

# Post Talks

## Implementation of the Agreement

The dire nature of the situation on the ground necessitated the immediate implementation of the Peace Agreement. To this end, the Parties agreed, within 24 hours of the signing, to establish a channel of communication – a hotline - between their senior military commanders. This was achieved as planned. It was further agreed, per Article 6 (d) of the Agreement, that the senior military commanders would meet within five days of signing the Agreement to discuss and work out detailed modalities for the disarmament process. Consequently, from 7 to 12 November 2022, the AU High-Level Panel (AU-HLP) facilitated a Senior Commanders meeting in Nairobi to detail the modalities for implementing the COHA. Its conclusion directed a Joint Planning Committee from both parties to develop a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) strategy from 30 November to 5 December 2022.



## Joint Planning Committee Meeting, 30 November – 5 December 2022



In yet another major confidence-building gesture, the Joint Planning Committee met in Shire in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia from 30 November to 5 December 2022. This in accordance with Section 2(1e) of the Senior Commanders' Declaration, which states that "a Joint Committee shall be established to work out a detailed implementation plan." The Joint Planning Committee met to work on a detailed implementation plan for the DDR of former Tigray combatants. The primary objective of the implementation plan was to outline the various phases of the DDR process within agreed timelines.

## Second Senior Commanders Meeting, 12-16 December 2022



A second meeting of senior commanders was held in Nairobi from 12 to 16 December 2022 as a follow-up to the first and to adopt the Joint Planning Committee outcome. Representatives of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the USA attended both meetings. The meetings culminated in the signing of a declaration to facilitate unhindered humanitarian access to all needing assistance in Tigray and neighbouring regions consistent with the provisions of the COHA. The Senior Commanders further agreed to establish the Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission on 29 December 2022.

## **AU High-Level Panel follow-up visit to Addis Ababa Ethiopia, 24 November 2022,**



The AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa, H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, together with H.E. Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Member of the AU High-Level Panel for the Ethiopian Peace process and the Panel of the Wise, undertook a working visit to Ethiopia on 24 November 2022, towards consolidating the peace commitments. The Panel engaged with the Prime Minister and President of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa. In Mekelle, the High-Level Panel held in-depth discussions with the TPLF leader, Inter-Religious Council leaders and key stakeholders. The Panel also consulted with representatives of Humanitarian agencies and development partners, galvanising support for the implementation of the COHA and the Declaration of the Senior Military Commanders, which concluded on 12 November 2022 in Nairobi, Kenya.

## **Establishment of the Joint Monitoring Committee**

Consistent with Article 11 of the Permanent COHA, a Joint Monitoring Committee comprising the Parties, the AU through the High-Level Panel, and IGAD was established and later became known as the Joint Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mechanism. The AU also deployed a Monitoring, Verification, and Compliance Mission made up of ten (10) African experts and two(2) liaison officers from both the EADF and the Tigray Armed Combatants to monitor the implementation of the Permanent COHA for a period of six (6) months. The team comprised serving military officers and civilians from three countries: Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. The experts were tasked to, among other things, monitor the disarmament of heavy weapons, machine guns, mortars, anti-air guns, artillery, and tanks, among others; humanitarian access and delivery of services in the conflict-affected areas; the restoration of services; disarmament of light weapons such as pistols, submachine guns, rifles, and grenades. Furthermore, the team was tasked to monitor the overall reintegration plan.

On the verification of the Permanent COHA, the team was tasked to verify the disarmament of heavy and light weapons at the designated four zones, as agreed by the Parties through joint patrols, as well as confirm the humanitarian access and service delivery across the conflict-affected region. On compliance, the team was tasked to monitor compliance consistent with national, regional and international laws, standards and best practices.



# Key Lessons Learned

## The AU's Leadership



The AU has established frameworks and mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, which provide a structured approach to addressing conflicts. Additionally, the AU enjoys international recognition and legitimacy, which allows it to lead efforts to address conflicts on the continent. Nevertheless, the TPLF expressed reservations regarding its neutrality, before it agreed to participate in the Pretoria talks. Thus, at the onset, the AU had to assure all stakeholders of its neutrality, competence and availability of resources to lead the process. It also assured the parties of its commitment to accompany them in their quest for a pacific resolution of their differences. This assurance was achieved through some confidence-building measures. This included acknowledging the con-

cerns and interests of the Government of the FDRE and the TPLF. Through regular briefings, the Commission also updated the AU PSC and the three elected African Members of the UN Security Council (the A3), which ensured Ethiopia was not formally placed on the UN Security Council (UNSC) agenda during the period. This prevented disruptions and helped the AU retain control of the process.

Shuttle diplomacy by the AU High Representative further deepened the AU's confidence-building measures. Former President Obasanjo and, subsequently, the Panel's engagements targeted the parties to the conflict and key stakeholders in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, the US, UK, China, France, Russia, the UN, and the EU, among others. Former Pres-

ident Kenyatta and Former Deputy President Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka ensured that their engagements as panel members and in their personal interactions demonstrated their commitment to an acceptable outcome. These activities and initiatives fostered a constructive negotiation environment, reinforcing the AU's leadership of the process.

## Promoting Ownership



Ownership is crucial to the success of any mediated process. This often manifests as a genuine and meaningful involvement of the parties directly affected by the conflict in shaping the mediation process and the outcomes. Ownership bears directly on the practicality and sustainability of peace agreements. Through the Panel's intervention, the AU ensured that opportunities for ownership were adequately and effectively harnessed. At every level of the process, the AU played a facilitation role by guiding the parties to reach a consensus. The AU, for instance, refrained from setting a fixed agenda throughout the process, allowing the parties to take the lead.

Furthermore, neither the Panel nor the AU Commission engaged in the process with an externally-authored or imposed

draft peace agreement for signature by the Parties. The AU, as facilitator instead, solicited the agenda and issues for negotiation from the Parties. The Parties had developed their own respective comprehensive draft Agreement. The AU Commission crafted a consensus working draft for the consideration of both parties. In some cases, the AU draft highlighted areas of convergence and identified major and minor areas of difference, with some proposals of text or approaches to reconcile the Parties' positions. This document's acceptability and usefulness helped enriched the work of the parties. This approach augmented the credibility and the ownership of the process, letting both parties steer the conversation and, consequently, the mediation trajectory. This reinforced the parties' ownership

of the process.

The AU's effort to promote ownership was also seen in the efforts of the Panel to allow the parties unlimited opportunity to caucus together and separately in closed-door sessions without the presence of the AU Panel, AU technical staff, and any observers. With fighting continuing during the negotiations, the rhetoric surrounding the situation, and the fast-eroded trust, it was not easy to

imagine that the FDRE and TPLF representatives could have engaged in one room without third-party presence. Nonetheless, the AU's facilitation strategy helped rebuild mutual respect and trust among the parties. It also created a high sense of confidence both in the process and between the parties and made them see their shared destiny. As such, the Parties frequently discussed among themselves in one closed room in Amharic language.

## Selection of Mediators

Selecting the right mediator(s) is crucial in any mediation process, as the mediator plays a pivotal role in facilitating communication, resolving conflicts and helping parties reach mutually acceptable agreements. The mediator's credibility can also enhance the legitimacy of the mediation process. Before selecting the Panel of Mediators, the AU had proposed that its High Representative for the Horn of Africa, Former President

Olusegun Obasanjo, mediate the conflict. As a former president of Nigeria, Obasanjo's wealth of political and diplomatic experience was undoubtedly a major factor in his selection. An elder statesman and avowed pan-Africanist, the AU considered his stature, gravitas and magnanimity to keep his sight on the bigger picture as beneficial to the integrity and sustainability of the process.



Notwithstanding his presumed neutrality, the TPLF made reservations. This related to his perceived support for Prime Minister Abiy, having been involved in the 2021 Ethiopian Elections as the Chair of the African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM) to Ethiopia. As Chair of the AUEOM, his endorsement of the integrity of a seemingly uninclusive election was deemed problematic as it signified support for the winner. Meanwhile, some on the FDRE side also harboured reservations due to the former President's close relationship with the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. These reservations were brought to the attention of the AU.

The reservations concerning Obasanjo's perceived affiliations gradually gave way to a widespread acknowledgement of his immense experience and commitment to a mutually acceptable outcome. Nevertheless, it catalysed the formation of a panel of mediators. The panel approach was deemed a critical guarantee against any perception of bias. One that ensured that neither of the disputing parties felt marginalised or structurally

unfavoured.

Given the historically amicable ties between Kenya and Ethiopia, Former President Uhuru Kenyatta was favoured for this position. The confidence reposed in him was undoubtedly justified as, together with the other members of the Panel, he played a crucial part in steering the conversation towards a mutually acceptable outcome.

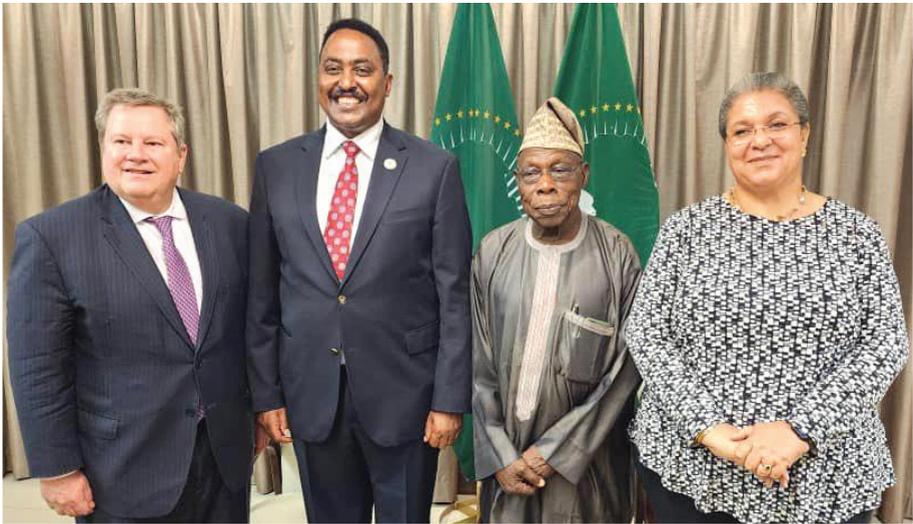
With two male Panel members already chosen, the AU High Representative proposed considering a qualified female member for the Panel's third position. This was in compliance with the AU's established frameworks on women, gender, peace and security. A decision was reached to appoint former South African Deputy President Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, an accomplished and distinguished African personality in diplomacy and politics. In a negotiation landscape predominantly influenced by male voices, Dr. Mlambo-Ngcuka's involvement added a distinct richness to the dialogue, underlining the irreplaceable value of diversely experienced mediation panels.

## Media Management



Rationalising media engagement during mediation is essential to maintaining the integrity of a process, protecting the confidentiality of discussions and creating an environment conducive to open conversation. With the conflict attracting overwhelming interest both from the continent and the diaspora, the AU was aware of the degree of attention to the mediation process. To manage confidentiality and ensure that external factors, including public opinion and media scrutiny, did not influence the mediation process, carefully planned media engagements were invariably restricted to press statements. This ensured that the Chairperson of the AU Commission approved all pronouncements. The AU further avoided media ping pong with some of the key stakeholders, ensuring that statements made were consistent with the overall goal of the process.

## Engagement with Observers



Recognising observers' vital role in the peace process, the AU took a three-pronged approach to engage them. First, it engaged the parties in the conflict on the importance of accepting the 'friends' of the other group. The AU's second priority was keeping influential observers apprised of developments, and its third was to use the influence of some of those observers to bolster the peace process. In this approach, the USA

made significant contributions leveraging its close interactions with the TPLF and in arranging transport for its delegation.

Throughout the process, the AU took extra confidence building measures. The establishment of the AU High-Level Panel and the leverage of the USA contributed to bolstering trust and invariably bringing the parties to the table.

The UN's observer role was also critical to the AU's engagement. Given the size of the UN, its representation was restricted to one to reduce transaction costs. This responsibility fell on the Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa, Hannah Tetteh. The rest of the UN system was mobilised through her initiative to support the peace process. The provision of logistics, including flights arranged in and out of Mekelle, during the height of the conflict guaranteed the free flow of the process, alleviating what could have been a logistics challenge. Like the US, the UN may have envisaged a much broader role in the process. From an AU perspective, however, a leaner model facilitated more focused decision making by reducing possible layers of bureaucracy and enhancing the agility of the mediation team. Such agility is crucial in a mediation where the timeliness of decisions impacts the dynamics of the process. The lean model also fostered deeper relationships and trust among the parties and the mediators, as building or activating personal connections was easier. Finally, the lean model proved crucial to managing confidentiality, ensuring the correct information was shared with the right people at the right time.

The IGAD was also an observer in the process, albeit in a limited capacity. As a key regional organisation in East Africa, IGAD's political capital, particularly its senior leadership, was leveraged by the AU during the process, enabling it to unblock some of the key challenges en-

countered during the talks in Pretoria.

Defining the specific role of the observers afforded the AU's technical staff space to work independently, impartially and transparently, thereby delivering a Peace Agreement within a very short time considering the issues at hand. Overall, the observers respected the AU's role and accepted its leadership and direction. However, some observers occasionally disagreed with the position of the AU on procedural matters. A part of this was because some observers felt that the roles assigned to them were not commensurate with their investments in the process. While recognising the limitation of forecasting in a process, a clearer definition of roles for all stakeholders, from external partners like the US and UN to regional bodies, could have helped prevent overlaps and potential disagreements. It could have also maximised the benefits of partnerships in the mediation process, potentially opening up additional resources and support.

## Financial Independence



Mediation efforts can be compromised through perceptions of partiality engendered through conflict of interest, among others. Financial independence typically reduces susceptibility to external pressures or biases that may arise from funding sources with vested interests in the outcome of the process. Conscious of this, the AU carefully considered multiple offers of financial support, accepting limited assistance from CMI Martii Ahtisaari Peace Foundation alongside the Commission's resources at the start of its intervention before ultimately partnering with the AfDB. While the AfDB is not impervious to political influence, on the balance of possibilities, it offered the best safeguards relative to the other offers on the table. With no political interests, the AfDB's role was restricted to financial and logistical support. As a financial institu-

tion, the Bank's engagement with AU also meant that it was more interested in the extent to which it could accompany the AU in its endeavour by providing financial and technical support. This provided the AU with the financial autonomy needed to manage the process. The ready availability of funds also ensured consistency and was crucial in sustaining the trust and confidence of the parties in the mediation process. Overall, this was the first time the AU and the AfDB, the Pan-African institutions, had leveraged their respective comparative advantages in the area of mediation.

## Selecting Venues for Hosting Mediation Processes



The choice of venue for hosting mediation processes plays a role in shaping the credibility of the process. Beyond the obvious question of safety, the choice of venue has implications on perception regarding neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality. While it has been suggested that a successful holding of the pre-talks in Tanzania would have offered an earlier deal and paved the way for a broader political settlement, the dynamics surrounding the deliberate leakage of information regarding that potential venue by the French Daily, *Le Monde*, simply made that venue untenable. Consequently, the two parties, leveraging their ownership

of the process, recommended to the AU to suggest five AU Member States among which a choice could be made. Based on consensus, they agreed on South Africa. In terms of lessons, the South African Government's decision not to disclose the venue was helpful as it provided an additional layer of security to the integrity of the venue. The AUC and the Government of the FDRE arranged and facilitated the TPLF delegation's travel to Pretoria for the peace talks. The timely issuance of the travel document for the TPLF negotiating team was noteworthy and signified one of the breakthrough moments in the peace process.

### Leveraging the Agency of Focal Persons

The AU's approach to the mediation process also involved the use of strategic focal persons in a very strict and confidential manner. This involved the identification of key persons acting as central points of contact for communication between different parties involved in the mediation. All parties had focal persons at the technical and strategic levels who served as the primary links constantly engaged on the process. The benefits of this approach were enormous. It included a speedy feedback loop between parties that allowed for real-time adjustments to the mediation strategy and the management of confidentiality relating to sensitive details of the process. The approach also helped reduce the risk of miscommunication in ensuring that messages were conveyed accurately and promptly.

## Functional Delegation of Responsibilities for Mediation Management



The functional delegation of responsibilities was crucial in allowing the space for experts within the AU to support the process. At the first level of delegation, the leadership of the Commission and, in particular, the Bureau of the Chairperson delegated the responsibility for managing the process to the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (CPAPS). At the second level, the Commissioner delegated the responsibility of managing the process to the Conflict Management Directorate. To ensure the strict confidentiality of the process in a manner that supported the AU's neutral role, the CMD deployed a joint technical team from its Mediation and Dialogue Division and the East Africa Regional Desk to support the process. The technical team was responsible for developing a process design that was accepted by everybody. The CMD also reciprocated the investment of au-

thority and control by ensuring regular and full briefing of the CPAPS, who in turn ensured that the Chairperson of the Commission was adequately briefed. In the absence of any political or functional intermediaries, this system proved robust in dealing with the complexities arising from managing the mediation process.

## Scope of the CoHA



As described in the background, the issues underlying the war were complex. Yet, with the humanitarian situation deteriorating, a ceasefire was urgently needed. As a result, discussions in Pretoria were largely concerned with achieving a cessation of hostilities. However, once that process began, other crucial components of the tension between the two parties were engaged. The result was an ‘overloaded’ agreement combining immediate, medium and long-term objectives.

A further lesson regarding the COHA is the absence of guarantors. Guarantors play crucial roles in peace deals by providing levels of assurance and oversight to ensure that conflicting parties adhere to the terms and conditions of the Agreement. This adds credibility and trust to the peace process by ensuring that the parties fulfil their commitments. The

AU’s deployment of monitors has been largely applauded by parties to the conflict.

In summary, the Lessons Learned Report on the Peace Process in northern Ethiopia encapsulates a wealth of insights derived from the complex and dynamic mediation initiative led by the African Union Commission. This comprehensive examination has shed light on the critical importance of ownership of the mediated process, strategic media interactions, and the management of confidentiality. The three-pronged approach to managing third parties and stakeholders, along with the use of strategic focal persons, has proven effective. Additionally, the report emphasises the significance of ensuring the consistent availability of financial and technical resources to sustain trust and confidence in the mediation process.

## Peace Agreement: A Means to an End



The primary objective of any peace agreement is to ensure the restoration of peace and stability. In other words, a peace agreement serves as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself. The signing of the Permanent COHA was a significant milestone, but its implementation will determine its sustainability. Consequently, accompanying the peace process through regular and consistent engagement with the parties to ensure compliance is critical. The strategic reflection sessions convened by the Chairperson of the AUC and facilitated by the AU HLP, involving the parties and partners, could serve as a model to support the implementation of peace agreements in other parts of the continent.

Moreover, lessons from the implementation of the Permanent COHA demonstrate the significance of establishing a robust monitoring and verification mechanism. However, the absence of guarantors for the Permanent COHA highlights the limitations of facilitating institutions such as the AU in ensuring strict adherence to the terms of the agreement, particularly regarding political dialogue, the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and the disengagement of non-ENDF forces.



## Conclusion

Overall, national and regional leadership, mobilisation of critical mass, and institutional resilience are crucial in conflict management and preventing state failure. In furtherance of African agency and ownership, the AU leadership in mediation is also key for success. Complementary support from partners is welcome as appropriate. The AU continues to use the panel format of mediation to positive effect.

The Report underscores the need for comprehensive and context-specific strategies in peacemaking initiatives, recognising the multifaceted nature of conflicts and the necessity for continuous adaptation. It serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, diplomats, and peacebuilding practitioners, providing a compelling case for the integration of the lessons learned into future initiatives. The dedication and cooperation of various stakeholders, along with the commitment of the African Union and its leadership in this process, have been pivotal in distilling these invaluable insights.

Ultimately, this Report stands as a testament to the unwavering commitment of the AU to fostering enduring peace and stability in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and the broader African continent. It is hoped that the lessons gleaned from this Report will serve as a guiding light, steering future peacemaking efforts towards sustainable and positive change.



















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