

Treasury Sanctions Eritrean Military Leader in Connection with Serious Human Rights Abuse in Tigray

August 23, 2021

WASHINGTON — Today, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned General **Filipos Woldeyohannes (Filipos)**, the Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), for being a leader or official of an entity that is engaged in serious human rights abuse committed during the ongoing conflict in Tigray. **Filipos** is designated pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13818, which builds upon and implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and targets perpetrators of serious human rights abuse and corruption around the world.

“The Treasury Department will continue to take action against those involved in serious human rights abuse around the world, including in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, where such acts further exacerbate the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis,” said Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control Andrea M. Gacki. “Today’s action demonstrates the United States’ commitment to imposing costs on those responsible for these despicable acts, which worsen a conflict that has led to tremendous suffering by Ethiopians. We urge Eritrea to immediately and permanently withdraw its forces from Ethiopia, and urge the parties to the conflict to begin ceasefire negotiations and end human rights abuses.”

SITUATION IN TIGRAY

The ongoing conflict in Tigray has exacerbated a humanitarian crisis that threatens hundreds of thousands of lives. Despite the Ethiopian government’s June 28 unilateral ceasefire declaration, parties on all sides continue to escalate the conflict. The EDF reentered Tigray after an initial withdrawal following the June 28 ceasefire. Meanwhile, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) has moved into neighboring Afar and Amhara regions, potentially further widening the conflict. Despite an estimated 5 million people in need of humanitarian aid, and more than 400,000 people experiencing famine conditions, Ethiopian federal and Amhara regional forces continue to restrict humanitarian access, while the Ethiopian

government has called for all capable Ethiopians to mobilize to support the campaign in Tigray. These escalatory actions risk furthering a severe humanitarian crisis.

ERITREAN DEFENSE FORCES INVOLVED IN SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

General Filipos is the Chief of Staff of the EDF. In this role, he commands all of the EDF forces that have been operating in Ethiopia. The EDF are responsible for massacres, looting, and sexual assaults. EDF troops have raped, tortured, and executed civilians; they have also destroyed property and ransacked businesses. The EDF have purposely shot civilians in the street and carried out systematic house-to-house searches, executing men and boys, and have forcibly evicted Tigrayan families from their residences and taken over their houses and property.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Tigray have described a systematic effort by the EDF to inflict as much harm on the ethnic Tigrayan population as possible in the areas the EDF controls. IDPs reported that in some cases, the EDF used knives or bayonets to slash open the torsos of pregnant women and then left them for dead. The EDF have forced survivors to leave the bodies of the dead where they lie or face execution themselves. Countless IDPs recounted instances of witnessing the rape, murder, and torture of friends and family members by the EDF. Sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war and a means to terrorize and traumatize the entire population; the majority of rapes are committed by men in uniform, such as the EDF. IDPs also spoke of a “scorched earth” policy intended to prevent IDPs from returning home.

Filipos is being designated pursuant to E.O. 13818 for being a foreign person who is a leader or official of an entity, including any government entity, that has engaged in or whose members have engaged in, serious human rights abuse relating to his tenure.

SANCTIONS IMPLICATIONS

As a result of today’s action, all property and interests in property of the person above that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked and must be reported to OFAC. In addition, any entities that are owned, directly or indirectly, 50 percent or more by one or more blocked persons are also blocked. Unless authorized by a general or specific license issued by OFAC, or otherwise exempt, OFAC’s regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or within (or transiting) the United States that involve any

property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons. The prohibitions include the making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of any blocked person or the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services from any such person.

GLOBAL MAGNITSKY

Building upon the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, E.O. 13818 was issued on December 20, 2017, in recognition that the prevalence of human rights abuse and corruption that have their source, in whole or in substantial part, outside the United States, had reached such scope and gravity as to threaten the stability of international political and economic systems. Human rights abuse and corruption undermine the values that form an essential foundation of stable, secure, and functioning societies; have devastating impacts on individuals; weaken democratic institutions; degrade the rule of law; perpetuate violent conflicts; facilitate the activities of dangerous persons; and undermine economic markets. The United States seeks to impose tangible and significant consequences on those who commit serious human rights abuse or engage in corruption, as well as to protect the financial system of the United States from abuse by these same persons.

[Click here to view more information on today's designation.](#)