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ETHIOPIAN ELITES SPREAD RAMPANT DISINFORMATION ABOUT S.3199 AND
HR6600**

Falls Church, Virginia (4/6/2022) – In the coming months, the US Congress will be considering two bills related to the human rights and humanitarian situation throughout Ethiopia: HR 6600 in the House and S.3199 in the Senate. OLLAA worked with members of Congress on the text of these bills, and while they are far from perfect, we have been proud to support them as they were approved by the committees they were initially assigned to, and now have moved to the floor for consideration by the entirety of their respective houses. At the same time, I must note my disappointment at some of the rhetoric that has been advanced by members of the Ethiopian diaspora community, the Ethiopian government, elites, and media organizations who oppose these pieces of legislation and are fueling the conflict. This disinformation is being spread with the specific intent to confuse their audience about the content and intent of the bills, as well as the likelihood of these bills being passed into law. Others have sought to protect the perpetrators of human rights abuses by attacking members of Congress who have called for the cessation of hostilities. Such actions can be described as irresponsible, at best, and, at worst, as a blatant attempt to weaken the Ethiopian diaspora community’s trust in the US government and prolong the conflict.

For example, in the week prior to the mark up of S.3199, disinformation about the contents of the bill was spread by multiple parties, including by an Ethiopian state-owned television [channel](#), which aired a segment claiming that the bill imposes sanctions on finance and investments, prevents remittance and diaspora investment in Ethiopia, and restricts travel for members of Ethiopian diaspora communities. Such claims were patently false, as the bill only targets those individuals who are determined to have been involved in the conflict, but nevertheless, it led to panic among members of the diaspora community. I can only speculate as to why the Ethiopian government chose to propagate such false information, but I believe it shows their belief that these bills present powerful diplomatic tools for the US government to use in order to ensure lasting peace throughout the country.

Unfortunately, such actions have not ceased since S.3199 was marked up. On April 3, 2022, Professor Alemayhu G. Mariam, who teaches political science at California State University, San Bernardino, published a [blog post](#) in which he labeled 12 members of Congress who have actively worked to address the conflicts in Ethiopia as a “mafia” who are, “gunning to bring down Ethiopia paid by the *dirty money* stolen by the TPLF over a quarter of a century.” Such statements are blatantly untrue, and it is beyond the pale to suggest that members of Congress who have consistently used their voices to raise awareness to the human rights and humanitarian disaster unfolding throughout Ethiopia, including what could be labelled a genocide in Tigray, are seeking



to profit from their actions, instead of seeking to address valid concerns through US foreign policy. This tactic is hardly a new one for Professor Mariam, who has frequently used his blog as a platform to [denigrate](#) the [TPLF](#), as well as others who have spoken out against Prime Minister Abiy's regime.

As if personal attacks against government officials were not enough, yesterday, the Ethiopian American Civic Council (EACC) posted on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) claims that the US Congress has "hit pause" or is "suspending" its consideration of HR 6600 and S.3199, citing a [piece](#) published on The Africa Report. Their claims were immediately picked up by Ethiopian media organizations, including [FBC Afaan Oromoo](#) and [EBC News](#). However, if one digs into the text of the article cited, one can see instantly that this is a purely speculative opinion piece, which draws on creative interpretations of public statements made by Congressmen in order to advance the author's desired narrative. For example, the author cites a statement made by Senator Menendez in which he expressed skepticism about the recently declared humanitarian truce, called for "Congress to act", and noted that the bill's provisions could "create leverage that will help push [...] diplomacy forward," as proof that the US Congress has paused in its consideration of the bill, and instead is giving the Ethiopian government time to give the humanitarian truce a chance to work. In contrast, a more straightforward reading of the text would lead one to believe that Senator Menendez was encouraging his fellow Congressmen to pass the bill because the diplomatic tools it authorizes grant the US great leverage to bring about lasting peace in the country.

It should be noted that the opinion article also cites Senator Coons, who posted on [Twitter](#) after the US Committee on Foreign Relations decided to advance the bill that, "If the humanitarian truce and ceasefire is upheld, this bill will not be necessary. I pray it won't be, and as long as this peace continues, I'll work to make sure this bill goes no further. However, my colleagues and I must be ready to pass this bill swiftly if fighting resumes." While this quote does support a claim that Senator Coons, as an individual, would not support the bill's passage into law at this time, it does not mean that Congress has decided to suspend consideration of the bill. In fact, as noted in the article, all members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, including both Senators Coons and Menendez, recently voted to advance the bill, a move that clearly shows their skepticism regarding the Ethiopian government's claims they are taking steps to bring about lasting peace.

In the United States, the legislative process is often long and grueling, and to those unfamiliar with the steps that are required in order for a bill to be passed into law, it may seem as though these bills have been forgotten. However, we must remember that the legislative process takes time, and that no members of the US Congress have stated that the bill has been "paused" or "suspended". This is another example of disinformation being spread by disingenuous actors hoping to demoralize those who have supported these bills and seek justice for human rights violations. OLLAA's staff will continue to keep you informed about the current status of these bills, and I hope that you will



continue to trust our organization to provide you with accurate and reliable information regarding US foreign policy towards Ethiopia.

Above all, I hope that you all will take away from this statement the message that it is always important to understand the motives of those actors who seek to spread disinformation about these bills and the crisis unfolding throughout Ethiopia. These groups are not interested in ensuring lasting peace and justice for all Ethiopians. They are members of the elite, who have been the sole benefactors under the current system, supported by Prime Minister Abiy, that ensures the supremacy of one ethnic group over the others. They are angry at the members of Congress who have dared to discuss the human rights violations perpetrated against those they view as less worthy of existence. In addition, they fear the effects of these bills on their personal fortunes, which is why they have continued to demand the US Congress allocate more funding to Ethiopia. I believe they should be held accountable for their role in the continuation of this conflict, where not only have thousands have lost their lives and millions been displaced, but ordinary civilians continue to face horrific atrocities, including the use of rape as a weapon of war, starvation into submission, indiscriminate drone attacks, burning humans alive, and many more other heinous acts that constitute crimes against humanity, so far only documented in Tigray. Their anger is not for Ethiopians but, rather, for their corrupt partner in crime.

OLLAA is an umbrella organization that represents Oromo communities around the world.