

An appeal to world leaders: health care for Ethiopians

More than 1 year into the current tragedy in Ethiopia,¹ the situation at Ayder Comprehensive Specialised Hospital, a major teaching institution in Mekele in Tigray, is dire.² In wars there are always many wrongs, often on both sides, but the worst is to deny food and medical care to innocent civilians—anywhere. As such, we, along with signatories of this Correspondence, appeal to the world's medical community to demand protection of hospitals such as Ayder from attack, and furthermore we plead for assistance in ensuring the provision of food, equipment, and medications to care for the civilian population of Tigray.

As staff, and as colleagues who have worked in, visited, and collaborated with staff or are familiar with Ayder Hospital, we know the lengths to which its dedicated team has gone to provide humane, high-standard care in the past 14 years. Now, the hospital has been forced to cancel basic surgeries. The availability of essential medications has, as estimated by the Ayder Hospital,² plummeted from almost 80% 1 year ago to less than 20%, and laboratory tests have dropped from 94% to less than 50%. Patients are dying from a simple lack of a reliable oxygen supply. Due to the blockade of Tigray, spare parts for all medical machinery are not just in short supply—they are non-existent. Neurosurgeons are operating without the benefit of imaging, depending on clinical skills only—a situation reminiscent of the 19th century. In Ayder Hospital, which only recently could boast of its achievements in providing haemodialysis to those in need,³ patients with renal failure are dying before the eyes of attending staff due to the lack of basic supplies. Hospital staff have gone unpaid for most of

2021; and for those who still have some savings, the banks are closed. It is becoming impossible to feed the staff and their children.

In short—a medical catastrophe is unfolding, in the background of war, famine, and a humanitarian tragedy. We demand that the relevant bodies, the UN, the African Union, WHO and, above all, the Ethiopian Government stand by the health workers and the patients in Mekele. It is heartbreaking to see that those with the capacity to help do nothing, merely muttering that they are gravely concerned. We write this on Christmas Day in Ethiopia. We pray for deliverance for Mekele's sick and helpless patients.

We declare no competing interests. Signatories are listed in the appendix.

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- 1 Mackintosh E. Ethiopia is at war with itself. Here's what you need to know about the conflict. Nov 5, 2021. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/03/africa/ethiopia-tigray-explainer-2-intl/index.html> (accessed Jan 7, 2022).
- 2 Houreld K, Paravicini G. Doctors say lives are lost in hospitals in Ethiopia's Tigray due to dwindling supplies, blame blockade. Jan 5, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/doctors-say-lives-are-lost-hospitals-ethiopia-tigray-due-dwindling-supplies-2022-01-05/> (accessed Jan 7, 2022).
- 3 Paltiel O, Berhe E, Aberha AH, Tequare MH, Balabanova D. A public-private partnership for dialysis provision in Ethiopia: a model for high-cost care in low-resource settings. *Health Policy Plan* 2020; **35**: 1262–67.



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