



ethiopian enterprises



Newsletter January 2022

“A Quantum of Solace”



Dear Friends of Ethiopian Enterprises

November 4th, 2021, marked the first anniversary of the ongoing civil war in Ethiopia. The bifurcation between the state of Tigray and the remainder of Ethiopia has deepened in the course of the past year to a point where reconciliation is frankly hard to imagine. In a land where a hang to revenge, jealousy and suspicion has long been part of the nation's DNA, the war has unearthed resentments of decades between family members, communities, ethnic groups, armies and political parties. The results have been seen in savage atrocities and a destabilization of communities throughout the war zones and beyond.

However, a report on the war itself is not the purpose of this Newsletter. Ethiopian Enterprises has followed its mandate of neutrality in the past year, working to help alleviate suffering on both sides of the conflict. Here we want to tell you about the contributions of our team both within Ethiopia and here in Switzerland throughout 2021. Life has continued in Ethiopia despite the war, and we are proud of the contributions made by our local team who have faced substantial risks this year in fulfilling their assignments. At the same time, our founding board members have never stopped working for our projects, whether here or there, and you will read in their own words about smaller and larger steps taken to continue our work in the spirit of our mission.

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Addis Ababa in an uproar

Lesley Stephenson, 23 November 2021, Addis Ababa: 'Addis is in an uproar today. Last night, after a two-day deliberation, Prime Minister Abiy Achmed announced that he and his cabinet ministers would be travelling early this morning, Tuesday November 23rd, as soldiers to warfronts between Bahir Dar and the border of Tigray. 'I can only lead by example' he told the nation on national television, already dressed in his army gear. After that announcement, the whole city was buzzing. Even the mosquitos were edgier than usual.

This morning Abiy and his ministers have left. The TPLF have already offered a reward of ETB 11 million to anyone who provides them with details of his planned destination - the region is large and the Ethiopian National Defence Force and the TPLF are fighting in several different areas. In a few hours, Abiy will defy their offer by posting pictures on his TWITTER account of his location.

,And you? What are you still doing here? Why aren't you joining in?'

In the café close by our family hotel in Bole Subcity, this is the only subject of conversation. One man stands after finishing his coffee and asks us to wish him luck, he is now leaving as Abiy has done to join the soldiers. Yeshi, the best coffee-maker in town, turns indignantly to our manager and says: 'And you? What are you still doing here? Why aren't you joining in?'

We explain to her that we are involved in humanitarian work and that saving lives through emergency aid in both Amhara and Tigray is also an important contribution. 'Yes', she says, 'that is good.' She apologises to our manager, we drink another coffee together and peace is restored. Flareups can erupt within

seconds anywhere right now, especially due to the anger of Addis citizens at the fake news reports throughout Western media of the city being under attack. This has never been the case.

What is true is that the TPLF have an enviable network throughout the country, built up over

Yeshi, the 'best' coffee-maker in Addis



years. Last Friday morning, when I arrived, I was interviewed at the airport by security police for the first time during my war-time visits. This was because arsenals of weapons and stashes of money had been found the previous day throughout Addis in the homes of TPLF sympathisers, possibly part of the preparation for an 'internal' attack. A beggar's shelter on the outskirts of our subcity was raided, producing dozens of guns. Perhaps it was believed that no one would bother searching behind barricades of corrugated iron where the beggars rest at night, but in this case that assumption was wrong. Now, all incoming foreigners need to be checked and I have been escorted by armed guard to a small interview room. The police want to know everything: what I'm doing here, why I come so often, and so on. Then my luggage is searched, eagerly as one guard accuses me of having medicines with me (possibly for the TPLF?). I smile to myself as the bag is opened. I know what he has seen on his screen, and it's not medicine or even food for humans. It's dog food for my pregnant dog,

Grace, who will shortly give birth. The guards laugh at their colleague's error when the mystery is solved, and I'm allowed to leave. What I don't yet know is that Grace will need much more food than I have brought because she will give birth in two weeks' time to 8 puppies. But that is another story.'

Paralysed on site but active behind the scenes

André Cardinaux, December 2021, Langnau am Albis: *'In February 2020, I was in our school in Mehoni for the last time. Who would have thought what would happen immediately afterwards? First the Covid lockdown in March, and then the civil war which unfortunately still makes travelling to our project impossible.*

Since then, of course, I have not remained inactive. There was and is enough to do from here in Switzerland. First the Covid pandemic, which also had to be fought in Ethiopia, then the terrible consequences of the war. Suddenly our focus was not on the school, on buildings, but on one thing: emergency aid!

I personally look after about 40 donors or members, whom I have repeatedly provided with information on the new situation and who have very generously supported us in this difficult situation with donations to our various emergency aid programmes. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them personally once again!

Then I handle our social media sites and presence, i.e. our page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/ethiopianenterprises>, where we have repeatedly uploaded photos and contributions on the current situation and of course also on our website <https://ethiopianenterprises.org/>. Since Lesley writes most of her reports in English, there was also plenty of translation work for me.

,His family members, who did not have a single photo of him, were overjoyed to have a memory of their boy at least in this form'

A special task I had during this time was the creation of photo books for the most diligent helpers of our Lemlem "Garden Club". One particular book I created was for a sad reason, namely after the accident death of Fanno, one of our helpers. His family members, who did not have a single photo of him, were overjoyed to receive this memento of Fanno's short life.

I also created a large photo book for our long-year manager Melkamu, who has done a great job in helping his suffering compatriots at this difficult time. This book brought him great pleasure at this otherwise dark time, and also to his elderly mother who had not previously known anything about his work with us.

Fotobook for Melkamu Abate



Of course, after an absence of almost two years, I would very much like to be back on site at our school and meet in person the many friends we have made there over all these years. However, the political situation at present is such that a visit in the near future unfortunately seems unlikely.'

The crisis gnaws at my spirit

Thomas Baumann, reflections throughout 2021: *'The past year was without a doubt the most difficult for me as president of Ethiopian Enterprises. Not that it brought an overload of work, no, on the contrary I would have been more than happy to deliver more constructive project work. What made this time so difficult were the manifold impacts of the on-going war between Tigray and the Central Government of Ethiopia.*

'The complete absence of empathy is something I can't grasp either emotionally or intellectually'

First, there is the indescribable agony that has been caused by this war. And again it has been, as always, the poorest and weakest members of society who have been most affected. Exactly those groups of people for which the governments should carry particular responsibility.

What makes this conflict even worse is that, in my opinion, it would have been avoidable. Ostensibly it is a conflict between ethnic groups. However, I think that the political and military leaders on both sides are exploiting historic rivalries, in particular between the Amharans and the Tigrayans. And they are doing so very skilfully in order to defend and maintain their own power and economic sinecures, and to hide their war crimes. I will never comprehend either emotionally or intellectually the complete absence of empathy which 'enables' the commitment of atrocities and war crimes by the mostly uneducated infantry. Unfortunately, the comments in the various

local news portals are equally hateful and primitive, just as they are over our way when it comes to the currently prevailing topic.

Secondly, uncertainty about the whereabouts and well-being of our smaller and larger friends in Mehoni and Kukuftu, such as those I have shown on the front page, gnaws all the time. Have they remained safe? Or are they starving? Do they still have shelter? How are they coping mentally, particularly the children of our schools, should they have witnessed armed conflict, killings and other atrocities? I don't know.

Against this background, the uncertainty about the state of our beautiful school buildings becomes almost a minor sorrow. We have received reports that Lemlem Baro School has been used as a military hospital which may well have helped protect the buildings provided that the soldiers have been shown a minimal level of respect for their enemies. Either way, I think there will be heaps of work for us - if and when we get back to Mehoni - to bring the schools back to the level they had reached prior to the conflict.



Devastated small-scale farmhouse (more disturbing pictures are not shown here)

But then there will be other questions: Will we be able to resume our work? Will the incoming administration want to cooperate with us again? And will we ourselves want to do so if the leaders were involved in the war and in war crimes, which we condemn to the fullest? These

uneasy thoughts have provided me with more than one sleepless night.

'A Quantum of Solace'

The fact that we have been able to provide genuine emergency aid under very challenging conditions (as described later in this report) is very satisfying. While small scale, it has been successful, which means for me that the aid was provided free of corruption to the appropriate needy people. As an analogy: recently, a surrendering TPLF officer was caught with high-nutrition bars funded by a large international NGO. These had been intended for starving children.

A quantum of solace has also been provided by the successful scholarship program for those young men and women who have been able to escape from Tigray and who have successfully started their studies in Addis Abeba, Arba Minch and Hawasa. And yet it is just a quantum which is quickly dissolved by the uncertainty about the whereabouts of our many students in Mehoni, Kukuftu and Cher-Cher.

'What we would need now? A dozen Nelson Mandelas!'

In the meantime, it appears to have dawned on the conflicting parties that a solution to the conflict cannot be achieved by military means. That's a start. However, when I read the letter that Debretsion Gebremichael (the leader of the TPLF) has written to Antonio Guterres in which he has announced the withdrawal of his troops back to Tigray, I have no illusion about his sincerity. The letter is full of hypocrisy and false claims. What would be needed instead is honesty, integrity, respect and the real will to shape the fate of the Ethiopian peoples in a constructive way in order to achieve peaceful

co-existence. If the path to this target entails the secession of Tigray, and possibly that of further regional states, so be it. What is essential is that the process remains non-violent and humane. But I fear that this is too much to wish for because the Nelson Mandelas of this planet are all too rare.

Sunset over the Gheralta mountains



For the Grace of Glory

Lesley Stephenson, December 2021: *'This story may seem a far cry from our mandate for Ethiopia. In some ways it is, and that is why everything involved with the story below has been, and will continue to be, financed privately by one of our board members. Nevertheless; when you read the story and reflect upon it, you may well agree that the mind-set changes which have occurred in this connection are absolutely in line with our work in education in Ethiopia.'*

In September, we met two female street dogs close to a family hotel we use in Addis: Senty Hotel. They were a mother and daughter, two beautiful animals, and we named them Glory (the mother) and Grace. Glory was heavily pregnant, Grace was beginning a pregnancy.

Addis Ababa and indeed all of Ethiopia is full of street dogs. Some survive on the scraps given to them by kinder citizens, lucky animals are taken in by foreigners living in the cities and sometimes even move back with their owners to the US, the UK or Europe. Most of the animals live in packs and are shy of humans, a sign that they have not always been well treated. Neutering is rare.

Glory and Grace were their own small pack. They had received a certain amount of food from the hotel owner and people who lived round about. They were friendly dogs and well behaved with most humans except towards the drunks who emerged from a nearby 'drinking hole' late at night. Then they would bark furiously until the drunks had swayed past, suggesting that perhaps an ugly wound on Grace's flank had been made by such a man. We'll never know.

We helped feed the dogs and fell in love with them. But three weeks after our return to Switzerland in October, Glory gave birth to a single still-born puppy and died herself shortly afterwards. The vet who had promised to help the dogs if help was required couldn't be reached.

All of us, here and there, were extremely upset by this event and we decided that we would not let this be Grace's fate.

Grace shortly before giving birth



Our suitcases for our final 2021 visit were packed with dog food and bedding, and the owner of Senty's hotel allowed us to create a protective tent for Grace in the hotel's outside washing area made with our suitcases, sheets and rugs. There, with the help of our manager and the hotel guard, we stayed with her round the clock, sharing a blanket with her in the cold and windy Addis nights, and gained her full trust. On December 1st she delivered 8 pups to the world and honoured Lesley and our manager by letting them sit with her during the birth. On December 4th we were able to move her and the pups to her first safe and secure location where she enjoys good nutrition, her own 'nursery' room and lots of love and

kindness. The puppies are now a month old and all alive and well at this time.

That this was a stressful exercise for all of us goes without saying. It remains our private contribution to animal protection in Ethiopia. No-one wanted to take responsibility for these dogs, but it was interesting what happened when they saw us doing so. Senty's hotel filled up with Ethiopian visitors. When we commented on this, we were told that locals who had friends or relatives visiting were telling people to stay there and see the 'farangi' lady who was sleeping outside with street dogs. It seemed incredible that we should be making such an effort to help a single dog. Even our kind manager and the caring hotel guard told us that they had never seen such kindness for an animal and that they had learned a lot from our example.

Animal protection facilities don't exist in Ethiopia. Generally speaking, the treatment of animals is poor to excessively cruel, and this has led to several incidents over the years we have worked in Ethiopia. When we have intervened in totally unacceptable situations, people have always been surprised. We can only hope that the individuals who have seen our affection and care for animals will remember this and treat their own more kindly. If the treatment of animals improved, and empathy for them developed, we might not see such bloody atrocities being inflicted by humans on other humans. The current conflict is a case in point.'

Proud mummy of eight (!) puppies



Emergency Relief in 2021

Ethiopian Enterprises began to provide emergency food relief in the Raya region in April 2020 as a response to Corona. For months we were the only NGO helping the region in this way and our help continued until September 2020 with a large allocation in the Raya region of Cher Cher in which board member Lesley Stephenson participated. All in all we made five allocations during 2020, each costing between CHF 20'000 - 25'000.

Then came the war. Our activities were severely handicapped in 2021 due to the difficulty of travel between Amhara and Tigray. Nevertheless, Lesley returned to Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, in March/April, and was able to support our manager in organising two allocations in our project region. The last, at the end of May 2021, was delivered to our school community as they registered their children for the new school year and what we hoped was a return to normality. However, in June, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces who had been helping to keep the region secure, withdrew. Within days, the TPLF assumed control. At the end of June, the state of Tigray had entered a lockdown/locked in phase which is still operating.

Nevertheless, between August 20th and 24th 2021, further funds supplied to Ethiopian Enterprises for emergency support were transferred to Ethiopia in preparation for our 3rd round of emergency food relief this year. Within a few days, our local manager and his team were able to purchase over 350 quintals of rice in the farming town of Wereta in the zone of southern Gonder in Amhara. A quintal is the common weight unit used for measuring grain, and represents 100 kg. So a total of 35'000 kg (35 tons) was purchased. This purchase was made before the exact allocation plan for this round of emergency aid had been finalised as the prices for rice, millet and the

Ethiopian grain Tef have escalated throughout rural Amhara and Tigray during the civil war. With the state of Tigray completely shut off from the remainder of Ethiopia, the grain could only be purchased in Amhara.

Emergency relief in Amhara



We and our local team considered it essential to secure the grain at the best available price as quickly as possible, and our decision proved wise. The grain was then stored in a secure warehouse close to Wereta.

Throughout September, the grain was weighed, parcelled, transported and allocated to nearly 1'500 families spread across three rural townships in Amhara: Nefas Mawcha, Meket and Lay Gayint. These towns are located roughly half way between the Amharan city of Bahir Dar and the south western border of Tigray. They have all been subjected to repeated attacks and plundering during the

themselves just 20 kms from a war zone. Normally their information was very precise but on this occasion a second circle of fighting had erupted overnight. Nevertheless, within a week they were able to return and deliver the grain to its intended recipients.



civil war, largely by the TPLF - Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front. The local councils in each town supplied our team with lists of their most vulnerable families and these families received a grain package. In addition, rice was allocated to hundreds of displaced Tigrayans in a large camp north east of Nefas Mawcha.



Ethiopian Enterprises demonstrates political neutrality

We estimate that between 8'500 and 10'000 individuals received packages which would last for several weeks (between 20-50kgs depending on the size of the family) in the course of these allocations. Our expenditure for the three allocations in 2021 was CHF 71'000.

Without the dedication and bravery of our team, of course, this support would not have been possible. Only on one occasion did they have to abort a mission when they found

Scholarship Program

One of the important things we have been able to do this year despite the challenges of wartime has been to look after our university scholarship students. We currently have 12 students at universities in Addis Ababa, Arba Minch and Hawasa, and one student starting a business administration course in January 2022 at a college in Addis Ababa. In addition, one of our high school scholarship students recently 'escaped' from Tigray and is about to settle into an English language school in Addis.

Our students at the Science and Technology Institute of Addis Ababa University did well in their first semester exams in October. Despite the late start into their freshman year due to the long and harrowing trip they had to make from Tigray to Addis (much of it on foot), they all passed their first semester and have moved on into the second. They were allowed to remain on campus during the semester break as there was simply nowhere else for them to go. We were able to supply them with extra books and some 'fun' art materials to keep them entertained during the break, as well as extra food supplies. It is difficult for all of them to be away from their communities with no news of their families for months.

The two girls in the university program, Senait and Harignesh, are doing extremely well and we are proud of them. We have many more female students in our high school program in Tigray and hope that when the state finally reopens they will still want to continue their education.

Tadele Kalayu and his twin brother Hailu, both from our pilot STIP program, are streaking ahead. When Mekelle university was closed in

summer due to a lack of budget to feed its live-in students, Tadele was studying Software Engineering there. He managed to escape to Addis just before the lockdown. He and many of his colleagues have now been transferred by the education department to Arba Minch in southern Ethiopia. The twins have received laptops from the program this year as well as other materials. They have joined the get-togethers with other students which we hold on our trips to Addis, and this is important for all of them.

Nigus Haftu, university student in Addis Ababa



All our students have a story to tell and most stories are very tough. Still, one happy story reached us just before Christmas. Our older student in Addis, Getachew Tesfay, received a telephone call from a relative in Cher Cher, a farming region within our scholarship area in Raya. The relative had managed to find a connection outside the town and informed Getachew that his elderly parents and siblings were all safe. In addition, he said that the farmers in this community had just completed harvesting their tef which is plentiful in the region due to substantial rain in 2021. We can

only hope the story is similar in Kukufto and the farming hamlets around Mehoni.

Studenten in Addis Ababa (November 2021)



Many thanks to you all

During the past year, many of you have provided us with additional support. This was perhaps additional funding for our emergency relief work, the sponsorship of a student in our scholarship program, or support for our various collections of urgently required materials. We have continued our work to the best of our ability, and you have not given up on us despite the challenges we have faced. We have received warm and motivating comments on our efforts and about the Newsletters, and this in turn has been a strong support on darker days.

We board members thank you all, and wish you a fulfilling, joyous and healthy 2022.

Lesley, Caroline, André und Thomas



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