



PAAI Executive Brief No. 1

A Peace Agreement in Terminal Crisis: What Is at Stake?

Dr. Makda Maru
Prof Mehari Taddele Maru

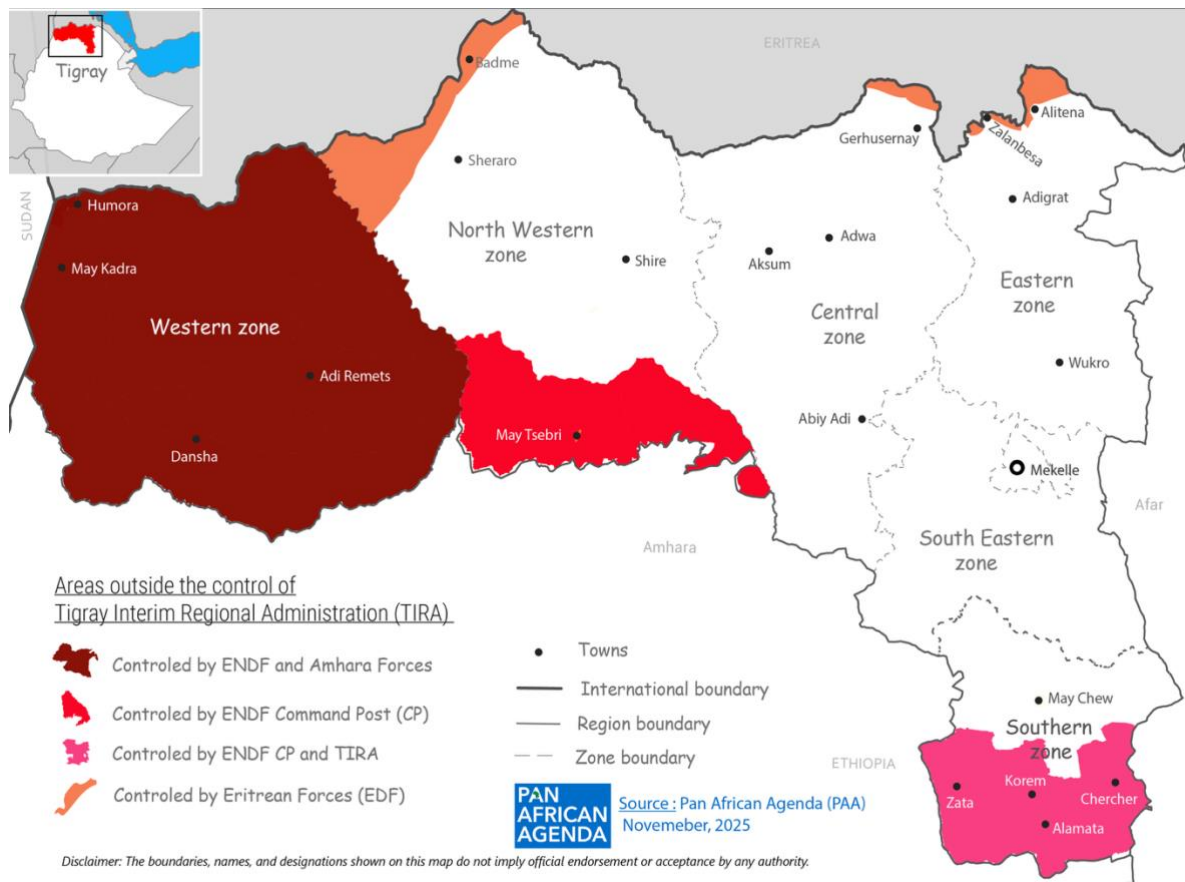
On 14 May 2026, the African Union Commission Chairperson, H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, appointed former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo to support AU peace efforts in the Horn of Africa,¹ less than two months after appointing former Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete as AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea on 25 March 2026.² Two high-profile appointments in eight weeks. Two mandates have yet to be clearly delineated. These appointments raise urgent questions. Are these mandates complementary or overlapping? Does Obasanjo's appointment replace or supersede Kikwete's appointment? If, as some argue, the Obasanjo appointment is specifically targeted at de-escalating military mobilisation in Ethiopia and Tigray, what is the justification for a new appointment rather than recalling the existing mediators, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and former South African Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka? But these institutional questions, important as they are, must not distract from the far more pressing and urgent issue at hand: the catastrophic failure to implement the Pretoria Agreement.

The appointments came at a time when the Horn of Africa is hurtling toward the precipice of renewed war.

Well over three years after the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (the Pretoria Agreement) between the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was signed on 2 November 2022, the promise of peace remains largely unfulfilled. An agreement that ended the war that claimed an estimated 319,000 direct battlefield deaths, 61% of African conflict fatalities during the period, and over 600,000 lives, including indirect deaths from starvation and disease, the deadliest globally since the Rwandan genocide of 1994, has met systematic non-implementation, impunity, and institutional neglect.

¹ African Union Commission, "AU Commission Chairperson Appoints President Obasanjo to Support Peace Efforts in the Horn of Africa," Press Release, May 14, 2026, Addis Ababa: African Union, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20260514/auc-chairperson-appoints-president-obasanjo-support-peace-efforts-horn>.

² African Union Commission, "Chairperson of the AU Commission Appoints President Jakaya Kikwete as the AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea," Press Release, March 25, 2026, Addis Ababa: African Union, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20260325/auc-chairperson-appoints-president-jakaya-kikwete-au-high-representative>



Description

The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the GoE and the TPLF, referred to as the Pretoria Agreement (2 November 2022) and implemented through the Nairobi Declaration (12 November 2022), concluded one of the most lethal conflicts of the 21st century. By halting large-scale military operations, the Agreement produced an immediate and consequential reduction in battlefield fatalities. Three years on, however, this Policy Brief finds that **the Pretoria Agreement has failed to achieve its core political, humanitarian, and institutional objectives**. While negative peace, the absence of active fighting, has been achieved, the Agreement has not translated into **positive peace**, defined by constitutional restoration, justice and accountability, inclusive governance, and sustainable recovery.

Absent urgent revitalization, the Pretoria Agreement risks becoming obsolete—particularly amid escalating Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions and widening regional instability—raising the prospect of renewed war in Tigray and across the Horn of Africa.

Based on an evidence-based, mixed-methods study of 103 participants and a 78-page Peace Agreement Implementation Report, PAAI finds that:

- 83% of respondents report that the constitutional order has not been restored

- 89% express no trust in either the GoE or the TPLF to deliver justice or accountability
- Over 70% assess economic recovery efforts as ineffective or entirely absent
- Approximately 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain unable to return home due to continued occupation and insecurity.

The African Union's own Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mechanism (MVCM) has proven fundamentally ineffective, producing virtually no consequences for systematic non-compliance. A planned AU Peace and Security Council field mission to Tigray was cancelled without adequate explanation, as was the Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate massive allegations of international human rights and humanitarian law violations in the Tigray Region. This means the continental body has yet to engage with one of Africa's most devastating wars, three years after its formal conclusion.

The Pretoria Agreement set out several crucial objectives:

1. Immediate cessation of hostilities;
2. Restoration of constitutional order and federal authority in Tigray;
3. Rejection of violence as a means of resolving political differences;
4. Protection of civilians and the provision of security;
5. Return of refugees and IDPs;
6. Unhindered humanitarian access;
7. Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of combatants;
8. Political dialogue, including the establishment of an interim regional administration and the resolution of constitutional issues;
9. Transitional justice; and
10. Post-war reconstruction and development.

This PAAI Policy Brief highlights the extent to which the Agreement has fulfilled its intended objectives, identifies the primary challenges encountered during its implementation, and examines how affected communities perceive its sustainability. Utilizing mixed-methods research involving 103 participants (expert interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions), analyzed through a Peace Agreement Implementation Assessment Matrix, the findings reveal systematic, deliberate, and politically motivated non-implementation across nearly all substantive provisions of the Agreement. The analysis is conducted along three principal dimensions: the extent of implementation, the major areas of progress, and the barriers to the implementation process.

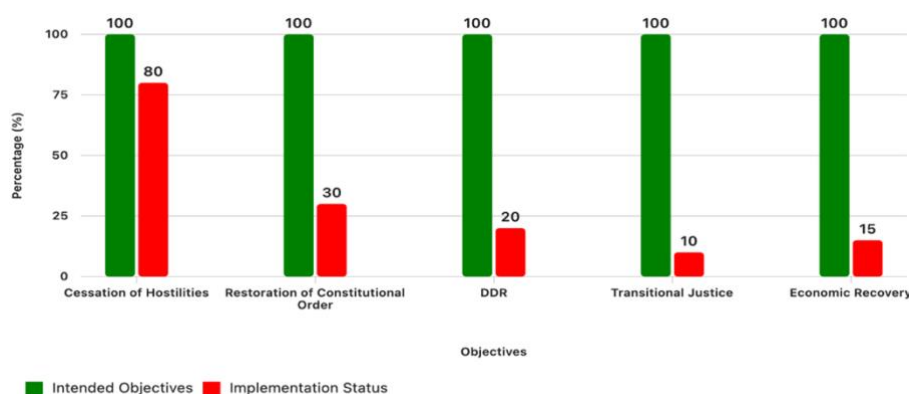
Methodology

This brief draws on the **Peace Agreement Implementation Report (PAIR)** study conducted by PAAI, employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative evidence. Data sources include expert interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions, systematically assessed through an Implementation Assessment Matrix to evaluate compliance, sequencing, and political feasibility.

Findings

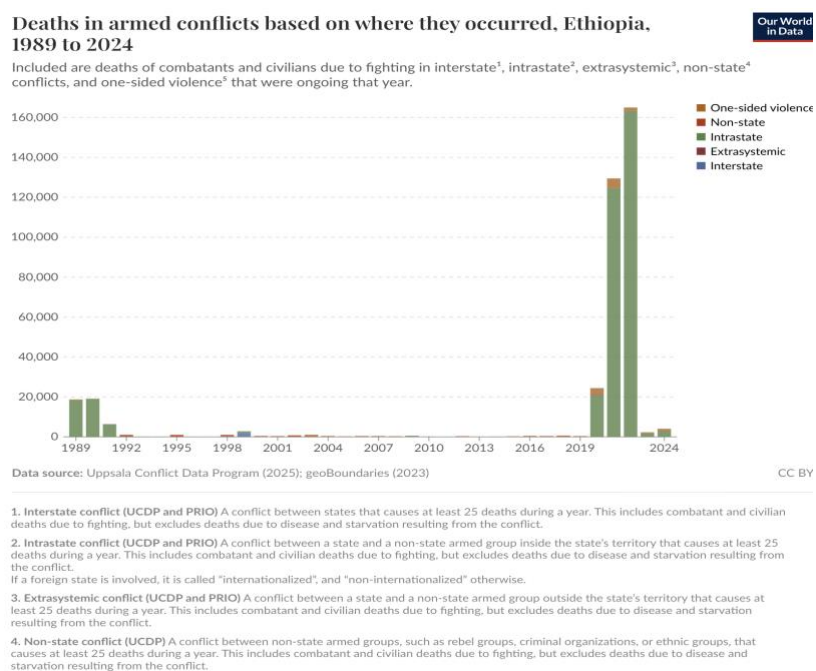
The Pretoria Agreement represents a significant humanitarian achievement by halting the Ethiopia-Eritrea war against Tigray forces (2020-2022), stopping battle fatalities and mass atrocities. It demonstrated the value of diplomatic mediation in resolving complex internationalized conflicts.

Figure 1: Pretoria Agreement intended objectives vs implementation status



With 319,000 deaths from fighting (61% of Africa's fatalities in that period), the war on Tigray was the world's deadliest war. Including indirect deaths from disease and starvation due to blockades, total mortality exceeded 600,000, making it the deadliest conflict since the 1994 Rwandan genocide. After the Pretoria Agreement, fatalities plummeted.

Figure 2: Surge in fatalities during the war on Tigray

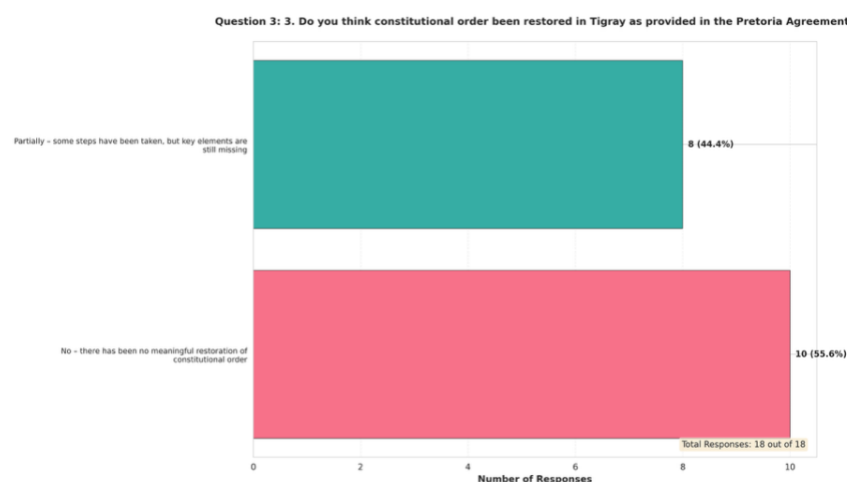


The United Nations International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) determined widespread atrocities by all parties, amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray. Abuses include targeting civilians, indiscriminate shelling, starvation as a weapon, forced displacement, and widespread sexual violence intended to destroy the reproductive capacity of Tigrayan women. According to the Commission of Inquiry, 286, 250 survivors experienced sexual and gender-based violence.³ The war's economic impact exceeded USD 140 billion. In Western Tigray, authorities systematically committed violence against Tigrayans, which Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch deemed ethnic cleansing. The U.S. State Department drafted but never released a genocide declaration regarding Ethiopian atrocities in Tigray. Reports indicate the Biden administration feared a "second Rwanda" scenario but halted genocide determination to pursue diplomatic engagement.

Beyond this, however, progress in implementation has been dismal. Research involving over 103 participants reveals systematic implementation failure across virtually all substantive provisions of the Agreement.

The most significant implementation failure concerns the restoration of constitutional order. The evidence is unambiguous that the constitutional *status quo ante* remains unrealized. Territorial integrity has not been restored; displaced persons cannot safely return; and Eritrean and Amhara forces continue to occupy parts of Tigray. Over 83% of survey respondents report that constitutional order has not been restored, and approximately 1 million IDPs remain unable to return to their homes due to continued occupation and insecurity (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Restoration of Constitutional order



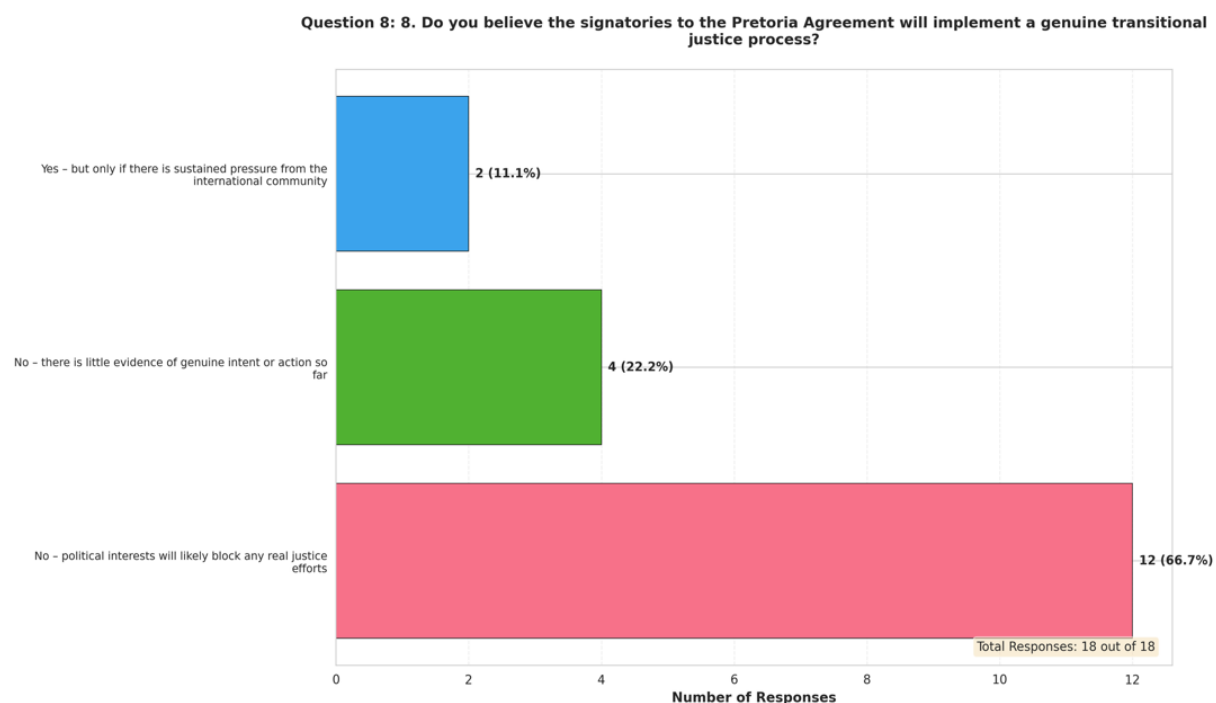
³ Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide. The systematic undoing of society: War damage and loss in the social sector of Tigray (Vol. 1). Mekelle, Ethiopia: Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide. <https://citghub.org/war-induced-genocidal-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-tigray-ethiopia-vol-1/>

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process exemplifies how implementation has been weaponized for political purposes rather than serving peacebuilding objectives.

The root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed, and no genuine political dialogue has taken place. Political engagement has degenerated into a humiliating process in which Tigrayan officials are reduced to petitioners rather than equal partners in governance, as the Agreement envisioned.

Transitional justice and accountability represent perhaps the most consequential abandonment of Agreement commitments by all, including GoE, TPLF, the AU, and the UN and its key member states. Justice and accountability mechanisms are entirely absent, with no investigations, prosecutions, or reconciliation frameworks. The UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia's mandate ended in October 2023 despite documenting widespread war crimes and ethnic cleansing against Tigrayans, while the African Union's Commission of Inquiry was also terminated prematurely. These terminations reflected political pressure rather than achieving justice, abandoning victims to impunity. 89% of surveyed respondents lacked trust in parties to deliver justice, while over three-quarters were unaware of transitional justice initiatives, with aware respondents viewing existing efforts as superficial (See Figure 4).

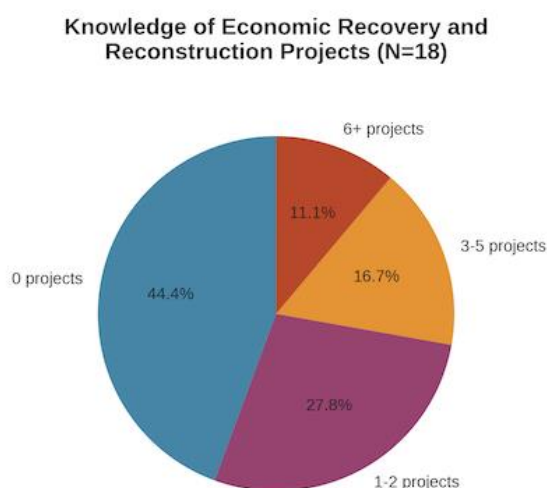
Figure 4: Trust on genuine justice and accountability



Economic recovery and reconstruction remain minimal to absent, despite war damages exceeding tens of billions of dollars. Despite the staggering magnitude of destruction exceeding USD 140 billion according to the reports by the Commission of

Inquiry on Tigray Genocide,⁴ virtually no systematic post-war rebuilding effort has commenced. More than 70% of survey respondents characterize recovery efforts as either entirely absent or severely ineffective, not only due to a lack of sufficient resources but also due to a lack of transparent planning and willingness (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Economic Recovery and Reconstruction

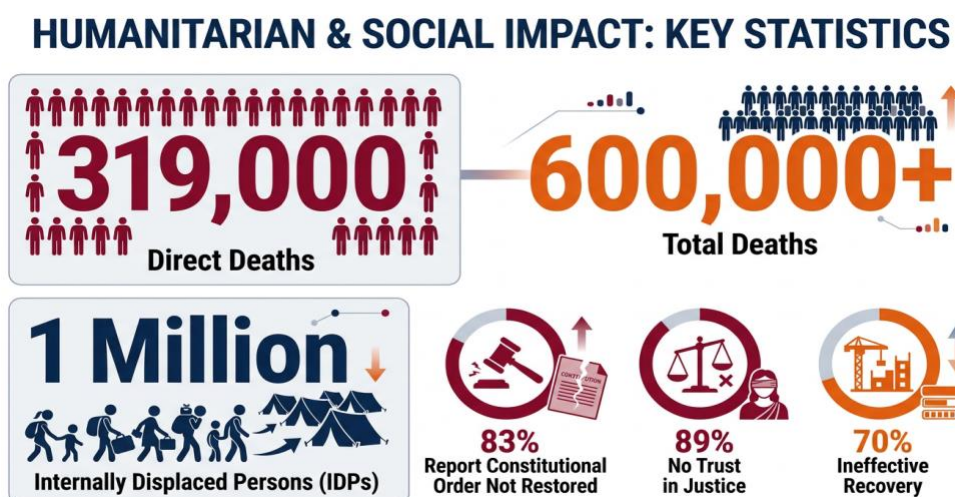


The monitoring and verification mechanisms established under the Agreement have proven fundamentally ineffective. The AU MVCMM is weak, lacking meaningful impact on compliance, while producing virtually no consequences for systematic non-compliance by signatory parties. A planned African Union Peace and Security Council field mission to Tigray was canceled without adequate explanation, meaning the continental body has yet to visit the site of one of Africa's most devastating wars three years after its formal conclusion.

These implementation failures are compounded by rapidly evolving regional dynamics that threaten to render the Pretoria Agreement obsolete. The prospect of interstate war between Ethiopia and Eritrea over Red Sea access and geopolitical tensions poses an existential threat to peace. Conflicts in Ethiopia's Amhara and Oromia regions, along with Sudan's catastrophic war since April 2023, create instability that could overwhelm stabilization efforts. Tigray faces a neutrality trap, where attempts at balance among regional adversaries are seen as hostility, magnifying existential risk.

⁴ Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide. *The systematic undoing of society: War damage and loss in the social sector of Tigray* (Vol. 1). Mekelle, Ethiopia: Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide. <https://citghub.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/The-Systematic-Undoing-of-Society-War-Damage-and-Loss-in-the-Social-Sector-of-Tigray-2.pdf> ; Commission of Inquiry for Tigray Genocide (CITG). 2025. "CITG Report Reveals \$46.6 Billion Damage to Tigray's Natural Resources and Environment from War and Siege." <https://tigrayitv.com/en/citg-report-reveals-46-6-billion-damage-to-tigrays-natural-resources-from-war-and-siege/>. ; Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide (CITG). 2025. "Report on Tigray's Productive Sector and Livelihood: Effects and Impacts of the War, Siege, and Blockade – Volume 1." <https://tinyurl.com/3vu2xc32>.

Figure 6: Humanitarian & Social Impact



Why Implementation Failed

The failure to implement the Pretoria Agreement is not merely incidental or due to technical difficulties; rather, it is a consequence of structural and deliberate political decisions. Both the GoE and the TPLF have opted to maintain their tactical advantages in the pursuit of power and resource politics, rather than striving for genuine peace. Critical obligations remain unfulfilled due to systematically low compliance from the GoE and power-driven calculations by the TPLF, which has used the plight of IDPs as leverage in political negotiations. The lack of political will on both sides is particularly evident. The research demonstrates a clear correlation between political will and the outcomes of implementation.

1. Obligations representing shared priorities of both parties, specifically the cessation of hostilities and establishment of an interim regional administration, were implemented relatively quickly because they demanded no fundamental shift in power relations or accountability for past actions.
2. In stark contrast, obligations prioritized primarily by one party, but requiring the other party's action have encountered systematic obstruction and active resistance from both sides. For example, the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), a priority for the Government of Ethiopia, has faced resistance as Tigrayan forces maintain military capacity as insurance against renewed conflict. The TPLF also benefits from the continued mobilization of the Tigrayan army as a deterrent and insurance mechanism should hostilities resume, thus rationalizing incomplete disarmament, despite Agreement commitments. Similarly, the restoration of occupied Tigrayan territories, a fundamental priority for Tigray, has been systematically obstructed by the GoE. This enables the GoE to avoid confrontation with Eritrean and Amhara actors, important given their valuable cooperation in efforts to contain Tigray. At the same time, the GoE derives strategic benefit from continued territorial

ambiguity and the resultant weakening of Tigrayan political and economic capacity.

3. The low level of implementation has, in effect, enabled the instrumentalization of the Agreement by its signatories. The GoE has used the Agreement to consolidate its control over Tigray and to absolve itself of responsibilities related to justice, accountability and post-war recovery. Conversely, the TPLF has sought to leverage the Agreement by making the return of IDPs conditional on the reestablishment of its party structures and dominance in Western Tigray, and by utilizing public resources to remunerate loyalist functionaries appointed as proxy administrators elsewhere in the region.
4. Having secured its primary wartime objective of ending active military resistance, the GoE faces minimal immediate costs for indefinitely deferring obligations that would benefit Tigray, particularly given the absence of effective international enforcement mechanisms with real leverage.
5. This mutual failure of key provisions reflects the classic security dilemma in post-conflict environments, where neither party trusts the other sufficiently to fully implement obligations that would reduce their strategic position, resulting in an unstable equilibrium that maintains negative peace while preventing a transition to sustainable positive peace.

The Pretoria Agreement was premised on a delicate balance: Ethiopia's sovereignty and GoE authority, Tigray's security and autonomy, and regional stability under international oversight. Yet asymmetrical implementation has eroded this balance, leaving trust shattered on all sides. There is also divergence of interest and narrative about the Pretoria Agreement among the TPLF, GoE, the AU, and the international community.

For many in Tigray, the Agreement now represents a peace imposed rather than a negotiated one that freezes the status quo instead of transforming it.

For the GoE, Tigray's internal fragmentation offers a convenient rationale to deflect responsibility, recasting noncompliance as a problem of regional governance rather than GoE's failure.

Meanwhile, major external stakeholders, the USA, the EU, and the AU, have prioritized the appearance of stability over substantive peace. In this context, Tigray's political disarray is both a symptom and driver of a broader regional disorder. Its weakened institutions constrain national engagement, while unaddressed grievances fuel cycles of militarization that undermine regional peacebuilding. The failures of the AU, the UN, and IGAD have deepened cynicism toward both continental and international institutions.

This pattern mirrors documented pathologies of peace-agreement failure. As Joshi and Mason (2011)⁵ note, implementation collapses when parties sign without genuine commitment. Others emphasize weak institutions,⁶ and elite resistance to power-sharing.⁷ The Pretoria case shows these features, but its core problem is a fundamental lack of political determination by parties and a lack of commitment from the Pan African and international community, shown by absent incentives and punitive measures on the GoE and TPLF.

As Bell and Pospisil describe, this situation reflects a *formalized political unsettlement* where a peace accord that contains rather than resolves conflict enables the continuation of political struggles through nonviolent but still adversarial means.⁸ Three years on, Pretoria has entrenched this unsettled order. Both parties and their constituents recognize that no genuine political settlement has been achieved. The Agreement has buried root causes while ensuring Tigray's containment.

Policy prescription

As a result, the Pretoria Agreement achieved *negative peace*, the cessation of direct violence, but not *positive peace*, which requires structural justice, inclusive governance, and sustainable institutions. Yet if revitalized and fully implemented, the Agreement still holds the potential to transform Ethiopia's internal conflicts into a foundation for regional stability. Achieving this, however, demands honest reckoning with past failures, renewed political will from both Addis Ababa and Mekelle, and principled engagement from the African Union and international partners.

The first proposal advances the imperative of launching intensive high-level diplomacy to prevent a relapse into conflict between the GoE and TPLF, recognizing that renewed fighting, particularly as part of the looming Ethiopia-Eritrea war, would render the Pretoria Agreement obsolete. Preventing war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, therefore, must begin with renewed international commitment to revitalize the full and effective implementation of the Pretoria Agreement, with mechanisms in place to ensure such. The most urgent task for international actors, particularly the United States, which commands significant leverage over the parties, is to deploy credible warnings and engage in sustained preventive diplomacy aimed at rapid and effective implementation of the Pretoria Agreement.

⁵ Joshi, Madhav, and David Mason. 2011. "Civil War Settlements, Size of Governing Coalition, and Durability of Peace in Post-Civil War States." *Taylor & Francis Journals*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03050629.2011.622645>.

⁶ Stedman, John. 1997. "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes." *Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford University*. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/123283/1997_Spoiler_Problems_in_Peace_Processes.pdf

⁷ Kaldor, Mary. 2013. "In Defence of New Wars." (Department of Peace Studies and International Development, University of Bradford). <https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/sta.at> ; de Waal, Alex. 2015. "The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power." (Polity Press). <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=3911898>.

⁸ Pospisil, Jan and Bell, Christine. 2017. "Navigating Inclusion in Transitions from Conflict: The Formalised Political Unsettlement." Wiley Online Library. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jid.3283> ;

The second proposal calls for a comprehensive revitalization of the Pretoria Agreement through re-engagement with all stakeholders to account for new realities and actors that have emerged since signing. These include the need to reconstitute the Tigray transitional process. Several factors necessitate this revitalization: the implementation impasse and mounting popular frustrations; escalating tensions between GoE and TPLF; the Ethiopia-Eritrea confrontation; internal divisions within both TPLF and former Tigray Interim Regional Administration (TIRA); and systematic exclusion of key political forces from the transitional process. The renewed implementation mechanism should aim to reconstitute the transitional process through inclusive consultations with all political forces and ensure it reflects the diversity of Tigrayan society and possesses genuine legitimacy and capacity to function as the primary regional implementer alongside the federal government. The revitalized plan must rectify critical shortcomings of the original Agreement by ensuring inclusive consultation and establishing credible enforcement mechanisms.

The third proposal advances the creation of a ‘Friends of the Pretoria Agreement’ group to provide the international support mechanism necessary for sustained pressure, oversight, and guarantor functions while imposing meaningful consequences on violators and spoilers through coordinated international action. This ‘Friends of the Pretoria Agreement’ should replace the ineffective African Union Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mechanism (AU-MVCM) with stronger oversight structures that establish realistic timelines for all obligations, supported by robust compliance mechanisms, enforcement through punitive accountability measures for spoilers, and transparent reporting structures. The group should include actors with leverage over the parties, the USA, UN, EU, AU, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, among other relevant stakeholders. These actors would support speedy implementation by establishing clear, measurable benchmarks and timelines for key obligations, conducting regular reviews with transparent public reporting of progress and gaps, and providing resources for formalized and institutionalized political dialogue.

The fourth proposal calls for active and urgent mobilization of local constituencies for peace, to build agency within communities and establish regional networks capable of resisting war, atrocities, and impunity. This approach recognizes that sustainable peace requires more than elite-level diplomacy and international pressure, and envisions innovating the future of peacebuilding through bottom-up mobilization, drawing inspiration from historic civil society movements such as pro-peace, anti-war community-based movements in Africa and elsewhere, such as the Emergency Response Rooms of Sudan, the Alliance of Civil Society Organizations of Tigray (ACSOT) and its members, and the Tigray Accountability Coalition. Similar to these transformative grassroots movements, local actors would organize around the prevention of war and mass atrocities, ensuring that communities most affected by conflict become central participants in shaping and sustaining peace rather than passive beneficiaries of externally imposed settlements. Such mobilization must move beyond state-centric peace and security frameworks towards a more participatory architecture inclusive of civil society. A key constituency across all levels – global, continental, national, and local – is Generation Z. Creating alternative civic spaces for young people, women, and youth

organizations to engage proactively in movements for peace and justice is a strategic imperative for long-term conflict prevention and durable peacebuilding.

At this juncture, a renewed commitment to implementation or a continued drift toward non-compliance will determine the future not only of Tigray but also of the broader Horn of Africa region. Without a fundamental course correction, the Pretoria Agreement risks becoming not a celebrated blueprint for peace and reconciliation, but rather a sobering historical record of solemn promises made, documented, and then systematically unfulfilled.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume is published in partnership with Pan African Intellectuals (PAI).

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the institutional positions of PAAI or PAI.

We also thank the Open Society Foundations for their financial support.

© 2026 PAAI

Copyright in this volume as a whole is vested in the Pan African Agenda Institute (PAAI).

REVIEW COMMITTEE

1. Mengo Shelastine
2. Abdelkader Abderrahmane
3. Enoch Aikins
4. Darlington Tshuma
5. Emmanuella Aggrey
6. Massimo Guglietta