

## Responding to the Humanitarian Crisis in Ethiopia



*In Ethiopia, a long-standing political disagreement between the federal government and the northern state of Tigray's regional government led to an outbreak of hostilities in November of 2020. Related military action resulted in general insecurity, internal and external displacements, and disruption of livelihoods. An estimated 5.2 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance; and as of January, approximately 495,000 people had been internally displaced in the region.*

***Week of Compassion is responding, supporting partners in the region as they work to meet critical needs.*** The conflict in Ethiopia is especially dire for already vulnerable groups. Women and girls are particularly at risk in situations like these--especially those who are internally displaced. In addition to other needs, they require protection from assault and harassment. There is also an urgent need to provide immediate assistance in the way of food, water, safety, and shelter for those fleeing from the conflict areas. Week of Compassion program priorities for 2021 include programs focused on ending gender-based violence; supporting girls' education and women's empowerment; and prioritizing protections for refugees, migrants, and internally displaced people.

Since the May 1 initiation of this response plan, Week of Compassion partners in the region have reached about 3.7 million people with food aid, out of the targeted 5.2 million. In addition to food security, our partners are also sharing support for early livelihood recovery and infrastructure for improved sanitation and hygiene practices, including those that protect against COVID-19. Preventing the spread of disease is of particular concern, given the high number of internally displaced people now living inside schools, where distancing is difficult and access to adequate hygiene facilities is limited. Of even greater concern for those in this vulnerable situation: getting enough safe drinking water to survive another day.

Partners are working to deliver water by truck into the IDP camps. But the process is hindered by challenges of the rainy season, with damage to dirt roads making it difficult to transport, while also causing strain on the water and sanitation systems. Fuel shortages make for even greater difficulty. In addition to transporting water,

partners are also planning to drill a borehole well, and then establish a water distribution plan. Longer term plans include water purification tablets for tens of thousands, as well as the installation of latrines and showers.

In spite of many significant challenges, Week of Compassion partners work alongside local faith leaders and other community leaders, building on existing relationships in order to meet critical needs and protect the most vulnerable.

“The humanitarian response [to this crisis] has been hampered,” says Simon Chambers, Director of Communications for ACT Alliance. But, he says, “we as churches have one advantage--we are already in communities before disasters happen, already part of both formal and informal infrastructure. When people flee, they still come to churches in camps as a place for structure and support. It is primarily churches we are working with, so we are on the ground and know where the needs are. We’re going to be there for the long haul, looking at the long-term needs of a community.”

Due to the particularly vulnerable situation of women and girls, our partners are working with religious leaders in the region to provide additional supports--like train the trainer events to curb gender-based violence. Religious leaders are viewed as authority figures and trusted sources of information, so they are often the ones who receive the training. Then, they help distribute tools and information throughout their communities. In this way, the role of faith leaders is essential in crisis situations, and our partners’ long standing relationships in the region a valuable asset.

Week of Compassion is grateful for partners who build trust and community presence over time, empowering local leadership to respond to urgent needs while also planning ahead for the future. We are also grateful for those who give so generously, supporting urgent responses in places of need--around the world, around the year. Thank you for sharing your compassion.





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Storm Relief



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*Week of Compassion is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.*

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