In Ethiopia, over 5.2 million people in Tigray and an additional 2.9 in Amhara, and Afar require immediate humanitarian aid. Four million people (70 per cent of the population) are severely food insecure (IPC 3 or above), with over 400,000 in famine-like conditions (IPC 5). The conflict in Tigray began during the harvest season in November 2020, when many households had not yet harvested their crops. Over 90 per cent of the crop harvest was lost due to looting or destruction. 80 per cent of the livestock in the region have reportedly also been looted or killed. Given that most households depend on subsistence agriculture, the loss of their harvest and production inputs has had a devastating impact on their food security and nutrition – 2 million people require urgent livelihood assistance.

It is expected that only 25 per cent to 50 per cent of the average cereal production will be available this year as the agricultural planting season has been missed in many parts of Tigray due to access issues, operational challenges, and lack of funding. Further complicating the food insecurity and agricultural yield in northern Ethiopia, Desert Locust are forming in the eastern Amhara Region.

With the main agricultural season for 2021 finished, livelihood assistance must focus on vegetable production, livestock and micro-irrigation. Enabling people to plant so they have access to a steady supply of nutritious food – as well as keep their life-sustaining and difficult to replace livestock alive, healthy, and producing – are critical. This is particularly vital as access into the region remains extremely changeable – with livelihoods assistance, people will be less impacted by sudden cuts in supply lines.

The provision of seeds and veterinary care not only ensure rapid and sustained access to food, but these foods are of high nutritious value and particularly important for women and children given the high levels of acute malnutrition these groups are experiencing.

Nutrition screening of children under the age of five conducted in early September revealed an alarming situation, with a global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate of 22.7 percent and a severe acute
malnutrition rate of 3.1 percent – far exceeding international emergency standards (15 percent for GAM; 3 percent for SAM)

Anecdotal reports of people dying from hunger and other malnutrition-related causes continue to be received by partners, but they are difficult to verify due to fuel/transportation and communications challenges. The irregular and inadequate supply of food during a blockade of basic food commodities since June is taking a toll on food security. Coping strategies may have delayed severe outcomes earlier but three months down the line – the situation is dire. Rations have been further reduced in recent months, as only the limited amount of food brought in can be distributed. However, as rounds have stretched longer than expected (up to 4-5 months instead of 6 weeks), it is understood that the distributed assistance covered much less than the minimum caloric needs. Partners currently report having no capacity to run stabilization centres for the most severe cases of acute malnutrition in Tigray.

With the nutritional status of the general population already under enormous pressure due to the disruption of supply lines, reduced humanitarian access and growing gaps in Tigray’s healthcare system, nutrition experts warn that window for treating these most severe cases may be as little as 14 days from when they are first identified.

Analysis done by WFP/FAO state that the interaction between conflict, deteriorating socio-economic conditions, and multiple bad rainfall seasons, is expected to continue to create broad food assistance needs across Ethiopia. In Tigray, the most extreme results are likely. Since mid-July, conflict has continued to spill over into bordering regions of Amhara and Afar.

It is expected that the number of people entering IPC 4/5 is likely to increase. UNICEF has warned that 100,000 children are at risk of life-threatening severe acute malnutrition in the coming year in Tigray. This a 10-fold increase from the previous year. Analysis of latest malnutrition data suggests that as many as 214,000 severely malnourished children may require treatment over the coming year. Additionally, a lack of vaccinations would mean that measles and malaria could kill thousands of children. Without unimpeded humanitarian access, partners will be forced to stop essential programs, including food assistance, nutritional activities, effective health care provision and livelihood support. Many more people will face famine conditions.

The Humanitarian Response Plan for Northern Ethiopia currently appeals for $854 million for May-December. The current gap is $171 million. However, requirements are growing as the conflict expands, needs outpace the response, and operational challenges raise costs. The Response Plan is currently being revised. In the meantime, agencies have also had to re-allocate from other operations in Ethiopia and elsewhere, which still require support.

We call on all States to use their influence to ensure that the parties to the conflict respect their obligations under IHL, including to respect civilians and civilian objects such as agricultural areas, crops and livestock, and to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief for all civilians in need. We also call for the restoration of basic public services in all affected areas, and for an immediate end to hostilities.