

Considering autonomous governance in Dankalia

Ahmed Y. Mohamed¹

I. Introduction

The tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia regarding access to the Red Sea were brought to the forefront by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's address to the Ethiopian parliament in October 2023.² In his speech, Prime Minister Abiy asserted Ethiopia's "natural" rights to access the Red Sea waters in neighboring countries, prompting responses from Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, who declared their territorial integrity non-negotiable in reaction to Ethiopia's comments.

Ethiopia's challenges intensified as it sought access to another port, this time in Somaliland, an autonomous region within Somalia. A recent agreement³ signed on January 1st, 2024, between Somaliland and Ethiopia involves the leasing of over 20 kilometers of Berbera Port City to Ethiopia. The agreement also includes acknowledgment of the potential for Somaliland to pursue independence in the future. This has further exacerbated regional tensions surrounding Ethiopia's efforts to secure a port from its neighboring countries.

Ethiopia's pursuit of port access as a landlocked nation is significant in Eritrea, which gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991 after a long struggle. After Eritrea's independence, Ethiopia lost access to its only port when it had a population of 50 million, compared to the current population of 120 million.⁴ The recent strained relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea have raised concerns about the potential for renewed regional conflict. Ethiopia's aggressive demand for sea access, Eritrea's resentment for being sidelined in Pretoria, and the signed Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front are all contributing factors. Additionally, there are internal rebellions in Amhara and Oromia as well as generalized insecurity across the country, which Ethiopia quietly blames on Eritrea's involvement.

This article will delve into the "Afar Factor" one of the key arguments presented by Prime Minister Abiy to justify Ethiopia's interest in the Red Sea. It will also consider why granting the Afar people "Special Status" could be a viable political strategy for the region and explore the role Eritrea should play regarding Afar grievances in the country.

¹ Ahmed Y. Mohamed leads the Eritrean Afar National Congress, a political group that represents exiled indigenous Eritrean Afar people. The organization advocates for self-governance and autonomy for the indigenous Afar people in Dankalia, Eritrea, who have faced marginalization, persecution, and ethnic cleansing under the current government. <https://dankalia.org/>

² Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said in a televised program held with members of the country's parliament on Sunday, according to the state Ethiopian News Agency (ENA). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMhN-aAsiVO>

³ Prime Minister@AbiyAhmedAli and the President of Somaliland Muse Bihe Abdi have signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding in Addis Ababa. <https://twitter.com/PMEthiopia/status/1741828595457143004/photo/1>

⁴ With about 123 million people (2022), Ethiopia is the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview>

Prime Minister Abiy defended Ethiopia's case for port access to the Red Sea by citing the Afar demographic factor in the Afar Triangle. He highlighted the cultural and economic relationships maintained by the Afar Sultanates, which transcend transboundary and international borders as indigenous peoples. Prime Minister Abiy emphasized the significance of the Afar demographic region in the context of Ethiopia's historical and cultural ties to the Red Sea.

II. The Strategic Significance of the Afar Triangle and its Geopolitical Curse

The Afar is an ancient and indigenous nation. The Afar traditional territories (Afar Triangle) underwent fragmentation into today's sovereign states of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea, which was dubbed as "the Scramble for Africa" 1880's, or the slicing of Africa by European power in 1885. The Franco-Italian colonialist divided what is known as the "Afar triangle" into three pieces and set up their colonies and international borders separating the Afar nation. Djibouti fell to the French, Eritrea to the Italians, and Ethiopia was, by and large, escaped uncolonized, though the Italians briefly did occupy Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941⁵.

The strategic region of Afar covers an approximate area of 157,000 square kilometers, which is large enough to encompass four European states - Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, and Switzerland. Positioned at a crucial geopolitical junction, the Triangle connects the coastal waters of the Red Sea with international maritime shipping routes that connect the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandab. Moreover, it hosts three significant ports: Assab in Eritrea and Obock and Tadjourah in Djibouti.

Despite initially honoring peace agreements with the Afar nation, European powers expanded their dominance by encroaching into Afar territories without consent. This led to a revolt by the Afar people against the colonial powers. The resistance was ultimately suppressed due to Europe's superior military strength, leading to the death of Yasin Haysama, Sultan of Girrifo, and the capture of the Sultan Laoita in Goba'ad by French forces. He was subsequently taken to French colonies in Madagascar and vanished without a trace⁶.

Today, long after the colonial division of Afar territories by the Europeans, artificial borders continue to define the contemporary reality for the Afar people. The psychological wounds left over from the colonial era manifest in Afar poverty, marginalization, and helplessness throughout the region.

III. Eritrea's Independence and the Impact on the Afar Autonomy

⁵ Emperor Haile SELASSIE became an internationally renowned figure in 1935, when he unsuccessfully appealed to the League of Nations to prevent Italy from occupying Ethiopia from 1936 to 1941. CIA World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/#introduction>

⁶ Sultan of Gobaad and his deputy was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and taken to Fort Duaphin, Madagascar. The sultan died in exile 19 July 1932 both titles of Sultan and deputy Sultna(Banoyta) ceased to exist and the Sultanate was abolished. <https://en.sewasew.com/p/ge-baa-d>, Encyclopaedia Aethiopica

Dankalia is a traditional territory of the Afar people in Eritrea, stretching 1000 kilometers along the coastline from the Bori Peninsula to Rahayta. It has pristine beaches, islands, ports, and vast deserts rich in natural resources like essential minerals and precious metals.

Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in May 1991, marking the end of indigenous Afar self-governance in Dankalia. The region had been historically administered by the Afar people for their affairs, even during the last years of Ethiopian rule until 1991.

For the last 32 years, Eritrea has been governed by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), a highly centralized single-party state led by Isaias Afwerki. In contrast to the EPRDF in Ethiopia, which constitutionally ensured ethnic self-determination for nations, nationalities, and peoples within Ethiopia, the PFDJ established a new cultural identity for its newly formed government.⁷

The PFDJ's cultural revolution meant pre-existing cultural identities, such as the Afar, would need to assimilate into Eritrea's single cultural identity, heavily influenced by the majority Tigrigna culture.

The land proclamation, known as PROCLAMATION NO. 58/1994, declared that the land and sea historically belonging to the indigenous Afar community for centuries would be taken over by the government. PFDJ implemented measures of internal colonization, marginalization, unauthorized seizure of land, violence, and relocation of Afar people in Dankalia under its new regulations. With this particular law on land ownership, Eritrea authorized the appropriation of ancestral lands and natural resources from the indigenous Afar population.

After seizing control of valuable Afar lands and resources through illicit and forceful methods, Eritrea proceeded to grant licenses for some of these traditional territories to its global associates. The UAE set up a military base in Assab⁸ in 2015, accompanied by acquiring strategic coastal villages. Additionally, an Australian corporation acquired a substantial 400 km² area for potash mining and established the Colluli Potash mine,⁹ which a Chinese company subsequently purchased.

The Afar community in Eritrea is facing a threat to their survival due to the actions and policies of the government. These measures have significantly impacted traditional Afar livelihoods, such as their ability to fish in coastal waters, which has been central to their way of life for numerous generations. The vital economic resources that the Afar community relies on, including traditional fishing, cross-border trade with caravans transporting essential food, and traditional

⁷ Eritrea is a highly centralized, totalitarian regime under the control of President Isaias Afwerki.
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/eritrea/>

⁸ In 2015 the UAE established its first military base overseas in the Eritrean port of Assab. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/could-emirati-activism-in-the-horn-make-the-situation-worse>

⁹ Australia's Danakali (ASX: DNK) has completed the sale of its 50% stake in the Colluli potash project in Eritrea, Africa, 13 years after partnering with the Eritrean National Mining Corporation (ENAMCO) to build the mine. Chinese company Sichuan Road and Bridge Group, have paid a first instalment of \$105 million
<https://www.mining.com/danakali-sells-stake-in-flagship-colluli-potash-project-in-eritrea/>

salt mining lands, have been significantly damaged by government policies aiming to displace the Afar from key areas along the Southern Red Sea coast of Eritrea.

Furthermore, Eritrea has taken steps to close longstanding borders by land and sea to disconnect the Afar people in Eritrea from their relatives in Djibouti and Ethiopia.

IV. Afar History of self-governance in Eritrea

The Afar nation has a solid historical basis for asserting its right to special autonomy in Dankalia. The Afar have maintained control over their traditional lands in the Afar Triangle long before modern states were established. The five Afar Sultanates¹⁰ - Rahayta, Biru, Tadjourah, Goba'ad, and Awsa have a well-documented history of self-governance that was acknowledged by external powers like the Ottoman Turks, Italians, and French through peace treaties and mutual agreements. Internally, Afar customary law has governed daily life within their society and their interactions with neighboring nations or tribes.

V. Afar Grievances and Marginalization in Eritrea

The marginalization of the people of Afar in Eritrea is systemic, widely documented, and unique. Approximately three-quarters of the estimated 500,000 Afar population fled Eritrea due to persecution. UN human rights experts have extensively investigated Eritrea's violations against the indigenous Afar people and found the country guilty of grave human rights violations.

On May 2023, the UN SR on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker noted: "The Afar are one of the most disenfranchised communities in Eritrea. For several decades, they have been subjected to discrimination, harassment, arbitrary arrests, disappearance, violence, and widespread persecution."¹¹

In 2016, The UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COI) confirmed that Eritrean officials had committed the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, against the Eritrean Afar population since 1991.¹²

¹⁰ The Afar society has been organized into independent Kingdoms, each ruled by its own Sultanate. The Afar are one Africa's long-established and culturally homogeneous indigenous people who have lived in the Afar Triangle, at the convergence of what are now known as Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea since the time immemorial.

<https://theafricanroyalfamilies.com/2023/04/20/sultans-of-afar-people-of-afar-triangle/>

¹¹ There is an established history of arbitrary detentions and disappearances of Afar people, as noted by the Special Rapporteur. One particularly egregious incident in 2022, as noted in the Special Rapporteur's report, was that of a mass detention of Afar fisherfolk by the Eritrean navy. UN SR 2023 <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/5228-disturbing-situation-human-rights-afar-eritrea.html#:~:text=For%20several%20decades%2C%20they%20have,carrying%20out%20their%20traditional%20occupation.>

¹² The Commission also has reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials have intentionally and severely deprived Eritrean Kunama and Afar of fundamental rights contrary to international law on ethnic grounds. The Commission has corroborated evidence that the Afar and Kunama were targeted, at a minimum, in the period

In 2015, UN COI stated the actions by Eritrean authority “may be construed as an intentional act to dispossess them [the Afar] of their ancestral lands, their livelihood and their culture” (Paragraph 56) and that

The killing of members of the Afar ethnic group and reports of the existence of mass graves... have also triggered their displacement from their lands within the country and across borders to Ethiopia and Djibouti. This has posed great difficulty to their livelihoods as they depend on their traditional lands for the sustenance as an indigenous ethnic group.”¹³

The COI also “confirmed” that Land traditionally belonging to or used by the Afars was seized in the framework of the land reform and afterward by the decision of the Government, without consultation of the impacted communities.¹⁴

The UNHCR has registered 60,000 Eritrean Afar refugees¹⁵ in Ethiopian camps alone, with tens of thousands more internally displaced throughout the region.

Compared to colonial times, Eritrea as an African state has committed more crimes against indigenous Afar than those committed by European colonizers.¹⁶ The threat against the Afar nation in Eritrea is immediate and persistent.

VI. Regional precedence

a. Ethiopia

In 1994, the Ethiopian federal constitution officially designated the Afar regional state as one of nine ethnolinguistic regional states (Kilil), which has since increased to twelve. This recognition of the Afar nation’s right to self-determination and self-governance enabled indigenous Afar autonomous administration in the region. The Ethiopian parliament recently sanctioned a federal budget for the 2023/24 fiscal year for the Afar regional state, amounting to 6.3 billion birr

between 1998 and 2001. It has also received uncorroborated information that both ethnic groups were persecuted during other periods as well, and that such persecution persists.

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColEritrea/A_HRC_32_CRP.1_read-only.pdf

¹³These killings have also triggered their displacement from their lands within the country and across borders to Ethiopia and Djibouti.

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColEritrea/A_HRC_29_CRP-1.pdf

¹⁴ The Commission collected numerous testimonies from Afar people who fled Eritrea. These testimonies confirmed that land traditionally belonging to or used by Afars was seized in the framework of the land reform and afterwards by decision of the Government, without consultation of the impacted communities. (para 1157)

¹⁵ Eritrean Afar Refugees- UNHCR Ethiopia <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth>

¹⁶ 1882-1941: In 1882, Italy occupied the port of Assab. In 1885, Italy occupied the port of Massawa and other regions along the Red Sea coast. In 1889, Italy conquered all of Eritrea. https://brill.com/previewpdf/journals/hrao/5/1/article-p1059_31.xml

(approximately 112 million USD).¹⁷ Additionally, the Afar regional state's GDP stands at 15.94 billion birr (\$0.567 billion) at a constant market price; furthermore, between 2012 and 2018, it achieved an average growth rate of 8.10%, according to data from the Afar Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, dated 2020.¹⁸

Under federal constitutional arrangement, the Afar people in Ethiopia have excelled as a self-governing nation. Their language, Afar-Af, is the official language of the regional state. The Afar national regional state has seen nearly twofold economic growth from 2010 to 2018 and is striving greatly to build infrastructure, primary schools, roads, and health centers while also attracting investment to strengthen its economic force further.

b. Cameroon

Like the Horn of Africa's Afar, Cameroon in west-central Africa suffered from colonialism when two European colonial powers divided the indigenous territory (the French and the British).

Cameroon gained its independence in 1961, with a majority francophone central government imposing its will to assimilate the smaller Anglophone regions and oppress them. Six years of conflict have led to the death of over 6,000 people in Cameroon's two Anglophone regions, as well as the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.¹⁹ In 2019, Cameroon's government acknowledged the Anglophone regions' distinct identity by giving them Special Status.

The government says that awarding “special status” to the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions will give Cameroon’s Anglophone minority greater autonomy over local affairs and settle historical grievances. According to the administration of President Paul Biya, this will mean secessionist forces will no longer have a reason to fight.²⁰

c. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

Article 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Indigenous Peoples reads, “Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for

¹⁷ Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Addis Ababa, Gambella, Dire Dawa and Harari receive ETB 6.3 billion, ETB 3.8 billion, ETB 5.3 billion, ETB 2.8 billion, ETB 1.8 billion and ETB 1.6 billion, respectively.

https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/media/9126/file/UNICEF_Ethiopia_Highlights_2023-24_Federal_Budget_Proclamation.pdf

¹⁸ Afar regional state's GDP stands at 15.94 billion birr (\$0.567 billion) at a constant market price; furthermore, between 2012 and 2018, it achieved an average growth rate of 8.10%, according to data from the Afar Bureau of Finance and Economic Development [ABoFED], dated 2020 .

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23322039.2022.2072555>

¹⁹ The bigger conflict, between the government and separatists from the English-speaking minority, started in 2017 and has killed over 6,000 people. It has displaced 765,000 people, of whom over 70,000 are refugees in Nigeria. Crisis Group 2023 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon>

²⁰ The government says that awarding “special status” to the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions will give Cameroon’s Anglophone minority greater autonomy over local affairs and settle historical grievances. According to the administration of President Paul Biya, this will mean secessionist forces will no longer have a reason to fight. <https://africanarguments.org/2020/01/cameroon-grants-special-status-anglophone-conflict/>

financing their autonomous functions.” The UN General Assembly adopted the UNDRIP Resolution on 13 September 2007.

The UN Indigenous Charter recognizes and investigates the experiences of indigenous nations, such as the Afar of the Horn. It explicitly addresses discriminatory policies, language dominance by states and powerful groups within them, and historic injustices resulting from colonization and dispossession of lands, territories, and resources. This prevents them from exercising their rights to development.

The UNDRIP Resolution, adopted in 2007, recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination and autonomy in local affairs. It addresses discriminatory policies and historic injustices from colonization, emphasizing respecting their inherent rights. International experiences affirm the Afar's right to self-government within Eritrea.

d. IGAD's Critical Role in Regional Stability and Development

The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development is a regional bloc in Eastern Africa comprised of eight member states: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. After a 16-year hiatus, Eritrea has again become a part of IGAD.

The organization plays a vital role in ensuring regional stability. IGAD’s primary focus areas in the 2021-2025 strategy²¹ include ensuring access to food, promoting economic development, sustainably managing transboundary resources, and fostering peace and security.

The Afar people are spread across three of IGAD’s member states: Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. They are a pastoralist transboundary family. IGAD recognizes Afar as an ethnolinguistic group that has been annexed during the formation of its member states and has faced historical marginalization in political, socio-economic, and cultural domains.

IGAD also recognizes that its member states have not fully acknowledged the rights of traditional governance of transboundary indigenous communities, such as the Afar, especially the impact on governance and resource management. IGAD findings read...

“Recognition of pastoralists’ community land rights is important because the tenure system among most of the communities is communal and is governed by traditional customary laws. Yet in most Member States, the pastoralist land tenure system is unfavorable, constraining their mobility and has been the source of most regional conflicts.”

²¹ The IGAD 2021-2025 Strategy sets the strategic framework for priority interventions over the first five year for the implementation of IGAD Vision 2050. It builds on a number of on-going Programmes established to develop resilient ecosystems and economic growth. The programmes include IGAD Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI), regional CAADP Compact, Institutional Strengthening Action Programme (ISAP), Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food Security, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration, Social Development, Peace and Security, Gender Affairs, and other strategies and policy papers which underpin the IGAD regional programmes. <https://igad.int/about/?tab=our-strategy>

Furthermore, IGAD has acknowledged its member states inability to respect the authority and customary laws of indigenous pastoralist groups. (i.e., traditional leaders)

“Equally, their traditional authorities and institutions, which they depend on to manage their resources and livelihoods, have been weakened and undermined, further marginalizing the pastoral communities from the formal governmental processes and decision-making. Though the Member States supreme laws recognize their authority, in practice, they have not been empowered to discharge their functions effectively”.²²

VII. Ethiopia and Collaboration

Ethiopia faces a distinct challenge that is not likely to disappear in the near future. The Afar regional state serves as a crucial artery for Ethiopia's food security and export requirements. Strengthening Ethiopia's collaboration with the Afar leadership and maximizing the geopolitical significance of the traditional territories within the region will significantly support its economic goals and provide a political solution for Ethiopia's growing population.

Ethiopia's Prime Minister has strongly expressed willingness to collaborate with traditional Afar leaders to secure access to the Port of Assab in Eritrea. Ethiopia may also seek support from IGAD to utilize its influence on Eritrea's economic development and integration, aiming to encourage Eritrea's participation in addressing the concerns of both the Afar people and Ethiopia.

Furthermore, Ethiopia has a forty-year history of using the Port of Assab as its main import-export port. While it is natural for Ethiopia's growing population to demand access to Red Sea ports for their economic aspirations, these development goals must be pursued without infringing on the aspirations of the Eritrean Afar nation or encroaching on Eritrea's sovereignty.

Ethiopia has a distinct challenge that will not go away in near future. Distinction being the Afar regional states in Ethiopia reserves as a key artery for its food security and exports needs. Ethiopia's collaboration with the Afar leadership and maximize the geopolitics of the Afar traditional territories within the region will significantly support its economic aspiration and the political solution for growing population of Ethiopia.

VIII. Eritrea and Challenges

The Eritrean state has a legitimate concern over its sovereignty and territorial integrity, but this should not come at the expense of Afar marginalization. Granting recognition to its indigenous minority would strengthen Afar's loyalty and secure Eritrea's border. This action would also put to rest the extremist elements within Ethiopia that claim the Port of Assab as integral Ethiopian territory.

²² Japheth Kasimbu Transhumance Expert IGAD Centre for Pastoral Areas and Livestock Development (ICPALD), IGAD Legal, Policy and Institutional Frameworks on Pastoral Areas and Cross-Border Transhumance in IGAD Region, sections (iii)&(iv) 2020 <https://icpald.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Legal-Policy-and-Institutional-Frameworks-in-IGAD-Region.pdf>

Eritrea is responsible for addressing the grievances of Afar, criticized by the international community. The Afar Eritreans do not seek secession despite historical oppression. Geopolitical volatility and repression are the root causes of conflict in the region. Eritrea has many enemies and risks erupting into new clashes without warning. Eritrea is confronted with a range of challenges, and the risk of unexpected flare-ups of fresh tensions extends beyond just geopolitical factors or issues related to access to the Red Sea. Dissatisfaction toward Eritrea's governing party is widespread among Diaspora opposition groups. Moreover, persistent low-level Afar insurgency has fueled ongoing grievances, resulting in more than 200,000 Afar refugees seeking to reunite with their homeland in Eritrea by crossing the border.

IX. The Afar Nation and Future

Eritrea is now a member of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and has signed a five-year sustainable development²³ cooperation with the United Nations. Furthermore, Eritrea has gained a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, indicating that it can no longer ignore calls from international or regional institutions to address human rights concerns regarding the Afar community within its borders.

The Afar nation in Eritrea has particular grievances that must be addressed. Eritrea needs to acknowledge and support the political and economic aspirations of the Afar people, allowing them autonomy and the freedom to utilize their traditional resources, including coastal waters, to alleviate poverty, economic hardship, disenfranchisement, and marginalization that have been prevalent since 1991.

The proposed agreement for "Special Status" aims to grant autonomous governance to Dankalia. This special autonomy provides an opportunity for collaboration between Afar and Eritrea in sharing power, implementing plans for resource and revenue sharing, and addressing historical grievances related to self-rule. Moreover, it allows the Afar community to leverage its coastal waters, ports, and traditional fishing economies, as well as facilitate transhumance pastoralism for trade and development. Granting autonomous status to Dankalia is crucial in addressing issues such as historic marginalization, land rights, human rights violations, and the current lack of development opportunities in the region.

X. Conclusion

In conclusion, the complex geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa require a multifaceted approach that acknowledges historical grievances while promoting development and regional stability. IGAD's commitment to improving peace and security in the region, along with the region's dedication to fostering peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, underscores the importance of collaborative efforts by all stakeholders. Through working

²³ The UNSDCF-2022-2026 aligns with Eritrea's overarching priorities of achieving rapid, balanced, homegrown, and sustainable growth, alongside social equity, and justice, anchored in the principles of national dignity and self-reliance. <https://www.undp.org/eritrea/publications/sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-between-government-state-eritrea-and-united-nations-2022-2026>

together, these objectives can be attained, paving the way for a more stable and prosperous future for the Horn of Africa.

IGAD needs to arrange an urgent special agenda meeting to address Ethiopia's concerns regarding access to the port of Assab, Afar's desire for special status autonomy in Dankalia, and Eritrea's worries about sovereignty infringement by Ethiopia.

The leadership of IGAD plays a crucial role. It should establish a special commission to implement a political solution to meet the increasing demands of the region's population for development. This includes addressing conflicts over resource access and ports while ensuring equality and addressing marginalized populations like the Afar people to ensure that the rights and traditional governance of indigenous communities are recognized and respected.

IGAD's strategy is centered on guaranteeing food security, promoting economic development, sustainably managing transboundary resources, and fostering peace and security. The historical marginalization experienced by the Afar people within IGAD member states extends across political, socio-economic, and cultural domains. Recognizing this situation is essential for effectively managing resources through acknowledging indigenous communities' traditional governance rights, such as those held by the Afar people.