The Advisory Panel:

Topic: Addressing Escalating Cross-Border Disputes Between Sudan and Ethiopia

General Overview:

The ongoing cross-border disputes between Sudan and Ethiopia over the Al-Fashaga territory have escalated, resulting in conflict and instability in both nations. Al-Fashaga, a fertile land situated along the Sudan-Ethiopia border, is claimed by Sudan based on the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty. However, Ethiopia disputes Sudan's interpretation and enforcement of the border demarcation, thus increasing tensions.

Tensions escalated significantly in late 2020 when the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) began entering Al-Fashaga while Ethiopian forces were preoccupied with the internal Tigray conflict with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The military deployment has since displaced thousands of farmers and increased tensions from both sides.

The dispute also has economic consequences, as the SAF aimed to strengthen its control over Al-Fashaga's fertile lands to direct the profitable trade from crops such as sesame and other crops away from Ethiopian markets. Therefore, when trade along the Ethiopia-Sudan border has significantly dropped because of the civil war in northern Ethiopia and the SAF incursion into Al-Fashaga, which caused the closure of the main overland transport and trade routes, many problems arose. It became extremely difficult to transport consumer goods to Ethiopian communities, which reportedly forced some goods to be either smuggled or obtained from central cities such as Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa.

Transport routes have also become increasingly militarised in Ethiopia, as insecurity has grown since the start of the Tigray war, with numerous new checkpoints being established. A mixture of official and unofficial forces, including the Ethiopian Federal Police, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, and the Amhara Region Special Forces, operate these checkpoints. This raises the cost and risk of transporting goods.

Since November 2020, the SAF has gained a significant portion of Al-Fashaga, reinforcing its presence with new infrastructure and developments.

Economic Aspect:

The economic aspect of the cross-border disputes between the two countries is highly significant. Al-Fashaga contains fertile agricultural land that has generated profitable trade through crops such as cereals, sunflowers, cotton, sesame, and gum Arabic, with sesame

alone producing hundreds of millions of dollars in exports for Ethiopia. By taking control of Al-Fashaga's fertile lands, Sudan was able to gain control over much of the trade in this region, which has played a role in sustaining Sudan's war economy during its own internal conflict. Furthermore, the conflict caused some Sudanese investors to withdraw from their lands, disrupting broader economic cooperation between Ethiopian and Sudanese investors in Al-Fashaga and across the border. Trade has also been significantly affected, leading to increased costs and greater risks in transporting goods.

Humanitarian Aspect:

The humanitarian consequences of the cross-border disputes between Sudan and Ethiopia are highly significant and have been further complicated by the ongoing civil war in Tigray. The ongoing civil war in Tigray has further complicated the humanitarian situation and indirectly intensified cross-border tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights UNHCR, as well as other international organizations such as Amnesty International, reported that the Ethiopian Federal Government has received allegations of serious human rights violations, including the use of starvation, rape, and extrajudicial killings as methods of war. Additionally, these same organizations stated that the TPLF also committed serious human rights violations. This further escalated the conflict because Ethiopia claims that Sudan provided weapons to the TPLF during the conflict and offered refuge to certain high-ranking TPLF members. At the same time, Sudan says Ethiopian forces are carrying out raids to loot and abduct people for ransom. Moreover, thousands of farmers were forced to leave their homes and lost their only way to make money. The region is now part of a massive refugee crisis, with people living in overcrowded camps without enough clean water or doctors, which is only exacerbated by the already high number of Sudanese and Ethiopian refugees from their respective civil wars.

Social Aspect:

The social aspect of these disputes has significantly strained relations between Sudanese and Ethiopian border communities. For at least a decade, Sudanese and Ethiopian farmers lived in Al-Fashaga, with many preferring to sell their produce in Ethiopia. However, the renewed conflict has disrupted these local relationships and increased tensions between communities. The forced displacement of thousands of Ethiopian farmers has separated families from their homes, land, and established livelihoods. In addition, the growing presence of national armies, militias, and fortified positions along the border has created

insecurity and instability for civilians living in the region. If these disputes continue, long-standing cross-border cooperation and community trust may be further damaged.