



### [2019 Nobel Peace Prize Awarded to Ethiopian Prime Minister](#)

Since taking office in April 2018, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has made restoring relations with neighboring Eritrea a priority. Ethiopia and Eritrea fought a war between 1998-2000 over their shared border, and there have been sporadic clashes ever since. In July 2018, Prime Minister Ahmed met with his Eritrean counterpart, President Isaias Afwerki, and the two signed a treaty which officially ended the conflict and normalized relations between the two countries. The deal opened the border to allow movement of people, goods, and services, and established diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea. For his efforts in negotiating the treaty and ending the conflict, Prime Minister Ahmed was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. Following his announcement as the award winner, Ahmed stated that he was “humbled and thrilled” and added that “it is a prize given to Africa, given to Ethiopia and I can imagine how the rest of Africa’s leaders will take it positively to work on the peace-building process on our continent.”

In addition to ending the conflict with Eritrea, Prime Minister Ahmed has enacted sweeping reforms aimed at liberalizing Ethiopia. He released thousands of political prisoners, ended media censorship, legalized opposition political groups, and increased the role and influence of women in social life. The Prime Minister also helped mediate a maritime territory dispute between Kenya and Somalia, and has been an integral part of the efforts to bring together the leaders of Sudan and South Sudan for negotiations. Mr. Ahmed rose to power as a political insider, but he is also a member of a minority ethnic group which has given him credibility among marginalized people in Ethiopia. Some members of the Ethiopian establishment view him as a threat to their interests, and he survived an assassination attempt in the capital of Addis Ababa in June of 2018. Ahmed has also promised to hold free elections in the coming year, most likely in May.

The Nobel Committee’s decision to give Prime Minister Ahmed the coveted prize has drawn similarities to the 2009 prize awarded to President Barack Obama, who was championing denuclearization efforts at the time. Both leaders were recognized soon after coming to power, and detractors point to the notion that the prize was won on promises, not actions. President Obama’s drive to denuclearization stalled soon after winning the prize, and there are fears that the peace deal signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea may be short-lived. However, these fears are predicated on Eritrea not holding up its end of the bargain, as President Afwerki rules the nation with an iron fist – evidenced by the vast number of political and economic refugees fleeing Eritrea. Critics also warn that the peace process could be hurt by the increased attention it will bring, as President Afwerki is averse to being put under international pressure. The prize will also raise expectations for Prime Minister Ahmed, which could lead to increased high-pressure decisions with more at stake.

For now, though, the peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia is a welcome change from decades of fighting. The standard for Abiy Ahmed will undoubtedly increase, but Africa’s youngest leader has proven to be up to the task thus far.