



OMNATIGRAY

# SITUATION REPORT

August 2021

On June 28, 2021, nearly eight months after the declaration of war on the region and people of Tigray, the military and political dynamics on the ground changed dramatically. The Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) took over control of Mekelle and many other parts of Tigray on June 28, 2021, after the retreat of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). The next day, Eritrean Defense Forces retreated from many parts of Tigray they were controlling, including Shire, Mai-Tsebri, and Korarit in Western Tigray. The Ethiopian government claimed that the retreat of ENDF forces was pursuant to a unilateral, humanitarian ceasefire declared hours after its troops vacated Mekelle. However, numerous sources on the ground concur that the TDF's successful battleground counteroffensive preceded the retreat of the ENDF and its allies, including Eritrean and Amhara forces. Journalists and humanitarian workers have shared that the liberation of large parts of Tigray, including its capital city - Mekelle, was met with jubilation and celebration on the streets.

Despite this welcome development, the situation remains dire as Tigray is still under siege. Since November 4, 2020, the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces have carried out atrocities that amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide. There are verified reports of countless massacres and extrajudicial executions, extensive weaponization of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), a displacement crisis affecting millions, and a man-made famine that threatens the lives of hundreds of thousands in Tigray, some of whom have already begun to starve to death.

Despite its declaration of a unilateral ceasefire, ostensibly on humanitarian grounds, the Abiy administration continues to block humanitarian convoys from going into Tigray, cutting off communication, transportation, and utilities—thereby aggravating the humanitarian catastrophe in Tigray. The food stock that humanitarian organizations have is severely depleted, and with the transportation of aid into Tigray prohibited by the Ethiopian government, the starvation crisis is set to reach its worst stage yet, endangering the lives of hundreds of thousands who are under siege. As the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell stated, a meaningful ceasefire means “doing everything possible so that aid reaches the millions of children, women and men who urgently need it” [1].

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While continuing to besiege Tigray by cutting off critical services and mobilizing troops to the region's borders, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration and its allies have also ramped up the ethnically motivated verbal, physical, and existential attacks against Tigrayans throughout the country. Thousands of Tigrayans are arbitrarily arrested, detained, and face a new wave of ethnic targeting across Ethiopia, including in Addis Ababa, the Amhara region, and the Somali region. Ordinary Tigrayans across the country are increasingly under attack from the government as well as fellow citizens. The federal government and Abiy himself have fueled this flame of ethnic hatred, accusing all Tigrayans of being enemies of the ENDF and traitors to the country. In a July 18 statement, Abiy described the enemy as the "cancer of Ethiopia" and vowed to remove what he labelled an "invasive weed." Similar to the derogatory use of the term "junta" to describe Tigrayans, words like "cancer" and "weed" serve to criminalize and demonize all Tigrayans, regardless of their political affiliation.

In a July 25, 2021, television address, the President of the Amhara regional government, Mr. Agegnehu Teshager, escalated the dehumanizing and inflammatory language against Tigrayans by declaring that the people of Tigray are the enemy of all Ethiopians, including the Amhara, Oromo, Afar, and Somali peoples, after asserting that they will not rest until this enemy is eliminated. Labelling over 7 million Tigrayans as "cancer," "invasive weed," or "enemies of the people of Ethiopia" and calling for their elimination is an explicit announcement of the genocidal intention that has fueled the war on Tigray. Unless those who use their power to espouse this dangerous genocidal rhetoric are held accountable for leading and fueling ethnically motivated attacks, the situation for the millions of Tigrayans will become even more life-threatening.

## **SIEGE, NOT CEASEFIRE**

Upon being dealt a decisive defeat when the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) launched a successful counteroffensive, the ENDF retreated from most areas of Tigray, including the capital Mekelle. While the Abiy government's declaration of a unilateral ceasefire was ostensibly designed in response to the enormous humanitarian crisis in Tigray, on-the-ground reports clearly outline that this was a retreat by an incapacitated army. On June 28, 2021, the TDF peacefully took over control of large areas of Tigray, including Mekelle, Adigrat, Adwa, Axum, and Shire and were met with overwhelming support by the local populations. Main cities and roads within Tigray are under the control of TDF and the recently reinstated Government of Tigray.

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With the TDF takeover of large parts of Tigray, humanitarian access to previously blocked areas is now possible. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reported that in July 2021, its humanitarian operations could reach 75% of the people in the region, as opposed to the 30% it was able to reach in May 2021. This lends further support to the assertion that it was Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need in Tigray. However, even after retreating from most parts of Tigray, the Ethiopian and Amhara forces continue to prevent aid from reaching the most desperate people in Tigray.

The continued prevention of aid delivery to the region reveals that, despite the alleged humanitarian concern that precipitated the declaration of the ceasefire, the Abiy administration and allied forces are determined to cut Tigray off from the rest of the world and starve the people of Tigray. These actions, in the words of the US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Linda Thomas Greenfield, “are not an indication of a humanitarian ceasefire, but of a siege” [2]. The Abiy administration’s siege on Tigray involves blocking the transportation of humanitarian aid, a communication and transportation blockade, cutting off all essential services, and preparations for another round of assaults.

### **Blocking transportation of aid**

Since the restoration of the regional government of Tigray in early July 2021, humanitarian access within Tigray has significantly improved, enabling aid agencies to reach 75% of the population in need. However, aid agencies continue to face major obstacles in getting much-needed supplies and staff into Tigray because of the ongoing obstruction by Ethiopian and Amhara forces, who are blocking the transportation of humanitarian aid. Aid agencies need to transport food, health, sanitation, and other non-food supplies into Tigray, as existing stocks are rapidly depleting. Most alarmingly, on July 27, the World Food Programme's David Beasley announced that the agency would run out of food by Friday, July 30. However, with flights from Addis Ababa to Mekelle suspended and road access to Tigray remaining blocked in the Amhara and Afar regions, humanitarian operations have been disrupted, resulting in fragmented and inadequate aid delivery. Moreover, the incendiary rhetoric by the Abiy administration, who repeatedly cast doubt on the operation of humanitarian organizations, has created a dangerous climate for aid workers, 12 of whom have unfortunately lost their lives since the start of the war on Tigray.

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Blocked aid convoys

Humanitarian organizations on the ground concur that delivering aid to Tigray has been extremely challenging for them. In July, only one UN food convoy was allowed to enter Mekelle, as opposed to the 100 trucks that need to be arriving daily to meet the overwhelming demand. This one convoy meets only 1% of the need for food for the month. This discrepancy between the growing need and dwindling supplies has been caused by the Ethiopian government's enactment of extremely strict controls on aid organizations, including heavily restricting air and overland routes into Tigray and setting up numerous checkpoints. Amhara regional forces have been blocking the transportation of supplies on the Southern front, turning back a 29-truck convoy carrying food aid at the end of June.

Moreover, the ongoing occupation of Western Tigray by Amhara forces has made it impossible to transport aid through neighbouring Sudan. Thus, Tigray is surrounded on all sides; with occupying and neighbouring forces using their location to stop life-saving supplies from reaching people in desperate need. For a government that declared a ceasefire allegedly on humanitarian grounds, the Ethiopian government is mobilizing all of its forces to impede the transportation of humanitarian aid into Tigray, indicating that rather than a genuine ceasefire, this is an ongoing siege on Tigray.

### **Communication and transportation blockade**

Another element of Abiy's ongoing siege in Tigray is the near-total communication and transportation blockade imposed on the region since the retreat of the ENDF forces at the end of June 2021. While phone and internet services have been repeatedly and arbitrarily disrupted in Tigray since November 2020, starting in July, communication is completely cut off in many parts of the region, especially in the rural areas. The retreating ENDF forces entered various UN and humanitarian offices, confiscating and vandalizing telecommunications, internet, VSAT, and other communications equipment in Mekelle, Dansha, and Abdurafi. UN OCHA reported that telecommunication and mobile networks are cut off throughout Tigray. In addition to telecommunication services, transportation networks into and out of Tigray are blocked as well. On July 1, the Tekeze bridge, which is one of the most important bridges connecting the Western zone of Tigray to the rest of the country, was intentionally destroyed and rendered inoperative. The destruction of this vital infrastructure not only hampers people's mobility but also seriously threatens humanitarian responses. Similarly, air travel into Mekelle has been halted by the federal government, prohibiting people from travelling to or from Tigray via air transport.

The communication and transportation blockade is an important component of the Abiy administration's siege over Tigray because it presents a substantial barrier to the delivery of aid. Humanitarian organizations have repeatedly stated that the restoration of telecommunications and transportation routes is vital for the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in need of essential supplies and services. The communication blackout imposed on Tigray by the Ethiopian federal government thus serves to exacerbate the humanitarian catastrophe in Tigray, by ensuring that the humanitarian response remains piecemeal and ill-coordinated.

### **Cutting off essential services**

In addition to severely curtailing phone, mobile, and internet services across Tigray, the Abiy administration has also cut off essential services such as electricity, banking, and delivery of fuel supplies. UN OCHA has reported on the disruption of basic services in Tigray, including banking and electricity, starting from July. The power outage impacting most parts of Tigray makes daily life difficult for millions of people and worsens the humanitarian catastrophe, as people do not have access to running water and other essential services that require electricity, including grinding mills and cooking supplies. Aid organizations have also reported that the blackout is slowing down humanitarian operations.

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Moreover, while retreating from Mekelle and other parts of Tigray at the end of June, the ENDF forces are reported to have looted all the money from banks, leading to a serious cash shortage in Tigray. Due to this deliberate attack on the region's banking system, most people have been left with limited access to commodities. This has also left aid partners unable to provide cash assistance in Tigray. Furthermore, the shortage of fuel supplies has worsened the humanitarian conditions and hindered aid agencies' ability to scale up their response. UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric underscored how the service blackout affects the most vulnerable populations, reporting that 23 Internally Displaced People (IDP) sites in Mekelle no longer have access to water as the pumps are non-functional due to the lack of fuel. Had this been a genuine humanitarian ceasefire, as Abiy has declared it is, his administration would have immediately prioritized measures that can alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe, including restoring essential services like electricity and banking and ensuring the availability of energy supplies. Instead he has kept Tigray disconnected and in the dark.

### **Preparing for another round of assaults**

Finally, despite declaring a unilateral ceasefire supposedly for humanitarian reasons, the Abiy administration has ramped up its rhetoric and preparations for another round of assaults. After the ENDF forces retreated from most parts of Tigray following the counteroffensive by the TDF, various government officials made statements about how troops could return to Tigray within weeks, if needed. Abiy, in an address after the ENDF's retreat, claimed that the Ethiopian government could mobilize 100,000 special forces to march against Tigray, adding that "if said special force isn't enough, if a militia is needed, in one or two months half a million militiamen can be organized. One million youths can be mobilized and trained" [3]. Similarly, Redwan Hussein, a federal government official and Ethiopia's Ambassador to Eritrea stated that Ethiopian forces could enter Mekelle in less than three weeks if needed. Lieutenant-General Bacha Debele of the ENDF, repeated similar sentiments in an exchange with reporters, indicating that the ENDF is willing and able to mobilize against Tigray to restart its offensive.

In addition to the ENDF, Special Forces have been mobilized from six regions and the city of Dire Dawa to back government forces. These reinforcements include Special Forces from Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples, and Sidama regions and are being sent to border areas to join the assault on Tigrayan forces.

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The intensification of violent and warmongering rhetoric from those within the Ethiopian government and the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of new recruits and Special Forces indicate that the ceasefire was a ceasefire in name only. Not even a month after its supposed ceasefire, ostensibly designed to let farmers in Tigray make use of the rainy season, the Abiy administration is mobilizing troops to besiege Tigray. Therefore, the 'unilateral ceasefire' has proven to be nothing more than a rhetorical cover for the ongoing siege.



Members of the Oromia Regional State Security Forces

Given the sheer scale of the humanitarian need in Tigray, which, if unmet, could lead to hundreds of thousands of people starving to death, immediate action is required from the international community. Various humanitarian agencies have called for the immediate restoration of electricity, communication, banking, fuel supplies and access to get staff and supplies into Tigray, requests that only the federal government can grant. Therefore, exerting pressure on the Ethiopian government to halt its mobilization of ENDF and regional Special Forces and restore essential services, transport links, and safe routes for the delivery of food aid are of paramount importance to avert the worst famine catastrophe in decades from claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands. Beyond these immediate steps, as Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield asserted, a meaningful ceasefire

**“would affirm the redeployment of forces and the complete withdrawal of Eritrean troops, and Amhara regional forces, it would facilitate unhindered humanitarian access. It would affirm neither the internal nor external borders of Ethiopia will be changed by force, and in contravention of the Constitution, and it should lay the groundwork for discussions toward political solutions to the crisis” [2].**



Because of the coordinated campaign by the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces since November 2020, Tigray has been facing a growing starvation crisis, which has escalated to a catastrophic famine in many parts of the region. As reiterated by several international organizations, independent media, and aid agencies, the famine in Tigray is not the result of natural or inevitable causes. The famine that nearly a million Tigrayans are living in today has been systematically and deliberately engineered by the Abiy and Isaias regimes to annihilate the Tigrayan population and decimate the region for generations to come. The campaign of weaponized starvation has included blocking humanitarian aid, systematic looting and destruction of farms, crops, and livestock, and prohibiting Tigrayans from farming their land.

Because of the months-long campaign of destruction undertaken by Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces, farmers in Tigray have limited access to their farms, implements, and services. Farmers and pastoralists have lost livestock because of extensive looting, displacement, and diseases, exacerbating the humanitarian catastrophe. United Nations organizations and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have long warned that hundreds of thousands of people in Tigray are at risk of imminent death unless they receive immediate humanitarian assistance.

Throughout July, the humanitarian conditions have deteriorated because of the continued blockage of humanitarian aid by the Abiy government. UN OCHA and Oxfam disclosed that 5.5 million people are in high acute food insecurity, while more than 350,000 people are in the catastrophic phase of famine in Tigray. The World Food Programme (WFP) puts the number higher, stipulating that 400,000 people have crossed the threshold into famine, with 1.8 million more on the brink of famine. Similarly, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) estimates that 900,000 people in Tigray are facing famine conditions.

Moreover, the UN Children's fund reported that 140,000 acutely malnourished children are at risk of dying without immediate nutritional treatment while the WFP revealed that 33,000 children in Tigray are facing severe acute malnutrition. While the scope of the catastrophe conveyed by these figures is staggering, according to UN chief Ramesh Rajasingham, the numbers might be even higher.

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Humanitarian organizations operating in the region have shared that while they have improved access to parts of Tigray that had been inaccessible to them thus far, they are still facing a complex and rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation. On July 12, a humanitarian convoy of 54 trucks carrying essential supplies arrived in Mekelle. Despite this welcome development that will help alleviate the acute shortage of food, medical supplies, and other relief items, UN OCHA stated that it is far below what is required to meet the crisis. The WFP stated that it is running dangerously low on supplies and needs at least 100 trucks to be arriving daily in Tigray to meet the food need.



The WFP has repeatedly stated that it is mobilizing at its highest capacity to deliver food but it continues to face significant barriers in getting the food aid into the region, past the federal government's blockades. Aid trucks carrying food items are continuously being blocked and attacked on their way into Tigray. In July, a 10-vehicle WFP convoy was attacked 115 kilometers from the town of Semera, Afar. Similarly, five United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) trucks carrying nutritional and sanitation supplies have been barred from entering Tigray, pending approval from federal authorities. Because of the Ethiopian government's continuing siege on Tigray, the delivery of lifesaving assistance is hampered, leading to piecemeal and inadequate delivery of aid.

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A harrowingly brutal aspect of the genocidal war on Tigray has been the large-scale, systematic, and brutal weaponization of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV). Weaponized SGBV is employed by Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces against the women and girls of Tigray, affecting tens of thousands, with the most conservative estimates indicating that at least 22,500 survivors of sexual violence will seek clinical care in Tigray in the coming months.

UN OCHA has reported that at least 100 cases of SGBV were reported daily over the last few months, underscoring that because of the destruction of health facilities and normal reporting structures, the number of those affected is likely much higher. Survivors who have come forward have reported that they are only a small percentage of the women and girls who have been similarly brutally attacked. This systematic mass rape inflicts not only unbelievable trauma on survivors and leaves them vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) but also devastates entire families and communities. Moreover, the picture that has emerged reveals that similar to the cases of Rwanda, Bosnia, and Myanmar, SGBV has been used as a tool of ethnic cleansing and genocide in Tigray.



VOA News "Hundreds of Women, Girls Brutalized by Soldiers in Tigray War," July 2021

With the takeover of many parts of Tigray by the Tigray Defense Forces at the end of June 2021, the imminent threat of SGBV women and girls were facing has been largely removed. The ousting of invading forces from large swaths of Tigrayan territory has enabled civilian populations to find respite from the daily violence that was being inflicted indiscriminately. However, accountability for the heinous crimes committed with impunity and support services for survivors still need to be addressed. Reports reveal that a notable proportion of the sexual violence was committed inside military camps occupied by Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces, indicating that SGBV was tolerated or endorsed by commanders. Eritrean troops, who have engaged in extremely brutal and inhumane acts of SGBV, including gang-rape and sexual slavery, told survivors that they were specifically instructed to attack women and girls. As such, in addition to individual perpetrators, the entire military of each of the belligerents need to face accountability. Moreover, medical and trauma support services for survivors are desperately needed, including counseling and psychological care for the extremely high rates of trauma and depression among survivors and communities.

In July, Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)'s Director for East and Southern Africa released a statement acknowledging the gravity of the SGBV crisis in Tigray and enumerating how the UNFPA is working to address it. In this statement, the Director said that the UNFPA is working with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Police University, and the Federal Police Commission. While the news that UNFPA is taking the SGBV crisis seriously and mobilizing to address it is encouraging, its partnership with various agencies of the Ethiopian government that itself stands accused of these heinous crimes undermines the effectiveness of its efforts. Neither the Ministry nor the police commissions have taken any meaningful steps to address the widespread, weaponized SGBV against women and girls in Tigray for the last 9 months. In fact, they have worked in close collaboration with the Abiy administration, whose forces have committed these heinous acts. As such, UNFPA's efforts to deliver support, accountability, and justice for survivors may be compromised because of the collaboration with these bodies.

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Soon after the federal government declared war on Tigray in November 2020, various armed groups from the neighbouring Amhara region joined the offensive against Tigray. The war presented the perfect opportunity for the Amhara regional government and armed forces to annex land in Western and Southern Tigray that they claim is theirs, including the territories of Welkait, Tsegede, Humera, Tselemete and Raya. Consequently, Amhara forces systematically rounded up and forcibly displaced Tigrayans living in Western Tigray from their homes. Refugees that managed to escape to Sudan shared that Tigrayans were facing massacres, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, and kidnappings by armed forces from the Amhara region. These atrocities were committed with the intention of ethnically cleansing Tigrayans and annexing land in Western Tigray.

The Tigray regional government has repeatedly called for the restoration of the legal, pre-war boundaries between the two regions and has implored the occupying Amhara forces to leave Tigrayan territories. Despite widespread condemnation, including by the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who characterized these actions as ethnic cleansing, Amhara officials and forces have repeatedly asserted their intention to continue occupying and cleansing Western Tigray. The occupation by Amhara forces not only violates the regional border demarcations in the country but encloses Tigray on all sides, blocking off humanitarian corridors that could be used for the transportation of aid.



BBC News, "Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Rebel resurgence sparks questions for Abiy Ahmed," July 2021

In July, this occupation and administration of Tigrayan territories by the Amhara regional government has continued. While many parts of Tigray were liberated when the TDF forced the ENDF to retreat out of Mekelle, some parts of Western Tigray remain under the control of the Amhara forces. There are ongoing reports of harassment, abuse, and assault against Tigrayans still living in Western Tigray. In July, BBC reported that an increasing number of young Tigrayans are making the dangerous journey to cross the border into Sudan, swimming across a fast-flowing river to escape ethnically motivated attacks. Refugees who have recently crossed into Sudan share that Amhara militias gave them two days to leave their homes in Western Tigray, or they would be killed. Amhara militias who are in control of the key town of Humera in Western Tigray have intensified their campaign of ethnic cleansing, mass arresting, detaining, and killing Tigrayan men of fighting age. A July UN OCHA report further corroborates these accounts, revealing that while ethnically motivated violence against Tigrayans is on the rise across Ethiopia, it is particularly extreme in Western Tigray. Additional reports confirm that Tigrayans in parts of Western Tigray are being given 24 hours to leave their homes but are not being provided safe routes to leave. They are prohibited from traveling west to cross the border into Sudan or traveling east into central Tigray, leaving them stranded in dangerous conditions, vulnerable to abuse, detention, and even execution.

**“The Amhara militia are going door to door. If they know you are a Tigrayan, they kill or arrest you” [4]** -- a Tigrayan refugee in Sudan.

On July 12, the U.S. State Department published its annual report on Genocide and Atrocities Prevention to Congress. In it, the State Department disclosed that Ethiopia and Eritrea have been engaged in ethnically-motivated attacks and could face consequences for their actions against ethnic groups in ongoing conflicts they are engaged in. In addition to noting that both Ethiopia and Eritrea are implicated in ethnic cleansing, the Biden administration has additionally demanded the full withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Tigray and the restoration of pre-war boundaries between Tigray and Amhara regions. Ongoing acts of ethnic cleansing, territorial annexation, and extralegal occupation by the Amhara regional government and its armed forces violates Ethiopia’s own laws governing territorial demarcation and threatens the lives of millions in Tigray who are effectively cut off from aid. As such, the immediate removal of all occupying forces from all parts of Tigray is of paramount importance for the safety and security of Tigrayans.

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Since the onset of the war, ethnically targeted attacks and measures against Tigrayans in Ethiopia are on the rise. As early as November 2020, members of the international community warned that the dangerous trend of ethnic profiling, hate speech, and demonization of Tigrayans would unleash heavy destruction. While waging war on the region and people of Tigray since November, the Abiy administration also began undertaking a massive campaign of ethnic profiling against Tigrayans living in the capital Addis Ababa and elsewhere in the country. Hundreds of Tigrayan service members were purged from the Ethiopian African Union (AU) peacekeeping missions, the ENDF, and from police forces across the country. Thousands of Tigrayan service members have been detained and are feared to be facing torture in remote prisons.

In addition to those in the security sector, Tigrayan civilians have been fired from their jobs, denied access to their bank accounts, evicted from their homes, have been subject to unlawful raids, and have been arbitrarily and illegally detained and imprisoned. The widespread ethnic profiling and detention of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa, Somali region, and elsewhere in the country is a core component of the Abiy administration's genocidal war.

**"We can't speak Tigrinya on the streets anymore because someone could just call you 'junta' [Abiy's preferred term for the TPLF] and security forces will come and take you, no questions asked" [5]** -- a 27 year-old Tigrayan woman living in Addis Ababa.

As the ENDF were forced to retreat out of many parts of Tigray in June 2021, ethnically targeted attacks against Tigrayans have drastically increased, both in scope and intensity. On July 16, Amnesty International released a statement confirming that police in Addis Ababa arbitrarily arrest and detain Tigrayans without due process. Accounts by former detainees, witnesses, and lawyers indicate that these arrests are ethnically motivated, as police officers checked identity documents before detaining Tigrayans. At checkpoints and random areas throughout the city, as well as in cafes, restaurants, and public spaces, plainclothes officers are harassing, ethnically profiling, and arresting Tigrayans. Former detainees shared that police stations around Addis Ababa are filled with Tigrayans who have been arbitrarily detained without any legal, due process. Addis Ababa police confirmed on July 19 that they had arrested over 300 Tigrayans, alleging that they are supporters of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

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Despite Ethiopian law requiring detainees to be brought to court within 48 hours of their arrest, the government has not presented any legal charges against the hundreds of Tigrayans it has detained. Instead, those arrested are kept in overcrowded, unsanitary, and inhumane detention centers, some facing physical assault and torture. While detainees who are able to pull resources together to post the exorbitant amount of bail are sometimes released, those unable to do so are taken to Awash Arba, in the Afar region, 240 kilometers out of Addis Ababa. Neither detainees nor their families and lawyers are given an explanation as to why Tigrayans are arrested and transported out of the city en masse.

Consequently, the whereabouts of thousands of detained Tigrayans remain unknown. Journalists who have been reporting on the war on Tigray have also been victims of the Ethiopian government's brutal crackdown, with more than 15 journalists arrested in late June alone. These journalists, including those from prominent media outlets like Awlo Media and Ethio Forum, have not appeared before a judge since their arrest and their families and lawyers have not been able to contact them since July 2, 2021.



Committee to Protect Journalists. "Ethiopian authorities arrest at least 15 employees of 2 independent media outlets." July 2021.

From left to right: detained journalists Bekalu Alamrew, Abebe Bayu, Yeyesew Shimelis, Fanuel Kinfe, & Fana Negash

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In addition to violating Tigrayans' constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, the Abiy administration utilizes the state apparatus to attack Tigrayans financially. Bank accounts opened in Tigray have been blocked, and Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and elsewhere are unable to access or withdraw their funds. In the most recent crackdown, countless Tigrayan businesses have been shut down by the Ethiopian government for reasons as trivial as playing Tigrigna music. Businesses affected by this crackdown range from small cafes and restaurants to large hotels and construction companies that contribute significantly to the tax base of the country. There have also been reports that Tigrayan business owners are being coerced to sell their businesses below the market price. These patterns point to the government's ongoing efforts to extract financial assets from Tigrayans.

By depriving Tigrayans of their livelihoods, businesses, and access to their own money, the Abiy administration is transferring their resources to the state. This resource transfer can also be seen in the exorbitant amounts of bail that illegally detained Tigrayans are expected to pay. In short, the Abiy administration is working to ensure the complete economic devastation of Tigrayans both inside Tigray and across Ethiopia. These ethnically targeted attacks against Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and other places in Ethiopia are fueled by the dangerous rhetoric espoused by Abiy himself, his supporters, and close advisors, several of whom have openly called for explicit ethnic profiling of Tigrayans. The international community has a responsibility to call out and bring an end to the Ethiopian government's systematic ethnic profiling, arrest, detainment, and coercion of Tigrayans.

## **DISPLACEMENT CRISIS**

The war on Tigray has forcefully displaced millions of people from their homes. Since November 2020, over 70,000 Tigrayan refugees have fled to neighbouring Sudan. For tens of thousands of Tigrayans, the harrowing journey of several days or even weeks required avoiding Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces, who have reportedly carried out extrajudicial executions of people attempting to flee. During their journey to Sudan, families have been separated, women and girls have been subjected to SGBV, and many have died along the way. Refugees arrive in Sudan exhausted, malnourished, and traumatized, after traveling for days or weeks. Within Sudan, refugees are currently sheltered in five camps: Um Rakubah, Tunaydbah, Village 8, Hamdayet, and Village 6.

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While finding respite from the violence of war, Tigrayan refugees in Sudan are increasingly exposed to further hardships. Floods associated with the arrival of the rainy season have compromised shelters in the refugee camps, making the living conditions even more precarious. The UN Refugee Agency shared that more than 16,000 refugees in the Um Rakuba and Tunaydbah camps had been impacted by storms and severe weather conditions. Moreover, several camps are facing a severe shortage of essential supplies, chief among them food, with MSF reporting as early as February 2021 that refugee camps were facing a serious food shortage. This is an alarming development that exacerbates the challenges refugees continue to face.

Beyond necessities like food and shelter, there are growing medical needs within the refugee centers as well, where new mothers, pregnant women, and hundreds of survivors of sexual violence are in desperate need of medical care. These ongoing challenges that Tigrayan refugees in Sudan face were underscored in a June 17 letter by Western embassies and donors, which highlighted the lack of safe and dignified sanitation facilities, scarcity of food supplies, and insufficient access to health services.



The New York Times, "Tigray Rebels in Ethiopia Celebrate a Victory," June 2021

IDPs sheltered in schools in Mekelle

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In addition to refugees in Sudan, according to UN OCHA, there are currently more than 2.1 million IDPs in over 380 sites across Tigray. While some IDPs stay in IDP camps, thousands have had to take refuge in schools, abandoned buildings, and factories in cities and towns across Tigray. There are currently over 575,000 IDPs in Shire, 188,000 IDPs in Adwa, and 165,000 IDPs in Sheraro. The tens of thousands of IDPs in these cities are living in dire conditions, “sleeping out in the open, in overcrowded schools, makeshift sites or the homes of local community members,” [6] according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM)’s Ethiopia Chief, Maureen Achieng. Moreover, IDPs have to depend on the local communities for their survival, as humanitarian food assistance has been severely limited.

The IOM has issued an urgent appeal for more funds to scale up the humanitarian response in Tigray in order to meet the needs of IDPs, including access to food, water, and medical supplies. The IOM additionally underscored the need to continue providing support for vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and newborn children. As it stands now, there is an urgent need to scale up efforts to address the dire conditions IDPs are facing and establish safe and secure sites to shelter the tens of thousands of people that are currently unsheltered. The needs of IDPs in Tigray, who have been forced out of their homes and subjected to horrific violence, extend beyond immediate life-sustaining necessities. IDPs need safe, secure, and sanitary living conditions, access to medical care, including psychological services, family reunification, and support services, and educational facilities to serve the tens of thousands of internally displaced children.



While humanitarian access within Tigray has seen significant improvements since the reinstatement of the elected Government of Tigray, the humanitarian situation remains grim as access to Tigray is still deliberately blocked by the Abiy Administration and its allied forces. As the WFP's David Beasley highlighted in his July 27 tweet,

**“WFP runs out of food in Tigray this Friday. It takes 100 trucks per day to reach everyone we are aiming to feed. 170 trucks bound for Tigray with food and other supplies are stuck right now in Afar and can't leave. These trucks must be allowed to move NOW. People are starving”[7].**

The vulnerable people of Tigray who urgently need life-saving humanitarian relief are being denied aid by invading forces that are hellbent on using hunger and rape as weapons in this genocidal war. The international community must immediately move from exclusively producing strongly-worded statements into meaningful action. The consequences of this war are not solely a humanitarian catastrophe, but there are serious international peace and security ramifications that must be adequately weighed, as Abiy is leading Ethiopia down a path of fragmentation.

The Tigrayan government has made it clear that its priority is securing safe transportation routes to facilitate humanitarian access into Tigray. However, while the Tigrayan government and forces are fighting to protect the security of over 7 million people, there is a dangerous increase in incendiary rhetoric by leaders at multiple levels in Ethiopia, ranging from federal, regional, to local levels. Officials in Abiy's administration are purposefully trying to blur the lines between civilian populations and those in the TDF, making innocent Tigrayans throughout Ethiopia targets for attack. Additionally, as the TDF has significantly reduced the fighting ability of the ENDF, the officials in Abiy Administration are desperately attempting to appeal to civilians to join the war on Tigray by flaming the already fraught ethnic tensions throughout Ethiopia.

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The international community must therefore work in a concerted and urgent manner to bring meaningful peace to the area and avoid further catastrophe. The international community must therefore call for and support in:

- unhindered humanitarian access into Tigray;
  - an immediate, negotiated cessation of hostilities;
  - the immediate and verified withdrawal of all invading Eritrean and Amhara forces from Tigray. The major obstacle to vulnerable Tigrayans receiving life-saving aid - as well as the main perpetrators of the crimes against humanity - are Eritrean and Amhara forces that have invaded Tigray. As such, the international community needs to oversee their immediate removal and the restoration of the pre-war territorial boundaries;
  - the full restoration of all essential services - like banking, electricity, telecommunications, water, and fuel - which have been cut off by the Abiy administration. The blocking of these services has significantly impeded the delivery of humanitarian relief;
  - an immediate end to the state-sanctioned ethnic profiling and ethnically-motivated attacks against Tigrayans living across Ethiopia, including evictions, firings, arbitrary arrests, detention, torture, and extrajudicial execution;
  - imposing targeted economic sanctions on Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials and freeze assets belonging to Ethiopian and Eritrean military and civil government personnel;
  - cutting bilateral and multilateral trade relations with Ethiopia and Eritrea and prohibit new investments in either country;
  - official recognition of the Tigray Genocide committed by the ENDF, Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), Amhara Special Forces, and Amhara Fano Militia against the Tigrayan people; and
  - conducting any domestic or international relations regarding Tigray directly with the democratically elected and constitutionally mandated government of Tigray and other stakeholders.
  - an independent, UN-led investigation into all atrocities that have been committed during the war on Tigray; and
  - an all-inclusive political dialogue which involves all stakeholders.
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