

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark skin and hair, wearing a grey headscarf and a white earring. She is holding a baby wrapped in a black and white patterned cloth. The background is a patterned fabric with red, green, and yellow floral designs. The text 'SITUATION REPORT' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

SITUATION REPORT

JULY 2021



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Since the official declaration of war on November 4, 2020, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and Amhara forces have wreaked havoc in Tigray, committing atrocities that amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide. This brutal war has caused immense human suffering with countless reports of massacres and extrajudicial executions, widespread weaponized Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), a man-made famine, and a refugee crisis that has displaced millions.

In addition to the massacres carried out in Axum, Maryam Dengelat, and Kola Tembien in which hundreds of civilians were killed by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, new video evidence of the January Mahbere Dego massacres surfaced in July. These extremely graphic videos show the ENDF grouping unarmed civilians by a cliff edge, executing and throwing their bodies over the cliff. A June 16 letter written by the interim administration of the Mai Kinetal zone in Central Tigray revealed that 440 people have been killed, 558 people have been victims of SGBV, and 125 people had died of starvation in this small region alone. Finally, an aerial bombardment on June 22 by the Ethiopian Air Force of the market town of Togoga, which is located 25 kilometers from Mekelle, killed over 60 civilians and injured hundreds. This Togoga Market airstrike took place around noon, with as many as 3,000 civilians trading goods on a busy market day. In an effort to maximize casualties, Ethiopian forces also blocked ambulances that were attempting to reach Togoga to help survivors.

As we continue to receive more reports of the atrocities committed in Tigray, the number of reported cases of SGBV, including rape and gang-rape is steeply rising. While over 500 cases of SGBV had been officially reported in May 2021, there were over 120 cases reported during the first week of June alone. As the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reported, at least 22,500 women and girls in Tigray will seek medical help for SGBV in 2021. Due to the systematic destruction of health facilities, road blockades in the region, and the psychological trauma around SGBV, we know that reporting is hindered and this is a very conservative estimate. It is suspected that the actual number of women and girls who have endured SGBV is much higher.

Finally, the man-made famine that has gripped the region will likely kill tens of thousands, unless corrective measures are taken immediately. The USAID revealed at the end of June that the number of people living in famine conditions in Tigray had grown exponentially, rising to a staggering 900,000 people. Of these, at least 33,000 are children, who are at high risk of acute malnutrition and famine.

On June 28, the ENDF began an abrupt withdrawal from Tigray's capital city of Mekelle and many other parts of Tigray, after suffering military defeat at the hands of the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). Despite announcing what it has claimed to be a unilateral ceasefire, the Abiy Administration has stated that it has the power and ability to return to Tigray to continue committing atrocities and brutalizing the people. The ENDF reportedly emptied out banks, looted public and private property, and destroyed crucial infrastructure on their way out of Mekelle. Most notably, ENDF forces dismantled satellite equipment in UNICEF's offices in Mekelle, in violation of international humanitarian law.

Moreover, the Abiy Administration imposed a telecommunications, transportation, and banking blockade in Tigray, exacerbating the insecurity of millions of people and worsening the humanitarian crisis. In addition, three days after the ceasefire on July 1, Amhara Regional Special Forces destroyed the bridge over the Tekeze River, which connects Gondar (Amhara) to Shire (Northwestern Tigray). The Tekeze bridge was one of the main supply routes for transferring aid to Western Tigray. According to Rashid Abdi, a Horn of Africa analyst, 60 percent of aid traffic goes through the Tekeze Bridge. The destruction of the bridge is part of the Ethiopian government's strategy to starve and isolate Tigray. Now that Tigray's legitimately elected government has taken back control of many parts of Tigray, a full restoration of all essential services and unhindered humanitarian access by the federal government is required to ensure that thousands of people in Tigray do not die from the famine engineered by Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia and Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea.

Finally, in a war that has unleashed incomprehensible brutalities time and again, in June, humanitarian workers who have dedicated their lives to helping civilians were brutally attacked. OMNA Tigray has put out a press release (accessible [here](#)), but would like to reiterate its heartfelt condolences to the families of Maria Hernandez, Yohannes Halefom Reda, and Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael, who were killed while trying to provide aid to communities in dire need of assistance. In addition to Hernandez, Yohannes, and Tedros, at least 10 other humanitarian workers have tragically lost their lives in Tigray. Instead of ensuring their safety and security, in a televised June 23 interview, Abiy attacked and demonized humanitarian workers, which exposes workers on the ground to more danger. The harassment, attacks, and killing of humanitarian workers is part and parcel of the overall strategy of brutalizing and starving the people of Tigray, by scaring off the people who are best placed to provide relief. We condemn attacks against humanitarian workers in the strongest terms and call on international actors to ensure their protection, working in concert with the restored government of Tigray and the TDF.

During a question-and-answer session with a European Parliament committee on June 15, Finland's foreign minister Pekka Haavisto described his February 2021 stay in Ethiopia, where he participated in meetings with Abiy and other key ministers about the humanitarian crisis in Tigray. Haavisto stated,

“When I met the Ethiopian leadership in February they really used this kind of language, that they are going to destroy the Tigrayans, they are going to wipe out the Tigrayans for 100 years and so forth” [1].

Despite the Ethiopian government's weak denial, the conduct of the war on Tigray for the last 8 months is consistent with the sentiments expressed in Haavisto's testimony; the Abiy regime intended and intends to wipe out Tigray and Tigrayans for 100 years. Beyond the massacres, extrajudicial executions, weaponized SGBV and famine, the Abiy regime also sought to destroy the region through systematic attacks against the health system, economic infrastructure, educational institutions, ecological structures, and social and cultural sites.

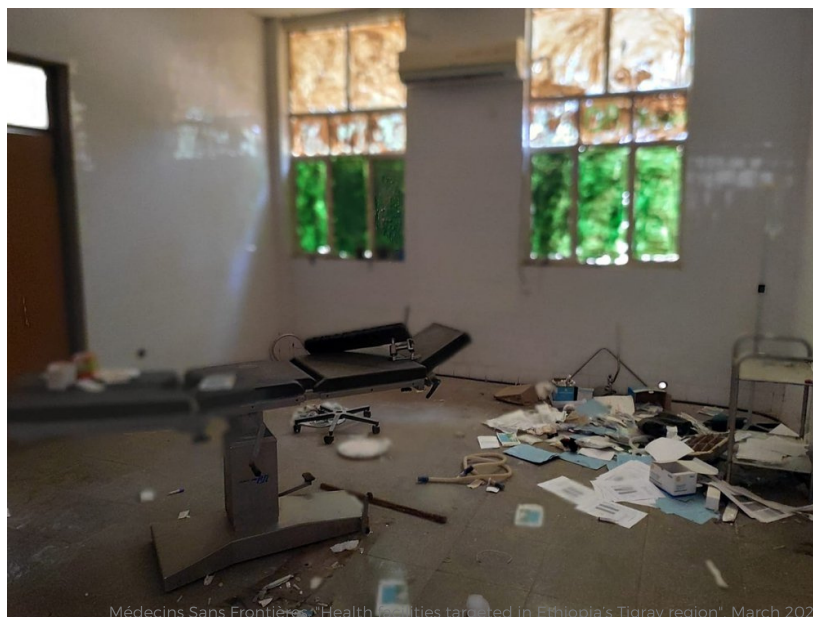
Healthcare Infrastructure

Before the genocidal war, considerable work had been done to develop a well-equipped and well-functioning health infrastructure in Tigray, which consequently had one of the best health systems in Ethiopia. However, as a direct consequence of the ongoing war, the health system in Tigray has completely collapsed. In March 2021, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) first reported on the widespread looting, vandalism, and destruction of health facilities across Tigray, noting that of the health facilities assessed, 70% had been looted and more than 30% had been damaged. Time also published that 82% of health facilities were non-functional. Medical facilities have been targeted by the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces, who have vandalized, destroyed, and set fire to hospitals, clinics, and health centers. Even veterinary clinics set up to provide health services for livestock have been looted and set on fire in Central Tigray.

MSF additionally reported that 20% of health facilities it reached were occupied by invading forces. Eritrean troops had set up camp in Mugulat in Eastern Tigray while Ethiopian troops were occupying the hospital in Abiy Addi in central Tigray, making these facilities completely inaccessible to the civilian population.

Additionally, medical equipment and supplies have been deliberately destroyed across health centers in Tigray, including ambulances that have been set on fire or stolen by soldiers to be used as military vehicles. Medical professionals have been killed by the invading forces, while thousands have fled to save their lives. Remaining health staff, who are providing lifesaving care under dire circumstances, do so with few supplies and under constant threat.

In what MSF's Joseph Velliveau has described as a "systematic elimination of an entire people's fundamental right" [2] to healthcare, hospitals in Fasti, Freweini, and Hawzen (Eastern Tigray), in Adwa and Abiy Addi (Central Tigray), Slekleka, Shul, and Sheraro (Western Tigray), and Debre Abay and May Kuhli (Northwestern Tigray) have been looted and completely destroyed. The biggest health facilities in the region, including Ayder Referral Hospital in Mekelle and Axum Hospital are functioning at a fraction of their full capacity due to the destruction of facilities, interruption of supplies, and shortage of personnel. Only 13% of health facilities in Tigray are functioning at a normal level and there is effectively no healthcare in the rural parts of the region, beyond the emergency relief work done by humanitarian organizations.



Health center in May Kuhl

Humanitarian agencies operating on the ground have reported that rather than it being a sporadic act, the looting and destruction of health facilities has been deliberate and systematic, with the goal of rendering them non-operational. The destruction of the health infrastructure in Tigray has taken place in clear view of the international community and has been committed with complete impunity. As health facilities are crucial for the wellbeing of any society, it is clear that the deliberate attack against the health system in Tigray is designed to devastate the population.

Amid a war in which Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces are shelling entire towns, bombing open markets, and indiscriminately attacking civilians, there are thousands of people who urgently need medical attention. People who sustain injuries because of the war waged on Tigray are unable to access health care they need because the health system in the region has been deliberately destroyed. Therefore, even those civilians whose lives could have been saved by timely medical attention are succumbing to their injuries.

The gendered impact of the destruction of health facilities is prominent. Given the prevalence of weaponized SGBV in the region, which has been among the worst in modern history, there are thousands of women in Tigray in dire need of medical attention. Tens of thousands of women who have survived various forms of SGBV including rape, gang-rape, and sexual slavery cannot access the medical and psychological help they desperately need. Similarly, an increasing number of pregnant women are forced to give birth at home, leading to higher maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates. The mothers and children who survive childbirth cannot access the necessary postnatal care such as vaccinations. Finally, the sheer scale of wholesale destruction that has been inflicted on the health facilities in Tigray means that it will take years, if not decades, to rebuild the health system in the region. This has a devastating impact not only on the existing population, but threatens the wellbeing and health of future generations of Tigrayans as well. As such, the destruction of health systems has been part and parcel of the strategy to destroy Tigray for the next 100 years.

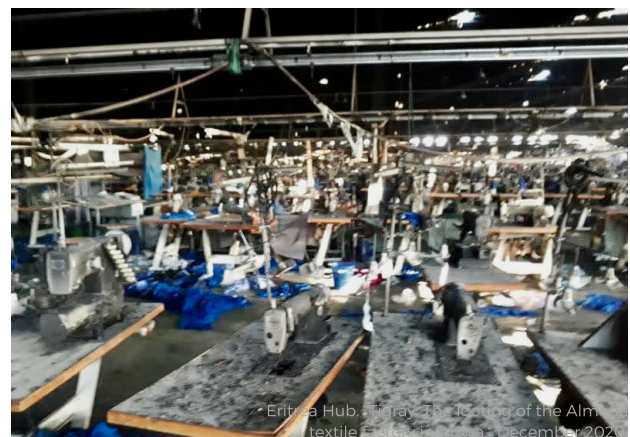


Outside the gates of Samre health center

Economic Infrastructure

Prior to the war, decades of concerted efforts had produced a rapidly growing economy in Tigray and across Ethiopia. In partnership with international donors and investors, the government managed to improve food security in Tigray by promoting diversification and sustainability in smallholder agriculture, facilitating commercial sesame production, and implementing a robust safety net program. There was also heavy investment in artisanal mining, factories, and industries. The Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT) - a conglomerate of factories established to rehabilitate the Tigrayan economy after the Ethiopian Civil War (1974-1991) and famine (1983-1985) - had established construction, textile, mining, and pharmaceutical factories that employed thousands.

Since the onset of the war on Tigray, factories across Tigray, most notably those owned by EFFORT have been ransacked, looted, and completely destroyed. Eyewitness reports, photos, and videos illustrate the widespread systematic and intentional ransacking of industries and factories. The World Peace Foundation (WPF) reported in April 2021 that there has been large-scale looting, asset stripping, asset destruction, pillaging, and vandalism across factories in Tigray. Alula Habteab, head of the Tigray interim administration's construction, road and transport department (prior to the reoccupation of Mekelle by TDF on June 28), confirmed that Eritrean and Amhara forces, in particular, have inflicted the most destruction against Tigray's economic infrastructure. The Eritrean forces have destroyed all factories, employing thousands of Tigrayans, without exception, Alula reported. Prominent examples of such factories include Almeda Textile/Garment Manufacturing, Addis Pharmaceuticals, Adigrat Pharmaceuticals, Sur Construction, and Sheba Leather. It will require at least 100 billion birr to replace and reestablish these factories, according to Mr. Abera Niguse, head of the Tigray former interim government's justice bureau.



Almeda textile factory, before and after the war

What is especially noteworthy about the destruction of Tigray's economic infrastructure by the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces is its comprehensiveness. The WPF's report underscores the pre-meditated, vindictive, and deliberate damage to the economic foundation of Tigray inflicted by the invading forces. This destruction was undertaken with the intention of depriving Tigrayans of objects and resources necessary for their continued survival. In particular, the Eritrean and Amhara forces undertook extensive looting, carting away machinery, cars, and other properties from factories in Tigray. The destruction of factories that employed thousands of workers additionally contributes to the economic hardship Tigrayans face as they continue to deal with the fallout of the genocidal war.

In addition to ransacking, vandalizing, and setting hundreds of buildings and factories on fire, the invading Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have also arbitrarily prohibited access to banks and microfinance institutions, closed essential services, and overtaken private and public infrastructure, compounding the economic crisis in the region. Tigray thus faces a multitude of exceptionally difficult economic and social challenges due to invading forces' deliberate targeting of economic infrastructure. The actions of the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have created a bleak economic outlook in Tigray for the foreseeable future.

Education Infrastructure

Prior to the war, Tigray had a growing educational infrastructure, encompassing primary schools, secondary schools, as well as public and private universities. Among them, the largest included Adigrat University, which had 14,300 students in 37 departments, Axum University which was home to six colleges across three campuses, and Mekelle University, which hosted over 31,000 students in its eleven institutes and seven campuses. Since November 4, 2020, armed actors have undertaken a thorough destruction of the education infrastructure in the region, pillaging, vandalizing, and destroying schools. A May 2021 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report revealed that a quarter of all schools in Tigray had sustained damage. Airstrikes and indiscriminate shelling by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces have damaged schools and killed students in Adihaki and Adwa. University staff members have also been killed by ENDF and Eritrean forces at Tembien, Raya, Adigrat, and Axum universities.

A report by Nyssen et al. (2021) details the damage to universities, which has been deliberate and extensive. Technology and Veterinary campuses of Mekelle University have been completely looted, while Ethiopian soldiers have partially looted all other campuses. Similarly, Adigrat University and Axum University were completely looted by Eritrean forces and anything that remained was destroyed by fire or bombs. The Ethiopian and Eritrean forces looted computers, lab equipment, and classroom supplies from universities. Even small everyday items like kitchen equipment and students' mattresses were looted by the Eritrean forces. In addition to the looting, the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces also deliberately inflicted heavy damage to schools, destroying entire buildings, electrical installations, water pipes, and student records.



Tsegaye Berhe school in Adwa, Tigray - completely destroyed

In addition to looting and destroying educational institutions, the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces used schools in Tigray as military encampments. The Ethiopian forces forcefully occupied Atse Yohannes Preparatory School in Mekelle while the Eritreans occupied Raya University for months. These forces used educational institutions to commit atrocities against civilian populations, in some instances using schools to hold women hostage and commit innumerable atrocities against the civilian population. For instance, Nyssen et al (2021) report that more than 10 Tigrayan students were raped inside Ayder campus by Ethiopian Federal Police officers. When the invading armies vacated occupied schools, they often left vulgar, anti-Tigrayan graffiti on the walls of the schools, including messages that "Tigray must be cleansed," which clearly indicates the genocidal intent of the war.

Tigrayan students have been out of school for almost an entire year now, which has taken a terrible toll on children and their education. Tigrayan children are unable to access the education that their peers in the rest of the country have been able to. Moreover, Tigrayan students in secondary school and university have also had their studies abruptly interrupted by the war. The ongoing war denies students their right to education, which is protected under international human rights law. The war has also affected school attendance rates; more than half of expected students have been absent from the universities that are open because of war-related insecurity. The use of schools as military barracks, the abuses that were committed in them, and the epithets that were left behind has turned educational institutions into dark and traumatic spaces for survivors as well as the surrounding communities. Beyond the physical destruction of the school structures, the psychological wounds inflicted by the conversion of educational institutes into military camps by the invaders does immeasurable damage. In all, this deliberate and targeted pillaging, vandalism, and destruction of educational facilities has done incalculable damage to young children and students of all ages across Tigray.

In addition to the destruction of essential health, economic and educational infrastructure, important social, cultural, and religious sites have also been targeted since November 2020. Christian and Muslim sites of worship have been desecrated, ransacked, looted, and shelled. The Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA) reported that Eritrean troops looted manuscripts and treasures from monasteries and churches across Tigray. Moreover, Al-Nejashi mosque, one of the oldest and most sacred mosques in the world, with immense significance to Muslims the world over, was damaged by the invading forces. The destruction of religious and cultural sites is another strategy aimed at tearing up Tigray's social fabric; designed to humiliate, demoralize and dispirit the Tigrayan people.

Finally, in addition to the damage inflicted on physical and human-made structures, the ecological destruction the invading forces have wrought is damage generations of Tigrayans will have to live with. Indiscriminate shellings and bombings across Tigray have deeply disrupted ecological conditions and will likely lead to severely degraded soil and air and water quality for generations to come. Particularly, Eritrean forces' vindictive and unimaginably malicious acts of deliberately setting forests and settlements on fire, cutting down trees, and undoing three decades worth of conservation efforts is designed to destroy the very earth that Tigrayans have and will continue to live on.



Al-Nejashi mosque after shelling



Al-Nejashi mosque before shelling

In a televised speech on June 30, after the ENDF forces vacated Mekelle following a resounding defeat at the hands of the TDF, Abiy publicly declared that

“[E]verything is effectively dismantled in Tigray. We have no business there, as nothing is left” [3].

This statement and many others like it that were shared during the same broadcast lay bare the Abiy regime’s intention in waging a brutal war against the people of Tigray for nearly 8 months. Despite the repeated statements that this was a “law enforcement operation,” the fact that the complete devastation of Tigray was the ‘mission accomplished’ moment for Abiy confirms what Foreign Minister Haavisto revealed in his testimony. The genocidal forces in Addis Ababa and Asmara have intentionally and systematically targeted hospitals, factories, schools, churches, mosques, and the very environment that Tigrayans have to live in, with the stated goal of destroying Tigray and wiping out Tigrayans for a hundred years.

The man-made famine that has exposed millions of people to what is feared to be the worst starvation crisis in decades is an ongoing aspect of the genocidal war on Tigray. This man-made famine in Tigray is a result of the organized, systematic, and intentional strategy of the Ethiopian and Eritrean regimes to use food as a weapon of war. Since November 2020, the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have undertaken large scale looting and destruction of food supplies in Tigray, stealing foodstuff, burning crops, and slaughtering livestock. Moreover, these forces have blocked the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian aid, harassing and killing humanitarian workers.

Officials from the now disbanded Tigray interim government had confirmed the federal government's strategy of deliberately starving the people of Tigray prior to leaving Mekelle, specifically highlighting the anti-farming campaign in the areas of Shire, Tembien, and Hawzen, where farmers are prevented from working on their land. Oxfam International and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) revealed in May 2021 that a staggering 91% of the total population of Tigray, approximately 5.2 million people, were facing extreme hunger. Most alarmingly, 350,000 people in Tigray were facing conditions of famine as of May, among them 30,000 children, who are especially susceptible to malnutrition-related death.

In June 2021, Samantha Power of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) revealed that the number of people facing famine conditions had tripled in the span of a month, from 350,000 in May to a staggering 900,000 in June. Power further stated that millions more are at risk of famine in Tigray. UNICEF found increasing levels of malnutrition among children, pregnant women and nursing women assessed. UNICEF reported that at least 33,000 children are severely malnourished and face imminent death in the absence of immediate humanitarian assistance. It additionally revealed that 56,000 children face severe acute malnutrition, underscoring the depth of the humanitarian catastrophe that has been created in Tigray. Of those who need immediate food aid, only 20% have been reached by humanitarian agencies.



Throughout June 2021, the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have exacerbated this man-made humanitarian catastrophe. UNOCHA disclosed that armed forces continue to obstruct the transportation of food, non-food, and medical supplies. Checkpoints in Agulae (Eastern zone), Wajerat (South Eastern zone), Maichew (Southern zone), and Enticho (Central zone) have become major obstructions for humanitarian agencies attempting to deliver lifesaving assistance to millions of people. The harassment, intimidation, and detention of aid workers and confiscation of humanitarian supplies has continued unabated, despite the international community's condemnation of such actions.

Barrels of fuel belonging to an international non-governmental organization were forcefully taken at a military checkpoint on June 16 while a vaccination team in Asgede Woreda, North-Western zone, was stopped and physically assaulted by Eritrean soldiers on June 17. Because of the actions of the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara regional forces, Samre and Fijet woredas in the South Eastern Zone and Adigrat, Edaga Hamus, Freweyni and Wukro in the Eastern zone - along with large swaths of the region of Tigray - are in dire need of food aid, with parts of these zones at risk of starvation.

Additional Omna reports document the extent and brutality of weaponized sexual and gender-based violence in the war on Tigray. Since November 2020, there have been numerous reports of Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces perpetrating egregious levels of SGBV, with survivors ranging in age from an 8-year-old child to an elderly woman over 80.

The weaponized SGBV in Tigray is characterized by extreme brutality. Women are being subjected to gang rape by as many as 20 soldiers for days or even weeks. In attempting to escape these atrocities, Tigrayan women have lost their eyes, arms, or even been killed. The UN has reported that many of these violations happen in front of survivors' family members and that soldiers have forced Tigrayan men, under the threat of their families' death, to commit SGBV against their own family members. Witnesses and survivors additionally testify that women and girls are being kidnapped, drugged, tied to trees or rocks, and repeatedly and violently gang-raped for days and sometimes weeks. The viciousness of these attacks and the sheer brutality and inhumanity they embody has been decried by humanitarian workers, who have described it as "a level of cruelty beyond comprehension" [4]. Many humanitarian workers have stated that they are observing the worst accounts of sexual violence they have ever heard in decades of humanitarian service.

SGBV has been utilized as a weapon of war; it is deliberate, systematically organized, and intended to humiliate, terrorize, and disintegrate the social fabric of Tigrayan society. In May 2021, it was confirmed by USAID that Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara troops are targeting the wives of priests, abusing women in front of their families, and using a level of violence so brutal that women are ending up with organ damage. A National Geographic report released in May also provided harrowing insight into the brutalities of the weaponized sexual violence committed against Tigrayan women. The most conservative estimates indicate that at least 22,500 survivors of sexual violence in Tigray will seek clinical care in 2021.

Given the large scale destruction of health facilities by invading forces and the stigma and psychological trauma associated with sexual violence – there are likely thousands of women who have experienced similar brutalities who are unable to seek medical care or report their assaults. The horrific brutality of the systematic and intentional sexual violence inflicted on tens of thousands of women leaves many with permanent bodily injury, including internal organ damage and spinal injuries. After surviving such sadistic attacks, women and girls across Tigray are additionally facing the risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections (including HIV) and unwanted pregnancies. With health facilities systematically destroyed, there are few places that survivors can turn to in the aftermath of weaponized SGBV.

The sexually violent attacks are not random, and the language used by soldiers indicates the women are being targeted because of their ethnicity - with the intention of rendering them infertile. The attacks are an instrument of war. In June, two separate letters demanded international action, one from former Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark, and the other from Zimbabwean author and 2020 Booker prize nominee Tsitsi Dangarembga. Clark's letter calls on the UN Security Council to set up a tribunal to investigate allegations of sexual violence in Tigray as a "war crime, crime against humanity or a constitutive act of genocide" [5].

ETHNIC PROFILING

An under-reported but nevertheless important aspect of the Ethiopian government's genocidal campaign against Tigrayans is the rampant ethnic profiling of Tigrayans across the country. In early November 2020, shortly after the declaration of war on Tigray, the Ethiopian government disarmed hundreds of ethnic Tigrayans serving as part of the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) Peacekeeping forces in Somalia. The Ethiopian government rounded up ethnic Tigrayan personnel from the UN peacekeeping mission and forced them back to Addis Ababa in November. Officials within the UN expressed their concerns about the fate of these Tigrayan service members, fearing that they would be tortured or even executed upon reaching Ethiopia. Similarly, 200 to 300 Tigrayan soldiers in the AU peacekeeping force were disarmed and confined to their base in Somalia. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet stated, the situation remains "worrying and volatile" [6]. The safety, security, and whereabouts of Tigrayan service members purged from various missions remains unknown.

Within Ethiopia, a similar process of purging Tigrayans from the police and security infrastructure has been undertaken by the Ethiopian government. Since November 2020, Tigrayan police and soldiers – some with decades of service – have been forced to turn in their arms and have been placed on indefinite leave. Alarming, thousands of Tigrayans that were members of the ENDF have been detained and are feared to be facing torture in prisons. These patterns of ethnic profiling within the military infrastructure are still ongoing. Tghat media shared a [May 23, 2021 notice](#) from the ENDF southern command which explicitly states that service members have been denied promotion solely on the basis of their Tigrayan ethnicity.

Beyond the disarming and detention of Tigrayans in the security sector, Tigrayan civilians have also been victims of ethnic profiling since the onset of the war. There have been widespread reports of Tigrayans being fired or put on indefinite forced leave from their jobs in government and the private sector in many parts of Ethiopia, including in Addis Ababa. It has been widely reported that Ethiopian Airlines, a state-owned enterprise, has fired or put Tigrayan pilots, technicians, caterers and security personnel on indefinite leave, with no warning or cause. The only crime they seem to be guilty of is their ethnicity;

“They identified us by our Tigrayan sounding names,” a staff member revealed [7].

The state-affiliated Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) itself has expressed its concern at these reports of ethnic profiling, condemning the arbitrary firing and detention of Tigrayans across the country. The EHRC additionally confirmed that Tigrayan homes are being raided and illegally searched by Ethiopian security forces, without legal justification. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government has prohibited Tigrayans from leaving the country for work, studies or even lifesaving medical treatment, in violation of domestic and international laws.

Most recently, in June 2021, as the TDF took back control of Mekelle and the ENDF retreated, ethnic profiling of Tigrayans has increased in the capital Addis Ababa and other regions of Ethiopia. Facing mounting military and diplomatic pressure, the Abiy administration has escalated its attacks against Tigrayans outside of Tigray. Reports indicate that hundreds, if not thousands of Tigrayan civilians have been unlawfully detained, imprisoned, and transported to undisclosed locations.

In addition to the detention and disappearance of Tigrayan civilians, businesses owned by Tigrayans are increasingly coming under attack. Multiple reports coming out of Addis Ababa indicate that Tigrayan businesses are being arbitrarily and illegally closed down by the city administration. Statements by government officials, journalists, and public figures in support of this systematic and extensive ethnic profiling targeting Tigrayans are being repeatedly aired by state-owned media, which further threatens the safety and well-being of Tigrayan civilians. Moreover, these official reports do not account for societal-level ethnic profiling and discrimination, which are being reported by individuals living in Addis Ababa and elsewhere. Tigrayans in other parts of the country recount the harassment they are subjected to solely because of their ethnic identity, reporting that they are afraid to speak their language, express their ethnicity or even share their Tigrayan last names.

While the war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed in Tigray have understandably been highlighted as the most egregious aspects of the war, the ethnic profiling and detention of Tigrayans in the rest of the country is important to call attention to as it underscores the genocidal intent of the Ethiopian government. The widespread ethnic profiling and detention of Tigrayans lends credence to the argument that it is not merely a political group that the Abiy regime seeks to eliminate but rather Tigrayans at large, both as individuals and a social entity.



AP News: "Purely ethnic profiling": New wave of Tigrayans detained." July 2021

Months have passed since the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken first came out with a condemnation of the acts of widespread ethnic cleansing taking place in Tigray and more specifically, in Western Tigray. Witness and first-hand accounts relayed that armed forces from the neighbouring Amhara region had taken over entire communities, rounding up ethnic Tigrayans and forcibly displacing them from their homes. Several accounts by refugees in Sudan also revealed that thousands of Tigrayans in Western Tigray were forced into trucks and taken away by armed forces. In addition to the tens of thousands ethnically cleansed from Western Tigray and forced to flee to either Sudan or other parts of the region, there are also reports of ethnic Tigrayans getting massacred in towns like Dansha in Western Tigray.

Statements made by Amhara regional government officials and militia leaders before and after the declaration of war in November 2020 clearly indicate their intention of expelling Tigrayans from Western Tigray and annexing the land. Joining Abiy's genocidal war efforts, Amhara forces committed innumerable atrocities, brutalized civilians, and undertook the systematic destruction of Tigray. Beyond these acts, by their own admission, Amhara forces undertook a campaign to "take back land" [8], using extreme violence to forcefully displace hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans in Western Tigray. Civilians were forced to leave their homes, farms, and businesses just to save their lives, most of them now leading precarious lives either as refugees in Sudan or IDPs. Amhara officials have confirmed and supported these illegal acts of territorial annexation, which violate the constitutional order of the country. Having taken control of a swathe of territory, amounting to approximately a quarter of Tigray, Amhara officials have stated that they have no intention of leaving this occupied land.

The occupation of Western Tigray by Amhara forces has continued throughout June. Rather than leaving the Tigrayan territories it is occupying, as per the request of the elected Tigray regional government and various international bodies including the United States and select European governments, the Amhara regional government has doubled down on its claims that it has "returned" the land. On June 29, the Amhara branch of the Prosperity Party released a statement in which it declared that it would "pay the price" to oppose any attempts to restore the occupied areas, including Wolkait, Tsegede, Tselemt and Raya to their constitutional administration under the Tigray regional government [9].

The ongoing occupation of Western Tigray by Amhara forces not only violates the law governing territorial boundaries within Ethiopia but also effectively encloses Tigray on all sides. By removing the only international border Tigray has on the Western front, the Amhara forces are aiding the Abiy administration's efforts to isolate and completely encircle Tigray. This occupation of Western Tigray by Amhara forces therefore blocks off the entire region from aid access and restricts avenues for people to flee conflict. The occupation has already been weaponized by the Amhara forces, who have held up and returned trucks that were attempting to deliver aid to the more than 5.2 million Tigrayans who are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

The Tigray Regional Government has offered conditions for the formalization of a ceasefire that can alleviate the immense humanitarian suffering in the region. Among them, the withdrawal of occupying Eritrean and Amhara forces from the constitutionally established and protected boundaries of Tigray is paramount. In a July 6 statement, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed the same sentiment, echoing the Tigray government's call for the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean and Amhara forces. In this statement, Blinken further added that "neither the internal nor external border of Ethiopia will be changed by force or in contravention of the constitution." [10] The international community as well as the Tigrayan forces have repeatedly called for a ceasefire and a political resolution to the war, in order to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe in Tigray. This political resolution requires, first and foremost, the removal of occupying forces from all of Tigray.

DISPLACEMENT

Internal displacement has been an ongoing issue since the start of the genocidal war in Tigray - there are currently more than 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Many of them were forced to flee their homes under assault. International aid agencies have repeatedly noted that the humanitarian needs in the region are grave, far exceeding current capacities. Hundreds of thousands of IDPs are entirely cut off from humanitarian assistance and are completely dependent on host community support in places like Alaje, Maichew, Nek-Sege, Mokoni, Raya-Azebo, and Raya-Chercher. Because of the lack of emergency shelters, many IDPs have taken refuge in schools, abandoned buildings, and factories near urban centers. Tens of thousands of displaced people are thus living in unsuitable, unsafe, and health-threatening conditions, experiencing the worst of the starvation crisis. Moreover, UNOCHA has further highlighted that health care services are largely inaccessible to IDPs, many of whom desperately need medical assistance.

On May 25, 2021, Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers rounded up, detained, and tortured hundreds of IDPs in Shire. The Ethiopian and Eritrean troops invaded Adi Wenfito and Tseha IDP centers, beating and harassing displaced Tigrayans in their efforts to detain hundreds. While some of the detainees have since been released following mounting international pressure, their initial detainment has exacerbated the insecurity in the region. In addition to facing the brutality of war and being displaced from their homes, the people of Tigray are being denied security even in IDP centers, which are subject to invasion by the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies. There is a desperate need to scale up efforts to address the displacement crisis and establish safe and adequate IDP sites to shelter the thousands of people that are still being displaced because of the ethnic cleansing and genocidal war. In June, UNOCHA reported there were concerns about the presence of a military unit in the proximity of the “Sabacare-4” IDP relocation site in Mekelle.

The living conditions of the 73,000 Tigrayan refugees in Sudan are similarly bleak. In addition to the trauma Tigrayan refugees endured at the hands of the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara armed forces, thousands are traumatized by the dangerous and harrowing journey into Sudan, having lost their husbands, wives, or children on the road. Refugees are currently settled in six refugee camps and settlements: Um Rakubah, Al-Tenideba, Tunaydbah, Village 8, Hamdayet, and Village 6. However, extreme weather conditions in Sudan have led to a deterioration of living conditions for thousands of Tigrayans in refugee camps. Torrential rain and strong winds have destroyed shelters and latrines and caused flooding in the Tunaydbah settlement in Eastern Sudan, which houses 20,000 refugees.

Due to the rainy season in Al-Tenideba camp, thousands of refugees who fled Tigray are stuck in precarious conditions. In May, a storm created panic and destroyed 200 tents. Three weeks later, on June 7th a second storm destroyed the remaining tents in the camp. Al-Tenideba is one of two camps that together host about 40,000 refugees from Tigray. This has left refugees with limited, dangerous options: remain in the camp with deteriorating weather and conditions, return to war-torn Tigray, go to the other camp in the state, Hashaba, head to Hamdayet (crossing point between Ethiopia and Sudan) and arguably the most dangerous option - leave for Libya and risk their lives crossing to Europe.

Confirmed in the 47th Session of the Human Rights Council at the UN General Assembly, recent reports indicate that two refugee camps hosting more than 25,000 Eritrean refugees in the Tigray region, Hitsats and Shimelba, were allegedly attacked by Eritrean and Ethiopian troops between November 2020 and January 2021. According to information received, there were clear and consistent patterns that these refugee camps were being specifically targeted, despite their protected humanitarian status.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The shift in the dynamics of the war on Tigray throughout June have been reflected in the international response. The international community has continued its expressions of grave concern at the humanitarian catastrophe in Tigray. The United States, Canada, and several European governments have once again reiterated their calls for the cessation of hostilities. Of paramount concern, both for the people of Tigray and the international community, has been the famine that has already taken hold in the region. In high-level meetings, congressional sessions, and statements, members of the international community have drawn attention to the famine crisis in Tigray and called on all parties – but especially the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces – to stop obstructing the delivery of aid.

On June 2, the United States, Canada, and several European nations called for a “cessation of hostilities by all conflict parties and unfettered humanitarian access so that aid can flow and famine can be averted” in a statement on Twitter [11].

In a June 4 press briefing, U.S. State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter expressed that “the U.S. has concerns about the crisis in the Tigray region, as well as other threats to both the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia.” She called for “the parties to the conflict in Tigray that have no meaningful steps or - to end the hostility, to pursue a peaceful resolution to the political crisis” [12].

On June 7, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that,

“Several areas in Tigray are on the brink of famine. The situation will only keep getting worse unless needed funding is increased and humanitarian access is improved” [13].

On June 9, USAID Administrator Samatha Power held a day-long series of high-level meetings on the humanitarian catastrophe in Tigray, convening humanitarian partners, diplomats, aid workers, donor countries and U.S. government officials for urgent discussions on fighting famine and ending ongoing atrocities, including widespread and systematic sexual violence. Power announced more than \$181 million in additional USAID humanitarian assistance and met with Ethiopian Canadian recording artist The Weeknd to discuss raising global awareness about the scale of the need facing those impacted by the conflict. Power also convened a high-level group of donor countries - Canada, Denmark, the European Commission, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK to discuss immediate steps to assisting those in need and calling on the Ethiopian government to end hostilities and provide access to critical aid. Power also spoke with AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat to best address the urgency of the situation in Tigray.

On June 12, in a pre-recorded video message, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia Demeke Mekonnen accused unspecified members of the “international community” of undertaking “a campaign against Ethiopia” ahead of the G7 leaders’ communication expressing concern for the ongoing conflict in Tigray. He accused the group of countries for utilizing a “condescending approach” and demanded they “desist from these unhelpful activities” [14]. At the G7 Summit, 1000 protestors marched through the streets of Cornwall, to protest against the Tigray crisis.

On June 15, the EU special Envoy to Ethiopia and Finland’s Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto revealed that language was revealed during meetings with the Ethiopian leadership earlier this year that acknowledged, “they are going to destroy the Tigrayans [...] they are going to wipe the Tigrayans out for 100 years” [1]. He further explained that the comments appear to be describing a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

On June 16, Head of Security Policy at Facebook Nathan Gleicher released a statement claiming the removal of a network of accounts, pages and groups in Ethiopia for coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) targeting domestic audiences on their platform in-country. The network posted primarily news and current events in Ethiopia targeting various opposition political groups.

On June 17, it was revealed that the Ethiopian government has urged an AU body to “immediately cease” a new commission of inquiry into allegations of abuses in Tigray [15]. A statement released from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs critiqued the independent inquiry as “misguided” and lacking legal basis - proposing a joint probe instead. Members of the new AU Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights have remarked the investigation into alleged human rights abuses will go forward, however no date has been set for the commission to visit Tigray given the security factors.

On June 21, U.N. Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet stated a joint investigation with the state-run Ethiopian Human Rights Commission would conclude in August and be made public.

In the 47th Session of the Human Rights Council at the UN General Assembly from June 21 to July 9, introduced by the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, information was received that Somali soldiers were moved from military training camps in Eritrea to the front line in Tigray, where they accompanied Eritrean troops as they crossed the Ethiopian border. It is also reported that Somali fighters were present around Axum. The government of Somalia denied the participation of Somali soldiers in the Tigray conflict, although a Somali parliamentary committee has demanded an explanation from the President of Somalia on the whereabouts of the Somali troops sent to Eritrea. The Special Rapporteur was informed that the foreign affairs and defence committee of the Parliament has called on the head of State to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Asmara for an investigation.

On June 22, U.S. State Department Spokesperson Ned Price confirmed the death of a U.S. citizen in Addis Ababa. He was a member of an American delegation in Ethiopia at the time to observe the upcoming elections.

On June 28, a statement was released by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore on the obstruction of UNICEF humanitarian operations in Mekelle. She stated that

“members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces entered our [UNICEF] office in Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia today and dismantled our VSAT equipment” [16].

The statement also noted the act was a serious violation of international humanitarian law with respect to humanitarian relief objects. Fore condemned the act in the strongest terms. On behalf of the UN agency, she urged “all parties to the conflict in Tigray to abide by the rules of war and to respect and protect humanitarian agencies. Parties to conflict must not search, confiscate or interfere with humanitarian relief operations, must allow access to the populations in need, and must protect children at all times” [16].

On June 29, following rapid advancements against invading forces within Tigray, U.S. State Department Spokesperson Ned Price stated the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire “could be a positive step, if it results in changes on the ground to end the conflict, stop the atrocities, and allow unhindered humanitarian assistance” [17]. He noted the continued close monitoring of the situation on the ground and prioritization of the humanitarian situation.

On June 29, a hearing of the U.S. Foreign Affairs Committee (GOP) on the conflict was held, and in opening remarks Lead Republican Michael McCaul highlighted the catastrophic conditions on the ground in Tigray. U.S. President Joe Biden also called Ethiopian PM Abiy to restore telecoms services in Tigray, following the announcement of the ceasefire.



AP News, "Ethiopia declares immediate, unilateral cease-fire in Tigray," June 2021.

In his January 17 testimony in which he shared his exchange with Abiy Ahmed and Ethiopian ministers, Haavisto articulated his alarm at the Ethiopian government's genocidal intentions in Tigray. "You cannot destroy all the people, you cannot destroy all the population in Tigray. And I think that's very obvious, that we have to react, because it looks for us like ethnic cleansing. It is a very, very serious act if this is true," he said [1]. The seriousness of the intention and subsequent action of the Ethiopian and Eritrean regimes cannot be overstated. In addition to explicitly discussing their genocidal intentions with a foreign minister of another country, they have followed through on these words with action on the ground. Despite knowing these intentions and understanding the seriousness of the existential threat the people of Tigray face, Haavisto himself and the international community at large have been slow to react and put a stop to the Ethiopian government's attempts to "wipe out the Tigrayans for 100 years" [1].

It is becoming increasingly undeniable that only concerted and sustained international pressure can put an end to the genocidal campaign that is being waged by Ethiopia and Eritrea against the people of Tigray. Expressions of grave concern are no longer adequate and need to be followed up by tangible actions to mitigate the worsening humanitarian catastrophe in Tigray. To this end, the international community needs to facilitate:

- An immediate cessation of hostilities inclusive of the terms put forward by the government of Tigray. Despite declaring a purported 'unilateral ceasefire', the Ethiopian government continues to block aid, transportation, telecommunication, and crucial services to Tigray effectively placing the region under total siege. Therefore, the international community needs to mediate a negotiated ceasefire;
 - Immediate, internationally monitored and verifiable, withdrawal of Eritrean and Amhara invading forces from Tigray and restore the pre-war territorial integrity of Tigray;
 - For the United Nations to establish an independent body charged with impartial investigation into the different crimes committed against the people of Tigray and to bring perpetrators of such crimes to the International Criminal Court;
 - Allow unimpeded humanitarian access to all of Tigray, via ground transport and/or an air bridge, and facilitate the comprehensive rehabilitation of internally displaced Tigrayans as well as refugees;
-

- Restore public services including internet, electricity, banking, transportation and telecommunications throughout Tigray. Allow direct international flight to and from Tigray;
- Respect the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and accept the framework laid out by such constitution to settle any political issue;
- Any bilateral or multilateral relations regarding Tigray, be it domestic or international, should be conducted between the democratically elected and constitutionally mandated government of Tigray and other stakeholders;
- Immediate end to the ongoing mass arrest of Tigrayans residing in different parts of Ethiopia including Addis Ababa and release of all wrongfully detained individuals on the basis of their ethnic identity including Tigrayan members of the ENDF;
- Targeted sanctions of Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials and arms embargo;
- Official recognition that genocide is being committed against Tigrayans by Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces; and
- An all-inclusive national dialogue with all stakeholders across Ethiopia. Multiple stakeholders have indicated their eagerness to participate in a national dialogue to resolve the multiple crises the country is facing. The only party unwilling to engage in inclusive dialogue is the Ethiopian government, which values holding on to power above all else—even the protection of the lives and safety of millions of its citizens.



The New York Times, "How Local Guerrilla Fighters Routed Ethiopia's Powerful Army," July 2021



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