



# SITUATION REPORT

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PREPARED BY



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On November 4, 2020, Ethiopia's unelected Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed mobilized the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), the Amhara Special Forces, and Afar Special Forces to launch a war against the 7 million people of the region of Tigray, the northernmost region of the Ethiopian federation. In a statement shared on Twitter while much of the world was focused on the outcome of the American elections, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner declared a war that has unleashed the worst humanitarian crisis in recent memory. Despite the Ethiopian regime's repeated assertions that this is a "domestic" operation directed against a political entity, the ongoing involvement of Eritrean troops, the reported use of armed drones, the atrocious human rights abuses, and escalating humanitarian crisis in Tigray clearly show that this is an all-out war being waged against the people of Tigray.

In the 200+ days since the declaration of war, there have been verified reports of widespread civilian massacres, extrajudicial executions, sexual and gender-based violence, weaponized starvation, looting, destruction of health care facilities, and forced displacement of millions of Tigrayans. The picture emerging from these seven months of war—albeit incomplete due to a telecommunications blockade affecting large swaths of the region—provides a glimpse into the level of devastation in Tigray. According to the latest figures, over 70,000 civilians have been killed in Tigray [1], while 70,000 have been forced to seek refuge in Sudan [2], and 2.2 million more people have been internally displaced [3]. Of the region's 7 million residents, more than 91% or 5.2 million people are in dire need of emergency food assistance - 2.3 million of them are children [4].

In addition to attacks against the safety and security of Tigrayan civilians, the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have also undertaken the wholesale destruction of essential infrastructure and services in the region. Over 80% of healthcare facilities and over 99% of ambulances have been looted, vandalized, or destroyed, exacerbating the already dire humanitarian conditions [5]. Moreover, 75% of state and private universities have been destroyed while countless sacred and religious institutions have been desecrated [6]. These facts and figures paint a vivid picture of the reality on the ground: far from being a 'domestic law and order' operation, this is a genocidal war waged by the Eritrean and Ethiopian regimes to annihilate the history and culture, political existence, and future of the people of Tigray.

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Under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed—in consort with the dictator of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki— this war has been waged in the dark, making it impossible to obtain up-to-date information on the true extent of destruction in the region. Despite urgent calls by the international community, the Ethiopian government has refused to provide unhindered access to aid organizations or international journalists. As such, the figures mentioned above do not reflect the true magnitude of the destruction caused by the genocidal war in Tigray.

## **STARVATION AND FAMINE**

One of the most devastating aspects of the ongoing genocidal war in Tigray is the weaponization of starvation, which has exposed the entire population to what is feared to be the worst famine in Ethiopia's history. It is crucial to note that the starvation crisis that has gripped the region and the looming famine was not inevitable and has not emerged because of natural causes. This man-made famine is a result of the systematic, organized, and intentional strategy pursued by the Ethiopian and Eritrean regimes to weaponize hunger against the 7 million people of Tigray. A timeline of the unfolding of weaponized starvation helps demonstrate the genocidal intent behind this strategy.

### **i. The Pre-War Context**

Two major developments in the period since Abiy's rise to power are important to consider here vis-a-vis the looming famine. First, starting from 2018, the major highway connecting Tigray to the neighbouring Amhara region as well as the rest of the country was closed down. This decision by the Amhara regional government, tacitly supported by the federal government, was designed to hinder the transportation of crucial supplies—such as food—into Tigray, isolating the northernmost region from the rest of the country. Second, a 2020 locust infestation that had affected large swaths of East Africa was especially devastating to farmers in Tigray. This locust invasion was the country's worst in 25 years and resulted in the large-scale destruction of crops in Tigray, threatening food security. Not only did the federal government fail to support the farmers whose livelihoods had been deeply affected by this locust invasion, it additionally withheld millions of dollars in donor funds intended to bolster the safety net program for 1.5 million Tigrayan farmers.

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The above is only a partial sampling of decisions by the Abiy regime that actively undermined and jeopardized food security in Tigray long before the official declaration of war.

## **ii. November - December 2020**

As soon as the Federal government began its military offensive against Tigray, international organizations were quick to warn that this would disrupt the delivery of vital humanitarian aid, preventing assistance from reaching hundreds of thousands of people. Concerns about a looming famine were voiced as early as November 17 by notable scholars with extensive knowledge of the region. The food crisis worsened throughout December, with the communication and transportation blockages causing a severe scarcity of essential food items, including bread, grains, and vegetables. Large-scale food insecurity was observably growing while the Ethiopian government—which had declared ‘mission accomplished’ on November 28—continued to actively prevent the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the region.

**“I was faced with the threat of hunger. Some of my friends were already starting to starve. Fortunately, the people of Mekelle were all kind, despite the fact that I and my friends were Amharic-speaking. It was our Tigrayan neighbours and friends who were feeding us in those difficult times.” -- A Tigrayan doctor who worked at Mekelle's main hospital in December 2020 [7].**



### **iii. January - April 2021**

The rapid and preventable escalation of the starvation crisis can be traced throughout the early months of 2021. The interim administration in Tigray confirmed that at least 13 people had died due to lack of food in January 2021, leading local government officials to warn that hundreds of thousands could die due to starvation. The few aid organizations that managed to access the region unequivocally declared that “people are starving.” With 80% of Tigray cut off from aid and humanitarian agencies prevented from accessing all areas of the region, the UN warned of the ‘extremely alarming’ situation developing in February and March. By April, it was revealed that 4.5 million of the region’s 7 million people were in dire need of humanitarian assistance, millions of them children. Central, Eastern, and North-Western Tigray were classified as facing “crisis” and “emergency” levels of hunger levels by the UN, which meant that people in these areas were already experiencing acute malnutrition. Malnutrition, especially among children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as other vulnerable populations, was skyrocketing.

### **iv. The Crisis in May 2021**

Oxfam International and The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) revealed in early May that the number of people facing extreme hunger is now over 5.2 million. On June 10, 2021, a U.N. report established that between May and June, over 350,000 in Tigray are facing famine, underscoring the pervasiveness and seriousness of the starvation that has gripped the region. Increased levels of malnutrition are being recorded, especially among children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers who, without humanitarian assistance, “will die because of complications,” according to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). An alarming rise of acute malnutrition among children has already been recorded throughout May. People forced to flee their homes because of the attacks by Eritrean and Ethiopian troops bear the brunt of the starvation crisis: IDPs have to travel for days without food - sometimes as long as 15 days - leading to many deaths along the journey. It has now been confirmed by domestic and international bodies, including World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom, that people in Tigray are dying from starvation. In short, the scale of this man-made catastrophe is staggering.

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IDPs further report that Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers continue to loot, vandalize and destroy crops and food reserves amid the growing starvation crisis. Moreover, there are ongoing reports that Ethiopian and Eritrean troops are either blocking or looting humanitarian aid intended to help the most vulnerable populations in Tigray. Despite both countries' promise that the Eritrean troops would leave Tigray, it is clear that Eritrean troops are controlling entire towns and villages, terrorizing residents, preventing them from farming their fields, and actively and systematically exacerbating the starvation crisis. The prospects for the future are bleak, with the region facing the worst food insecurity since the 1983-84 famine that killed over a million people.

The seriousness of the starvation crisis already gripping the region and the magnitude of the looming threat of famine is indisputable. However, instead of mobilizing its forces and coordinating with humanitarian organizations to effectively address this crisis, the Ethiopian government has in fact weaponized starvation, utilizing it as another weapon in its ongoing genocidal war against Tigray. As the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations stated on May 26,

**“what we are seeing appears to be systematic and intentional, part and parcel of a coordinated campaign of destruction that could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity” [8].**

### **v. An Entirely Man-Made Crisis**

As underscored by several international organizations and aid agencies, this is not a famine resulting from natural or inevitable causes. The famine crisis looming over millions of Tigrayans has been intentionally and systematically engineered by the Abiy and Isaias regimes to decimate the region for generations to come. This coordinated campaign of destruction has included: blocking humanitarian aid, destruction of farms and cropland, and prohibition of farming.

#### **• Blocking Humanitarian Aid**

Various humanitarian agencies, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have reported that they face significant obstacles accessing populations in dire need of assistance, with only 1.8 million of the 5.2 million people in need of food assistance reached by humanitarian workers so far. Eritrean and Ethiopian troops are still not allowing unhindered transportation of humanitarian supplies, but rather continue to block and loot aid that aid agencies provide. Humanitarian workers face harassment and obstruction by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops, who are using checkpoints to intimidate aid workers and prevent the delivery of essential health and relief supplies to civilians in places like Adigrat, Adwa, and Axum. Intimidation and assault of humanitarian workers has been widespread, and multiple reports have confirmed that at least seven humanitarian workers have been killed even after identifying themselves as humanitarian workers. On May 26, USAID Administrator Samantha Power released a statement on the death of a USAID partner and humanitarian aid worker in Tigray, condemning this abominable attack against a known humanitarian worker.

#### **• Destruction of Farms, Crops and Livestock**

The seven months since the declaration of war have seen Ethiopian and Eritrean troops carrying out widespread, systematic pillaging and looting across Tigray. These soldiers have been marauding around all parts of Tigray, looting and stealing foodstuffs from individual farmers and leaving entire villages and communities with nothing. Particularly, Eritrean soldiers have been viciously going door-to-door looting crops, stealing livestock, and emptying grain silos. Multiple videos show the looted food supplies and livestock being transported north to Eritrea. Similarly, there have been first-hand accounts of Amhara militias also engaging in large-scale looting. The looted material ranged from machinery and tools to food items like sugar, cooking oil, and animal fodder to everyday objects like utensils and plates.

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Whatever the Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Amhara troops could not steal, they made sure to destroy it so that it could not be used by the people in the region. Refugees and IDPs fleeing different parts of Tigray have reported that the invading armies are burning crops, farmlands, and farming supplies. Photographic evidence from the region shows large-scale damage to vital farming infrastructure, where the troops have burned farmhouses, intentionally ruined seeds, and destroyed grinding mills.

### • Prohibition of Farming

Another component of this man-made famine is the prohibition of farming in the region. Similar to the rest of the country, Tigray has an overwhelmingly agrarian economic base. More than 80% of the population of the region relies on labour-intensive, rain-fed agriculture for subsistence. The war poses significant dangers for agricultural communities, as they cannot get the seeds, farming equipment, and supplies they need to commence their farming in time for the rainy season (July-August). Moreover, the targeting of working-age men, who have been indiscriminately and gruesomely killed by the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces, has significantly reduced the supply of agricultural labor. Many of those left alive in rural villages are elderly men and women or children, who are unable to undertake backbreaking farm work. Therefore, both the war itself and the massacre and killing of tens of thousands of working-age men has left more than 80% of the region's population in insecure livelihoods.

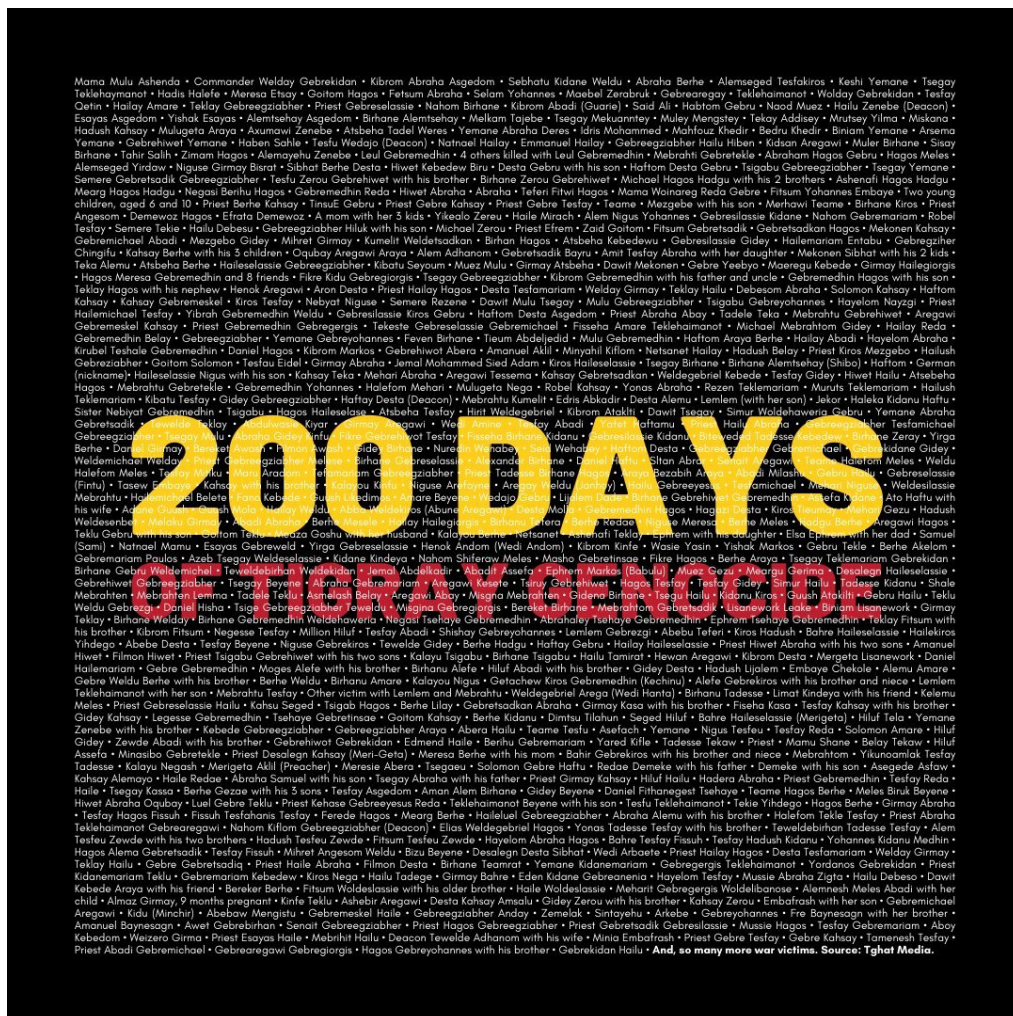
Most alarmingly, however, farmers in many parts of Tigray and administrative officials from the Interim government have revealed that there is a campaign to prohibit Tigrayan farmers from ploughing their lands. This anti-farming campaign is especially prevalent in the areas of Shire, Tembien, and Hawzen, where farmers are being prevented from tending to their fields. If farmers are prohibited from farming in time for the rainy season and consequently miss an entire cycle of production, the already dire starvation crisis will be exacerbated in the coming years. After a devastating war that has sought to annihilate the Tigrayan population, this prohibition of farming inflicts weaponized starvation on future generations, all but guaranteeing the worst humanitarian crisis in Tigray since the 1980s.



In what he termed a “deliberate act of starving,” an official in the Tigray interim government’s Disaster Management Bureau confirmed the weaponization of starvation in Tigray. More than 5 million people—millions of them children—require immediate, life-saving humanitarian assistance. While aid organizations have repeatedly asserted that they are ready and willing to provide this desperately needed aid, the deliberate, systemic, and coordinated action of the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments ensures that a famine of hitherto unseen proportions will wreak havoc on Tigray in the coming years. Therefore, it must be remembered that this is a preventable, man-made, and politically engineered humanitarian catastrophe.



As noted in previous reports, one of the most horrific aspects of this war has been the widespread extra-judicial killings and massacre of civilians. Prominent examples of such massacres include the Maryam Dengelat massacre in which Eritrean forces opened fire on hundreds of congregants during mass, the Axum massacre in which hundreds of civilians were massacred, the Mahbere Dego massacre, footage of which shows Ethiopian armed forces executing young men and throwing their bodies over a cliff, MSF's statement detailing the extra-judicial killings of civilians dragged off public buses, and the Abi Addi Massacre in Tembien, in which Ethiopian and Eritrean troops went door-to-door killing 182 people. While the full scale of the human cost of the war has not been accounted for, various outlets have reported partial lists of those killed since November 2020. Tghat media has published a list of over 2,400 casualties of the war. Similarly, a team of researchers led by University of Ghent professor Jan Nyssen has established the identities of almost 2,000 civilians killed in more than 150 massacres by Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Amhara soldiers in Tigray [9].





Throughout May 2021, massacres and indiscriminate attacks against civilians have continued unabated. The Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA) reported that Eritrean forces killed 20 civilians, mostly farmers, in Edaga Hibret in Asgede Woreda (district). After carrying out this massacre, the troops forbade families from carrying out religious burial services, ordering them to leave the bodies of the deceased in the streets. Additionally, the Eritrean and Ethiopian forces went door-to-door, massacring priests, deacons, and visually impaired persons in the district of Tanqua Abergele in Yechilay sub-region, according to an early May 2021 report.



Foreign Policy, "Did Eritrea Commit War Crimes in Ethiopia?" March 2021

An additional report described a May 8, 2021, massacre in a village near Abune Y'ma'eta Guh, a world-renowned rock-hewn church. In the early morning of May 8, Eritreans troops conducted door-to-door raids throughout the village, shooting 21 people, 19 of whom died. Of the 19 civilians massacred, seven were children under the age of 10, while one was a one-month-old infant. Two brothers from the village, Gebrehiwet Gebreananya and Abraha Gebreananya, lost 8 members of their households, including their father, both of their wives, and six of their children. Throughout May, massacres and extra-judicial executions of civilians have been rampant, vicious, and victimized the most vulnerable, including the elderly, women, and children.

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A May 24, 2021, Telegraph Report by Lucy Kassa and Will Brown revealed another horrendous level of violence unleashed by the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces against the people of Tigray. After expert analysis of video and photographic evidence, the report concluded that civilians in Tigray had suffered horrific burns consistent with the use of white phosphorus. The report also found that the invading armies are using banned firearms in areas inhabited by civilians. Hamish de Bretton-Gord, former commander of the UK's Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Regiment confirmed that the injuries sustained by civilians in Tigray look very similar to casualties in Syria. Additionally, Mukesh Kapila, a professor with extensive humanitarian experience in organizations like the UN and WHO, stated that the pictures emerging from Tigray looked like what he saw when he visited Halabja, Northern Iraq—ground zero of Saddam's chemical attacks against Kurds. A graphic video documenting the suffering of a 13-year-old Tigrayan child who survived a chemical weapon attack attests to the unbearable level of suffering inflicted on civilians, including children.

## SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

Previous reports have documented the extent and brutality of weaponized sexual and gender-based violence in the war on Tigray. Since November, there have been numerous reports of Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces perpetrating egregious levels of weaponized Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). The survivors range in age from an 8-year-old child to an elderly woman over 80. The defining character of the weaponized SGBV in Tigray is its abhorrent viciousness. Women are being subjected to gang rape by as many as 20 soldiers for days or even weeks. While 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" [10]. Many humanitarian workers have stated that they are receiving the worst accounts of sexual violence they have ever heard in decades of humanitarian service.

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It is vital to note that SGBV has been utilized as a weapon of war; sexual violence against Tigrayan women 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 May 28, 2021, National Geographic report provided a harrowing insight into the brutalities of the weaponized sexual violence committed against Tigrayan women.



**Senayit grieves for her 12-year-old son. She was drugged, tied to a tree, and raped by Eritrean soldiers for 10 days. At one point she awoke to find her son dead at her feet. "I never buried him," she screams, between sobs. "I never buried him."**



**Fifteen soldiers raped her over the course of a week, says Eyerus, and now she doesn't know where her children are. "Why is this happening?" she asks. "This is doomsday for me."**

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**Nineteen-year-old Rahel is at Abiy Addi Hospital because she is pregnant after being raped by Ethiopian soldiers. "They did this to eliminate Tigrayans, and for the generations of babies delivered to be Ethiopian, because they don't want the next generation to be Tigrayan," she says. "I am waiting to abort this baby."**



**At the center for rape victims at Mekele Hospital, Letehana recounts how Eritrean soldiers accused her of helping Tigrayan forces—her son is a member of TPLF—and then raped her. "They took everything," she said.**

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The most conservative estimates indicate that at least 22,500 survivors of sexual violence in Tigray will seek clinical care in 2021. As with all other aspects of the war on Tigray, this is likely only the tip of the iceberg. Given the ongoing occupation by the invading Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces, the large scale destruction of health facilities, 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.

## DESTRUCTION OF HEALTH FACILITIES

As part of the wholesale destruction of essential infrastructure, the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have deliberately destroyed, vandalized, or looted 80% of healthcare facilities and 99% of ambulances in Tigray. Consequently, there is a severe shortage of essential medical equipment, supplies, and medications, leaving most health facilities nonfunctional. An estimated 2.3 million people, predominantly in small towns and rural areas, are unable to access primary health care because of the looting and targeted attacks against healthcare facilities. Combined with the ongoing and escalating violence against civilians in the region, the destruction of health facilities is increasing the death toll: people are dying due to lack of medication, medical treatment, and many women are dying during childbirth.



BBC News, "Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Hospitals vandalised," March 2021.



BBC News, "Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Hospitals vandalised," March 2021.

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MSF had indicated back in March 2021 that one-fifth of the health facilities they visited were occupied by soldiers, some even being used as military bases. Not only does the presence of invading forces cause fear and terror among the people in these areas, it also makes it impossible for them to access these health facilities. Furthermore, Ethiopian and Eritrean troops continue to harass and intimidate healthcare workers and block the delivery of essential healthcare supplies to hospitals and populations in dire need.

## **ETHNIC CLEANSING**

It has been months since U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken first came out with a condemnation of the acts of ethnic cleansing taking place across Tigray and in Western Tigray, more specifically. Witness and first-hand accounts relayed that armed forces from the neighbouring Amhara region had taken over entire communities, rounding up ethnic Tigrayans and forcefully displacing them from their homes. Refugees in Sudan also shared 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.

What is happening in Western Tigray fits a UN Commission of Experts' definition of ethnic cleansing - "a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas" [11]. The ethnic cleansing campaign in Western Tigray, which violates the constitutional order and human rights within the country, has not been curtailed by the federal government and appears to have received the tacit approval of the Abiy regime. Consequently, the Amhara regional government has reportedly begun to resettle Amhara populations into the areas they have annexed. In a bold display flaunting these crimes of ethnic cleansing, the Amhara regional government has put out promotional material celebrating this ethnic cleansing and advertising "free land" for investment.

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In addition to the ethnic cleansing that has been carried out, the nature and intent of the war on Tigrayans is genocidal. While the international community has stated there is ethnic cleansing, the reluctance to name it a genocide may stem from a desire to evade its responsibility to protect and immediately act. Yet as the war still rages, it will become undeniable for the world to confront the harsh truths in Tigray - let it not be too late, vulnerable Tigrayans need action now.

## **DISPLACEMENT CRISIS**

There are more than 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Tigray, many of them 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.

In an alarming development, it was reported on May 25, 2021, that 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. Therefore, 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.

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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 scarred by the dangerous and harrowing journey into Sudan, having lost their husbands, wives, or children on the road. Refugees are currently settled in five refugee camps and settlements: Um Rakubah, 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 Tundayadbah settlement in Eastern Sudan, which houses 20,000 refugees. Tigrayan refugees thus continue to face deteriorating and insecure living conditions within some of the camps in Sudan.



## INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The human rights abuses, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed against the people of Tigray have received significant international recognition since November 4, 2020, this includes:

- U.S. President Joe Biden's May 26, 2021, statement on the crisis in Ethiopia, in which he elucidates the U.S.' position on the large-scale human rights abuses taking place in Tigray, including widespread sexual violence. President Biden called on Ethiopian and Eritrean forces to allow immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access to the region.
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- The U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations held a session on the Tigray conflict on May 27, 2021. Chairman Menendez and ranking member Risch condemned the horrific violence occurring in the region and called on the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to heed calls for the cessation of hostilities. Chairman Menendez, in particular, sent a clear and unequivocal message: “we will not tolerate war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic violence.”
- On May 28, 2020, the U.S. announced that it will freeze funding for Ethiopia as more details of the abuses in Tigray surface. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank will henceforth withhold new funding to Ethiopia.

While the American government has shown its commitment to the protection of human rights and peaceful resolution of the crisis, the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments have adopted a defiant and confrontational stance. Rather than heeding the calls to stop the atrocities committed in Tigray and engage in an all-inclusive national dialogue, the Abiy and Isaias governments have instead criticized the international community.

In fact, the Ethiopian government called for a national protest on May 30 to ostensibly oppose ‘foreign intervention’ in its domestic affairs. The thousands of participants in these protests—some of whom were government employees forced to attend in order to keep their jobs—echoed the Ethiopian government’s indefensible and reprehensible stance on the brutal war it is waging against the people of Tigray. However, given that Ethiopia is the biggest recipient of U.S. foreign aid in Africa, targeted economic and diplomatic sanctions are vital in getting the regime to stop the atrocities it is committing and enabling others to commit. The defense and protection of human rights require the utilization of any and all measures to alleviate the widespread human suffering in Tigray.

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In her witness testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Ms. Sarah Charles of USAID stated, “the severity of abuse is among the absolute worst I have seen in my nearly two decades of humanitarian work.” This statement indicates the extent of the atrocities that have been committed against the people of Tigray for over two hundred days now. International Organizations, aid agencies, journalists, and political actors have confirmed that what is happening in Tigray amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Levels of hitherto unseen violence and brutality have been inflicted on the most vulnerable populations through widespread massacres, sexual violence, and weaponized starvation. It is evident that the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara troops have been and continue to undertake systematic attempts to destroy families and completely dismantle Tigrayan society. These facts are even more alarming given that communication blackouts have been widespread in the region, which means that existing reports do not capture the full scale of the atrocities. A full picture of the extent of the war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide will only be revealed through independent international investigations.

As such, it is more important than ever for the international community to move beyond expressions of concern and take tangible actions to mitigate the worsening humanitarian crisis in Tigray. To this end, the international community ought to reinforce its calls for:

- An immediate cessation of hostilities;
  - Verified withdrawal of the invading Eritrean forces;
  - Verified withdrawal of the Ethiopian and Amhara troops - who are implicated in the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against the people of Tigray;
  - Safe and unhindered access, across all of Tigray, to humanitarian organizations providing lifesaving assistance;
  - Access to independent bodies to conduct independent investigations on the extent of the atrocities - joint investigations that involve the Ethiopian government cannot yield accurate insights;
  - Mechanisms to ensure that not only individuals but also governance structures that have led this assault against civilians will be held accountable;
  - Targeted sanctions of Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials and arms embargo;
  - Restoration of the elected government of Tigray, voted by over 2.6 million Tigrayans
  - Humanitarian intervention, including military action, and the establishment of an international no fly zone;
  - Official recognition that genocide is taking place in Tigray;
  - 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.
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