



**OMNA
TIGRAY**

SITUATIONAL REPORT

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PREPARED BY
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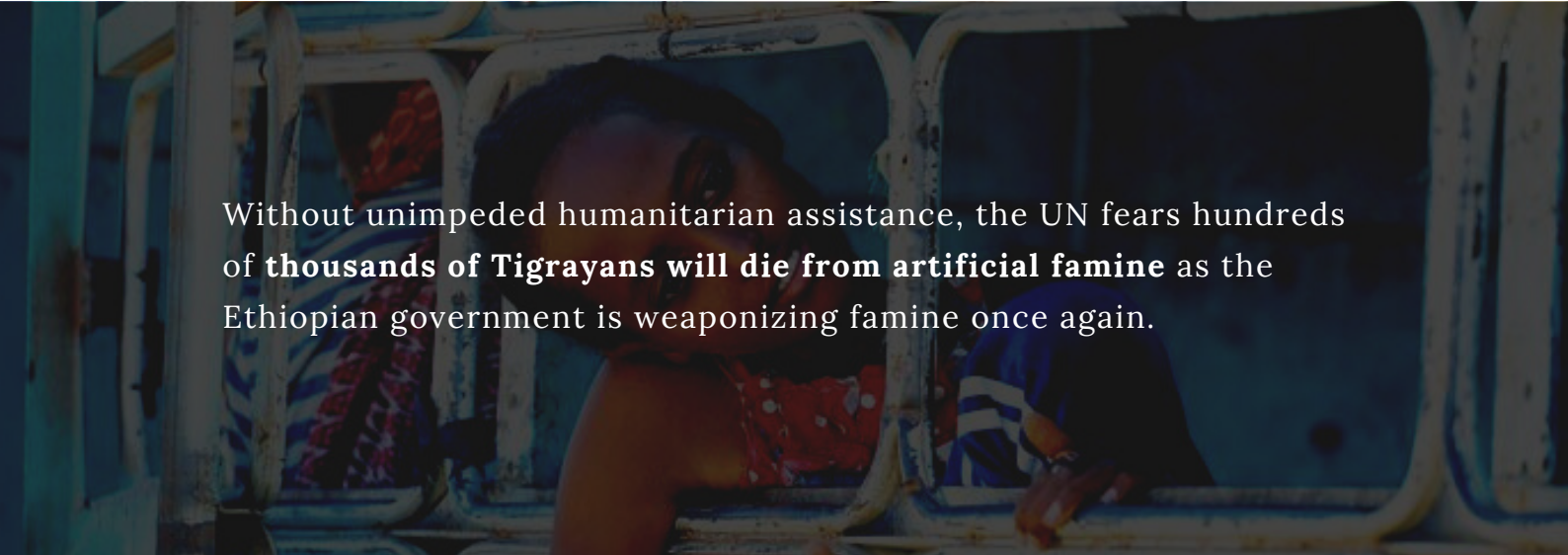
HOW DID WE GET HERE?

The Civil War in Tigray has led to the killings of thousands of civilians.

It has been 90 days since PM Abiy Ahmed began a “law and order” enforcement operation against the elected Tigray regional government that quickly escalated into a regional war with international actors. Since November 4, 2020, the conflict has resulted in thousands of civilian casualties, reportedly 2.5 million people internally displaced, and over 60,000 refugees fleeing into Sudan. Nearly 4.5 million (up to 50-75% of the Tigrayan population) is in need of food aid, 2.3 million children are in need of aid, only five out of 40 hospitals are accessible, 300 motorized water sources are dysfunctional, and local markets are near collapse.

At least 700 women have reported being raped in Mekele, Tigray in a time span of two weeks. Aid agencies suspect thousands of women have been victims of weaponized sexual and gender-based violence at the hands of invading forces. The Eritrean government is heavily involved in committing the large-scale killings, raping, looting, and destruction of infrastructure and UNESCO heritage sites.

Alongside the Ethiopian government, Eritrean forces are among the primary reasons why unfettered humanitarian aid is being blocked from entering Tigray.



Without unimpeded humanitarian assistance, the UN fears hundreds of **thousands of Tigrayans will die from artificial famine** as the Ethiopian government is weaponizing famine once again.

As the war progresses, there has been increasing evidence that the war on the Tigray region has been planned since Ethiopia normalized relations with Eritrea in 2018, as the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) was increasingly becoming a common adversary to both central governments. Furthermore, since 2018, there has been a series of assassinations of prominent political figures that further exacerbated the growing instability and rising ethnic tensions. All of the assassinations have two common factors: victims who privately and publicly criticized PM Abiy Ahmed and unclear investigation results as to who the perpetrators were. The ENDF recently assassinated prominent Tigray regional state television journalist Dawit Kebede Araya and his friend. Sources in Ethiopia who knew him closely disclosed to Omna Tigray that members of the Prosperity Party asked him to formally become a member and he refused a week before he was assassinated.

As tensions rose between TPLF and PM Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party, the TPLF decided to hold elections in September 2020, despite PM Ahmed publicly warning that the repercussions would involve "mothers crying, youth dying, and buildings falling," during a speech to parliament.

After the elections, PM Abiy Ahmed called the elections unconstitutional and TPLF illegitimate and eventually labeled them as terrorists. In response, PM Ahmed withheld social welfare funds, refused to release a budget, and confiscated locust-fighting machinery during the worst locust-outbreak in decades. This is further corroborated by the first-hand accounts of over 2,000 Tigrayan truck drivers who are currently in Djibouti and spoke with Tigray Media House. They are on strike and refuse to let the Ethiopian government confiscate millions of dollars worth of their property (the trucks) which is used to transport goods throughout the country. This received very little international media coverage; however, the drivers have reported that they received orders from government officials to divert food and medical aid from Tigray and instead deliver them to the Amhara region prior to the start of the war. Omna Tigray has direct access to these witnesses.

PM Abiy Ahmed claims that the TPLF attacked a Northern Command Base that led to the "law and order" operation supposedly lasting 3-5 days. There is mounting evidence that the genesis of the war was propagated disinformation. During a speech, the PM stated that on November 3, 2020, between 10:00 - 10:30 PM local time, he sent 500 commandos to Mekelle in a surprise attack. An ENDF general was recorded on tape admitting that they were preparing for war before the alleged attack by TPLF.



The PM enforced a telecommunication shutdown on the entire region. Currently, only a limited amount of cities in Tigray have access to working phone lines. The government also cut off electricity and water in many parts of the region. The PM's Office suspended the licenses of BBC and Reuters, two of the largest international media organizations covering the conflict.

On November 21, 2020, the Ethiopian military warned civilians that there would be “no mercy” if the residents don't “save themselves” during a final offensive to capture Mekele. There is mounting evidence that the United Arab Emirates has been supplying the Ethiopian government with weapons and drones. Both governments denied this. There was a leaked video of an ENDF general admitting to the utilization of UAE drones on Tigray. Omna Tigray has access to photos leaked to us from Ayder hospital of victims from the aerial bombardments that ensued. Omna Tigray has access to the translated, captioned leaked video clip.



The federal government repeatedly denied claims of Eritrean forces' involvement in the war, however, there is mounting evidence to prove the contrary. The United States recently demanded for Eritrean forces to immediately exit Tigray. There are two videos that display government officials publicly admitting to Eritrea's presence in Tigray. Recently, there have been credible sources coming from Tigray's military leadership stating that the Eritrean government sent 2,000 more soldiers into Tigray, 800 of which were deployed into Mekele. An unknown number of Eritrean soldiers were transported by Ural trucks into Tigray through Maychew, Raya, and are currently camped at Raya University as of February 1, 2021. It is being reported that Eritrean soldiers will start to dress in Ethiopian military uniforms. Omna Tigray has access to these sources if needed.

WAR CRIMES OCCURRING

"We have received allegations concerning violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including artillery strikes on populated areas, the deliberate targeting of civilians, extrajudicial killings and widespread looting," - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet

There are reports of large-scale massacres committed by ENDF, Amhara militias (i.e. Fano), Eritrean Forces, and Amhara Special Forces in areas of Mai-Kadra, Zalambasa, Edaga Hamus, Axum, Adigrat, Adwa, Humera, and Shire.

There have been uncontested acts of genocide inside Tigray, as actors, such as Amhara militias and Eritrean soldiers, explicitly stated their purpose in the war was to exterminate Tigrayans. There is video evidence that corroborates this that is translated and captioned. Refugees that escaped into Sudan also reported being ethnically targeted during massacres as soldiers would repeatedly claim their intention was to mass exterminate and make Tigrayans face their vengeance. There have been reports of pre-genocidal acts and policies perpetrated by government officials against ethnic-Tigrayans in Addis Ababa. More than 40,000 Tigrayans have reportedly been detained just in the capital. According to a senior diplomat in Canada, there are internment camps throughout the country where young Tigrayan men are taken and held at.

Reports of these internment camps have been circulating in Ethiopian media since early 2019.

Ethnic Tigrayan members of the ENDF, including those in the UN-mandated peacekeeping missions, the Federal Police, federal employees, and diplomats are being fired due to their Tigrayan ethnicity. There were leaked photos of lists that certain employers were forcing their employees to fill out if they were Tigrayan. There have been thousands of incidents of ethnic profiling and ethnic-targeted hate crimes against Tigrayans. Omna Tigray has been collaborating with the Global Society of Tigrayan Scholars association which is compiling a list of all of these incidents.

During the first Ethiopian Civil War in the 1980s, the Derg regime weaponized food and humanitarian aid and denied doing so when the international community confronted them. As a result, 1.2 million died from starvation, and they were predominantly from Tigray. This was the methodology used to drain resources from the TPLF then, and the same tactics are being employed now--"to kill the fish, you drain the water," according to a senior Derg official.

Ninety days into the war, at least 13 people, 5 of which are children, have died from starvation in Irob, Adwa, and Adigrat. The Economist recently wrote that "Ethiopia's government appears to be wielding hunger as a weapon" as the Tigray region is "being starved into submission."

Eritrean forces looted markets, small shops, and residences in the past two months.

Eritrean forces and Amhara militia also burnt crops that were ready for harvest. Satellite imageries have confirmed the destruction of crops and the UN World Food Programme compound at one refugee camp.

The UN Humanitarian Chief, Mark Lowcock, states: "For more than two months there has been essentially no access into Tigray...there are 450 tonnes of supplies we've been trying to get in that are stuck."

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) reported that it took several attempts to enter Tigray. In Mekele, there were no basic supplies, and the local hospital was running at 30 to 40 percent, with very little medication. There were almost no patients, which is a very bad sign. Most of the health staff had left, were hardly any medicines and there was no food, water, or money. On December 27th, MSF reported that the towns of Adwa and Axum had no running water or electricity. Beyond the hospitals, around 80 to 90 percent of the health centers visited by MSF between Mekele and Axum were not functional, either due to a lack of staff or because they were looted. Rural areas within Tigray are virtually unreachable by aid agencies and are expected to be faring much worse.

Families of SGBV victims, international aid/medical workers in Tigray, Tigrayan medical workers, doctors in refugee camps in Sudan, and Ethiopian military officials have confirmed the increasing number of SGBV victims in Tigray. Reports of these allegations from Tigray are coming from the capital city of Mekelle, where some telecommunication has been restored.

Hospitals and aid agencies operating out of Tigray estimate thousands of women have been raped by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers.

Doctors in Sudan treating Tigrayan refugee women have recounted harrowing stories from survivors of weaponized SGBV. Hundreds of women who fled to refugee camps in Sudan when the conflict broke out have reported being raped by invading forces prior to fleeing their hometowns or on their way to refugee camps in Sudan.

Most of these women have confessed about being forced to choose between rape or death. Others were raped in exchange for basic commodities, such as water and food.

- A 25-year-old woman who was given a harrowing choice of rape or life by a soldier ended up being raped with a gun held to her head. International and national aid workers have told of receiving similar reports of abuse in Tigray (Choose - I Kill You or Rape you: Abuse Accusations Surge in Ethiopia's War) -- Reuters, January 22, 2021
- **"In Shire, Eritrean soldiers raped and killed a 20-year old autistic woman, killed her 14-year old sister, and raped their 60-year old mother. When the mother asked them to kill her too, they responded: no, we want you to cry."** -- Interview with victims' family

Military officers and appointed interim Tigray officials have acknowledged the issue on national TV. January 9, 2021: Ethiopian national TV showed a military officer admitting to rape allegations in Mekelle, after the Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers took control. He went on to say that rape is expected to occur in conflict.

Ethiopia's Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth in Tigray said they were "investigating" the legitimacy of these SGBV claims.

- January 26, 2021: The Ministry denied SGBV allegations on local radio, saying the claims were unfounded. — Ahadu Radio, Ethiopia
- January 29, 2021: In a Twitter post, Minister Filsan Abdullahi Ahmed announced the Ministry's plans to investigate sexual violence allegations "in the northern region" through a special Task Force, without acknowledging SGBV in Tigray: "The task force will be on a fact-finding mission to investigate and ascertain facts on the ground."

The European External Programme with Africa (EEPA) reported "countless number of women and victims of physical and sexual abuse and rape, including gang rape and other forms of violence and brutality" --Situation Report EEPA Horn No. 42-2 January 2021.

The UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten said that she was “greatly concerned by serious allegations including ‘a high number of alleged rapes in the Tigrayan capital Mekelle. There are also disturbing reports of individuals allegedly forced to rape members of their own family, under threats of imminent violence. Some women also reportedly been forced by military elements to have sex in exchange for basic commodities” -- January 21, 2021

CONCLUSION

The situation in Tigray, Ethiopia is dire and has the potential to be one of the most catastrophic humanitarian disasters in modern history. This requires immediate attention from the international community to take action and condemn the actions of war criminals and disinformation propaganda understating the current reality on the ground.

Omna Tigray has included detailed documents that further provide explanations, nuances, and sources of information related to the conflict and humanitarian situation.

Drafted:

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