

Open letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison – Urgent action from the Australian government regarding the crimes against humanity, war crimes and egregious human rights violations actively committed against the people of Tigray

Dear Prime Minister:

We, members of ATCAN (Alliance of Tigrayan Associations in Australia and New Zealand) are writing to request urgent action from the Australian government regarding the crimes against humanity, war crimes and egregious human rights violations actively committed against the people of Tigray by the Ethiopian and Eritrean government forces, ethnic Amhara State Police and Militia forces.

Background

The Federal government of Ethiopia, led by the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy Ahmed Ali, declared a military offensive on its Northern Tigray state of Ethiopia on November 4th, 2020. It has been over 160 days since the all-out ground offensive and air bombardment targeted at Tigray began in collusion with Eritrean forces. Despite PM Abiy's announcement in late March that Eritrean Defence Force troops would leave Tigray, the UN reported on April 15 that no signs of Eritrean withdrawal had been found. This is a serious geopolitical crisis, unravelling the stability of East Africa and other nearby regions

The Global Genocide Watch has declared the Tigray genocide is at Stage 9: **Extermination** (according to Stanton's 10 Stage of Genocide model). This genocide is being orchestrated using a systematic and multi-sectoral approach where critical facilities that are imperative to the wellbeing of Tigrayan people are being targeted and decimated. Over the past 6 months, there have been limited means of contacting the people in Tigray to check on their wellbeing, as the government has cut all services to the state including phone lines, internet access, electricity, banks, any land, or air transport. The Australian-Tigrayan community has watched PM Abiy's repeated announcements and threats that his air force has been bombarding Tigray and that this will continue indefinitely until he brings all Tigrayan leaders under his control.

PM Abiy continues to reject calls for peaceful negotiation and mediation from the regional government of Tigray, and the UN, AU, IGAD, the US and UK government and other bodies. The EU's special envoy, led by MP Pekka Haavisto, has made several attempts to negotiate with the Ethiopian government, and announced that the situation in Tigray "is militarily and human rights-wise, humanitarian-wise very out of control" (Source: Euractiv, 2021).

Genocidal Acts

Unfortunately for the people of Tigray and ethnic Tigrayans living elsewhere in Ethiopia, they are under extreme siege and in real danger of ethnic cleansing. The confirmed death count is reportedly at 150,000 people.

Researchers, NGO's, and media outlets have been able to confirm the following atrocities that have taken place in Tigray over the past 6 months.

- Over 70,000 refugees have fled Tigray across the borders of Sudan ([UNHCR reports on displaced civilians](#)), with 2.3 million internally displaced.
- A reported 51,000 Tigrayan civilians living in other parts of Ethiopia have been jailed due to their ethnicity.
- Mass looting, vandalism and deliberate destruction of not only everyday homes, businesses, churches, mosques, heritage sites, but of essential running hospitals within the Tigray region. ([MSF report on health facilities targeted in Tigray](#)).

Artificial Famine

Tigray has been in complete isolation from the rest of Ethiopia and aid organizations have not been granted access, causing mass preventable deaths of innocent civilians.

According to the UN this is human made tragedy with purposeful 'red tape' created by the Ethiopian Ministry of Peace.

- Satellite and media images confirm the destruction of the majority of Tigrayan crop fields and of the United Nations World Food Programme compound at a refugee camp.
- 80% of the population are unreachable due to government blockade and 91% of Tigrayans are in need of dire food assistance.

Rape and sexual based violence is being used as a weapon in this war with hundreds of reports from women and children around the atrocities endured and witnessed. ([WHO - Statement of GBV in Tigray](#)).

- On 24 March 2021, PM Abiy Ahmed, has used words that implied that SGBV is being used as a method of warfare to subdue the people of Tigray into submission.
- Hospitals and aid agencies have reported that thousands of women have been raped by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers, in many cases gang raped.
- Women are forced to choose between rape or death. Others were raped in exchange for basic commodities, such as water and food. People have been forced to rape family members or face death.
- Women and young girls describe being told that their blood was getting cleansed as they were brutally raped by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces.

Ethnic Cleansing conducted via extrajudicial killing, shelling, massacres.

Innocent young men forcibly removed from their homes to be rounded up and slaughtered in mass killing ([CNN - Massacre Report](#)). The victims of these massacres over the past six months ranged from the elderly in their 90s and infants who were barely one.

- 28th and 29th of November 2020, Eritrean troops invading Tigray massacred, approximately 800 unarmed people in the northern city of Axum.
- 28th of November 2020, 200 civilians in Wukro were massacred.
- 21st of December 2020, 317 people were massacred in Adi Abun in Adwa
- Prior to the 24th of December 2020, three hundred people were massacred in Mariam Dengelat of Edaga Hamus, Eastern Tigray.

CALL TO ACTION


Thus, we urge the Australian government to:

1. Demand an immediate cessation of hostilities - Tigray Defense Forces hold territory and the presence of Eritrean troops means aid workers will not reach large parts of Tigray unless authorities allow them to negotiate access to Tigrayan-held areas and persuade the Eritreans to consistently allow increased aid flows.
2. Follow-up on Ethiopia's claim that Eritrean forces will leave Tigray- there has been considerable evidence that Eritrean troops are still entering Tigray after Prime Minister Abiy's statement that they would leave.
3. Call for a UN-led independent investigation into the atrocities - the results of a joint EHRC and U.N. investigation cannot be trusted as the EHRC is affiliated with the state and hence the Abiy administration.
4. Join its allies, the USA and EU, in withdrawing its assistance to the Ethiopian government and use all other means in its power to stop the genocide in Tigray and help the people of Tigray.
5. Provide further funding and support to alleviate the humanitarian calamity in Tigray and ensure its distribution to Tigrayans in dire need.

Prime Minister Morrison, on behalf of the Australian-Tigrayan community, we are thankful that we were given the opportunity to meet with some of the advisors to the honourable Senator Marise Payne. ATCAN wishes to acknowledge the generous financial contribution from the Australian government of \$3mil to the World Food Programme (WFP) in Ethiopia for Tigray. However, we implore you to continue to push for humanitarian corridors to be opened in Tigray to ensure this critical aid is delivered to the people who need it most in Tigray.

The Australian-Tigrayan community are concerned for their fellow Australian citizens stuck in the embattled Tigray region. Not only do we need sympathy and compassion, we need an effective course of action. We strongly plead to the Australian government to join its allies, the USA and EU, in withdrawing its assistance to the Ethiopian government and use all other means to take immediate action using its complete power to stop the genocide in Tigray.

Sincerely,

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Mulugeta Seyoum
Chairperson
Alliance of Tigrayan Associations in Australia and New Zealand

This letter was initiated by the Alliance of Tigrayan Associations in Australia and New Zealand (ATCAN). The signatory is representing the view of all ATCAN member associations and by extension the views of the Tigrayan Australians and the residents of Australia of Tigray origin.