



SITUATION REPORT


October 2021 |  OMNA
TIGRAY

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It has been 11 months since Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared war on the people of Tigray. As Tigray approaches the one-year mark of the beginning of this war, the humanitarian catastrophe Abiy and his partner, Eritrean dictator Isaias Afwerki, have unleashed is unparalleled in its magnitude and severity. Conservative reports indicate that more than 70,000 Tigrayans have been killed since the onset of the war, with tens of thousands more injured. 6.8 million people in the region are in dire need of emergency aid, more than 900,000 are in conditions of famine, and 100,000 children are at risk of death from severe acute malnutrition. At least 70,000 people have fled to neighbouring Sudan while over 2.2 million people are internally displaced, sheltering in makeshift camps and schools.

The region's healthcare infrastructure has completely collapsed, with 80% of health facilities looted, vandalized, or otherwise destroyed. In Western Tigray, which is still under the occupation of invading Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Amhara regional forces, Tigrayans continue to face ethnic cleansing, imprisonment in concentration camps, and extrajudicial executions and massacres. The Irob and Kumana, Tigray's minority groups located on the Eritrean border, are still under full occupation by Eritrean forces. Tigrayans living in many other parts of Ethiopia have also been targeted because of their identity, with tens of thousands evicted from their homes, fired from their jobs, arbitrarily detained, and disappeared.

Since June 28, 2020, when the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) were forced to retreat from many parts of Tigray after a decisive defeat by the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), the Abiy administration has imposed a deadly siege on the region. The administration has obstructed the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid into the region and cut off vital supplies, including cash and fuel. The siege exacerbates the humanitarian catastrophe that threatens the lives of millions, preventing the delivery of crucial food, non-food, and medical supplies into the region. The few trucks carrying humanitarian aid able to enter the region are unable to return because of the severe fuel shortage that the regional government of Tigray has long warned about. Moreover, the complete suspension of vital services such as electricity, banking, ground and air transportation, and communication is dangerously hampering the humanitarian response, heightening the death toll in the region. In addition to desperately needed food supplies, Tigray has also run out of medical supplies. The Abiy administration has prevented aid agencies from transporting any medical supplies to Tigray, confiscating and looting medication destined for Tigray. The deadly besiegement of Tigray thus continues unabated.

On September 17, 2021, U.S. President Joseph Biden signed an executive order that enables the American government to impose sanctions on those implicated in the ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis in Northern Ethiopia. Similar meaningful action in the form of sanctions or the threat of sanctions is required from donor states and the international community at large to break the deadly siege that threatens the lives of millions of people in Tigray. While the international community has worked through established institutions and official channels to facilitate a ceasefire and political resolution to the crises in Ethiopia, these institutions must take urgent and forceful measures while remaining free, fair, and unbiased. As such, investigations into the atrocities perpetrated in Tigray require independent international investigators. Joint investigations undertaken in partnership with state-affiliated organizations, such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, a biased and unreliable organization that has repeatedly downplayed the atrocities in Tigray, cannot provide a clear and accurate picture of the humanitarian crisis on the ground.

THE UNITED NATIONS GENOCIDE CONVENTION

The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which first recognized genocide as a crime under international law, was ratified in 1948 and came into force in January 1951. The Convention defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

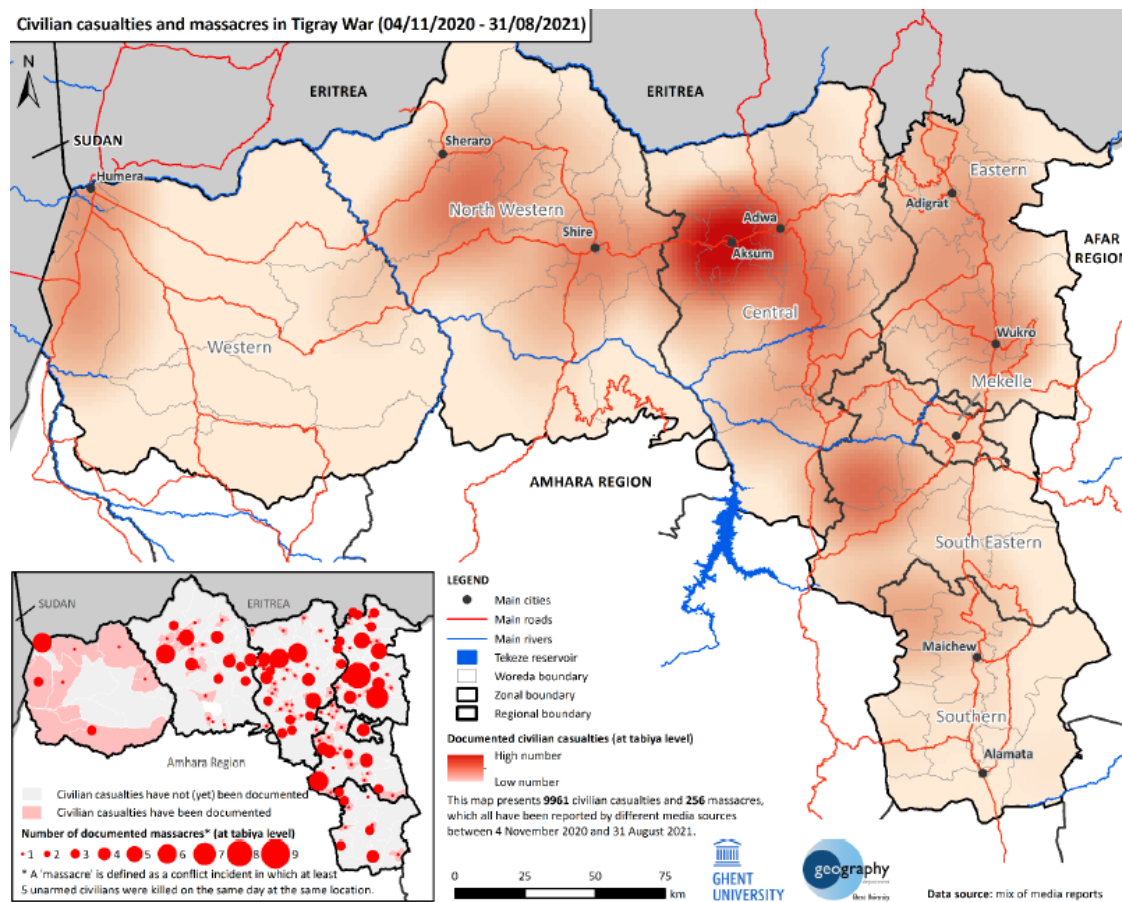
Article III of the Convention specifies punishable acts, including genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide, complicity in genocide [1].

Since November 4, 2020, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have committed atrocities with intent to destroy the Tigrayan people, an ethnic minority in Ethiopia. Throughout the last 11 months, these forces have carried out at least four out of the five acts identified as the physical element of genocide in the Convention.

a. Killing members of the group

Since Prime Minister Abiy's declaration of war, thousands of people have been killed in Tigray. While the exact number of those killed cannot be verified due to the ongoing communications blackout, *Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation*, a report by scholars at Ghent University in Belgium, provides a glimpse into the devastating loss of life in Tigray. This report, which utilizes both qualitative and quantitative data, reveals that casualties in Tigray are predominantly deaths through massacres, extrajudicial executions, and house-to-house searches. A map compiled by researchers reveals that the killing of Tigrayans was carried out all across the region.

According to the publication, 256 massacres have been reported, in which at least 5 civilians were killed on the same day at the same location. The number of victims of each of these massacres ranges from dozens to several hundred. The perpetrators of these massacres were Eritrean soldiers (46%), Ethiopian soldiers (21%), Amhara militia (4%), and the rest, a combination of Ethiopian and Eritrean forces. The thousands of confirmed casualties in this report do not include those who perished due to lack of food or medical care. While this report provides the most comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the casualties, the death of thousands of Tigrayans, often in gruesome and public ways, has been extensively documented by numerous reliable media outlets.

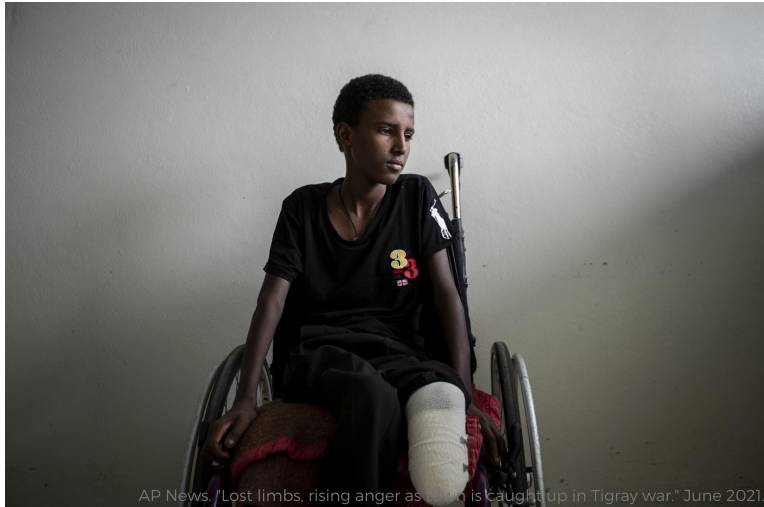


Annys, Vanden Bempt, Negash, et al. "Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation," September 2021.

Heatmap of civilian casualties in the Tigray up to 31 August 2021, as well as occurrence of massacres

b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group

Bombings and shellings of towns and villages, indiscriminate attacks against civilians, and weaponized Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) are a few of the various forms of physical violence that have been inflicted on the people of Tigray. Civilians, including children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, suffered horrendous physical injuries when artillery rounds struck their homes. Moreover, the weaponized SGBV has inflicted unimaginable bodily as well as mental harm on all persons in Tigray. As a result, thousands in Tigray are left with permanent bodily injuries, including internal organ damage, spinal injury, paralysis, and amputations.



Haftom Gebretsadik, 17 (L) & Mikiele Kahsay, 16 (R), injured in artillery attacks

Incalculable mental harm has also been deliberately inflicted on the people of Tigray during the course of the genocidal war. During their occupation of large swaths of Tigray, the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces undertook a campaign to terrorize the civilian population. These forces conducted summary executions, assaulted civilians, and tyrannized towns and villages in an effort to intimidate and subjugate the people of Tigray. Families and communities throughout Tigray, and those in refugee camps in Sudan, report Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, insomnia, anxiety, and other forms of mental harm and distress. Therefore, it is evident that grave bodily and mental harm has been deliberately inflicted on the people of Tigray.

c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part

Since the onset of the war, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have undertaken a coordinated campaign to degrade living conditions to a level that would threaten the continued existence of the Tigrayan people. They accomplished this by engineering a man-made famine, weaponized SGBV, destroying health infrastructure, and destroying vital services and supplies.

Beginning in November 2020, the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces looted and destroyed food supplies, blocked humanitarian aid, killed livestock, and prohibited farming, which has resulted in the worst famine in the world. This man-made famine engineered by these forces to exact collective punishment on the people of Tigray has placed 900,000 people in conditions of famine.

Moreover, these forces deliberately targeted, looted, and vandalized health facilities, completely destroying 80% of health facilities in Tigray. The destruction of healthcare has been described by MSF's Joseph Velliveau as a **"systematic elimination of an entire people's fundamental right to healthcare"** [2]. Additionally, these forces targeted vital infrastructure and supplies necessary to sustain life, such as water delivery systems and grinding mills.

By deliberately, vindictively, and systematically targeting essential resources necessary for the continued existence of the group, such as food, water, shelter, and medical services, the Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces sought to bring about the destruction of the Tigrayan people.

d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group

The war on Tigray is characterized by widespread and brutal weaponized SGBV, including rape, gang-rape, sexual slavery, and sexual mutilation. In its August 2021 report, Amnesty International declared that SGBV in Tigray amounted to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity. The sexual violence has been accompanied by abuse, ethnic slurs, and expression of genocidal intent. Assailants told survivors, **"we want to get rid of you here,"** [3] and **"girls can make Amhara babies,"** [4] during the attacks; perpetrators forcibly sterilized Tigrayan women by burning their reproductive organs while declaring that **"A Tigrayan womb should never give birth"** [5]; and told survivors that they sought to **deliberately infect them with HIV** [3].

In a patrilineal society such as Ethiopia, where a child takes on the ethnic identity of their father, widespread, systemic rape is intended to ensure that the children born from these assaults will not be seen as Tigrayan. As such, in addition to being a war crime and crime against humanity, the brutal SGBV committed by Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces in Tigray is genocidal because it sought to prevent Tigrayan women from giving birth to more Tigrayans, and thereby destroying Tigrayan society as a whole.

A crucial element that distinguishes the crime of genocide from other crimes under the Convention is the **intent** to destroy. To meet the Convention's definition of genocide, there must be special intent, or *dolus specialis*, to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. This *dolus specialis* means that victims are purposely targeted because of their identity and their real or perceived membership to a given group. Often, intent is the most difficult aspect of genocide to prove, as perpetrators will rarely openly discuss their intent to eliminate an entire group. However, in the Ethiopian case, Abiy, his advisors, and members of his administration have explicitly stated their genocidal intent. Some examples of these expressions of intent include:

- "The enemy we are facing is an enemy which is **the cancer of Ethiopia.**" [6] – Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, July 18, 2021
- "We will not know rest until we have annihilated this enemy. **This people [in reference to the people of Tigray], are enemies of the whole of Ethiopia.**" [7] – Agegnehu Teshager, President of the Regional State of Amhara, July 25, 2021
- "Since each and every Tigrayan youth [...] has been raised with the same Woyane [Tigrayan rebellion] mentality [...] if you want to defeat them, **you have to eliminate all the youth in Tigray.**" [8] – Seyoum Teshome, prominent pro-Abiy activist, June 30, 2021
- "When I met the Ethiopian leadership in February [2021], 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." [9] – Pekka Haavisto, Finnish Foreign Minister, June 15, 2021
- "There should be no land in this country which can sustain this kind of **weed. They should be erased and disappeared from historical records.**" [10] – Daniel Kibret, Advisor to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, September 16, 2021

WHY THE WORLD MUST #CALLITAGENOCIDE

According to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the prohibition of genocide is a peremptory norm of international law, obligating states to prevent and punish genocide. As such, according to Article VIII of the Convention, signatory states may call upon competent organs of the United Nations to take action for the prevention and suppression of: acts of genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide and/or complicity in genocide.

On September 23, 2021, the United States House of Representatives passed a bill that would compel the Biden administration to determine whether the atrocities committed against the people of Tigray amount to genocide. Additionally, the U.S. State Department is conducting a legal assessment of whether the actions of Ethiopian and Eritrean forces in Tigray amount to genocide. While there has been widespread recognition that Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have committed ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity—an official recognition of the genocidal intent behind these actions is vital from a legal standpoint because all states are bound by international law to prevent and punish genocide. As such, recognizing the war on Tigray as genocide will oblige states to mobilize to mitigate the atrocities and hold the perpetrators accountable in international court.

The Genocide Convention recognizes that “at all periods of history genocide has inflicted great losses on humanity” [1]. This is true for the ongoing state-sanctioned genocide in Tigray, which has unleashed a wave of devastation unparalleled in its vindictiveness. As the Convention states, liberating humanity from the odious scourge of genocide requires international cooperation. Therefore, the international community needs to immediately recognize the acts of genocide committed in Tigray, with a view to prevent and suppress these atrocities and bring the perpetrators to justice.

OVERVIEW OF THE ATROCITIES DURING THE WAR ON TIGRAY

Famine

Tigray is experiencing a devastating man-made famine, and humanitarian aid is not reaching the region due to the ongoing blockade enacted by the Abiy administration. The blockade extends to banks remaining closed, a complete telecommunications shutdown, and fuel not entering Tigray, making life extremely difficult for Tigrayans while the Ethiopian government impedes humanitarian assistance in Tigray. The starvation of the people of Tigray is intentional, systematic, and widespread. Starvation, like rape and ethnic-based killings, is being used as a tool by the Abiy Administration to carry out a genocide against Tigrayans. Since the start of the war, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces have looted and burned Tigrayan harvests, destroyed farming infrastructure in Tigray, killed or stolen livestock, and prevented farmers from preparing their land for future harvests.

It must be stressed that the blockade is causing extreme human suffering, and the needs are mounting by the day. An estimated 6.8 million civilians in Tigray, over 90% of the population, need emergency food aid, and an estimated 900,000 civilians face famine conditions. The Tigray External Affairs Office has reported that: malnutrition rates stand at 23.7%, with severe malnutrition at 3.4%, malnutrition of pregnant and lactating women stands at over 70%—causing miscarriages and maternal death—and in-patient admission stands at just 3%, as the demand for healthcare is beyond the capacity of what remains of the collapsed health system.



Birhan Etsana (27) with her malnourished baby, Mebrhit (17 months), the lone survivor of her triplets.

Extremely distressing photos of malnourished babies and children have surfaced—these photos must be seen by all, as it is vital to remember that there are real people behind the numbers and figures whose lives hang in the balance. Not only does Abiy continue to deny the gravity of the starvation crisis his actions have unleashed on millions in Tigray, his continued besiegement of the region is killing dozens, if not hundreds, by the day.

Displacement

In September 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) recorded 2.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in Tigray, 250,000 in the Amhara region, and 112,000 in the Afar region. With very limited access to humanitarian aid, cities hosting large numbers of IDPs such as Shire, Adwa, and Axum are running out of supplies to support incoming and existing IDPs. Access to food is a worsening problem, as thousands are experiencing famine in the region. With food sources depleted, IDPs are left in an especially vulnerable situation. The Tigray regional government has reported that IDPs have been most severely affected by the depletion of food stocks. Deaths due to starvation have already been recorded among IDPs.

Moreover, overcrowding and lack of sanitation services in the schools and abandoned buildings occupied by IDPs further jeopardizes the health and security of hundreds of thousands of people. Aid organizations who are supporting IDPs are facing supply challenges due to lack of cash and fuel in the region. Relations between the Ethiopian government and aid organizations are also hindering aid access, as the Ethiopian government has suspended operations for the Dutch branch of Doctors without Borders and the Norwegian Refugee Council. This is following dangerous unverified statements made by Ethiopian officials that aid organizations are providing supplies to the Tigray Defense Forces.



Internally Displaced People take shelter in schools.

Moreover, the government of Tigray has reported new waves of IDPs from areas on the border with Eritrea. This wave of IDPs, which includes unaccompanied children, further exacerbates the humanitarian catastrophe. Similarly, as fighting worsens in the western region of Tigray, Amhara and Eritrean soldiers are going door to door to find and detain Tigrayans, leading to a renewed exodus of Tigrayans from Western Tigray. In the summer of 2021, the number of Tigrayans crossing into Sudan increased to about 50 per day, with 70,000 currently living in refugee camps. Famine and malnutrition are growing, and continued conflict and security concerns are blocking all humanitarian access. As we enter the 11th month of the crisis, aid is desperately needed to support the millions of IDPs in Tigray and beyond.

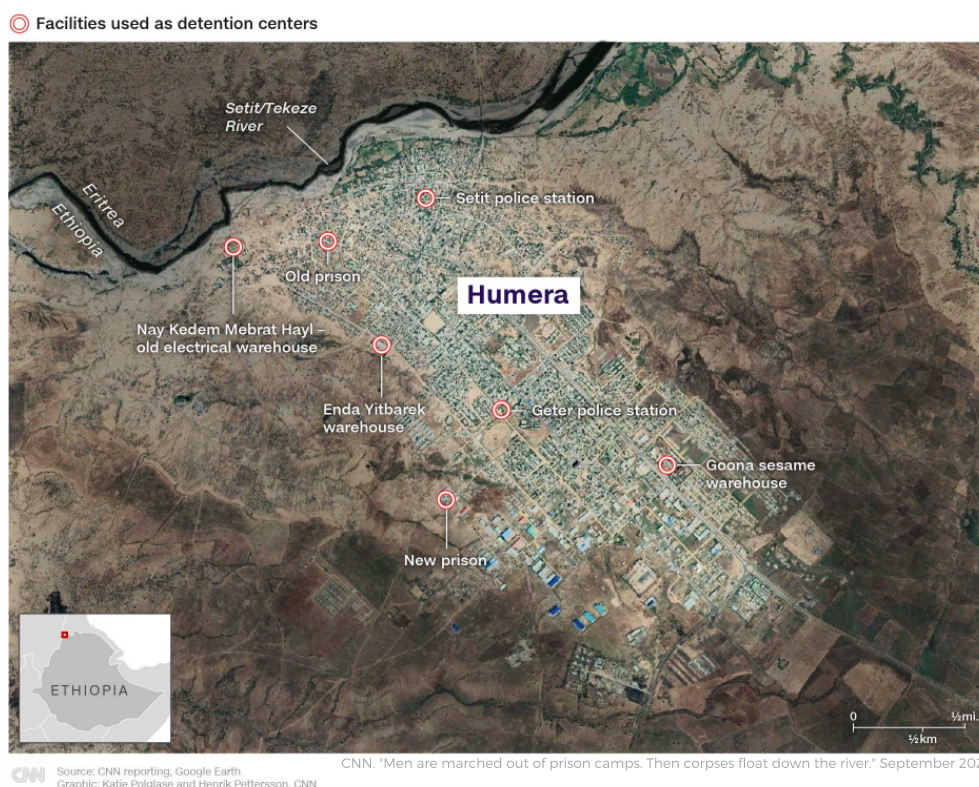
Ethnic Profiling and Ethnic Cleansing

Thousands of Tigrayan civilians face torture and extra-judicial executions in concentration camps in Western Tigray, northern Ethiopia. Over 60 bodies of Tigrayans killed in Western Tigray have been recovered from the Tekeze River in Sudan. The bodies are believed to be from a concentration camp in Humera, a city in Tigray that has seen heavy fighting since the beginning of the war. The camps are monitored and controlled by Ethiopian soldiers guarding, torturing, and executing imprisoned Tigrayan civilians, whose only crimes are their ethnic identities as Tigrayans. These mass detention centers are spread throughout Western Tigray, Addis Ababa, and the Afar region. In Humera, Amhara soldiers are going door to door rounding up Tigrayans by checking their identity cards and bringing them to concentration camps in the city.



Abbadi Warehouse Compound, a concentration camp established by the Amhara regional government in Western Tigray.

Detainees who escaped the camps describe them as being cramped with no privacy. Armed guards at these concentration camps do not provide detainees with food, water, or access to bathroom facilities. According to a CNN investigation, one detainee who escaped stated that: "They weren't providing us food and we didn't even have access to the toilet, [...] Some people were toileting inside the warehouse." [11]. Detainees lived in these camps in fear for their future. They recalled watching other detainees being taken away by soldiers never to return and constantly wondered if they were next. When they can, escaped detainees call Tigrayan refugees in Sudan to inform them of missing persons that they believe were killed then dumped in the Tekeze River.



In Addis Ababa, Tigrayans are forcibly disappeared every day. Addis Ababa police are arresting Tigrayans on the streets, cafes, workplaces, and other public spaces, claiming that those arrested are connected to the Tigray's People Liberation Front (TPLF, the governing party of Tigray). On July 17, 2021, Addis Ababa's police commissioner confirmed the mass arrest of 300 Tigrayans. These arrests are often conducted without warrants as police are searching public places popular within the Tigrayan community. After confirming their ethnic identity through their IDs, they are taken to detention centers. Initially, family members are aware of the arrests and are able to contact those detained. However, a few days later, they find that their family member was moved to a new, undisclosed location or a different city altogether.

The disappearances are especially difficult as detainees are often denied access to lawyers and rely on their family members to provide food and clothes. In addition to the mass arrests, Tigrayan businesses are facing mass closures. Several Tigrayan-owned businesses were shut down for arbitrary reasons, like playing “inciting music”. Business owners have tried to appeal these decisions, but all attempts were unsuccessful. The targeting of Tigrayan civilians, homes, and businesses is undeniably ethnic profiling, and these instances are ethnically motivated attacks against Tigrayans living all across Ethiopia.

International Response

At the end of August 2021, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres amplified three demands—calling for a ceasefire, unrestricted aid access, and political dialogue—to resolve the crisis in Tigray. Since then, the international community has coalesced around these three demands, which is a welcome development. Yet the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seems to be at an impasse, as two of the five permanent members of the UNSC, China and Russia, remain widely supportive of the Abiy Administration. In return, the regime in Addis Ababa has ramped up anti-Western sentiment.

The United States, under the leadership of President Biden, passed an Executive Order on September 17, 2021, that establishes new sanctions, allowing the United States to target those responsible for, or complicit in, prolonging the conflict in Ethiopia, obstructing humanitarian access, or preventing a ceasefire. Additionally, the United States Department of State has launched a legal review examining whether the actions in Tigray amount to genocide. These two actions undertaken by the United States exemplify global leadership and should spur donor states and members of the international community to take similar meaningful action to end the suffering and bring accountability and justice for the people of Tigray.

Recognizing that **“The widespread humanitarian crisis precipitated by the violent conflict in northern Ethiopia has left millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance and has placed an entire region on the brink of famine”** [12], President Biden signed an executive order on September 17, 2021. This executive order, which authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to impose a wide range of sanctions, is a meaningful step towards pressuring the Abiy administration to lift its deadly siege on Tigray. While the executive order itself is a strong start, it remains to be seen how the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of State will utilize this authorization to target those who have contributed to the large-scale suffering in Tigray and northern Ethiopia broadly. In a statement issued on September 18, 2021, the Government of the National Regional State of Tigray welcomed this step by the Biden administration, re-affirming its willingness to enter into an all-inclusive dialogue to negotiate a ceasefire. Similarly, in an interview with Al Jazeera on September 18, 2021, Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), Antonio Guterres shared, **“we received a letter from the leadership of the TPLF showing interest in cooperating with the UN,”** [13] underscoring the Tigray government’s readiness to enter into negotiations.

The Abiy administration’s response, on the other hand, has been defiant and combative. In a response issued on Twitter a few hours after the executive order was released, Abiy once again refused calls for a negotiated ceasefire. This lengthy statement, which featured a number of factual inaccuracies (chief among them the origin of the 1998 Ethiopian-Eritrean War), reiterated the Abiy administration’s determination to pursue war rather than dialogue. For more than 10 months now, Abiy, his advisors, and domestic and regional partners have chosen to fan the flames of war and genocide instead of negotiations. While the myriad of political crises in Ethiopia, manifesting in their most violent form in Tigray, require an all-inclusive political dialogue, the Abiy administration’s trajectory and current stance is incapable of addressing these crises and risks further destabilizing Ethiopia. Destabilization in the second most populous country in Africa, home to an estimated 110 million people, threatens the stability of the Horn of Africa, a place of significant strategic importance to global politics.

As the Human Rights Watch (HRW) Horn of Africa Director Laetitia Bader emphasized in a September 18, 2021 dispatch, expressions of concern from the international community have done little to ease the immense human suffering precipitated by the war on Tigray.

Bader instead urges the UNSC, the African Union, the European Union, and other concerned governments to employ the threat of sanctions to mitigate this suffering.

Therefore, donor states, international organizations, and the international community at large has to move beyond expressions of grave concern and take immediate action to mitigate the rapidly expanding humanitarian catastrophe that threatens the lives of millions of people. We are calling for:

- **Increased and immediate humanitarian access** into all of Tigray via the opening of a humanitarian corridor by way of Sudan and a consistent humanitarian air bridge to airdrop food;
- **The immediate, internationally monitored and verifiable withdrawal** of Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces from Tigray and the restoration of pre-war territorial boundaries;
- **Implementation of economic sanctions** on Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials to increase pressure to stop the blockage of aid;
- **The halt of bilateral and multilateral trade relations** with Ethiopia and Eritrea and prohibition of new investments in either country;
- **The full restoration of all essential services**, including banking, electricity, telecommunications, transportation, and trade;
- **An immediate end to the state-sanctioned ethnic profiling and ethnically-motivated attacks** against Tigrayans living across Ethiopia, including evictions, firings, arbitrary arrests, detention, forced disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial execution;
- **Release of all Tigrayans that have been held on the basis of their identity**, including dissident journalists and the 17,000+ Tigrayan ENDF members unlawfully held;
- **An independent, UN-led investigation** into all atrocities committed in Tigray and to Tigrayans across Ethiopia, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide;
- **An arms embargo and a limited no fly zone** that does not hinder humanitarian delivery;
- **A negotiated ceasefire and an inclusive national dialogue** that includes the democratically elected and constitutionally mandated government of Tigray and other stakeholders; and
- **Official recognition of the Tigray Genocide** committed by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, Eritrean Defense Forces, Amhara Special Forces, and Amhara Fano Militia against the Tigrayan people.

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