

SITUATION REPORT

JANUARY 2022



OMNA
TIGRAY

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TIGRAY

Upon the 14th month of the Tigray genocide orchestrated by the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, which has included extrajudicial killings, massacres, weaponized sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), detention, torture and execution, and wholesale destruction, the humanitarian crisis in Tigray continues unabated. The region remains isolated and under siege, leaving survivors of these atrocities without the medical and psychological support they need. Civilians continue to die daily from starvation and lack of access to medical services and life-sustaining medicines. The humanitarian response remains stalled, with the United Nations (UN) food distribution operating at 10%, while most other operations are suspended.

Inaccessibility to the region has hindered more accurate estimates of food insecurity figures. Estimates of 900,000 Tigrayans in famine and 1.8 million on the brink of famine have not been updated since July 2021 despite a continued humanitarian blockade. Malnutrition rates established by the Tigray government are illustrative of the dire food insecurity. In November 2021, 28,000 children under five were screened for malnutrition and 2.8% were diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) while 20% were diagnosed with moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). Among 18,800 pregnant and lactating mothers, 69% were diagnosed with malnutrition.

As Tigrayan civilians, especially children, starve to death, they also have to worry about airstrikes conducted by the Ethiopian government with the assistance of foreign military equipment and personnel. In an effort to bring peace, the President of Tigray, Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael ordered the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) to withdraw from the Amhara and Afar regions of Ethiopia. Yet the Tigray government's overtures were rebuffed and the Ethiopian government responded by aurally bombarding Tigray. As the TDF were making progress in their march to Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa to lift the total siege that Tigray has been under since the end of June 2021, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration was making arms deals with Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, and Iran. The Ethiopian government receiving drones from the aforementioned countries has consistently targeted schools, marketplaces, residential areas, and public infrastructures, causing dozens of civilian casualties and further disrupting the limited power the region had.

Despite the Ethiopian government reportedly calling on its forces not to enter Tigray, the reality on the ground indicates the Ethiopian government's rejection of Tigray's call for the start of peace negotiations. This rejection is not only illustrated by an intensification of aerial bombardments, but also by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces' attempt to reinvade liberated Tigrayan land, the continued brutal ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray by Amhara and Eritrean forces, and the Eritrean occupation of Irob land in the northeast of Tigray on the Eritrean border. Eritrean troops, the Ethiopian army and its allied militias are attempting to reinvade Tigray from the north through Badme, northeast from Irob, southeast through Afar, and the west through Western Tigray.

In the Afar region, there are several credible reports of Eritrean and allied Afar militant groups extrajudicially killing and massacring Tigrayans. Therefore, the crimes against humanity, war crimes, and acts of genocide against Tigrayans continue. Furthermore, Tigrayans outside of Tigray, living throughout Ethiopia, are targeted for their ethnicity and tens and thousands remain in concentration camps that lack food, water and hygienic sanitation facilities where they face rape, torture and executions.

The international community called upon the Tigray government to withdraw the TDF from Afar and Amhara region to facilitate a peace process, which it has, but renewed acts of genocide across Tigray on the part of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and allied forces loom. The international community has yet to seriously address the consistent aerial bombardments and the threat of another round of genocidal acts throughout Tigray. There have, however, been some measures taken. On December 17, 2021, after a special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council called by the European Union, member countries voted in favour of the establishment of an independent Commission of Inquiry (CoI) into the crimes committed in Tigray—a development crucial in establishing accountability and justice for victims. Furthermore, on December 23, 2021, the United States government terminated Ethiopia's participation in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as a result of its human rights abuses. That said, more meaningful action needs to be taken by the international community, as the Tigray genocide continues and Tigrayans starve to death, are massacred, sexually assaulted, bombed, detained, tortured, and executed.

Despite gains to lives and livelihoods in Tigray, food insecurity in Tigray predates the official declaration of war on November 4, 2020, as crops in Tigray as well as across Ethiopia and East Africa were plagued by locust infestations in the worst locust swarm to affect Ethiopia in 25 years. The Ethiopian government supported most regions of Ethiopia in their efforts to combat the infestation yet purposefully withheld aid to combat the locust spread in Tigray. In October 2020, prior to the start of the genocidal war on Tigray, the *Guardian* reported on the locust infestation quoting a Tigrayan farmer: “The federal government is not supporting us. [...] It is trying to kill us” [1]. Not a month later, the genocidal war on Tigray started, a central strategy consisting of weaponized starvation through agricultural destruction and restricting access to food aid.

Upon Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara regional forces invading Tigray and occupying most of the region until June 28, 2021, these genocidal forces burned crops, stole and killed livestock and cattle, destroyed grains and warehouses storing agricultural products, and prevented farmers from harvesting their crops after the June to September growing season. Additionally, the occupation lasting through June 2021, farmers could not get the seeds, farming equipment, and supplies they needed to commence their farming in time for the rainy season. This agricultural destruction has played a key role in the development of famine in Tigray and will impact generations of Tigrayans to come.

The agricultural destruction has been compounded by restricted access to humanitarian aid until June 2021 followed by a complete siege on Tigray at the hands of the Ethiopia government in which less than 12% of needed food assistance has entered Tigray since July 2021 and no medicine has been allowed to enter. The humanitarian response coordinated by the UN has largely stopped due to safety concerns for the personnel of humanitarian organizations and a lack of cash, fuel, and supplies. The Ethiopian government, its allies, and supporters have proclaimed on numerous occasions that humanitarian organizations are supporting the Tigray government and that humanitarian workers are against Ethiopian interests. Further affecting the humanitarian response in Tigray, on October 22, 2021, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights to Tigray’s capital city of Mekelle were suspended because of government airstrikes and did not resume until November 24, 2021.

Despite the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stating at the end of November 2021 that “A new convoy is moving, so the humanitarian aid is effectively restarted, probably not as much as we would like. But that is a good signal and the UN flights between Mekele and Addis have been re-established,”[2] no humanitarian aid truck entered Tigray in the month of December. Furthermore, the status of the flights remains unknown, as airstrikes throughout the Tigray region have taken place throughout December 2021.

Amid the continued siege, the food insecurity situation can only worsen. Famine is yet to be declared; however, as of June 2021, at least 900,000 Tigrayans were living in famine conditions – a number which has not been updated since despite a continued humanitarian blockade. Images and footage of emaciated children have been emerging from Tigray for months. At the end of July 2021, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) released a statement that “over 100,000 children in Tigray could suffer from life-threatening severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in the next 12 months – a tenfold increase compared to the average annual caseload” [3]. High levels of acute malnutrition in certain areas were also documented by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) as early as May 2021. Results of screenings conducted at the end of November 2021 reported by Tigray’s External Affairs Office corroborate findings from UNICEF and MSF, indicating a deteriorating situation with high rates of malnutrition among children under five as well as pregnant and lactating mothers. Among 22,800 children screened, 2.8% had severe acute malnutrition, well over the 2% globally recognized emergency threshold. An additional 20% were identified as moderately malnourished. Among 18,800 pregnant and lactating mothers, 69% were diagnosed with malnutrition.



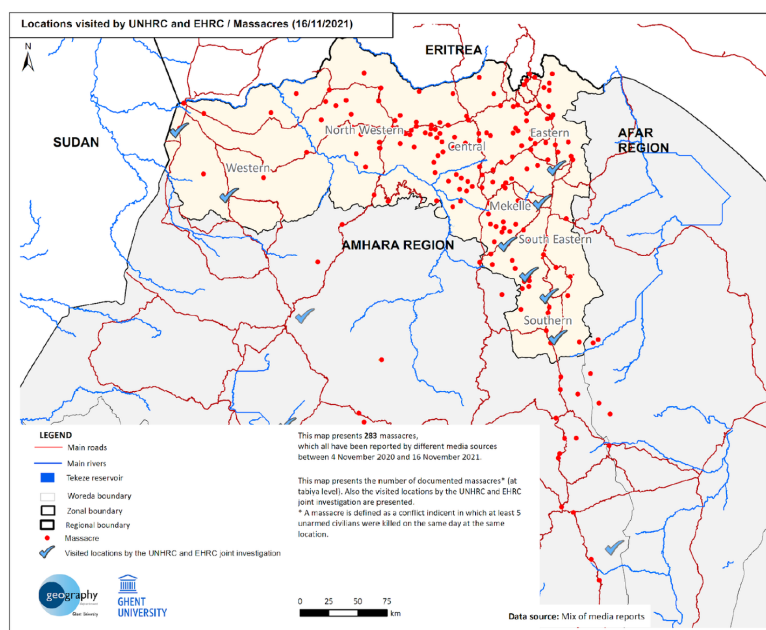
The Guardian, “More than 300,000 suffering from famine conditions in Ethiopia’s Tigray, says UN,” June 2021

The estimates we have are limited by access to Tigrayan populations. The true extent of the famine will not be ascertained until rural and isolated communities have been surveyed, which is inhibited by the ongoing genocidal war. Despite the limited access to Tigray and the “political implications” that come with declaring the hunger crisis in Tigray a famine, there is a famine in Tigray that is the most acute hunger crisis in the world. Yet, the international community has not gone beyond condemning the Ethiopian government for imposing a “de facto humanitarian blockage” on Tigray. Upon the Tigray government meeting the international community’s request of Tigrayans forces to withdraw from the Amhara and Afar regions and calling for a peace process despite being under siege, the international community has not renewed calls for the Ethiopian government to allow unfettered access to Tigray. Each day that the international community does not take action to end the siege, more innocent Tigrayans die of starvation or lack of medications and medical supplies.

MASSACRES AND EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

Massacres and extrajudicial killings of Tigrayans have been commonplace since the start of the genocidal war on Tigray on November 4, 2020. Throughout Tigray, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces and militias have subjected civilians to extrajudicial killings and massacres from Humera and Mai Kadra in Western Tigray to Aksum in central Tigray, Mekelle in the south and Irob in northeast Tigray. Despite incredibly challenging access and connection to Tigray since the start of the war, the occurrence of massacres have been well-documented by reputable international media and human rights organizations, including CNN and Amnesty international. Researchers at Ghent University in the Netherlands have been documenting the humanitarian crisis in Tigray as part of their ‘Tigray: Atlas of the humanitarian situation’ research. Defining massacres as “a conflict incident in which at least 5 civilians were killed on the same day at the same location,” [4] between November 2020 and October 2021, they have documented 283 massacres with between 9,124 and 11,516 reported victims. Most recently, there have been credible reports of massacres of Tigrayans in Afar region by Afar regional forces and Eritrean troops. On December 30, 2021, Tigray External Affairs Office released a statement on a massacre in Afar region’s Abala town in which 250 innocent civilians were brutally massacred.

This terrifying element of the Abiy's administration's ongoing genocidal campaign is taking place in full view of the international community and the whole world. Photos, videos, and accounts of people being harassed, arrested, and taken to makeshift concentration camps are widely available. Reporters have spoken to family members of those detained or those recently released who describe the hellish conditions in these camps. Yet, the international community and states who profess to uphold values of international human rights have not taken meaningful action to stop the Ethiopian government's unlawful and immoral actions. Tens of thousands of Tigrayans sent to concentration camps where they are vulnerable to all forms of torture is an alarming violation of all international humanitarian and human rights laws. An even more terrifying prospect is what the Ethiopian government may choose to do with all of those civilians that are now at its mercy. The regime has shown that it will freely and openly carry out extrajudicial executions of imprisoned people, which means that the life of every single Tigrayan currently in detention is under imminent threat.



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

Massacres in Tigray have been both conducted on the ground, as well as aurally. Instruments of massacres have included guns, axes, and bombs dropped from the sky. On June 22, 2021, the Ethiopian government bombed a market in Togoga in central Tigray, near Tigray's capital city of Mekelle. At least 64 people were killed with casualties in the hundreds. Aerial bombardments and airstrikes intensified in October 2021, when between the 18th and 24th, the Ethiopian government conducted 6 airstrikes in Mekelle and its surrounding areas and one each in Agbe, Adwa, and Mai Tsebri. These bombings were indiscriminate and caused numerous casualties. On December 17, 2021, bombings resumed when the town of Alamata in southern Tigray was subjected to airstrikes. A marketplace was hit, resulting in the death of at least 28 civilians.

Consistent bombing of Tigray has renewed since the Tigray government withdrew its forces from the Afar and Amhara regions on December 19, 2021. Equipped with new drones supplied by Turkey, Iran, the UAE, and China, the Ethiopian government has continually bombed Tigray with drones and fighter jets. The government is indiscriminately bombing civilian populations and essential public infrastructures, including homes, hospitals, places of worship, power stations, while claiming to target military assets.

With airstrikes on the Tekeze Hydroelectric Power Plant on November 30, 2021 and the bombing of Mekelle city substation on December 20, 2021, electricity has been further restricted in Tigray, making communication even more difficult. Nonetheless, reports of airstrikes and video footage of their aftermath have emerged. On December 21, 2021, on the Tigray-Afar border, an airstrike hit a bus and killed 30 civilians. On the same day, strikes were reported in Mai Chew, Korem, and Mekelle. An airstrike was also reported on Christmas day in Chercher Tigray, among the victims was an 8 year old boy. On December 24, 2021, a UNHCR staff member named Hiluf Michael was killed by an Ethiopian government drone attack.

Not being able to win the war on the battlefield on the ground, the Ethiopian government has turned to the skies and sought to subjugate the people of Tigray through aerial bombardments enabled by drones and fighter jets supplied by foreign actors.

There is a long history in the Ethiopian empire of Tigrayan land being strategically annexed to weaken Tigray, which has always been known for its commitment to autonomy and self-determination. Tigrayan land was annexed by both Emperor Menelik II and by Emperor Haile Selassie. When the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)-led coalition of forces removed the Derg military dictatorship from power in 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was established. The EPRDF was grounded in the idea that each ethnic group, known as peoples, nations, and nationalities in Ethiopia, had the right to self-determination.

As a result, parts of Tigrayan land which had been previously annexed to Amharic-speaking regions, such as Begemder and parts of northern Wollo annexed by Menelik I and Haile Selassie respectively, were returned back to Tigray. Their return was supported by the 1994 Ethiopian census, which found that most of the populations inhabiting the returned land were Tigrayan and most were Tigrigna speaking. The EPRDF's return of previous annexed lands to Tigray are at the root of the annexation of Western Tigray in today's genocidal war on Tigray. The Amhara regional government and its forces have not only annexed Western Tigray, they are also committing the textbook definition of ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans from their ancestral homes.

Shortly after the start of the genocidal war in November 2020, it became evident that acts potentially amounting to the ethnic cleansing were occurring in Tigray under a telecommunication blackout. However, it took until March 2021 for U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken to describe the violence in Western Tigray as "acts of ethnic cleansing." When Amhara forces invaded Tigray in November 2020, they did so from the west and south of Tigray, as a means to reclaim land they ahistorically believe belongs to the Amhara region. In doing so, Amhara forces started their campaign of ethnic cleansing that has included mass forced displacement of ethnic Tigrayans, seizure of Tigrayan property and land, distribution of Amhara ID cards, extrajudicial killings, massacres, weaponized rape, as well as torture and detention in concentration camps eventually leading to execution. There are also recent credible reports of Tigrayan women and girls in Western Tigray detained in concentration camps subjected to sexual slavery.

In September 2021, CNN reported from Sudan with damning evidence of brutal massacres of ethnic Tigrayans. Dozens of Tigrayan mutilated and dismembered bodies have been recovered downstream in Sudan in Tsitit or Tekeze river. It is believed that these are bodies from a mass grave site in Humera, Western Tigray, where Amhara militias and special forces have been cleansing the area of all ethnic Tigrayans, detaining and torturing them in concentration camps before executing them. According to an investigative report by the *Telegraph*, a witness of the ethnic cleansing described the brutal murder of a 40-year-old shop owner: **“Before they killed her, they removed her eyes and cut off her legs. They did not let anyone pick her body up and bury her”** [5].

Since CNN’s investigative report, Eritrean forces have entered Western Tigray and supported the Amhara regional government and its militias in their ethnic cleansing campaign. Throughout November 2021, when Tigray Defense Forces were progressing to Addis Ababa, the house-to-house round up and detention of Tigrayans in concentration camps intensified. Most recently, in November 2021, about 15,000 Tigrayans had to flee Western Tigray. On December 16, 2021, Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report on what they titled “A new wave of atrocities in Western Tigray.” In interviews with 31 people, AI and HRW were told of the rounding up and killing of Tigrayans in Adebai, Humera, and Rawyan. Interviewees spoke of the dire conditions in concentration camps and their mistreatment and torture. A day laborer who escaped after being held in Bet Hintset prison by Amhara regional police described his experience: “They used electric wires and for the ages from 12 to 30, they hit us on the soles of our feet... the others that are older, they lay them down on their stomachs and hit them from their necks to their feet” [6].



Not only are Amhara special forces, police, and militia rounding up Tigrayans and torturing and executing them in concentration camps, they are also massacring them. A 34-year-old farmer from Abedai in Western Tigray recounted what he witnessed:

“They started shooting whoever was in range running. When the people tried to escape... [the Fano] attacked them with machetes and axes so no one could escape...We were passing bodies and we were all in shock... After we calmed down, we noticed that there were more bodies there too. Everywhere you turned, there would be five, 10 bodies” [6].

As part of the Amhara government's attempts to cover up its atrocities, its forces and allies have razed Tigrayan villages to the ground. Occupying forces are ridding Western Tigray of any evidence of their crimes, including leaving no Tigrayan survivors behind. In May 2021, the Amhara regional government invited investors to lease farms in Western Tigray. In the published list of names, almost all 288 farms were owned by Tigrayans. The Amhara government also allowed investors to purchase the land with only proof of identification to speed up the process of giving away Tigrayan land. Amhara settlers also have been transported in minibuses with their household goods to occupy Western Tigray. Amhara representatives plan to resettle half a million Amharas in Western Tigray.

The international community continues to turn a blind eye to the brutal ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray. Despite U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken labelling the violence against Tigrayans in Western Tigray as acts of ethnic cleansing in March 2021, nothing has been done to stop the immense suffering of Tigrayans in Western Tigray who are completely cut off from the rest of the world.

ATROCITIES AGAINST THE IROB AND KUNAMA

Among the over 7 million Tigrayans in Tigray, there are two minorities within a minority: the Irob and Kunama. With a population of between 30,000 to 40,000 Irob and approximately 10,000 Tigrayan-Kunama, these minorities face an existential threat as Irob remains brutally occupied by genocidal Eritrean forces and Kunama are displaced with little to no food.

Because of their proximity to the Eritrean border, the Irob and Kumana were among the first to be affected by the invasion of Eritrean forces at the beginning of November 2020. The Irob have remained occupied since, while many Kunama remain internally displaced. While all of Tigray is isolated and cut off from the rest of the world as a telecommunication blockade has persisted, these minority communities risk to be forgotten as no humanitarian organization or journalists have been able to access Irob and little coverage has been given to the Kunama.

Since the start of the genocidal war, there has been extremely limited information as to the plight of Tigrayan-Kunama who are perilously close to the Eritrean border and vulnerable to attack from Eritrean forces. That said, reports from the Kunama diaspora indicate that starvation, looting, massacres, and displacement occurred. Eritrean troops reportedly burned down Kunama settlements, destroyed their property and looted their livestock, forcing many Kunama to become internally displaced. The Kunama who were forced to flee their homes faced starvation from early on in the genocidal war and are reliant on their host communities or have survived only on leaves.



For the Irob, the atrocities the Eritrean forces have committed are reminiscent of their experiences during the 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrean “border” war. In May 1998, Eritrean Armed Forces invaded Irob, as well as other parts of Northern and Western Tigray. The violence in Irob during this two year war was almost identical to the war crimes and crimes against humanity occurring in Irob today. The occupation included imprisonment, harassment, beatings, and killings of civilians (including priests) and the rape of women and girls.

It also included the looting, confiscation, and destruction of private property as well as schools, health centers, and churches; systematic cultural destruction and theft of relics took place. People were evicted from their houses, their livestock and beehives slaughtered or destroyed, and then had to escape to the mountains without food or shelter. Eritrean forces also kidnapped 97 civilians whose fate is unknown to this day. To add insult to injury, as part of the peace agreement to end the 1998-2000 border war, in 2002 a United Nations border commission awarded a third of Irob land to Eritrea.

“The invasion and the subsequent cruel treatment of the people have not received enough coverage especially by the news media” [7] — Ethiopian Reporter, Oct. 25, 1998.

Much like what happened between 1998 to 2000, Irob lands are presently occupied by the brutal Eritrean forces. This time, however, all of Irob is occupied and until the end of June 2021, there was nowhere to escape to as invading forces occupied all of Tigray. Under occupation, the Irob have been bombed, evicted from their homes, their property has been looted, their livestock have been stolen or killed, Irob women and girls have been raped, and young and old alike have been brutalized and massacred. Children of those killed during the 1998 to 2000 war were among those massacred. Public infrastructure, including health facilities and schools have been looted and destroyed. Much like other inaccessible areas of Tigray, the extent of the atrocities and human suffering is not known, but can be imagined. Irob who have managed to escape and travel to Adigrat have told of the immense suffering.

“In one Irob village called Gamada, Eritrean forces killed countless young students and threw their bodies in the river. They then told the parents of those killed not to remove the bodies from the river so that people couldn’t drink the water from the river. There are many stories of bodies being thrown into villages’ only water wells to make the water undrinkable. In cities, the Eritrean forces destroyed water pumps.” [8] — 62 Year Old Tigrayan-Irob who managed to flee to Canada.

This month, January 2022, is the one-year anniversary of the Irob Massacre, which entailed a series of massacres of Irob throughout the several Irob villages. A partial list of those massacred was collected by Irob Anina Civil Society and contains the names of 72 victims. Surviving relatives, some of whom hid in caves, were not allowed to bury their loved ones.

The Irob and Kumana have been forgotten in the past. Upon the anniversary of the Irob massacre, the international community should not forget these minorities and must actively work to assure their survival.

MASS ARRESTS

Since November 2020, the onset of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's genocidal war against Tigray, innocent civilians of Tigrayan descent across Ethiopia have faced mass arrests and ethnic profiling. More recently, with the declaration of the Prime Minister's state of emergency (SoE) on November 2, 2021, the mass arrests of Tigrayans, particularly in Addis Ababa, have increased. Federal forces and vigilante groups across Ethiopia are conducting unwarranted searches and arresting innocent Tigrayan civilians without due process for suspected affiliation with, or support of, a political party—namely the TPLF. In Western Tigray, a site of ethnic cleansing, the arrest, and detainment of young children and elderly Tigrayans alike in concentration camps have been evidenced through eyewitness accounts, video footage, and independent reporting. Lacking any material evidence, the arbitrary mass arrest of thousands of Tigrayan civilians from their homes, workplace, and streets are politically motivated and evidence of ethnic profiling and genocide.

Tigrayans in all parts of Ethiopia face eviction, firing, detention, torture, and extrajudicial execution on the basis of their ethnic identity. Armed police officers have raided the homes of innocent Tigrayan families, as one Tigrayan recounted to the New York Times, "last month his house in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, was raided by security officers in plain clothes who tore open his mattress and couch and smashed his washing machine" [9]. Ethnic profiling is a violation of international human rights, it deteriorates the social fabric of society and trust in government. In the Ethiopian context, the mass arrest of Tigrayans has turned family members, neighbors, and friends against one another—as many have reported Tigrayans they know personally to authorities for interrogation and potential detainment. For those Tigrayans who have been arrested, the conditions of their detainment remain unclear, as the location of thousands of detainees remains unknown.

The earliest evidence of ethnic profiling and mass arrests took place in November of 2020, when UN peacekeepers of Tigrayan descent were withdrawn from their international posts. The Associated Press published video evidence of an Ethiopian military official verifying that Tigrayan members of the UN peacekeeping mission were being targeted, stating that the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) needs to “clean out our insides” [10]. Tigrayan members of the ENDF within Ethiopia, totaling over seventeen thousand individuals, were also early targets of mass arrests; the total number of those detained is undetermined. One detainee shared that “he is being held with more than 400 other Tigrayans, and lawyers are not allowed to contact them. Even families can't visit” [11]. Many of the military personnel targeted were not combatants, but were teachers, nurses, and even employees of state-owned companies.

The six month SoE declared by Abiy Ahmed on November 2, 2021 has enabled federal forces to conduct unwarranted searches and mass arrests of Tigrayans. Thousands of Tigrayans have been arrested and detained across Ethiopia. The SOE and hate speech has cultivated a culture of fear and suspicion, driving neighborhood groups in Addis Ababa to come together and police streets for any Tigrayans—who are reported to federal forces for interrogation and detainment. In both the public and private sector, Tigrayan employees have been fired without cause or forced into indefinite leave. Tigrayan tenants have been reported to authorities by their landlords, leading to their detainment. Tigrayans are not safe from ethnic profiling and detainment on the streets, in public transit, the workplace, or even their homes. Transferred to unidentified locations with limited communication or legal representation, the wellbeing of those detained remains widely unknown yet torture, rape and killings have been reported.

The culture of fear and suspicion that fuels the mass arrest of Tigrayans extends beyond the borders of Ethiopia. In neighboring Kenya, Tigrayans live in fear that they will not be able to return to their homeland. In the United States, Tigrayan activists have been targets of doxxing campaigns by pro-war advocates who have even led efforts to incriminate the director of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, an ethnic Tigrayan.

International organizations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and more have condemned the mass arrests of Tigrayans, which has impacted over 40 UN staff of Tigrayan descent and their dependents who were arrested following the SOE. Warning against the mass arrests, the UN stated that the SOE and current conditions of random search, arrest, and detainment of Tigrayans compounds the “already very serious human rights and humanitarian situation” [12].

REGIONAL AND GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS/FOREIGN ACTORS

Since waging a genocidal war on Tigray in November 2020, the Ethiopian government has warned the international community against interfering in its handling of the war, claiming it is solely a domestic matter. However, after over a year, it is clear to observers that the war on Tigray has not been a quick “law enforcement operation.” Contrary to its request for non-interference, the Ethiopian government has sought and received military assistance from multiple foreign actors throughout the genocidal war on Tigray.

According to intelligence from the ground and various reports and claims on social media, Eritrea, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Somalia have actively supported the Ethiopian government's mission in Tigray. There are also reports of Russia, China, and Iran providing military supplies, logistical support, and personnel to assist the Ethiopian government in the war on Tigray. Foreign actors involved in this war have exacerbated the catastrophe in the region and committed some of the most egregious human rights violations by assisting the Ethiopian government through military personnel, intelligence, and equipment. Foreign militaries and their arsenal of weapons of mass destruction have aided the Ethiopian government in bombing cities, destroying heritage sites, and killing Tigrayan civilians.

Although both the United States (US) and European Union (EU) have threatened sanctions on the Ethiopian government to put a stop on the war on Tigray, “the Ethiopian government feels that it can do without the West - that it can obtain weapons from Iran, Turkey and China, soft loans from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and political protection from Russia and China” (BBC, October 2021) [13].

As a result of foreign interference during the war on Tigray, Abiy and Eritrea's dictator Isaias Afwerki are empowered to dismiss international laws and norms, while exacerbating the chaos in the Horn of Africa.

Eritrea

Eritrea is heavily invested and involved in the war on Tigray. In July 2018, Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a “peace agreement” that was celebrated globally and led to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s Nobel Peace Prize. However, the negotiation of this agreement took place behind closed doors and evidence now shows that it was not a peace deal but rather a war pact between Abiy and Eritrea’s dictator Isaias Afwerki to attack Tigray and eliminate the people as well as the elected government of the region—the TPLF. At the beginning of the war, the Ethiopian government denied Eritrea’s participation in the war. However, following credible accusations and evidence coming out from Tigray, the world now knows of Eritrea’s role in starting and advancing the war on Tigray. Since the start of the war, Eritrean forces have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocidal acts. Although TDF pushed Eritrean and Ethiopian troops from most of Tigray in June 2021, Eritreans still occupy Tigray lands in the north, northeast, and west of Tigray. Eritrea’s intelligence has also taken an active role in Ethiopia’s capital, targeting Tigrayans and sending them to concentration camps across Ethiopia and Eritrea. Most recently, after a withdrawal of the TDF from Afar and Amhara regions, there are credible reports of Eritrean forces preparing to invade Tigray on several fronts.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

At the start of the war, Tigrayan forces confirmed that the UAE was assisting the Ethiopian army with drones dispatched from an airbase in Eritrea. These drones were responsible for neutralizing Tigrayan infrastructure, civilians and forces, and the military success of Ethiopia and its allies in the early days of the conflict is attributed to the destructive use of drones. As the TDF made significant military gains through November 2021 and pushed toward Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian government turned once again to the UAE for military support. This renewed partnership between Ethiopia and the UAE has been confirmed by satellite imagery.

Satellite imagery obtained by Al Jazeera has revealed that the UAE has opened an air bridge to provide extensive military support to the Ethiopian government in its fight against forces from the northern Tigray region. Between September and November 2021, there were more than 90 flights between the UAE and Ethiopia, with many intentionally concealing from where they took off and where they landed. Flight charts and satellite images show aircraft recently arriving from Sweihan Base in Abu Dhabi, UAE, to Harar Meda base, just south of Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa.

Turkey

In a desperate attempt to counter advancing Tigrayan forces seeking to end the Ethiopian government's catastrophic siege on Tigray, the Ethiopian government intensified its shopping-spree to acquire an arsenal of drones from Turkey. It has also been confirmed that Turkish personnel are in Ethiopia supporting military efforts. The Ethiopia-Turkey cooperation was solidified through a military cooperation agreement in August 2021, allowing Ethiopia to obtain additional military technology, specifically the destructive Turkish Bayraktar-TB2 and ANKA-S drones. Turkish Bayraktar-TB2 drones are made by a private company, run by the son-in-law of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It has been reported that Turkish defense and aviation exports to Ethiopia rose to \$94.6 million between January and November 2021 from around \$235,000 in the same period last year, according to figures published by the Turkish Exporters Assembly [14].

Other Foreign Participants

Although the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)'s heavy weapons are of Russian and Ukrainian origin, including T-72 tanks and Su-27 and MiG-23 fighter jets, Ethiopia has reportedly recently purchased weapons from China and Iran. Most recently, there are unconfirmed reports of UAE personnel on the ground in Ethiopia operating Chinese drones, while Russian contractors have been reported to provide support in equipment upkeep.

Further, at the beginning of the war in November 2020, several reports confirmed the presence of Somali soldiers participating in the war on Tigray. Reportedly, Somali youth were told they were being sent abroad for education, but they ended up in the battlefronts of a genocidal war. Although it is unknown how many Somali soldiers participated in the war on Tigray, mothers and families of these young Somali soldiers have protested in Somalia, demanding the whereabouts of their loved ones. Some were told their sons died in Tigray. Crowdsourced lists are circulating across social media platforms with names of people who received military training in Eritrea and have disappeared, or even been killed in Tigray.



INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

The international community had employed strong rhetoric in condemning the atrocities in Tigray until November 2021 when a shift occurred and the atrocities that constitute acts of genocide committed in Tigray were equated with atrocities committed in Amhara and Afar regions. The time and likely reason for the shift differ among the international community actors. For the United Nations, the rhetoric changed after the release of the UNHCR-EHRC joint investigation report. This report was based on a methodologically flawed and biased investigation that involved the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, a state affiliated organization that's head Daniel Bekele was appointed by Prime Minister Abiy who is responsible for the atrocities committed in Tigray. An interpreter who was initially hired by the UN to be a part of the joint-investigation team only to be fired described his induction as a interpreter illustrating one of many methodological flaws in the investigation:

“The investigators seem to have made up their mind as to what to expect from the IDPs before having interviewed them. During the half-day induction, one of the EHRC investigators who facilitated the presentation on the code of conduct of interpreters cautioned us that we would come across people **who would tell us lies about things that never happened**” [15].

Despite it being a highly flawed investigation, its report did lead the EU to call a special session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) to decide on the need for a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) that would entail an independent investigation into the atrocities committed in Tigray. On December 17, 2021, HRC member countries voted in favour of the establishment of an independent CoI into the crimes committed in Tigray—a development crucial in establishing accountability and justice for victims. However, the Ethiopian government has already rejected an independent investigation and inaccessibility to the region will likely obstruct efforts to conduct the investigation.

For the United States, the shift occurred when the Tigray Defense Forces drew closer to Addis Ababa. Until the intention of the Tigray forces' advance to Addis Ababa were made clear, the U.S. was strong in condemning the atrocities committed in Tigray and was potentially going to determine whether the crisis in Tigray is a genocide. A change in direction and policy with regards to Tigray took place when genocide determination was removed from the Congressional Resolution 445. This change was solidified on December 1, 2021, when U.S. President Joe Biden's administration decided not to follow through on conducting a legal review on whether the crimes committed in Tigray constitute genocide.

"We have decided to refrain at the current moment from making a public determination in order to allow space and time to see if the talks that are currently underway can make any progress" [16]. — Molly Phee, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

The explanation provided for the suspension of the genocide determination process was to leave room open for diplomatic solutions to the conflict, but this statement was made after more than a year of atrocities with no diplomatic solution in sight. The United States did, however, follow through on suspending Ethiopia's membership status in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) as a result of its human rights abuses. The Ethiopia government has heavily opposed this decision and lobbied to have the decision overturned.

Despite the two positive developments, establishment of a Col and Ethiopia's AGOA suspension, the international community has not nearly done enough to prevent further atrocities from being committed against Tigrayans across Ethiopia. Acts of genocide continue. Even though the TDF withdrew from Afar and Amhara regions, a key demand of international actors, the international community has done nothing to ensure the Ethiopian government allows access to Tigray and provides a humanitarian corridor to the over 6 million Tigrayans in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

CALL TO ACTION

Prior to the genocidal war on Tigray, Ethiopia was an example of developmental success and stability for other African countries. It made significant progress towards its sustainable development goals, attracted foreign investment, and was widely regarded as a linchpin for peace and stability in the region.

More than a year into the genocidal war on Tigray, the Abiy administration and its allies have been completely unresponsive to calls for peaceful resolution, as Tigray suffers through a widening humanitarian catastrophe Abiy and his allies' actions have created. The Ethiopian government may be giving an appearance of commitment to de-escalation, however, atrocities against Tigrayans continue. There are growing humanitarian needs, primarily in Tigray but also in other parts of the country, where food insecurity, displacement, and instability are affecting the lives of an increasing number of people across Ethiopia. As has been repeatedly underscored, the multitude of crises in the Ethiopian state can only be resolved through an all-inclusive political dialogue that brings together all stakeholders. This month's Ethiopian government's announcement regarding the proclamation of a National Consultative Commission approved by the House of Peoples' Representatives, which lacks representation from Tigray, must be scrutinized at the onset. This sham process will not include parties that offer a differing vision to that propagated by Abiy Ahmed. For the national dialogue to be successful it must be inclusive of different perspectives that represent the will of Ethiopia's diverse peoples in order to address the root causes to the nations issues. The international community has thus far continued to support Abiy because of its prioritization of the unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. However, instead of utilizing this support to ensure the safety and protection of the Nations and Peoples of Ethiopia, Abiy has exploited the global community's leniency to continue his genocidal campaign.

It is past time for states in the international community to recognize that the Abiy administration is a threat to the peace and stability of Ethiopia and a danger to the broader Horn region as well. The policy of appeasement the international community has pursued thus far has failed and cost thousands of lives and incalculable damage to both people and property in the process.

It is time for the international community to move past expressions of concern and take decisive action to stop this expanding humanitarian catastrophe, mitigate the effects of the genocidal war, and bring perpetrators to justice.

Therefore, we are calling for:

- **Immediate humanitarian access into all of Tigray;**
- **Immediate internationally monitored and verifiable withdrawal of Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces** from Tigray and the restoration of pre-war territorial boundaries;
- **Immediate protection of Tigrayans who are facing ethnic cleansing** in occupied Western Tigray;
- **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 prohibit new investments in either country;
- **Immediate 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 detained on the basis of their identity**, including dissident journalists and the 22,000 Tigrayan ENDF members unlawfully held;
- **Swift funding and implementation of the independent investigation**, which should include investigations of drone supplying actors and linked atrocities;
- **An arms embargo and 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 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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