



MONTREAL INSTITUTE FOR GENOCIDE AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES



To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council (Geneva, Switzerland)

10 June 2021

Joint NGO Call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned human rights non-governmental organizations, strongly urge the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) to adopt a resolution at its upcoming 47th session (HRC47) on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia.

Over the last seven months an overwhelming number of reports have emerged of abuses and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law (IHL/IHRL) during the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. Reports by civil society organizations have detailed widespread massacres, violence against civilians and indiscriminate attacks across Tigray while preliminary analysis by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicates that all warring parties have committed abuses that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. There is now ample evidence<sup>1</sup> that atrocities continue to be committed, notably by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Eritrean Defense Forces, and Amhara regional special police and affiliated Fano militias. These include indiscriminate attacks and direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, widespread and mass extrajudicial executions, rape and other sexual violence, forced displacement, arbitrary detentions, including of displaced persons, widespread destruction and pillage of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, factories and businesses, and the destruction of refugee camps, crops and livestock.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Sexual Violence in Conflict has repeatedly expressed alarm over the widespread and systematic commission of rape and sexual violence in Tigray. On 21 April she stated that women and girls in Tigray are being subjected to sexual violence "with a cruelty that is beyond comprehension," including gang rape by men in uniform, targeted sexual attacks on young girls and pregnant women, and family members forced to witness these horrific abuses. The SRSG also stated that these reports, coupled with assessments by healthcare providers in the region, indicate that sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war.

Thousands of civilians are estimated to have been killed, while the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs believes at least 1.7 million people remain displaced. On top of ethnic targeting and massacres within Tigray, there have been reports of government discrimination, demonization and hate speech directed at Tigrayans in other parts of Ethiopia. A number of UN officials, from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to UNICEF's Executive Director and the UN Special Advisers on the Prevention

<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, Ethiopia: The Massacre in Axum, 26 February 2021; Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021.

[of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect](#), have publicly called for urgent action to end the abuses in Tigray and alleviate the conflict's devastating impact on the region's civilian population.

The UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator has also [warned](#) that famine is imminent in Tigray and that without a drastic upscaling of funding and access, hundreds of thousands of people could starve. Despite this looming risk, humanitarian workers have also been targeted throughout the conflict, with nine aid workers killed since November, the most recent on 29 May.

On 25 March, OHCHR and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission announced the launch of a joint investigation into the ongoing reports of atrocity crimes in Tigray. On 12 May, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) adopted an important [resolution](#) establishing a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to investigate violations of IHL and IHRL and identify perpetrators. Unfortunately, the HRC has so far remained largely silent on Tigray, aside from a welcome [joint statement](#) delivered by Germany on behalf of 42 states on 26 February 2021.

A robust, dedicated and coordinated approach to this human rights crisis by the international community is both critical and urgent, given the gravity of ongoing crimes, the complex nature of the situation, and the involvement of various parties. After seven months of serious violations and abuses, the HRC can no longer stay silent. It should take urgent action to address the crisis and fulfil its mandate to address and prevent violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations and abuses, and to respond promptly to emergencies. We therefore respectfully urge your Mission to work towards the adoption of a resolution at HRC47 that:

- Recognizes the serious concerns expressed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect, and other senior UN officials regarding possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Tigray;
- Requests the High Commissioner to report on her investigations, findings and recommendations to date regarding the human rights situation in Tigray, Ethiopia, and possible violations of IHL and IHRL at the HRC's 48<sup>th</sup> session in the context of an enhanced interactive dialogue;
- Also invites the ACHPR's CoI to brief the HRC on its investigation at the enhanced interactive dialogue at the 48<sup>th</sup> session;
- Emphasizes the important role of the HRC's prevention mandate, as outlined in Resolution 45/31, and requests the High Commissioner to brief UN member states intersessionally and on an ad-hoc basis to update the HRC on the situation in Tigray.

The adoption of such a resolution would provide a concrete foundation for the HRC to decide on the action needed to prevent further human rights violations and abuses in Tigray and ensure accountability.

Excellencies, please accept the assurances of our highest consideration,

1. AfricanDefenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network)
2. Amnesty International
3. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
4. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
5. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
6. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
7. Global Justice Center
8. Human Rights Watch
9. International Service for Human Rights
10. Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies
11. Unitarian Universalist Association Office at the United Nations
12. World Federalist Movement/Institute for Global Policy