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Ethiopia: Fears of fresh atrocities loom in Tigray as conflict intensifies

Parties to the ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia must protect civilians amid intensifying hostilities in the Tigray region, warned Amnesty International today.

Tigrayan civilians are afraid that the widespread abuses, such as killings and sexual violence, might happen again

Muleya Mwananyanda, Amnesty International's Director for East and Southern Africa

The Ethiopian government said on Tuesday its army had captured the major town of Shire in north-western Tigray, which hosts thousands of forcibly displaced Tigrayans, as well as Alamata and Korem in the south of the region. The government said that it is trying to minimize civilian casualties by avoiding urban fighting and instructing their forces to follow strict rules of engagement. Reports received by Amnesty International however belie this claim.

"Tigrayan civilians are afraid that the widespread abuses, such as unlawful killings, sexual violence and systematic attacks, that were rampant when the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and its allied forces were in control of these areas from November 2020 to June 2021, might happen again," said Muleya Mwananyanda Amnesty International's Director for East and Southern Africa.

In August and September, multiple air strikes in Mekelle and Adi Daero, killed hundreds of civilians including children. Between 6-12 September 2022, the Eritrean army, which is allied with the ENDF, extrajudicially executed at least 40 people, including Eritrean refugees, in Sheraro town.

"Military and civilian officials must recognize their duty to prevent and prosecute war crimes committed by their forces. Failure to do so implicates them in these crimes. We have already seen in this conflict that impunity for previous atrocities will only embolden security forces to commit more heinous crimes, the war crimes and crimes against humanity Amnesty International has documented should never be allowed to happen again," said Muleya Mwananyanda.

Ethiopian authorities must suspend and remove from active duty all those, including in the Eritrean army and Amhara militia, implicated in human rights violations and war crimes and ensure that they are immediately investigated. Anyone against whom there is sufficient admissible evidence of responsibility for crimes should be prosecuted in fair trials.

"Promises, short of concrete actions, will not protect civilians. We've already seen in this conflict that impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity and ethnic divisions fuel mass atrocities," said Muleya Mwananyanda.

Military and civilian officials must prevent and prosecute war crimes committed by their forces

Muleya Mwananyanda

Amnesty International is also calling on Ethiopian authorities to allow unhindered access to Tigray, so that impartial and effective humanitarian relief can be delivered. Ethiopian authorities should also allow international, regional and other human rights mechanisms to conduct independent and credible investigations on past and present atrocities in the northern Ethiopian conflict.

Background

Since 2020, Amnesty International has [documented](#) grave human rights violations by all parties of the conflict in the Tigray region, which may amount to war crimes and crimes under international law.

Most recently, on 18 October 2022, the Ethiopian army recaptured three towns from Tigrayan forces. One of these towns is Shire, home to large numbers of internally displaced people.

Due to the ongoing conflict, the region has been largely cut off from the outside world. Humanitarian workers told Amnesty International of credible allegations of numerous civilian casualties due to direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks on infrastructure since the latest round of fighting broke out between the federal army and Tigrayan forces in August.

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ecoi.net summary:



Tigray region: Risk of further civilian casualties as fighting continues and several towns are taken by government forces

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