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World Report 2023



Ethiopia

Events of 2022

A compound of abandoned buildings sheltering internally displaced people near the town of Dubti, in Ethiopia's northern Afar region, June 7, 2022.

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The two-year armed conflict in northern Ethiopia, which began in November 2020, continued to inflict a terrible toll on civilians. A truce was reached by the main warring parties in November. State security forces and armed groups committed serious abuses, in other regions, notably Oromia. Authorities sporadically cut internet and telecommunication services in conflict-affected areas, with [internet and other forms of communications cut in Tigray](#) since June 2021.

Conflict and unrest in several regions, followed by drought also exacerbated one of the world's largest humanitarian catastrophes. [Over 20 million people required humanitarian assistance](#) in 2022.

In western Oromia, fighting between government forces and armed groups [resulted in serious abuses committed by all sides](#).

Journalists, civil society organizations, and outspoken public figures in the country faced an increasingly hostile and restrictive reporting environment.

Consensual same-sex relationships are outlawed and carry a penalty of up to 15 years in prison.

Despite mounting evidence of international law violations by warring parties in northern Ethiopia, as well as in Oromia, government efforts toward accountability for past and present abuses have

been [inadequate, lacked transparency, and independent oversight](#).

Conflict in Northern Ethiopia

The conflict in northern Ethiopia persisted for the second year amid limited global pressure.

In Western Tigray Zone, an [ethnic cleansing campaign, amounting to crimes against humanity](#), against the Tigrayan population by newly appointed officials and Amhara regional security forces and militias, continued.

On January 7, a government [drone strike hit a school compound in Dedebit](#) hosting thousands of Tigrayans displaced from Western Tigray, killing at least 57 civilians and wounding more than 42.

Ethiopian authorities maintained an effective siege on Tigray throughout the year that violated international humanitarian law. From mid-December 2021 to April 1, 2022, and also from [late August to November 16, no humanitarian convoys entered the region](#). On March 24, [the federal government declared](#) an “indefinite humanitarian truce” and finally let aid reach Tigray as it was obligated to do, but the [response did not match the scale of needs](#).

Basic services, key to people’s basic survival, notably banking, electricity, and communications remained shut off. An [August report by the United Nations highlighted dire food crisis in Tigray](#), finding food insecurity in 89 percent of areas surveyed and [one out of three children under the age of five acutely malnourished](#).

In Afar, clashes along the border with Tigray, between Tigrayan forces and Afar forces, starting in late December 2021, intensified in early 2022, with reports of killings, [shelling](#), and [looting by Tigrayan forces](#).

Afar forces also [rounded up around 9,000 Tigrayans in detention sites in Afar’s regional capital, Semera](#), in late December 2021 and held them for months. Detainees received limited assistance with reports that [several dozen died as a result of conditions there](#).

Fighting between Ethiopian forces and its allies against Tigrayan forces resumed on August 24. Aid into Tigray by road and air was suspended. Tigrayan forces [seized fuel stored at a UN warehouse in Tigray’s capital, Mekelle](#). Fighting also intensified with [reports of Eritrean armed forces taking part in offensives](#) and increased airstrikes in the Tigray region.

A September 27 airstrike on a residential area in Adi Daero town killed eight people and injured 13. Attacks continued near Adi Daero with an [airstrike on October 4 killing over 50 displaced people](#). [Intensifying Ethiopian and Eritrean operations around Shire town](#) led to killings, property destruction, and further displacement. On October 14, an airstrike on Shire town [killed two civilians and an International Rescue Committee aid worker delivering life-saving assistance](#).

Fighting in the Amhara and Afar regions in September resulted in further displacement, humanitarian access constraints, as well as reports of [extrajudicial killing of Amhara residents](#) by Tigrayan fighters, [looting, and property destruction in Kobo town during their control](#).

On November 2, the Ethiopian federal government and Tigrayan authorities [reached a cessation of hostilities agreement](#) in South Africa following 10-days of African-Union led negotiations.

Security Force Abuses, Attacks by Armed Groups

Extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, arbitrary detentions, and violence against civilians occurred in other regions facing unrest, insecurity, and conflict.

On June 14, government forces clashed with Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and Gambella Liberation Front armed groups in the Gambella regional capital. After controlling the town, government forces conducted [house-to-house searches](#) and [summarily executed residents suspected of collaborating with the armed groups](#).

Parts of Oromia experienced protracted fighting due to government operations against the OLA. On June 18, heavily armed gunmen [killed about 400 Amhara civilians](#), many women and children and destroyed homes and businesses in villages in West Wellega Zone, in Oromia, and in neighboring Benishangul-Gumuz region. Two weeks later, on July 4, assailants [attacked Amhara civilians in Kellem Wellega Zone](#) in Oromia, killing scores.

Fighting intensified between Ethiopian government forces and the OLA in early November, with civilian casualties reported due to [fighting](#) and [airstrikes](#). In western Oromia there were [reports](#) of fighters from the Amhara region operating in Zone. The UN [reported](#) that the violence in the area led to a drastic increase in internal displacement and the destruction of infrastructure.

In [late July](#), the armed group Al-Shabab carried out incursions on [three towns hosting regional special forces in Ethiopia's Somali region](#), the first such attack on Ethiopian territory in over a decade.

Freedom of Expression, Media, and Association

Authorities arrested several journalists, holding them without charge for several weeks despite court orders for their release. In November 2021, authorities [arrested](#) Oromia News Network journalists Dessu Dulla and Bikila Amenu, who covered the conflicts in Tigray and Oromia. Dessu and Bikilia were held without formal charges until April, when prosecutors [charged them with offenses](#) against the constitution and sought the death penalty. Authorities [released](#) both Dessu and Bikila in mid-November.

Journalists and individuals offering a critical or different narrative to that of the federal government faced threats, arrests, and expulsion. In May, security forces [arrested Solomon Shumye](#), an Addis Ababa-based talk show host who has been critical of the government and the war in northern Ethiopia. Solomon was among [19 journalists](#), including Gobeze Sisay and Meaza Mohammed, detained between May 19 and early July as part of broader government crackdown in which [over 4,500 people were arrested in the Amhara region alone](#). Gobeze and Meaza were both subsequently released, and then rearrested by authorities in September.

In May, federal authorities withdrew the accreditation of Tom Gardner, *The Economist's* Addis Ababa correspondent, and expelled him from the country.

On September 6, security forces [broke up a peace conference](#) organized by a group of 35 local civil society organizations in Addis Ababa. The event was later held online, and the group subsequently issued a joint statement calling for peace. Two days later, [a federal official intimidated the group to get them to retract their statement](#).

Federal authorities maintained their internet and telecommunications shutdown in Tigray since June 2021, and sporadically cut services in parts of Oromia facing insecurity, hampering real-time [reporting](#).

Due Process and Fair Trial Rights

In January, the government [dropped charges](#) against several high-profile political opposition figures, including Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and Eskinder Nega, whom [authorities detained in June 2020 after the assassination of Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa](#).

On February 15, [Ethiopian lawmakers ended a sweeping nationwide state of emergency](#) declared in November 2021 that led to mass arrests of ordinary Tigrayans. Tigrayans [remained detained for several months](#) without charge and were subject to ill-treatment after the lifting of the emergency declaration, including [Tigrayans deported from Saudi Arabia](#).

Federal security forces also [rearrested Kibrom Berhe in July](#), and Hailu Kebede in August, Tigrayan opposition figures and vocal critics of the conflict in Tigray. By October, authorities released Kibrom and Hailu.

Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees

Ethiopia continued to face large-scale internal displacement due in large part to armed conflict, followed by [drought and other natural hazards](#). Figures shifted throughout the year, with [5.6 million internally displaced persons \(IDPs\) nationally as of March 2022, in addition to 2.8 million returnees \(former IDPs\)](#).

Refugees were also impacted by conflict and unrest in the country. On January 18, a camp hosting more than [10,000 refugees from Sudan and South Sudan in the Benishangul Gumuz region](#) was [looted and burned](#) after fighting broke out between unidentified groups and federal forces.

A January 5 airstrike on Mai Aini refugee camp in Tigray killed three Eritrean refugees, including two children. On February 3, [armed men entered the Berahle refugee camp hosting Eritrean refugees](#) in Afar, looted belongings, killed five refugees, and kidnapped several women. The attack caused thousands of refugees to flee. At various points in September, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [lost access](#) to several refugee camps and IDP sites in northern Ethiopia due to renewed fighting. In October, [UN human rights experts](#) cited reports of abductions of refugees and internally displaced women and girls fleeing conflict in northern Ethiopia.

Key International Actors

International efforts to support a cessation of hostilities and commence formal talks, between the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan authorities, [yielded little results for most of 2022](#). Directly involved were special envoys on the Horn, including the African Union (AU), United States, European Union, and United Nations. The cessation of hostilities agreement reached by the two main warring parties on November 2 did not immediately lead to a resumption of humanitarian assistance and basic services to Tigray, and [lacked formal details on accountability](#), highlighting the [need for robust rights monitoring by key international backers of the truce](#).

The [UN Security Council remained largely paralyzed on Ethiopia](#) with Gabon, Ghana, and Kenya (the three elected members representing the AU on the Security Council until the end of 2022) repeatedly blocking any public discussion of Ethiopia at the council, though they were open to closed-door discussions of the conflict. On October 21, the African members on the council called a closed-door Security Council meeting on Ethiopia given the deteriorating situation and attempted to release a statement that was [blocked by Russia and China](#).

In January 2022, the US [suspended](#) Ethiopia's trade privileges under the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) due to concerns about human rights abuses by the Ethiopian government and warring parties in the conflict in northern Ethiopia. In September, US President Joe Biden [renewed](#) a 2021 executive order that established a sanctions regime on individuals and entities responsible for human rights abuses in northern Ethiopia, but it has [only sanctioned Eritrean entities and individuals](#).

In December 2021, the [UN Human Rights Council established](#) an independent international commission to investigate allegations of international law violations by all parties since November 2020. Ethiopian [authorities rejected the commission's mandate](#), and in March introduced a

resolution at the UN General Assembly's budget committee to [cut its funding](#). The budget committee rejected the resolution.

The [commission published its first report](#) in September, finding that all parties to the conflict had carried out war crimes, and that Ethiopian federal forces and allied forces committed crimes against humanity against the Tigrayan population. [Ethiopia rejected the findings](#) and opposed the renewal of the commission's mandate. On October 7, [council members voted](#) to renew the commission's mandate for one year.

The EU remained a [vocal critic of the abuses committed by warring parties in northern Ethiopia](#) and repeatedly called for lifting the effective siege on humanitarian access. On October 6, the European Parliament [adopted a resolution](#) on the rights situation in Tigray, finding the use of starvation as a weapon of war. The European Union also played a leading role on Ethiopia at the Human Rights Council, though divisions among EU member states prevented the adoption of other measures, such as an arms embargo.

Though several of Ethiopia's international partners suspended non-humanitarian assistance to the country since the outbreak of conflict, in April the [World Bank approved a US\\$300 million grant](#) to support the response and recovery efforts in conflict-affected areas, including in Tigray, despite [concerns surrounding the project's implementation](#).