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Ethiopia: Atrocities Mar Ceasefire Anniversary

Abuses, Impunity Amid Waning International Attention

(Nairobi) – Fighting and serious rights abuses persist in northern [Ethiopia](#) a year after the signing of [the cessation of hostilities agreement](#), Human Rights Watch said today. The two main warring parties, the Ethiopian federal government and Tigrayan authorities, signed an African Union-led agreement in Pretoria, South Africa on November 2, 2022, ending active hostilities in the Tigray region.

“While the [Ethiopian government](#) and its [international partners](#) tout the tremendous progress made in the past year, civilians in conflict areas are still bearing the brunt of atrocities,” said [Laetitia Bader](#), deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Fighting has intensified in other regions of the country, as past violators repeat patterns of abuses without consequences.”

The November 2022 [agreement](#) outlines key measures to protect civilians, resume basic services, provide for unhindered humanitarian assistance, enable internally displaced people to return to their original areas, and to carry out the Ethiopian government’s commitment to create a transitional

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Human rights abuses continue one year after signing of agreement to end conflict; agreement lacks details on accountability

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justice policy aimed at “accountability, truth, redress, reconciliation, and healing.” It lacks details on criminal accountability for crimes committed, notably on the types of mechanisms that could investigate alleged crimes for future prosecution.

The parties also agreed to establish an African Union monitoring mechanism to oversee the agreement. But the African Union’s effort has focused mainly on [disarmament of Tigrayan fighters’ heavy and medium weapons](#) and does not [include rights and gender monitors](#) or public reporting on violations of the agreement.

During the past year, the warring parties have continued to commit human rights abuses in Tigray in violation of the November agreement’s pledge to protect civilians, Human Rights Watch said. Eritrean forces have carried out killings, [sexual violence](#), [abductions](#), and [pillage](#), and [obstructed humanitarian assistance](#), and impeded the work of AU monitors in areas under their control. In the Western Tigray Zone, [which remains largely inaccessible to humanitarian agencies](#), the authorities and Amhara regional forces and militias known as Fano have [continued an ethnic cleansing campaign and forcibly expelled Tigrayans](#).

The armed conflict that began in northern Ethiopia in November 2020 displaced millions of people and left them in need of humanitarian assistance, partly the result of a nearly two-year [effective siege](#) on the Tigray region. Though basic services began to be restored in Tigray and humanitarian assistance trickled into the region in the months following the cessation of hostilities agreement, [banking and other services remained cut off in parts of Tigray](#) as of October 2023.

The decision by the UN World Food Programme and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to [suspend food support to Tigray](#) in March, which was [later extended](#) to the entire country in May following reports of high-level and widespread food diversion, had a [devastating impact](#) on an already suffering population.

An aid worker in Tigray told Human Rights Watch in October: “Humanitarian partners are demoralized; they don’t have enough resources. Food remains a critical issue. The displaced are in a dire situation, people are dying. They don’t know what will come next.”

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Fighting between the Ethiopian military and Fano militias also [intensified in August in the Amhara region](#), accompanied by [reports](#) of hundreds of civilian casualties, [mass arrests of Amharas](#), and damage to civilian infrastructure. The authorities have resorted to past repressive tactics to limit access to real-time information and independent scrutiny, [including blocking access to internet services in the region in August](#). Phone connectivity remains intermittent in areas experiencing heavy fighting.

On August 4, the Ethiopian government declared a sweeping six-month state of emergency in Amhara and placed the region under a military command post. The emergency declaration grants the government far-reaching authority to arrest suspects without a court order, impose curfews, ban public gatherings, and carry out searches without a warrant.

A 24-year-old woman in the North Gondar Zone in the Amhara region said: “People are getting killed and arrested. Things are much worse. I don’t feel safe right now. No one is feeling safe.”

The latest [reports](#) by the UN-mandated inquiry, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), highlighted the staggering scale of abuses during the two-year conflict. The expert commission warned of the [high risk of further atrocity crimes](#) given that since the cessation of hostilities agreement, violence and abuses were taking place throughout the country. Despite the clear need for continued independent investigations and international scrutiny, Human Rights Council [member states took no action](#) to renew the expert commission’s mandate in September. The decision followed the Ethiopian government’s heavy lobbying against the expert commission, including its threats in March to introduce a resolution at the council to [prematurely terminate its mandate](#).

Ethiopian authorities have pointed to a series of public transitional justice consultations it held [since March](#) to demonstrate their commitment to accountability and to carry out the agreement. The consultations, however, have yet to lead to a formal transitional justice process for the country. Few people have been [held accountable](#) for their actions in the conflict.

With victims of human rights violations expressing a lack of trust in domestic institutions, and as violence continues in the country, the UN and concerned governments should maintain pressure on

the Ethiopian government to deliver on its commitments to ensure that civilians are protected and to set clear benchmarks for ensuring victims' access to justice, Human Rights Watch said.

"Governments supporting Ethiopia's fragile truce cannot afford to look away as crises in Ethiopia mount," Bader said. "Ethiopia's many victims deserve a future that is not marred by recurring abuses and impunity."

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