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Ethiopia: The Situation in Tigray

November 2021 (COI included from 1st September 2020 – 29th September 2021)

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Explanatory Note

Country of Origin Information (COI)

This report presents Country of Origin Information (COI) on Ethiopia focusing on the current situation in Tigray on issues identified to be of relevance in refugee status determination for individuals from this region. Research concentrated on events that took place between 1st September 2020 and 29th September 2021.

The COI presented in this report is illustrative but not exhaustive of the information available in the public domain, nor is it determinative of any individual human rights or asylum claim. All sources are publicly available and a direct hyperlink has been provided.

A list of sources and databases consulted is also provided in this report, to enable users to conduct further research and source assessments. All sources included in this report were accessed in September and October 2021.

The following reports, which post-date the cut-off point have been included given that they address issues of relevance for this report:

- Reuters, *Ethiopians in three regions vote in delayed election*, 30 September 2021
- UN News Centre, *Tigray: Food aid reaches Afar and Amhara, but situation still 'dire'*, 5 October 2021
- Bloomberg, *Abiy Taps Ethiopia Opposition, Keeps Finance Head in Cabinet*, 6 October 2021
- UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *Ethiopia response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis Situation Report, 1 to 15 September 2021*, 6 October 2021
- European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021
- Reuters, *Ethiopian attack in two northern regions intensifies, Tigrayan forces say*, 13 October 2021
- ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) Monthly: September 2021*, 13 October 2021
- ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 2-8 October 2021*, 13 October 2021
- International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest September 2021: Ethiopia*, 14 October 2021
- International Medical Corps, *Ethiopia–Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report #20*, 20 October 2021
- ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 9-15 October 2021*, 20 October 2021
- UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 22 October 2021
- UN News Centre, *Ethiopia: UN forced to abort humanitarian aid flight into Tigray*, 23 October 2021
- ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 16-22 October 2021*, 27 October 2021
- UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *UNFPA Ethiopia response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis, Situation Report 16 to 30 September 2021*, 22 October 2021
- UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
- Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021

It should be noted that the following sources have highlighted the ongoing constraints and limited access to Tigray, as well as the limited access to information, resulting in a lack of reporting:

The U.S. Department of State noted in its annual human rights report covering 2020 that "As of the end of the year, there was very limited access to the majority of Tigray, except for the capital Mekele, resulting in a lack of reporting and making it difficult to ascertain the extent of human rights abuses and violations".[1]

Following the recapture of Mekelle by the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF), the armed forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Amnesty International noted in July 2021 that "Access to information is currently hindered by a communication blackout, with no internet service, newspapers, radio or television broadcasts in the region".[2]

Amnesty International, in its oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13 September 2021 re-iterated the "limited access for human rights organizations to the affected regions [of Tigray] and severe communications restrictions".[3]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) provided the following background summary in September 2021 as to the communications blackouts and media access:

> Communications cuts, access restrictions, propaganda, and disinformation have made it difficult to confirm information on developments in Tigray. Phone and internet connections were cut when the conflict began, and the parties trade blame for the outages. Communications were later restored in some areas. Groups that monitor internet freedom attribute the shutdown to the federal government—there have been at least 13 internet shutdowns in Ethiopia under the Abiy administration. All communications were cut again in late June [2021], and the military dismantled U.N. satellite communications equipment in Mekele. Federal authorities did not grant journalists access to Tigray during the first four months of the conflict, and access since has been subject to authorization.[4]

In its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the month of September 2021, ACLED highlighted:

> Ethiopia is at a crossroads and has been since current Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was appointed in April 2018. Along with a dizzying number of changes to Ethiopia's governing structure and personnel, the federal government's attitude toward journalists and reporting has changed significantly since Abiy took power. When Abiy was elected, he promised that he would open up the space for mass media (broadcasting, publishing, and the internet) — and he did for a time. As violence has spread throughout the country and reached catastrophic levels in the north, Ethiopia's media space has become more restricted, with journalists facing threats from rebel groups and government forces alike. […]
> EPO research indicates that Ethiopia's media environment has changed significantly over the past year, in what appears to be a reaction to a heavily polarized society and increasing pressure from

[1] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Executive Summary*
[2] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: As Mekelle changes hands, civilians remain in urgent need of protection*, 29 June 2021
[3] Amnesty International, *Oral Statement, Item 2: Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, UN Human Rights Council Forty-eighth regular session 13 September – 8 October 2021*, 13 September 2021
[4] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 14*

> the government. Increasingly, reports provide one-sided accounts of conflict and omit relevant factors that could legitimize the "other side."
>
> Many outlets and journalists work to overcome these challenges and produce objective reporting, despite the risks. Yet, the risks to the media continue to intensify, and independent reporting is coming under greater threat. Conflict environments are already 'low-information' spaces, as the identity of perpetrators, victims, the intensity of violence, and its outcomes are difficult to accurately ascertain in real-time. In Ethiopia, these difficulties are compounded in a highly polarized environment where ethnic identities can place even non-combatants on one side of a conflict.
>
> Ethiopia's infrastructure also poses a challenge to journalists. Journalists struggle to reach far-flung areas where militant groups operate, resulting in information gaps and "hidden conflicts," such as those in Benshangul/Gumuz region. […]
>
> In the absence of objective, reliable reporting on the conflict, both parties are mobilizing supporters using different narratives. TPLF leaders are using accounts of atrocities to mobilize support, with Amhara elites making similar allegations, in turn, to mobilize civilians to fight TPLF forces, creating a cycle of accusations and incitement. The Amhara regional government is encouraging locals to fight TPLF forces and, in some cases, allowing individuals to keep whatever weapons they capture from the TPLF (Amhara Media Corporation, 16 August 2021; Addis Standard, 18 August 2021). The Amhara regional government and elites have called for a "public wave" to defend the region against TPLF forces (Amhara Media Corporation, 16 August 2021). This call was reportedly made in response to TPLF mobilizing and drafting civilian Tigrayans (Tegarus) into the war. Thus, individuals who are outside the command of formal security institutions, who are not trained, are clashing with TPLF forces in different areas of the Amhara region.
>
> The lack of information, biased reporting, and restrictions on reporting create an environment where policy decisions are made with incomplete information.[5]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas journalists have been attacked and several media outlets' licences have been suspended, which hampers the ability to monitor the situation on the ground".[6]

Disclaimer

This document is intended to be used as a tool to help to identify relevant COI and the COI referred to in this report can be considered by decision makers in assessing asylum applications and appeals. **This report is not a substitute for individualised case-specific research and therefore this document should not be submitted in isolation as evidence to refugee decision-making authorities**. Whilst every attempt has been made to ensure accuracy, the authors accept no responsibility for any errors included in this report.

[5] ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) Monthly: September 2021*, 13 October 2021

[6] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *Q*

Sources and databases consulted

Not all of the sources listed here have been consulted for each issue addressed in the report. Additional sources to those individually listed were consulted via database searches. This non-exhaustive list is intended to assist in further case-specific research. To find out more about an organisation, view the 'About us' tab of a source's website.

Databases
Asylos's Research Notes
EASO COI Portal
European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI)
Relief Web (Ethiopia)
UNHCR Refworld

Media
Addis Standard
African Arguments (Ethiopia)
Africanews
The Africa Report (Ethiopia)
All Africa
Al Jazeera
EthioMedia.com
Ethiopia Insight
Ethiopia Observer
Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT)
Inter Press Service
New Business Ethiopia
The New Humanitarian (Ethiopia)
The Reporter Ethiopia

Sources
Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) (Ethiopia)
Africa Center for Strategic Studies
African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)
African Studies Centre Leiden
Amnesty International (Ethiopia)
Armed Conflict Location & Event Date Project (ACLED) (Ethiopia)
Article 19
Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) (Ethiopia)
Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE)
Association for the Prevention of Torture
Atlantic Council
Atlas of Torture
Brookings Institution
Care International (Ethiopia)
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Centre for Security Governance

Centre for Strategic and International Studies
Combating Terrorism Center
Committee to Protect Journalists (Ethiopia)
Conciliation Resources
Council on Foreign Relations
Dallaire Institute [> Child Soldiers World Index]
Eldis
Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
Ethiopian Human Rights Council
Foreign Affairs (published by Council on Foreign Relations) (Ethiopia)
Freedom House (Ethiopia)
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) (Ethiopia)
Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
Hands off Cain
Humanitarian Response (Ethiopia)
Human Rights Watch
Insecurity Insight (Ethiopia)
Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Ethiopia)
International Crisis Group (Ethiopia)
International Federation for Human Rights [Africa pages]
International Federation of Journalists
International Freedom of Expression Exchange (Ethiopia)
International Institute for Strategic Studies
International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM DTM) (Ethiopia)
International Rescue Committee (Ethiopia)
IPC Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IPI Global Observatory
Jamestown Foundation
Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor
Minority Rights Group International
Oakland Institute
OECD's Social Institutions & Gender Index (Ethiopia)
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
Oxfam (Ethiopia)
Peace Women
Reporters Without Borders (Ethiopia)
Right to Education
Save the Children (Ethiopia)
Security Council Report (Ethiopia)
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations Committee Against Torture
United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances
United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Ethiopia)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
United Nations Human Rights Council
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UNHABITAT)
United Nations News Centre
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) (Northern Ethiopia)
United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (Ethiopia)
United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
United Nations Population Fund (UNPFPA)
United Nations Security Council
United Nations Women
United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context
United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders
United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children
United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences
United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) [Publications]
United States Institute of Peace
United States Congressional Research Service
United States Department of State [Annual human rights report; annual terrorism report; trafficking report]
War Child
Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict
Women News Network (WNN)
Women's Refugee Commission
World Bank
World Health Organisation (WHO)
World Organisation Against Torture (Ethiopia)

List of acronyms

AHRE	Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia
ARF	Amhara Regional Forces
ASF	Amhara Regional Police Special Force
EDF	Eritrean Defence Forces
EHRC	Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
ENDF	Ethiopian National Defence Force
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPO	Ethiopia Peace Observatory
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
HoF	House of Federation
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IHRL	International Human Rights Law
NEBE	National Electoral Board of Ethiopia
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OMN	Oromia Media Network
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region
TDF	Tigray Defense Forces
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TSF	Tigray Special Forces

I. Background to the conflict

A useful map of Tigray can be found in Appendix A of the International Crisis Group's report *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021.

For a more detailed analysis on the "Roots of Tension and Routes to War" see International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021, section III.

a. September 2020 Election

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) provided the following background summary as to the lead-up to the September 2020 election:

> Repression and abuses of power under the EPRDF [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front], which some Ethiopians attribute specifically to the TPLF, fueled grievances and spurred a mass protest movement that brought Prime Minister Abiy to power. Abiy, a member of the EPRDF, pledged to open the country politically and economically, and commenced reforms. His efforts to mend ties with neighboring Eritrea, long strained by a border conflict and an antagonistic relationship between the TPLF and the Eritrean regime, won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. Later that year, Abiy merged the EPRDF coalition into a new Prosperity Party. The TPLF opposed the party's creation, viewing it as part of an agenda to shift Ethiopia from a federal to a unitary state. Tensions between the TPLF and Abiy's government rose, and an election dispute in 2020 led federal and Tigray regional authorities to challenge each other's legitimacy […]
>
> In early 2020, citing COVID-19 concerns, Abiy's government postponed the general elections that were scheduled for August 2020 and extended its term—an act that the TPLF dismissed as unconstitutional. The TPLF-led regional government proceeded with Tigray's state council elections in September, despite federal objections and warnings from Abiy and parliament. The election disputes led federal and regional authorities to challenge each other's legitimacy, with the federal government reducing federal budget support to the region and the Tigray regional government declaring that federal authorities lacked legal authority. A subsequent federally ordered change of command for military forces stationed in Tigray became a flashpoint.[7]

The International Crisis Group summarised the lead up to the election and the aftermath as follows:

> Addis Ababa and Mekelle have been locked in a power struggle since 2018, when Tigray's leaders began losing most of the federal influence they had long held. After taking office in April of that year, Abiy consolidated his power by fusing Ethiopia's regional ruling parties into a new Prosperity Party in late 2019 while accelerating efforts to open up the country's economy and political space. But the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Tigray's ruling party which had been a dominant force in Ethiopian politics for decades, refused to join in Abiy's merger, arguing that the new structure undermined the regional autonomy that the 1995 constitution guarantees. In June 2020, federal authorities delayed national elections because of the COVID-19 pandemic, extending all governments' terms until the vote could be held. Defying Addis Ababa's decision, Tigray declared the extension unconstitutional and ran its own regional vote that September. Abiy's government subsequently declared the newly elected TPLF leadership illegitimate, paving the way for military intervention.[8]

Al Jazeera reported on 9th September 2020 that:

[7] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2* and *9*
[8] International Crisis Group, *As Ethiopian Troops Exit Tigray, Time to Focus on Relief*, 9 July 2021

> Ethiopia's northern Tigray region held regional elections on Wednesday [September 2020], defying the federal government and increasing political tensions in Africa's second-most populous country.
> Tigray officials, holding polls for the 190-seat regional parliament, warned that any intervention by the federal government would amount to a "declaration of war" […]
> They objected to the postponement of the national and regional elections, originally scheduled for August [2020], because of the coronavirus pandemic and the extension of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's time in office.[9]

The same source further noted that "On Saturday [September 2020], Ethiopia's upper house of parliament, which mediates constitutional disputes, ruled that the polls for regional parliaments and other positions were unconstitutional".[10]

According to ACCORD, "When the regional election was ultimately held on 9 September 2020, the TPLF received 98.2% of the vote and exited with 152 of the 190 seats in the regional parliament. The remaining 38 seats will be distributed among the four parties that participated in the election".[11]

An article published by the Atlantic Council in November 2020 noted that:

> In its impatience, the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] defied government orders and called Tigrayans to the polls. The lack of observers and the nature of the announced results—which showed the TPLF winning 98 percent of the popular vote—prevent this exercise from being described as an election.[12]

b. Response from the Federal Government (October/November 2020)

For more information on the Federal Government see section II., *c. Federal Government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed*.

An article by African Arguments published in October 2020 described Tigray's elections, noting that:

> On 5 September, the HoF [House of Federation] in its closed emergency meeting ruled the planned elections of Tigrai to be "unconstitutional" and therefore "null and void".[10] On 8 September, the eve of polling day, the PM appeared on television and declared that his government is not bothered by the election as it considers it as a "village gathering and conference", and ruled out any military intervention. However, his government instructed all national media outlets not to report the "unconstitutional election" of the Tigrai region and barred international journalists from flying to the region to report on it.[11]

Freedom House observed in its 2020 annual report on freedoms in Ethiopia, published in March 2021, that:

> The Tigrayan Regional Council held regional elections in September 2020, defying the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia's decision to postpone all elections due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several parties participated and the results showed a landslide victory for the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front], though the Prosperity Party and the Tigray Democratic Party boycotted the poll. Following the election,

[9] Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia's Tigray region holds vote, defying Abiy's federal gov't*, 9 September 2020
[10] Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia's Tigray region holds vote, defying Abiy's federal gov't*, 9 September 2020
[11] ACCORD, *Threats to Ethiopia's Fragile Democratic Transition*, 9 November 2020
[12] Atlantic Council, *Calls for negotiation are driving Ethiopia deeper into war*, 13 November 2020

> the federal government deemed the regional Tigray government unlawful, and withdrew budget subsidies from the Tigray Regional Council. TPLF parliamentarians were recalled to the regional capital, and the Tigrayan Regional Council said it no longer recognized the executive and legislative branches of the federal government.
> In December, the NEBE [National Electoral Board of Ethiopia] set the next parliamentary elections for June 2021, but its schedule did not include polls in Tigray Region.[13]

In August 2021, the Brookings Institute reported that: "In October [2020], fearing the federal government's response as well as escalating tensions with the Amhara and Oromo, the Tigrayan leaders started seizing military depots in the Tigray region".[14]

As described by an Atlantic Council Center expert, Gabriel Negatu, in November 2020:

> The newly-installed regional legislators in Tigray immediately declared that the federal government lacked legitimacy to govern the country and refused to recognize it.
> The national assembly then countered by annulling Tigray's election results and refusing to acknowledge the newly-elected leadership. Federal funding to the region was also slashed significantly, limiting the flow of resources only to local governments to protect basic services, and bypassing the TPLF. The leadership in Mekele, the capital of Tigray, called the cessation of their funding a declaration of war. Days before the assault by federal forces, the region's president, Debretsion G. Michael, warned the public that the Prime Minister was planning an attack to punish Tigray for its defiance.[15]

In December 2020, a piece published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies on the battle of Mekelle reported that:

> The election was a turning point. In response, the federal government declared the TPLF's [Tigray People's Liberation Front] rule unlawful and the Tigray government indicated it would no longer recognize Abiy's leadership. The TPLF claimed that federal troops had started to mass on Tigray's southern flanks, presumably precipitating the raid on a federal military base. Abiy in turn accused the TPLF of "crossing a red line" on November 4, deploying his military to capture the region's major towns and infrastructure and arrest the TPLF. The ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] subsequently swept through Tigray, conducting air strikes and warning civilians there would be "no mercy" during the final assault on Mekelle. The TPLF, meanwhile, fired rockets at least three times into Eritrea to internationalize the conflict.[16]

The International Crisis Group summarised the aftermath of the election leading to the internal armed conflict in November 2020 as follows:

> In June 2020, federal authorities delayed national elections because of the COVID-19 pandemic, extending all governments' terms until the vote could be held. Defying Addis Ababa's decision, Tigray declared the extension unconstitutional and ran its own regional vote that September. Abiy's government subsequently declared the newly elected TPLF leadership illegitimate, paving the way for military intervention.
> Tigray's government, claiming that troop movements indicated a federal incursion was imminent, struck first on 3 November 2020 by forcibly taking over federal military bases in Tigray and commandeering the

[13] Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021: Ethiopia*, 3 March 2021, sect. *A2*
[14] Brookings Institute, *Dangerous trends in Ethiopia: Time for Washington's tough love*, 9 August 2021
[15] Atlantic Council, *Experts react: Understanding the conflict in Tigray*, 11 November 2020
[16] Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Battle of Mekelle and Its Implications for Ethiopia*, 4 December 2020

armoured vehicles and artillery pieces there. Addis Ababa immediately sent in the rest of its military, backed by Eritrean forces and Amhara paramilitaries and militias from the region south of Tigray. The coalition made rapid gains. On 28 November, it forced the TPLF government from power – and out of Mekelle – amid a near-total blockade on the region. Saying the war was over, the federal government appointed an interim administration and announced its intention to rebuild Tigray.[17]

II. Parties to the conflict

For information on the human rights abuses perpetrated by all parties involved in the conflict see section IV., *a. Overview*.

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) provided the following summary in its September 2021 report with regards to the parties involved in the conflict: "The conflict has evolved into an apparent civil war in northern Ethiopia. It pits an array of armed groups aligned with the federal government—including the militaries of Ethiopia and Eritrea, paramilitary forces from Ethiopia's regional states, and informal militia—against an ethnic insurgent force led by a former head of Ethiopia's military and composed of former soldiers, Tigray regional security forces, militia, and civilian recruits".[18]

Amnesty International noted in its annual report covering 2020:

> The conflict in the Tigray Region, which began on 4 November, pitted the Ethiopian federal government against the Tigray regional government. From the beginning of the conflict, there were armed confrontations between the federal army, supported by the Amhara Region's special (paramilitary) police units and local militias on one side, and the Tigray special (paramilitary) police units and local militias on the other.[19]

a. Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

For more information on the various militia operating in Tigray see section II., *d. Militias*, *i. Ethnic militia – Tigray*, and *iii. Samri militia -Tigray*.

According to ACLED, in an undated *Actor Profiles* webpage as part of its Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO):

> The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) is also known as Weyane (ወያኔ) and was established in 1974 by ethnic Tigrayan students at Addis Ababa University under an association known as Mahber Gesgesti Behere Tigray (MAGEBT- Associations of Progressive Tigray People's movement) (The Manifesto of TPLF, 1976; Paulos Milkias, 2003; Aregawi Berhe, 2004). The group was inspired by Marxist-Leninism. Later, when the struggle shifted to the countryside in Tigray, the name was changed to TPLF. In the beginning, the group's objective was to secede and establish an independent Tigray (The Manifesto of TPLF, 1976). The TPLF mobilized Tigrayans to join its forces and fight the central government: the Derg regime. In 1989, the TPLF and two other groups which were established by TPLF — the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) and the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) — created a coalition party called the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF – የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝቦች አብዮታዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ግንባር). After 16 years of civil war, EPRDF took control of the central government in 1991 and formed a

[17] International Crisis Group, *As Ethiopian Troops Exit Tigray, Time to Focus on Relief*, 9 July 2021
[18] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*
[19] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia 2020*, 6 April 2021, *Background*

> transitional government that developed a new constitution and implemented ethnic federalism. In 1994, the Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Front (SEPDF) was established and joined the EPRDF coalition (Lovise Aalen, 2002). EPRDF won the general election in 1995 and became Ethiopia's ruling party. Until EPRDF was dissolved and replaced by the Prosperity Party on 1 December 2019, the TPLF dominated EPRDF and the central government. In 2019, the TPLF decided not to join the Prosperity Party and continued to govern the Tigray region until a new conflict erupted on 4 November 2020. Currently, the TPLF actively fights the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Amhara Special Forces, and the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) in the Tigray region. TPLF is led by Debretsion Gebremichael. In November 2020, it was estimated that the TPLF comprised around 250,000 fighters (Crisis Group, 5 November 2020). Those numbers have likely declined significantly throughout the course of the conflict.[20]

An article published by the Atlantic Council in November 2020 reported that "the TPLF is thought to control several hundreds of thousands of soldiers and irregular militia, and has a powerful modern arsenal. Until now, Abiy has not had the military strength to confront it, even as the TPLF has been widely accused of fomenting ethnic unrest around the country".[21]

Human Rights Watch wrote in a Q&A on the situation in Ethiopia in November 2020 that: "Aside from administering and governing the Tigray region, the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] also purportedly controls a large regional paramilitary police force as well as local militia, which the Ethiopian Constitution allows by empowering regional states to establish and administer police and security in their respective regions".[22]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary on the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF):

> The TPLF had been the ruling party in Tigray region since 1991, until 7 November 2020, when the House of Federation voted to establish a transitional government in Tigray state.[130] According to International Crisis Group analyst, William Davison, Tigray has 'a large paramilitary force and a well drilled local militia, thought to number perhaps 250 000 troops combined'.[131] On 29 November 2020, one day after the capture of Mekelle by the ENDF, the leader of TPLF announced that his forces had recaptured the northern town of Axum from the federal government forces.[132] According to AI and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), witnesses said that a TPLF youth militia, called 'Samri', attacked members of the ethnic Amhara community in Maikadra on 9 November 2020.[133] EHRC reported with regards to the attack in Maikadra that 'while Samri, comprised of several groups consisting of 20 to 30 youth, each accompanied by an estimated 3 to 4 armed police and militia, carried out the massacre, police and militia - strategically posted at street junctions - aided and directly participated in the carnage by shooting at those who attempted to escape'. [134] […]
>
> 130 AA, Ethiopia moves to set up interim government in Tigray, 7 November 2020, url
> 131 International Crisis Group, Clashes over Ethiopia's Tigray Region: Getting to a Ceasefire and National Dialogue, 5 November 2020, url
> 132 Reuters, Tigray forces claim to have shot down Ethiopian plane, taken town, 29 November 2020, url
> 133 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, url; AI, Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state, 12 November 2020, url

[20] ACLED, *Actor Profiles*, Undated
[21] Atlantic Council, *Calls for negotiation are driving Ethiopia deeper into war*, 13 November 2020
[22] Human Rights Watch, *Q&A: Conflict in Ethiopia and International Law*, 25 November 2020

134 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, url […][23]

In April 2021 the International Crisis Group reported: "Its [the Tigrayan armed resistance] commanders include former Chief of Staff General Tsadkan Gebretensae, who led the Ethiopian military into war with Eritrea from 1998-2000, and another, more recently retired former senior officer, Lieutenant General Tadesse Werede".[24] For more information on General Tsadkan Gebretensae see the BBC News article written by analyst Alex de Waal in July 2021.[25]

The Brookings Institute reported on 15 May 2021 that: "Ethiopian lawmakers […] voted to designate both the Oromo Liberation Army and the Tigray People's Liberation Front as terrorist organizations".[26]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that "The TPLF, a party representing one of Ethiopia's ethnic minorities, had been the dominant political party in the country's ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition for almost three decades, until Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office in 2018. The TPLF was the ruling party in the regional state of Tigray when the conflict began".[27] The same source further noted that "Federal authorities have since accused the TPLF of orchestrating ethnic violence across Ethiopia to make it ungovernable. In May 2021, the Ethiopian government designated the party as a terrorist group".[28]

ACLED reported in its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering June-July 2021 that "Advancements by the TPLF in July have indicated a new phase in its development, showcasing a transformation of the TPLF strategies from insurgency tactics to more formalized warfare using captured heavy weapons and rapid advances along major transportation arteries. Regional special forces — which are trained and equipped to combat insurgencies in their home regions — are unlikely to be very effective against such tactics and are at a major disadvantage. The TPLF's ability to organize and manage both its own internal structure and its absorbed militia forces is its greatest enabling factor. Its military success can be attributed to individuals within the organization with a vast amount of experience (BBC, 1 July 2021)".[29]

b. Tigrayan Defense Force (TDF)

The International Crisis Group reported in April 2021: "The Tigrayan leadership, though driven from power in Mekelle, the region's capital, has rallied under the banner of the Tigray Defence Forces, an armed resistance group. It is led by the removed Tigrayan leaders and commanded by former high-ranking Ethiopian National Defence Force officers. It currently operates primarily from rural areas in central and southern Tigray, while federal troops control the main roads and urban areas […] The Tigray Defence Forces appear to have established a foothold in rural central Tigray. Tigrayan media regularly

[23] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.2.1 The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)* and *2.2.2 The Eritrean Army*
[24] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021
[25] See Alex de Waal (BBC News), *Gen Tsadkan Gebretensae: Ethiopia's Tigray rebel mastermind*, 1 July 2021
[26] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Wildlife, Horn of Africa, and infrastructure updates*, 15 May 2021
[27] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*
[28] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*
[29] ACLED, *EPO Monthly: June-July 2021*, 20 August 2021

report what they describe as victories by these forces over either the Ethiopian or Eritrean armies. These claims are hard to verify due to an internet blackout and access restrictions".[30]

In May 2021 Michael Horton, fellow for Arabian Affairs at the Jamestown Foundation, noted: "The TPLF, now merged into the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), is an organization that knows how to fight a guerrilla war […] the TPLF, or now TDF, possess the two components most critical to conducting a guerrilla war: deep knowledge of the geographic and socio-political terrain and a sympathetic population. The TPLF/TDF also has caches of weapons and an abundance of fighters as well as professionally trained officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Many of these officers and NCOs defected from federal forces in the lead up to—and in the immediate aftermath of—the current war".[31]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that "The self-declared Tigrayan Defense Forces (TDF) have since [July 2021] launched incursions into Amhara and Afar regions in what they describe as an effort to break a government-imposed blockade on their region and press the government into negotiations".[32]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) also stated:

> The TDF's commander, General Tsadkan Gebretensae led Ethiopia's military from 1991 to 2001. He describes the resistance in Tigray as being led by "the duly elected Government of Tigray," not solely by the TPLF, which he says remains Tigray's ruling party.[48]
> While TPLF leaders play a key role in the leadership of the insurgent force, the TDF appears to draw support from beyond the party among Tigrayans.[49] (Ethiopian authorities object to the use of the term TDF: the federal media authority briefly revoked the license of a local media outlet in July for using it, contending that it advanced the agenda of a terrorist group.[50]).
>
> 48 "Tigray crisis: A conversation with General Tsadkan Gebretensae, Tigray Defense Force Central Command," The Elephant, July 9, 2021. Tsadkan, who had fallen out with the TPLF during a leadership split in 2001, had been critical of what he described as authoritarianism and state brutality under the EPRDF. He had publicly welcomed Abiy's initial reforms, but had also warned of troubles in the Tigray-federal relationship and concerns over Abiy's deal with Eritrea. He says he joined the resistance after the conflict began, because the government had "invited foreign forces to invade
> our country." "'Ethiopia is in transition defined by no clear direction': Tsadkan Gebretensae," Ethiopia Observer, January 8, 2021 and "Former TPLF General reveals hopes and fears in Tigray," TesfaNews, August 22, 2018.
> 49 See, e.g., interviews cited in William Davison (@wdavison10), Twitter, September 3, 2021, 9:34 am EST.
> 50 Addis Standard, Statement of fact on the suspension of Addis Standard, July 19, 2021.[33]

c. Federal Government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

In November 2020, the Brookings Institute wrote that:

> Ethiopia was until last year governed by a four-party coalition, a TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front]-designed marriage of convenience that allowed each ethno-regional bloc a degree of autonomy and a share of the national cake. But the coalition began coming apart in recent years, and a popular backlash

[30] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021
[31] Michael Horton (The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 19 Issue: 10), *Tigray Defense Forces Resist Ethiopian Army Offensive as Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethnic Militias Enter the Fray*, 24 May 2021
[32] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*
[33] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 10*

> finally dislodged the TPLF establishment and, in turn, opened the door to [Prime Minister] Abiy [Ahmed]. Keen on redistributing power and moving the country away from ethnic federalism, Abiy replaced the coalition with a single, nationally oriented "Prosperity Party." The TPLF, concerned its relative influence would decline, fought the move, failed, and then opted out, leaving the powerful minority outside the national government for the first time in a generation.[34]

In her December 2020 statement, Lauren Ploch Blanchard, Specialist in African Affairs of the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) provided the following brief overview:

> The outbreak of hostilities in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November [2020] reflects a power struggle between the federal government of self-styled reformist Prime Minister Abiy (AH-bee) Ahmed and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a former rebel movement that dominated Ethiopian politics for more than a quarter century before Abiy's ascent to power in 2018. […]
>
> After being hailed for his reforms and efforts to pursue peace at home and in the region, Abiy has faced growing criticism from some observers who express concern about democratic backsliding. […]
>
> Some of Abiy's early supporters have since become critics, accusing him of seeking to consolidate power, and some observers suggest his government has become increasingly intolerant of dissent and heavy-handed in its responses to law and order challenges. Abiy and his backers argue their actions are necessary to preserve order and avert further conflict. They blame the TPLF and militant ethnic nationalists for violence that has plagued Ethiopia since he took office. Many Ethiopians viewed the TPLF's rule as authoritarian, and abuses committed under its leadership fueled resentment in many communities.[35]

The Atlantic Council reported in March 2021 on the "Ethiopian government's near-immediate need for supplementary troops—pulled in from Ethiopian deployments in Somalia and, most notably, the al-Fashqa Triangle—to respond to the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] attack in Mekelle. The subsequent entry into the Tigray conflict of Eritrean forces and Amhara state militias further indicated that the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defense Force] was unable to subdue the TPLF uprising on its own and was operating from a greater position of relative weakness than was perhaps anticipated".[36]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) summarised the June 2021 parliamentary election as follows:

> Amidst the fighting in Tigray, Ethiopia held what Prime Minister Abiy termed the country's "first attempt at free and fair elections" on June 21, 2021. The elections took place against the backdrop of multiple security crises, not only in Tigray, and voting did not occur in roughly a fifth of the 547 constituencies, leaving millions of Ethiopians unable to participate. Elections were not held in Tigray. Election officials cited security concerns, "malfeasance," and logistical problems in their decision to postpone elections in other parts of the country as well. Elections in two regions, Somali and Harari, and dozens of constituencies (82 in total, not including Tigray's 38) were postponed until September 30, 2021. Two major opposition parties boycotted the June polls, leaving ruling party candidates running unopposed in some constituencies.

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[34] Brookings Institute, *Averting civil war in Ethiopia: It's time to propose elements of a negotiated settlement*, 16 November 2020

[35] Lauren Ploch Blanchard (U.S. Congressional Research Service), *Statement of Lauren Ploch Blanchard, Specialist in African Affairs Before Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearing on "The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia"*, 1 December 2020, *p. 2*

[36] Atlantic Council, *The unintended consequence of Ethiopia's civil war might be a border war with Sudan*, 3 March 2021

> Where elections were held, Abiy's party won 410 parliamentary seats while opposition and independent candidates won 15. The party also dominated the regional council elections. Voter turnout reportedly exceeded 90% in most regions, prompting questions about the genuineness of the vote. The election process is not yet complete, but the Prosperity Party's parliamentary wins in June position Abiy for reelection as prime minister in early October.[37]

Covering June 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "Parliamentary and regional elections held 21 June [2021], results expected 1 July [2021]; opposition accused local officials and militias of blocking opposition observers in Amhara and Southern Nations regional states; AU observer mission 23 June [2021] however said poll was "peaceful and credible". Ahead of elections, govt 10 June [2021] postponed vote in Harari and Somali regional states to Sept, citing logistical issues; vote also not held in Tigray, parts of Oromia and most of Benishangul-Gumuz. Seven opposition parties 12-13 June [2021] alleged irregularities in electoral process".[38]

Reuters reported on 30th September 2021 that "Ethiopians in three regions where elections had been delayed head to the polls on Thursday to vote for their representatives and one area will also vote on whether to form its own regional state"; these included "Somali region, where registration irregularities delayed voting; Harar, where registration issues and a legal dispute caused delays; and in the southwestern Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), where ballot and security issues delayed polls".[39] The same source further noted that "Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed will form the next government regardless of the results from late voting. His party already won 410 of the 436 parliamentary seats that were contested in the June [2021] vote".[40] According to Reuters "It is unclear when the delayed elections for the remaining seats, some of which are in Tigray, will take place".[41]

On 4th October 2021 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was re-appointed and a few days later he "named opposition leaders to join his new cabinet, while he retained his deputy, Demeke Mekonnen, and finance minister, Ahmed Shide, in their roles" and "named Abraham Belay to head the defense ministry. Abraham led the interim government in the Tigray region before the rebels regained control of the region in June [2021]. Deputy Prime Minister Demeke will also continue as the nation's foreign minister" reported news agency Bloomberg.[42]

ACLED reported in its weekly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the week 16-22 October 2021 that "the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) released a new election timeline for the delayed June general election in Benshangul/Gumuz region. Elections in Metekel and Kamashi zones were delayed due to security concerns. According to the new timeline, the sixth general election will be held on 30 December 2021 in 17 election constituencies in Benshangul/Gumuz region (NEBE, 19 October 2021) […] Benshangul/Gumuz region is the only region that did not establish a new government because elections were not held for the majority of the regional council seats. During the June 2021 election, elections were held for only 34 seats out of the 99 regional council seats".[43]

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[37] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 21*
[38] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, June 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[39] Reuters, *Ethiopians in three regions vote in delayed election*, 30 September 2021
[40] Reuters, *Ethiopians in three regions vote in delayed election*, 30 September 2021
[41] Reuters, *Ethiopians in three regions vote in delayed election*, 30 September 2021
[42] Bloomberg, *Abiy Taps Ethiopia Opposition, Keeps Finance Head in Cabinet*, 6 October 2021
[43] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 16-22 October 2021*, 27 October 2021

i. The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)

According to ACLED, in an undated *Actor Profiles* webpage as part of its Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO):

> The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) is the national military of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. ENDF consists of four parts: the ground force, the air force, the navy (since January 2020), and the Republican Guard (established in 2018). The Republican Guard is a unit of the military that protects senior government officials (CIA World Factbook-Ethiopia, 2021). It is estimated that ENDF has around 162,000 active personnel (Global Fire Power, 3 March 2021). The Commander-in-Chief of the force is Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, while the Minister of Defense is Kenea Yadeta and the Chief of General Staff is General Birhanu Jula. ENDF is currently active in Tigray, Benshangul/Gumuz, Oromia, the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), and Amhara regions. In the Tigray region, ENDF is clashing with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its affiliated militia group, the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). In Benshangul/Gumuz, the military is taking action against the Gumuz People's Democratic Movement. The force is part of a command post that is re-establishing security in the Metekel zone of the region (The Ethiopian Herald, 25 December 2020). ENDF is also actively fighting with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) – Shane, also known as the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), in the Oromia region. ENDF is active in several areas of SNNPR, such as the Amaro area, Wolayita, Konso, and Bench-Maji zone. In the Amhara region, the military is taking part in two command posts, which were established due to frequent violent conflicts in the Central Gondar zone and in the North Shewa/Oromia Special zone area (FDRE Defense Force, 18 April 2021; Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, 29 April 2021).[44]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary on the ENDF:

> The Ethiopian National Defence Force comprises an army and air force of approximately 150 000 personnel combined.[90] […]
> The ENDF relies on voluntary military service of people over 18 years of age, although the ENDF retains the right to conduct call-ups and compliance is compulsory.[92] There have been occasions when community security [regional police or local militia] was insufficient to maintain law and order and the military intervened to maintain internal security.[93] The Ministry of National Defence oversees the ground forces, air force, as well as the Defence Industry Sector, while the Prime Minister is the chair of the Council and the
> Commander-in-Chief of the National Armed Forces.[94] In 2018, as part of Abiy's reform agenda, the ENDF's regional commands had been cut down to four from six. The commands are the Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern Commands.[95]
> On 4 November 2020, the Northern Command of ENDF, a division stationed in the region for over two decades in Mekelle[96], under Commander Major General Belay Seyoum[97], was attacked by forces loyal to TPLF and the Northern Command Head Quarters were captured. According to Chief of Staff, General Birhanu Jula, 5 days after the attack, 'the 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th mechanised units, as well as the 11th, 20th, 23rd, and 31st battalions had managed to regroup and launch counter attacks on different fronts'.[98]
> Al Jazeera, citing a regional security expert, reported that several ENDF soldiers remained in the Northern Command and did not participate in the conflict.[99] Within approximately 3 weeks, the ENDF captured several main cities in Tigray region […] and on 28 November 2020, Abiy stated that the ENDF had taken control of Mekelle and announced end of military operations in Tigray.[100] Furthermore he claimed that

[44] ACLED, *Actor Profiles*, Undated

'federal troops had also taken control of the airport, the regional administration office and other key facilities'.[101]

Throughout the conflict, the ENDF has been backed by Amhara region's official forces and paramilitaries, namely the Fano militia[102], as well as by the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), although Eritrea has denied allegations of involvement.[103] Although Abiy denied any civilian casualties caused by the ENDF[104], Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported indiscriminate shelling by the Ethiopian federal forces on urban areas such as Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in the Tigray region in November 2020[105], and several sources reported that the Ethiopian and Eritrean military forces killed several hundreds of civilian in Axum on 19 November 2020.[106]

90 CIA, World Factbook- Ethiopia, 12 March 2021, url […]
92 CIA, World Factbook- Ethiopia, 12 March 2021, url
93 USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Ethiopia, 11 March 2020, url
94 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of the Prime Minister, n.d, url
95 Africanews, Ethiopia restructures military, set to revive naval force - State Media, 13 December 2018, url
96 Reuters, Ethiopian military operation in Tigray is complete, prime minister says, 28 November 2020, url
97 Addis Standard, We Don't Want It": North Command Chief On Eritrean Army In Tigray; Says Army Didn't Let Alien Forces In- Full Speech, 6 January 2021, url
98 Janes, Ethiopia says Northern Command is counterattacking Tigray rebels, 12 November 2020, url
99 Al Jazeera, Ethiopia: The forces fighting in Tigray in 500 words, 18 November 2020, url
100 International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch- Ethiopia, November 2020, url
101 Reuters, Ethiopian military operation in Tigray is complete, prime minister says, 28 November 2020, url
102 HRW, Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 23 December 2020, url; Theafricareport, The war in Tigray: Abiy, Isaias, and the Amhara elite, 29 January 2021, url
103 International Crisis Group, Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 11 February 2021, url; Theafricareport, The war in Tigray: Abiy, Isaias, and the Amhara elite, 29 January 2021, url
104 Reuters, Abiy says Ethiopia's federal forces have not killed civilians in Tigray, 30 November 2020, url
105 HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, url
106 AI, Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, url; HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, url; CCN, Massacre in the mountains, 22 March 2021, url […][45]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that: "The ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] has been allegedly supported by Amhara Regional Forces (ARF) and the Amhara Fano militia in Western Tigray, and by Eritrean Defence Forces especially in Northern and Central Tigray".[46]

The U.S. Department of State noted in May 2021 that "There are many credible reports of armed forces in Tigray committing acts of violence against civilians, including gender-based violence and other human

[45] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.2.1 The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)*

[46] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *p. 1*

rights abuses and atrocities. The conduct of the Eritrean Defense Forces and Amhara regional forces have been particularly egregious".[47]

In September 2021 the U.S. Department of State established a "new sanctions regime in response to the crisis [in Ethiopia]. With it, the United States will be able to impose financial sanctions on individuals and entities in connection with the conflict, including those responsible for threatening peace and stability, obstructing humanitarian access or progress toward a ceasefire, or committing serious human rights abuses".[48]

d. Militias

In August 2021, the Brookings Institute wrote that:

> The emboldened TDF [Tigray Defense Forces] has seized parts of the Afar and Amhara regions. In response to the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defense Force] meltdown, the prime minister intensified efforts to stand up regional ethnic-based militias. Yet Addis Ababa has severely limited capacity to control these paramilitary forces: Over time, they will pose a graver threat to Ethiopia's stability, territorial integrity, and ethnic coexistence than the Tigray situation.
> […] Crucially, Abiy's resort to ethnic militias as a key response of the weakness of ENDF is dangerous and will likely prove deeply counterproductive. Ethnic militias and paramilitary forces were forming across Ethiopia even before last fall's TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] rebellion.
> Abiy has now enlisted militia support and reinforced their formation in Afar and other regions of Ethiopia. However, the militias will prove to be a loose cannon. Traditionally, anti-insurgent militias require central government reinforcement, lest many such groups succumb to defection pressures or are crushed by potent rebel forces: Afghanistan and Mexico provide many an example.
> Moreover, like elsewhere around the world, many of the Ethiopian ethnic paramilitary forces have intense local agendas, some directly clashing with Addis Ababa's. After initially fighting TDF, many of the militias popping up around Ethiopia will turn against the capital, as well as against one another, in their conflicts over resources and power distribution, even though some are likely to accommodate with TDF.
> Already, in various parts of Ethiopia, local recruits are refusing to join ENDF, preferring instead to sign up with state paramilitary or special forces, such as the notorious Liyu Police in the long restive Somali region. Numbering hundreds to thousands, such forces can easily discard Addis Ababa's control.[49]

i. Ethnic militia – Tigray

According to ACLED, in an undated *Actor Profiles* webpage as part of its Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO):

> The Tigray Ethnic Militias referred to in ACLED's dataset are made up of ethnic Tigrayans, organized at a local level, who are operating in the Tigray region. Before the violent conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal government began in 2020, the militias were the official security force operating at the kebele level of the region. The primary purpose of kebele militias is to provide security in localities in coordination with the local and federal police. After the conflict between the TPLF and the federal government erupted on 4 November 2020, the Tigray militias have fought alongside the

[47] U.S. Department of State, *Continuing Atrocities and Denial of Humanitarian Access in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 15 May 2021
[48] U.S. Department of State, *Issuance of New Executive Order Establishing Sanctions Related to the Crisis in Ethiopia*, 17 September 2021
[49] Brookings Institute, *Dangerous trends in Ethiopia: Time for Washington's tough love*, 9 August 2021

> TPLF against the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Amhara Special Forces, and the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF). Tigray militias are mostly active in the Tigray region, although militias sometimes clash with the Amhara Special Forces in the Amhara region (Waghimra Communication, 27 April 2021; DW Amharic, 27 April 2021).
> With the dissolution of the TPLF, some Tigray Regional Special Force police officers have joined local ethnic militias and participate in fighting against the military forces of Ethiopia and Eritrea under the umbrella term 'Tigray Militias'.[50]

ii. Fano (Fanno) militia - Amhara

According to ACLED, in an undated *Actor Profiles* webpage as part of its Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO):

> Fano youth can be loosely defined as an ethno-nationalist youth movement with roots in the 2010-2018 anti-Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) protest era. Although Fano is hailed for being instrumental in bringing about the fall of the TPLF through both non-violent and violent struggles, their current status and organizational structure are unclear.
> The territorial integrity of the Amhara ethnic 'homeland' has been a key issue for the Fano youth. Protests led by Fano in 2017-2018 were often centered around the issue of Western Tigray and the ethnic Amhara who lived there. As the purported 'protectors' of Amhara society, the Fano have engaged in violent conflicts throughout the state in the name of neutralizing perceived threats to the Amhara people and, by extension, Amhara nationalism.
> Fano has become aligned with –and, in many instances, absorbed by — the Amhara Regional Special Forces. Fano is deeply involved in the conflict against TPLF-associated forces in Western Tigray and in operations against militants associated with the Kemant Democratic Party in areas of Chilga. In this respect, their future is aligned with the Amhara regional special forces and by extension Amhara regional ethno-nationalist ambitions […]
> Some Fano youth recognize the leadership of Solomon Atanaw (Ezega, 28 March 2020).[51]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary on the Fano militia:

> The Fano is an Amharan youth group in Ethiopia, perceived as either a protest group/nationalist movement or an armed militia.[121] In March 2020, Ezega News reported that Solomon Atanaw is the chairman of Fano and that his group had demanded the return and annexation of the Welqait, Raya, Dera, and Metekel areas to the Amhara region.[122] […]
> No information could be found on the exact number of Fano's members. The Guardian reported, citing Amhara's security officials, that thousands of Amhara militiamen headed towards Tigray to fight alongside federal forces.[125]
> According to witnesses interviewed by Reuters, Fano militiamen were involved in the mass killings in Mai-Kadra town in November 2020[126], while witnesses interviewed by the Director of Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa, Laetitia Bader, reported additionally, that Fanos, along with Amharan special forces, detained civilians that had not fled Maikadra and that they looted houses and hospitals in the region.[127] A witness described to the Guardian that when federal forces captured his town, Humera, they beat him and then 'passed him over' to the Fano. According to the witness' account, Fano 'had been tasked with destroying the city and finishing Tigrayans'.[128] On 22 December 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that she had received several reports of human rights abuses by Fano militia.[129] […]

[50] ACLED, *Actor Profiles*, Undated
[51] ACLED, *Actor Profiles*, Undated

121 New York Times (The), Fleeing Ethiopians Tell of Ethnic Massacres in Tigray War, 9 December 2020, url; Lefort René,
Preaching unity but flying solo, Abiy's ambition may stall Ethiopia's transition, 25 February 2020, url
122 Ezega News, Fano Will Not Lay Down Arms If Demands Are Not Met: Chairman, 28 March 2020, url […]
125 Guardian (The), Ethiopia: leaders of Tigray region admit they attacked neighbouring Amhara, 14 November 2020, url
126 Reuters, Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray, 13 November 2020, url
127 HRW, Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 23 December 2020, url
128 Guardian (The), 'I saw people dying on the road': Tigray's traumatised war refugees, 2 December 2020, url
129 UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December
2020, url […][52]

iii. Samri militia - Tigray

According to ACLED, in an undated *Actor Profiles* webpage as part of its Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO):

> Samri is an informal Tigrayan youth group in Maikadra named after an area in Maikadra which is inhabited by mostly ethnic Tigray. One Samri group typically consists of 20 to 30 ethnic Tigray youth (Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, 24 November 2021). This youth group is believed to have been actively involved in the November 2020 massacre in Maikadra.[53]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following information on the Samri militia:

> According to AI and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), witnesses said that a TPLF youth militia, called 'Samri', attacked members of the ethnic Amhara community in Maikadra on 9 November 2020.[133] EHRC reported with regards to the attack in Maikadra that 'while Samri, comprised of several groups consisting of 20 to 30 youth, each accompanied by an estimated 3 to 4 armed police and militia, carried out the massacre, police and militia - strategically posted at street junctions - aided and directly participated in the carnage by shooting at those who attempted to escape'. [134] […]
> • On 9 November 2020, Tigrayan local police, aided by a local militia and an 'informal Tigray youth group called "Samri"' killed at least 600 civilians 'pre-identified/profiled as Amharas and Wolkaits', all males, in Maikadra town, Kafta Humera woreda.[144]
>
> 134 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, url […]
> 144 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, url, pp. 1, 2; GCR2P, Atrocity Alert No. 229: Ethiopia, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Global Landmine Report, 18 November 2020, url […][54]

[52] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.2.1 The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)* and *2.2.2 The Eritrean Army*
[53] ACLED, *Actor Profiles*, Undated
[54] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.3.1 Civilian casualties*

III. Conflict and Security Situation

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[55] The "26 maps in this atlas provide detailed information at the scale of districts (woredas) or sub-districts (tabiyas). Besides background information related to administrative divisions, social and natural resources - locations of internally displaced people, massacres and civilian casualties receive due attention. Humanitarian access and needs are particularly addressed; official data on humanitarian aid distribution are mapped, and contrasted to ground evidence related to such distributions. The final outlook, links up the emergency and famine conditions in Tigray to the current crop status and to the blockade and siege of the region".[56] In particular the following maps may be of interest:

- Map 10 (p. 30); Reported conflict incidents from November 2020 to September 2021, including battles, ambushes, air strikes, drone attacks and shelling;
- Map 11 (p. 31): Approximate territorial control on 31 August 2021;
- Figure 4.1 (. 33) Graphic representation of fully documented civilian casualties, by the end of September 2021;
- Map 13 (p. 37): Heatmap of civilian casualties and massacres in the Tigray War between 4th November 2020 and 28th September 20201;
- Map 14 (p. 38): Occurrence of massacres in the Tigray War up to 3rd October 2021 and Annex A (p. 89-95): Chronological overview of the 260 reported massacres in the Tigray War between November 2020 and September 2021;
- Map 15 (p. 40): Restricted humanitarian access due to the ongoing conflict (as of 31st July 2021)
- Map 16 (p. 46): Sites with IDPs due to the Tigray War (November 2020 to June 2021);
- Map 22 (p. 68): Current (June 2021) and projected (January 2022) food security outcomes in Tigray.[57]

a. Attacks on federal army camps

The International Crisis Group noted: "Though details are sometimes sketchy, it is possible to piece together a rough narrative of the war to date. The final trigger for conflict was when Tigray's regional paramilitaries, assisted by Tigrayan federal military officers, took over almost all the army's Northern Command on 3 November [2020], capturing heavy weapon stockpiles, and detaining or killing officers and soldiers who resisted".[58]

An article written by Jan Abbink, anthropologist-historian with specialisation on Ethiopia, and published by the African Studies Centre Leiden in November 2020 reported that: "Now, 2,5 years after the change of leadership and the decline of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and

[55] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography

[56] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, *p. 1*

[57] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, [*various pages]*

[58] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021

despite the dawn of a new era with the rise to power of Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed, we see grounds for deep concern. The most recent indication is the eruption of armed conflict between the Tigray region armed forces and the federal army, provoked by an assault of the Tigray army on two federal military bases (near Dansha town and near Meqele in Tigray) in the early hours of 4 November 2020, to rob equipment, arms and ammunition, and with many people killed".[59]

The U.S. National Public Radio (NPR) reported that "In early November [2020], the regional government — controlled by the Tigray People's Liberation Front, a leftist political party — launched a full-scale siege of a key Ethiopian military base at Sero, using tanks, heavy guns and mortars. Calling the TPLF assault a 'treason that will never be forgotten,' Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a federal offensive against the region, setting off the conflict".[60]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) stated:

> On November 4, 2020, Prime Minister Abiy announced the start of military operations in Tigray, following a TPLF attack on a military base that Abiy asserted had forced the federal government into a military confrontation. His government described the TPLF attack as high treason and termed the military's actions "law enforcement operations." […]
> The TPLF denies initiating the conflict, asserting that the government had massed troops on Tigray's borders days beforehand and that Tigray forces moved to take the base after officers defected and warned of a pending attack. The TPLF accused Abiy of starting a war "to consolidate his personal power.".[61]

According to the same source and basing its information on a number of sources:

> The International Crisis Group (ICG), which had warned for months of a looming conflict, says that while Tigray's government may have "struck first," assertions that the federal intervention was prepared beforehand have merit.[39] Press reports suggested movements of federal troops in the days before the TPLF attack, and senior Sudanese officials say they discussed the prospective conflict with Abiy a week before it started, when Abiy asked them to secure the border.[40] By some accounts, operations against the TPLF were planned in coordination with Eritrea.[41]
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> 39 ICG, "Toward an end to Ethiopia's federal-Tigray feud," August 14, 2020, "Steering Ethiopia's Tigray crisis away from conflict," October 30, 2020, "Finding a path to peace in Ethiopia's Tigray region," February 11, 2021; "As Ethiopian troops exit Tigray, time to focus on relief," July 9, 2021; ICG Senior Analyst William Davison (@wdavison10), Twitter, August 27, 2021, 8:44 am.
> 40 "Is Ethiopia headed for civil war?" Foreign Policy, November 5, 2020; Cameron Hudson, "The unintended consequence of Ethiopia's civil war might be a border war with Sudan," Atlantic Council, March 3, 2021; "Sudanese troops have been deployed on the border in agreement with Ethiopia's PM," Sudan Tribune, January 17, 2021.
> 41 Mesfin Hagos, "Eritrea's role in Ethiopia's conflict and the fate of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia," African Arguments,
> December 4, 2020.[62]

In November 2020, the Brookings Institute wrote that: "The dam finally gave way in the early morning hours of November 4, when Tigrayan forces attacked a national military base in Tigray. Citing months of

[59] African Studies Centre Leiden, *Hopes dashed: sabotage and mayhem in Ethiopia*, 5 November 2020
[60] National Public Radio (NPR), *9 Things To Know About The Unfolding Crisis In Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 5 March 2021
[61] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 9*
[62] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 10*

sustained "provocation and incitement of violence," Abiy declared that "the last red line has been crossed," and ordered government troops to mount a military operation against the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front]".[63]

b. Military Offensive in Tigray

i. November 2020

For a timeline of events in November 2020 see ACLED, *Tigray Conflict*, Undated.[64]

The Brookings Institute reported in November 2020 that:

> On Wednesday, November 3, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a military operation against the government of the country's northern Tigray region, after accusing the Tigrayan ruling party of attacking a defense post and attempting to steal military equipment. In addition to sending troops to the region, the federal government shut down some lines of communications—including telephone and internet services in Tigray. The conflict escalated on Thursday, with reports of heavy shelling in Tigray. In fact, the Ethiopian army's deputy chief declared that Ethiopia had entered "an unexpected war" and was sending more troops to the area, and Ethiopia's lower house of parliament unanimously approved a six-month state of emergency in Tigray. Debretsion Gebremichael, president of the Tigray region, told reporters that Tigray was "in position to defend [itself] from enemies" and that "we are ready to be martyrs.[65]

The International Crisis Group noted: "Fighting started in the late hours of 3 November [2020], sparking Ethiopia's worst security crisis in decades. Tigray's forces fired the first shots after they partnered with Tigrayan federal military officers to take over the Ethiopian armed forces command located in the region, killed or detained soldiers who refused to defect, and commandeered armaments that comprised the bulk of the national military's hardware. Tigrayan leaders said they acted in anticipation of a federal intervention they thought was imminent. The same day, Abiy sent tens of thousands of Ethiopian National Defence Force soldiers, backed by Amhara region paramilitaries and militiamen, to battle Tigray's defence forces. Eritrea's army soon joined the offensive from the north.".[66]

The U.S. Department of State noted in its annual human rights report covering 2020 that "On November 4 [2020], fighting between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front Regional Security Force resulted in protracted conflict in the northern Tigray Region and reports of serious and widespread abuses".[67]

Susan Stigant, Director of Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace stated in her testimony before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations that "A military confrontation between the federal government of Ethiopia

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[63] Brookings Institute, *Averting civil war in Ethiopia: It's time to propose elements of a negotiated settlement*, 16 November 2020
[64] ACLED, *Tigray Conflict*, Undated
[65] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Unrest in Ethiopia, contentious elections results in Tanzania and Côte d'Ivoire, and a new UK-Kenya trade deal*, 7 November 2020
[66] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021
[67] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Executive Summary*

and the regional state of Tigray, in the country's north, began November 4 [2020] and quickly escalated. The ruling party of Tigray, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which once led the ruling party coalition that preceded the Abiy government, claims that it launched a pre-emptive attack on the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) Northern Command. The federal government responded with an operation to regain control of the regional state and apprehend the TPLF leadership, which now stands accused of acts of treason".[68]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) stated with regards to the start of the conflict in Tigray:

> On November 4, 2020, Abiy announced military operations in Tigray, following an attack by Tigrayan forces on a military base in the region. The federal government described the attack as unprovoked and constituting treason, while the Tigray government asserted that its forces were acting in self-defense against a planned federal assault. Federal authorities have since accused the TPLF of orchestrating ethnic violence across Ethiopia to make it ungovernable. In May 2021, the Ethiopian government designated the party as a terrorist group.[69]

According to the same source: "The fighting in Tigray turned members of Ethiopia's security forces against each other, along ethnic lines. Tigray regional security forces and informal militia, joined by Tigrayans in the army, reportedly seized heavy weapons from the federal forces at the onset of the fighting. The Ethiopian military, supported by Eritrean troops and regional security forces and ethnic militia from the neighboring Amhara region, carried out ground operations and airstrikes".[70]

Human Rights Watch wrote in a Q&A on the situation in Ethiopia in November 2020 that:

> The prime minister and other federal government officials have been characterizing the military operations in Tigray as a "law enforcement operation," in order to "protect the constitution and restore the rule of law
> But, since the outbreak of fighting on November 4, 2020 , the Ethiopian military has conducted ground operations and carried out airstrikes reportedly focused on targeting the military assets of the Tigray regional forces in several locations in Tigray.
> At the same time, the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] has launched missile attacks and conducted ground operations against Ethiopian military as well as Amhara regional forces and militias.
> Since the military operations began, the Ethiopian government has made territorial gains in Tigray by seizing key military and civilian installations in the western Tigray region, as well as in other territories, the full control over which are difficult to independently verify.[71]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary on the military offensive in Tigray in November 2020:

> • On 9 November 2020, Tigrayan local police, aided by a local militia and an 'informal Tigray youth group called "Samri"' killed at least 600 civilians 'pre-identified/profiled as Amharas and Wolkaits', all males, in Maikadra town, Kafta Humera woreda.[144]

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[68] Susan Stigant (U.S. Institute of Peace), *The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia, Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations*, 3 December 2020

[69] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*

[70] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 10*

[71] Human Rights Watch, *Q&A: Conflict in Ethiopia and International Law*, 25 November 2020

• Between 9-11 November 2020, Humera town was hit by artillery strikes, of which at least some were reportedly launched from Eritrea. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, 'the shelling damaged residential areas in the Kebele 02 neighbourhood, and struck near a church and a school, near a mosque in Kebele 01, and hit areas near the town's main hospital'. The same source quoted a medical worker estimating that on 9 November 2020, the shelling had 'killed at least 46 people and wounded over 200' others.[145] According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), 'the Ethiopian army and regional Amhara forces and militia' took control of Humera, and killed civilians.[146] On 26 November 2020, Deutsche Welle (DW) quoted an account of a Tigrayan refugee claiming that Amharic soldiers in Humera had shot people over 18 years of age who admitted to speaking Tigrinya.[147]
• On 17 November 2020, Shire town was hit by shelling, and an unspecified number of civilians were killed and injured.[148]
• On 19 November 2020, 'Ethiopian and Eritrean forces indiscriminately shelled Axum town, killing and wounding civilians'. After taking control of the town, members of the two forces 'shot civilians and pillaged and destroyed property'. According to HRW, after being attacked on 28 November 2020 by 'Tigray militia and Axum residents', Eritrean soldiers 'in apparent retaliation, fatally shot and summarily executed several hundred residents, mostly men and boys', between 28-29 November 2020. Estimates of the fatalities are of several hundred civilian deaths, with Amnesty International (AI) reporting at least 240 deaths, while another source quoted by HRW states that around 800 people had been killed in Axum.[149]
• In November 2020, four humanitarian workers were killed in Tigray region. One of the victims was reportedly killed in Hitsats refugee camp in Shire on 19 November 2020.[150]
• Between 20-24 November 2020, 'many people' from Adigrat town were reportedly killed in the mountains, after being displaced from the town by artillery strikes in 'early November' 2020.[151]
• On 28 November 2020, civilian facilities in Mekelle were hit by 'heavy shelling', and at least 27 civilians were killed and another 100 were wounded, according to witness accounts quoted by HRW. [152]
• On 30 November 2020, Eritrean soldiers opened fire on Maryam Dengelat church in Dengelat village, killing tens of civilians that had gathered for mass. According to witness accounts, some of the civilians who managed to flee were followed by soldiers into neighbouring villages and killed.[153]
• Between November and 'early December' 2020, 'scores of young men' were reportedly killed in Wukro town by Eritrean soldiers, with one witness claiming at least 81 deaths, while an International Crisis Group report highlighted estimates of around 200 deaths.[154] […]

144 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, url, pp. 1, 2; GCR2P, Atrocity Alert No. 229: Ethiopia, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Global Landmine Report, 18 November 2020, url
145 UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December 2020, url; HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, url
146 UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December
2020, url
147 DW, Ethiopia: 'People in Tigray are terrified', 25 November 2020, url
148 HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, url
149 GC2RP, 2.2 million people displaced by fighting in Tigray since 4 November 2020, 15 March 2021, url; HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, url; AI, Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, url
150 BBC, Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Four aid workers killed, 11 December 2020, url; 2
151 UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December
2020, url
152 HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, url
153 CNN, Massacre in the mountains, 1 March 2021, url; AI, Ethiopia: UN human rights chief underscores urgency of impartial, international investigation into Tigray atrocities, 4 March 2021, url; GC2RP, 2.2 million people displaced by fighting in Tigray since 4 November 2020, 15 March 2021, url;

154 MSN, 'The fighting continues': A Tigray town reels from drawn-out war, 16 March 2021, url; International Crisis Group, Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 11 February 2021, url, p. 8 […][72]

In January 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the situation of civilians in Humera, Dansha and Bissober, based on investigative missions to these parts of Tigray between November 2020 and January 2021. The report found that:

> Humera experienced heavy fighting which lasted for 3 days during the war and heavy artillery was heard. The Commission saw the damages to property and infrastructure in parts of the city, apparently caused by the use of heavy artillery. Although the investigation team received reports of serious damages to the area known as Kebele 2, the team was unable to access the said area to verify the reports. Reports indicate that there was heavy shelling of Kebele 2 (Kudar sefer), near Mariam Church and a Mosque between November 9th and November 11th, 2020. According to these reports, public spaces and residential houses in Kebele 2 bore the brunt of the damage. The Commission's team also visited Humera Hospital which itself sustained serious damage.
> An employee of Humera Hospital informed the investigation team that 92 people, including Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), TPLF forces (Tigray Special Forces) and civilians were killed due to the war. He added that some of them died while receiving treatment at the Hospital. The Commission was not able to verify this information from other sources.
> Numerous people, including Humera Hospital staff, have fled the city of Humera. People who have received treatment at the hospital include civilians injured by shrapnel fragments.
>
> […] Residents of Humera report widespread looting of houses and businesses, by a youth group calling itself "Fano", some members of the Amhara Liyu Hayl (Amhara Special Force) and Amhara Militia, a few members of the Ethiopian Defense Force, and some Eritrean soldiers. Looters have also emptied food and grain storages. In addition, the Commission has received multiple accounts from various sources of insults and harassment targeting ethnic Tigrayans.
> […] The Commission has also received information that although inadequate, some measures are being taken by the Amhara Liyu Hayl and the Militia to restore peace and security in the area, such as putting in place a curfew to address the rise in criminal activities. Curfew for vehicles is 6:00 PM and up to 7:00 pm for pedestrians. But residents report that this has not stopped organized groups of looters from roaming the city at night.
> During the Commission's investigation mission to Humera in mid-November 2020, the team observed that the Amhara Liyu Hayl and Militia were providing security support to the city, and as part of the rebuilding efforts, interim administrations were being set up for each district/neighborhood. During this period, the Commission received multiple reports of harassment of residents of Tigrayan ethnic origin.
> […] During the Commission's second mission to Dansha, in mid-December 2020, the team received reports of civilian casualties and injuries from members of the interim coordination, survivors and witnesses. Residents informed the Commission that civilians were killed and injured in the crossfire between the warring parties. However, at the time of the Commission's visit the identity of the victims, their address, the extent of injuries and related information such as number of injured and gender was still being compiled. The fact that the deceased were buried outside Dansha also added to the delay in the identification process. The latest information obtained by the Commission put the number of civilians killed at 25 but their identity and the place where they were buried remains unverified.
> During its first investigation mission to Dansha in mid-November 2020, the Commission met with ENDF representatives, who confirm that Dansha city went through "a very tense period during the war". The second EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] mission which travelled to the area in mid-December observed that the security situation in the area had improved. ENDF member the team spoke to at the time indicated that "ENDF was working in a lawful and ethical manner to ensure the protection of the

[72] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.3.1 Civilian casualties*

community". While admitting that "there were people who have fled the area fearing for their safety" he explained that "food assistance and other essential provisions to internally displaced persons currently in Dansha is improving".

Although some Dansha residents of Tigray ethnic origin have confirmed that the security situation in the city has improved, they also shared their fear and concern about ethnic- based attacks and "retaliation for what happened Maikadra". They told EHRC that some residents of Dansha have fled to other areas as a result.

According to the interim coordinator of Dansha, "Tigrayans live peacefully in the area, but those residents who felt at risk were provided with transportation to their chosen destinations". Regarding the current situation the coordinator informed the Commission's team, "a platform was set up where residents are encouraged to discuss issues openly in order to facilitate a return to peaceful and respectful co-existence. Nonetheless, we are concerned that TPLF operatives may still attack the woreda to cause discord between residents of Amhara and Tigray ethnic origins."

While it was possible to observe that relative peace had returned to Dansha Woreda, the Commission's team also noted many residents of Tigray ethnic origin still feared ethnic based attacks.

[…] Bissober and Ullaga Villages

[…] In the early hours of November 14, 2020, TPLF forces and Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) began an exchange of fire that lasted three days. Residents also heard heavy artillery. Witnesses describe seeing members of TPLF forces dressed as civilians fighting from inside residential houses. Residents have shown the Commission's team houses damaged by bullet holes.

When the exchange of fire intensified, residents began to flee to the neighboring towns of Buta, Meferta and Yalo leaving all their properties behind. Victims describe seeing, along the way, people injured with bullets wounds and unable to flee.

A total of 31 civilians died during the fighting that lasted for three days. Residents explain that the majority of the victims died of bullet wounds during the exchange of fire, some were killed by soldiers participating in the fighting and by other unknown assailants.

[…] Although Bissober residents say that most of the victims died in cross fires during the fighting, they describe finding one of the victims, Tesfaye Abera's body with a severed head. Those who coordinated his burial confirm that he was beheaded but they could not confirm by whom. One mother has told the investigation team that her husband and her son were killed by members of ENDF after being wrongly accused of "being TPLF informants." The Commission has also talked to a father who says his son, who had a disability, died in the same manner. The investigation team has also received reports from a few residents who say they were beaten, inside their house or while fleeing, by members of ENDF who wrongly accused them of "giving information to TPLF".

Families of victims say that it was only possible to organize burials for the dead five days after the fighting, on November 19, 2020, when the ENDF cleared the area for residents to return. Some of the victims were discovered only then.

[…] In Bissober, the Commission visited and verified that 104 houses were either completely or partially burned or otherwise damaged by the war. The Ullaga primary school, located in Bissober, is partially damaged by what appears to be heavy artillery. The Ullaga health center has sustained heavy damage and is no longer operational as a result.

Several civilian commercial and residential properties have also been looted. One resident says that his full grain storage was completely burned down, and his 15 goats stolen. Residents say they came back to the town to find that it has been looted and suspect people who are not from Bissober are responsible.[73]

Human Rights Watch reported in February 2021 on the shelling of Tigray urban areas in November 2020, and noted that:

[73] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Brief Monitoring Report on the Situation of Civilians in Humera, Dansha and Bissober*, 17 January 2021, *pp. 1-2, 4-7*

> Ethiopian federal forces carried out apparently indiscriminate shelling of urban areas in the Tigray region in November 2020 in violation of the laws of war, Human Rights Watch said today. Artillery attacks at the start of the armed conflict struck homes, hospitals, schools, and markets in the city of Mekelle, and the towns of Humera and Shire, killing at least 83 civilians, including children, and wounding over 300. […]
> Witnesses described to Human Rights Watch a pattern of artillery attacks by Ethiopian federal forces before they captured Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in November. In each of these attacks the Tigrayan special forces appeared to have withdrawn, while in Humera local militias lacked a significant presence to defend the town. Many of the artillery attacks did not appear aimed at specific military targets but struck generalized populated areas. Human Rights Watch found similar patterns in interviews with 13 people from the towns of Rawyan and Axum.
>
> These attacks caused civilian deaths and injuries; damaged homes, businesses, and infrastructure; struck near schools; disrupted medical services; and prompted thousands of civilians to flee.
>
> […] In the western border town of Humera, residents said that on November 9, artillery fired from Eritrea terrified unsuspecting civilians, striking them in their homes and as they fled. The shelling damaged residential areas in the Kebele 02 neighborhood, and struck near a church and a school, near a mosque in Kebele 01, and hit areas near the town's main hospital.
> […] Doctors from the town's main Kahsay Aberra's hospital said they were overwhelmed by the sudden influx of dead bodies and patients with severe injuries. One estimated that the shelling on November 9 killed at least 46 people and wounded over 200.
> In the northwestern town of Shire, shelling began on November 17 and hit buildings in the center of town and an industrial area. Civilians were killed and injured as they fled near the Abuna Aregawi church. Later that day, witnesses saw Ethiopian forces pass through Shire alongside Eritrean forces. Residents from the regional capital, Mekelle, said that heavy shelling on November 28 killed 27 civilians, including children, and wounded over 100. In one attack, shells struck a residential compound near a market, mosque, and an empty school in Ayder sub-city, and killed four members of a single family, including two young children, and wounded five adults and a 9-year-old child.[74]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region reported on the events of November 2020, particularly in relationship to human rights violations by the Eritrean army:

> Tensions between the federal Government of Ethiopia and the regional government of Tigray had been building up for the past years and escalated as regional elections were held in Tigray on 9 September 2020 while the national elections had been postponed due to COVID-19. The appointment of a new chief for the northern command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) was also a point of tension. On 4 November 2020, an armed conflict erupted in Tigray when the ENDF launched a military offensive against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in response to reported attacks against ENDF military bases in Tigray by Tigrayan forces. The ENDF has been allegedly supported by Amhara Regional Forces (ARF) and the Amhara Fano militia in Western Tigray, and by Eritrean Defence Forces especially in Northern and Central Tigray.
> On 4 November 2020, the Federal Council declared a state of emergency for a period of six-months, and on 7 November 2020, Ethiopia's parliament voted to dissolve the Tigray regional government and establish a transitional administration.
> According to reports received, the conflict was characterized by airstrikes and shelling of civilian structures, usually on the outskirts of the towns, resulting in civilian casualties, followed by the occupation of the towns by ENDF and the Eritrean army. The TPLF reportedly systematically withdrew from urban areas as the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces advanced. Heavy fighting was reported in some

[74] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas*, 11 February 2021

locations. Serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) against civilians by all parties to the conflict have been reported, resulting in killing and injury of civilians, the destruction of civilian homes and structures, and mass displacement.

[…] At the end of November 2020, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia declared victory; however, fighting seems to have continued in Tigray.

[…] Between 9 and 11 November 2020, the agricultural town of Humera, located in West Tigray at the border with Eritrea and close to Sudan with an estimated population of about 30,000 or 50,000 people, was reportedly subjected to indiscriminate shelling by Eritrea-based artillery which struck homes and other civilian structures. According to reports, at least 46 people were killed by the shelling and over 200 were wounded, overwhelming Kahsay Aberra's hospital. As shells hit near the hospital, most of the staff left the hospital and transported the patients to another town. The hospital was almost empty and lacked doctors and medical supplies to treat the wounded who continued to arrive. Many people were displaced from Humera.

[…] On 7 and 8 November 2020, ENDF reportedly conducted airstrikes on sites around Adigrat in Eastern Tigray, after which Tigray regional forces left the city. From 19 November 2020, there was reportedly heavy shelling of Adigrat for several days from the direction of the town of Zelambessa/Fatsi at the border with Eritrea, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement. Many people were displaced to the town of Edaga Hamus, in the mountains to the south west of Adigrat, where they were subsequently caught in fighting. On 20 November, Ethiopian and Eritrean troops took control of Adigrat. Eritrean forces reportedly committed extrajudicial executions of civilians and widespread sexual and gender-based violence. Eritrean troops have also reportedly committed widespread looting of the town, and transported the looted goods to Eritrea on stolen trucks.

[…] On 17 November 2020, the town of Shire in north-western Tigray, with a population of about 47,000 people, was reportedly subjected to indiscriminate shelling which impacted populated areas in the centre of the town and an industrial area northwest of Shire, resulting in civilian casualties, including children, and the destruction of civilian structures. Reportedly, Tigrayan forces had already pulled out of the town when the attack started, and ENDF and Eritrean troops took control of the town after the shelling.

[…] Axum is a city of about 67,000 inhabitants located in Central Tigray. Axum is a historical city in Ethiopia and former capital of the Aksumite Empire, and a city with a religious significance. Each year, on 30 November, large celebrations are traditionally held at St Mary Church for the religious festival of St Mary, which used to attract large numbers of pilgrims and tourists. Axum was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980, and used to be a popular touristic destination in Ethiopia. At the time of the attacks in November 2020, Axum reportedly hosted visitors who were present for the religious celebrations, as well as many internally displaced persons who had fled from Western Tigray.

On 19 November 2020, allegedly after TPLF forces had already withdrawn from Axum, the ENDF and Eritrean forces reportedly conducted indiscriminate shelling of the city leading to many civilian casualties, and subsequently took control of the city. Reportedly, Eritrean soldiers carried out house searches, harassing residents and conducting summary executions of those perceived as TPLF fighters or sympathizers, especially young men. There are accounts of numerous bodies with bullet wounds lying on the streets. Reports indicate that Eritrean soldiers shot indiscriminately at civilians and killed patients in Saint Mary's hospital, including civilians and wounded TPLF fighters. ENDF and Eritrean soldiers have reportedly looted and damaged Saint Mary's Hospital and Axum Referral Hospital, including medication, medical equipment, furniture, and the wing of Axum Referral Hospital equipped to treat COVID-19 patients. For the following week, Eritrean soldiers reportedly committed widespread looting of the city, including food and medication.

On the morning of 28 November 2020, a group of TPLF militiamen supported by some local residents reportedly launched an attack on Eritrean troops positioned on Mai Koho Mountain, east of the Axum Tsion St Mary Church, and were defeated.

In response, during the afternoon the Eritrean troops entered the city and reportedly carried out widespread killing of young men and boys in the streets and in house searches. Reports indicate that the victims were unarmed; many were shot from behind while they were running away, and others were lined up and shot from behind. ENDF were reportedly present in Axum but allegedly did not take action to protect civilians.

> On the morning of 29 November 2020, Eritrean troops reportedly shelled the city targeting survivors who had left their houses to collect the numerous bodies across the city. Some of the victims were still alive but could not be taken to hospital as the facilities had been looted and there were no doctors. It is also alleged that Eritrean troops arbitrarily detained a large number of people.
> Reportedly, many of the dead were buried on 30 November as the residents jointly collected the bodies, already in decay, from the streets. While the exact number of civilian casualties is unknown, hundreds of civilians were reportedly killed in Axum. Children as young as 13 were allegedly among the victims.
> […] On 28 November 2020, ENDF have reportedly carried out artillery attacks on Mekelle, the capital of Tigray with a population of about 500,000 people, striking civilian structures such as homes, markets, hospitals and schools, and killing and injuring civilians, including children. Reports indicate that 27 civilians were killed by the shelling and another 100 were injured. TPLF forces had reportedly already withdrawn from Mekelle when the shelling started.
> ENDF and Eritrean troops subsequently entered the town. On the evening of 28 November, Prime Minister Abiy declared that ENDF had taken control of Mekelle.
> There are allegations of summary executions and arbitrary arrests of young men by ENDF in Mekelle. There are also numerous reports of sexual violence by Eritrean troops. Widespread looting has also been reported, including markets, hospitals, laboratories and homes, and the population has been deprived of access to food, medication and other essential items.
> Many people were displaced from Mekelle due to the attacks, including during the days prior to the shelling because of airstrikes in and around the city and statements that ENDF would bomb Mekelle.
> […] On 30 November, in Dengelat, a village five kilometres south of the town of Edaga Hamus, Eritrean soldiers allegedly killed about 80 people, including men, women and children who were attending a celebration at the historic church of Mariam Tagot. Priests and internally displaced persons who had fled the fighting in Adigrat were among the victims.[75]

Susan Stigant, Director of Africa Programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace stated in her testimony before the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations that "The federal government announced on November 28 [2020] that it had completed military operations and would turn its attention to 'rebuilding what has been destroyed, repairing what has been damaged and returning those who have fled.' For its part, the TPLF withdrew from Mekelle and vowed to 'fight…to the last' asserting that 'this is about defending our right to self-determination'".[76]

The International Crisis Group summarised the aftermath of the election leading to the internal armed conflict in November 2020 as follows:

> Tigray's government, claiming that troop movements indicated a federal incursion was imminent, struck first on 3 November 2020 by forcibly taking over federal military bases in Tigray and commandeering the

[75] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *pp. 1-5*

[76] Susan Stigant (U.S. Institute of Peace), *The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia, Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations*, 3 December 2020

> armoured vehicles and artillery pieces there. Addis Ababa immediately sent in the rest of its military, backed by Eritrean forces and Amhara paramilitaries and militias from the region south of Tigray. The coalition made rapid gains. On 28 November, it forced the TPLF government from power – and out of Mekelle – amid a near-total blockade on the region. Saying the war was over, the federal government appointed an interim administration and announced its intention to rebuild Tigray […]
> Having lost control of Mekelle, Tigray's leadership formed strongholds in rural areas instead. As fighting spread, reports of atrocities further inflamed popular sentiment against the intervention. Allegations of Eritrean crimes against civilians proved particularly critical in stiffening Tigrayan resistance.[77]

Covering November 2020, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* documented:

> Following months of tensions between federal and Tigray's govts, PM Abiy 4 Nov [2020] ordered military offensive against Tigray after alleged attack same day by regional forces on federal military in Tigray, which reportedly killed dozens. Federal troops, supported by Amhara regional forces, subsequently launched ground and air operations against Tigray forces; fighting reportedly killed thousands and prompted tens of thousands to flee to neighbouring Sudan. Both sides reportedly committed atrocities including 9-10 Nov [2020] massacre by Tigrayan militia of at least 600 civilians in Mai-Kadra town in West Tigray Zone. Tigray 13 Nov [2020] fired rockets at Bahir Dar and Gondar airports in neighbouring Amhara region; and 14 Nov [2020] and reportedly 27-28 Nov [2020] at Eritrea's capital Asmara, after accusing neighbouring country of supporting federal forces' offensive (see Eritrea). As federal forces advanced on Tigray's capital Mekelle, Abiy 22 Nov [2020] issued 72-hour ultimatum demanding Tigray regional forces lay down arms; 26 Nov [2020] announced he had ordered assault on Mekelle after Tigrayan leadership refused to surrender; 28 Nov [2020] said federal forces had taken control of Mekelle and announced end of military operations in Tigray. Tigray President and ruling party Tigray People's Liberation Front leader Debretsion Gebremichael immediately said its forces would continue "to fight these invaders to the last".[78]

1. Capture of Mekelle

The Brookings Institute reported in November 2020 that: "On Friday, November 20, Tigray also fired rockets at the capital of its neighboring region within Ethiopia, Amhara, raising fears that the conflict could spread to new areas of the country. Meanwhile, the Ethiopian government claimed that its forces were approaching the capital of the Tigray region, Mekelle, after winning a series of battles elsewhere in the region. The Ethiopian government has also continued to bombard Tigray with frequent air strikes occurring in Mekelle, including near a church and university".[79]

On 23 November 2020, the Center for Strategic and International Studies noted in a newsletter that: "Ethiopian federal forces were encircling the Tigray region's capital from around 50 km (30 miles) on Monday, the government said, after giving the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) a 72-hour surrender ultimatum, as Reuters reports".[80]

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[77] International Crisis Group, *As Ethiopian Troops Exit Tigray, Time to Focus on Relief*, 9 July 2021
[78] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, November 2020 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[79] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Fighting in Ethiopia, end of cease-fire in Western Sahara, and debt relief updates*, 21 November 2020
[80] Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Evening: Biden National Security Team, Israeli Saudi Meeting, Althea and More*, 23 November 2020

With regards to bombings, ACLED reported in mid-November 2020 that "Two people were killed during an Ethiopian air strike on the Tigrayan capital of Mekele".[81]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in November 2020 that:

> Despite international calls for a ceasefire, the armed conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region continues into its third week, resulting in over 40,000 people being displaced and hundreds killed. On 22 November Ethiopia's federal armed forces gave the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) 72 hours to surrender the regional capital of Mekelle before military operations against the city begin. They also declared there would be "no mercy" in the impending assault of the city if its half a million residents did not immediately "free themselves" from the TPLF. The TPLF has refused to surrender and has been accused of using the civilian population as human shields. The Ethiopian army's deadline is due to expire today, 25 November.
>
> Both the collective punishment of Mekelle's population and the use of human shields are potential war crimes. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, has warned that, "the highly aggressive rhetoric on both sides regarding the fight for Mekelle is dangerously provocative and risks placing already vulnerable and frightened civilians in grave danger.[82]

The International Crisis Group noted: "Fears arose of a bloodbath in Mekelle after an Ethiopian colonel said citizens would receive "no mercy" if they did not separate from Tigray's leaders. In the event, the regional capital was spared the worst. Tigrayan leaders and fighters retreated from Mekelle, saying they wanted to save civilian lives, so leaving the door open to federal forces. Still, the destruction has been severe across the region. Ethiopia's air force bombed and used drones against military and civilian infrastructure targets in Tigray. Tigrayan officials and civilians accuse Eritrean troops of mass killings, systematic looting and vandalism, claims which aid workers back".[83]

Human Rights Watch reported in February 2021 on the shelling of Tigray urban areas in November 2020, including Mekelle, and noted that:

> Ethiopian federal forces carried out apparently indiscriminate shelling of urban areas in the Tigray region in November 2020 in violation of the laws of war, Human Rights Watch said today. Artillery attacks at the start of the armed conflict struck homes, hospitals, schools, and markets in the city of Mekelle, and the towns of Humera and Shire, killing at least 83 civilians, including children, and wounding over 300. […] On November 22, Ethiopian authorities began broadcasting warnings on social media and state television that the Ethiopian army was in a position to encircle Mekelle, the Tigray capital with a population of 500,000, with tanks. Many Mekelle residents had reportedly fled to rural areas in the weeks before because of airstrikes in and around the city, still many others had remained. On the morning of November 28, Ethiopian federal forces launched a military offensive. TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] leaders and Mekelle residents said that Tigray special forces had already retreated from Mekelle before heavy shelling began.
>
> The shelling killed at least 27 civilians, including four children, and injured over 100, based on accounts from residents and medical workers, as well as media reports. Human Rights Watch directly received 21 images of people killed and injured in Mekelle on November 28, including images showing a man with half his face blown off. Human Rights Watch consulted an independent senior forensic pathologist, who, based on the photos, noted that the shape and size of the injuries were consistent with fragmentation wounds, likely from shelling.

[81] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 15-21 November 2020*, 25 November 2020

[82] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 230: Ethiopia, Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 25 November 2020

[83] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021

> Residents said that shelling began around 8:30 a.m. from the north of the city, occurring at irregular intervals and striking at least two areas, Ayder and Kebele 15.
> […] In Ayder, artillery fired after approximately 9 a.m. struck a residential compound near Hamza mosque, a sheep market, and the Yekatit 23 elementary school, killing four members of a family, including two girls ages 4 and 13, and wounding five residents.
> A 56-year-old man was at home with his family when mortar rounds landed in his compound injuring him, his wife, and his 9-year-old child. Three neighbors were seriously wounded by fragments. The bones in one woman's foot were shattered. The other two had serious hand injuries. All spent weeks in the hospital.
> Two residents said they did not see any Tigray special forces or militia members in the area or in the empty school compound at the time of the attack.
> Human Rights Watch was able to confirm the damage and the exact location of the residential compound in Ayder that was hit based on photographs and a video, as well as satellite images captured shortly before and after the incident. Analysis of satellite images recorded at 11 a.m. on November 29 revealed at least two impacts that damaged residential structures, including at least two homes. A video posted on YouTube on November 28 similarly shows damage to a small, single-story dwelling and to the walls of the Yekatit 23 school next to it.
> The irregularity of the fragmentation patterns on buildings and the blast damage in the residential area in Ayder, as seen on the photographs and footage, indicates the use of large-caliber artillery projectiles, Human Rights Watch said.
> Other projectiles fired that day struck near Ayder Referral hospital and nearby physicians' residences, killing a woman and a child.
> […] Staff from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited Ayder hospital on November 28 and reported that 80 percent of the patients at the time appeared to suffer from trauma-related injuries. For weeks, the hospital had been receiving people injured in fighting from areas surrounding Mekelle and was running low on medical supplies when more arrived on November 28.
> On the evening of November 28, Prime Minister Abiy declared that Ethiopian federal forces had control of Mekelle. In a November 30 address before members of parliament, he said that Ethiopian federal forces had not "killed a single person" in the military offensive on Mekelle.[84]

On 28th November 2020 Al Jazeera reported:

> Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has announced the end of military operations in the northern Tigray region after the army said it was in "full control" of the regional capital, Mekelle.
> Since November 4 [2020], the Ethiopian government has been trying to quell a rebellion by a powerful ethnic faction, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), in a war that has shaken the Horn of Africa. Thousands of people are believed to have died and nearly one million forced from their homes, including some 43,000 refugees who fled to neighbouring Sudan.[85]

In December 2020 Michael Horton, fellow for Arabian Affairs at the Jamestown Foundation, noted: "The fight for Mekelle, a city of over a half a million, was quickly concluded as TPLF troops carried out a strategic withdrawal from the city. The TPLF, which commands at least 100,000 fighters and possesses an abundance of heavy weaponry, could have fought to retain control of what has long been their seat of power. Instead, they chose to retreat to the surrounding mountains".[86]

[84] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas*, 11 February 2021
[85] Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia PM says Tigray operation over after army seizes Mekelle*, 28 November 2020
[86] Michael Horton (The Jamestown Foundation, Hot Issues), *Hot Issue – Is the War in Ethiopia's Tigray Region Ending or Only Just Beginning?*, 10 December 2020

In her December 2020 statement, Lauren Ploch Blanchard, Specialist in African Affairs of the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) provided the following brief overview:

> On November 22 [2020], Prime Minister Abiy issued a 72-hour deadline for the TPLF to surrender before a "final phase" of operations, aimed at removing the TPLF from Tigray's capital city, Mekele, which is home to approximately 500,000 people. […]
> U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet expressed alarm at the military build-up around the city, calling "the highly aggressive rhetoric on both sides" over a prospective fight for Mekele "dangerously provocative" and noting concern that it would lead to "further violations of international humanitarian law." She and other human rights experts warned that shelling the city would be a war crime, and could be considered a form of collective punishment. The TPLF declared that its people were "ready to die in defense of our right to administer our region" and pledged to "arm each and every civilian to defend Mekele."
> Within hours of the military launching its offensive on Mekele on November 28, Prime Minister Abiy declared military operations in Tigray complete, saying that federal forces had taken full control of Mekele and that police would henceforth pursue the TPLF leadership. Abiy suggested that the government would now install a provisional regional government and focus on rebuilding the region and providing humanitarian aid. With access to the city and the wider region still restricted, however, the situation there remains unclear, and reports suggest that fighting continues outside the city and in various parts of Tigray. The International Committee for the Red Cross reports that Mekele's hospitals have faced an influx of trauma patients […]
> While Abiy has declared victory, the TPLF says the war is not over, calling the federal and Amhara regional forces "invaders." Since withdrawing from Mekele, the TPLF has fired more rockets at Eritrea; it also claims to have shot down an Ethiopian fighter jet and detained some Eritrean soldiers. U.N. officials describe the conflict as ongoing, and have raised alarm with the reported abduction of Eritrean refugees in Tigray by Eritrean forces, calling on Abiy to address the issue "as a matter of urgency.".[87]

According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) "The federal government claimed victory after taking Tigray's capital, Mekele, in late November [2020] and publicly declared an end to military operations, installing an interim regional administration in Mekele. The conflict continued, however, and security conditions deteriorated in Tigray as the warring parties vied for control of territory".[88]

The International Crisis Group noted in February 2021: "The federal military intervention removed the TPLF administration from the seat of power in the space of a month, with Addis Ababa establishing a provisional replacement in Mekelle from whence the TPLF leadership fled. It has come at great cost, however, and most wanted Tigrayan leaders are still at large despite some of them being killed (including a former foreign minister) and arrested in recent weeks.".[89]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that:

> On 28 November 2020, ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] have reportedly carried out artillery attacks on Mekelle, the capital of Tigray with a population of about 500,000 people, striking civilian structures such as homes, markets, hospitals and schools, and killing and injuring civilians, including

[87] Lauren Ploch Blanchard (U.S. Congressional Research Service), *Statement of Lauren Ploch Blanchard, Specialist in African Affairs Before Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearing on "The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia"*, 1 December 2020, *p. 8/9*
[88] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 10*
[89] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021

children. Reports indicate that 27 civilians were killed by the shelling and another 100 were injured. TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] forces had reportedly already withdrawn from Mekelle when the shelling started.

ENDF and Eritrean troops subsequently entered the town. On the evening of 28 November, Prime Minister Abiy declared that ENDF had taken control of Mekelle.

There are allegations of summary executions and arbitrary arrests of young men by ENDF in Mekelle. There are also numerous reports of sexual violence by Eritrean troops. Widespread looting has also been reported, including markets, hospitals, laboratories and homes, and the population has been deprived of access to food, medication and other essential items.

Many people were displaced from Mekelle due to the attacks, including during the days prior to the shelling because of airstrikes in and around the city and statements that ENDF would bomb Mekelle.[90]

ii. December 2020 – May 2021

The International Crisis Group summarised the security situation and military capabilities of both sides as follows during the time period December 2020 to June 2021:

> Buoyed by a swell of popular support, the TDF mounted a highly effective insurgency. The drawdown of a federal drone campaign, which in November and December [2020] destroyed much of the military hardware Tigrayans had seized at the war's outset, helped its efforts, as did ambushes on Ethiopian and Eritrean army convoys. Although they had no apparent external supply line, Tigray's resistance leaders say they were able to capture weaponry and equipment from federal and Eritrean troops, which allowed them to gradually build up the defence forces' capability and launch a major counteroffensive. By June's [2021] end, the TDF had taken back control of much of central Tigray, including areas around Mekelle, spurring the federal evacuation. With federal forces on the back foot, thousands of Eritrean troops retreated northward to take up positions along Eritrea's contested border with Ethiopia (roughly half of which is Tigray's northern boundary).[91]

The Brookings Institute reported on 5 December 2020 that: "Last Saturday, Ethiopia's military declared the end of its four-week offensive after indicating that it had gained "full control" of Mekele, the capital of the rebelling Tigray region. Despite the declaration, there are signs that the conflict is not over: In fact, Saturday night, explosions in Ethiopia could be heard across the border in the Eritrean capital of Asmara. There also have been reports of continued fighting in areas outside of Mekele. Despite signs of the conflict continuing, Zadig Abraha, Ethiopia's minister in charge of democratization, sought to dispel such reports, saying, "There is no war"".[92]

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[90] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *p. 5*

[91] International Crisis Group, *As Ethiopian Troops Exit Tigray, Time to Focus on Relief*, 9 July 2021

[92] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: COVID-19 vaccine, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso updates*, 5 December 2020

The Council on Foreign Relations wrote on 30 December 2020 that "despite the federal government's assertion that the military operation ended in late November, some fighting clearly continues".[93]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in January 2021 that: "Despite claims by Ethiopia's federal government that fighting in the Tigray region officially ended on 28 November, recent UN reports and satellite images reveal that the destruction of infrastructure and widespread civilian displacement continues. Violence also continues around the cities of Mekelle, Shiraro and Shire, and in rural areas, constraining the delivery of life-saving aid to vulnerable civilians".[94]

ACLED similarly provided the following summary:

> On 4 November 2020, regional militias loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) — acting as the administration of the Tigray Region — attacked the Ethiopian National Defence Force's (ENDF) Northern Command, sparking a war between the TPLF led by Tigray Regional-President Debretsion Gebremichael and the federal government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. […]
> Four weeks of intense fighting resulted in what appeared to be a decisive victory for the federal government, and troops claim to be squarely in control of all major cities in the region. Debretsion's whereabouts are not currently known, and a number of high-level TPLF officials have been killed or captured (Reuters, 14 January 2021). Although the conflict with the TPLF was declared officially over, clashes between TPLF forces and local militias, on one side, and ENDF and Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), on the other, continued throughout December, January and February. The humanitarian situation remained dire, and little access was granted to the region until March. In March and into April, dangerous conflict dynamics have evolved with the involvement of ethnically exclusive militias from the Amhara region as well as Eritrean troops.[95]

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that:

> The Interim Administration also says that the presence of Eritrean soldiers in the North-western and Eastern Tigray, and the fact that the former Western and Southern Zones of Tigray are now under the Amhara Region's administration, adds to the challenge of fully re-establishing the regional governmental structure.
> The Commission has noted that the uncertainty regarding the legal status and administrative authority in these zones has increased the residents' sense of insecurity and risk of being exposed to further conflict and injury. In Alamata, Southern Zone, for example, residents and other sources indicate that "issues of ethnic identity" remain a cause of political tension in the area.
> Following the dismantlement of the previous regional administration, all the prisoners in all the 10 prisons of the region were dispersed and prisoner documentations have been destroyed. The Interim Administration explains that this has made the task of tracking major offenders nearly impossible and that it is one of the causes for the substantial increase of looting, gender-based violence and other major crimes.
> The efforts to return and to fully equip the former local police force members to their function is only making very limited progress. The resources availed in terms of federal security forces do not match the

[93] Council on Foreign Relations, *Amid Misinformation and Suppressed Free Speech, Ethiopian Conflict Erodes Abiy's Credibility*, 30 December 2021
[94] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 235: Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Cameroon*, 13 January 2021
[95] ACLED, *Tigray Conflict*, Undated

> security protection needs of the region. This has significantly challenged the task of law enforcement and ensuring security.[96]

In April 2021 the International Crisis Group reported: "The war in Tigray has become a grinding stalemate. Neither side appears poised to achieve a definitive victory, despite the federal government's success in pushing Tigray's leadership out of Mekelle. The presence of Eritrean and Amhara forces fighting alongside federal soldiers has galvanised Tigrayan resistance to the intervention. On 26 March [2021], Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced that Eritrean troops would withdraw "effective immediately". These were welcome words, though it remains to be seen whether the soldiers will in fact depart. Nor is it clear that Eritrean forces can withdraw without giving a boost to the Tigrayan forces Addis Ababa is set on defeating".[97]

The same source further highlighted:

> Broadly speaking, Tigray's territory is now a battleground for four different forces fighting on two sides. The Tigray Defence Forces are on one side. They hold territory in rural parts of Central Tigray Zone, as well as some areas of Eastern, South-eastern and Southern Tigray Zones. Those forces are pitted against the Ethiopian military, which occupies towns and cities; Amhara regional forces, both regular and irregular, which patrol most of western Tigray and parts of southern Tigray; and the Eritrean army, which is present mostly in the northern sections of North-western, Central and Eastern Tigray Zones. In early 2021, the Eritreans have also fought further south, according to, among others, the UN.[98]

Specifically the same source reported on the following areas of combat:

> Most of the combat over the past few months has occurred in central Tigray, where Tigrayan leaders fled from Mekelle, and increasingly in the two southern zones. For example, battles erupted in Samre district in South-eastern Zone on 14 February [2021], and again in March [2021], as well as further south in several locations (Tigrayan claims of the latter received rare corroboration from non-Tigrayan media on 14 March). From 9 to 12 February [2021], a major clash broke out between Tigrayan and Eritrean forces to the north in the Werie Leke district of Central Tigray Zone. February fighting between, on one side, Tigrayan forces and, on the other, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces also clustered around Abiy Adiy town, whose roads the UN says are inaccessible due to insecurity. More recently, the Ofla and Endamehoni districts in southern Tigray experienced heavy fighting, with Tigray forces' victory claims over Ethiopian and Eritrean troops contradicted by media that support the federal intervention. Tigrayan forces also staged a deadly attack inside Amhara region on 18 March [2021].[99]

ACLED reported in its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering April 2021 that:

> In Tigray, violence levels have generally decreased throughout April [2021]. ACLED records more than 50 fatalities in Central and North Western Tigray. These numbers are likely a low estimate as access to the region – especially rural areas – remains poor. However, the clear decline in hostilities is a result of strategy shifts by the Tigray Defense Force (TDF), who have stopped attempting to hold territory and have instead begun engaging in hit-and-run attacks.
> Nevertheless, civilians are still routinely falling victim to violent attacks by TDF, Eritrean troops, and Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) affiliated forces likewise

[96] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *p. 2*
[97] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021
[98] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021
[99] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021

> killed civilians in April and burned ambulances, as well as private and government vehicles. On 8 April 2021, TPLF associated forces reportedly ambushed a convoy traveling between Adwa and Tembien towns (Central Zone), killing an unspecified number of civilians (EBC, 8 April 2021). Reports indicate that at least 33 civilians were killed by ENDF soldiers in Selekleka town, North Tigray. On 12 April 2021, Eritrean forces opened fire and killed at least nine civilians and wounded more than 12 in Adwa town until the Ethiopian National Defense Forces intervened and stopped the Eritrean forces (Reuters, 14 April 2021). Even though both Ethiopia and Eritrea have agreed to the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from the Tigray region, Eritrean forces were still active in the Tigray region at the end of April [2021].[100]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported on 26 May 2021 that:

> Reports emerged earlier this week of the probable use of white phosphorus against civilians in Ethiopia. A video, reportedly smuggled out of the Tigray region and seen by the British newspaper, The Telegraph, shows victims – including a 13-year-old girl – covered in horrific burns as a result of attacks in Eastern and Central Tigray on 9 and 20 April.
> […] Survivors of the attacks in Tigray testified that there had been no fighting in the vicinity of their homes prior to the use of incendiary weapons.[101]

With regards to the use of cluster munition, the Cluster Munition Coalition reported in its 2021 Monitor report that:

> There have been indications that cluster munitions may have been used in the Tigray region of Ethiopia during the reporting period. However, the evidence is insufficient to conclusively determine whether cluster munitions were used and to determine who was responsible.
> Media reports, and accounts and images shared on social media, indicate that air-dropped cluster bombs may have been used in attacks on Samre and Gijet, southwest of the city of Mekelle, on 20–25 February 2021; and on Menji and Guyya, near the town of Abi-Adi Tembien, on 13 June 2021.[35] The cluster munitions reportedly used include RBK-250 PTAB2.5M and RBK-250-275 AO-1SCh bombs.[36]
> The Ethiopian Air Force and Eritrean Air Force both possess aircraft capable of delivering Soviet or Russian-made RBK-series cluster bombs. Eritrean and Ethiopian forces have both used cluster munitions in the past, including during their 1998–2000 war. As of 31 July 2021, neither country has responded to Monitor requests to confirm or deny their possible use of cluster munitions during the outbreak of hostilities in Tigray in 2020–2021.[37]
>
> 35 For an example of the claims, see, Hiwot, Kindeya G. (ProfKindeya), '' These are the bombs that jets of Abiy Ahmed @AbiyAhmedAli are dropping in #Tigray against civilians everytime his forces lose battles. Some of these images seem to suggest the probable use of gas cannisters than ordinary bombs. #tigraygenocide #Tigraywillprevail @antonioguterres.'' 21 June 2021, 06:32 UTC. Tweet, bit.ly/ProfKindeyaTweet21June2021; and Martin Plaut, "Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 168 – 14 June 2021," 14 June 2021, bit.ly/MartinPlautSituationReport168.
> 36 RBK-250 ZAB-2.5 incendiary weapons may have also been used and delivered submunitions containing an incendiary payload similar in effect to white phosphorus.
> 37 Letter from Mary Wareham, HRW, to H.E. Demeke Mekonnen, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, 21 June 2021; and letter from Mary Wareham, HRW, to H.E. Osman Saleh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea, 21 June 2021.[102]

[100] ACLED, *EPO Monthly: April 2021*, 13 May 2021
[101] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 254: Myanmar (Burma), Ethiopia and South Sudan*, 26 May 2021
[102] Cluster Munition Coalition, *Cluster Munition Monitor 2021*, September 2021, *Allegations of use, Ethiopia, p. 15*

Covering June 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "army airstrike 22 June [2021] reportedly killed dozens of civilians in Togoga village, drawing widespread condemnation; military 24 June [2021] said attack only struck Tigrayan forces".[103]

iii. June 2021 – Present

ACLED reported in its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering June-July 2021 that "TPLF insurgents swept across the Tigray region in June, fighting battles with Eritrean and Ethiopian forces, and taking control of territory, including the capital of Tigray, Mekele. Ethiopian government troops subsequently withdrew from areas of eastern and southern Tigray during the last days of June".[104]

The U.S. Department of State reported in June 2021 that it was "gravely concerned by reports that dozens of civilians were killed or injured during a bombing of a village market in northern Tigray" and that "There are also credible reports that security forces denied medical personnel access to the victims of this terrible attack".[105]

In July 2021 William Davison, Senior Analysis at International Crisis Group, noted:

> Authorities in Addis Ababa announced a "unilateral ceasefire" following the federal withdrawal from Tigray, which came after the region's fighters had dealt the Ethiopian armed forces a series of devastating blows in June [2021]. Addis Ababa said it had taken this step to address a humanitarian crisis in which at least 400,000 Tigrayans are experiencing famine conditions. Tigray's leaders rejected the ceasefire. Their key objection was the continued Amhara presence in western and southern Tigray and the federal blockade on the region, which Crisis Group detailed on 9 July [2021].[106]

Following the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Ethiopian Government in June 2021, the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) stated:

> The government's declaration of a ceasefire did not end the war. Tigrayan leaders dismissed it as cover for military losses rather than a humanitarian gesture, and they denounced the continued presence of forces from Amhara in western Tigray—which the Amhara government has sought to claim as its territory (discussed below)—and pledged to "liberate" the area. […]
> Eritrean forces, meanwhile, reportedly withdrew from much of Tigray but remained in border areas. By August [2021] the United States reported that "large numbers" had re-entered Ethiopia.[107]

On 16 July 2021, an information alert on Ethiopia by Insecurity Insight reported that:

> The Ethiopian government declared the launch of a new offensive against the TDF [Tigray Defense Forces] on 14 July in response to their advances and accused aid organisations of "arming" opposition forces
> The cease fire is now in name only by both sides – though international pressure to try and ensure it holds until its planned demise in September will continue. It is however looking increasingly fragile – with conflict likely to increase within the next month.

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[103] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, August 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[104] ACLED, *EPO Monthly: June-July 2021*, 20 August 2021
[105] U.S. Department of State, *Air Strike on Village Market in Tigray*, 23 June 2021
[106] William Davison (International Crisis Group), *The Dangerous Expansion of Ethiopia's Tigray War*, 30 July 2021
[107] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 11*

> […] On 14 July, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and General Bacha Debele of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (EDF) cautioned the Tigrayan Defence Force (TDF) that they were ready to launch a new offensive against it following the TDF's claim that they had taken control of Alamata, and were now approaching Mai-Tsebri, north of Adi Arkay.[108]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in July 2021 that: "Amhara forces have promised to defend the long-disputed districts of Welkait, Tegede, Humera, Telemte and Raya in Western Tigray from Tigrayan forces who are trying to militarily retake the areas".[109]

An article published by the Africa Report in July 2021 noted that:

> The recapture of Mekele, the capital of Tigray region, by rebels of the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) on 28 June, shows that the conflict in Ethiopia's northern region is far from over.
> On 17 July, Tigrayan rebels continued their offensive in Afar Region, in the eastern part of the country.
> […] On 16 July, three regions announced that they were dispatching 'special forces' to support the federal army in Tigray: 1) Oromia, Ethiopia's largest region, 2) Sidama and 3) the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR). They will be supporting the Amhara forces who have been in Tigray since the hostilities began.[110]

In August 2021 ACLED reported, based on a number of sources, that "The extent of damage inflicted on the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies in Tigray is difficult to estimate, as troops were evacuated quickly in the face of the TPLF advance into Mekele in the last days of June [2021]. By the government's admission, however, conditions in Tigray had become "unbearable" for Ethiopian soldiers prior to withdrawal (New York Times, 30 June 2021). As many as 7,000 troops of the Ethiopian military were reported by international journalists to have been taken captive (New York Times, 2 July 2021), though government sources have insisted that the number of ENDF members held by the TPLF is exaggerated (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, 3 July 2021). If it is the case that federal forces have been incapacitated or the ranks cannot be filled, military power will devolve to ethnically exclusive forces loyal to the regional governments, like the Amhara special forces controlling Western Tigray zone. There is some evidence that this has already occurred, given the prominent role Afar and Amhara militias have played in holding off TPLF advances in July 2021".[111]

The Political geography Now (PolGeoNow) also produced a territorial control map illustrating the 'Map of Control in Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict' in August 2021, which can be found here.[112] The same source also included a timeline of "major events reported by news media and humanitarian organizations since our previous Tigray map feature of February 3, 2021. The timeline has been compiled by PolGeoNow's in-house conflict tracker, Djordje Djukic, and does not necessarily represent the judgments of Daniel from Passport Party. Sources are indicated by in-line links within the text", which can also be found here.[113]

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[108] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia: Vigil Insight Information Alert Report 4*, 16 July 2021, *pp. 1-2*

[109] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 262: Ethiopia, Myanmar (Burma) and Afghanistan*, 21 July 2021

[110] The Africa Report, *Ethiopia/Tigray: 'UN and AU silence reveals a widespread embarrassment'*, 22 July 2021

[111] ACLED, *Mid-Year Update: 10 conflicts to worry about in 2021*, 5 August 2021

[112] See Political Geography Now, *Guest Featured map of Control in Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict (August 2021)*, 10 August 2021

[113] See Political Geography Now, *Guest Featured map of Control in Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict (August 2021)*, 10 August 2021

The Council on Foreign Relations reported in August 2021 that: "Nine months after fighting erupted in the northern region of Tigray, Ethiopia is going from bad to worse. The conflict has expanded geographically to Afar and Amhara, regions outside of Tigray's borders, drawing in new combatants as the federal government mobilizes ethnic militia forces from around the country and calls upon "all capable Ethiopians of age" to take up arms and fight".[114]

International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch Digest* of September 2021 noted that in August 2021 "The war in Ethiopia's northernmost region, Tigray, continued as Tigray forces maintained offensive positions across the country's north, particularly in Amhara region. In parallel, the federal government intensified its war rhetoric and mobilised reinforcements".[115]

In its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the month of September 2021, ACLED reported:

> During the first half of September [2021], over 40 armed clashes with nearly 400 reported fatalities were recorded between TPLF and government forces across Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions. The highest number of fatalities were recorded in the North Gondar zone when TPLF forces battled Amhara militia in Chenna for five days, leading to the reported deaths of at least 120 people in early September (Reuters, 9 September 2021). In contrast, in the last half of September, only two armed clashes were recorded (see map below). Despite the decline in the number of armed clashes, there are signs indicating both the TPLF and government forces are reorganizing to continue fighting in areas currently controlled by TPLF forces.[116]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Ethiopian Government on 28 June 2021 did not stop the fighting, with the parties to the conflict launching new offensives; whereas the conflict is now spreading to the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara and there is a risk that the impact will spread to the whole Horn of Africa".[117]

In mid-October 2021 Reuters reported that "An air and ground offensive by Ethiopian troops and their allies against rebellious forces from the northern Tigray region is intensifying, a spokesperson for the Tigrayan forces said […] claiming 'staggering' casualties".[118]

Similarly, ACLED reported in its weekly EPO covering the week 16-22 October 2021 that "Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) airstrikes resumed in the Tigray region. From 18 October 2021 to 22 October 2021, the ENDF conducted five airstrikes in the Tigray region. The airstrikes mark the first round of such attacks by the government since it announced a unilateral ceasefire in June 2021".[119]

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[114] Council on Foreign Relations, *Ethiopia Plunges Deeper Into Conflict*, 12 August 2021
[115] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest September 2021: Ethiopia*, 14 October 2021
[116] ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) Monthly: September 2021*, 13 October 2021
[117] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, A*
[118] Reuters, *Ethiopian attack in two northern regions intensifies, Tigrayan forces say*, 13 October 2021
[119] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 16-22 October 2021*, 27 October 2021

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[120] They found that:

- The TDF has recaptured and reclaimed a lot of territory (in blue), after launching a major offensive in the second half of June ('Operation Alula'). It is again in control of major towns such as the regional capital Mekelle, Shire, Axum, Adigrat, Adwa… and of the rural areas in between. It also controls major access roads and the Tekeze Hydropower Dam.
  • The ENDF has largely retreated its troops and remains present only in Western Tigray, alongside the Amhara militia, who have informally annexed that part of the Tigray region (in light yellow).
  • The area under control by the EDF (in dark brown) has strongly declined and is now restricted to areas along the Ethiopian-Eritrean border. In addition to this, there is a heavy presence of Eritrean soldiers along the Ethio-Sudanese border and the Tekeze river in Tigray, which would prevent a humanitarian corridor from establishing.
  • Few buffer zones remain (in grey), where the ENDF and its allies nor the TDF are permanently present, but where skirmishes and battles between opposing parties occur, particularly in the North Wollo Zone of Amhara region. Through September 2021, TDF has retreated from most of Afar region The conflict incidents are strongly linked to the expansion of the territorial control of the TDF, as a lot of incidents are reported in the Amhara region close to and within the territory now controlled by the TDF. Other incidents have been reported near the border with the Afar region

  [To understand the above colour coding please consult Map 10: Reported conflict incidents from November 2020 to September 2021 on p. 30 and Map 11: Territorial control on 31st August 2021 of the report].[121]

1. Recapture of Mekelle by TPLF/TDF

The Africa Report published an article on 28 June 2021 on the recapture of Mekelle by Tigray rebels, stating that:

> Tigray rebels enter regional capital as officials flee: witnesses tell AFP and Bloomberg. Abiy's officials have asked for a ceasefire, local media report.
> In a major setback to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, rebel forces have entered the regional capital of Mekelle. In so doing, they may have forced Abiy into a ceasefire, according to reports in state media.
> Celebratory gunfire has been heard in the city, which for months now has borne the brunt of the power struggle between Abiy's government in Addis Ababa, and the dissident members of Ethiopia's former ruling party, who lost power when Abiy acceded to the Premiership.
> Swedish researcher Kjetil Tronvoll in touch with forces loyal to the former government of Tigray claims that the Ethiopian army earlier withdrew from the city, and that the Tigray Defence Forces have been ordered to enter Mekelle "as of this evening to restore calm and stop alleged looting".
> With Ethiopian election results still being counted, it is a blow to the authority of Abiy's regime, and may increase the pressure for peace talks to be opened, say analysts.

[120] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography

[121] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 29/30

> The BBC report that the interim government in Tigray has declared a unilateral ceasefire in Tigray. Members of the interim government appointed by Addis to run Tigray have fled Mekelle after TDF [Tigray Defense Forces] took over the city.
> According to the Addis Standard, '"State media reported that the "request" by the federal government appointed Tigray Interim Administration for a ceasefire in the war torn-Tigray state "has been positively accepted by the federal government."[122]

In June 2021, Insight Insecurity noted in an information report on Ethiopia that:

> The opposition Tigray Defence Forces (TDF - an amalgamation of the Tigray People's Liberation Front and other militia groups) captured the capital of Mekelle from federal forces on 28 June following a series of earlier advances that began during the 21 June national elections. These gains included several towns on the road between Axum and Adigrat as well as Wukro, Hawzen and Agula on the main road leading north of Mekelle.
> The initial federal government response included a 22 June airstrike targeting a market in Togoga town, some 25km from Mekelle in which the US State Department "noted dozens of civilians were killed or injured". The government dismissed the initial gains as "fabrications" and they claimed that the market bombing targeted TDF fighters. The government responded to the fall of Mekelle by offering a unilateral ceasefire on the evening of 28 June, claiming that it was offered to allow farmers to complete the growing season (which ends in late September/early October).[123]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in June 2021 that: "After almost eight months of armed conflict and atrocities in the northern Tigray region, the Ethiopian government announced a unilateral ceasefire on 28 June and plans to allow wider delivery of humanitarian aid. The announcement was made after a week-long intensification of fighting and major territorial gains by the opposition Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). On Monday, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) hastily retreated from the regional capital of Mekelle, as TDF forces marched into the city. Eritrean forces, who are allied with the ENDF and have also been occupying parts of Tigray, also appear to be retreating and have left the towns of Shire, Aksum and Adwa".[124]

The International Crisis Group described the departure of government troops from Mekelle at the end of June 2021 as follows:

> The devastating civil war in Ethiopia's Tigray region took a stunning turn on 28 June. Eight months after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a federal military intervention to remove Tigray's governing party from power and quash Tigrayan loyalist forces, federal troops had to abandon almost all the territory they had taken. Thousands of soldiers departed Mekelle, Tigray's regional capital, along with the administrators Addis Ababa had appointed to replace the ousted Tigrayan leadership. The withdrawal marked a major victory for the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) in their insurgency against federal troops and allied Eritrean and Amhara regional forces.[125]

The same source highlighted further:

> An Ethiopian official told Crisis Group in the days after withdrawal that Addis Ababa wants to seal off Tigray from anything other than humanitarian aid in order to thwart the regional leadership's ambitions.

[122] The Africa Report, *Ethiopia: Tigray rebels enter regional capital of Mekelle, ceasefire requested*, 28 June 2021
[123] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia: Vigil Insight Situation Report*, 29 June 2021, *p. 2*
[124] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 259: Ethiopia, Myanmar (Burma) and Burkina Faso*, 30 June 2021
[125] International Crisis Group, *As Ethiopian Troops Exit Tigray, Time to Focus on Relief*, 9 July 2021

> Retreating federal soldiers looted UN satellite internet equipment and reportedly emptied banks before fleeing Mekelle.
> Addis Ababa has closed Tigray's airspace and Ethiopian soldiers and Amhara forces have been blocking World Food Programme trucks from reaching Mekelle. Federal authorities have shown no inclination to fully restore the region's power supply or telecommunications. On 1 July, a bridge over the Tekeze river collapsed, severing a key route into central Tigray. Diplomats and UN officials say Amhara and federal forces likely sabotaged the bridge, while the government blames the TPLF. The cumulative effect is one of debilitating isolation.[126]

In its June 2021 *CrisisWatch*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "Following large-scale counteroffensive against federal govt forces in Tigray regional state (north), Tigrayan forces 28 June [2021] reportedly entered regional capital Mekelle, allegedly prompting federal govt to declare "unilateral ceasefire" same day; federal govt said it had withdrawn its forces for humanitarian reasons. Tigrayan forces 29 June [2021] dismissed ceasefire as "joke", vowed to "intensify struggle" until "enemies completely leave Tigray"; by month's end, Tigrayan forces reportedly controlled most of region".[127]

2. Federal/Regional Government response/Recruitment Drive

In July 2021 William Davison, Senior Analysis at International Crisis Group, explained:

> Ethiopia's grinding nine-month war has entered a dangerous new phase. In late July [2021], the federal government and allied regional leaders intensified attempts to mobilise people from across the country to join the war against forces from the country's northernmost region, Tigray. Those forces, having broken the back of a combined Ethiopian-Eritrean intervention in Tigray after compelling most federal troops to withdraw on 28 June [2021], have made incursions into the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions. In response, authorities in Addis Ababa enlisted paramilitaries from some of Ethiopia's nine other regions to buttress the flagging federal military. They then launched a mass recruitment drive, including in the capital and in the two most populous regions, Oromia and Amhara.[128]

The Council on Foreign Relations reported in August 2021 that: "Nine months after fighting erupted in the northern region of Tigray, Ethiopia is going from bad to worse. The conflict has expanded geographically to Afar and Amhara, regions outside of Tigray's borders, drawing in new combatants as the federal government mobilizes ethnic militia forces from around the country and calls upon "all capable Ethiopians of age" to take up arms and fight".[129]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that following "The self-declared Tigrayan Defense Forces (TDF) have since launched incursions into Amhara and Afar regions in what they
describe as an effort to break a government-imposed blockade on their region and press the government into negotiations", the federal and regional authorities have in the meantime "launched a mass recruitment drive and deployed paramilitary units from other regional states to the front lines, and

[126] International Crisis Group, *As Ethiopian Troops Exit Tigray, Time to Focus on Relief*, 9 July 2021
[127] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, June 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[128] William Davison (International Crisis Group), *The Dangerous Expansion of Ethiopia's Tigray War*, 30 July 2021
[129] Council on Foreign Relations, *Ethiopia Plunges Deeper Into Conflict*, 12 August 2021

Eritrea has deployed more troops into northern Ethiopia. A new defense agreement with Turkey, and reported acquisitions from Iran, may provide Ethiopia's military with additional capabilities".[130]

The same source further noted that "In August [2021], Abiy called for all eligible civilians to join the armed
forces to fight the Tigrayan forces, who announced a nascent alliance with another rebel group".[131]

Covering August 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "Federal govt 6 Aug [2021] threatened to "deploy the entire defensive capability of the state" if offensives continued, 10 Aug [2021] urged "all capable" citizens to join military effort".[132]

Covering September 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "Mobilisation continued, with military graduating tens of thousands of new recruits in Sept. [2021]".[133]

c. Eritrean Army Involvement

According to ACLED, in an undated *Actor Profiles* webpage as part of its Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO):

> The Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) is the national military of Eritrea. It comprises the ground force, the air force, and the navy. It is estimated that EDF has around 200,000 active personnel and 500,000 reserve personnel (Global Fire Power, 3 March 2021). EDF is active in the Tigray region and frequently clashes with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and its affiliated militia group, the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). EDF also attacks civilians in different parts of the Tigray region. It sometimes clashes with the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) (Reuters, 14 April 2021).[134]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary of the Eritrean army's involvement:

> Throughout the conflict, the ENDF has been backed by Amhara region's official forces and paramilitaries, namely the Fano militia[102], as well as by the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), although Eritrea has denied allegations of involvement.[103] Although Abiy denied any civilian casualties caused by the ENDF[104], Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported indiscriminate shelling by the Ethiopian federal forces on urban areas such as Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in the Tigray region in November 2020[105], and several sources reported that the Ethiopian and Eritrean military forces killed several hundreds of civilian in Axum on 19 November 2020.[106] […]
>
> Since the beginning of the conflict in November 2020, the Amhara region joined the federal army against the TPLF in the south and south-western Tigray.[118] Witnesses of the attack in the town of Maikadra blamed the Amhara 'special forces' for the attacks to civilians and the looting of houses and hospitals.[119]

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[130] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*
[131] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 6*
[132] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, August 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[133] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, September 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[134] ACLED, *Actor Profiles*, Undated

> Amhara administrators and security forces have been utilised as interim directors in areas of Western Tigray.[120] […]
>
> 102 HRW, Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 23 December 2020, url; Theafricareport, The war in Tigray: Abiy, Isaias, and the Amhara elite, 29 January 2021, url
> 103 International Crisis Group, Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 11 February 2021, url; Theafricareport, The war in Tigray: Abiy, Isaias, and the Amhara elite, 29 January 2021, url
> 104 Reuters, Abiy says Ethiopia's federal forces have not killed civilians in Tigray, 30 November 2020, url
> 105 HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, url
> 106 AI, Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, url; HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, url; CCN, Massacre in the mountains, 22 March 2021, url […]
> 118 BBC News, Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: A rare view inside the conflict zone, 20 March 2021, url
> 119 Reuters, Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray, 13 November 2020, url; HRW, Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 23 December 2020, url;
> 120 Al Jazeera, In Pictures: Inside Humera, a town scarred by Ethiopia's war, 25 November 2020, url[135]

According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) "The Abiy administration rejected calls for peace talks and denied the presence of Eritrean forces in Tigray for months—despite reports of abuses attributed to them—before publicly stating in March [2021] that Eritrean soldiers were acting to secure their border. The Eritrean presence has extended beyond the border area, and reports, which U.S. officials call credible, suggest Eritrean forces have sometimes donned Ethiopian uniforms.[136]

Amnesty International noted in relation to the Axum massacre that it had "found that Eritrean troops killed hundreds of civilians in Axum – in what likely amounted to a crime against humanity – on 28-29 November [2020]".[137] In a previous statement in April 2021 the same organisation stated:

> Eritrean troops fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray state systematically killed hundreds of unarmed civilians in the northern city of Axum on 28-29 November 2020, opening fire in the streets and conducting house-to-house raids in a massacre that may amount to a crime against humanity […]
> Amnesty International spoke to 41 survivors and witnesses – including in-person interviews with recently arrived refugees in eastern Sudan and phone interviews with people in Axum – as well as 20 others with knowledge of the events. They consistently described extrajudicial executions, indiscriminate shelling and widespread looting after Ethiopian and Eritrean troops led an offensive to take control of the city amid the conflict with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in mid-November [2020].
> Satellite imagery analysis by the organization's Crisis Evidence Lab corroborates reports of indiscriminate shelling and mass looting, as well as identifies signs of new mass burials near two of the city's churches.[138]

In May 2021 Amnesty International noted that "According to witnesses Amnesty International interviewed and who were on the spot when the killing spree started, Eritrean soldiers 'went on a rampage, shooting at civilian men and youths who were out on the streets attempting to flee'. Rather than shooting fighters, Eritrean soldiers shot at men who posed no threat to them. The victims,

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[135] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.2.1 The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)*, *2.2.2 The Eritrean Army* and *2.2.3. The Amhara Regional Forces*
[136] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 10*
[137] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Tepid international response to Tigray conflict fuels horrific violations over past six months*, 4 May 2021
[138] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity*, 26 February 2021. For further details see the report by Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021

residents said, carried no weapons and in many cases were running away from the soldiers when they were shot […] In multiple instances Eritrean soldiers killed all male members of any family they found in a house".[139]

In August 2021 the U.S. Department of State designated the "Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) Chief of Staff General Filipos Woldeyohannes (Filipos) for his connection with serious human rights abuse committed during the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia".[140] The same source further noted that:

> Under Filipos' command, EDF troops have raped, tortured, and executed civilians in Ethiopia. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have described a systematic effort by the EDF to inflict as much harm on the ethnic Tigrayan population as possible in the areas the EDF controls. Eritrean troops have forcibly displaced civilians and ransacked businesses; IDPs spoke of a "scorched earth" policy intended to prevent civilians from returning home.[141]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas the Eritrean forces have infiltrated Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia and have also been committing serious human rights violations; whereas the majority of allegations relate to violations committed by the Ethiopian National Defence Force and the Eritrean forces".[142]

i. November 2020 – April 2021

In November 2020, an article published by the Atlantic Council stated that: "There have been unconfirmed reports of fighting between Eritrean and TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] troops at various points along the border, but these have not been confirmed, and there is reason to think that Abiy and Isaias will resist Eritrea's entry into the conflict unless it is absolutely necessary".[143]

The Brookings Institute reported in November 2020 that:

> Eritrea, which shares a border with Tigray, fought a bloody war with Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000, and its president, Isaias Afwerki, is public enemy No. 1 in Tigray. Isaias and Abiy have found common cause in subduing the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front]. And the Eritrean leader was already intimately involved in the war effort before this past weekend, when the TPLF launched a volley of missiles at Asmara — officially internationalizing the conflict.
>
> Meanwhile, worrying reports of unlawful detentions, ethnic targeting, and civilian massacres are polarizing Ethiopians of all backgrounds, and constituencies in the neighboring Amhara region have already been drawn into the fight — evidence of just how easily this conflict could spread.[144]

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[139] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: The Need For An Independent International Investigation Of The Axum Massacre*, 13 May 2021, *p. 1* and *2*

[140] U.S. Department of State, *Sanctioning Eritrean Military Leader in Connection with Human Rights Abuse in Ethiopia*, 23 August 2021

[141] U.S. Department of State, *Sanctioning Eritrean Military Leader in Connection with Human Rights Abuse in Ethiopia*, 23 August 2021

[142] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, F*

[143] Atlantic Council, *Calls for negotiation are driving Ethiopia deeper into war*, 13 November 2020

[144] Brookings Institute, *Averting civil war in Ethiopia: It's time to propose elements of a negotiated settlement*, 16 November 2020

The Brookings Institute reported on 21 November 2020 that: "Fighting continued in Ethiopia's Tigray region this week, in the continuation of a conflict that began earlier this month. On Sunday, November 15, the leader of the Tigray region, Debretsion Gebremichael, confirmed that his forces had fired rockets at the airport in Eritrean capital Asmara, a major escalation that internationalizes the war. In his announcement of the attack, Debretsion accused Eritrea of sending tanks and troops into Tigray in support of the Ethiopian government's offensive. Eritrea's government has denied involvement in the conflict".[145]

In December 2020, a piece published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies on the battle of Mekelle reported that during the capture of Mekelle, the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front]can "fired rockets at least three times into Eritrea to internationalize the conflict". [146] The piece goes on to report that: "There have been rumors that Abiy and Isaias coordinated the assault on their mutual enemy in Tigray, and the TPLF has alleged that Eritrean soldiers crossed the shared border to support government operations. The TPLF launched strikes into Eritrea presumably in retaliation, as well as to draw Eritrea further into the conflict. The TPLF has an interest in exploiting Tigrayan animosity toward Eritrea to ensure its fighters and the general Tigrayan public continue to side with the TPLF". [147]

An article on Eritrea's human rights violations in Tigray, published by African Arguments in December 2020, noted that:

> Eritrea has deployed most of its army in Tigray region of Ethiopia. This is no secret. At minimum, 12 divisions have been fighting inside Tigray.
>
> At first, the United States gave Eritrea a free pass, expressing "thanks to Eritrea for not being provoked" into retaliating after a TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] rocket attack on Asmara. Later it admitted that Eritrea was a belligerent. The United Nations Secretary General repeated Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed's assertion that Eritrean troops had not crossed the border. The Chairperson of the African Union has carefully said nothing on the issue.
> It is lawful for a state to request the military assistance of another state. The involvement of Eritrea in Ethiopia isn't illegal per se.
>
> But there is mounting evidence that activities of Eritrean troops include perpetrating war crimes on a vast scale. Every report from the northern parts of Tigray speaks about Eritrean soldiers looting. They ransacked the town of Shire. They shelled Humera close to the Sudanese border. They systematically dismantled the university and pharmaceutical factory in Adigrat. They stole cars, generators, and high value goods. Now we hear that they are combing ordinary houses in towns and villages, taking such basic items as furniture, doors, and jerrycans. Eritreans are said to have emptied food stores and looted cattle, sheep and goats.
>
> Catholic priests in Eritrea were horrified by the looted items coming into Eritrea from Tigray and admonished anyone buying them.

[145] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Fighting in Ethiopia, end of cease-fire in Western Sahara, and debt relief updates*, 21 November 2020
[146] Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Battle of Mekelle and Its Implications for Ethiopia*, 4 December 2020
[147] Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Battle of Mekelle and Its Implications for Ethiopia*, 4 December 2020

> […] Eritrean troops overran and emptied four refugee camps where Eritreans who had escaped their country had been living, until last month under the protection of the Ethiopian government.
>
> […] As the weeks pass, it is becoming ever clearer that President Isseyas Afewerki has long planned this war with the intention of annihilating the TPLF and reducing Tigray to a condition of complete incapacity. His strategy is to say nothing and make a fait accompli on the assumption that the world will, in due course, come to live with it.[148]

The Council on Foreign Relations wrote in December 2020 that: "Ample, alarming evidence belies Abiy's repeated denials of the involvement of Eritrean forces in Ethiopian territory".[149]

On 16 January 2021, the Brookings Institute reported that: "Last week, a senior Ethiopian military official confirmed that Eritrean troops were indeed present in the country's Tigray region, which has been the source of infighting for several months".[150]

The International Crisis Group highlighted in January 2021:

> The Eritrean deployment of troops into Tigray in November [2020] has also exacerbated tensions. Tigrayan witnesses have told the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission that Eritrean and Amhara forces looted homes and committed atrocities. While Addis Ababa and Asmara have denied Eritrea's role, the new head of the military's Northern Command and Mekelle's federally appointed interim mayor acknowledge it. Foreign officials, UN employees and aid agencies say Eritrean troops attacked refugee camps in Tigray and abducted Eritrean asylum seekers. Tigrayans also accuse them of shooting dead hundreds of civilians in towns, including around 100 sheltering at a church compound in Edaga Hamus on 30 November [2020] and more than 200 in Wukro in late November [2020], partly, they say, when locals resisted the Eritrean looting of Sheba Leather Industry and Semayata Dimensional Stones Factory, and in Axum around the same dates. Purportedly in response to Eritrea's role, Tigray's forces launched missiles at military targets near the Eritrean capital three times in November.[151]

In March 2021, the Brookings Institute reported that: "The presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray is disputed by the Ethiopian government, though even government-appointed interim Tigray leaders confirmed their presence back in January".[152]

In April 2021, an article published by African Arguments on the Eritrean involvement in the Tigray conflict wrote that:

> During a session in parliament on March 23, 2021 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia publicly acknowledged Eritrean involvement in his country's ongoing civil war in Tigray but indicated that it would take some time for Eritrea's forces to withdraw. Three days later, the Prime Minister issued a statement announcing that the government of Eritrea had "agreed to withdraw its forces out of the Ethiopian border" and that the Ethiopian army "will take over guarding the border area effective immediately". This begrudging admission – after four months of unconvincing denial – that Eritrea was in fact waging war inside Ethiopia was, in large measure, a result of sustained pressure from the European Union and the Biden Administration in the United States. However, the announcement raises several important

[148] African Arguments, *Who Will Call Out Eritrea's War Crimes in Tigray?*, 23 December 2020
[149] Council on Foreign Relations, *Amid Misinformation and Suppressed Free Speech, Ethiopian Conflict Erodes Abiy's Credibility*, 30 December 2021
[150] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Central African Republic, Ethiopia, and Uganda updates*, 16 January 2021
[151] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021
[152] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Ethiopia, Nigeria, and internet control updates*, 6 March 2021

> questions, one of which has been at the heart of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict all along and could determine its conclusion or continuation.
> […] In responding to questions from members of the Ethiopian House of Representatives, Abiy Ahmed explained away Eritrea's crossing of the border into Ethiopia as a response to TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] provocations and because the suddenly weakened Ethiopian military could not give security guarantees to Eritrea. He assured the parliamentarians that once Ethiopia rebuilds its pre-war military capacity to guard its own borders, the issue of Eritrean troop presence in Tigray would cease to exist. One is then compelled to ask how it is that in three days Ethiopia regained its pre-war military strength to guard its borders, give Eritrea the needed security guarantees, and execute Eritrean military withdrawal. Ethiopia is in no position to demand withdrawal of Eritrean military; without whose support it could not contain – much less defeat – the TPLF. Nor would President Isaias give in to such demands as he seeks total demise of the TPLF.
> The Prime Minister's announcement of Eritrean withdrawal from Tigray is nothing more than public relations theatrics. Troop movements on the ground show that Isaias' regime, with the connivance of the Ethiopian government, is merely reorganizing and reinforcing its units and repositioning them for plausible deniability while it continues with its scorched earth campaign against the TPLF/TDF [Tigray Defense Forces], and indeed the people of Tigray. Before the Prime Minister's announcement, six brigades had returned from Tigray to Eritrea. These brigades belonged to three infantry divisions that carried out the bulk of fighting and bore the brunt of casualties. Their return to Eritrea had more to do with their need to recuperate and replenish their personnel than an intent to withdraw from Ethiopia.
> Since Prime Minister Abiy's announcement, confidential sources on and near the ground report that there has indeed been large-scale movement of Eritrean troops within Tigray and between Eritrea and Tigray. Accordingly, as of late March 2021, an entire division composed of popular militia has returned to central Eritrea. A unit of the 23rd Division has also reported back and has been sighted in western Eritrea. The fast-changing developments make it hard to conclusively establish final position or deployment destination. But while a few units have returned to Eritrea and a few others have been rotated to the border area, credible reports from the ground indicate that the Eritrean government has in fact reinforced its forces in Tigray rather than drawn them down. On balance, confidential sources from the area are reporting that Isaias Afwerki has as of late March/early April committed some 40 percent of Eritrean military personnel in a last-ditch effort to finish off what remains of the TPLF.
> Partially because of that troop build-up, fighting has intensified across many parts of Tigray. The other reason for the intensification of fighting is because Tigrayan forces are ambushing Eritrean government forces on the move and attacking their rear as they are rotated to new positions. Two such rotated brigades of the 16th Division, for example, travelled in a large convoy from areas of active fighting in Tigray's lowlands and arrived in Biyara and Badme at the end of March 2021. These two villages were once contested between the two countries and Ethiopia held them until the outbreak of the current war because the TPLF refused to relinquish them to Eritrea. Even if one were to assume the remaining Eritrean troops were to be similarly rotated to the border between the two countries, the exact location and legality of that border remains unresolved.[153]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region, particularly with regards to the Eritrean army, wrote that:

> On 4 November 2020, an armed conflict erupted in Tigray when the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] launched a military offensive against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in response to reported attacks against ENDF military bases in Tigray by Tigrayan forces. The ENDF has been allegedly supported by Amhara Regional Forces (ARF) and the Amhara Fano militia in Western Tigray, and by Eritrean Defence Forces especially in Northern and Central Tigray.

[153] African Arguments, *The Tale of Eritrean Withdrawal from Tigray: But Where is the Border?*, 15 April 2021

On 4 November 2020, the Federal Council declared a state of emergency for a period of six-months, and on 7 November 2020, Ethiopia's parliament voted to dissolve the Tigray regional government and establish a transitional administration.

According to reports received, the conflict was characterized by airstrikes and shelling of civilian structures, usually on the outskirts of the towns, resulting in civilian casualties, followed by the occupation of the towns by ENDF and the Eritrean army. The TPLF reportedly systematically withdrew from urban areas as the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces advanced. Heavy fighting was reported in some locations. Serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) against civilians by all parties to the conflict have been reported, resulting in killing and injury of civilians, the destruction of civilian homes and structures, and mass displacement.

Allegations received suggest patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by parties to the conflict, including the Eritrean Army, such as the deliberate targeting of civilians, mass killings, extrajudicial and summary executions, arbitrary detentions, arbitrary displacement and widespread destruction and looting of civilian property. Eritrean troops have allegedly forcibly returned a number of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers to Eritrea.

There have also been numerous reports of conflict-related sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, some involving children, attributed to Eritrean forces in Adigrat and Mekelle.

Given the situation of conflict and alleged human rights violations, persons caught up in the conflict, displaced or who suffered human rights violations may also be at risk of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Unaccompanied and separated children surrounded by violent actors may be at risk of exploitation and abuse.

At the end of November 2020, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia declared victory; however, fighting seems to have continued in Tigray. Satellite images emerged revealing widespread destruction of civilian structures in Gijet town, in southern Tigray, indicating that a large number of houses were burned down in a deliberate attack on 22 February 2021. There were no indications of military targets in the area.

A number of allegations involving Eritrean troops in specific locations have been received, as described below.

[…] Between 9 and 11 November 2020, the agricultural town of Humera, located in West Tigray at the border with Eritrea and close to Sudan with an estimated population of about 30,000 or 50,000 people, was reportedly subjected to indiscriminate shelling by Eritrea-based artillery which struck homes and other civilian structures. According to reports, at least 46 people were killed by the shelling and over 200 were wounded, overwhelming Kahsay Aberra's hospital. As shells hit near the hospital, most of the staff left the hospital and transported the patients to another town. The hospital was almost empty and lacked doctors and medical supplies to treat the wounded who continued to arrive. Many people were displaced from Humera.

There have been allegations of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, summary executions and looting of civilian property by the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] and the Amhara Fano militia in Humera, as they reportedly searched houses looking for Tigrayans and individuals who were perceived to be affiliated with the TPLF.

[…] On 7 and 8 November 2020, ENDF reportedly conducted airstrikes on sites around Adigrat in Eastern Tigray, after which Tigray regional forces left the city. From 19 November 2020, there was reportedly heavy shelling of Adigrat for several days from the direction of the town of Zelambessa/Fatsi at the border with Eritrea, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement. Many people were displaced to the town of Edaga Hamus, in the mountains to the south west of Adigrat, where they were subsequently caught in fighting. On 20 November, Ethiopian and Eritrean troops took control of Adigrat. Eritrean forces reportedly committed extrajudicial executions of civilians and widespread sexual and gender-based violence. Eritrean troops have also reportedly committed widespread looting of the town, and transported the looted goods to Eritrea on stolen trucks.

[…] On 17 November 2020, the town of Shire in north-western Tigray, with a population of about 47,000 people, was reportedly subjected to indiscriminate shelling which impacted populated areas in the centre of the town and an industrial area northwest of Shire, resulting in civilian casualties, including children, and the destruction of civilian structures. Reportedly, Tigrayan forces had already pulled out of the town when the attack started, and ENDF and Eritrean troops took control of the town after the shelling.

[…] Axum is a city of about 67,000 inhabitants located in Central Tigray. Axum is a historical city in Ethiopia and former capital of the Aksumite Empire, and a city with a religious significance. Each year, on 30 November, large celebrations are traditionally held at St Mary Church for the religious festival of St Mary, which used to attract large numbers of pilgrims and tourists. Axum was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980, and used to be a popular touristic destination in Ethiopia. At the time of the attacks in November 2020, Axum reportedly hosted visitors who were present for the religious celebrations, as well as many internally displaced persons who had fled from Western Tigray.

On 19 November 2020, allegedly after TPLF forces had already withdrawn from Axum, the ENDF and Eritrean forces reportedly conducted indiscriminate shelling of the city leading to many civilian casualties, and subsequently took control of the city. Reportedly, Eritrean soldiers carried out house searches, harassing residents and conducting summary executions of those perceived as TPLF fighters or sympathizers, especially young men. There are accounts of numerous bodies with bullet wounds lying on the streets. Reports indicate that Eritrean soldiers shot indiscriminately at civilians and killed patients in Saint Mary's hospital, including civilians and wounded TPLF fighters. ENDF and Eritrean soldiers have reportedly looted and damaged Saint Mary's Hospital and Axum Referral Hospital, including medication, medical equipment, furniture, and the wing of Axum Referral Hospital equipped to treat COVID-19 patients. For the following week, Eritrean soldiers reportedly committed widespread looting of the city, including food and medication.

On the morning of 28 November 2020, a group of TPLF militiamen supported by some local residents reportedly launched an attack on Eritrean troops positioned on Mai Koho Mountain, east of the Axum Tsion St Mary Church, and were defeated.

In response, during the afternoon the Eritrean troops entered the city and reportedly carried out widespread killing of young men and boys in the streets and in house searches. Reports indicate that the victims were unarmed; many were shot from behind while they were running away, and others were lined up and shot from behind. ENDF were reportedly present in Axum but allegedly did not take action to protect civilians.

On the morning of 29 November 2020, Eritrean troops reportedly shelled the city targeting survivors who had left their houses to collect the numerous bodies across the city. Some of the victims were still alive but could not be taken to hospital as the facilities had been looted and there were no doctors. It is also alleged that Eritrean troops arbitrarily detained a large number of people.

Reportedly, many of the dead were buried on 30 November as the residents jointly collected the bodies, already in decay, from the streets. While the exact number of civilian casualties is unknown, hundreds of civilians were reportedly killed in Axum. Children as young as 13 were allegedly among the victims.

[…] On 28 November 2020, ENDF have reportedly carried out artillery attacks on Mekelle, the capital of Tigray with a population of about 500,000 people, striking civilian structures such as homes, markets, hospitals and schools, and killing and injuring civilians, including children. Reports indicate that 27 civilians were killed by the shelling and another 100 were injured. TPLF forces had reportedly already withdrawn from Mekelle when the shelling started.

ENDF and Eritrean troops subsequently entered the town. On the evening of 28 November, Prime Minister Abiy declared that ENDF had taken control of Mekelle.

There are allegations of summary executions and arbitrary arrests of young men by ENDF in Mekelle. There are also numerous reports of sexual violence by Eritrean troops. Widespread looting has also been reported, including markets, hospitals, laboratories and homes, and the population has been deprived of access to food, medication and other essential items.

Many people were displaced from Mekelle due to the attacks, including during the days prior to the shelling because of airstrikes in and around the city and statements that ENDF would bomb Mekelle.

[…] On 30 November, in Dengelat, a village five kilometres south of the town of Edaga Hamus, Eritrean soldiers allegedly killed about 80 people, including men, women and children who were attending a

celebration at the historic church of Mariam Tagot. Priests and internally displaced persons who had fled the fighting in Adigrat were among the victims.[154]

1. Massacre at Axum

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., *b. Extrajudicial Killings* and b., *i. Ethnic-Related Attacks/Massacres*.

In February 2021, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect wrote that:

> A deacon of the St. Mary of Zion church in the town of Aksum, northern Tigray region, reported to the Associated Press that approximately 800 people were killed near the church around 28 November. St. Mary of Zion is especially holy to adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church as it is supposed to contain the Ark of the Covenant.
> The deacon attributed the killings to Eritrean armed forces operating in Tigray. Soldiers reportedly forced their way into the church, dragged out worshippers and shot at those who tried to flee. The deacon said that "we could hear gunfire all over" and that bodies were scattered around Aksum. Although reports of the massacre were previously shared on social media, the ongoing communications blackout in Tigray had inhibited verification.
> Both the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments deny Eritrea's involvement in the ongoing Tigray conflict, despite the fact that reports of rape, killings, looting and other abuses perpetrated by Eritrean forces continue to surface.
> The massacre in Aksum is among a number of recent attacks on or around Tigray's ancient cultural and religious heritage. The town of Aksum is a UNESCO World Heritage site with ancient ruins of global significance."[155]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary of the Eritrean army's involvement:

> Although Abiy denied any civilian casualties caused by the ENDF[104], Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported indiscriminate shelling by the Ethiopian federal forces on urban areas such as Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in the Tigray region in November 2020[105], and several sources reported that the Ethiopian and Eritrean military forces killed several hundreds of civilian in Axum on 19 November 2020.[106] […]
> Several sources reported that Eritrean armed forces massacred 'scores' of civilians in Axum.[112] There have been also witnesses of looting by Eritrean forces in Tigray,[113] and the United States called all Eritrean troops to leave Tigray, 'given credible reports of looting, sexual violence, assaults in refugee camps and other human rights abuses'.[114] […]
>
> 104 Reuters, Abiy says Ethiopia's federal forces have not killed civilians in Tigray, 30 November 2020, url

[154] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *pp. 1-5*

[155] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 241: Ethiopia, South Sudan and Yemen*, 24 February 2021

105 HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, url
106 AI, Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, url; HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, url; CCN, Massacre in the mountains, 22 March 2021, url […]
112 AI, Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, url; HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, url; CCN, Massacre in the mountains, 22 March 2021, url
113 Guardian (The), 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses, 21 December 2020, url; Abc news, Witnesses: Eritrean soldiers loot, kill in Ethiopia's Tigray, 26 January 2021, url
114 AP News, US says Eritrean forces should leave Tigray immediately, 28 January 2021, url[156]

The U.S. Department of State's *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom* reported:

> International media and human rights NGOs stated that on November 28 and 29 [2020], Eritrean forces, fighting alongside Ethiopian government forces to retake the town of Axum from a Tigrayan militia committed indiscriminate killings of hundreds of civilians, including those attending services at the Orthodox Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion (Maryam Ts'iyon), on the anniversary of the day EOTC followers believe the Ark of the Covenant arrived at the church. The soldiers allegedly entered the church and killed worshippers and others as they fled. Eyewitnesses reported as many as 800 civilians were killed in Axum. The EHRC conducted an investigative mission to Axum and found no evidence that the attack on the church occurred. According to CNN, in a similar attack on November 30 [2020], Eritrean forces opened fire on Maryam Dengelat Church in Dengalat Village while hundreds of worshippers were celebrating Mass, killing dozens. The EOTC deployed a task force to provide humanitarian assistance in Tigray, and one of its senior representatives denied these claims by international media. Local human rights groups could not confirm the allegations of these attacks without on-the-ground verification.[157]

The same source also highlighted the conflicting reporting on the attack in Axum:

> Despite international attention to an alleged attack on the Orthodox Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in November in Axum, in Tigray Region, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) stated that there was no evidence this event occurred, while local human rights groups could not confirm the allegation without on-the-ground verification. The EHRC based its findings on a rapid investigative mission sent to the area. The EOTC deployed a task force to provide humanitarian assistance in Tigray, and one of its senior representatives said reports of the Axum attack were unfounded and false.[158]

In March 2021, Human Rights Watch released a report on the massacre of Tigrayan civilians by Eritrean forces in Axum in November 2020:

> Eritrean armed forces massacred scores of civilians, including children as young as 13, in the historic town of Axum in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November 2020, Human Rights Watch said today. The United Nations should urgently establish an independent inquiry into war crimes and possible crimes against humanity in the region to pave the way for accountability, and Ethiopian authorities should grant it full and immediate access.

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[156] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.2.1 The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)* and *2.2.2 The Eritrean Army*
[157] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ethiopia*, 12 May 2021, *Section II., Government Practices*
[158] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ethiopia*, 12 May 2021, *Executive Summary*

> On November 19, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces indiscriminately shelled Axum, killing and wounding civilians. For a week after taking control of the town, the forces shot civilians and pillaged and destroyed property, including healthcare facilities. After Tigray militia and Axum residents attacked Eritrean forces on November 28, Eritrean forces, in apparent retaliation, fatally shot and summarily executed several hundred residents, mostly men and boys, over a 24-hour period.
> […] The attacks in Axum followed weeks of fighting between the Ethiopian military and allied forces from the Amhara region and Eritrean troops against forces affiliated with the region's former ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front.
> Between December 2020 and February 2021, Human Rights Watch interviewed by phone 28 witnesses and victims of abuses and their relatives in Axum and examined videos of attacks and their aftermath.
> Survivors consistently identified Eritrean troops by the vehicles bearing Eritrean license plates, their distinctive uniforms, the spoken dialect of Tigrinya, and their plastic "congo" shoes, worn by Eritrean forces since the liberation struggle.
> On November 19, after Tigrayan forces and militia withdrew from Axum, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces began shelling the town around 4 p.m., continuing into the evening. The next day, witnesses saw Ethiopian and Eritrean forces indiscriminately shoot at civilians, including in the town's Saint Mary's hospital.
> For about a week, the military forces pillaged. While several residents who spoke to Human Rights Watch saw Ethiopian forces participate, most said the soldiers just stood by and watched.
> […] The abuses generated considerable anger in the town. On November 28, after 7 a.m., a group of Tigrayan militia and town residents attacked Eritrean forces, triggering fighting. That afternoon, Eritrean reinforcements entered Axum and went on a 24-hour killing spree.
> Survivors described the horror of Eritrean soldiers moving through the town, going house to house, searching for young men and boys, and executing them. A student described watching helplessly as Eritrean soldiers led six neighbors, including a 17-year-old the witness knew as "Jambo" and another young man, outside. He said: "They made them take off their belts, then their shoes. They lined them up and walked behind them. The Eritrean soldiers fired their guns. The first three then fell. They fired other shots, and the other three fell."
> Eritrean troops shot other civilians on the street. "A group of soldiers killed a man and then forced a pregnant woman and two children that were with him to kneel on the asphalt street beside his body," said one witness.
> Those retrieving bodies for burial did not escape harm. Several residents said Eritrean forces shot at them while they tried to collect the dead on November 28 and 29.
> The massacre left the town's inhabitants reeling.
> […] Human Rights Watch was unable to determine the number of civilian deaths resulting from the joint Ethiopian-Eritrean offensive on Axum and the ensuing massacre. However, based on interviews with elders, community members collecting identification cards of those killed, and those assisting the retrieval of the dead, Human Rights Watch estimates that over 200 civilians were most likely killed on November 28-29 alone. Human Rights Watch also received a list of 166 names of victims allegedly killed in Axum in November, 21 of which correspond to the names of those killed on November 28 and 29 given by witnesses interviewed.
> […] The late November attacks were documented by media organizations, as well as by Amnesty International. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has also begun investigations. Human Rights Watch provided its findings to Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials on February 18 but received no response. On February 26, the Ethiopian government announced it would thoroughly investigate events in Axum and expressed "readiness to collaborate with international human rights experts."[159]

In March 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a preliminary findings report on grave human rights violations that took place in Axum in November 2020, based on a rapid investigation mission to Axum from 27 February to 5 March 2021. The report found that:

[159] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians*, 5 March 2021

Aksum, in Central Zone of Tigray Region, is located 190 km north of Mekelle and 132 km south of Adigrat. With a population estimated at around 67,000, Aksum is famous for its many tourist attractions and the Aksum Obelisks, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

During the period covered by this preliminary report, and especially from November 18 to 29, Aksum was hosting internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other affected parts of Tigray and visitors from other parts of Ethiopia, there to attend the annual Orthodox Christian celebration of Lady Mary of Zion, marked on November 30.

Civilian casualties related to the war (November 18 to 24, 2020)

Starting from November 18, members of the former administration of Aksum city began fleeing the city. Residents say they heard heavy artillery and gunfire all around the city, nearby rural areas and recounted how the area was 'rocked' by military air strikes. The gun fire went on until the next day; November 19.

[…] Heavy artillery and military air strikes on November 18, caused "civilian casualties and property destruction." Residents say that in *Hatsebo (Morer*), a rural town in the outskirts of Aksum, for example, 10 people were injured following military air strikes in the town on November 18, 2020. Five of them died instantly and a sixth person, a priest, died while receiving treatment in hospital. […] In Aksum, around a neighbourhood called 'Damo Hotel', military airstrikes on November 18, hit the residence of Woynareg Reda, a well-known woman in Aksum city, killing her and three members of her family.

The number of people taken to St Mary and Aksum Referral Hospital with physical injuries (to the arms, legs and other body parts) is "significant". The hospitals' medical staff have told the Commission that 10 of the people brought in with physical injuries on November 18, have died.

[…] Starting from November 19, ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] and Eritrean soldiers were seen entering the city. St Mary and Aksum Referral Hospital staff say that they were forced to flee from the areas and their duties because of the heavy fighting. Those who decided to stay behind say that some members of ENDF and Eritrean soldiers looted the hospitals. Saint Mary Hospital staff recount how "on November 19, some members of ENDF and Eritrean soldiers came into the hospital. They looted the hospital's pharmacy and other medical equipment and destroyed the ones they did not need. They shot a man in bed in the emergency ward. Eritrean soldiers were insulting the staff ethnic based slurs." Aksum Referral Hospital was also looted by some members of ENDF and Eritrean soldiers four times over several days. They also looted one of the Hospital's wings that was set up and equipped at high cost to serve as a Covid-19 treatment centre. Eyewitnesses say the Eritrean soldiers even took the hospital beds and mattresses.

[…] "Many people died for lack of adequate treatment" because of the looting of drugs and medications. […] The hospital's records obtained by EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] show that between November 18 and 20, a total of 41 people died in both hospitals from physical injuries, blood loss and from lack of adequate medical treatment. Hospital records also show that 126 people were brought in with medium to heavy physical injuries (bone fractures, injuries to the head).

Furthermore, the hospital's medical staff believe that "several people may have died without being taken to health facilities", citing the body of an as yet unidentified man who was found with bullet wounds in a sewer on November 19, around a neighbourhood of Aksum known as "Samuna Fabrika".

[…] Damages to civilian property

The Commission visited some of the neighbourhoods of Aksum to assess the extent of damages to civilian property. For example, Berana, a privately owned hotel, has sustained heavy damages. The hotel's owners told the Commission that "ENDF was targeting another hotel nearby owned by a TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] general. But instead, they hit our hotel, which has nothing to do with the TPLF general. They fired at the hotel's windows and shattered them. Then, they went into the hotel and destroyed most of what was inside." The hotel was still not operational at the time of the Commission's visit. The hotel's owners have also shown the Commission a letter they received from the local interim administration attesting to the "fact that the hotel had sustained an unfortunate level of damage" and photographs showing the level of damage sustained.

In addition, residents say "privately owned mobile shops, clothes shops, edible oil, food aid reserves and government offices were all looted by Eritrean soldiers". The breakdown of law and order also allowed other individuals to take part in the looting.

"On November 24, Eritrean soldiers went into the administrative office of Aksum Tsion Church and took a Toyota car belonging to Abune Meqarios. They also stole all the four tires of another car belonging to the office (Code 5, plate number 02223) and the internal digital system of the car." The church's staff said they "have informed the relevant ENDF authorities but, at the time of the Commission's visit, were yet to receive a response."

Attack on Civilians by Eritrean Soldiers (November 25 to 29, 2020)

On November 25, members of ENDF were seen to be leaving Aksum and on November 26, residents said they could not see any "soldiers moving around the city". On November 27, however, "a large number of Eritrean soldiers began coming into Aksum". "They took up posts in three different locations of the city: 'Maye Kuho'; 'Samuna Fabrika' and 'Tsele'a'. On November 28, 2020, we started hearing heavy gun fire all around the city."

Most of the residents the Commission talked to say they do not know the reason why the heavy shooting began. Others gave varying explanations. Some say, "armed local militia started shooting at the Eritrean soldiers and that the angered soldiers began firing at civilians". Others said, "Eritrean soldiers tried to loot Aksum Tsion Church and when angered residents tried to prevent it the Eritrean soldiers began shooting at civilians". Other sources of the Commission said "some residents joined local militia to attack Eritrean soldiers and the Eritrean soldiers retaliated with vengeful attacks, killing civilians and especially targeting men."

One local resident told EHRC that "On November 28, I was about to leave Saint Michael's Church when I heard gunshots. Then I saw young children who looked like they were under 18 years old and carrying sticks and knives, running towards Maye Kuho, a hill not far from the Church. Shortly after, I saw Eritrean soldiers coming from a nearby road known as 'Adwa Exit'".

On November 29, residents tried to recover bodies of people killed on November 28, but Eritrean soldiers prevented them by firing gunshots. The Eritrean soldiers were saying "your people will not be buried before our soldiers are buried." Fearing for their lives, residents who had come to recover the bodies fled. They were only allowed to come back for the bodies on November 30.

[…] Witnesses identified 9 churches where victims are buried, 7 in Axum and 2 in outskirts of the city. The Commission visited two mass graves in Arbaetu Ensesa and Endamichael Churches and obtained some photographs from residents.

[…] Other families of victims and eyewitnesses have told the Commission "Muluberhan Gebremedhin (Wedi Gonyo), 38 years old, was killed in front of his pregnant wife and children; Mekonnen Temi'a was killed in front of his children; Guash Mekonnen, 38 years old and a veterinarian, was dragged out of his house and was killed in front of his son who was crying; Bitwoded Tadesse Kebede 51 years old, was shot in the neck and chest and killed while trying to collect bodies of other victims (it was not possible to inform his family so he was buried along with others); Mulugeta Te'ame (Wedi Wukro) was shot three times and killed on November 29, around 8:00 am in the morning during a similar attempt to recover bodies of other victims."

Members of his family told the Commission "Mulugeta Fisseha, a 14-year-old child, who witnessed his mother, Techawit, getting killed by Eritrean soldiers, was shot while trying to run towards her". Residents also recount how "a young man called Ephrem Alem and two of his friends were shot on their way to Ephrem's house to celebrate the baptism of his new-born son. Only one of them survived. Another young man, Berihu Gebrerufael was at home celebrating his son's first birthday when Eritrean soldiers came and dragged him and four other people out of the house and killed them."

"Eritrean soldiers went into the house of another man Berhane Gebreegziabher Abraha, 70 years old, "dragged him out of there along with his two sons, Shishay and Mekonnen, and took them to a nearby water tanker where they made them lie on the ground. The soldiers shot all three of them in the head and killed them" says an eyewitness. "Lisaneworq, his son Biniam Lisaneworq and his daughter's husband, 'Memhir' Ghirmay, were all killed inside Lisaneworq's house by Eritrean soldiers" say members of the family the Commission spoke to.

“On November 28, Eritrean soldiers who went into two adjacent residential houses, in an area of Aksum city known as “Seattle Cinema”, found two residents whom they confirmed could not speak Tigrinya and let them go, while they dragged the remaining residents, out of their compound and shot them dead. They also killed one Tegen Bahta whom they found sleeping in his room.”

[…] The Commission also talked to residents who said they have been detained by Eritrean soldiers. On November 29, Eritrean soldiers “rounded up a large number of the city’s young men and took them in areas known as ‘Meshelam’ and ‘Zero’. They remained detained the whole day inside a pit until their release in the evening. The Eritrean soldiers told them ‘Tomorrow, Aksum Tsion celebration is also marked in Eritrea so we will let you go and bury the dead today’”. Eyewitnesses say “Eritrean soldiers who were rounding up young people found a young man inside the compound of Saint Mary Church. When they asked him to get up, he explained that he had a disability and could not move an arm and a leg. ‘Should we kill you then?’ the soldiers smirked and the young man replied ‘yes kill me!’. So the soldiers shot and killed him.”

Residents also say that “although the November 30 Aksum Tsion holiday was marked within the Church’s compound, they have been saddened that the media did not report the state of grief the city was in.”

The Commission also visited survivors who sustained physical injuries during the attack.

[…] In addition to physical injuries and loss of civilian life, the attack also caused damages to civilian residences and religious institutions. “On November 28, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., an unknown number of Eritrean soldiers went into the cemetery of Saint Michael’s Church and were shooting directly at the church to destroy it. They shouted “hit it’ in Tigrinya and shot at the church all day” said eyewitnesses. On November 28, the residential building where Aksum University Medical Doctors stayed was deliberately and selectively targeted and shot at. The Commission has obtained images showing the extent of damage on both buildings.

Residents deplored the perceived inaction of members and authorities of ENDF who were in the city during the attack on November 28, which they say has worsened the extent of the damage. Residents and church officials say however that a month after the November 28 attack, on December 23, an attempt by Eritrean soldiers to enter Aksum Tsion Church to loot it was foiled by the combined efforts of members of ENDF and residents.

Information collected during this preliminary investigation confirm that during the two days of November 28 and November 29, grave violations of human rights were committed and that in Aksum, over one hundred residents including visitors from other parts of the country who came to mark the annual Aksum Tsion celebration and internally displaced persons from other parts of Tigray, were killed by Eritrean soldiers. As the residents, families of victims and eyewitnesses described to EHRC, “civilians were killed in front of their children, spouses and mothers.” Eritrean soldiers went door to door asking women “where their husbands or children were” telling them “to bring their sons out if they have any” and asking questions in Tigrinya and shooting at civilian men they dragged out of houses and caught on streets even as the men pleaded saying they were not armed. Families of victims and eyewitnesses identified the attackers as Eritrean soldiers by their distinct Eritrean Tigrinya accent, by the uniforms and shoes they were wearing and a distinct cultural marking on the face of some of the Eritrean soldiers.”

These widespread human rights violations are not ordinary crimes but grave contraventions of applicable international and human rights laws and principles, marked by intentionally directed attacks against civilians who were not directly taking part in the hostilities and including intentional looting, destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity (including religious institutions and health facilities). As these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes, it underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into overall human rights situation in Tigray region.

Damages related to the enforcement of curfew rules

Authorities imposed a curfew in Aksum which curbs vehicle and pedestrian movement between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Action taken by security forces on people seen on streets during curfew hours has caused loss of life and physical injuries. On January 19, 2021, around 7:30 p.m., Teklay Seyoum, was caught outdoors by soldiers who started chasing after him when he tried to run. He went into Aksum Tsion Church compound, but the soldiers followed him inside and shot him dead inside the Church’s premises. The Commission has also obtained information that, on January 25, two as yet unidentified people were

> killed in a similar manner; one of them around The Ark Hotel and the other around Megabit Primary School.
> On January 22 around 6:30 p.m., Berha Reda, 35 years old, was returning home with a friend after work when he was shot on his doorstep by soldiers wearing ENDF uniforms. Berha had to undergo a 6-hour long surgery at Aksum Referral Hospital first and then referred to Ayder Referral Hospital for a second surgery on the jaw to treat the extensive injury he sustained on the face. He has lost sight on both eyes from the injury and has trouble breathing. He has shown the Commission photographs of his injuries.
> Another man, identified as a security guard head of Aksum University, who is said to have returned to his post along with other colleagues following a call by the University, was killed in a controversy with soldiers while three of his colleagues were severely beaten up by the soldiers.
> The Commission is highly concerned that actions taken by security forces to enforce the curfew continue to cause loss of life and physical injuries with the use of disproportionate measures including lethal weapons to enforce curfews and ensure security of the city.[160]

Amnesty International noted in relation to the Axum massacre that it had "found that Eritrean troops killed hundreds of civilians in Axum – in what likely amounted to a crime against humanity – on 28-29 November [2020]".[161] In a previous statement in April 2021 the same organisation stated:

> Eritrean troops fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray state systematically killed hundreds of unarmed civilians in the northern city of Axum on 28-29 November 2020, opening fire in the streets and conducting house-to-house raids in a massacre that may amount to a crime against humanity […]
> Amnesty International spoke to 41 survivors and witnesses – including in-person interviews with recently arrived refugees in eastern Sudan and phone interviews with people in Axum – as well as 20 others with knowledge of the events. They consistently described extrajudicial executions, indiscriminate shelling and widespread looting after Ethiopian and Eritrean troops led an offensive to take control of the city amid the conflict with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in mid-November [2020].
> Satellite imagery analysis by the organization's Crisis Evidence Lab corroborates reports of indiscriminate shelling and mass looting, as well as identifies signs of new mass burials near two of the city's churches.[162]

In May 2021 Amnesty International noted that "The evidence that Amnesty International collected indicates that most of victims of the massacre were unarmed civilian residents of Axum, many of whom were attempting to flee the violence. According to witnesses Amnesty International interviewed and who were on the spot when the killing spree started, Eritrean soldiers 'went on a rampage, shooting at civilian men and youths who were out on the streets attempting to flee'. Rather than shooting fighters, Eritrean soldiers shot at men who posed no threat to them. The victims, residents said, carried no weapons and in many cases were running away from the soldiers when they were shot".[163] The same source further noted: "In addition, many of the killings took place in private homes, during house-to-house searches. Witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International described how Eritrean soldiers supported by mechanized units went house-to-house killing all males that they found, including

[160] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violations in Aksum City: Report on Preliminary Findings*, 24 March 2021, *pp. 1-10*
[161] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Tepid international response to Tigray conflict fuels horrific violations over past six months*, 4 May 2021
[162] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity*, 26 February 2021. For further details see the report by Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021
[163] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: The Need For An Independent International Investigation Of The Axum Massacre*, 13 May 2021, *p. 1*

teenagers, adults, and elders alike. In multiple instances Eritrean soldiers killed all male members of any family they found in a house".[164]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that:

> Axum is a city of about 67,000 inhabitants located in Central Tigray. Axum is a historical city in Ethiopia and former capital of the Aksumite Empire, and a city with a religious significance. Each year, on 30 November, large celebrations are traditionally held at St Mary Church for the religious festival of St Mary, which used to attract large numbers of pilgrims and tourists. Axum was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980, and used to be a popular touristic destination in Ethiopia. At the time of the attacks in November 2020, Axum reportedly hosted visitors who were present for the religious celebrations, as well as many internally displaced persons who had fled from Western Tigray.
>
> On 19 November 2020, allegedly after TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] forces had already withdrawn from Axum, the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] and Eritrean forces reportedly conducted indiscriminate shelling of the city leading to many civilian casualties, and subsequently took control of the city. Reportedly, Eritrean soldiers carried out house searches, harassing residents and conducting summary executions of those perceived as TPLF fighters or sympathizers, especially young men. There are accounts of numerous bodies with bullet wounds lying on the streets. Reports indicate that Eritrean soldiers shot indiscriminately at civilians and killed patients in Saint Mary's hospital, including civilians and wounded TPLF fighters. ENDF and Eritrean soldiers have reportedly looted and damaged Saint Mary's Hospital and Axum Referral Hospital, including medication, medical equipment, furniture, and the wing of Axum Referral Hospital equipped to treat COVID-19 patients. For the following week, Eritrean soldiers reportedly committed widespread looting of the city, including food and medication.
>
> On the morning of 28 November 2020, a group of TPLF militiamen supported by some local residents reportedly launched an attack on Eritrean troops positioned on Mai Koho Mountain, east of the Axum Tsion St Mary Church, and were defeated.
>
> In response, during the afternoon the Eritrean troops entered the city and reportedly carried out widespread killing of young men and boys in the streets and in house searches. Reports indicate that the victims were unarmed; many were shot from behind while they were running away, and others were lined up and shot from behind. ENDF were reportedly present in Axum but allegedly did not take action to protect civilians.
>
> On the morning of 29 November 2020, Eritrean troops reportedly shelled the city targeting survivors who had left their houses to collect the numerous bodies across the city. Some of the victims were still alive but could not be taken to hospital as the facilities had been looted and there were no doctors. It is also alleged that Eritrean troops arbitrarily detained a large number of people.
>
> Reportedly, many of the dead were buried on 30 November as the residents jointly collected the bodies, already in decay, from the streets. While the exact number of civilian casualties is unknown, hundreds of civilians were reportedly killed in Axum. Children as young as 13 were allegedly among the victims.[165]

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[164] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: The Need For An Independent International Investigation Of The Axum Massacre*, 13 May 2021, *p. 2*

[165] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *pp. 3-4*

Human Rights Watch reported on 12 May 2021 that:

> This week Ethiopia's attorney general's office released its findings into allegations of atrocities committed by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces in Tigray's historic city of Axum in late November 2020. The press release stated that most of those killed were fighters who died in clashes with Eritrean troops, and not civilians.
> Human Rights Watch's own reporting found that young civilian men, some armed, joined a small group of Tigray militia to ambush Eritrean troops atop the town's May Quho hill.
> But what is most revealing in the attorney general's press release is what it ignores – namely – the widespread pillaging that occurred the week Ethiopian forces captured the town and the horrific massacre by Eritrean forces that unfolded over 24-hours from the afternoon of November 28 through November 29.[166]

ii. April 2021 – Present

On 7 May 2021, the Council on Foreign Relations reported that: "Eritrean troops remain active on Ethiopian soil".[167]

The Brookings Institute reported on 15 May 2021 that "this week, the United Nations confirmed that Eritrean troops, often donning old Ethiopian military uniforms, were blocking the delivery of aid to the Tigray region".[168]

In May 2021 CNN reported that:

> Eritrean troops are operating with total impunity in Ethiopia's war-torn northern Tigray region, killing, raping and blocking humanitarian aid to starving populations more than a month after the country's Nobel Peace Prize winning leader pledged to the international community that they would leave.
> A CNN team traveling through Tigray's central zone witnessed Eritrean soldiers, some disguising themselves in old Ethiopian military uniforms, manning checkpoints, obstructing and occupying critical aid routes, roaming the halls of one of the region's few operating hospitals and threatening medical staff.[169]

The same source further highlighted:

> CNN's interviews with humanitarian workers, doctors, soldiers and displaced people in Axum and across central Tigray -- where up to 800,000 displaced people are sheltering -- indicate the situation is even worse than was feared. Eritrean troops aren't just working hand in glove with the Ethiopian government, assisting in a merciless campaign against the Tigrayan people, in some pockets they're fully in control and waging a reign of terror […]
> Ethiopian security officials working with Tigray's interim administration told CNN that the Ethiopian government has no control over Eritrean soldiers operating in Ethiopia, and that Eritrean forces had blocked roads into central Tigray for over two weeks and in the northwestern part of the region for nearly one month.[170]

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[166] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia's Axum Findings Ignore Massacre of Civilians*, 12 May 2021
[167] Council on Foreign Relations, *In Ethiopia, Peace Requires Domestic Reconciliation*, 7 May 2021
[168] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Wildlife, Horn of Africa, and infrastructure updates*, 15 May 2021
[169] CNN, *Eritrean troops disguised as Ethiopian military are blocking critical aid in Tigray*, 13 May 2021
[170] CNN, *Eritrean troops disguised as Ethiopian military are blocking critical aid in Tigray*, 13 May 2021

Ahead of an in-person informal interactive dialogue on the humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia by the UN Security Council, the Security Council Report discussed updates in Tigray and noted that: "UN officials further report that Eritrean troops remain in Ethiopia, despite the Ethiopian government's announcement of their withdrawal in April. In a 10 June interview with Reuters, [Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark] Lowcock reportedly maintained that Eritrean troops are blocking food supplies to more than one million people in areas outside of government control".[171]

The Africa Report reported in August 2021 that:

> The United States government announced on Monday 23 August that it had imposed sanctions on General Filipos Woldeyohannes, chief of staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces, "for his connection with serious human rights abuse committed during the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia."
> Under his command, Eritrea's forces have adopted a "scorched earth" policy in a "systematic effort to inflict as much harm on the ethnic Tigrayan population as possible" in the areas under its control, Washington said in several press statements.
> […] Eritrea responded saying it rejects "the utterly baseless allegations and blackmail", and demanded that the US "bring the case to an independent adjudication if it indeed has facts to prove its false allegations."
> The sanctions against 66-year-old Woldeyohannes, who has served as the country's military chief since March 2014 and doubles up as the minister for defence, are the latest sign that the United States intends to increase diplomatic pressure on key figures in Asmara and Addis Ababa.[172]

A day ahead of the UN Security Council convening in person for an open briefing and closed consultations on the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia under the "Peace and Security in Africa" agenda item, the Security Council Report wrote on 25 August 2021 that: "On 23 August, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the US is concerned that large numbers of Eritrean Defence Forces have re-entered Ethiopia, after having withdrawn in June. In addition, according to international media reports, an internal memorandum by EU diplomats noted that Eritrean troops have deployed to the western part of Tigray and have taken up defensive positions with tanks and artillery. At tomorrow's meeting, some Council members may call on Eritrean forces to withdraw from Ethiopia".[173]

The Council on Foreign Relations reported in August 2021 that: "The United States issued new sanctions against Filipos Woldeyohannes, chief of staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), accusing the EDF of committing a range of human right abuses, including massacres, rapes, and deliberate shootings of civilians. Two weeks ago, Amnesty International released a report contending that the EDF and other forces supporting the Ethiopian government in its civil war against Tigrayan rebels have adopted a strategy of committing sexual violence against women and girls in Tigray, constituting war crimes and potentially crimes against humanity".[174]

[171] Security Council Report, *Ethiopia (Tigray): Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Humanitarian Situation*, 14 June 2021
[172] The Africa Report, *US sanctions on Eritrean officials for role in Tigray deemed 'blackmail' by Asmara*, 25 August 2021
[173] Security Council Report, *Ethiopia (Tigray): Briefing and Consultations*, 25 August 2021
[174] Council on Foreign Relations, *Women This Week: New Realities for Women in Afghanistan*, 26 August 2021

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[175] They found that:

- The TDF has recaptured and reclaimed a lot of territory (in blue), after launching a major offensive in the second half of June ('Operation Alula'). It is again in control of major towns such as the regional capital Mekelle, Shire, Axum, Adigrat, Adwa… and of the rural areas in between. It also controls major access roads and the Tekeze Hydropower Dam.
  • The ENDF has largely retreated its troops and remains present only in Western Tigray, alongside the Amhara militia, who have informally annexed that part of the Tigray region (in light yellow).
  • The area under control by the EDF (in dark brown) has strongly declined and is now restricted to areas along the Ethiopian-Eritrean border. In addition to this, there is a heavy presence of Eritrean soldiers along the Ethio-Sudanese border and the Tekeze river in Tigray, which would prevent a humanitarian corridor from establishing.
  • Few buffer zones remain (in grey), where the ENDF and its allies nor the TDF are permanently present, but where skirmishes and battles between opposing parties occur, particularly in the North Wollo Zone of Amhara region. Through September 2021, TDF has retreated from most of Afar region The conflict incidents are strongly linked to the expansion of the territorial control of the TDF, as a lot of incidents are reported in the Amhara region close to and within the territory now controlled by the TDF. Other incidents have been reported near the border with the Afar region

  [To understand the above colour coding please consult Map 10: Reported conflict incidents from November 2020 to September 2021 on p. 30 and Map 11: Territorial control on 31st August 2021 of the report].[176]

At the end of October 2021, suggesting the resumption or continuation of fighting, the UN published an article reporting that "A UN humanitarian aid flight destined for the capital of the Tigray region in northern Ethiopia, was forced to return to Addis Ababa due to airstrikes".[177]

d. Involvement of Somali Army

In February 2021, African Arguments published an article with an overview of the Tigray conflict thus far; it reported that "despite denials by the Somali government, there are widespread allegations that Somali troops have been secretly fighting in Tigray too".[178]

The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) published a report on 25 January 2021 which stated that: "In response to rumours claiming that hundreds of Somali troops had died in fighting in Tigray following military training in Eritrea, the Ethiopian government flatly denied any involvement of

[175] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography
[176] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 29/30
[177] UN News Centre, *Ethiopia: UN forced to abort humanitarian aid flight into Tigray*, 23 October 2021
[178] African Arguments, *Tigray: One hundred days of war*, 12 February 2021

Somali soldiers in the conflict in the Tigray region, as did Somalia's Information Minister Osman Dubbe shortly before".[179]

In June 2021, Insight Insecurity noted in an information report on Ethiopia that: "The Somalia government has also denied reports from a UN investigator that Somalian military recruits training in Ethiopia had taken part in fighting in Tigray".[180]

ACCORD noted in August 2021 that: "Recent, albeit unconfirmed, reports have suggested that Somali troops may also be involved in the war in Tigray, prompting Somali parliamentarians to demand an investigation into the location of their troops". [181]

e. Spread of Conflict

This section should be read in conjunction with section VI., *a. Internal Displacement of people from Tigray and adjacent regions in 2021*, notably subsections *i. – v*.

In July 2021 William Davison, Senior Analysis at International Crisis Group, explained:

> In late July [2021], the federal government and allied regional leaders intensified attempts to mobilise people from across the country to join the war against forces from the country's northernmost region, Tigray. Those forces, having broken the back of a combined Ethiopian-Eritrean intervention in Tigray after compelling most federal troops to withdraw on 28 June [2021], have made incursions into the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions. […]
> For their part, Tigrayan forces have moved aggressively as Addis Ababa's recruitment campaign proceeds. Though federal authorities have, in effect, blockaded their region, Tigrayan fighters have been able to pursue federal and regional units into Afar, which lies east of Tigray, reportedly displacing tens of thousands of people who fled the violence. They may soon try to cut the key trade route from Addis Ababa through Afar to Djibouti, which functions as landlocked Ethiopia's main port. They have also advanced south and south west, with thousands of Tigrayan fighters pushing down main roads toward Woldiya and Gondar cities in the north of Amhara, taking control of several towns along the way.[182]

The same source further noted regarding the objectives of these Tigrayan fighters: "Their objective appears to be to force Ethiopian leaders into accepting their terms for a ceasefire, which now include a demand for a "transitional arrangement" – in effect, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's ouster – as well as the withdrawal of Eritrean and Amhara forces from Tigray".[183]

ACLED reported in its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering June-July 2021 that "Clashes were reported across Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions […] In June [2021], armed clashes were reported between TPLF and the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) within the Tigray region. The federal government announced a unilateral ceasefire at the end of June. However, in July [2021], armed clashes spread into both Amhara and Afar regions. TPLF forces clashed with the ENDF, as well as Amhara regional special forces and militias and Afar regional special forces and militias, as they attempted to seize areas controlled by the Amhara and Afar regional governments. The TPLF provided two reasons to

[179] German Federal office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), *Briefing Notes*, 25 January 2021, *p. 3*
[180] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia: Vigil Insight Situation Report*, 16 June 2021, *p. 3*
[181] ACCORD, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Foreign Relation: From 'Imperfect Hegemon' to Occupied State*, 24 August 2021
[182] William Davison (International Crisis Group), *The Dangerous Expansion of Ethiopia's Tigray War*, 30 July 2021
[183] William Davison (International Crisis Group), *The Dangerous Expansion of Ethiopia's Tigray War*, 30 July 2021

justify the attacks on neighboring regions: securing humanitarian access and forcing the federal government to accept a list of preconditions for a mutual ceasefire. In July [2021], TPLF released two lists of preconditions for a mutual ceasefire negotiation. The latest list of preconditions was released on 29 July 2021. TPLF officials have indicated that if this list of preconditions is not accepted, its forces will continue to fight with federal forces (Reuters, 6 July 2021; DW Amharic, 5 July 2021)".[184]

In its July 2021 *CrisisWatch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "Tigrayan forces advanced into neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions as federal and regional state govts took steps to reinforce their military capacity, making greater instability countrywide likely in coming weeks".[185]

In its August 2021 *CrisisWatch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "Tigray forces continued to launch offensives into Amhara and Afar regions in August, seizing several towns in Amhara and prompting tens of thousands to flee. Afar regional authorities accused Tigray forces of killing over 200 people in an attack on displaced civilians in the Galicoma area".[186]

In its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the month of August 2021, ACLED reported:

> At the beginning of the month, TPLF continued to gain territory in Amhara and Afar regions. TPLF forces took control of large swaths of territory in the North Wello zone, including Gashena and Lalibela. TPLF fighters also took control of areas in South Gondar around mid-month but lost control of Nefas Mewcha, Mersa, and Debre Zebit towns shortly near the end of the month as federal troops and Amhara regional forces rallied in a fresh offensive.
> Along with territorial changes, shelling increased in August and both government forces and TPLF troops used heavy artillery. On 5 August 2021, TPLF forces shelled an IDP center in GaliKuma, Afar region, resulting in the death of at least 150 internally displaced people. TPLF forces likewise shelled Woldiya, Nefas Mawecha, and Debre Tabor. TPLF reportedly looted areas under their control throughout the week.[187]

International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch Digest* of September 2021 noted that "The federal government said on 9 September [2021] that federal troops and local forces from the Afar region had compelled Tigray
forces to withdraw from Afar. Tigray leaders denied this and said that the forces had redeployed to neighbouring Amhara. Federal mobilisation continued, with the military graduating tens of thousands of new recruits".[188]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that "The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region […] is spreading beyond Tigray".[189] It further summarised the situation as follows:

> The conflict was initially concentrated in Tigray, parts of which have been occupied by forces from the neighboring Amhara region and by Eritrean troops, but an insurgent offensive in June 2021 led the federal government to withdraw its military from much of the region and declare a temporary ceasefire. The self-declared Tigrayan Defense Forces (TDF) have since launched incursions into Amhara and Afar regions in

[184] ACLED, *EPO Monthly: June-July 2021*, 20 August 2021
[185] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, July 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[186] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest August 2021: Ethiopia*, Unknown
[187] ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) Monthly: August 2021*, 9 September 2021
[188] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest September 2021: Ethiopia*, 14 October 2021
[189] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*

> what they describe as an effort to break a government-imposed blockade on their region and press the government into negotiations […]
> The expansion of the conflict into Afar and Amhara has displaced over 300,000 people and made another 1.7 million people food insecure.[190]

The same source further highlighted "Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray conflict and rising tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan also fuel concerns about a potential regional conflict. Ethiopia-Sudan border tensions have been exacerbated by the Tigray dispute, further complicating efforts to resolve a dispute between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan over a new dam on the Nile".[191]

Amnesty International, in its oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13 September 2021 re-iterated that "now new allegations of abuses by the TPLF, in their offensive in Afar and Amhara regions have emerged, which Amnesty International is trying to investigate".[192]

In its monthly EPO covering the month of September 2021, ACLED reported:

> During the first half of September [2021], over 40 armed clashes with nearly 400 reported fatalities were recorded between TPLF and government forces across Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions. The highest number of fatalities were recorded in the North Gondar zone when TPLF forces battled Amhara militia in Chenna for five days, leading to the reported deaths of at least 120 people in early September (Reuters, 9 September 2021). In contrast, in the last half of September, only two armed clashes were recorded (see map below). Despite the decline in the number of armed clashes, there are signs indicating both the TPLF and government forces are reorganizing to continue fighting in areas currently controlled by TPLF forces.[193]

i. Amhara

With the conflict surrounding Tigray spreading into neighbouring regions, the International Crisis Group provided the following brief background to place the Amhara militias and Amhara regional government in the current content:

> The region's leaders were for years at the helm of the ruling coalition that Abiy took over when he came to power in 2018. Following the TPLF's refusal to merge with the Prosperity Party in 2019, its influence on the national stage waned further, offering its longstanding Amhara adversaries an opportunity. After supporting the federal intervention in Tigray, Amhara militias, with backing from the Amhara regional government, de facto annexed what they see as historical Amhara land in Tigray – the western section of the region bordering Sudan that stretches from northern Amhara to southern Eritrea, as well as a chunk of South Tigray Zone. Amhara nationalists argue that the area was populated predominantly by Amharic speakers, and that the area's 1992 incorporation into what later became Tigray was a result of demographic engineering and land grabs by the rebels-turned-rulers in the TPLF.
> Amhara land claims do not stop there. Some Amhara also assert ownership over al-Fashaga and have designs on Metekel Zone, which lies to Amhara's west and is also the site of the GERD. Defending the

[190] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021*, p. 2* and *12*
[191] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021*, p. 3*
[192] Amnesty International, *Oral Statement, Item 2: Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, UN Human Rights Council Forty-eighth regular session 13 September – 8 October 2021*, 13 September 2021
[193] ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) Monthly: September 2021*, 13 October 2021

> assertive Amhara stance, activists contend that Amhara civilians are suffering "genocide" at the hands of armed factions from dominant groups in Ethiopian regions with substantial Amhara minorities.
> Addis Ababa implies that Egypt is trying to maintain its Nile basin hegemony by destabilising Ethiopia.
> Abiy seems unwilling or unable to remove the Amhara factions from western Tigray and he may also be reluctant to offer concessions to Khartoum over al-Fashaga to avoid upsetting a constituency he needs within the ruling party.[194]

In November 2020, the Brookings Institute wrote, in reference to the military escalation between Tigrayan forces and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, that "worrying reports of unlawful detentions, ethnic targeting, and civilian massacres are polarizing Ethiopians of all backgrounds, and constituencies in the neighboring Amhara region have already been drawn into the fight — evidence of just how easily this conflict could spread".[195]

Already in February 2021 the International Crisis Group highlighted Amhara factions involvement: "Federal troops are backed by Amhara factions claiming areas they say Tigray annexed in the early 1990s".[196] The same source further highlighted: "The TPLF launched missiles at airports in Amhara region's capital Bahir Dar on 14 and 20 November [2020], and the Amhara city of Gondar on 14 November [2020]".[197] The same source further noted:

> The de facto Amhara annexation of parts of south and west Tigray heightens concerns. West Tigray is now patrolled by Amhara security forces, while some towns in both the west and south are being run by Amhara administrators. Amhara nationalists claim these parts of Tigray as rightly belonging to their region, and say they intend to stay. West Tigray purportedly has experienced grave ethnic massacres. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, a body accountable to parliament, says a Tigrayan militia killed 600 mostly Amhara civilians in Maykadra on 9 November [2020]. Tigrayans who escaped to Sudanese refugee camps say Amhara militiamen attacked many of their kin in Maykadra town and elsewhere in west Tigray.[198]

In mid-March 2021 ACLED reported that "Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)/Tigray Special Forces (TSF) clashed with Amhara regional special police and federal forces in the Ofla area of Southern Tigray".[199] At the end of April 2021 ACLED further reported that "an armed clash between forces associated with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Amhara Regional Special Forces left at least 11 people dead".[200]

In its July 2021 *CrisisWatch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "Tigrayan forces 12 July [2021] launched southward and westward offensives with apparent view to driving ethnic Amhara forces off disputed territory, reportedly seizing Korem and Alamata towns 12-13 July [2021]; Abiy 14 July [2021] vowed to repel Tigrayan "enemies", effectively tearing up unilateral ceasefire declared by federal govt late June; most of country's ten regional states in following days said they would send

[194] International Crisis Group, *Containing the Volatile Sudan-Ethiopia Border Dispute*, 24 June 2021
[195] Brookings Institute, *Averting civil war in Ethiopia: It's time to propose elements of a negotiated settlement*, 16 November 2020
[196] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021
[197] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021
[198] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021
[199] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 13-19 March 2021*, 24 March 2021
[200] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 24-30 April 2021*, 5 May 2021

reinforcements".[201] The same source further noted: "25 July [2021] said they had seized Adi Arkay town in Amhara regional state, which latter denied; Afar and Amhara regional govts 23 and 25 July called on civilians to take up arms".[202]

In July 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a press release stating that:

> EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] has received information on the killing of three residents of ethnic Tigrayan origin in Woreta, Fogera Woreda, South Gondar Zone of the Amhara region on 11 July, 2021.
> These killings occurred following reports of an attack by TDF [Tigray Defense Forces]/TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] forces in an area known as Feyel Wuha, on July 10, 2021, and which killed a group of militia who were reportedly mostly residents of Fogera Woreda and the Head of the Peace and Security Bureau of the same Woreda. Reports also indicate that residents from the Woreda Peace and Security Head's birthplace, Gumera Wonz, who had come to Woreta to receive his body were responsible for the attack on the three residents of ethnic Tigrayan origin.
> While the Commission is encouraged to learn that swift measures by the Fogera Woreda security and administrative authorities restored calm to the area and resulted in the quick arrest of six other residents who attempted further attacks, the incident evidences the need for regional and federal governments to take urgent measures to protect civilians against similar attacks.
> Reports of a number of retaliatory attacks, including killings and abductions, against persons perceived to be opponents of TDF/TPLF and serious allegations of attacks against Eritrean refugees in Tigray region and environs are of grave concern. There are also reports of a new wave of displacements from Alamata due to active hostilities in the area and reports of retaliatory attacks in Mekoni.
> […] EHRC is extremely concerned about the growing intensity and the spread of the impact of the conflict to areas neighbouring Tigray region, including in Afar and Amhara regions.[203]

In August 2021, Insecurity Insight reported in an information alert on Amhara that: "The Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) captured the UNESCO World Heritage Site town of Lalibela (a highly revered Ethiopian Christian icon) in Amhara on 5 August and rejected calls to leave the Amhara and Afar regions. In response, the Ethiopian government warned that it could "deploy the entire defensive capability of the state" if the TDF did not reciprocate its "humanitarian overtures"; in other words, its current ceasefire. Meanwhile an Amhara regional official stated on 7 August that it would launch an offensive following the TDF's capture of Lalibela".[204]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that "Regional authorities in Amhara, Afar, and Oromia called for civilians to take up arms in July [2021], signaling a further escalation of the conflict. In early August [2021, the TDF, which also advanced south into Amhara, took Lalibela, a UNESCO World Heritage site home to 13th century rock-hewn churches, reportedly without any shooting. Heavy fighting has been reported in other areas of Amhara, however, and some reports suggest Tigrayan forces have razed villages killed civilians, and looted aid supplies during their offensive; the TDF denies targeting civilians and has called for an independent investigation of the incidents.

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[201] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, July 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[202] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, July 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[203] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Protect civilians from harassment, arbitrary detention and attacks*, 15 July 2021
[204] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia Information Alert: Amhara, Vigil Insight Report 6*, 8 August 2021, *p. 1*

Amidst this fighting, a minority group in Amhara, the Qemant, have accused Amhara forces and militia of attacking their communities and displacing thousands, some who have fled as refugees to Sudan. Amhara officials assert some Qemant have become a proxy force for the TPLF (an allegation Ethiopian officials have also made against armed groups in other regions). With all sides mobilizing civilians to fight, distinguishing civilians from combatants has become more challenging for journalists and human rights monitors as reports of possible new atrocities emerge.[205]

According to reporting by UNOCHA covering the first half of August 2021:

> The conflict along the Amhara-Tigray regional border is worsening, with an estimated 200,000 displaced people in volatile and conflict-prone areas in North Gondar, Central Gondar, South, Wag Hemra, North Wello, and in various pockets across the region. There is a limited humanitarian relief presence in North Wello, North Shewa, and Oromia Special Zone where urgent humanitarian needs are being reported. There are an unconfirmed number of IDPs in Zigem Woreda in Awi Zone, none of whom have received humanitarian assistance. Partners are prioritizing scaling up the response in Afar as well as in Amhara.[206]

The same source further highlighted that "Due to the escalating conflict, humanitarian access to Northern Gondar, namely towards the Amhara-Tigray border, is increasingly getting restricted by Amhara security agents. This prevents/limits the understanding of the situation on the ground and compromises planning for any eventual responses".[207]

Covering September 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "Amhara officials 8 Sept [2021] accused Tigray forces of having killed over 120 civilians in Chenna village near Dabat town (North Gondar Zone) 1-2 Sept [2021] – in what would be one of deadliest massacres of ten-month war; Tigray forces rejected "fabricated allegation", as well as claims they executed dozens of civilians in and around Kobo town in North Wollo Zone starting 9 Sept [2021]".[208]

On 19 September 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported on attacks on civilians in Kobo, Amhara, stating that: "The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is alarmed by disturbing reports it is receiving about allegations of deliberate attacks against civilians in Kobo town and surrounding rural towns by TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] fighters including shelling on civilian areas, house to house searches and killings, looting and destruction of civilian infrastructure".[209]

In its weekly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the week 25 September-1 October 2021, ACLED reported that "fighting between Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) forces and Amhara regional special forces, Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) soldiers, and government-aligned communal militias continued in West Gondar, North Wello, and Central Gondar zones of Amhara region […] Clashes between the warring parties in the Amhara region have slowed over the past two weeks, although there is evidence that government-allied forces are gearing up for a fresh offensive that will likely lead to increased conflict in the coming weeks (Sky News, 5 October 2021)".[210]

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[205] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 12*
[206] UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia, Issue #11 2-16 August 2021*, 16 August 2021, *p. 2*
[207] UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia, Issue #11 2-16 August 2021*, 16 August 2021, *p. 2*
[208] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, September 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[209] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Amhara Region: Deliberate attacks against civilians in Kobo*, 19 September 2021
[210] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 25 September-1 October 2021*, 6 October 2021

In its weekly EPO covering the week 9-15 October 2021, ACLED reported that "After a period of relative calm, the conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the government reignited last week. Each side accused the other of initiating a new round of armed clashes in the Amhara region. Due to a lack of credible information, details of the clashes are sparse. Clashes last week were mainly concentrated in the North Wello zone, specifically in Wirgessa, Wegeltena, and Haro towns, as well as in Wuchale, Tehuledere, Werebabo, and Delanta areas in the South Wello zone. An unspecified number of people were killed during the clashes, including civilians killed by shelling".[211]

ACLED reported in its weekly EPO covering the week 16-22 October 2021 that "TPLF forces and the ENDF, alongside Amhara regional special forces and Amhara militias, clashed in different areas in the North and South Wello zones (see map below). On 17 October 2021, TPLF shelled an ancient mosque in Zarima town in the North Gondar zone. Around 18 October 2021, TPLF forces shelled Ambassel town in the North Wello zone, killing an unspecified number of people".[212] The same source further noted: "The Amhara regional government has called for mass mobilization throughout the region and encouraged individuals to travel to both North and South Wello zones to defend the area from further TPLF attacks (Amhara Media Corporation, 21 October 2021). At the beginning of the week, authorities from the South Wello zone administration made a similar call to the public (Amhara Media Corporation, 18 October 2021)".[213]

ii. Afar

An article published by the Africa Report in July 2021 noted that: "The recapture of Mekele, the capital of Tigray region, by rebels of the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) on 28 June, shows that the conflict in Ethiopia's northern region is far from over. On 17 July [2021], Tigrayan rebels continued their offensive in Afar Region, in the eastern part of the country."[214]

In its July 2021 *CrisisWatch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "Tigrayan forces 17-19 July [2021] clashed with Afar regional forces and militias in Afar regional state, leaving at least 20 civilians killed and some 54,000 displaced […] Afar and Amhara regional govts 23 and 25 July [2021] called on civilians to take up arms".[215]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that following "In July [2021], regional forces from other parts of Ethiopia reportedly deployed to the Afar-Tigray border to reinforce the army. The TDF moved into Afar in what it said was an operation against the amassing forces. Some observers speculated that the TDF might seek to cut off the road and rail line to Djibouti's port, through which 95% of Ethiopia's maritime trade transits, in an effort to force the federal government into negotiations. (That route—through Afar—was blocked for days in July [2021] by protests and violence between communities in Afar and Ethiopia's eastern Somali region, who are involved in a simmering border dispute unrelated to the Tigray conflict). Regional authorities in Amhara, Afar, and Oromia called for civilians to take up arms in July [2021], signaling a further escalation of the conflict.[216]

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[211] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 9-15 October 2021*, 20 October 2021
[212] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 16-22 October 2021*, 27 October 2021
[213] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 16-22 October 2021*, 27 October 2021
[214] The Africa Report, *Ethiopia/Tigray: 'UN and AU silence reveals a widespread embarrassment'*, 22 July 2021
[215] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest July 2021: Ethiopia*, Unknown
[216] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 12*

According to reporting by UNOCHA covering the first half of August 2021:

> In Afar, nearly 76,500 people are reported to be displaced following the expansion of the conflict into Yalo, Awra, Gulina, and Ewa Woredas of Zone 4 (Fantana Rasu). Fighting is reported in areas around Zone 04, including n Ewa, Awra, Yalo and Kelwan Woredas of Fenti Zone. Accurate reliable reporting on the current situation remains limited; however, an unknown number of casualties, including civilians have been reported and several thousand people displaced because of fighting. Reports indicate that on 5 Aug [2021], several civilians were attacked in Galikoma Kebele of Gulina Woreda in Fenti Zone. 46 people with mild-severe bullet injuries were evacuated from Galikoma to the regional hospital in Dubti Town, 10 km from Semera Town. […]
> Access to the other areas in the Zone 4 is still not possible due to the unpredictable security situation in the zone.[217]

Reporting in August 2021 the UN reported about the spill-over effects of the conflict in Tigray and noted that "UNICEF was extremely alarmed by the reported killing last Thursday of over 200 people, including more than 100 children, in attacks on displaced families sheltering at a health facility and a school in Afar [adjoining region to Tigray]".[218] Borkena news reporting on the same incident further stated: "Afar Human Rights Organization said this week, as reported by DW Amharic service, the International Community has ignored internal displacement, destruction and killings of civilians in the region after the TPLF took the war to the region several weeks ago".[219]

In August 2021, the Brookings Institute reported that: "The emboldened TDF [Tigray Defense Forces] has seized parts of the Afar and Amhara regions".[220] The same article further noted that "With the departure of ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] from Tigray, Tigrayan forces rapidly pushed into the Afar and Amhara regions, on August 5 seizing the important town of Lalibela, home to rock-hewn 13th century churches. In Afar, the TDF seek to take over the crucial land route to Djibouti, a vital artery for landlocked Ethiopia. Suppositions abound that the Tigrayan forces even entertain ambitions to march on Addis Ababa".[221]

An August 2021 open letter from a group of African intellectuals calling for urgent action in Ethiopia over the Tigray conflict, published in the Africa Report, noted that: "We note too, the advance of the TDF [Tigray Defense Forces] into Amhara and Afar regions, which, despite the TDF's claims to be seeking to enable humanitarian and other supply access chains, is contributing to the expansion of the conflict across Ethiopia".[222]

In September 2021, an Insecurity Insight report on Ethiopia on the implications of the situation on aid, noted that:

> The Government meanwhile claimed on 07 September that the TDF [Tigray Defense Forces]/ TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] had been defeated in Afar region and had withdrawn. The TPLF countered that they had merely shifted troops to neighbouring Amhara for an offensive there.[223]

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[217] UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia, Issue #11 2-16 August 2021*, 16 August 2021, *p. 3*
[218] UN News Centre, *Tigray: Intensified fighting across borders 'disastrous' for children*, 9 August 2021
[219] Borkena, *Ethiopia: Tigray rebels reportedly slaughtered over 100 children in Afar region*, 9 August 2021
[220] Brookings Institute, *Dangerous trends in Ethiopia: Time for Washington's tough love*, 9 August 2021
[221] Brookings Institute, *Dangerous trends in Ethiopia: Time for Washington's tough love*, 9 August 2021
[222] The Africa Report, *Ethiopia: African intellectuals call for urgent action over Tigray war*, 27 August 2021
[223] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia: Situation Report*, 14 September 2021, *pp. 2,4*

Reporting in its weekly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the week 4-10 September 2021, ACLED reported that "the Ethiopian government stated that Afar region is currently under the control of ENDF and Afar forces. At the same time, TPLF claimed that its forces voluntarily withdrew from Afar region and were redeployed to Amhara region (Reuters, 9 September 2021). On 6 September 2021, ENDF clashed with TPLF in Uwa and Hida woredas in Afar region, taking control of Uwa shortly after. ENDF forces attacked TPLF forces using airstrikes in Awra and Hida woredas in Afar region. The next day, ENDF forces clashed with TPLF forces in Gulina, Yallo, Awra, and Kelwan woredas in Afar region, taking control of these woredas shortly after".[224]

ACLED reported in its weekly EPO covering the week 16-22 October 2021 that "clashes have resumed after a lull in September [2021]. Armed clashes between TPLF and ENDF, accompanied by Afar regional special forces, were reported last week in the Chifra area which borders the Amhara region".[225]

iii. Alliance between TPLF and Oromo Liberation Army

Covering August 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "Tigrayan forces […] formed alliance with insurgent group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) with stated aim of toppling federal govt".[226]

In early November 2020, ACLED reported that "State forces launched a retaliatory attack on OLF-Shane militants, killing 24 militants. Government sources have accused the TPLF of supporting OLF-Shane".[227]

An August 2021 open letter from a group of African intellectuals calling for urgent action in Ethiopia over the Tigray conflict, published in the Africa Report, noted that: "We note with dismay that protagonists to the conflict no longer include just the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) and the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) together with the special forces from Amhara, but now also include the Oromo Liberation Army on one side, and on the other side, special forces from several other regions, as well as numerous conscripts".[228]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that:

> The war in northern Ethiopia overlaps with other conflicts in the country, including in Abiy's home region of Oromia, where his government has faced rising political discontent and a growing insurgency. Reports of a nascent military alliance between the Tigrayan and Oromo insurgents, and possibly other armed groups, raises the prospect of a wider war and adds to concerns over Ethiopia's stability.[229]

The same source further reported:

> the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) announced in August [2021] a new military alliance with the TPLF. The OLA is a splinter faction of the OLF that did not disarm in 2018 and later renewed its rebellion, accusing

[224] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 4-10 September 2021*, 14 September 2021
[225] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 16-22 October 2021*, 27 October 2021
[226] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, August 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[227] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 1-7 November 2020*, 11 November 2020
[228] The Africa Report, *Ethiopia: African intellectuals call for urgent action over Tigray war*, 27 August 2021
[229] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 3*

> the government of reneging on commitments in the peace deal. The government calls the faction OLF-Shene, or "Shene," and has designated it, alongside the TPLF, as a terrorist organization. These terrorist designations are the first since the government rescinded designations on opposition groups after Abiy took office. The prospect of an alliance between the TPLF and OLA, which reportedly made territorial gains in 2021, increases concerns about a widening war. The two groups say their partnership is based on principles of "respect for self-determination and human rights." Historically, the TPLF and OLF were both strong proponents of the constitutional right to ethno-regional self-determination. The TPLF is reportedly debating whether it now seeks secession. Its leader says the decision depends on "politics at the center," but he suggests "If they don't want us, why should we stay?".[230]

International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch Digest* of September 2021 noted that "The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), allied to Tigray forces since August [2021, claimed in late August-early September that they had captured localities in East Wollega Zone and parts of Borana Zone in Oromia. The OLA clashed with federal government and Oromia forces in North Shewa Zone in late September [2021]. The OLA attacks reportedly killed at least 28 civilians in Kiramu district, East Wollega Zone between 16-18 September. The group denies it targets civilians".[231]

iv. Metekel Zone in Benishangul-Gumuz

ACLED provided the following summary to the conflict in Benshangul/Gumuz:

> The Benshangul/Gumuz Region lies on Ethiopia's western border with Sudan, and shares internal borders with Amhara and Oromia Regions. The Region hosts Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and has been the site of intense ethnic killings throughout the past year. Throughout the past two years, Metekel Zone of the Region has been one of the most violent locations in the country, with over 1052 fatalities recorded. […]
>
> Most fatalities that are recorded represent attacks mounted by unspecified ethnic militias on ethnic Amhara civilians.
>
> Official sources have continually refused to definitively identify the perpetrators of the violence, although they are almost certainly made up of Gumuz ethnic militias who may be associated with more officially organized ethno-nationalistic movements. Locals sometimes place blame on factions of the Oromo Liberation front (OLF) as being behind the killing, which the latter denies. Some OLF leaders believe splinter groups that once belonged to the front could be responsible (Yusif Semir, 9 December 2020). Government sources have consistently accused "anti-peace forces" of having links with Sudan (AFP, 12 February 2021) […]
>
> In the face of increasing fatalities as a result of attacks on Amhara civilians, Amhara authorities began to demand that additional actions be taken. In December of 2020, the Commissioner of the Amhara Regional State Police requested that his force be responsible for solving the crisis in Benshangul/Gumuz Regional State, or that the Federal Government intervene (Amhara Mass Media Agency, 7 December 2020). Benshangul/Gumuz Regional State officials reacted to these requests by labeling them "repeated threats of intimidation" (Metekel Zone Communication Bureau).
>
> As of 23 January 2021, the Federal Government has declared a state of emergency to the Metekel Zone (EBC, 23 January 2021) and federal troops have taken control of security in the area. This official transfer of security responsibility represents a formal intervention by multiple factions of the federal government into the regional affairs of the Benshangul/Gumuz State.[232]

[230] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 23*
[231] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest September 2021: Ethiopia*, 14 October 2021
[232] ACLED, *Benshangul/Gumuz Region*, Undated

The same source further elaborated in its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering August 2021 that "The groups involved in the violence reportedly have connections to the conflict occurring in the north of the country, although some government allegations linking Gumuz armed groups are unclear and over-simplifies the complex issues at play (Awash Post, 24 August 2021). However, authorities have cracked down hard on individuals with suspected links to the TPLF, and several high-profile battles were fought during the month".[233]

Specifically, the source documented in August and early September 2021:

> On 10 August 2021, unidentified gunmen (identified by some sources as being ethnic Gumuz) attacked a bus traveling from Chagni to Gilgel Beles in Gidiga kebele in Mandura woreda in Metekel zone, Benshangul/Gumuz, killing at least six civilians and abducting 14 others (Ethiopia Insider, 11 August 2021). Days later, government forces claimed to have killed more than 170 members of an unidentified armed group, including 12 members of TPLF, as they attempted an incursion into Guba woreda through the Sudan border (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, 14 August 2021).
> An additional 32 people with suspected links with TPLF have been arrested in Kurmuk woreda in the Asosa zone while trying to enter the region from Sudan (Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, 17 August 2021). Later in the month, security forces carried out a serious crackdown and hundreds of people were reportedly arrested in Benshangul/Gumuz region with suspected links to anti-government groups (DW Amharic, 19 August 2021). During the month, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission expressed concern after an investigation found that 19 women, along with young children, had been arrested by the federal command post in an attempt to pressure armed actors into surrendering (EHRC, 4 September 2021). The 19 women were later released (EHRC, 5 September 2021).[234]

In its August 2021 *CrisisWatch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "The Benishangul-Gumuz regional government accused militias allied with Tigray forces of having entered the region from neighbouring Sudan in an alleged destabilisation attempt".[235] In its actual *CrisisWatch* for August 2021, the same source stated: "In west, Benishangul-Gumuz regional govt 14 Aug [2021] said its forces had killed 170 armed "anti-peace elements" allied to Tigrayan forces who had reportedly entered from Sudan, mid-Aug [2021] also arrested 32 suspected Tigrayan forces "operatives" after they reportedly crossed from Sudan in alleged attempt to destabilise region".[236]

International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch Digest* of September 2021 noted that "more federal troops reinforced operations in Benishangul-Gumuz" and that "Federal troops deployed to the Benishangul-Gumuz region on the Sudanese border after regional authorities on 9 September [2021] accused ethnic Gumuz rebels of killing five security forces and one Chinese national in the Metekel Zone. Attacks in Metekel have displaced hundreds of thousands since September 2020".[237]

In its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the month of September 2021, ACLED reported:

> Instability in Benshangul/Gumuz region continued throughout the month, with TPLF affiliated forces expanding into the Metekel zone. Around 3 September 2021, an armed group affiliated with TPLF clashed

[233] ACLED, *EPO Monthly: August 2021*, 9 September 2021
[234] ACLED, *EPO Monthly: August 2021*, 9 September 2021
[235] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest August 2021: Ethiopia*, Unknown
[236] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, August 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[237] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch Digest September 2021: Ethiopia*, 14 October 2021

> with ENDF and Amhara regional special forces in the Almehal area in the Metekel zone, when the group tried to enter Ethiopia through Sudan. This clash represents the expansion of the conflict between TPLF and ENDF into a new region, as for the past few months TPLF forces have mostly clashed with government forces in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions.
> Violence between state forces and other separatist groups also spread into the Kamashi zone. By the end of September, ENDF forces had entered the Kamashi zone, following weeks of the zone being under the control of the Benshangul People's Liberation Front. The front is a separatist group that is fighting against regional and federal forces.[238]

In its weekly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the week 25 September-1 October 2021, ACLED reported that "the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) entered the Kamashi zone in Benshangul/Gumuz region last week, following weeks of the zone being under the control of the Benshangul People's Liberation Front. The move comes as the Benshangul/Gumuz regional security forces were unable to push back the Benshangul People's Liberation Front forces. The Benshangul People's Liberation Front is reportedly supported by OLF-Shane (VOA Amharic, 24 September 2021) and has looted and attacked civilians in the area".[239]

In its weekly EPO covering the week 2-8 October 2021, ACLED reported that "after a recent ENDF incursion into the Kamashi zone following weeks of the zone being under the control of the Benshangul People's Liberation Front, more than 13,000 people were internally displaced from two kebeles in Kamashi zone (DW Amharic, 6 October 2021). According to the regional government, more than 490,000 internally displaced people are now in the region (DW Amharic, 6 October 2021)".[240]

f. Civilian casualties

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[241] They found that:

> While no numbers exist for the total amount of civilian casualties, well documented cases of 3055 deaths (by 3 October [2021]) indicate that 8% of the dead are women, and 92% are men (Fig. 4.1). This is in line with an often stated intention to "eradicate Tigray fighters, as well as the future generation of fighters". Among the men, a small number of victims are priests and deacons, traditionally people with authority in the community. Casualties are dominantly (30%) victims of massacres, killing sprees, pointblank executions, in house searches, rounding up of civilians, or after arrest (including journalist Dawit Kebede) (classified under 'Execution' in Fig. 4.1).
> Though impressive in video footage, only 3% of the known victims was killed during shelling and airstrikes, such as the one targeting the Togoga market (Central Zone) on 22 June [2021]. People who died of hunger or due to the total collapse of the healthcare system are generally not reported, and make up less than 1% of the fully documented victims. However, the number of people who died of hunger was expected to be in the thousands already by early July [2021], as 353,000 people were reported to experience famine conditions in early June, a number that was updated to 400,000 in early July [2021]. As 2 out of 10,000 of

[238] ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) Monthly: September 2021*, 13 October 2021
[239] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 25 September-1 October 2021*, 6 October 2021
[240] ACLED, *EPO Weekly: 2-8 October 2021*, 13 October 2021
[241] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography

> these people are expected to die of hunger every day, approximately 71 to 80 people died every day due to man-made famine conditions in the region […]
> In addition to this, 66% of the fully documented victims was killed by violence that has not been further detailed - most of the victims can be allocated to massacres or executions, although some of them also may have died in crossfire. In case of the latter, the perpetrator is indicated as 'not provided'. For female victims, deaths caused by sexual violence also may not be well represented in the list. As of June 2021, the victims of sexual violence that have been reported, were all women.
>
> [To understand the above better please consult Figure 4.1 Graphic representation of fully documented civilian casualties, by the end of September 2021, on p. 33 of the report].[242]

With regards to the June 2021 airstrike against Togoga market in Central Zone, the Explosive Weapons Monitor reported:

> In June 2021, there were 244 recorded civilian casualties from explosive weapon use in Ethiopia this month and all of these were the result of one incident on 22 June, when an airstrike by the Ethiopian state airforce struck a market in Togoga, Tigray, killing 64 civilians and wounding at least 180 others. The airstrike took place around 1pm, when many families were in the market. Ambulances were reportedly blocked by Ethiopian soldiers from reaching the scene and/or returning to the hospital in Mekele, causing the death toll to rise. This is, by far, the most lethal and injurious incident of explosive weapon use recorded in Ethiopia in the last decade, and the first recorded state airstrike this year [2021].
> Sources: Reuters, BBC, Guardian and AP.[243]

IV. Human Rights Situation in relation to Tigray

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[244] The "26 maps in this atlas provide detailed information at the scale of districts (woredas) or sub-districts (tabiyas). Besides background information related to administrative divisions, social and natural resources - locations of internally displaced people, massacres and civilian casualties receive due attention. Humanitarian access and needs are particularly addressed; official data on humanitarian aid distribution are mapped, and contrasted to ground evidence related to such distributions. The final outlook, links up the emergency and famine conditions in Tigray to the current crop status and to the blockade and siege of the region".[245] In particular the following maps may be of interest:

- Map 10 (p. 30); Reported conflict incidents from November 2020 to September 2021, including battles, ambushes, air strikes, drone attacks and shelling;
- Map 11 (p. 31): Approximate territorial control on 31 August 2021;

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[242] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 32/33

[243] Explosives Weapons Monitor, *Monthly Update for June 2021*, Undated

[244] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography

[245] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, *p. 1*

- Figure 4.1 (. 33) Graphic representation of fully documented civilian casualties, by the end of September 2021;
- Map 13 (p. 37): Heatmap of civilian casualties and massacres in the Tigray War between 4th November 2020 and 28th September 20201;
- Map 14 (p. 38): Occurrence of massacres in the Tigray War up to 3rd October 2021 and Annex A (p. 89-95): Chronological overview of the 260 reported massacres in the Tigray War between November 2020 and September 2021;
- Map 15 (p. 40): Restricted humanitarian access due to the ongoing conflict (as of 31st July 2021)
- Map 16 (p. 46): Sites with IDPs due to the Tigray War (November 2020 to June 2021);
- Map 22 (p. 68): Current (June 2021) and projected (January 2022) food security outcomes in Tigray.[246]

a. Overview

The U.S. Department of State reported its annual human rights report covering 2020 that:

> There were reports that government security forces, security forces from neighboring regions, the Eritrean military, private militias, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front Regional Security Force all committed human rights violations and abuses, including extrajudicial killings, sexual assaults, forced displacement of civilian populations, and torture. There are reports that government security forces engaged in arbitrary arrests and detentions.[247]

In February 2021, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, published a statement which read:

> The United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, is alarmed by the continued escalation of ethnic violence in Ethiopia and allegations of serious violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the Tigray region.
> The Special Adviser has received reports of serious human rights violations and abuses, committed by the parties to the conflict in the Tigray region and their allies. These include extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, looting of property, mass executions and impeded humanitarian access. Ms. Nderitu reiterated the call by the Secretary-General for continued urgent steps to alleviate the humanitarian situation and extend the necessary protection to those at risk. […]
> The Special Adviser has also received disturbing reports of attacks against civilians based on their religion and ethnicity as well as serious allegations of human rights violations and abuses including arbitrary arrests, killings, rape, displacement of populations and destruction of property in various parts of the country. These are in addition to reported acts of hate speech and stigmatization including, ethnic profiling against some ethnic communities, notably, the Tigray, Amhara, Somali, and Oromo.[248]

Already in November 2020 the UN Acting Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Ms. Pramila Patten, and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Ms. Karen Smith, "expressed deep concern over reports of escalating ethnic tensions in Ethiopia and recent military clashes in the Tigray region, in which many civilians have allegedly been killed. The two Special Advisers have received

[246] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, [*various pages]*

[247] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Section I., g. Abuses in internal conflict*

[248] UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, *Statement by the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, on the situation in Ethiopia*, 5 February 2021

reports of incidents of ethnically and religiously motivated hate speech, incitement to violence and serious human rights violations including arbitrary arrests, killings, displacement of populations and destruction of property in various parts of the country".[249]

In May 2021 Amnesty International raised its concern that "Since the fighting broke out on 4 November 2020, thousands of civilians have been killed, hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced within Tigray, and 63,000 refugees have fled to Sudan. Amnesty International and other organizations have documented a string of serious human rights violations that include war crimes and likely crimes against humanity. There are also numerous credible reports of women and girls being subjected to sexual violence, including gang rape by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers".[250]

In May 2021, announcing its visa restriction policy to the issuance of visas for any current or former Ethiopian or Eritrea government officials, members of the security forces, or other individuals, including mhara regional and irregular forces and members of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the U.S. Department of State noted its:

> deepening concerns about the ongoing crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray region as well as other threats to the sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. People in Tigray continue to suffer human rights violations, abuses, and atrocities, and urgently needed humanitarian relief is being blocked by the Ethiopian and Eritrean militaries as well as other armed actors. Despite significant diplomatic engagement, the parties to the conflict in Tigray have taken no meaningful steps to end hostilities or pursue a peaceful resolution of the political crisis. The United States condemns in the strongest terms the killings, forced removals, systemic sexual violence, and other human rights violations and abuses. We are equally appalled by the destruction of civilian property including water sources, hospitals, and medical facilities, taking place in Tigray.[251]

In June 2021 a joint NGO call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray stated:

> 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 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

[249] UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, *UN High-level Officials Express Deep Concern Over Escalating Ethnic Tensions in Ethiopia*, 12 November 2020
[250] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Tepid international response to Tigray conflict fuels horrific violations over past six months*, 4 May 2021
[251] U.S. Department of State, *United States' Actions To Press for the Resolution of the Crisis in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia*, 23 May 2021

> Violence in Conflict has repeatedly expressed alarm over the widespread and systematic commission of rape and sexual violence in Tigray. […]
> 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.[252]

Following the recapture of Mekelle by the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF), the armed forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Amnesty International raised its concern in July 2021 that "There are fears of reprisal attacks against civilians in Tigray by all sides – retreating ENDF troops, their allied armed forces and militias in the neighbouring Amhara region and Eritrean forces and the TDF".[253]

In July 2021 the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, published a statement which read:

> The Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, expressed alarm at the continued deterioration of ethnic violence in Ethiopia and at the strong allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in the Tigray region as well as in other parts of the country, including in Afar, Somali, Oromo and Amhara regions […]
> Since the beginning of the conflict in the Tigray region, the Special Adviser has continued to receive reports of serious human rights violations and abuses, including alleged sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, arbitrary arrests and ethnic based targeted killings committed by all parties, which have now escalated to other parts of the country. She also deplored the erosion of rule of law and echoed the recent call by the Human Rights Council for an immediate end to the violence and human rights violations in Tigray.
> The Special Adviser also condemned inflammatory statements used by top political leaders and associated armed groups. The use of pejorative and dehumanizing language like "cancer", "devil", "weed" and "bud" to refer to the Tigray conflict is of utmost concern. Hate speech, together with its propagation through social media is part of a worrisome trend that contributes to further fuel ethnic tensions in the country […].[254]

Amnesty International, in its oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13 September 2021 re-iterated that:

> We have shared evidence of horrifying massacres that constitute war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity. We have warned that the humanitarian situation has worsened with time, as the Ethiopian government continues to restrict access for aid and aid workers to the region. We have shared evidence of how women and girls have been subjected to rape and other sexual violence by forces aligned with the Ethiopian government. And now new allegations of abuses by the TPLF, in their offensive in Afar and Amhara regions have emerged, which Amnesty International is trying to investigate.[255]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that:

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[252] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Joint letter calling for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 10 June 2021
[253] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: As Mekelle changes hands, civilians remain in urgent need of protection*, 29 June 2021
[254] UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, *Statement by Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the continued deterioration of the situation in Ethiopia*, 30 July 2021
[255] Amnesty International, *Oral Statement, Item 2: Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, UN Human Rights Council Forty-eighth regular session 13 September – 8 October 2021*, 13 September 2021

> U.N. officials assert that all parties to the Tigray conflict have committed serious abuses, including widespread sexual violence, extrajudicial executions, mass killings, and forced displacement, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. They have described the use of rape and starvation as weapons of war. State Department officials suggest Ethiopian security forces have committed acts of ethnic cleansing and accuse forces aligned with the federal government of a violent campaign of collective punishment against the people of Tigray. Reports indicate that ethnic Tigrayans have been targeted based on their ethnicity, and hate speech and dehumanizing language are rising. Aid workers and Eritrean refugees have also been attacked in Tigray, and concerns about revenge attacks have grown as the TDF has moved into Amhara and Afar. "Inflammatory rhetoric and ethnic profiling are tearing apart the social fabric of the country," Secretary-General Guterres warned in August [2021]. The U.N. Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has expressed alarm over the situation in Tigray, where some observers say atrocities may constitute genocide.[256]

Referencing its information to a number of sources, the same source further reported:

> The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) asserts that multiple actors in the conflict, including the Ethiopian military, have committed abuses that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, including widespread sexual violence, extrajudicial executions, mass killings, and forced displacement.[11] Cultural heritage sites have been damaged and looted, as have health facilities, factories, and other civilian structures.[12] Armed actors have reportedly blocked aid and destroyed crops, livestock, and food stocks.[13] A European envoy says Ethiopia's leaders spoke to him of an intention to "wipe out Tigrayans for 100 years," in what "looks...like ethnic cleansing."[14] U.S. officials assert that Ethiopian security forces have committed acts of ethnic cleansing and have accused Eritrean forces of a violent campaign that amounts to the collective punishment of Tigray's people.[15]
> The U.N. Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has expressed alarm over the situation in Tigray and other parts of the country, highlighting concern with hate speech, ethnic profiling, and attacks on civilians based on religion and ethnicity. She cautioned in early 2021 that "the risk of atrocity crimes in Ethiopia remains high and likely to get worse," absent an urgent response.[16]
> The Special Adviser cited "a failure to address ethnic violence, stigmatization, hate speech, religions tensions" as contributing factors. She warned of a deteriorating situation in late July [2021], noting that communal violence had reached an unprecedented level and described dehumanizing language by top political leaders in relation to the Tigray conflict as being of "utmost concern."[17]
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> 11 Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), "Ethiopia: Persistent, credible reports of grave violations in Tigray underscore urgent need for human rights access – Bachelet," March 4, 2021.
> 12 "'No more sacred places': Heritage sites under siege in Tigray conflict," AFP, April 30, 2021 and "In Tigray's war, ancient Christian and Muslim houses of worship are increasingly under attack," The Globe and Mail, May 10, 2021.
> 13 World Peace Foundation, Starving Tigray, April 6, 2021; "EU decries Ethiopia 'siege of Tigray'," AFP, July 6, 2021.
> 14 "EU envoy: Ethiopian leadership vowed to 'wipe out' Tigrayans," AP, June 18, 2021.
> 15 HFAC, The Biden Administration's Priorities for U.S. Foreign Policy, hearing, March 10, 2021 and Statement of Acting Assistant Secretary Godec, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (SFRC), Ethiopia in Crisis: U.S. Strategy and Policy Response, hearing, May 27, 2021.
> 16 U.N., Statement by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide on Ethiopia, February 5, 2021.
> 17 U.N., Statement by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide on the continued deterioration of the situation
> in Ethiopia, July 30, 2021.[257]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted in her statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13th September 2021:

[256] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*
[257] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 6*

> Fighting has continued unabated and has expanded to neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions. Together with other pockets of intercommunal violence, the conflict risks spilling over to the whole Horn of Africa.
> In the last few months, mass detentions, killings, systematic looting, and sexual violence have continued to create an atmosphere of fear and an erosion of living conditions that resulted in the forced displacement of the Tigrayan civilian population. Civilian suffering is widespread, and impunity is pervasive.
> Even with the changing dynamics in the conflict, there has been one constant: multiple and severe reports of alleged gross violations of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law by all parties. […]
> It is already clear that cases documented comprise multiple allegations of human rights violations, including attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances among other grave abuses. Sexual and gender based violence has been characterised by a pattern of extreme brutality, including gang rapes, sexualised torture and ethnically targeted sexual violence. […]
> From my last update to the Council to date, allegations of human rights violations have continued to implicate Government forces and its allies. We have received disturbing reports that local fishermen found dozens of bodies floating along the river crossing between Western Tigray and Sudan in July [2021]. Some allegedly had gunshot wounds and bound hands, indications that they might have been detained and tortured before being killed.
> There are continued reports of large-scale arbitrary detentions of ethnic Tigrayan civilians in unofficial sites in Western Tigray. Reports also suggest that people of Tigrayan ethnicity have been profiled and detained by law enforcement officials on ethnic grounds, with hundreds having reportedly been arrested in recent security sweeps, mostly in Addis Ababa, and several businesses belonging to ethnic Tigrayans having reportedly been closed.
> Incitement to hatred and discrimination, and rising levels of inflammatory rhetoric were also documented targeting people of Tigrayan ethnicity. […]
> Threats and attacks on journalists have also been reported, as well as the suspension of media outlets' licenses and intermittent restrictions and shutdowns of Internet and telecommunications in Tigray. […]
> Since gaining control of parts of Tigray and expanding to neighbouring regions, reports have also identified Tigrayan forces as perpetrators of human rights abuses.
> During the period under review, the Tigrayan forces have allegedly been responsible for attacks on civilians, including indiscriminate killings resulting in nearly 76,500 people displaced in Afar and an estimated 200,000 in Amhara.
> More than 200 individuals have reportedly been killed in the most recent clashes in these regions, and 88 individuals, including children, have been injured. On 5 August, Tigrayan forces allegedly attacked and killed displaced people, mainly women, children, and older people, sheltering in a camp in Galikoma Kebele, in the Afar Region.
> We have also received serious reports of recruitment of children into the conflict by Tigrayan forces, which is prohibited under international law.[258]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas there are multiple and severe reports of alleged gross violations of human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law perpetrated by all parties to the conflict; whereas these reports include attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killings, torture, enforced disappearances, mass detentions, systematic lootings and the systematic and deliberate destruction of basic services, water systems, crops and livelihoods".[259]
The same source further noted: "whereas according to credible sources, both the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the Ethiopian National Defence Force have perpetrated human rights violations in Tigray; whereas the Eritrean forces have infiltrated Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia and have also been

[258] UNHCOHC, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet*, 13 September 2021
[259] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, C*

committing serious human rights violations; whereas the majority of allegations relate to violations committed by the Ethiopian National Defence Force and the Eritrean forces".[260]

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".[261] The report "details a series of violations and abuses, including unlawful killings and extra-judicial executions, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, violations against refugees, and forced displacement of civilians" and covers the period from 3 November 2020 to 28 June 2021.[262] The full report report can be accessed here.[263]

The report also lists under 'Other violations':

> The report also details the specific impact of the conflict on a range of other human rights, including children's rights; the rights of older people and people with disabilities; the denial of access to humanitarian relief; restrictions on freedom of movement; as well as constraints on freedom of expression and access to information, with the internet and other means of communication largely cut off.
> "The shutdown of communication has caused trauma and distress among civilians in Tigray, as well as families and loved ones residing within the rest of the country and abroad," the report says. The arrest and intimidation of journalists have threatened independent voices and produced a chilling effect limiting the work of journalists.[264]

b. Extrajudicial Killings

This section should be read with section IV., *a. Overview* and a., *i. Ethnic-Related Attacks/Massacres*.

Laetitia Bader, Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa Director, highlighted during an interview in December 2020 that:

> Witnesses described significant civilian deaths during the initial offensives and fighting. Medical professionals, notably in Humera, described being overwhelmed by the influx of injured civilians and bodies of those who had been killed in the heavy shelling.
> […] A number of refugees said that they witnessed extrajudicial executions by federal forces and their allies during the fighting or after they took over towns. Witnesses said that some of the victims were suspected TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] members, fighters, or supporters and retired soldiers.

[260] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, F*
[261] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[262] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[263] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021
[264] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

> However, businesspeople and farmers were also targeted, as were others whom the soldiers happened to have stopped, including families and children trying to flee. In the town of Mai-Kadra, a number of refugees reported seeing hundreds of dead bodies which had been shot, stabbed, or hacked with knives, machetes, and axes, including those of ethnic Amharas but also of Tigrayans. Family members from several towns said they saw loved ones killed but could not offer them a proper and dignified burial.[265]

Covering January 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "Security forces throughout month killed or captured dozens of senior Tigrayan leaders; notably, unidentified security forces 13 Jan [2021] killed former Ethiopian FM Seyoum Mesfin".[266] Similarly, ACLED reported: "a former foreign minister and senior figure in the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Seyoum Mesfin, was killed during operations by Ethiopian federal forces in Tigray. Ethiopian government sources claimed that he was killed after refusing to surrender to state forces".[267]

In March 2021, the Africa Report and Ethiopia Insight together published an article detailing first-hand accounts of killing of civilians in Tigray at the hands of Eritrean and Ethiopian forces:

> I fled Mekelle just days before the Ethiopian and Eritrean defence forces were to take the capital. Many residents fled the city in fear of fighting and threats of indiscriminate shelling that had occurred as the occupying forces took hold of other cities.
> […] I went west towards Tembien, then to Adet, going from village to village on foot for two months. Initially, the soldiers were primarily on the main roads, so we stayed in the most rural areas, as far away as possible. But soon enough, no village, no matter how remote or difficult to reach would escape the wrath of the occupying forces.
> Eritrean and Ethiopian forces engaged in the widespread killing of civilians; they would randomly shot and loot, mainly livestock such as chickens, cows, and animal products such as honey.
> […] In Wukro, around 50 kilometres north of Mekele, the relative told me that six people from one household were killed. They spared one person. In what appears to be an attempt to create terror, soldiers spare one member of the family after killing others so they can tell the harrowing stories of their assault.
> In the towns of central Tigray, they mostly killed men, going house to house. In villages, they would kill both men and women. In one village near Wukro, they tied a grandfather and grandmother together and then killed their grandson right in front of them.
> My relative in Wukro told me that they killed 16 people near her house. Furthermore, she shared with me a story of a woman whose husband was murdered and then denied the women the chance to take the body for burial. She stayed with his body for two days, mourning alone, keeping guard of her husband's corpse.
> There were so many incidents where dogs and even hyenas ate the remains of slain people. Some young men in Wukro put the bodies in carts and took them to a nearby church to bury them in open spots. This was a risk to their lives as soldiers didn't allow proper burial. Four people were killed by either Ethiopian or Eritrean soldiers in Wukro for attempting to bury the bodies.
> The Eritrean soldiers said they were ordered to kill any male over the age of 14. According to a soldier, the order they received from their superiors was to kill those who "pee against the wall" – a reference to men.
> I learned the above through a dad of my relative's friend who, along with his daughter, was hiding in a village. His Tigrinya had an Eritrean accent as a result of living in Eritrea, which helped him befriend an Eritrean soldier in the town engaged in looting.

[265] Human Rights Watch, *Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 23 December 2020
[266] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, January 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[267] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 9-15 January 2021*, 20 January 2021

> Over tea, the Eritrean soldier said that people in Tigray should be grateful as they were being kind by not killing children. He also said: "We will make you eat each other."
> In Axum, Eritrean soldiers killed people by going from house to house. A priest at Maryam Tsion Church told my friend when he visited him that they buried 243 people that day alone. The bodies were ordered not to be picked up and, again, people were shot for trying to collect them.[268]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that:

> Serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) against civilians by all parties to the conflict have been reported, resulting in killing and injury of civilians, the destruction of civilian homes and structures, and mass displacement.
> Allegations received suggest patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by parties to the conflict, including the Eritrean Army, such as the deliberate targeting of civilians, mass killings, extrajudicial and summary executions, arbitrary detentions, arbitrary displacement and widespread destruction and looting of civilian property.
> […] Between 9 and 11 November 2020, the agricultural town of Humera, located in West Tigray at the border with Eritrea and close to Sudan with an estimated population of about 30,000 or 50,000 people, was reportedly subjected to indiscriminate shelling by Eritrea-based artillery which struck homes and other civilian structures.
> […] There have been allegations of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, summary executions and looting of civilian property by the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] and the Amhara Fano militia in Humera, as they reportedly searched houses looking for Tigrayans and individuals who were perceived to be affiliated with the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front].
> […] On 7 and 8 November 2020, ENDF reportedly conducted airstrikes on sites around Adigrat in Eastern Tigray, after which Tigray regional forces left the city. From 19 November 2020, there was reportedly heavy shelling of Adigrat for several days from the direction of the town of Zelambessa/Fatsi at the border with Eritrea, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement. […] On 20 November, Ethiopian and Eritrean troops took control of Adigrat. Eritrean forces reportedly committed extrajudicial executions of civilians and widespread sexual and gender-based violence. Eritrean troops have also reportedly committed widespread looting of the town, and transported the looted goods to Eritrea on stolen trucks.
> […] On 19 November 2020, allegedly after TPLF forces had already withdrawn from Axum, the ENDF and Eritrean forces reportedly conducted indiscriminate shelling of the city leading to many civilian casualties, and subsequently took control of the city. Reportedly, Eritrean soldiers carried out house searches, harassing residents and conducting summary executions of those perceived as TPLF fighters or sympathizers, especially young men. There are accounts of numerous bodies with bullet wounds lying on the streets. Reports indicate that Eritrean soldiers shot indiscriminately at civilians and killed patients in Saint Mary's hospital, including civilians and wounded TPLF fighters.
> […] On the morning of 28 November 2020, a group of TPLF militiamen supported by some local residents reportedly launched an attack on Eritrean troops positioned on Mai Koho Mountain, east of the Axum Tsion St Mary Church, and were defeated.
> In response, during the afternoon the Eritrean troops entered the city and reportedly carried out widespread killing of young men and boys in the streets and in house searches. Reports indicate that the victims were unarmed; many were shot from behind while they were running away, and others were lined up and shot from behind. ENDF were reportedly present in Axum but allegedly did not take action to protect civilians.
> On the morning of 29 November 2020, Eritrean troops reportedly shelled the city targeting survivors who had left their houses to collect the numerous bodies across the city. Some of the victims were still alive

[268] The Africa Report and Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopia: Sadism is the most shocking part of the war in Tigray*, 31 March 2021

> but could not be taken to hospital as the facilities had been looted and there were no doctors. It is also alleged that Eritrean troops arbitrarily detained a large number of people.
> Reportedly, many of the dead were buried on 30 November as the residents jointly collected the bodies, already in decay, from the streets. While the exact number of civilian casualties is unknown, hundreds of civilians were reportedly killed in Axum. Children as young as 13 were allegedly among the victims.
> […] There are allegations of summary executions and arbitrary arrests of young men by ENDF in Mekelle. There are also numerous reports of sexual violence by Eritrean troops.
> […] On 30 November, in Dengelat, a village five kilometres south of the town of Edaga Hamus, Eritrean soldiers allegedly killed about 80 people, including men, women and children who were attending a celebration at the historic church of Mariam Tagot. Priests and internally displaced persons who had fled the fighting in Adigrat were among the victims.
> […] There have also been reports that Ethiopian forces killed a number of civilians who were trying to cross the border to Sudan.
> Internally displaced persons have endured exhausting and dangerous journeys in search for safety, some walking for weeks to reach their destination. During their journey, some have reportedly been killed or beaten, especially young men.
> […] Allegations have been received suggesting that there is an ongoing widespread systematic campaign by Amhara Regional Forces and Amhara militia to forcibly displace Tigrayans from Western Tigray to the east of Tekeze river, where they have reportedly been subjected to atrocities by ARF, Eritrean and Ethiopian forces, including killings.
> […] Reports of ongoing insecurity and allegations of grave human rights and humanitarian law violations and abuses, including killings, targeted abductions and forced return of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers to Eritrea continue to emerge.[269]

In early April 2021 ACLED reported that "In North Western Tigray, Ethiopian soldiers shot and killed dozens of civilians during an attack on the town of Selekleka".[270] Similarly, Amnesty International reported in April 2021 that "Eritrean troops killed three people and injured at least 19 in an unprovoked attack on civilians in the centre of Adwa town on 12 April [2021]. Witnesses told Amnesty International that Eritrean troops were passing through the town located in the Tigray region, when they suddenly opened fire at people on the main street close to the bus station".[271]

Amnesty International noted in May 2021:

> Amnesty International found that Eritrean troops […] indiscriminately shot at civilians in Adwa, killing three of them and wounding 19 others, on 12 April 2021. Working in collaboration with CNN, Amnesty International also confirmed that Ethiopian National Defence Force troops carried out extrajudicial executions in Mahibere Dego, near Axum, on 15 January 2021.[272]

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[269] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *pp. 2-6*

[270] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 3-9 April 2021*, 14 April 2021

[271] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Three killed, 19 injured in Tigray as Eritrean troops open fire on civilians*, 14 April 2021

[272] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Tepid international response to Tigray conflict fuels horrific violations over past six months*, 4 May 2021

In June 2021 a joint NGO call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray stated:

> 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 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 […] widespread and mass extrajudicial executions.[273]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021, based on a range of sources:

> Among other incidents, as many as 160 people in the town of Bora may have been executed by Ethiopian troops in January, and in February, over 180 civilians in Abi Adi were reportedly killed in house-to-house searches by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces.[114]
> A military airstrike on Togoga, a market town, killed dozens and wounded almost 200 in June, according to health workers, who say soldiers blocked first responders. A military spokesman said those injured were fighters in civilian clothes.[115]
> Ethiopian officials cite a mass killing that occurred early in the conflict, in the western Tigray town of Mai Kadra, among their justifications for operations against the TPLF. An early EHRC report suggested that at least 600 people were killed; a subsequent federal investigation reported 229 deaths.[116] Some witnesses say Tigrayan youth militia and local security forces killed hundreds of ethnic Amhara civilians.[117] Other witnesses have implicated pro-government forces in the violence, suggesting that Amhara militia targeted Tigrayans after the military took the town.[118] A Reuters investigation suggests there were two rounds of killing—first of Amhara by ethnic Tigrayans and then revenge killings of Tigrayans by Amhara forces—leaving over 700 dead in total.[119] The EHRC has acknowledged reprisal attacks against Tigrayans, noting that it did not have enough information on them when it issued its original report.[120].
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> 114 Lucy Kassa and Nabih Bulos, "In an out-of-sight war, a massacre comes to light," Los Angeles Times, March 19, 2021 and Lucy Kassa, "'Their bodies were torn into pieces': Ethiopian and Eritrean troops accused of massacre in Tigray," The Telegraph, April 7, 2021.
> 115 Jason Burke, "Scores killed in Ethiopian airstrike on Tigray market," The Guardian, June 24, 2021.
> 116 Attorney General of Ethiopia, "A Summary of Efforts to Ensure Accountability Regarding Violations of International Humanitarian Law and Other Legal Norms in the Regional State of Tigray," May 21, 2021.
> 117 AI, "Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state," November 12, 2020; EHRC, Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra, November 24, 2020.
> 118 "Questions linger among the corpses of an Ethiopian massacre," AFP, November 25, 2020, and "En Ethiopie, le mystère du village de Maïkadra révèle la profondeur des conflits ethniques," Le Monde, November 30, 2020.
> 119 "How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," Reuters, June 7, 2021.
> 120 "Ethiopia's human rights chief as war rages in Tigray: 'We get accused by all ethnic groups,'" The Guardian, June 2, 2021.[274]

The same source further noted:

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[273] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Joint letter calling for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 10 June 2021

[274] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 17*

> Federal and Amhara regional forces remain in control of much of Western Tigray, despite the military's withdrawal from the rest of the region in late June [2021]. In late July [2021], bodies—some showing signs of torture and execution-style killings, according to doctors and forensics experts—began appearing in the river that flows from Tigray into Sudan. Some reports suggest they are evidence of ongoing atrocities in Western Tigray.[128]
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> 128 "Men are marched out of prison camps. Then corpses float down the river," CNN, September 8, 2021.[275]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted in her statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13th September 2021:

> From my last update to the Council to date, allegations of human rights violations have continued to implicate Government forces and its allies. […]
> Since gaining control of parts of Tigray and expanding to neighbouring regions, reports have also identified Tigrayan forces as perpetrators of human rights abuses.
> During the period under review, the Tigrayan forces have allegedly been responsible for attacks on civilians, including indiscriminate killings resulting in nearly 76,500 people displaced in Afar and an estimated 200,000 in Amhara.
> More than 200 individuals have reportedly been killed in the most recent clashes in these regions, and 88 individuals, including children, have been injured. On 5 August [2021], Tigrayan forces allegedly attacked and killed displaced people, mainly women, children, and older people, sheltering in a camp in Galikoma Kebele, in the Afar Region.[276]

In March 2021 Medecins Sans Frontieres's (MSF) Karline Kleijer, MSF Head of Emergency Desk, stated that ""We are horrified by the continued violence in Tigray, Ethiopia. This includes the extrajudicial killings of at least four men who were dragged off public buses and executed by soldiers, while our staff members were present, on Tuesday 23 March [2021]. The latest incident took place on the road from Mekele to Adigrat, where three MSF staff members were travelling in a clearly marked MSF vehicle. Along the journey they encountered what appeared to be the aftermath of an ambush of an Ethiopian military convoy, by another armed group, in which soldiers were injured and killed. Military vehicles were still on fire".[277]

BBC News reported in September 2021 that "the Sudanese government has summoned the Ethiopian ambassador in Khartoum over the appearance of almost 30 bodies that washed up on the shores of a river from Ethiopia's Tigray region. Sudan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs says that the bodies belong to members of the Tigrinya ethnic group".[278]

The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) produced a report, published in September 2021, which documented that "the Eritrean armed forces are again accused of arbitrary killings of the civilian population. They are allegedly responsible for the deaths of numerous ethnic Tigray in Humera. The town in the border area with Eritrea and Sudan is located in the west of the Tigray regional state, but has been controlled by Amharic militias and the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) since

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[275] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 19*
[276] UNHCOHC, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet*, 13 September 2021
[277] Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), *MSF Driver Assaulted, Staff Witness Men Dragged off Buses and Killed in Tigray*, 24 March 2021
[278] BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Mass graves found - Amhara officials*, 8 September 2021

the armed conflict between the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian military began in November 2020. No assessment by independent observers is possible as telephone and internet connections to the region remain disrupted".[279]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas there have been several reports of extrajudicial killings since the beginning of the conflict in Tigray, including massacres alleged to have taken place in Mai-Kadra on the night of 9 November 2020, in Axum on 28 November 2020 and in Mahbere Dego in January 2021; whereas in August 2021, Sudanese authorities reported that the bodies of around 50 people were found in the Tekeze River, bordering western Tigray and Sudan; whereas evidence has been found of more than 250 alleged massacres in Tigray since the beginning of the civil war in November 2020; whereas it has been reported that the Tigray People's Liberation Front also committed extrajudicial killings in Tigray's neighbouring regions in August 2021, such as in Chenna and Kobo".[280]

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".[281] The full report report can be accessed here.[282] With regards to 'attacks against civilians and indiscriminate attacks', the report found:

> There are reasonable grounds to believe all parties to the conflict - including the ENDF, EDF and Tigrayan forces - either directly attacked civilians and civilian objects, such as houses, schools, hospitals, and places of worship, or carried out indiscriminate attacks resulting in civilian casualties and destruction or damage to civilian objects. Among the incidents detailed in the report, on 28 November [2020] shelling fired from a mountain area under the ENDF's control hit more than 15 civilian facilities in Mekelle, killing at least 29 civilians and injuring at least 34. There was heavy fighting in Humera, with artillery shells reportedly fired by EDF and the Tigrayan forces hitting several populated areas between 9 and 11 November [2020] resulting in the deaths of 15 people and injuries to many more. During its visit to Humera, the JIT team saw visible shell marks on walls and craters in the streets.[283]

The same report further noted with regards to 'unlawful or extrajudicial killings and executions':

> The JIT concludes that these were perpetrated by the ENDF, EDF and Amhara militia, as well as by the TSF and militias affiliated with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The report details how on 9 and 10 November [2020] a Tigrayan youth group known as Samri killed more than 200 ethnic Amhara civilians in Mai Kadra. Revenge killings were then committed in Mai Kadra against ethnic Tigrayans after the ENDF and ASF had captured the town. On 28 November

[279] German Federal office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), *Briefing Notes*, 13 September 2021, *p. 4*

[280] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, E*

[281] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

[282] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021

[283] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

> [2020], the EDF killed more than 100 civilians, mostly young men, in Axum in central Tigray. "War crimes may have been committed since there are reasonable grounds to believe that persons taking no direct part in hostilities were wilfully killed by parties to the conflict," the report says. In addition, killings in some instances appear to have been committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack against a selected civilian population and therefore may also amount to crimes against humanity.[284]

i. Ethnic-Related Attacks/Massacres

This section should be read in conjunction with section III., c., *1. Massacre at Axum*, and section IV., *b. Extrajudicial Killings*.

The U.S. Department of State's *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom* cautioned that:

> A number of human rights groups stated that societal violence was on the rise. However, because ethnicity and religion are closely linked, and because criminality also played a role, it was difficult to characterize many incidents as solely based on religious identity.[285]

An article published by the Atlantic Council in November 2020 reported, in relation to the September 2020 election held in Tigray, that:

> Prime Minister Abiy, who could have chosen to ignore what was at best a flimsy provocation, likewise chose to escalate rather than defuse the situation. He retaliated by cutting funding to the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] leadership. That in turn, appears to have goaded the TPLF into attacking an Ethiopian Defense Forces base located in the Tigray region. Non-Tigrayan soldiers, in a foreshadowing of ethnic-based violence by TPLF-aligned forces to come, were allegedly executed during the attack, and other federal soldiers still remain hostage
> […] TPLF forces—having consumed the narrative of ethnic-based persecution being fed to them by the TPLF leadership—have subsequently been implicated in the massacre of scores or hundreds of innocent non-Tigrayan bystanders at Mai-Kadra (though we should absolutely assume, given the previous conduct of the Ethiopian Defense Forces in Oromia and elsewhere, that there will be atrocities on both sides).[286]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported on 18 November 2020 that: "Two weeks of armed conflict has led to at least 30,000 refugees fleeing to Sudan and hundreds of people being killed. This includes the likely hundreds of people stabbed or hacked to death on 9 November in the town of Mai-Kadra in the South West Zone of Tigray. Survivors of the attack allege that the TPLF carried out the killings and that most of the victims were ethnically Amhara. Refugees arriving in Sudan have also reported targeted attacks on ethnic Tigrayans by the armed forces".[287]

The U.S. Department of State reported its annual human rights report covering 2020 about the attack early November 2020 in Mai-Kadra in Tigray:

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[284] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[285] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Ethiopia*, 12 May 2021, *Executive Summary*
[286] Atlantic Council, *Calls for negotiation are driving Ethiopia deeper into war*, 13 November 2020
[287] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 229: Ethiopia, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Global Landmine Report*, 18 November 2020

> The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission's preliminary assessment of the November 9 [2020] attack in Mai-Kadra in Tigray concluded that a Tigrayan youth group supported by the Tigray People's Liberation Front Regional Security Force killed approximately 600 persons. Amnesty International reported that the abuses were carried out by police special forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front Regional Security Force.[288]

The same report further specified that "The victims were reportedly largely to be non-Tigrayan seasonal laborers"[289] and "Prior to the November 9 attack, Tigrayan militias and regional security services reportedly asked for the identification documents of Amharans before targeting them"[290].

With regards to the Mai-Kadra, also referred to as May Cadera, ACLED reported that "The shelling followed days of fighting in the Western Tigray zone, during which hundreds of fatalities were reported and Ethiopian forces seized control of the towns of Sheraro and May Cadera. In May Cadera, hundreds of ethnic Amhara civilians were killed during an attack attributed to retreating TPLF-affiliated militia forces".[291]

Amnesty International noted in relation to the May Cadera massacre:

> Among the atrocities the organization documented was the mass killing of hundreds of civilians in Mai-Kadra in western Tigray on 9-10 November 2020, allegedly by forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Subsequently, Amnesty has received reports of reprisal attacks targeting ethnic Tigrayan residents of Mai-Kadra, including extrajudicial executions, looting of property, and mass detention.[292]

Earlier in November 2020 the same source had reported in greater detail that:

> Amnesty International can today confirm that scores, and likely hundreds, of people were stabbed or hacked to death in Mai-Kadra (May Cadera) town in the South West Zone of Ethiopia's Tigray Region on the night of 9 November [2020].
> The organization's Crisis Evidence Lab has examined and digitally verified gruesome photographs and videos of bodies strewn across the town or being carried away on stretchers. It confirmed the images were recent and using satellite imagery, geolocated them to Mai-Kadra in western Tigray state (14.071008, 36.564681).
> "We have confirmed the massacre of a very large number of civilians, who appear to have been day labourers in no way involved in the ongoing military offensive […]," said Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International's Director for East and Southern Africa. […]
> Amnesty International has not yet been able to confirm who was responsible for the killings, but has spoken to witnesses who said forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) were responsible for the mass killings, apparently after they suffered defeat from the federal EDF forces.
> Three people told Amnesty International that survivors of the massacre told them that they were attacked by members of Tigray Special Police Force and other TPLF members. […]

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[288] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Executive Summary*
[289] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Section I., a. Arbitrary deprivation of life and other unlawful or politically motivated killings*
[290] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Section 6., Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups*
[291] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 8-14 November 2020*, 18 November 2020
[292] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Tepid international response to Tigray conflict fuels horrific violations over past six months*, 4 May 2021

> While the official death toll in Mai-Kadra is not yet known, the Amhara regional government's media agency AMMA reported there were around 500 victims, adding that they were primarily non-Tigrayan residents of the town. A man who is helping to clear the bodies from the streets told Amnesty International that he had looked at the state-issued identification cards of some victims, and most were Amhara.[293]

In December 2020, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council released a report on preliminary findings around major human rights violations in and around Mai-Kadra in November 2020, based off field inspections in Mai-Kadra, Humera, Abderafi, Abrahajira, Dansha, and Gondar towns between 3 and 11 December 2020. The report observed that:

> Since the beginning of the conflict, residents of the town, especially those of other ethnic groups, had been in a serious threat due to heavy clashes between the Tigray regional government and Federal Government security forces on the city's border areas. Two days before the *Maikadra* incident, the *Maikadra* local police and the Tigray Special Forces conducted a door-to-door search of people holding Sudanese SIM cards and destroyed them alleging that they would transfer information. People who worried about the situation tried to escape to the Amhara Region but they were unable to exit because all exit points from the city were closed by Tigray Special Forces and militia members.
>
> Victims said that on the day of the attack (November 9, 2020) police and Special Forces, as well as Tigrayan youths (mostly coming from the *Samri* neighborhood) ordered no one to leave their homes. They testified that the young people danced in large numbers in different parts of the city, and in some places starting at 11:00 am, and also in the area known as *Gimb Sefer*, where most Amharas live, starting from 3:00 pm, they began looking for Identification cards and they spoke to victims in Tigrigna and identified those who could not respond and began to attack them.
>
> The attack was mostly carried out using tools such as machetes, knives, axes, and ropes. It was discovered that the targets were mostly young men. The attack was based on ethnicity and targeted mostly Amharas and a few other minority ethnic groups. The incident took place mainly in the town of *Maikadra*, by a group of Tigrayan youths from the *Samri* and other kebeles. According to the victims, each youth group was supported and shielded by armed members of the Tigray Special Forces and the militia.
>
> The search and burial of those killed in the attack took place from November 11 - 15. Among them, 86 of the burial sites were found in the *Abune Aregawi Church* in *Maikadra* with an average of 5-10 people in each burial site, as well as several beds used to carry corpses were also found. Besides, it has been confirmed that there are mass graves where 42 people are buried near the church compound, 57 people in the area known as *Selela Mesmer*, 56 people on *Wolde-Ab Road*, 6 people near Kebele 04 bridge area, and 18 people near the flooding area.
>
> Victims also reported that there are bodies that had not yet been found or buried during the search and members of the EHRCO [Ethiopian Human Rights Council] investigation team have also confirmed this by looking at the unburied corpse. Moreover, they explained that in some places the weather was so hot that it made it difficult to pick up the bodies of the dead and they were buried at the same spot where it was found.
>
> In addition to the town of *Maikadra*, the team found similar attacks in *Humera* and *Dansha*. It confirmed from the families of the victims that six people had been killed with machetes, axes, and bullets in *Humera* town and because their bodies were left unburied and exposed to the sun for several days it is now buried in a place called *Enidiris*. In *Dansha*, 12- and 15-year-olds were also beaten to death with an axe and their funeral was held at *St. George's Church*.
>
> According to EHRCO's field observations and data collection, more than 1,100 civilians were killed in the attack. At least 122 people suffered from serious injuries and they are receiving treatment at *Abderafi* and *Gondar* hospitals. Victims' statements indicate that the perpetrators were vandalizing and looting property.

[293] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state*, 12 November 2020

> On the other hand, the investigation team has collected evidences that show of sexual assault cases such as rape that occurred on the day of the incidence in *Miakadra*. Six of the victims stated that they had been raped by more than 10 youths who carried out the attack. Members of the investigation team were able to confirm that the victims who spoke at the time were in a state of apparent physical and psychological harm and they did not receive any physical or psychological treatment after the attack. EHRCO urges relevant government bodies and humanitarian organizations to pay attention as they need urgent physical and psychological treatment.
> Moreover, the EHRCO investigation team confirmed that following the situation in and around *Maikadra*, an unestimated amount of property was destroyed and looted, and many people left their homes and displaced to other parts of the country, and crossed the border into *Sudan*.
> […] EHRCO also found out that during this atrocious event there were Tigrayan's who protected individuals from the attack by shielding them and giving them information to help them flee. Since they left the area due to fear, the investigation team was unable to contact the Tigrayan's involved in this humanitarian and ethical activity, but many survivors of the traumatic event by their help have testified their humanism.[294]

Other human rights abuses with an ethnic dimension were also noted by the U.S. Department of State's annual report as follows:

> As tensions mounted between the national government and the Tigrayan regional government, there were multiple reports of Tigrayan security officials, public officials, and other ethnic Tigrayans who were arrested, detained, or asked to step down or take a leave of absence from their official positions.[295]

A February 2021 article in the Council on Foreign Relations on the conflict in Tigray wrote that: "Refugees and others have said that forces on the ground—Ethiopia's military, Eritrean troops, and ethnic militias—are responsible for sexual violence, ethnic-based targeted attacks, and large-scale looting".[296]

In March 2021, the U.S. Secretary Blinked "stated that acts of ethnic cleansing have taken place in Western Tigray".[297]

In April 2021 the International Crisis Group reported: "Equally worrying are multiple reports of retaliatory attacks on Tigrayan civilians by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers following armed confrontations with Tigray forces, particularly as such atrocities may well increase as fighting intensifies. Notable incidents include an early January [2021] massacre at Debre Abay to the south west of Shire city, one at Axum in late November [2020] and, most recently, the reported murder of civilians by federal soldiers near Wukro town".[298]

Amnesty International noted in May 2021:

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[294] Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *EHRCO Preliminary Investigation Report on Major Human Rights Violations in and around Maikadra*, 25 December 2020, *pp. 1-3*
[295] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Section 6., Members of National/Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups*
[296] Council on Foreign Relations, *The Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray Region: What to Know*, 10 February 2021
[297] U.S. Department of State, *2021 Report to Congress Pursuant to Section 5 of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-441)*, 12 July 2021
[298] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021

> Since being granted access to Tigray in late February [2021], international media outlets have published a string of reports confirming earlier accounts, by Amnesty International and others, of atrocities, as well as revealing harrowing new reports of violations.
> These have included allegations of ethnic cleansing in western Tigray – an area under the control of pro-government Amhara Special Police and Fano, an Amhara militia – forcibly displacing tens of thousands of people. Amnesty International has not yet independently verified these allegations but continues to research the situation.[299]

In June 2021 a joint NGO call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray stated:

> 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 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. […]
> 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.[300]

In July 2021, an information alert on Ethiopia by Insecurity Insight reported that: "In Amhara, violence mostly targets ethnic Amhara and Oromo civilians and is typically reported to be perpetrated by Amhara armed groups, the OLF, and regional police forces or the Ethiopian military, although a relatively recent attack on civilians in March 2021 was reportedly perpetrated by the TDF [Tigray Defense Forces]".[301]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in August 2021 that: "Atrocities also continue inside Tigray. Since 2 August Sudanese officials reported finding over 50 bodies floating downstream in the Setit River, known to Ethiopians as the Tekezé. Witnesses said some victims had visible gunshot wounds while others had their hands bound. Some of the victims reportedly bore markings associated with ethnic Tigrayans".[302]
The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in September 2021 that:

> Amidst the deteriorating humanitarian situation, reports also continue to emerge of the ethnic-based targeting of civilians. According to local authorities, at least 120 civilians, including children, women and the elderly, were killed during the first week of September in the town of Dabat, Amhara region, by alleged Tigrayan forces. Thousands of civilians have fled since Tigrayan forces have seized territory in the region. According to a CNN report on Humera town in Western Tigray, which is currently controlled by Amhara regional forces, thousands of Tigrayan men, women and children are being held in detention camps. Escaped detainees who fled to Sudan recall men being taken at night to the banks of the Tekezé River and never returning. Since early August Sudanese officials reported finding over 60 bodies floating

[299] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Tepid international response to Tigray conflict fuels horrific violations over past six months*, 4 May 2021
[300] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Joint letter calling for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 10 June 2021
[301] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia: Vigil Insight Situation Report*, 14 July 2021, *p. 5*
[302] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 265: Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Sudan*, 11 August 2021

> downstream from Humera. Forensic experts in Sudan have indicated that many of the recovered bodies had execution-style bullet wounds or exhibited signs of torture.[303]

In September 2021, an Insecurity Insight report on Ethiopia on the implications of the situation on aid, noted that:

> Violence against civilians have also been highlighted on both sides with local officials from the Amhara region claiming on 08 September that the Tigrayan forces had killed 120 people over two days during clashes in the town of Dabat. Meanwhile, a report from the British Daily Telegraph stated that thousands of ethnic Tigrayans were being put into "concentration camps'' and "butchered" by pro-Government forces.
> […] Meanwhile the unverified reports of "concentration" camps, are also likely to have some credence as local sources confirm that certain tribes are being targeted by both sides, with Tigrayan staff often being singled out at checkpoints when travelling outside of Tigray.[304]

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[305] They found that:

> Based on the established database, a list of 260 massacres was compiled (ANNEX A). For this purpose, a 'massacre' has been defined as 'a conflict incident in which at least 5 civilians were killed on the same day at the same location' – a definition that comes from historical studies of massacres, including those committed during the Armenian genocide […]. The documented massacres of the Tigray war are represented on Map 14, and contrasted to the few sites investigated by EHRC and UNHRC […].
> An important remark is also that these maps of civilian victims do not include deaths by starvation or lack of medical care. At this stage, this is still a totally under-documented aspect of the war.
>
> [To understand the above better please consult Map 13: Heatmap of civilian casualties in the Tigray War up to 28 September 2021 on p. 37, Map 14: occurrence of massacres in the Togray War up to 3 October 2021 on p. 38, and Annex A on p. 89, of the report].[306]

c. Attacks on Hospitals, Schools, Places of worship and destruction of civilian infrastructure

Amnesty International noted in relation to the armed operations in Axum and the Axum massacre of November 2020 that "Between 19 and 29 November 2020, Eritrean troops operating in the Ethiopian city of Axum, Tigray, committed a series of human rights and humanitarian law violations, including killing hundreds of civilians. Over an approximately 24-hour period on 28-29 November, Eritrean soldiers deliberately shot civilians on the street and carried out systematic house-to-house searches, extrajudicially executing men and boys. The massacre was carried out in retaliation for an earlier attack

[303] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 269: Ethiopia, Guinea and Education Under Attack*, 8 September 2021
[304] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia: Situation Report*, 14 September 2021, *pp. 2, 4*
[305] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography
[306] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 36-38

by a small number of local militiamen, joined by local residents armed with sticks and stones".[307] The same report further noted that "The massacre was the culmination of a wave of violations carried out since 19 November, when Eritrean and Ethiopian forces entered Axum together, after indiscriminately shelling the city and firing at those who tried to flee" with "Shells landed on streets and on civilian buildings, killing and injuring residents".[308] The report further highlighted the 'systematic' and 'massive-scale' of looting:

> In addition to the killings and the detentions, Eritrean soldiers looted Axum systematically and on a massive scale, leaving residents without food or drink. All of the refugees we interviewed spoke of the looting and its terrible impact on daily life. They said that the looting began as soon as Eritrean forces entered the town on 19 November [2020], but that it escalated in the wake of the 28-29 November [2020] massacre. […]
> According to residents, Eritrean soldiers looted the university, private houses, hotels, hospitals, grain storage facilities, petrol stations, banks, electrical and maintenance stores, supermarkets, bakeries, jewelries, vendors' shacks (known locally as "containers") and other shops, breaking through entrance doors with automatic weapons […]
> The soldiers stole luxury goods, machinery (such as generators and water pumps), vehicles (including bicycles, trucks, three-wheel vehicles, and cars, sometimes taken from their garage), as well as medication, furniture, household items, food, and drink.[309]

Human Rights Watch published a report on the unlawful shelling of Tigray urban areas in November 2020, including schools:

> Ethiopian federal forces carried out apparently indiscriminate shelling of urban areas in the Tigray region in November 2020 in violation of the laws of war, Human Rights Watch said today. Artillery attacks at the start of the armed conflict struck homes, hospitals, schools, and markets in the city of Mekelle, and the towns of Humera and Shire, killing at least 83 civilians, including children, and wounding over 300. […]
>
> Human Rights Watch interviewed 37 witnesses and victims of government attacks on Humera, Shire, and Mekelle, as well as 9 journalists, aid workers, and human rights and forensic experts. Interviews were conducted in person in Sudan and by phone between December 2020 and January 2021. Human Rights Watch also examined satellite imagery, and reviewed photographs and videos from the site of six attacks that corroborated witness accounts. […]
>
> Witnesses described to Human Rights Watch a pattern of artillery attacks by Ethiopian federal forces before they captured Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in November. In each of these attacks the Tigrayan special forces appeared to have withdrawn, while in Humera local militias lacked a significant presence to defend the town. Many of the artillery attacks did not appear aimed at specific military targets but struck generalized populated areas. Human Rights Watch found similar patterns in interviews with 13 people from the towns of Rawyan and Axum. These attacks caused civilian deaths and injuries; damaged homes, businesses, and infrastructure; struck near schools; disrupted medical services; and prompted thousands of civilians to flee. In the western border town of Humera, residents said that on November 9 [2020], artillery fired from Eritrea terrified unsuspecting civilians, striking them in their homes and as they fled. The shelling damaged residential areas in the Kebele 02 neighborhood, and struck near a church and a school […]
>
> Residents from the regional capital, Mekelle, said that heavy shelling on November 28 [2020] killed 27 civilians, including children, and wounded over 100. In one attack, shells struck a residential compound

[307] Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021, *Executive Summary*
[308] Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021, *Executive Summary* and *Indiscriminate shelling and killing of suspected TPLF members*
[309] Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021, *Looting, hunger and thirst*

> near a market, mosque, and an empty school in Ayder sub-city, and killed four members of a single family, including two young children, and wounded five adults and a 9-year-old child. […]
>
> On the morning of November 9 [2020], residents heard shellfire from a camp called "Heligan" on the outskirts of Humera. Moments later, mortar and tank fire came from the direction of Eritrea, killing and wounding civilians, damaging and destroying homes and businesses, and exploding near schools, places of worship, the town's main hospital, and a slaughterhouse. The shelling continued into the evening. […]
>
> On the morning of November 17 [2020], mortar and tank fire striking Shire, a town of about 47,000 people in northwestern Tigray, killed at least 10 civilians, including children, and damaged businesses and homes.[…] Mortar and tank fire also struck at or near populated areas in Shire, including the Dejena Hotel, Gebar Shire Hotel, Shire elementary school, the municipal building, a multi-story apartment building, residential areas near Suhul hospital, and Shire university's agricultural campus, where displaced residents from Humera and other western Tigray towns had been staying. […]
>
> [On November 28] In Ayder, artillery fired after approximately 9 a.m. struck a residential compound near Hamza mosque, a sheep market, and the Yekatit 23 elementary school, killing four members of a family, including two girls ages 4 and 13, and wounding five residents. […] Two residents said they did not see any Tigray special forces or militia members in the area or in the empty school compound at the time of the attack. […] A video posted on YouTube on November 28 similarly shows damage to a small, single-story dwelling and to the walls of the Yekatit 23 school next to it.[310]

The Independent reported on 20 November 2020 that "An airstrike from Ethiopia has reportedly caused major damage to a school in the capital of the Tigray region as the conflict between regional forces and the government in Addis Ababa continues to escalate".[311]

In November 2020, Amnesty International called "on all parties to the conflict to" "Not target civilian facilities such as […] schools […]".[312]

UNOCHA similarly stressed in November 2020 that "The UN and humanitarian actors in affected areas are calling on the parties to the conflict to adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law, particularly protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, schools and water systems and humanitarian support".[313]

Bloomberg published an article in early January 2021 which documented that "Satellite images show the destruction of […] a high school […] in Tigray, northern Ethiopia, belying government claims that the conflict in the dissident region is largely over. Reportedly, the "secondary school [was] run by the Development and Inter-Aid Church Commission".[314]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in January 2021 that:

> On 7 January [2021] the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released a report, based on two joint assessment missions from 20-30 December, that also highlighted the dire humanitarian situation in Tigray. […] OCHA also warned of "massive community transmission" of COVID-

[310] Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas*, 11 February 2021
[311] The Independent, *Ethiopia military airstrike hits school as UN warns millions of children need humanitarian assistance*, 20 November 2020
[312] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Protect civilians in Mekelle offensive*, 23 November 2020
[313] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report No. 5 (24 November 2020)*, 24 November 2020
[314] Bloomberg, *Satellite Images Show Ethiopia Carnage as Conflict Continues*, 9 January 2021

> 19 due to civilian displacement caused by the conflict. Only five of forty hospitals in the region are functional and witnesses have reported massive damage, destruction and looting of healthcare centers.[315]

In January 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the situation of civilians in Humera, Dansha and Bissober, based on investigative missions to these parts of Tigray between November 2020 and January 2021. The report found that:

> Humera experienced heavy fighting which lasted for 3 days during the war and heavy artillery was heard. The Commission saw the damages to property and infrastructure in parts of the city, apparently caused by the use of heavy artillery. Although the investigation team received reports of serious damages to the area known as Kebele 2, the team was unable to access the said area to verify the reports. Reports indicate that there was heavy shelling of Kebele 2 (Kudar sefer), near Mariam Church and a Mosque between November 9th and November 11th, 2020. According to these reports, public spaces and residential houses in Kebele 2 bore the brunt of the damage. The Commission's team also visited Humera Hospital which itself sustained serious damage.
> […] In addition to the damage resulting from the War, the Hospital's medicine reserves, and laboratory equipment were looted during the security crisis that followed.
> […] In Bissober, the Commission visited and verified that 104 houses were either completely or partially burned or otherwise damaged by the war. The Ullaga primary school, located in Bissober, is partially damaged by what appears to be heavy artillery. The Ullaga health center has sustained heavy damage and is no longer operational as a result.[316]

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that: "An assessment carried out by the regional health bureau shows that the region's health facilities sustained physical damage and/or were looted including looting of ambulances and some health professionals are believed to have lost their lives in the context of the conflict".[317]

In mid-February 2021 ACLED reported that "At Adi Gudem in the Southern Tigray, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) forces targeted power line infrastructure, cutting electricity along the Alamata-Mekele power line".[318]

In a Statement released in March 2021, UNICEF's Executive Director Henrietta Fore stressed that "UNICEF remains deeply concerned about the continuing crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia, and its worrying implications for children and their access to basic social services. […] Schools and health centers have been looted, vandalized and occupied by armed forces and groups".[319]

The World Peace Foundation published a report in April 2021 that reported that "An increasing number of reports, from human rights organizations and humanitarian actors, tell of soldiers inflicting damage to

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[315] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 235: Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Cameroon*, 13 January 2021
[316] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Brief Monitoring Report on the Situation of Civilians in Humera, Dansha and Bissober*, 17 January 2021, *pp. 1, 3, 6*
[317] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *p. 3*
[318] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 13-19 February 2021*, 24 February 2021
[319] UNICEF, *Continuing crisis for children in Tigray, Ethiopia, amid reports of atrocities: Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore*, 19 March 2021

schools and universities […]" in the Tigray region.[320] The same source reported further that "Public service infrastructure, including […] schools, [and] universities, […] have been repeatedly targeted for total pillage since November [2020] […]. Numerous schools have been looted. […] Neksege secondary school in Endamekhoni, South Tigray has had all of its electronics taken. Eritrean troops burned Enticho Technical and Vocational College […]".[321]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in May 2021 that:

> On 7 May a video statement by the head of Ethiopia's Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Abune Mathias, was posted to social media, detailing attacks on religious sites in the Tigray region as well as other atrocities, including the rape of women and girls. Noting the "many barbarisms" being committed across Ethiopia, the Patriarch emphasized that "what is happening in Tigray is of the highest brutality and cruelty."
> Abune Mathias, who is ethnically Tigrayan, also indicated that he has been prevented from speaking out against atrocities committed in the Tigray region. The video was reportedly filmed by a foreign NGO worker on his mobile phone and smuggled out of Ethiopia. On 11 May the General Secretary of the Holy Synod distanced the Church from the Patriarch's remarks, stating that they were issued in his personal capacity and not as an official statement.
> Throughout the six-month armed conflict in Tigray, possible crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed against civilians, including attacks on religious and cultural heritage sites. In late November at least 800 people were massacred around the UNESCO World Heritage site of Aksum, including civilians sheltering in St. Mary of Zion church. Civilians were also massacred at Maryam Dengelat church by Eritrean forces who opened fire on congregants. Numerous ancient religious sites of international cultural significance have also been looted and bombed, including the al-Nejashi mosque and the Debre Damo monastery.
> Religious leaders have also been targeted. A letter to the Holy Synod of the Church that was shared with the UK newspaper, The Telegraph, listed 78 priests, deacons, choristers and monks who have allegedly been killed by Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and their Eritrean allies. One massacre took place at the church of Adi'Zeban Karagiorgis on 9 January during a holy festival, with the ENDF allegedly executing 12 deacons who were between the ages of 15 and 20. On 29 April the Associated Press also reported that priests are among the thousands of ethnic Tigrayans being arbitrarily detained in Ethiopia, "sometimes with ethnic profiling as the sole reason".[322]

In May 2021 CNN reported that Ethiopian soldiers attacked a University Teaching and Referral Hospital and raided a student dormitory:

> Ethiopian soldiers armed with machine guns, sniper rifles and grenades raided a hospital in Ethiopia's war-torn northern Tigray region earlier this week in retribution, doctors say, for a CNN investigation that revealed Ethiopian and Eritrean troops were blocking humanitarian aid to patients there. Medical staff at the University Teaching and Referral Hospital in the besieged city of Axum, in Tigray's central zone, said that the soldiers stormed the hospital in the early hours of Sunday morning, raiding the student dormitory, doctors and patient wards, contaminating the operating room and stopping all surgical operations.[323]

[320] World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray: How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, 6 April 2021, *p. 27*
[321] World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray: How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, 6 April 2021, *p. 30/31*
[322] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 252: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia*, 12 May 2021
[323] CNN, *Ethiopian soldiers armed with guns and grenades raid hospital featured in CNN report*, 19 May 2021

Also reporting in May 2020, Human Rights Watch reported on the situation of schools in Tigray since the conflict started in November 2020 as follows:

> All warring parties in Tigray have been implicated in the attacking, pillaging, and occupying of schools since the conflict started […]
>
> On just one example, government forces used the historic Atse Yohannes preparatory school in the regional capital, Mekelle, as a barracks after taking control of the city from the region's former ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, in late November 2020, and continued to use the school through mid-April 2021. Recent government efforts to reopen schools have partly been hindered by continuing insecurity, damage to schools, and protection concerns for students and teachers. […]
>
> Human Rights Watch conducted telephone interviews between January and May with 15 residents, teachers, parents, former students, and aid workers about the situation facing Tigray's schools, and assessed reporting by media outlets, aid agencies, and national human rights institutions. Human Rights Watch also reviewed satellite imagery that confirmed the presence of military vehicles inside the compound of Atse Yohannes high school in December [2020] and March [2021], as well as videos and photographs showing damage to school property. Several Mekelle residents said that in early December, Ethiopian forces began using the Atse Yohannes school as a base. After occupying the school for several weeks, they left; trucking away computers, plasma screens, and food. Interim authorities soon began to repair the damage so that classes could resume, but soldiers returned in February and occupied the school for another three months. During this time, troops posted armed sentries at the school gate and built fortifications using stones around the school grounds. A Mekelle resident working near the school witnessed women enter and leave the school's guarded compound on several occasions. "I saw different women taken inside. Sometimes they would stay two, three, or five days, and we would see them go in and out of the school," she said. "They appeared beaten and were crying as they would leave… No one could ask the women what happened to them, and the atmosphere made it difficult to do so." […]
>
> After Ethiopian forces suddenly left the school in April [2021], Mekelle residents found widespread damage to classrooms and offices, and destruction of electrical installations, water pipes, and other property. Videos posted on social media and photos sent to Human Rights Watch corroborated their accounts. In April [2021], Tigray's interim government presented aid groups with a list of damaged and pillaged property at the school, from pens and student records to 288 burned chairs and three destroyed science labs. […]
>
> Ethiopian soldiers also left behind walls covered with hateful and vulgar anti-Tigrayan messages. […] Government authorities are now trying to reopen schools in Tigray, where about 25 percent of schools have been damaged. In western Tigray, fighting displaced many teachers and left shortages of learning materials. The Education Ministry estimated that 48,500 teachers are in need of psychosocial and mental health support, and that some teachers at private schools are struggling to feed their families due to unpaid salaries. […]
>
> According to Human Rights Watch's research, armed forces pillaged food and school materials in at least three schools and a university in Tigray. Several residents said that Eritrean troops looted food and materials reserved for students at Axum University after Eritrean forces massacred civilians in the town. Eritrean refugees at Hitsats camp witnessed Eritrean forces loot offices and education facilities in mid-November. […]
>
> Throughout the conflict, all parties have used schools as military bases. Residents in Axum described the occupation of Basen primary school by Eritrean forces, who used it as a camp after Ethiopian and Eritrean forces took control of the town in mid-November. In the farming village of Bissober, in southern Tigray, Tigrayan armed groups occupied the local elementary school before the conflict began and remained for several months, digging trenches around the school, and storing weapons in the principal's office, according to media reports. […]

> Tigrayan forces also occupied a secondary school outside of Shimelba refugee camp – satellite images show that the ground around the secondary school had burned down before fighting broke out near the camp between Tigrayan and Eritrean forces in November, according to refugee accounts. […]
>
> Although it is likely an underestimate due to limited access, the authorities in May [2021] had determined that 15 schools in the region had been significantly damaged in Tigray, while 53 others had some damage, and 2 primary schools in southern Tigray remained under occupation by Ethiopian forces.[324]

In June 2021 BBC News reported that "In the town of Adigrat, which is near the border with Eritrea, the Catholic Church compound was shelled, leaving the school library and funeral home damaged".[325]

Also in June 2021, a joint NGO call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray stated:

> 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 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 […] civilian infrastructure […] widespread destruction and pillage of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, factories and businesses, and the destruction of refugee camps, crops and livestock.[326]

An August 2021 open letter from a group of African intellectuals calling for urgent action in Ethiopia over the Tigray conflict, published in the Africa Report, noted that: "We also condemn the destruction of hard-earned physical and metaphysical infrastructure across Tigray, as well as other regions of Ethiopia, including institutions of higher learning, houses of worship and cultural heritage".[327]

In September 2021, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported that in the Tigray region "Clergy and worshipers have been killed in large numbers": "According to a 17 February [2021] statement from the employees of Mekelle Diocese and the administrators of 45 monasteries and churches, almost every monastery and religious school in Tigray has been bombed by drones or heavy weapons, and "a lot of clergymen, deacons, congregation members of Sunday schools, religious students, and children, especially those clergymen who were on religious service, were massacred like animals".[328]

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against

[324] Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted*, 28 May 2021
[325] BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray war: Walking three days to find a hospital*, 17 June 2021
[326] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Joint letter calling for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 10 June 2021
[327] The Africa Report, *Ethiopia: African intellectuals call for urgent action over Tigray war*, 27 August 2021
[328] Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), *Ethiopia: Violence in Tigray*, September 2021, *p. 3*

humanity".[329] The full report report can be accessed here.[330] With regards to 'attacks against civilians and indiscriminate attacks', the report found:

> There are reasonable grounds to believe all parties to the conflict - including the ENDF, EDF and Tigrayan forces - either directly attacked civilians and civilian objects, such as houses, schools, hospitals, and places of worship, or carried out indiscriminate attacks resulting in civilian casualties and destruction or damage to civilian objects. Among the incidents detailed in the report, on 28 November [2020] shelling fired from a mountain area under the ENDF's control hit more than 15 civilian facilities in Mekelle, killing at least 29 civilians and injuring at least 34. There was heavy fighting in Humera, with artillery shells reportedly fired by EDF and the Tigrayan forces hitting several populated areas between 9 and 11 November [2020] resulting in the deaths of 15 people and injuries to many more. During its visit to Humera, the JIT team saw visible shell marks on walls and craters in the streets.[331]

The same source further noted under 'Pillage, looting and destruction of property':

> The conflict has seen large-scale destruction and appropriation of property by all parties to the conflict. Families whose crops and food were taken have had to rely on community members and humanitarian assistance to survive. Looting of health centres has resulted in civilians losing access to health care. Students across Tigray have seen their education disrupted because their schools were used for military purposes.[332]

d. Use of Torture and Ill-Treatment

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., a. Overview.

The joint research report published by the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) in July 2021 summarised the situation as follows:

> […] following the outbreak of war in the northern Tigray region in October 2020, there has been a violent return of torture, massacres, mass sexual violence and fears of ethnic cleansing. Local and international organisations have documented and reported serious allegations regarding the torture and ill-treatment of civilians by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), government forces[3], and Eritrean armed forces present in Tigray[4].
>
> The Ethiopian authorities have denied allegations of torture being committed by their armed forces and Eritrean allies and have failed to investigate or prosecute the perpetrators. However, recently the Ethiopian government has allowed joint investigation of all the alleged abuses and rights violations in the region to be carried out by the UN Office of High Commissioner and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.[5]
>
> Military force members have been accused for committing rape and killing civilians.[6]

[329] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

[330] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021

[331] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

[332] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

> Similarly, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has established pursuant to the ACHPR Resolution 482 (EXT.OS/XXXII) 2021 a fact-finding mission to the Tigray region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia that started its work on 17 June 2021.[7]
> Three years after the beginning of the political transition and reforms, the old demons of torture have returned to haunt Ethiopia and are threatening to recharacterize the country's governance.
>
> 3. Amnesty international, Ethiopia: Tepid international response to Tigray conflict fuels horrific violations over past six months, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/05/ethiopia-tepid-international-response-to-tigray-conflict-fuels-horrific-violations-over-past-six-months/, 4 May 2021
> 4. Amnesty international, The massacre in Axum, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR2537302021ENGLISH.PDF, 18 February 2021
> 5. Probe announced into alleged Tigray rights violations: UN rights office, https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1088272 accessed on 21/6/2021, 25 March 2025
> 6. Ethiopia Convicts 3 Troops of Rape, Charges 28 For Killings, https://www.voanews.com/africa/ethiopia-convicts-3-troops-rape-charges-28- killings accessed on 21/6/2021
> 7. Press Statement on the official launch of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, https://www.achpr.org/pressrelease/detail?id=583[333]

An August 2021 open letter from a group of African intellectuals calling for urgent action in Ethiopia over the Tigray conflict, published in the Africa Report, noted that: "We condemn the fact that the conflict is affecting ever-increasing numbers of civilians — the deaths, the sexual violence, the refugee outflows, the documented hunger and unmet medical and psychosocial needs, the reports of widespread and targeted illegal detentions (especially because of ethnicity), the enforced disappearances and torture in captivity".[334]

In relation to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights fact-finding mission to the Tigray region, the Commission extended at the end of August 2021 the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in the Tigray Region for a further three months.[335]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021, based on a range of sources:

> Federal and Amhara regional forces remain in control of much of Western Tigray, despite the military's withdrawal from the rest of the region in late June [2021]. In late July [2021], bodies—some showing signs of torture and execution-style killings, according to doctors and forensics experts—began appearing in the river that flows from Tigray into Sudan. Some reports suggest they are evidence of ongoing atrocities in Western Tigray.[128]
>
> 128 "Men are marched out of prison camps. Then corpses float down the river," CNN, September 8, 2021.[336]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted in her statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13th September 2021:

> From my last update to the Council to date, allegations of human rights violations have continued to implicate Government forces and its allies. We have received disturbing reports that local fishermen

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[333] Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE)/World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), *Ethiopia: Surviving Torture*, July 2021, *Executive Summary, p. 6/7*
[334] The Africa Report, *Ethiopia: African intellectuals call for urgent action over Tigray war*, 27 August 2021
[335] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *487 Resolution on the Renewal of the Mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia - ACHPR/Res. 487 (EXT.OS/XXXIV) 2021*, 24 August 2021
[336] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 19*

> found dozens of bodies floating along the river crossing between Western Tigray and Sudan in July [2021]. Some allegedly had gunshot wounds and bound hands, indications that they might have been detained and tortured before being killed.[337]

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".[338] The full report report can be accessed here.[339] With regards to 'Torture', the report found:

> "The torture and ill-treatment of civilians and captured combatants have been an expression of the brutality exhibited by all sides during the conflict," the report says. Victims were beaten with electric cables and metal pipes, detained incommunicado, threatened with guns to their heads and deprived of food or water. Civilians in Western Tigray were tortured and ill-treated mainly because of their ethnic identities as Amhara. Elsewhere, captured soldiers and fighters, as well as civilians suspected of providing support to them, were tortured. On 2 April in Samre, Eritrean soldiers forcibly paraded at least 600 Tigrayan men who were stripped to their underpants or completely naked, through the town. "Female EDF soldiers mocked us and took pictures of us," a 70-year-old victim told the JIT. The report also details how Tigrayan forces also subjected captured ENDF soldiers to public view and insults.[340]

e. Arbitrary Detention

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., a. Overview and b., *i. Ethnic-Related Attacks/Massacres*.

In November 2020, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commissioned released a press release stating that:

> EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] is closely monitoring the situation of persons detained as a result of ongoing measures related to the conflict taken by the government in various parts of the country and reports, in certain parts of the country, of people facing discriminatory and exclusionary processes on account of their Tigrayan ethnicity.
> Based on information and tips that EHRC has received, we have learned that a justified risk/threat of fear of ethnic profiling and discrimination has arisen, and the Commission is monitoring this closely.
> […] EHRC has carried out a quick monitoring in selected police stations in Addis Ababa and has seen, firsthand, the condition of persons detained in relation with current events. Accordingly, the Commission has visited the cases of a total of 43 persons detained in Bole, Kazanchis, Aware, TekleHaymanot and Cherkos police stations. It has also gathered information on suspected persons released on bail. EHRC has learned that many of these persons were suspected of carrying firearms without a lawful permit, that all

[337] UNHCOHC, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet*, 13 September 2021
[338] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[339] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021
[340] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

> of them have been brought before a court within the prescribed time frame and that most of them have been granted bail.
> One of the detained persons that EHRC has talked to has reported being beaten by the arresting officer and the police have assured the Commission that this will be investigated; we will follow up. The rest of the detained persons have reported that they have not been mistreated in any way during the investigation, that they have not faced threats or abuse and that the condition of their detention is fine. However, some of the detained have reported that they have been arrested only because of their ethnicity; and one of them has complained to the Commission that he was forced to hand over his weapon and take annual leave from his work.
> Police, on its part, maintains that the searches were carried out based on court orders quickly issued by telephone, in accordance with the law, to get an early hold on weapons that can be concealed easily; that the overall operation has followed the applicable legal procedures and that most of the suspects have been released on bail. EHRC has noted that there have not been human rights violations other than the one case mentioned above whose condition and process of detention is yet to be investigated. Meanwhile, EHRC recommends that due care must be taken to reduce the risk or fear of ethnic profiling and discrimination.[341]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported on 25 November 2020 that: "Despite a communications blackout in the Tigray region, reports continue to emerge of the targeting of ethnic Tigrayans, arbitrary arrests and killings. According to reporting by Foreign Policy, Tigrayans serving in UN and African Union (AU) peacekeeping missions are being removed from their posts and forcibly returned home where they face the threat of arbitrary detention and persecution".[342]

Amnesty International noted in relation to the armed operations in Axum and the Axum massacre of November 2020 that "Between 19 and 29 November 2020, Eritrean troops operating in the Ethiopian city of Axum, Tigray, committed a series of human rights and humanitarian law violations, including killing hundreds of civilians. Over an approximately 24-hour period on 28-29 November [2020], Eritrean soldiers deliberately shot civilians on the street and carried out systematic house-to-house searches, extrajudicially executing men and boys".[343] The same report further noted that "Eritrean soldiers also rounded up hundreds, if not thousands, of male residents in different parts of the city on 29 November [2020]. The men who were detained said the soldiers beat and abused them and robbed them of their belongings — jackets, belts, shoes and money. The soldiers also warned detainees that there would be renewed killings should they encounter any resistance".[344]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that:

> Allegations received suggest patterns of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by parties to the conflict, including the Eritrean Army, such as the deliberate targeting of civilians, mass killings, extrajudicial and summary executions, arbitrary detentions, arbitrary displacement and widespread destruction and looting of civilian property.

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[341] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *The War in Tigray Region and the Worrying State of Human Rights Protection*, 14 November 2020
[342] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 230: Ethiopia, Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo*, 25 November 2020
[343] Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021, *Executive Summary*
[344] Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021, *Mass detentions and threats*

> […] Between 9 and 11 November 2020, the agricultural town of Humera, located in West Tigray at the border with Eritrea and close to Sudan with an estimated population of about 30,000 or 50,000 people, was reportedly subjected to indiscriminate shelling by Eritrea-based artillery which struck homes and other civilian structures.
> […] There have been allegations of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, summary executions and looting of civilian property by the ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] and the Amhara Fano militia in Humera, as they reportedly searched houses looking for Tigrayans and individuals who were perceived to be affiliated with the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front].
> […] There are allegations of summary executions and arbitrary arrests of young men by ENDF in Mekelle.[345]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in May 2021 that: "On 29 April the Associated Press also reported that priests are among the thousands of ethnic Tigrayans being arbitrarily detained in Ethiopia, "sometimes with ethnic profiling as the sole reason"".[346]

In June 2021 a joint NGO call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray stated:

> 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 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 […] arbitrary detentions, including of displaced persons.[347]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted in her statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13th September 2021:

> From my last update to the Council to date, allegations of human rights violations have continued to implicate Government forces and its allies […]
> There are continued reports of large-scale arbitrary detentions of ethnic Tigrayan civilians in unofficial sites in Western Tigray.[348]

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[345] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *pp. 2-3, 5*

[346] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 252: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia*, 12 May 2021

[347] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Joint letter calling for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 10 June 2021

[348] UNHCOHC, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet*, 13 September 2021

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".[349] The full report report can be accessed here.[350] With regards to 'widespread arbitrary detentions, abductions and enforced disappearances', the report found:

> The ENDF detained individuals in secret locations and military camps, in many cases arbitrarily, the report says. Tigrayan forces and groups allied to them arbitrarily detained and abducted non-Tigrayan civilians some of whom were killed or disappeared.[351]

f. Forced recruitment

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., h., *i. Child recruitment*.

At the end of 30 November 2020, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) "raised concerns regarding the presence of thousands of Eritrean troops in Tigray, which posed a serious threat to the wellbeing of Eritrean refugees in the region. Attacks and raids on at least three of the four main refugee camps in the region have since been confirmed, including the bombing of Adi Harush camp."[352] The article refers to a letter which stated that "reports are emerging that a significant number refugees may have been seized at gunpoint from Hitsats, Shimelba and Shire town, and either forced onto the front lines of the fighting, or forcibly returned to Eritrea, where they will inevitably face indefinite detention, forced conscription, torture and other inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment, or death".[353]

In December 2020, UNHCR reported on the situation in Tigray between 28 November 2020 and 3 December 2020 and stated that it was "unable to verify reports of […] forced recruitment at the Eritrean camps, nor the overall conditions in the camps, due to the lack of access and continued communication blackout [in Ethiopia]." [354] A UNHCR report focusing on the period 4-8 December 2020 highlighted "reports of attacks, abductions and forced recruitment at the Eritrean [refugee] camps' [in Tigray] that could not be independently verified due to the active conflict".[355]

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[349] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

[350] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021

[351] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

[352] Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), *Calls continue for international assistance for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 30 November 2020

[353] Lord Alton of Liverpool, CSW, Eritrean Community Connections (ECC), Human Rights Concern – Eritrea (HRCE), Nightingale Ministries Rev Daniel Habtey, Elim Ministries, Release Eritrea, Eritrea Focus, SeReT Foundation, *Joint Letter to HE Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary General*, [undated, PDF link suggests 30 November 2020]

[354] UNHCR, *Regional Update #5; Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region); 28 November - 3 December 2020*, 3 December 2020, *p. 2*

[355] UNHCR, *Regional Update #6: Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region), 4-8 December 2020*, 10 December 2020, *p. 2*

On 9 December 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) raised its concerns over the "forced recruitment of Tigrayan youth to fight against their own communities".[356]

In January 2021, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) stated that "Ethiopian refugees fleeing to Sudan continue to report violence, forced recruitment of men and boys to armed groups, and sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in the Tigray region".[357] The same source later that same month documented that "On 4 November [2020] the federal government of Ethiopia launched a military offensive against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the Tigray region, following months of political tensions. Hundreds of people were killed and there have been reports of forced recruitment of men and boys to armed groups […]".[358]

In its January 2021 *Situation Updated on Tigray*, UNHCR reported that "Due to the lack of access to Shimelba and Hitsats refugee camps, reliable information about the conditions of refugees in those camps remains extremely limited and difficult to verify, with unconfirmed but consistent reports of attacks, abductions and forced recruitment at the refugee camps".[359]

Similarly, in February 2021, Refugees International published an article which stated that "Despite limited access to information in Tigray, reports have emerged of human rights violations and atrocities occurring there. MSF staff described the lack of medical care available in eastern and central Tigray. Refugees and asylum seekers have provided accounts of […] forced conscription, and other abuses committed by all parties to the fighting".[360]

In August 2021, BBC News was reportedly "offered an interview with teenagers allegedly caught fighting" for rebel Tigrayan fighters:

> "I was playing football with friends when I was forcefully recruited by Tigrayan fighters to join their ranks," one 17-year-old told us, on the phone from Afar, a state which borders Tigray. The conflict began in Tigray in northern Ethiopia in November [2020], but has since spread to the regions of Afar and Amhara, where the TPLF rebels recently captured Lalibela, a town famous for its rock-hewn churches. "I was taken by force to the war front," said another teenager, who told us he was in Year 10 at school in Tigray. "My family couldn't say anything because they feared for their life." A 19-year-old woman said: "We didn't get any military training. They took us to Afar. They threatened to kill our family if we didn't join the fight." The teenagers told us that around 50 adolescent boys and girls were rounded up near Tigray's capital Mekelle and forced to fight, before being captured by Afar's regional forces, who are allied to the federal government. […] TPLF spokesman Getachew Reda denied that teenagers were forced to join the group's ranks. "If there is a problem with regard to teenagers - 17, 18, 19-year-olds, although 18 is the legal age to join the army - these are children whose parents have been subjected to untold suffering by the Eritreans, by Abiy's forces, by Amharic expansionists," he told the BBC. "We don't have to force people. We have hundreds of thousands lining up to fight".[361]

[356] UN OHCHR, *Exceedingly worrying and volatile situation in Ethiopia – Bachelet*, 9 December 2020
[357] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P), *Atrocity Alert No. 234: Ethiopia, China and Niger*, 6 January 2021
[358] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P), *R2P Monitor, Issue 55 (15 January 2021)*, 15 January 2021, *p. 15*
[359] UNHCR, *Ethiopia Operation - Tigray Update; Tigray Situation Update; 21 January 2021*, 21 January 2021, *p. 4*
[360] Refugees International, *Time is Running Out: Urgent Action Needed to Address Humanitarian Crisis in Tigray*, 25 February 2021
[361] BBC News, *Tigray crisis: Ethiopian teenagers become pawns in propaganda war*, 19 August 2021

According to the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) in September 2021, "Abuses against civilians in Tigray by government aligned forces have reportedly fuelled insurgent recruitment".[362]

g. Situation of Women and Girls

i. Gender-Based Violence

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., a. Overview.

Refugees International providing context stated in August 2021:

> In November 2020, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) into Tigray to quell alleged uprisings by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). This escalation of hostilities has resulted in one of the most vicious conflicts in recent memory, marked by […] brutal sexual violence. […] Although the Ethiopian government has severely restricted information coming out of Tigray, reports of appalling sexual violence abound.[363]
>
> [Note that Refugees International's report of August 2021 reports in detail on the conflict-related sexual violence, the sexual exploitation and abuse, and what contributes to the risks to increasing sexual exploitation and abuse of girls and women in Tigray. The full report can be accessed here.[364]]

Similarly, the UN Report of the Secretary-General on *Conflict-related sexual violence* noted for the year 2020:

> During the period under review, sexual violence was employed as a tactic of war, torture and terrorism in settings in which overlapping humanitarian and security crises, linked with militarization and the proliferation of arms, continued unabated.
>
> In Ethiopia, during military operations in the Tigray region in November 2020, following attacks on the northern command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces by the Tigray People's Liberation Front, alleged serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including sexual violence, were recorded in northern and central Tigray. Allegations of over 100 rape cases were reported. There were also disturbing reports of individuals who had allegedly been forced to rape members of their own family under the threat of imminent violence, of women who had been forced by military elements to have sex in exchange for basic commodities, and of sexual violence being perpetrated against women and girls in refugee camps.[365]

In December 2020, *the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet* highlighted "serious violations of international humanitarian law, including […] sexual violence against women and girls."[366]

In January 2021, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict expressed that she was:

> greatly concerned by serious allegations of sexual violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, including a high number of alleged rapes in the capital, Mekelle. There are also disturbing reports of individuals allegedly forced to rape members of their own family, under threats of imminent violence. Some women

[362] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 1*
[363] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*, 26 August 2021
[364] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Amid Humanitarian Crisis*, August 2021
[365] UN Security Council, *Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General*, 30 March 2021, *para. 12*
[366] UN OHCHR, *Exceedingly worrying and volatile situation in Ethiopia – Bachelet*, 9 December 2020

> have also reportedly been forced by military elements to have sex in exchange for basic commodities, while medical centres have indicated an increase in the demand for emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) which is often an indicator of sexual violence in conflict. In addition, there are increasing reports of sexual violence against women and girls in a number of refugee camps. While noting the volatile security situation in the Tigray region, the hampered physical access in many parts of Tigray, and the dire situation of civilians especially refugees, it remains critical that humanitarian actors and independent human rights monitors be granted immediate, unconditional and sustained access to the entirety of the Tigray region, including IDP and refugee camps where new arrivals have allegedly reported cases of sexual violence. Immediate medical and psychosocial assistance must be accompanied by protection measures, to ensure that those who have been forced from their homes due to violence are not placed at further risk of sexual violence within the camps. […] Constrained humanitarian access and limited resources for service providers have reduced the availability of essential health care and assistance for survivors of sexual violence, including sexual and reproductive health care. Access to lifesaving assistance, such as dignity kits, post-rape kits, treatment to prevent HIV and STI transmission and psychosocial support is also critical. Accordingly, enhanced funding and support is urgently required to scale-up the provision and coverage of essential services."[367]

Also in January 2021, the United States called all Eritrean troops to leave Tigray, "given credible reports of looting, sexual violence, assaults in refugee camps and other human rights abuses".[368]

Covering events between 16 January 2021 and 31 January 2021 the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reported:

> Of the 1.2 million population in need of humanitarian assistance in the current conflict, partners estimate that 280,551 are women of reproductive age (WRA) and 44,888 are currently pregnant, while 6,733 could experience obstetric complication and might need Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (EmONC) services to deliver safely. The number of WRA who could need clinical management of rape (CMR) services as a results of sexual violence in the conflict is estimated 5,611 while a total of sexually active men who use condoms is projected at 224,441. […]
>
> Of particular concern in recent days is the alarming increase in reports of sexual violence and abuses in Tigray region, including rape cases. Most of the victims claim that the attack was perpetrated by "men in uniform", including sometimes in exchange for basic commodities.[369]

In February 2021, UNOCHA reported that "Since the start of the conflict in November [2020], humanitarian workers, local organizations and civilians have reported several cases of violations and abuses against civilians in Tigray […] Reports of sexual violence are widespread across Tigray region, with incidents, including rapes and women being forced to exchange sex for food and basic commodities have been reported in Mekelle, Shire, Humera and many other locations […] Lack of basic medical supplies has so far limited or made impossible health and psychosocial interventions to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence".[370]

A February 2021 article in the Council on Foreign Relations on the conflict in Tigray wrote that: "Refugees and others have said that forces on the ground—Ethiopia's military, Eritrean troops, and

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[367] UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Ms. Pramila Patten, urges all parties to prohibit the use of sexual violence and cease hostilities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 21 January 2021
[368] AP News, *US says Eritrean forces should leave Tigray immediately*, 28 January 2021
[369] UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis - Situation report #1 (16—31 January 2021)*, 31 January 2021
[370] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 4 February 2021*, 5 February 2021, *p. 2/8*

ethnic militias—are responsible for sexual violence, ethnic-based targeted attacks, and large-scale looting".[371]

The Ethiopian Minister of Women and Children, Filsan Abdullahi Ahmed, published a Tweet in February 2021 acknowledging that "it had received its report from its 'Taskforce team on the ground in the Tigray region' 'established rape has taken place conclusively and without a doubt'".[372]

The USAID published a report in March 2021 which documented that there were "Continued reports of grave protection violations across Tigray, including widespread incidents of gender-based violence (GBV), continue to generate serious concern among relief actors":

> the Ethiopia Human Rights Commission had recorded 108 cases of rape in Mekele and Eastern Zone's Adigrat and Wukro towns as of early February [2021]; relief actors note that rates of GBV are likely far higher than recorded by health authorities due to persistent barriers to accurate reporting, including a lack of legal and health services, fear of stigmatiz ation, and risk of further harm. Furthermore, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) are sheltering in unfinished or damaged buildings, many of which do not include separate spaces or latrines for women and men, exacerbating the risk of GBV, the UN reports.[373]

Similarly, UNOCHA reported, also in March 2021, on the services and needs of those who survived sexual violence:

> While more than 110 rape survivors are currently seeking medical care in several medical institutions, according to the Protection Cluster, these incidences are believed to be greatly under-reported due to fear of stigma, discrimination and repercussion. Partners have also received reports that survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) who have reached out locally for community support were not able to access any services. Given the stigma and shame surrounding GBV, survivors in rural and remote areas are less likely to access local or mobile clinics as they are less confidential. Further, since many areas in Tigray remain inaccessible, it is difficult for GBV survivors to receive urgent and life-saving medical care, GBV case management or mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Women and children displaced are at heightened risk of abuse and exploitation, while recent assessments in collective centres for displaced people in Mekelle, Adigrat and Shire showed that the severe lack of infrastructure leaves women and children exposed to a range of abuse, including GBV.[374]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in March 2021 that: "Physicians treating survivors of sexual violence in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region claim that rape is being used as a weapon of war against the ethnic Tigrayan population. A CNN report cited testimony from nine doctors recounting that women are being gang-raped, drugged and held hostage. Doctors said that the perpetrators – the Ethiopian federal forces and allied Eritrean soldiers – were operating with impunity. Dr. Tedros Tefera, a doctor who has been treating Tigrayan women in the Hamdayet refugee camp in Sudan, also stated that their rapists threatened that they came to cleanse their bloodlines and "Amharize" them. The Amhara are the majority ethnic group of one of the states bordering Tigray".[375]

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[371] Council on Foreign Relations, *The Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray Region: What to Know*, 10 February 2021
[372] Twitter, *Filsan Abdullahi Ahmed @1_filsan*, 11 February 2021
[373] USAID, *Ethiopia – Tigray Conflict Fact Sheet #3; Fiscal Year (FY) 2021*, 3 March 2021
[374] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 8 March 2021,* 8 March 2021, *p. 10/13*
[375] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 245: Niger, Myanmar (Burma) and Ethiopia*, 24 March 2021

At the end of March 2021, Reuters reported that in a parliamentary address the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed "acknowledged for the first time that atrocities like rape had been committed during the fighting, and promised perpetrators would be punished".[376]

During the same month, WHO published a "Statement on Gender-Based Violence in Tigray region of Ethiopia" which was signed by the IOM, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, HRC, UNOCHA, OHCHR, UNFPA, InterAction, International Council of Voluntary Agencies. This statement stressed that "Amid a worsening humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, reports of indiscriminate and targeted attacks against civilians, including rape and other horrific forms of sexual violence, continue to surface. This must stop".[377] The statement called upon:

> all State and non-State parties to the conflict to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law; ensure their forces respect and protect civilian populations, particularly women and children, from all human rights abuses; explicitly condemn all sexual violence; and take action to bring perpetrators to justice where abuses do occur. […]
>
> Only one facility [in Tigray] provides the full range of services for clinical management of rape survivors, and emergency contraception is fully available in less than half of the facilities assessed. The lack of direct access to health care also creates an environment of fear accessing health care, especially for women and children, who are already facing frequent and severe security threats and displacement. Moreover, many displaced civilians are sheltering in unfinished or damaged buildings, and most collective centres do not include separate spaces or latrines for women and men, girls and boys, thus increasing risks of gender-based violence (GBV) and the spread of certain infectious diseases.[378]

In a virtual briefing to UN members states on 25 March 2021 the UN's Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, who had spent two and a half months in Tigray, said that "five medical facilities recorded 516 rape cases in mid-March, and given that most health facilities aren't functioning and the stigma associated with rape, "it is projected that the actual numbers are much higher."[379]

At the end of March 2021, The Telegraph published an article which documented sexual violence against women in Tigray. The source stated that "Since early December [2020], major hospitals in Tigray have recorded 512 cases of sexual abuse by soldiers, most of which are gang rapes." [380] It reported that:

> Hundreds of women are rushing to Tigray's hospitals in northern Ethiopia for emergency contraception and HIV prevention drugs after being systematically raped, often gang-raped, by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers fighting in a brutal civil war. Dozens are seeking abortions, medical care and psychological support in overwhelmed hospitals, many of which have been destroyed by a five-month conflict between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Thousands more are thought to be suffering in silence as they fear reprisals by security forces and rejection from their families, survivors, doctors and aid workers told the Telegraph.[381]

In April 2021, CARE International published the following Rapid Gender Analysis which draws from focus group discussions and individual and key informant interviews with 94 people (67% of whom are women), secondary data sources, and CARE's research in the region which aims to understand the

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[376] Reuters, *Ethiopian PM confirms Eritrean troops entered Tigray during conflict*, 23 March 2021
[377] WHO, *Statement on Gender-Based Violence in Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 22 March 2021
[378] WHO, *Statement on Gender-Based Violence in Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 22 March 2021
[379] AP News, *UN warns of `alarming' crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 25 March 2021
[380] The Telegraph, *'We're here to make you HIV positive': Hundreds of women rush to Tigray hospitals as soldiers use rape as weapon of war*, 27 March 2021
[381] The Telegraph, *'We're here to make you HIV positive': Hundreds of women rush to Tigray hospitals as soldiers use rape as weapon of war*, 27 March 2021

specific challenges people of all genders are facing. The report was conducted in the Northern Amhara region at sites for IDPs in Debark and MayTsebri (Formerly under Tigray region). The source's key findings indicate that:

> Shelter is one of the highest priority needs. […] There are no separate places for families or for women and girls to sleep safely. Women and girls experience rape while they sleep, due to the collective and overcrowded living and sleeping arrangement. […] Gender-based violence is high, with multiple contributing factors. Women and girls has been victims of multiple rapes and sexual violence when the conflict broke, as they fled the conflict and after they reached the safety of the camps. High rates of sexual and other violence, especially as they are outside of the camps searching for firewood or water; Women and girls are reporting trading sex for resources as they have no resources of their own. The lack of safe spaces for women and girls is continuing to exacerbate the problems of GBV. Women report having nowhere to go after they experience violence. At the same time, men are targeted for violence as part of the ongoing political conflict.[382]

In April 2021, The New Humanitarian published a report on a poll which it suggests "confirms an inadequate relief operation in Tigray". According to the report, sexual violence, amongst other factors, "mean most of the estimated six million people in the region are negatively affected, and millions need some kind of help".[383]

Also in April 2021, Reuters published an article on the widespread use of rape in the Tigray conflict:

> It was the beginning of an 11-day ordeal in February, during which she says she was repeatedly raped by 23 soldiers who forced nails, a rock and other items into her vagina, and threatened her with a knife. Doctors showed Reuters the bloodstained stone and two 3-inch nails they said they had removed from her body. The woman, 27, is among hundreds who have reported that they were subjected to horrific sexual violence by Ethiopian and allied Eritrean soldiers after fighting broke out in November in the mountainous northern region of Ethiopia, doctors said. Some women were held captive for extended periods, days or weeks at a time, said Dr Fasika Amdeselassie, the top public health official for the government-appointed interim administration in Tigray. "Women are being kept in sexual slavery," Fasika told Reuters. "The perpetrators have to be investigated." […] In addition, eight other doctors at five public hospitals told Reuters that most of the rape victims described their attackers as either Ethiopian government soldiers or Eritrean troops. It was more common for women to report sexual violence by Eritrean soldiers, the doctors said. […] Most people interviewed for this article declined to be identified. They said they feared reprisals, including possible violence, by soldiers who guard the hospitals and towns. […] Fasika, the health official, said at least 829 cases of sexual assault have been reported at the five hospitals since the conflict in Tigray began. Those cases were likely "the tip of the iceberg," Fasika said. Rape is underreported in Ethiopia because it carries a huge stigma. Also, most of the region's health facilities are no longer functioning, and travel between towns remains dangerous, he said. Most of the women who have come forward are either pregnant or sustained severe physical injury from the rapes, Fasika said.[384]

Reuters further noted that it "interviewed 11 women who said they had been raped by soldiers from Eritrea, Ethiopia or both. Four said they were kidnapped, taken to military camps and gang raped, in some cases alongside other women. The women did not know the camp names but said they were located near Mekelle and the towns of Idaga Hamus, Wukro and Sheraro. Five other women said they were held in fields or deserted houses for up to six days. And two said they were raped in their own homes. Reuters could not independently verify their accounts. However, all told similar stories of being beaten and brutalized. Healthcare providers confirmed that the 11 women's injuries were consistent

[382] CARE International, *Tigray Conflict Rapid Gender Analysis*, April 2021
[383] The New Humanitarian, *Poll confirms an inadequate relief operation in Tigray*, 8 April 2021
[384] Reuters, *Health official alleges 'sexual slavery' in Tigray*, 15 April 2021

with the events they described, and they showed Reuters medical records for three of the women detailing their conditions. The healthcare providers also shared details of nine other cases of sexual assault, including the ordeals of two 14-year-old girls".[385]

On 21 April 2021, Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, said: "I have been extremely concerned by the numerous and horrific reports received from multiple and credible sources, about the extent and cruelty of acts of sexual violence being committed against women and girls. Images of the brutality of the violence and terror being inflicted on women and girls has sent shock waves around the world. Testimonies of some brave survivors revealed the brutal and hideous war being waged on the bodies of women and girls".[386]

UNFPA released a "Statement of the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility GBV in Tigray" on 22 April 2021 which highlighted that: "The Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) continues to be alarmed by reports of increasing violence against women and girls – including harrowing accounts of sexual violence– because of conflict and insecurity in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. […] Our current analysis of the situation in Tigray is that the response remains wholly inadequate to the scale of need. The GBV AoR therefore calls for increased resources – in the form of human resources, commodities, supplies and funding to support services – to programme-implementing organisations, including local organisations who have been responding for months in often dangerous situations."[387]

In a statement released on 23 April 2021, by the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action on GBV) – a global network of more than 90 states, donors, international organisations and NGOs, are deeply concerned by the ongoing reports of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, occurring as a result of the crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia – concerns were expressed "horrifying and widespread daily reality [of GBV] for women and girls". The statement stressed that "GBV is notoriously under-reported due to the fear of stigmatisation or retaliation, limited access to trusted service providers and impunity for perpetrators. Survivors of GBV are experiencing significant challenges accessing safe shelter, health services, psychosocial support, case management, protection by law enforcement and the justice system generally. This is in part due to a great shortage of service providers, the security risks, ongoing power cuts, and damaged as well as looted and attacked health facilities. Local civil society organisations, government institutions, and NGOs, including women-led organisations, who provided GBV services pre-crisis, face challenges responding to such a crisis and require financial and technical support as well as security."[388]

The UK Parliament House of Commons International Development Committee published a report at the end of April 2021 which stated that it was "appalled by the distressing reports of human rights abuses, gender-based violence and sexual violence in Tigray".[389] The source reported that:

> The horrors that have been inflicted on people and their suffering during this conflict are unimaginable, and we are particularly saddened that, once again, women and girls are being targeted. […] We welcome

[385] Reuters, *Health official alleges 'sexual slavery' in Tigray*, 15 April 2021
[386] UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Remarks from SRSG Pramila Patten: Georgetown University virtual event, "The Crisis in Tigray: Women and Girls Under Violent Assault"*, 21 April 2021
[387] UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *Statement of the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility GBV in Tigray*, 22 April 2021
[388] Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action on GBV), *Statement by the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence within the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 23 April 2021
[389] UK Parliament House of Commons International Development Committee, *The humanitarian situation in Tigray*, 30 April 2021, *para. 4*

> the statement by the G7 group condemning the killing of civilians, sexual and gender-based violence, indiscriminate shelling and forced displacement of civilian populations. […] Situation updates and media reports implicating various armed actors, including the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Eritrean armed forces, and Amhara Regional Forces and affiliated militia, have documented: […] sexual violence including against children […] rapes and other forms of gender-based violence […].[390]

According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Gender Analysis issued in early May 2021, sexual abuse and assault were prevalent during the conflict and continue to increase, including sexually exploitative relationships to meet basic needs in several IDP sites across the region.[391]

In May 2021, Al Jazeera reported that in the Tigray region "Ethiopia's military prosecutors have convicted three soldiers of rape and pressed charges against 28 others suspected of killing civilians in the ongoing conflict in the northern Tigray region, the attorney general's office announced. In addition, 25 other soldiers are charged with rape and other forms of sexual violence".[392]

Covering events between 15 May 2021 and 31 May 2021 the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) stressed that "Looking at the impact of the conflict on the protection needs of vulnerable populations, concerns about reports of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, continue to be highlighted by partners and official authorities in Tigray Region" and that:

> Although largely underreported due to fears of stigma and retaliation, at least 26,000 survivors of sexual violence between 15 and 49 years old are estimated to seek clinical management of rape services in the coming months while only 29% of the health facilities are partially available to provide services in the region. The lack of health staff (36%) and training of health providers (40%) continue to be the main barriers for service provision to GBV survivors at health facilities. Of particular concern is also the lack of medical supplies for emergency contraception in 86% of health facilities assessed across the region. All of this amid multiple stressors impacting the country, from the COVID-19 pandemic to risks for cholera disease outbreaks, to intercommunal conflicts and social unrest across regions, to climate-related shocks with a famine alert looming in the country.[393]

In June 2021, UNFPA noted that "findings from consultations with women and girls held by IRC show that there is an increase in sexual harassment, assault, rape and Intimate Partner Violence." It reported that "Since January this year [2021], 39,516 (9,920 girls and 29,165 women) have received dignity kits support in 10 woredas; 107,126 people have been reached with GBV awareness messages in 14 woredas; 6,720 people were reached with GBV psychosocial support activities in 7 woredas; and 1,788 people have been reached with capacity building activities in 14 woredas".[394]

In a report published in mid-June 2021, UNOCHA reported that "More than 500 cases of gender-based violence, including rape, officially reported in May [2021]. About 70 cases are against girls under 18".[395]

Between March and June 2021 Amnesty International "interviewed 63 survivors of rape and other sexual violence" and "medical professionals and humanitarian workers involved in treating or assisting

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[390] UK Parliament House of Commons International Development Committee, *The humanitarian situation in Tigray*, 30 April 2021, *Paras. 5/12*
[391] International Rescue Committee (IRC), *Tigray Gender Analysis Key Findings*, 4 May 2021
[392] Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia convicts soldiers of crimes against civilians in Tigray*, 21 May 2021
[393] UNFPA, *UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis - Situation report (15 - 31 May 2021)*, 31 May 2021
[394] UNFPA, *Response Update - Crisis in Tigray: Gender based violence AOR, June 2021*, June 2021, *p. 1/4*
[395] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 17 June 2021*, 17 June 2021, *p. 1*

survivors […] about the scale of sexual violence and for corroborating information on specific cases".[396] The report found: "Women and girls in Tigray were targeted for rape and other sexual violence by fighting forces aligned to the Ethiopian government", including "members of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF), the Amhara Regional Police Special Force (ASF), and Fano, an Amhara militia group".[397] The research established that "Soldiers and militias subjected Tigrayan women and girls to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation and other forms of torture, often using ethnic slurs and death threats".[398] Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General, specifically stated: "'It's clear that rape and sexual violence have been used as a weapon of war to inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in Tigray. Hundreds have been subjected to brutal treatment aimed at degrading and dehumanizing them […] The severity and scale of the sexual crimes committed are particularly shocking, amounting to war crimes and possible crimes against humanity'".[399] The report further highlighted:

> Health facilities in Tigray registered 1,288 cases of gender-based violence from February to April 2021. Adigrat Hospital recorded 376 cases of rape from the beginning of the conflict to 9 June 2021. However, many survivors told Amnesty International they had not visited health facilities, suggesting these figures represent only a small fraction of rapes in the context of the conflict.
> Survivors still suffer significant physical and mental health complications. Many complained of physical trauma such as continued bleeding, back pain, immobility and fistula. Some tested positive for HIV after being raped. Sleep deprivation, anxiety and emotional distress are common among survivors and family members who witnessed the violence.[400]

In June 2021 a joint NGO call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray stated:

> 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 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 […] rape and other sexual violence […]
> 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.[401]

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[396] See Amnesty International, *'I don't know if they realized I was a person': Rape and other sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 11 August 2021
[397] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Troops and militia rape, abduct women and girls in Tigray conflict – new report*, 10 August 2021
[398] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Troops and militia rape, abduct women and girls in Tigray conflict – new report*, 10 August 2021
[399] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Troops and militia rape, abduct women and girls in Tigray conflict – new report*, 10 August 2021
[400] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Troops and militia rape, abduct women and girls in Tigray conflict – new report*, 10 August 2021
[401] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Joint letter calling for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 10 June 2021

The July 2021 monthly *Protection in Danger* news brief produced by Insecurity Insight and basing the information on the source 'Medhanie Gaim', reported: "In Tigray region there are reports of Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Amhara forces harassing and intimidating survivors of sexual violence and putting them in isolated and undisclosed locations in order to prevent them from speaking to the international media".[402]

In August 2021, Refugees International reported that "The conditions for women and girls who have fled are appalling. Access to health care– –especially sexual and reproductive health services—is limited, and shelter is inadequate at best, unsafe at worst. Furthermore, famine conditions have set in throughout large areas".[403] The same source stressed that "the risk factors that lead to SEA [sexual exploitation and abuse] are exceptionally high in this humanitarian context":

> They further confirmed that a lack of reporting and data does not indicate a lack of SEA. Instead, it demonstrates that there are barriers to reporting, the mechanisms of reporting are imperfect, survivors fear reprisals, and access to justice is difficult, among other explanations. […] As food becomes scarcer, the risk of SEA increases. There are reports that displaced women and girls are exchanging sex for food from host communities. […] Ongoing difficulties in getting supplies into Tigray due to administrative barriers and the ever-changing security landscape exacerbate the scarcity of resources. This puts women and girls at greater risk of experiencing SEA. […] Despite the rise in female-headed households, Tigrayan society remains patriarchal, and displaced Tigrayan women continue to have limited power, or leadership and decision-making opportunities. Lack of power, lack of protection from a male family member, and lack of livelihoods are some of the contributing factors to female-headed households being particularly vulnerable to GBV [gender-based violence] and SEA.[404]

The same report noted protection from sexual exploitation and abuse depended on referral pathways and reporting mechanisms:

> One set of challenges is the lack of relevant services and lack of awareness of referral pathways. Referral pathways provide a way for organizations to responsibly share case information for individuals who need protection and support services. […] When the conflict erupted in Tigray in November 2020, referral pathways for GBV and child protection (CP) cases were either weak or non-existent. Because these referral pathways are only beginning to function more smoothly, it has been difficult for survivors of GBV and SEA to receive the care that they need. There is also a lack of reporting mechanisms. In Ethiopia, as is standard practice, the CP/GBV Area of Responsibility (AOR) reporting mechanisms are how people lodge SEA complaints. In November 2020, these reporting mechanisms did not exist in Ethiopia. […] survivors rarely report SEA or receive the necessary support following an incident of SEA. […] survivors might fear reprisals if they disclose information, including losing access to food and cash on which they depend. […] even if survivors were to report incidents of exploitation or abuse, the services they need to recover do not exist in many locations.[405]

[402] See Insecurity Insight, *Protection in Danger, Monthly News Brief*, May 2021, *p. 2*
[403] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Amid Humanitarian Crisis*, August 2021
[404] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Amid Humanitarian Crisis*, August 2021
[405] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Amid Humanitarian Crisis*, August 2021

The same report also commented on the subject of community engagement and noted that "weak referral pathways and the absence of SEA reporting mechanisms when the conflict began in Tigray, staff capacity to handle GBV cases and SEA is limited".[406]

Moreover, the report stated that "most IDPs and refugees also are not familiar with SEA and do not know how to report it".[407]

On the subject of accountability, the source also reported that "One of the most alarming barriers to ensuring displaced women and girls in Tigray are protected against SEA is the apparent absence of accountability".[408]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021, based on a range of sources:

> U.N. officials have noted "widespread and systematic" rape and sexual assault in Tigray, which they say has been used as a weapon of war, perpetrated by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops, Amhara Special Forces, and aligned militia.[129] The U.N. Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has cited acts of sexual violence "with a level of cruelty beyond comprehension."[130] U.S. officials contend that Ethiopia's military, with allied forces, "launched a campaign to shatter families and destroy the reproductive and mental health of their victims."[131] Journalists and human rights groups have documented accounts of rape victims who say they were targeted by members of these forces based on their ethnicity.[132] One report suggests the existence of "rape camps."[133] In August 2021, Amnesty International released a report suggesting "a pattern" of sexual abuse featuring torture, insults, and ethnic slurs by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops and allied militia, and noting "sadistic brutality" in some attacks, mostly attributed to Eritrean soldiers.[134] Ethiopian officials say soldiers implicated in rape are being prosecuted; several members of The Elders, a group of world leaders founded by Nelson Mandela, say the prosecutions have been "far from adequate given the scale of reported abuses."[135]
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> 129 "UN warns sexual violence being used as weapon of war in Ethiopia's Tigray region, RFI, April 16, 2021.
> 130 Remarks by U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, "The crisis in Tigray: Women and girls under violent assault," April 22, 2021.
> 131 USAID, Administrator Power at the U.S.-EU High Level Roundtable, op. cit.
> 132 See, e.g., Amnesty International, "I don't know if they realized I was a person": Rape and other sexual violence in the Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, August 11, 2021; Cara Anna, "'Leave no Tigrayan': In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased," AP, April 7, 2021; and Lynsey Addario and Rachel Hartigan, "A grave humanitarian crisis is unfolding in Ethiopia. 'I never saw hell before, but now I have.'" National Geographic, June 1, 2021.
> 133 Hayelom Mekonnen, Bridget Conley, Alex de Waal, Delia Burns, "What 'rape as a weapon of war' in Tigray really means," World Peace Foundation, August 10, 2021.
> 134 Amnesty International, "I don't know if they realized I was a person..." op. cit.
> 135 The Elders, "The UN and AU must act now to prevent famine and end atrocities in Tigray, Ethiopia," June 14, 2021.
> In late May, Ethiopia's Attorney General reported that three soldiers had been convicted of rape and 25 others indicted.
> "Ethiopia convicts 3 troops of rape, charges 28 for killings, Associated Press, May 21, 2021.[409]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas, despite the Ethiopian Government's expressed commitment to accountability for sexual violence […], rape and

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[406] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Amid Humanitarian Crisis*, August 2021
[407] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Amid Humanitarian Crisis*, August 2021
[408] Refugees International, *Women in Tigray Face Increased Risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Amid Humanitarian Crisis*, August 2021
[409] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*

other sexual violence against women and girls continue to be widely used by Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara regional armed forces in addition to death threats, the use of ethnic slurs, and capture in conditions of sexual slavery; whereas government forces and officials have harassed and threatened humanitarian organisations and national health providers which support survivors of sexual violence".[410]

In August 2021, Amnesty International published a report which covered the events that took place "During the conflict that began on 4 November 2020 in Tigray – Ethiopia's northernmost region" and documented that "troops fighting in support of the federal government have committed widespread rape against ethnic Tigrayan women and girls. The perpetrators include members of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Amhara Regional Police Special Forces (ASF), and Fano, an informal Amhara militia group. Given the context, scale, and gravity of the sexual violence committed against women and girls in Tigray, the violations amount to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity".[411]

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".[412] The full report report can be accessed here.[413] With regards to 'Sexual and gender-based violence', the report found:

> There are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict committed sexual and gender-based violence, with the ENDF, EDF, and TSF implicated in multiple reports of gang rape. In many cases, rape and other forms of sexual violence were used "to degrade and dehumanize the victims," the report says. The JIT conducted 30 interviews with women survivors, nearly half of whom had been gang-raped. Many had unwanted pregnancies and were infected with sexually transmitted diseases as a result. Men and boys were also subjected to sexual and gender-based violence. The JIT was told that a 16-year-old boy was raped by nine EDF soldiers in Humera and later committed suicide. Given the stigma and trauma attached to sexual violence, the JIT believes the prevalence of rape was likely much higher than documented. Some of these crimes may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.[414]

h. Situation of Children

i. Child recruitment

In January 2021, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported that "On 4 November [2020] the federal government of Ethiopia launched a military offensive against the Tigray People's

[410] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, D*

[411] Amnesty International, *"I don't know if they realized I was a person": Rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 11 August 2021

[412] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

[413] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021

[414] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021

Liberation Front (TPLF) in the Tigray region, following months of political tensions. Hundreds of people were killed and there have been reports of forced recruitment of men and boys to armed groups […]".[415]

In its 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report on Ethiopia, which covers events occurring between April 2020 and March 2021, the U.S. Department of State made a prioritised recommendation that Ethiopia "Coordinate with international organizations to prevent trafficking crimes and potential recruitment and use of child soldiers in Tigray".[416]

In July 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission stated that: "The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is deeply concerned by reports of […] use of child soldiers in the context of the ongoing conflict in Tigray".[417]

In August 2021, the BBC News documented that:

> The Ethiopian government has been accusing the Tigrayan fighters of using child soldiers ever since they recaptured Mekelle in June [2021], eight months after government troops took control of it. The New York Times published a story on this key turning point in the war, with a photo captioned 'a column of thousands of Tigrayans who joined the rebels". The paper described the young people as "highly motivated young recruits" inspired by the "catalogue of horrors that has defined the war - massacres, ethnic cleansing and extensive sexual violence". Photographer Finbar O'Reilly, whose shots were used, published extra photos on his Instagram page, some of which appear to show children carrying weapons. Since then, Prime Minister Abiy and his army of social media supporters have accused the Tigrayan rebels of forcibly recruiting child soldiers, doping them with drugs, and pushing them to the front lines. TPLF spokesman Getachew Reda denied that teenagers were forced to join the group's ranks. "If there is a problem with regard to teenagers - 17, 18, 19-year-olds, although 18 is the legal age to join the army - these are children whose parents have been subjected to untold suffering by the Eritreans, by Abiy's forces, by Amharic expansionists," he told the BBC. "We don't have to force people. We have hundreds of thousands lining up to fight.[418]

In September 2021, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect documented that "Reports indicate that widespread violations of IHL [International Humanitarian Law] and IHRL [International Human Rights Law] have been committed in Tigray by the ENDF and allied Eritrean forces, the TPLF/TDF, Amhara regional forces and affiliated militias. These abuses include [… the] use of child soldiers […]".[419]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted in her statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13th September 2021 that "We have also received serious reports of recruitment of children into the conflict by Tigrayan forces, which is prohibited under international law".[420]

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[415] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P), *R2P Monitor, Issue 55 (15 January 2021)*, 15 January 2021, *p. 15*

[416] USDOS, *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ethiopia*, 1 July 2021

[417] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Protect civilians from harassment, arbitrary detention and attacks*, 15 July 2021

[418] BBC News, *Tigray crisis: Ethiopian teenagers become pawns in propaganda war*, 19 August 2021

[419] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P), *R2P Monitor, Issue 58 (1 September 2021)*, 1 September 2021, *p. 9*

[420] UNHCOHC, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet*, 13 September 2021

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas there are reports of children being recruited into the conflict by the warring parties, including the Tigrayan forces; whereas the use of child soldiers constitutes a war crime".[421]

ii. Child abuse/violations due to the conflict

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., a. Overview and g., *i. Gender-Based Violence*.

In December 2020, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council released a report on preliminary findings around major human rights violations in and around Mai-Kadra in November 2020, based off field inspections in Mai-Kadra, Humera, Abderafi, Abrahajira, Dansha, and Gondar towns between 3 and 11 December 2020. The report observed that:

> Victims said that on the day of the attack (November 9, 2020) police and Special Forces, as well as Tigrayan youths (mostly coming from the *Samri* neighborhood) ordered no one to leave their homes. They testified that the young people danced in large numbers in different parts of the city, and in some places starting at 11:00 am, and also in the area known as *Gimb Sefer*, where most Amharas live, starting from 3:00 pm, they began looking for Identification cards and they spoke to victims in Tigrigna and identified those who could not respond and began to attack them.
> […] In addition to the town of *Maikadra*, the team found similar attacks in *Humera* and *Dansha*. […] In *Dansha*, 12- and 15-year-olds were also beaten to death with an axe and their funeral was held at *St. George's Church*.[422]

Human Rights Watch reported in February 2021 on the shelling of Tigray urban areas in November 2020, including Mekelle, and noted that:

> Ethiopian federal forces carried out apparently indiscriminate shelling of urban areas in the Tigray region in November 2020 in violation of the laws of war, Human Rights Watch said today. Artillery attacks at the start of the armed conflict struck homes, hospitals, schools, and markets in the city of Mekelle, and the towns of Humera and Shire, killing at least 83 civilians, including children, and wounding over 300.
> […]Residents from the regional capital, Mekelle, said that heavy shelling on November 28 killed 27 civilians, including children, and wounded over 100. In one attack, shells struck a residential compound near a market, mosque, and an empty school in Ayder sub-city, and killed four members of a single family, including two young children, and wounded five adults and a 9-year-old child.
> […] Doctors at Humera's main Kahsay Aberra hospital estimated that at least 46 people were killed, including children, and another 200 wounded on November 9.
> […] On the morning of November 17, mortar and tank fire striking Shire, a town of about 47,000 people in northwestern Tigray, killed at least 10 civilians, including children, and damaged businesses and homes.
> […] On the morning of November 28, Ethiopian federal forces launched a military offensive. TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] leaders and Mekelle residents said that Tigray special forces had already retreated from Mekelle before heavy shelling began.
> The shelling killed at least 27 civilians, including four children, and injured over 100, based on accounts from residents and medical workers, as well as media reports.

[421] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, N*
[422] Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *EHRCO Preliminary Investigation Report on Major Human Rights Violations in and around Maikadra*, 25 December 2020, *pp. 2-3*

> […] In Ayder, artillery fired after approximately 9 a.m. struck a residential compound near Hamza mosque, a sheep market, and the Yekatit 23 elementary school, killing four members of a family, including two girls ages 4 and 13, and wounding five residents.
> […] Other projectiles fired that day struck near Ayder Referral hospital and nearby physicians' residences, killing a woman and a child.[423]

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that:

> When the Commission visited Ayder Hospital's in-patient wing for children, 16 of the 20 children being treated for trauma had sustained injuries as a result of the war. Some of the hospitalized children have lost their body parts including an arm, or a leg or an eye or suffered other bodily injuries. The Regional health bureau also confirms that "the fact that health facilities in rural areas of the region haven't resumed services and the limited transportation services to cities with operational health facilities has caused loss of lives and grave bodily injuries as people who need urgent medical attention are not able to access hospital services."
> 12-year-old young child Mehari Fitsum was herding cattle in his native Temben when an explosion injured his leg. "Mehari was tending to the cattle when a group of his young children friends started playing with an undetonated explosive they found on the ground. It exploded on them. Two of the children died on the spot and three of them, including Mehari, were injured. At first, we thought Mehari only suffered mild injury, so we took our time to take him to hospital. When we realised it was more serious, the nearest hospital in Abi Gedi is being used for 'military purposes' and there was no transportation to Mekelle. We had to walk all the way here; but our son lost his leg because it was difficult to get to hospital fast enough" recounts with sadness Mehari's father.
> Information obtained by Ayder Hospital also shows that one of the causes for the children's injuries are land mines or hand grenades left lying on the ground. Another father of one of the hospitalised children says that "his son had stepped on a land mine while walking on the main road and lost an eye and a leg."
> Residents of rural towns also told EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] that "when the war was at its peak, they had to take shelter inside caves" and that, when they returned, they found that explosives were buried on some streets off main roads in particular. Residents and health professionals say that the problem of land mines is more frequent in rural areas.
> Three children aged 3, 5 and 7 were also being treated at the hospital and describe that their house in Hawzen was hit by a projectile explosive and killed all the people in the house and injured the three of them. Their father has been missing since then.
> Following news of the capture of Sebhat Nega, on January 8, 2021, security forces based in the surrounding area fired their guns in what seemed like a celebration. It caused some disarray among residents who did not know the cause of the gunfire. A 4-year-old boy was hit on the head by a stray bullet as a result and died in hospital after four days in intensive care unit.[424]

In March 2021, Human Rights Watch released a report on the massacre of Tigrayan civilians by Eritrean forces in Axum in November 2020:

> Eritrean armed forces massacred scores of civilians, including children as young as 13, in the historic town of Axum in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November 2020, Human Rights Watch said today.
> […] On November 19, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces indiscriminately shelled Axum, killing and wounding civilians. For a week after taking control of the town, the forces shot civilians and pillaged and destroyed

[423] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas*, 11 February 2021
[424] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *p. 5*

> property, including healthcare facilities. After Tigray militia and Axum residents attacked Eritrean forces on November 28, Eritrean forces, in apparent retaliation, fatally shot and summarily executed several hundred residents, mostly men and boys, over a 24-hour period.
> […] Survivors described the horror of Eritrean soldiers moving through the town, going house to house, searching for young men and boys, and executing them. A student described watching helplessly as Eritrean soldiers led six neighbors, including a 17-year-old the witness knew as "Jambo" and another young man, outside. He said: "They made them take off their belts, then their shoes. They lined them up and walked behind them. The Eritrean soldiers fired their guns. The first three then fell. They fired other shots, and the other three fell."
> Eritrean troops shot other civilians on the street. "A group of soldiers killed a man and then forced a pregnant woman and two children that were with him to kneel on the asphalt street beside his body," said one witness.
> […] Witnesses said that from 4 p.m. on November 28, until the following morning, Eritrean soldiers attacked Axum residents, shooting indiscriminately or summarily executing those they found on the streets or in house-to-house searches. Young men and boys were the evident targets.
> […] By evening on November 29, Eritrean forces had detained hundreds of men and boys and held them in at least three sites.[425]

In a report published in February 2021, the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) reported on the situation in the Tigray region and stressed that "Child labour is common".[426]

During the same month, UNOCHA reported that "As a result of school closures due to COVID-19 and conflict, reports of child marriage have increased in almost every part of the country [of Ethiopia]".[427]

UNOCHA published an update on 22 March 2021 which covered the humanitarian situation in Tigray which stated that: "As of 18 February [2021], 724 unaccompanied and separated children were registered by the Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA) and Protection partners in Mekelle, Adigrat and Axum Towns. These children are at increased risk of violence and abuse, including GBV, child labour, trafficking and exploitation."[428]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported on 26 May 2021 that: "Reports emerged earlier this week of the probable use of white phosphorus against civilians in Ethiopia. A video, reportedly smuggled out of the Tigray region and seen by the British newspaper, The Telegraph, shows victims – including a 13-year-old girl – covered in horrific burns as a result of attacks in Eastern and Central Tigray on 9 and 20 April".[429]

In its update of 19 July 2021 UNOCHA reported that "Women and children displaced are at heightened risk of abuses and exploitation".[430]

Also in July 2021, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) reported that "Sexual and gender-based violence increases in situations of conflict, displacement and other

[425] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians*, 5 March 2021
[426] ACAPS, *Ethiopia: The Pre-crisis situation in Tigray - Secondary Data Review, 22 February 2021*, 22 February 2021, *p. 1*
[427] UNOCHA, *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Ethiopia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021 (February 2021)*, February 2021, *p. 28*
[428] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 22 March 2021, 30 March 2021, *p. 14*
[429] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 254: Myanmar (Burma), Ethiopia and South Sudan*, 26 May 2021
[430] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Situation Report*, 19 July 2021, 19 July 2021, *p. 12*

emergencies and the situation is not different in Tigray and surrounding regions including Afar and Amhara. Food insecurity is a driver of protection issues that results in negative coping strategies including child labour, child marriages, sexual and genderbased violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse".[431]

Reporting in August 2021 the UN reported about the spill-over effects of the conflict in Tigray and noted that "UNICEF was extremely alarmed by the reported killing last Thursday of over 200 people, including more than 100 children, in attacks on displaced families sheltering at a health facility and a school in Afar [adjoining region to Tigray]".[432]

In September 2021, UNOCHA stated that protection needs included "Food, firewood and cooking energy, water and NFIs remain the main needs among IDPs leading to negative coping mechanisms, including children begging, child labor and survival sex".[433]

i. Freedom of expression, association, and assembly

i. Use of media by parties to the conflict, and media blackouts

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) provided the following background summary as to the communications backouts and media access:

> Communications cuts, access restrictions, propaganda, and disinformation have made it difficult to confirm
> information on developments in Tigray. Phone and internet connections were cut when the conflict began, and the parties trade blame for the outages. Communications were later restored in some areas. Groups that monitor internet freedom attribute the shutdown to the federal government—there have been at least 13 internet shutdowns in Ethiopia under the Abiy administration. All communications were cut again in late June [2021], and the military dismantled U.N. satellite communications equipment in Mekele. Federal authorities did not grant journalists access to Tigray during the first four months of the conflict, and access
> since has been subject to authorization.[434]

The U.S. Department of State reported its annual human rights report covering 2020 that:

> On November 4 [2020], telephone, cell phone, and internet services were shut down in the Tigray Region and as of December 31 [2020], the internet was still down, although telephone services improved throughout the region.[435]

Laetitia Bader, Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa Director, highlighted during an interview in December 2020 that:

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[431] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), *Tigray Crisis: Population Movement Complex Emergency Appeal*, 19 July 2021, *p. 10*
[432] UN News Centre, *Tigray: Intensified fighting across borders 'disastrous' for children*, 9 August 2021
[433] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 2 Sep 2021*, 2 September 2021, *p. 12*
[434] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 14*
[435] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Section II., a. Freedom of expression, including for the press, Internet freedom*

> The conflict in the Tigray region has taken place in a virtual blackout. A lengthy communications shutdown, and the closure of road and air access, has meant only a trickle of information has come out. Parties to the conflict have largely controlled the information and narratives.
>
> […] Refugees from western Tigray said that when fighting broke out, many fled by foot first to neighboring towns and farmlands in western and central Tigray, only to encounter more fighting. With phone and internet communications cut off, people were forced to rely on word of mouth and rumors to make snap, life-or-death decisions.[436]

African Arguments wrote in a February 2021 article on humanitarian access in Tigray that: "Internet and telephone connectivity was cut off as soon as the fighting began, disconnecting about 5 million people. Months later, the internet remains down and telephone communication has only been restored in a few main towns".[437]

Insight Insecurity produced a report in June 2021 on their monitoring of social media in relation to aid access and security; the report wrote that:

> Following recent United Nations (UN) claims earlier in June that food is being used as a "weapon of war" in the Tigray region amid warnings of famine, Ethiopian state-controlled outlet *Ethiopian Press Agency or The Ethiopian Herald* published a report on 10 June - also posted of social media - accusing "NGOs associated with the TPFL terrorist clique" of being behind these 'false' and 'fabricated' UN reports about the ensuing humanitarian situation in Tigray.
> These damaging accusations followed another report on 4 June [2021] by the Ethiopian state media in which unsubstantiated claims were advanced that "some relief agencies [were] caught red handed smuggling weapons to outlaw groups", a thinly-veiled reference to the rebel group Tigrayan People's Liberation Front.
> On 15 June [2021], these claims were repeated in another unsubstantiated report, purporting that "credible evidence have been found indicating that some actors have attempted to smuggle weapons to arm the terrorist TPFL cell under the guise of humanitarian assistance", before going on to specify that these actors in question are international humanitarian agencies.
> The report also suggests that some within the international community are using humanitarian aid to undermine the Ethiopian government: "some within the international community have embarked on a mission to undermine the unity, territorial integrity and the cohesion of the Ethiopian state, under the guise of humanitarian concern."
> The report goes on to refute UN claims that food is being used as a weapon of war in the Tigray region: "accusations labeled against Ethiopia of using hunger as a weapon of war on its own citizens, is an egregious falsehood."
> In another report on 13 June, the state news agency indirectly refers to the UN and other international actors such as the European Union (EU) as "special interests", claiming that the "misconceptions of special interest groups" which "accused the Government of Ethiopia [of] using hunger as a weapon of war" have been 'exposed' by the Ethiopian embassy in London.
> The report, titled "Embassy exposes special interest group's lies against Ethiopia", is accompanied by a cartoon featuring what appears to be a number of non- Ethiopians taking money from a TPFL graveyard while EU money is scurried away. This seems to suggest that international organisations, including the UN, are making money from their alleged collusion with the TPFL rebel group.
> These claims and designations represent a systematic and dangerous attempt to discredit those international aid organisations campaigning for better access to beneficiaries and for more international attention of the worsening local humanitarian situation in the Tigray region.[438]

[436] Human Rights Watch, *Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 23 December 2020
[437] African Arguments, *Ethiopian government must allow full humanitarian access to Tigray*, 4 February 2021
[438] Insecurity Insight, *Social Media Monitoring: Ethiopia*, 25 June 2021, *pp. 1-2*

Reporting on developments between November 2020 and July 2021, Freedom House noted:

> On November 3, 2020, the Ethiopian government imposed a communications blackout on the Tigray region as Ethiopian and Tigrayan security forces fought. Connectivity remained disrupted as of July 2021, impeding access to information, online communication, and humanitarian aid […]
> The Tigray conflict distorted the Ethiopian online environment, with increased manipulation by government actors, widespread misinformation, online campaigns, and an escalation of online harassment and hate speech […].[439]

In July 2021, a blog post published by the Council on Foreign Relations wrote that: "The country is awash in propaganda and unreliable information, and critics of government policy are increasingly smeared as terrorist sympathizers".[440]

An interview with Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa director Laetitia Bader discussed updates on the conflict in Tigray at the end of July 2021. Bader reported that:

> As we speak, the phone lines are once again down in the region. The internet has been cut off since the beginning of the conflict. No phone service makes it difficult for people to receive key information, like which areas may be safe, or where to go if they need medical help.
> People also can't get information about family and friends. I recently spoke to a doctor who fled Tigray into Sudan. His wife had a baby a month ago and he still hasn't been able to tell his family back home.
> It also makes it incredibly difficult for humanitarian workers to help people, and to make decisions around security or to assess a community's needs. And it hinders the ability of journalists and human rights groups like ours to collect information and report on unfolding abuses.[441]

In July 2021 the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported that "The Ethiopian media regulator suspended the license of popular English-language online news website, the Addis Standard, […] for allegedly 'advancing the agenda of a terrorist group'".[442]

In August 2021, the Center for Strategic and International Studies reported, in conversation around humanitarian access constraints in Tigray, that:

> Electricity and telecommunications remain cut off, banking services have yet to be restored, and aid workers are facing challenges importing key equipment, such as VHS radio and satellite phones.
> […] While MSF and NRC have remained vocal about the destruction of medical facilities and refugee camps in Tigray throughout the conflict, some humanitarian organizations may now alter their public messaging campaigns or self-censor to avoid facing suspension.
> […] Less eyewitness testimonies make it difficult to get a full and accurate assessment on humanitarian conditions. This was a serious problem at the onset of the conflict when journalists struggled with a government-imposed internet blackout, and it is now exacerbated by the expulsion of foreign journalists. Ultimately, these actions allow the Ethiopian government to retain control of the narrative and inhibit accurate and timely understanding of the ongoing humanitarian needs.[443]

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[439] Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2021: Ethiopia*, 23 September 2021, *Key Developments, June, 1, 2020 – May 31, 2021*
[440] Council on Foreign Relations, *Risks Grow as Tigray Conflict Enters New Phase*, 22 July 2021
[441] Human Rights Watch, *The Latest on the Crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 30 July 2021
[442] International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), *Ethiopia: media regulator suspends Addis Standard*, 16 July 2021
[443] Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Humanitarian Suspensions and the Politicization of Aid in Ethiopia*, 12 August 2021

In September 2021, an Insecurity Insight report on Ethiopia on the implications of the situation on aid, noted that:

> Both sides – the TDF [Tigray Defense Forces]/ TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] and the Ethiopian Government – continue to use both propaganda and fake news in an attempt to control the narrative over aid delivery and the humanitarian situation.
> […] 'Fake news' and propaganda continues with both sides claiming the advantage in the current military conflict, therefore gains and losses from both sides should be taken cautiously.[444]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas there have been intermittent restrictions and shutdowns of the internet and telecommunications in Tigray and neighbouring regions; whereas journalists have been attacked and several media outlets' licences have been suspended, which hampers the ability to monitor the situation on the ground".[445]

ii. Violence against, and arrest of journalists and media workers

In early November 2020, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stated "Today the Committee to Protect Journalists called on Ethiopian authorities to immediately release broadcast journalist Bekalu Alamrew, who was arrested on November 4 [2020] and has not been formally charged", but "In a fourth accusation, police said that Bekalu had contact with the political party Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF)".[446]

In mid-November 2020 the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported that "The Ethiopian Government has launched a wave of arrests against journalists covering the ongoing conflict in the Tigray region. Since November 7 [2020], at least six journalists have been arrested on unknown charges […] Three journalists from the state-owned Ethiopia Press Agency (EPA) - Haftu Gebregzhiabher, Tsegaye Hadush and Abreha Hagos - were arrested along with Udi Mussa from the Oromia Media Network (OMN), Medihane Ekubamichael, editor from the Addis Standard and Bakalu Alamirew, of YouTube news channel Awlo media […] All of them were arrested following their reporting on the ongoing conflict in the Tigray Region".[447]

The U.S. Department of State reported its annual human rights report covering 2020 that:

> On November 7 [2020], police arrested editor Medihane Ekubamichael of the news website Addis Standard and later charged him with "attempts to dismantle the constitution through violence." Ekubamichael led the website's reporting on the conflict in Tigray. Ekubamichael remains in custody despite being granted bail.[448]

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[444] Insecurity Insight, *Ethiopia: Situation Report*, 14 September 2021, *pp. 3-4*
[445] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, Q*
[446] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *Ethiopian journalist Bekalu Alamrew arrested, accused of disseminating false news*, 10 November 2020
[447] International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), *Ethiopia: Media crackdown amid military offensive in Tigray region*, 16 November 2020
[448] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia*, 30 March 2021, *Section II., a. Freedom of expression, including for the press*

Reporting on the same incident, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported: "federal police arrested Medihane, an editor at the privately owned news website Addis Standard, at his home in Addis Ababa" to which the CPJ further noted, "Prior to his arrest, Medihane had led the Addis Standard's coverage of the conflict between Ethiopia's federal government and regional forces in the northern state of Tigray, according to Tsedale [Tsedale Lemma, the publication's editor-in-chief], who said she believed his arrest to be connected to this work and his Tigrayan ethnic identity.[449]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) provided the following summary on the targeting of journalists:

> Journalists covering the war have faced threats, intimidation, and arrest.
> Ethiopian journalists are especially vulnerable, but foreign correspondents and researchers also have reported harassment. The government expelled ICG's [International Crisis Group's] Ethiopia analyst in November [2020] and in May [2021] revoked the accreditation of a New York Times reporter whose coverage of abuses by government-aligned forces was reportedly seen as creating diplomatic pressure.[450]

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported in January 2021:

> In the evening of January 19 [2021], unidentified attackers shot and killed Dawit, a reporter with the state-owned broadcaster Tigray TV, and his friend, Bereket Berhe, while they were driving near Dawit's home in Mekelle, the capital of the northern state of Tigray, where conflict broke out in late 2020, according to news reports and four people familiar with the case who spoke to CPJ on the condition of anonymity, citing fear of retaliation.
> Dawit and Bereket were found in the car the next morning with gunshot wounds to their heads, and were buried later that day, according to Reuters.
> In a statement, the Ethiopia Human Rights Council, an independent watchdog group, alleged that unspecified government security forces had killed Dawit and Bereket, potentially for violating the region's dusk-to-dawn curfew. The Addis Standard news website and Agence France-Presse also cited anonymous sources saying that they believed security forces were responsible for the killings […]
> Two other people were in the car at the time of the shooting and their whereabouts are unknown, according to two people who spoke to CPJ and the Amharic-language service of the U.S. Congress-funded broadcaster Voice of America.[451]

In January 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council released a press release on the human rights situation in Tigray, noting that: "For instance, journalists Dawit Kebede and Bereket Berhe were reportedly killed by security forces on January 19, 2021. The legitimacy of such measures is highly doubtful".[452]

Earlier in November 2020 "federal police arrested Dawit, managing editor of the online news outlet Awramba Times […] accused him of disseminating inaccurate information, inciting violence, and attempting to violate the constitution [and] accused Dawit of sending information that allegedly

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[449] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *Ethiopian authorities arrest Addis Standard editor Medihane Ekubamichael*, 13 November 2020
[450] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 14*
[451] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *Reporter Dawit Kebede Araya shot and killed in Ethiopia*, 28 January 2021. See also International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), *Ethiopia: Journalist shot dead in conflict-hit region of Tigray*, 26 January 2021
[452] Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *Immediate Press Release: Human Rights Situation in Tigray Region requires an immediate solution*, 22 January 2021, *p. 1*

tarnished the image of the federal government to Tigray TV and Dimtsi Woyane, broadcasters affiliated with the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front [and] accused Dawit of creating a negative perception of the government through interviews with leaders of the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front; disseminating false information and inciting violence through his Twitter page; and sharing false information on the Awramba Times YouTube page".[453]

In February 2021, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented that "On February 8, 2021, at about 10:30 a.m. in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, three armed men in plain clothes forced their way into the apartment of freelance reporter Lucy Kassa, searched her home, questioned her, and confiscated her reporting materials, according to the journalist […] The men knocked on Lucy's door, shoved her to the floor when she opened it, and stayed in the apartment for about two hours, she said. During that time, they ransacked her house, overturning shelves, tables, and her bed, and asked her whether she had connections to the Tigray People's Liberation Front […] The men also asked her about the source of photographs she had on her laptop from the conflict area in the northern state of Tigray, and then confiscated the laptop and a flash drive containing pictures allegedly showing evidence of Eritrean troops fighting in the Tigray conflict […] The men threatened to kill Lucy if she continued investigating the conflict".[454]

In March 2021 the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported:

> Between February 27 and March 1, military personnel in Mekelle, the Tigray state capital, arrested Agence France-Presse translator Fitsum Berhane and Financial Times translator Alula Akalu, as well as BBC reporter Girmay Gebru and Tamrat Yemane, a local reporter and fixer, as CPJ documented [who had been detained in relation to their coverage of the conflict in the northern state of Tigray].
> All four were released without charge today, according to reporting by the AFP, Reuters, and the BBC. In its report, the AFP wrote that a soldier told Fitsum that he could kill him and fabricate a story that the journalist had broken Mekelle's dusk-to-dawn curfew. Authorities had not returned a laptop and phone confiscated from Fitsum at the time the AFP report was published.
> Since the conflict in Tigray broke out in early November, CPJ has documented the detention of at least six journalists, with some being held in connection to their reporting on Tigray while others were accused of having links to the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front political party, whose forces are fighting the Ethiopian federal government. In January, a state media journalist, Dawit Kebede Araya, was shot dead in Mekelle, as CPJ documented.[455]

In March 2021, an article in African Arguments on major challenges faced by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed observed that: "Though the government has permitted carefully supervised visits to the capital Mekele by journalists (still at risk of being arrested) and diplomats, it seems that fighting between government and TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] forces continues elsewhere".[456]

Reporting on the New York Times report, Simon Marks, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) stated in May 2021:

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[453] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *Ethiopian journalist Dawit Kebede detained without charge since November 30*, 18 December 2020

[454] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *Unidentified armed men ransack home of Ethiopian journalist Lucy Kassa, question her about conflict coverage*, 24 February 2021. See also International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), *Ethiopia: Journalist attacked and threatened with death*, 11 February 2021

[455] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *Translators and journalists released without charge in Ethiopia*, 3 March 2021

[456] African Arguments, *Ethiopia: PM Abiy's three big challenges*, 16 March 2021

> Ethiopia's decision to expel Simon Marks, without warning or explanation, exposes the government's disturbing efforts to control the narrative on the Tigray conflict and its intolerance for critical reporting," said CPJ's sub-Saharan Africa representative, Muthoki Mumo. […]
> Officials in Addis Ababa yesterday summoned Marks, an Irish citizen who has reported in Ethiopia since 2019 for the Times and other publications, and drove him to the airport, where they detained him for eight hours before putting him on a plane at about 12:30 a.m. local time, The New York Times reported. The officials provided no explanation for his expulsion and in a thread on Twitter, Marks said he was prevented from going home to collect his belongings and to say goodbye to his child.
> Marks' reporting credentials were initially withdrawn on March 4 [2021], shortly after a reporting trip to Tigray during which he covered alleged atrocities including widespread sexual violence, but the journalist's residence permit was valid until October, according to a May 13 [2021] report by The New York Times. Officials at Ethiopia's Broadcasting Authority, a statutory regulator that has since been renamed the Ethiopia Mass Media Authority, accused Marks of "fake news" and "unbalanced" reporting about Tigray and said that his coverage had "caused huge diplomatic pressure," according to the same report.[457]

In its July 2021 *CrisisWatch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "Federal authorities 30 June-2 July reportedly arrested at least 11 journalists, 15-21 July temporarily suspended license of Ethiopian magazine Addis Standard for allegedly advancing Tigray leaders' agenda".[458]

Amnesty International reported in July 2021:

> Journalists and media workers who have been reporting on the situation in Tigray have also been detained without due process. On 30 June [2021], police arrested 11 journalists and media workers for Awlo Media and Ethio Forum, You Tube based media who have been covering the conflict and the human rights situation in Tigray, along with their lawyer. A lawyer and family members interviewed by Amnesty International said that they were able to visit the detainees on 1 July [2021], but since 2 July [2021] their whereabouts are unknown and they also have no information whether the detainees have been charged with any crime or not.[459]

In July 2021 the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported:

> Journalists have been facing increasing threats of arrest and violence in Ethiopia since the start of the war in Tigray. Twelve journalists from two independent media were arrested in late June [2021] and reports of atacks [sic] against media are common […] On 30 June, security forces raided the office of the independent media outlet Awlo Media Center, arresting 10 journalists as well as other employees. The police initially refused to provide any explanation, but later stated that the journalists were arrested for alleged affiliation to a terrorist organisation. On 21 June, journalist Abebe Bayu, who works for the YouTube media Ethio Forum, was arrested. He was in the capital when he was forced into a car and threatened by armed men. Another Ethio Forum journalist, Yayesew Shimelis, was also arrested earlier this year. According to the government, Shimelis was spreading false information. Both Awlo Media

[457] Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *CPJ condemns Ethiopia's expulsion of New York Times reporter Simon Marks*, 21 May 2021
[458] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, July 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[459] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: End arbitrary detentions of Tigrayans, activists and journalists in Addis Ababa and reveal whereabouts of unaccounted detainees*, 16 July 2021

> Center and Ethio Forum have recently reported on the armed conflict in the Tigray region between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).[460]

Reporting on developments between November 2020 and July 2021, Freedom House noted:

> Print and broadcast journalists reporting on the Tigray conflict were attacked, arrested, harassed on social media, and targeted by the Ethiopian government for their reporting, contributing to an environment of self-censorship on the internet. For instance, journalist Dawit Kebede Araya, who worked for the Tigray government-owned broadcaster Tigray TV, was killed by unknown attackers in Mekele on January 19, 2021 […] and Lucy Kassa, a prominent freelance journalist reporting on rights abuses in Tigray, was raided and intimidated by unidentified armed men in February […]In March 2021, BBC reporter Girmay Gibru, local journalist Tamirat Yemane and Alula Akalu and Fitsum Brhane, two translators working for the Financial Times and AFP, were arrested in Tigray by Ethiopian security forces; they were detained for two days and later released.[461]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted in her statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13th September 2021:

> From my last update to the Council to date, allegations of human rights violations have continued to implicate Government forces and its allies. […]
> Threats and attacks on journalists have also been reported, as well as the suspension of media outlets' licenses and intermittent restrictions and shutdowns of Internet and telecommunications in Tigray.[462]

In August 2021, Human Rights Watch published a report on the arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa. The report wrote that:

> Federal police held incommunicado for nearly a month 10 Ethiopian journalists and media workers, including four women from Awlo Media, along with another journalist, and two journalists from Ethio Forum. Awlo Media and Ethio Forum have both reported extensively on abuses against Tigrayans since the Tigray conflict began in November.
> […] Police arrested 10 Awlo Media journalists and media workers on June 30 at their offices, along with another journalist who was there. Their lawyer said that relatives were able to visit them at the Federal Police Commission for two days but were told on July 2 that they had been released.
> Federal police in Addis Ababa arrested and detained Ethio Forum staff members Abebe Bayu on July 1 and Yayesew Shimelis on July 2. Yayesew was detained on his way to a monthly court hearing on charges related to the spread of fake news that he has been facing since May 2020. Relatives were able to bring them food and clothes at the Federal Police Commission, near Mexico Square, until July 2. The authorities then told the relatives that Abebe and Yayesew had been released, but they never returned home.
> On July 27 after the journalists' lawyer filed a habeas corpus petition, the Federal Police Commission told a civil court in Addis Ababa that all 13 detained journalists and media workers had been transferred to federal police custody in Awash Sebat Kilo in Afar. The commission alleged that the journalists had sought to incite violence to overthrow the government in violation of the new media law. The 13 appeared before the Awash Fentale District court on August 2, the media reported.

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[460] International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), *Ethiopia: Relentless crackdown on journalists covering military conflict*, 8 July 2021
[461] Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2021: Ethiopia*, 23 September 2021, *B4*
[462] UNHCOHC, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet*, 13 September 2021

> […] Nine of the Awlo Media journalists and staff and the other journalist arrested at their offices were released on August 9. The court ordered the release on bail of the remaining journalists, as well as Tsegaze'ab and Kibrom, on August 16, but they remained in detention at time of writing.[463]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas journalists have been attacked and several media outlets' licences have been suspended, which hampers the ability to monitor the situation on the ground".[464]

iii. Protests and government response

Freedom House observed in its 2020 annual report on freedoms in Ethiopia, published in March 2021, that: "The state of emergency announcement in November [2020] in Tigray has once again prohibited assembly".[465]

In early February 2021 ACLED reported that "five people were killed in the Tigrayan capital of Mekele, when federal forces opened fire during clashes with demonstrators denouncing military operations and food shortages in the region. Further demonstrations were reported in multiple locations across Tigray during the following days. At least two people were killed when federal forces intervened in demonstrations in Wukro town, and another two killed during clashes between federal forces and demonstrators in Shire".[466]

j. Treatment of human rights defenders and civil society activists

This section should be read in conjunction with section V., *f. Attacks on aid workers*.

Amnesty International reported in July 2021:

> Tsegaze'ab Kidanu is an Tigrayan living in Addis Ababa, who has been coordinating humanitarian assistance for people affected by the conflict in Tigray. He is also a volunteer managing media relations for an association called Mahbere Kidus Yared Zeorthodox Tewahido Tigray. On 1 July [2021], a day before his association released a statement on the human rights situation in Tigray, he was arrested at his home.
> Tsegaze'ab's family and lawyer visited him at the Federal Police Remand Centre on 2 and 3 July [2021], but when they returned on 4 July [2021] he was not there. According to Tsegaze'ab's lawyer, they later heard from another detainee that he had been taken to Awash Arba. His lawyer was also never informed of charges brought against Tsegaze'ab..[467]

In August 2021, Human Rights Watch published a report on the arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa. The report wrote that: "Kibrom Berhe, an activist with the Baytona political party in the Tigray region, was detained on July 16 [2021]. Initially, security forces took Kibrom to the Federal Police Commission in Addis Ababa. On July 17 [2021], federal police told his

[463] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared*, 18 August 2021
[464] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *Q*
[465] Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021: Ethiopia*, 3 March 2021, *sect. E1*
[466] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa 6-12 February 2021*, 17 February 2021
[467] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: End arbitrary detentions of Tigrayans, activists and journalists in Addis Ababa and reveal whereabouts of unaccounted detainees*, 16 July 2021

relatives that he had been released, and on July 27 [2021], said that he had appeared before a court in Awash Sebat Kilo, accused of spreading false information. Earlier, on July 6 [2021], suspected plainclothes intelligence officials accompanied by federal police had assaulted Kibrom in a café in Addis Ababa and detained a friend who was with him".[468]

k. Forced evictions and destruction/dispossession of property

In December 2020, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council released a report on preliminary findings around major human rights violations in and around Mai-Kadra in November 2020, based off field inspections in Mai-Kadra, Humera, Abderafi, Abrahajira, Dansha, and Gondar towns between 3 and 11 December 2020. The report observed that:

> Victims said that on the day of the attack (November 9, 2020) police and Special Forces, as well as Tigrayan youths (mostly coming from the *Samri* neighborhood) ordered no one to leave their homes. They testified that the young people danced in large numbers in different parts of the city, and in some places starting at 11:00 am, and also in the area known as *Gimb Sefer*, where most Amharas live, starting from 3:00 pm, they began looking for Identification cards and they spoke to victims in Tigrigna and identified those who could not respond and began to attack them.
> […] Victims' statements indicate that the perpetrators were vandalizing and looting property.
> […] Moreover, the EHRCO [Ethiopian Human Rights Council] investigation team confirmed that following the situation in and around *Maikadra*, an unestimated amount of property was destroyed and looted, and many people left their homes and displaced to other parts of the country, and crossed the border into *Sudan*.[469]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in January 2021 that:

> Despite claims by Ethiopia's federal government that fighting in the Tigray region officially ended on 28 November, recent UN reports and satellite images reveal that the destruction of infrastructure and widespread civilian displacement continues. Violence also continues around the cities of Mekelle, Shiraro and Shire, and in rural areas, constraining the delivery of life-saving aid to vulnerable civilians.
> On 9 January *Bloomberg* released a report analyzing satellite images, revealing the destruction of infrastructure as recently as 5-8 January, including damage to two inaccessible Eritrean refugee camps, Hitsats and Shimelba. Images from Shimelba show scorched earth and the destruction of a World Food Programme facility, a school and a health clinic, while images from the Hitsats camp revealed destroyed or burning structures. It is not clear who is responsible for attacking the refugee camps, which would constitute a war crime, and grave fears exist regarding the fate of Eritrean refugees housed there.
> On 7 January the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released a report, based on two joint assessment missions from 20-30 December, that also highlighted the dire humanitarian situation in Tigray. […] Only five of forty hospitals in the region are functional and witnesses have reported massive damage, destruction and looting of healthcare centers.[470]

In January 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the situation of civilians in Humera, Dansha and Bissober, based on investigative missions to these parts of Tigray between November 2020 and January 2021. The report found that:

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[468] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared*, 18 August 2021
[469] Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *EHRCO Preliminary Investigation Report on Major Human Rights Violations in and around Maikadra*, 25 December 2020, *pp. 2-3*
[470] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 235: Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Cameroon*, 13 January 2021

> Humera experienced heavy fighting which lasted for 3 days during the war and heavy artillery was heard. The Commission saw the damages to property and infrastructure in parts of the city, apparently caused by the use of heavy artillery. Although the investigation team received reports of serious damages to the area known as Kebele 2, the team was unable to access the said area to verify the reports. Reports indicate that there was heavy shelling of Kebele 2 (Kudar sefer), near Mariam Church and a Mosque between November 9th and November 11th, 2020. According to these reports, public spaces and residential houses in Kebele 2 bore the brunt of the damage. The Commission's team also visited Humera Hospital which itself sustained serious damage.
> […] Residents of Humera report widespread looting of houses and businesses, by a youth group calling itself "Fano", some members of the Amhara Liyu Hayl (Amhara Special Force) and Amhara Militia, a few members of the Ethiopian Defense Force, and some Eritrean soldiers. Looters have also emptied food and grain storages. In addition, the Commission has received multiple accounts from various sources of insults and harassment targeting ethnic Tigrayans.
> […] The Commission has also received information that although inadequate, some measures are being taken by the Amhara Liyu Hayl and the Militia to restore peace and security in the area, such as putting in place a curfew to address the rise in criminal activities. Curfew for vehicles is 6:00 PM and up to 7:00 pm for pedestrians. But residents report that this has not stopped organized groups of looters from roaming the city at night.
> […] However, at the time of the Commission's investigation, the situation in Humera city and the Hospital remains dire. According to residents and Hospital staff members, "Public services and banks have not resumed operation and residents are fleeing to other areas and to Sudan. It is clearly evident that the number of residents in Humera city has declined. Some residents who returned have fled again because they found their homes and businesses looted or occupied by unknown people. Very few businesses have opened, and schools remain shut. People living near Humera Hospital get water from the Hospital's reservoir. Transport services are slowly resuming, but the fares have tripled or more for certain routes".
> […] In Bissober, the Commission visited and verified that 104 houses were either completely or partially burned or otherwise damaged by the war. The Ullaga primary school, located in Bissober, is partially damaged by what appears to be heavy artillery. The Ullaga health center has sustained heavy damage and is no longer operational as a result.
> Several civilian commercial and residential properties have also been looted. One resident says that his full grain storage was completely burned down, and his 15 goats stolen. Residents say they came back to the town to find that it has been looted and suspect people who are not from Bissober are responsible.[471]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in January 2021 that: "On 18 January the EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] also released a report based on assessment missions to the towns of Humera, Dansha, Bissober and Ullaga in the Tigray region, where fighting between the federal government and regional forces began on 4 November. The report provides evidence related to allegations that Amhara "Fano" militias, Amhara Special Forces, federal forces and Eritrean troops perpetrated violations that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. This includes widespread looting, the destruction of homes, schools and other civilian infrastructure, and fighting in populated areas that resulted in over 100 civilians being killed. The report also highlighted Tigrayans' fears of ethnic-based attacks and reprisals".[472]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in February 2021 that:

[471] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Brief Monitoring Report on the Situation of Civilians in Humera, Dansha and Bissober*, 17 January 2021, *pp. 1-3, 6-7*
[472] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 236: Sudan, Ethiopia and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, 20 January 2021

> DX Open Network, a UK-based research organization, has released satellite images revealing the systematic destruction of two refugee camps in Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region. The images document the ongoing destruction, looting and razing of both Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps, which previously hosted around 25,000 refugees, most of whom were from neighboring Eritrea.
> According to DX Open Network's analysis of the images, the camps appear to have been targeted between 24 November 2020 and 17 January 2021, despite their protected status under international law. The damage appears more extensive than previously reported, with over 1,000 structures destroyed or burned down, including schools, homes and food stores, as well as buildings operated by the World Food Programme, International Rescue Committee and the Norwegian Refugee Council. The Ethiopian government announced today that it is closing the two destroyed camps, stating one is an inhospitable location and the other is too close to the Eritrean border.
> […] The satellite images reveal that military vehicles and troops were present near the camps at the time of their destruction. There are also numerous reports that refugees may have been forcibly returned to Eritrea.[473]

A February 2021 article in the Council on Foreign Relations on the conflict in Tigray wrote that: "Refugees and others have said that forces on the ground—Ethiopia's military, Eritrean troops, and ethnic militias—are responsible for sexual violence, ethnic-based targeted attacks, and large-scale looting".[474]

Human Rights Watch reported in February 2021 on the shelling of Tigray urban areas in November 2020, including Mekelle, and noted that:

> Ethiopian federal forces carried out apparently indiscriminate shelling of urban areas in the Tigray region in November 2020 in violation of the laws of war, Human Rights Watch said today. Artillery attacks at the start of the armed conflict struck homes, hospitals, schools, and markets in the city of Mekelle, and the towns of Humera and Shire, killing at least 83 civilians, including children, and wounding over 300.
> […] These attacks caused civilian deaths and injuries; damaged homes, businesses, and infrastructure; struck near schools; disrupted medical services; and prompted thousands of civilians to flee.
> […] In the western border town of Humera, residents said that on November 9, artillery fired from Eritrea terrified unsuspecting civilians, striking them in their homes and as they fled. The shelling damaged residential areas in the Kebele 02 neighborhood, and struck near a church and a school, near a mosque in Kebele 01, and hit areas near the town's main hospital.
> A man was transporting the wounded on his motorbike when he noticed that a shell had torn through the roof of a house made of steel sheets about 100 meters away from Saint Gabriel church: "Five people were dead. We only found a 7-month-old infant crying among them. He was barely alive, so we took him to the church."
> […] In the northwestern town of Shire, shelling began on November 17 and hit buildings in the center of town and an industrial area.
> […] Residents from the regional capital, Mekelle, said that heavy shelling on November 28 killed 27 civilians, including children, and wounded over 100. In one attack, shells struck a residential compound near a market, mosque, and an empty school in Ayder sub-city, and killed four members of a single family, including two young children, and wounded five adults and a 9-year-old child.
> […] Humera is an agricultural town that is home to about 30,000 people in western Tigray, bordering Eritrea and close to Sudan.
> Soon after the conflict began, an exchange of gunfire between Ethiopian federal forces and Tigray local militia at a camp near the border crossing with Eritrea killed at least one federal soldier as he ran across the bridge toward Eritrea, and wounded both Ethiopian federal forces and Tigray local militia.

[473] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 239: Ethiopia, China and Iraq*, 10 February 2021
[474] Council on Foreign Relations, *The Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray Region: What to Know*, 10 February 2021

> […] On the morning of November 9, residents heard shellfire from a camp called "Heligan" on the outskirts of Humera. Moments later, mortar and tank fire came from the direction of Eritrea, killing and wounding civilians, damaging and destroying homes and businesses, and exploding near schools, places of worship, the town's main hospital, and a slaughterhouse. The shelling continued into the evening.
> […] The artillery attacks killed and wounded civilians and damaged several homes near Saint Mary's church in the Kebele 02 neighborhood.
> […] One man who fled Kebele 02 during the shelling returned home later that day. […] The blast also blew out the home's windows and doors and damaged the walls, while remnants of the exploded mortar shell and a projectile tail fin were embedded in the asphalt road outside the house.
> […] Artillery fired into Humera indiscriminately hit homes and private buildings, causing various degrees of damage.
> […] Human Rights Watch found that artillery fire struck areas in which there may have been military targets, but that also damaged civilian homes.
> […] Homes near a mosque in the northwest Kebele 01 neighborhood also came under heavy attack on November 9.
> […] Satellite imagery recorded on November 10 shows damage to a building 120 meters southwest of the mosque that Tigray special forces may have used as a camp. However, damage is also visible to buildings 300 to 350 meters southeast of the mosque.
> Government buildings, radio stations, and telecom towers are subject to attack if they are being used for military purposes.
> […] On the morning of November 17, mortar and tank fire striking Shire, a town of about 47,000 people in northwestern Tigray, killed at least 10 civilians, including children, and damaged businesses and homes.
> […] Mortar and tank fire also struck at or near populated areas in Shire, including the Dejena Hotel, Gebar Shire Hotel, Shire elementary school, the municipal building, a multi-story apartment building, residential areas near Suhul hospital, and Shire university's agricultural campus, where displaced residents from Humera and other western Tigray towns had been staying.
> […] An attack that morning also hit an industrial area northwest of Shire. Several residents saw smoke billowing from the location of the Zenith Hair Oil factory. A satellite image recorded at 11 a.m. that day shows a smoke plume rising from a warehouse belonging to the factory. Human Rights Watch analyzed a video posted on Twitter on December 8 that shows damage to a large warehouse building, while one smaller structure was destroyed. Media reports said that the federal government met with stakeholders and investors in Tigray in late December, including the owner of the Zenith factory, who said he lost millions of dollars in property damage.
> […] In Ayder, artillery fired after approximately 9 a.m. struck a residential compound near Hamza mosque, a sheep market, and the Yekatit 23 elementary school, killing four members of a family, including two girls ages 4 and 13, and wounding five residents.
> […] Human Rights Watch was able to confirm the damage and the exact location of the residential compound in Ayder that was hit based on photographs and a video, as well as satellite images captured shortly before and after the incident. Analysis of satellite images recorded at 11 a.m. on November 29 revealed at least two impacts that damaged residential structures, including at least two homes. A video posted on YouTube on November 28 similarly shows damage to a small, single-story dwelling and to the walls of the Yekatit 23 school next to it.[475]

In March 2021, Human Rights Watch released a report on the massacre of Tigrayan civilians by Eritrean forces in Axum in November 2020:

> Eritrean armed forces massacred scores of civilians, including children as young as 13, in the historic town of Axum in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November 2020, Human Rights Watch said today.
> […] On November 19, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces indiscriminately shelled Axum, killing and wounding

[475] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas*, 11 February 2021

> civilians. For a week after taking control of the town, the forces shot civilians and pillaged and destroyed property, including healthcare facilities.
> […] For a week, Eritrean forces raided neighborhoods and pillaged homes, banks, pharmacies, and jewelry, electronic, and souvenir shops – hauling away the stolen goods on trucks.
> […] The widespread pillaging of medicine, beds, and equipment from Axum's medical centers prevented injured and sick people from getting treatment.
> […] Several residents saw Ethiopian soldiers participate in the looting.
> […] Most, however, said that the Ethiopian soldiers stood by and watched the violence. The pillaging of medical equipment and medicines from hospitals meant that many with medical needs were left unassisted. […] Aid agencies that arrived in January and February found healthcare centers nonfunctional, and a population living without electricity, with shortages of water and food, and in need of critical assistance.[476]

In March 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a preliminary findings report on grave human rights violations that took place in Axum in November 2020, based on a rapid investigation mission to Axum from 27 February to 5 March 2021. The report found that:

> Saint Mary Hospital staff recount how "on November 19, some members of ENDF [Ethiopian National Defence Force] and Eritrean soldiers came into the hospital. They looted the hospital's pharmacy and other medical equipment and destroyed the ones they did not need. They shot a man in bed in the emergency ward. Eritrean soldiers were insulting the staff ethnic based slurs." Aksum Referral Hospital was also looted by some members of ENDF and Eritrean soldiers four times over several days. They also looted one of the Hospital's wings that was set up and equipped at high cost to serve as a Covid-19 treatment centre. Eyewitnesses say the Eritrean soldiers even took the hospital beds and mattresses.
> […] "Many people died for lack of adequate treatment" because of the looting of drugs and medications.
> […] The hospital's records obtained by EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] show that between November 18 and 20, a total of 41 people died in both hospitals from physical injuries, blood loss and from lack of adequate medical treatment.
> […] Damages to civilian property
> The Commission visited some of the neighbourhoods of Aksum to assess the extent of damages to civilian property. For example, Berana, a privately owned hotel, has sustained heavy damages. The hotel's owners told the Commission that "ENDF was targeting another hotel nearby owned by a TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] general. But instead, they hit our hotel, which has nothing to do with the TPLF general. They fired at the hotel's windows and shattered them. Then, they went into the hotel and destroyed most of what was inside." The hotel was still not operational at the time of the Commission's visit. The hotel's owners have also shown the Commission a letter they received from the local interim administration attesting to the "fact that the hotel had sustained an unfortunate level of damage" and photographs showing the level of damage sustained.
> In addition, residents say "privately owned mobile shops, clothes shops, edible oil, food aid reserves and government offices were all looted by Eritrean soldiers". The breakdown of law and order also allowed other individuals to take part in the looting.
> "On November 24, Eritrean soldiers went into the administrative office of Aksum Tsion Church and took a Toyota car belonging to Abune Meqarios. They also stole all the four tires of another car belonging to the office (Code 5, plate number 02223) and the internal digital system of the car." The church's staff said they "have informed the relevant ENDF authorities but, at the time of the Commission's visit, were yet to receive a response."
> […] In addition to physical injuries and loss of civilian life, the attack also caused damages to civilian residences and religious institutions. "On November 28, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., an unknown number of Eritrean soldiers went into the cemetery of Saint Michael's Church and were shooting directly at the church to destroy it. They shouted "hit it' in Tigrinya and shot at the church all day" said

[476] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians*, 5 March 2021

> eyewitnesses. On November 28, the residential building where Aksum University Medical Doctors stayed was deliberately and selectively targeted and shot at. The Commission has obtained images showing the extent of damage on both buildings.
> Residents deplored the perceived inaction of members and authorities of ENDF who were in the city during the attack on November 28, which they say has worsened the extent of the damage. Residents and church officials say however that a month after the November 28 attack, on December 23, an attempt by Eritrean soldiers to enter Aksum Tsion Church to loot it was foiled by the combined efforts of members of ENDF and residents.[477]

At the end of March 2021, the Africa Report and Ethiopia Insight together published an article detailing first-hand accounts of looting and destruction in Tigray at the hands of Eritrean and Ethiopian forces:

> I fled Mekelle just days before the Ethiopian and Eritrean defence forces were to take the capital. Many residents fled the city in fear of fighting and threats of indiscriminate shelling that had occurred as the occupying forces took hold of other cities.
> […] I went west towards Tembien, then to Adet, going from village to village on foot for two months. Initially, the soldiers were primarily on the main roads, so we stayed in the most rural areas, as far away as possible. But soon enough, no village, no matter how remote or difficult to reach would escape the wrath of the occupying forces.
> Eritrean and Ethiopian forces engaged in the widespread killing of civilians; they would randomly shot and loot, mainly livestock such as chickens, cows, and animal products such as honey.
> After Eritrean and Ethiopian forces took control of a small town, I met one local farmer who told me that he was coming back to town after moving his livestock deep in the bushes to save them from being slaughtered by the soldiers. He explained that farmers that didn't manage to escape the small city and its surroundings when it fell to the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces were doomed to have all their livestock (cows, oxen, goats, sheep, and chickens) slaughtered, emphasizing his good fortune.
> It was not just food that they took. They stole the clothes of farmers, their mattresses, and even cooking utensils. I also witnessed Eritrean soldiers taking jerrycans, plastic containers that people use to store water. Perhaps to deprive farmers of accessing water.
> The soldiers used big trucks with Eritrea license plates to load looted goods. I saw many empty trucks with ER plates being driven towards central Tigray, and loaded trucks leaving towards Eritrea via the direction of Adwa and Axum.
> […] The fact that many Tigray forces left all the towns and villages made it easy for the Eritrean soldiers to come in and loot. As far as I witnessed, it seemed like Eritrean soldiers came fully prepared to loot from the offset. The looting was not something of an afterthought on their behalf. Rather, they came equipped with strategies and tools.
> They brought car mechanics with them to help them unlock cars, Sino trucks, and dozers. They took away some vehicles and burned others after taking out all the valuable items inside. I saw Eritrean soldiers doing this countless times across central Tigray. Sadly, Ethiopian soldiers were idly watching the Eritrean soldiers as they did all this. Worse, some were praising them.
> […] The soldiers would kill or ruin basic possessions such as animals, food, and other items. In Wukro, for instance, a relative of mine told me that Ethiopian soldiers put Omo detergent inside her food and her stored wheat so that they spoiled. Her case was not an exception. After entering people's houses, it was typical of the occupying forces to take what they can and ruin the rest.
> The relative told me her store was completely looted. Ethiopian soldiers stayed in her house for days, drinking. All her food was spoiled, her belongings taken, and she is currently struggling to survive along with her children. In another village, residents told me that the soldiers would squash chicks under their

[477] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violations in Aksum City: Report on Preliminary Findings*, 24 March 2021, *pp. 2-8*

> feet. It was and continues to be a mission of spite and destruction intended to break the people of Tigray physically and spiritually.[478]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that: "At the end of November 2020, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia declared victory; however, fighting seems to have continued in Tigray. Satellite images emerged revealing widespread destruction of civilian structures in Gijet town, in southern Tigray, indicating that a large number of houses were burned down in a deliberate attack on 22 February 2021. There were no indications of military targets in the area".[479]

l. Situation of ethnic Tigrayans outside of Tigray

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., a. Overview and b., *i. Ethnic-Related Attacks/Massacres*.

In November 2020, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commissioned released a press release stating that:

> EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] is closely monitoring the situation of persons detained as a result of ongoing measures related to the conflict taken by the government in various parts of the country and reports, in certain parts of the country, of people facing discriminatory and exclusionary processes on account of their Tigrayan ethnicity.
> Based on information and tips that EHRC has received, we have learned that a justified risk/threat of fear of ethnic profiling and discrimination has arisen, and the Commission is monitoring this closely.
> […] EHRC has carried out a quick monitoring in selected police stations in Addis Ababa and has seen, firsthand, the condition of persons detained in relation with current events. Accordingly, the Commission has visited the cases of a total of 43 persons detained in Bole, Kazanchis, Aware, TekleHaymanot and Cherkos police stations. It has also gathered information on suspected persons released on bail. EHRC has learned that many of these persons were suspected of carrying firearms without a lawful permit, that all of them have been brought before a court within the prescribed time frame and that most of them have been granted bail.
> One of the detained persons that EHRC has talked to has reported being beaten by the arresting officer and the police have assured the Commission that this will be investigated; we will follow up. The rest of the detained persons have reported that they have not been mistreated in any way during the investigation, that they have not faced threats or abuse and that the condition of their detention is fine. However, some of the detained have reported that they have been arrested only because of their ethnicity; and one of them has complained to the Commission that he was forced to hand over his weapon and take annual leave from his work.

[478] The Africa Report and Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopia: Sadism is the most shocking part of the war in Tigray*, 31 March 2021

[479] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *p. 2*

> Police, on its part, maintains that the searches were carried out based on court orders quickly issued by telephone, in accordance with the law, to get an early hold on weapons that can be concealed easily; that the overall operation has followed the applicable legal procedures and that most of the suspects have been released on bail. EHRC has noted that there have not been human rights violations other than the one case mentioned above whose condition and process of detention is yet to be investigated. Meanwhile, EHRC recommends that due care must be taken to reduce the risk or fear of ethnic profiling and discrimination.[480]

In November 2020, Human Rights Watch stated that it "has received credible reports that Tigrayan residents elsewhere in the country have been suspended from their jobs and prevented from flying externally as fighting escalates in Tigray. One ethnic Tigrayan civil servant who was ordered to stay home, said, "We asked our bosses to tell us how many days they expected us to sit at home and why. They keep saying they don't know the reason, but accepted higher instructions from their bosses".[481]

According to a report by BBC News in November 2020, "Billene Seyoum - a spokeswoman for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed - denied reports that Tigrayans elsewhere in the country were being arrested on the basis of their ethnicity. But she admitted many had been detained for membership of what she called criminal networks".[482]

Also reporting in November 2020, Reuters reported on the treatment of Tigrayan peacekeepers in Somalia and the African Union's Tigrayan security head:

> Ethiopia said on Wednesday peacekeepers from its Tigray region serving in Somalia had been disarmed over a security issue, raising concerns over the forces' ability to fight al Qaeda-linked militants. Diplomatic and security sources said earlier that between 200 and 300 Tigrayans had had their weapons removed. […] Earlier, four diplomatic and security sources told Reuters those disarmed included bilateral and AU troops. The disarmed men were believed to be confined to their bases in Somalia, according to two diplomatic sources. They include a deputy commander in one of the military sectors, the security source said. […] Ethiopia had also withdrawn a small number of troops stationed in Somalia bilaterally, three sources told Reuters, but had decided against large-scale withdrawals. The government did not respond to requests for comment on the assertion. Last week, a spokesman for the taskforce said the offensive in Tigray would not lead Ethiopia to withdraw peacekeepers abroad. It was not clear whether the soldiers reportedly pulled out were Tigrayan or other troops destined for possible redeployment on the government side in Tigray. Earlier this month, the African Union fired its security head Gebreegziabher Mebratu Melese, a Tigrayan, after Ethiopia's defence ministry expressed concerns about him.[483]

Covering November 2020, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted that "Ethiopian human rights commission 30 Nov [2020] said it received complaints throughout month about ethnic profiling and harassment of ethnic Tigrayans, notably within civil service and federal army".[484]

The OHCHR published a transcript of remarks by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, made at a press conference in Geneva in early December 2020 in response to questions on Ethiopia: "Elsewhere in Ethiopia, there are numerous reports of ethnic profiling of Tigrayans, including in Addis. We have reports of dismissals from jobs – including in the civil service – harassment of Tigrayan

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[480] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *The War in Tigray Region and the Worrying State of Human Rights Protection*, 14 November 2020

[481] Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Ethiopia: Protect People as Tigray Crisis Escalates*, 13 November 2020

[482] BBC News, *Ethiopia crisis: Arrest warrants for officers amid Tigray fighting*, 19 November 2020

[483] Reuters, *Exclusive: Ethiopia says disarms Tigrayan peacekeepers in Somalia over security*, 18 November 2020

[484] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, November 2020 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]

journalists and hate speech against Tigrayans. Such discriminatory actions are deeply unjust but are also fostering divisiveness and sowing the seeds for further instability and conflict".[485]

In its Shadow Report to the Committee on Civil and Political Rights on Ethiopia's Tigray war, published in December 2020, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights stated that:

> With regard to coercive and racist measures adopted to undermine the powers of the Tigrayi leaders, Abiy's government has persecuted Tigrayans and purged them from positions. […]
>
> Abiy Ahmed continued his racist policies in the capital, Addis Ababa, where he dismissed the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the commander of the federal army, and the head of intelligence, replacing them with members of his loyalists. In addition, Ethiopia's parliament has stripped 39 members of immunity from prosecution. Abiy's racist policies did not stop at this point; it has crossed the borders, as the African Union (AU) had dismissed its security head, an Ethiopian national, after Abiy's government accused him of disloyalty, which highlights and perpetuates the policy of racial marginalization against the Tigranian leaders. […]
>
> the government has adopted coercive measures against all Tigray-owned companies such as the major telecom company, ETHO TELECOM. The company's branch in the capital was stormed and the Internet was shut down to prevent the publication of any media reports on the situation in Tigray, and two Tigrayan officials were arrested.[486]

In mid- December 2020, The New Humanitarian reported on the ethnic profiling of Tigrayans:

> Speaking with The New Humanitarian in a series of interviews over the past month, half a dozen Tigrayans living in the country's capital described ethnic profiling and growing harassment. Such abuse and discrimination by neighbours, strangers, and government officials could, analysts and others warn, widen the rift among Ethiopia's increasingly polarised ethnic groups, leading to renewed conflict. "The war drums have been sounding for years," said Million Gebremedhin, a Tigrayan restaurant owner who has lived in Addis Ababa since 2014. "The war is not a surprise. But what came after the war, the way [Abiy] is doing it, is a surprise." […] A man in his mid-thirties said he was having coffee in Addis Ababa with a group of friends – some speaking Tigrinya, the language spoken in Tigray – when a neighbour he had known for two years passed by and shouted: "Tigrayan troublemakers, why are you congregating?" […] In an email interview with TNH, Laetitia Bader, the Horn of Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said her organisation has received reports of Tigrayans outside of the northern region being harassed on the street, profiled at airports and cafes, and having their homes arbitrarily searched by Ethiopian security forces. "The discrimination by state agents could fuel further discrimination or harm," Bader said. "The government should immediately investigate these incidents, hold those responsible to account, and make clear that any violence, discrimination, or hostility against Tigrayans or any other group will not be tolerated." Media reports claim that Tigrayan soldiers serving on an African Union peacekeeping mission fighting Islamist insurgents in Somalia have had their weapons removed. And Tigrayan employees at Ethiopian Airlines – pilots, caterers, technicians, and security guards among them – have reportedly been instructed by their superiors to stay at home until further notice. High-profile Tigrayans have also been accused by the government of supporting the TPLF. In November, Ethiopia's army chief said – without providing evidence – that the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, was trying to procure weapons and secure diplomatic support for the Tigrayan party. Tedros denied the allegations.[487]

[485] OHCHR, *Exceedingly worrying and volatile situation in Ethiopia – Bachelet*, 9 December 2020
[486] Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, *UN Human Rights Committee: A Shadow Report to the Committee on Civil and Political Rights on Ethiopia's Tigray war*, 9 December 2020
[487] The New Humanitarian, *Tigrayans claim discrimination and abuse*, 16 December 2020

The same source also reported that Tigrayan people had their bank accounts frozen and homes searched:

> Alleging looting and corruption, the National Bank of Ethiopia ordered the suspension of bank accounts opened in Tigray, from mid-November to 3 December, according to reports in local media. It also ordered bank branches to close in the region. The freeze affected three of the six Tigrayans in Addis Ababa. One provided a photograph of their bank teller's computer screen, which confirmed the account was not working. Fearing arrest or physical assault if they leave their houses, some of the Tigrayans told TNH they haven't worked for weeks and fear their savings will run out. One woman, originally from Tigray, said members of her family who work for the government had their homes searched by armed men who took an inventory of their valuable household items – including their fridge, sofa and jewellery – shortly after the conflict broke out. The woman, who asked to remain anonymous, said her Tigrayan-sounding surname now "terrifies" her. She worries her family will be asked to leave the house they live in, which is provided for by the government.[488]

In December 2020, the news source Eritrea Hub reported that ethnic profiling of Tigrayans is heightening tensions in Ethiopia:

> Tigrayans far away from the conflict front are living in fear of ethnic profiling and harassment. […] he fighting between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) wasn't a surprise to Tigrayans living in Addis Ababa: They had seen it coming for years. What they didn't expect was to be living in fear so far away from the front lines. Speaking with The New Humanitarian in a series of interviews over the past month, half a dozen Tigrayans living in the country's capital described ethnic profiling and growing harassment. Such abuse and discrimination by neigbours, strangers, and government officials could, analysts and others warn, widen the rift among Ethiopia's increasingly polarised ethnic groups, leading to renewed conflict. […] "The ethnic profiling demonstrates that despite the government's stated intention to target only the TPLF leadership, this conflict is also having a much broader negative impact on Tigrayans outside of Tigray," said William Davison, an analyst at the International Crisis Group. In an email interview with TNH, Laetitia Bader, the Horn of Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said her organisation has received reports of Tigrayans outside of the northern region being harassed on the street, profiled at airports and cafes, and having their homes arbitrarily searched by Ethiopian security forces. "The discrimination by state agents could fuel further discrimination or harm," Bader said. "The government should immediately investigate these incidents, hold those responsible to account, and make clear that any violence, discrimination, or hostility against Tigrayans or any other group will not be tolerated.[489]

In mid-December 2020 ACLED reported that "In Somalia, two groups of Ethiopian troops serving with the African Union peacekeeping mission (AMISOM) clashed at a base in Halgan village, during an attempt to disarm ethnic Tigrayan soldiers. Three soldiers were killed in the clash".[490]

In January 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council released a press release on the human rights situation in Tigray, noting that: "In other parts of the country also, EHRCO [Ethiopian Human Rights Council] has received numerous complaints of arrests, harassment, and discrimination against Tigrayans".[491]

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[488] The New Humanitarian, *Tigrayans claim discrimination and abuse*, 16 December 2020
[489] Eritrea Hub, *Ethnic profiling of Tigrayans heightens tensions in Ethiopia*, 17 December 2020
[490] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa -12 December 2020*, 16 December 2020
[491] Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *Immediate Press Release: Human Rights Situation in Tigray Region requires an immediate solution*, 22 January 2021, *p. 1*

In a report published in January 2021, the Global Centre for the Responsibility reported that "Ethnic Tigrayans serving in UN and AU peacekeeping missions have also been removed from their posts."[492]

In February 2021 the International Crisis Group highlighted:

> Federal officials have taken several apparently discriminatory measures amid the war fervour and deepening polarisation. […]
> Still, authorities have detained numerous Tigrayan military officers, including those manning peacekeeping missions. Addis likewise has recalled some Tigrayans working at embassies abroad, and federal police managers have told some Tigrayans not to come to work. Police in Addis Ababa have raided Tigrayans' residences, detaining hundreds, while federal authorities have asked Ethiopians to present their local identity cards before they fly abroad, and then blocked some Tigrayans from leaving. The central bank suspended accounts opened at branches in Tigray. The Attorney General's Office froze assets of 34 Tigrayan companies operating under a conglomerate with TPLF ties and the finance ministry created a new trustees' board for them.
> While federal officials assert that they are targeting only TPLF leaders and sympathisers, many Tigrayans disagree. As one alarmed Tigrayan put it:
>
> > This war is waged not against the TPLF only but against Tigrayan people in general. They are striving to liquidate [Tigray's] political identity and remove it from the map without due regard for whether or not the people get exterminated in the process.[493]

In April 2021 the International Crisis Group reported: "There have also been several reports of serious rights abuses in western Tigray, where federal troops first intervened before Amhara regional forces took control. They suggest that Amhara factions have forcibly moved Tigrayans *en masse* from western Tigray, with an intensification of the depopulation in the last month".[494]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that:

> People have been displaced from western Tigray but also other areas such as north-western zones or central zones, and have taken refuge in other parts of Tigray or in Afar or Amhara regions. In addition, over 63,000 people have fled from Tigray to Eastern Sudan. There have also been reports that Ethiopian forces killed a number of civilians who were trying to cross the border to Sudan.
> Internally displaced persons have endured exhausting and dangerous journeys in search for safety, some walking for weeks to reach their destination. During their journey, some have reportedly been killed or beaten, especially young men. There are reports of women who were raped during the journey, or pregnant women who had to deliver on the way and lost their babies. Increasing reports of sexual violence against women and girls indicate heightened risks of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
> Allegations have been received suggesting that there is an ongoing widespread systematic campaign by Amhara Regional Forces and Amhara militia to forcibly displace Tigrayans from Western Tigray to the east

[492] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *R2P Monitor, Issue 55 (15 January 2021)*, 15 January 2021, *p. 15*

[493] International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021
[494] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021

> of Tekeze river, where they have reportedly been subjected to atrocities by ARF, Eritrean and Ethiopian forces, including killings.[495]

In April 2021, AP News documented research and interviews on the treatment of ethnic Tigrayans:

> Now, for the first time, they also bring proof of an official attempt at what is being called ethnic cleansing in the form of a new identity card that eliminates all traces of Tigray, as confirmed to The Associated Press by nine refugees from different communities. Written in a language not their own, issued by authorities from another ethnic group, the ID cards are the latest evidence of a systematic drive by the Ethiopian government and its allies to destroy the Tigrayan people. […] The Amhara authorities now in charge of the nearby city of Humera took Seid Mussa Omar's original ID card displaying his Tigrayan identity and burned it, the soft-spoken nurse said. On his new card examined by the AP, issued in January with the Amharic language, an Amhara stamp and a border of tiny hearts, even the word Tigray had vanished. […] In early March, after months on the run, 30-year-old Alem Mebrahtu attempted a desperate crossing of the Tekeze river. Separated from her three small children in the early chaos of the conflict, she had heard they were in Sudan. Sympathetic women from the Wolkait ethnic group pleaded with Eritrean soldiers near the river to let Alem cross, while urging her to pretend to be Wolkait, too. It worked, but she saw a grim reminder of what could have happened if she had failed. Bodies lay scattered near the riverbank, she said. She estimated around 50 corpses. "Some were face-down. Some were looking up at the sky," she said. Exhaustion still pressed deep under her eyes, Alem started to cry. There by the river, confronted with death, tears hadn't been allowed. The Eritrean soldiers beat people for expressing grief, she said. Samrawit Weldegerima, who had arrived just two weeks earlier in Hamdayet, also saw corpses by the river, counting seven. Freshly branded on their temples were the markings some Tigrayans have to express their identity, she said. […] In Sudan, the Tigrayans are registered and asked for their ethnicity. For once, they are free to answer.[496]

In May 2021, BBC News reported that "There are reports of ethnically selective purges of Tigrayans from government employment and the army, and restrictions on their travel, businesses and residence." The same source also reported that "Some Ethiopian media have expressed ethnic animosity towards Tigrayans, with derogatory language used indiscriminately to tar all Tigrayans with the alleged misdeeds of the TPLF, which was in power at a federal level for more than 25 years and had a bitter fall-out with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed after he took office in 2018, resulting in the conflict in its stronghold of Tigray".[497]

In June 2021 a joint NGO call for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray stated:

> 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

[495] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *pp. 5-6*

[496] AP News, *'Leave no Tigrayan: In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased'*, 7 April 2021

[497] BBC News, *Ethiopia Tigray crisis: Warnings of genocide and famine*, 29 May 2021

> 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 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. […]
> 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.[498]

In July 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a press release stating that: "In Addis Ababa, the Commission is monitoring reports of arrests of media personnel and residents of Tigray ethnic origin suspected of connection with the ongoing situation in the region. Such measures aggravate the public's concerns on risk of ethnic profiling".[499]

In its July 2021 *CrisisWatch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "police throughout month reportedly arbitrarily detained hundreds of ethnic Tigrayans and closed Tigrayan-owned businesses across country".[500] Similarly, Amnesty International reported in July 2021:

> Police in Addis Ababa have arbitrarily arrested and detained dozens of Tigrayans without due process, following the recapture of the Tigray region's capital, Mekelle, by forces from the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that also calls itself Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) on 28 June, Amnesty International said today. The arrests appear to be ethnically motivated, with former detainees, witnesses and lawyers describing how police checked identity documents before arresting people and taking them to detention centres […]
> While some people have been released on bail, approximately hundreds of others remain in detention, and their whereabouts unknown. Amnesty International is not aware of any internationally recognizable criminal charges against those still in detention who were arrested in these cases documented by the organization […]
> Amnesty International also heard of similar pattern of arbitrary arrests targeting Tigrayan residents in Awash Sebat, a town in Afar Region 200 kilometres to the east of Addis Ababa.[501]

African Arguments published an article in July 2021 on the situation of Tigrayans in Ethiopia, writing that:

> Since November 2020, Tigrayans in Ethiopian cities, especially the capital Addis Ababa, have been arrested by the thousands, had bank accounts temporarily frozen, been purged from their jobs, and had businesses shuttered. Tigrayans, a minority ethnic group who make up about 6% of the Ethiopian population, have also been prevented from traveling abroad.
> Now, Tigrayan residents in Addis Ababa tell African Arguments this racial profiling has escalated to an alarming degree since the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] regained ground, with many Tigrayans too fearful to leave their homes. Mass arrests have resumed, along with scores of Tigrayan businesses being forcibly closed by Ethiopian authorities.

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[498] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Joint letter calling for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on the ongoing human rights crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 10 June 2021
[499] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Tigray Region: Need for urgent measures to ensure the safety and security of civilians*, 3 July 2021
[500] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, July 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]
[501] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: End arbitrary detentions of Tigrayans, activists and journalists in Addis Ababa and reveal whereabouts of unaccounted detainees*, 16 July 2021

> […] There have been widespread reports over the last two weeks of scores of Tigrayans being detained and transported to detention centres. At least 15 Ethiopian journalists and media workers were also arrested in the crackdown.
> "It's very concerning," said Fisseha Tekle, a researcher for Ethiopia at Amnesty International. "It's clear racial profiling. People are getting arrested after police check their IDs and see that they're Tigrayan. They are not taken to court. It's a clear human rights violation and a violation of their rights to due process."
> […] Tekle from Amnesty International says there have also been cases of arbitrary arrests in Dire Dawa, a city in eastern Ethiopia, and that these people have not been heard from since their arrest.
> […] All those who African Arguments spoke to pointed to Abiy's recent speech after the TPLF's advancement as the source of escalating targeting and hate speech against Tigrayans. In his first remarks since he pulled federal troops out of Mekelle, Abiy, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, denied that his military was defeated by the TPLF and went on to allege that Tigrayan civilians had attacked the Ethiopian army and helped the TPLF.
> […] In a recent interview, Dagnachew Assefa, an advisor of Abiy, publicly suggested the registration and possible deportation of Tigrayans. Seyoum Teshome, a prominent social media activist with hundreds of thousands of followers, recently stated: "since each and every Tigrayan youth… has been raised with the same Woyane [Tigrayan rebellion] mentality… If you want to defeat them, you have to eliminate all the youth in Tigray."
> Amhara journalists have also called on citizens to spy on their Tigrayan neighbours.
> […] According to Amnesty researcher Tekle, this is not yet "people attacking people". "This is the government machinery that is targeting them," he says. "We haven't seen any actions by civilians against Tigrayans, at least in Addis." On Sunday, though, reports emerged of at least three Tigrayan civilians allegedly being killed by a mob in the town of Wereta in Amhara region.[502]

In July 2021, UNOCHA reported that "In recent weeks, there have been increasing reports of ethnic violence against Tigrayans in different parts of the country [of Ethiopia], including arbitrary detentions and forced closure of business of individuals suspected to be aligned with the Tigrayan forces, particularly in Addis Ababa".[503]

According to research in a report published also in July 2021 by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), state action against ethnic Tigrayans has resumed: "According to media reports, government action against ethnic Tigrays has resumed, especially in Addis Ababa. Hundreds have reportedly been detained for allegedly supporting the TPLF in recent weeks. The local authorities also ordered the closure of numerous shops, bars and restaurants run by Tigrays. Officials denied targeting Tigrays, but admitted that it could not be ruled out that some innocent people might also be arrested. This was justified by the "large network that the TPLF maintains in Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia".[504]

In August 2021, the Brookings Institute reported that: "In large parts of the country, strong anti-Tigrayan sentiments dominate and have locally broken out into anti-Tigrayan ethnic violence".[505]

In a report published in August 2021, Human Rights Watch documented its findings on the forcible disappearance of ethnic Tigrayans in Ethiopia:

> Ethiopian authorities since late June 2021 have arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, and committed other abuses against ethnic Tigrayans in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. The authorities should

[502] African Arguments, *Tigrayans in Ethiopia fear becoming "the next Rwanda"*, 12 July 2021
[503] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 19 July 2021*, 19 July 2021, *p. 3*
[504] German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), *Briefing Notes*, 20 July 2021, *p. 5*
[505] Brookings Institute, *Dangerous trends in Ethiopia: Time for Washington's tough love*, 9 August 2021

immediately account for Tigrayans' forcibly disappeared, release those being held without credible evidence of a crime, and end all discriminatory treatment. […]

In July and August [2021], Human Rights Watch interviewed by phone eight current and former Tigrayan detainees, four Tigrayan business owners, and 25 relatives of detainees, witnesses to abuses, and lawyers. Human Rights Watch also reviewed court and police documents and relevant photos. An August 11 [2021] email to Attorney General Gedion Timothewos summarizing the Human Rights Watch findings and requesting further information has not received a response. This research supplements interviews in November and December 2020 with nine people subjected to profiling, searches, and arbitrary arrests of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa after the conflict in Tigray began in November.

In mid-July [2021] the Addis Ababa police commissioner, Getu Argaw, told the media that over 300 Tigrayans had been arrested, saying they were under investigation for their alleged support for Tigray's former ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which Ethiopia's parliament designated as a terrorist group in May [2021]. Although the attorney general told the media that ordinary citizens would not be affected, in the arrests that Human Rights Watch researched, most if not all appeared to have been targeted on the basis of ethnicity. Witnesses said that security forces stopped and arrested Tigrayans on the streets and in cafés and other public places, and in their homes and workplaces, often during warrantless searches. In many cases, security forces checked people's identification cards to confirm their identity before taking them to a police station or other detention facility. A Tigrayan political activist and a Tigrayan aid worker, both based in Addis Ababa, were among those arrested in July [2021[, as were at least a dozen journalists and media workers who have reported on abuses against Tigrayans. While family members often knew where their relatives were being held during the first few days of detention, many were then secretly transferred to unidentified locations. Lawyers and families discovered, often weeks later and sometimes only informally, that some detainees were being held in the Afar region, over 200 kilometers from Addis Ababa. The whereabouts of others, including 23 cases Human Rights Watch documented, remain unknown. […]

Enforced Disappearances Human Rights Watch interviewed relatives, friends, and lawyers of 23 Tigrayan people whom the authorities arrested between June 28 and July 19 [2021] and whose whereabouts have not been revealed. A lawyer also shared a list of an additional 110 people whose relatives said they did not know their whereabouts as of August 2 [2021]. The people interviewed are identified by pseudonyms because of security concerns. The documented arrests were carried out by the Addis Ababa city or federal uniformed police, often accompanied by suspected intelligence officers in civilian clothes. For a few days after arrests, relatives could sometimes locate and bring their loved ones food, but after that short period, the authorities told relatives that the person had been moved to an undisclosed location or released, even though the detainees did not return home. Both federal and city police authorities initially detained people in police stations and prisons, including at Gotera, Gulele, Akaki Kaliti, Addisu Gebeya, the Addis Ababa Police Commission (commonly known as "Sostegna"), and the Federal Police Commission.[506]

In September 2021, Christian Solidarity Worldwide also reported that "In Humera, on the border with Eritrea and Sudan, Amhara soldiers reportedly conducted a "door to-door" search for ethnic Tigrayans, forcing thousands into makeshift detention centres. Subsequently, tightly bound male bodies bearing Tigrayan tattoos and marks of torture began to wash up on the Sudanese side of the Setit/Tekeze river. […] Hate speech dehumanising people of Tigrayan descent has also proliferated, with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, other political leaders and even some religious personalities describing them as "cancer" or "weeds" that Ethiopia must get rid of in order to prosper".[507]

[506] Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared*, 18 August 2021
[507] Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), *Violence in Tigray*, September 2021, *p. 1*

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that:

> Ethiopian security forces have committed acts of ethnic cleansing and accuse forces aligned with the federal government of a violent campaign of collective punishment against the people of Tigray. Reports indicate that ethnic Tigrayans have been targeted based on their ethnicity, and hate speech and dehumanizing language are rising. […]
> "Inflammatory rhetoric and ethnic profiling are tearing apart the social fabric of the country," Secretary-General Guterres warned in August [2021]. The U.N. Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has expressed alarm over the situation in Tigray, where some observers say atrocities may constitute genocide.[508]

Referencing its information to a number of sources, the same source further reported:

> A European envoy says Ethiopia's leaders spoke to him of an intention to "wipe out Tigrayans for 100 years," in what "looks...like ethnic cleansing."[14] U.S. officials assert that Ethiopian security forces have committed acts of ethnic cleansing and have accused Eritrean forces of a violent campaign that amounts to the collective punishment of Tigray's people.[15]
> The U.N. Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has expressed alarm over the situation in Tigray and other parts of the country, highlighting concern with hate speech, ethnic profiling, and attacks on civilians based on religion and ethnicity. She cautioned in early 2021 that "the risk of atrocity crimes in Ethiopia remains high and likely to get worse," absent an urgent response.[16]
> The Special Adviser cited "a failure to address ethnic violence, stigmatization, hate speech, religions tensions" as contributing factors. She warned of a deteriorating situation in late July [2021], noting that communal violence had reached an unprecedented level and described dehumanizing language by top political leaders in relation to the Tigray conflict as being of "utmost concern."[17]
>
> 14 "EU envoy: Ethiopian leadership vowed to 'wipe out' Tigrayans," AP, June 18, 2021.
> 15 HFAC, The Biden Administration's Priorities for U.S. Foreign Policy, hearing, March 10, 2021 and Statement of Acting Assistant Secretary Godec, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (SFRC), Ethiopia in Crisis: U.S. Strategy and Policy Response, hearing, May 27, 2021.
> 16 U.N., Statement by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide on Ethiopia, February 5, 2021.
> 17 U.N., Statement by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide on the continued deterioration of the situation
> in Ethiopia, July 30, 2021.[509]

The source further highlighted that "Refugees who have fled Humera, a city near the Sudanese border, say thousands ethnic Tigrayans are being held in detention facilities in the city".[510]

With special regards to Tigrayans outside of Tigray, the same source noted:

> Outside Tigray, human rights groups and journalists have reported ethnic profiling and harassment, arbitrary detentions, and forcible disappearances of Tigrayans, including in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.[136] Authorities have reportedly closed dozens of Tigrayan-owned businesses in the city. Ethiopian soldiers of Tigrayan ethnicity have been detained, and are reportedly being held with other Tigrayans in detention centers across the country.[137]

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[508] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*
[509] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 6*
[510] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 19*

136 "Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands, Reuters, May 7, 2021; "'Purely ethnic profiling': New
wave of Tigrayans detained," AP, July 13, 2021; and HRW, "Ethnic Tigrayans forcibly disappeared," August 18, 2021.
137 "Cara Anna, 'Clean out our insides': Ethiopia detains Tigrayans amid war," April 29, 2021[511]

In September 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported that: "Some of the residents of Tigrayan origin detained from Addis Ababa and other parts of the country have been transferred to various military and police camps in Addis Ababa and in Afar Region and the Commission's monitoring shows that many of them have not been allowed visitation rights by their lawyer or their families or been made to appear before a court. No person should be arbitrarily arrested for any reason and all persons detained should be made to appear before the court within the legally prescribed timeframe".[512]

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted in her statement to the UN Human Rights Council on 13th September 2021:

> From my last update to the Council to date, allegations of human rights violations have continued to implicate Government forces and its allies. […]
> Reports also suggest that people of Tigrayan ethnicity have been profiled and detained by law enforcement officials on ethnic grounds, with hundreds having reportedly been arrested in recent security sweeps, mostly in Addis Ababa, and several businesses belonging to ethnic Tigrayans having reportedly been closed.
> Incitement to hatred and discrimination, and rising levels of inflammatory rhetoric were also documented targeting people of Tigrayan ethnicity.[513]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas, despite the Ethiopian Government's expressed commitment to accountability for sexual violence […], rape and other sexual violence against women and girls continue to be widely used by Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara regional armed forces in addition to […] the use of ethnic slurs".[514]

The same source further highlighted:

> whereas the Ethiopian authorities have arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared ethnic Tigrayans in Ethiopia's capital, and have committed other abuses against them such as closing Tigrayan-owned businesses; whereas incitement to hatred and discrimination and rising levels of inflammatory anti-Tigray rhetoric are evident throughout Ethiopia, including by high-level government officials.[515]

m. Situation of other non-Tigrayan groups in Tigray

[511] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 20*
[512] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Tigray Region: Ensure uninterrupted and improved provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians*, 11 September 2021
[513] UNHCOHC, *Enhanced interactive dialogue on the situation of human rights in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 48th session of the Human Rights Council, Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet*, 13 September 2021
[514] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, D*
[515] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*,)*

This section should be read in conjunction with section IV., a. Overview and b., *i. Ethnic-Related Attacks/Massacres*.

An article published by the Atlantic Council in November 2020 reported, while discussing Prime Minister Abiy's cutting of funding to Tigray People Liberation Front after the September 2020 election held in Tigray, that:

> That in turn, appears to have goaded the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] into attacking an Ethiopian Defense Forces base located in the Tigray region. Non-Tigrayan soldiers, in a foreshadowing of ethnic-based violence by TPLF-aligned forces to come, were allegedly executed during the attack, and other federal soldiers still remain hostage.
> […] TPLF forces—having consumed the narrative of ethnic-based persecution being fed to them by the TPLF leadership—have subsequently been implicated in the massacre of scores or hundreds of innocent non-Tigrayan bystanders at Mai-Kadra (though we should absolutely assume, given the previous conduct of the Ethiopian Defense Forces in Oromia and elsewhere, that there will be atrocities on both sides).[516]

In April 2021 the International Crisis Group reported: "in western Tigray, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said Tigrayan militiamen backed by local officials killed hundreds of mostly Amhara civilians in Mai Kadra town on 9 November [2021]".[517] Amnesty International, reporting in November 2020 on this ethnic-related massacre noted:

> Amnesty International can today confirm that scores, and likely hundreds, of people were stabbed or hacked to death in Mai-Kadra (May Cadera) town in the South West Zone of Ethiopia's Tigray Region on the night of 9 November [2020] […]
> Amnesty International has not yet been able to confirm who was responsible for the killings, but has spoken to witnesses who said forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) were responsible for the mass killings, apparently after they suffered defeat from the federal EDF forces.
> Three people told Amnesty International that survivors of the massacre told them that they were attacked by members of Tigray Special Police Force and other TPLF members. […]
> While the official death toll in Mai-Kadra is not yet known, the Amhara regional government's media agency AMMA reported there were around 500 victims, adding that they were primarily non-Tigrayan residents of the town. A man who is helping to clear the bodies from the streets told Amnesty International that he had looked at the state-issued identification cards of some victims, and most were Amhara.[518]

Between 14 November 2020 and 19 November 2020, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission team travelled between "Maikadra, Abrhajira, Sanja, Gondar, Dansha and Humera and gathered testimonies and other evidences from victims, eye witnesses, families of victims, first responders, military personnel and various other sources including government authorities who were present at the time":

> Maikadra is a rural town located in Western Zone, Hafta Humera Woreda of Tigray Region. It is situated 30 kilometers south of Humera and 60 kilometers north of Midre Genet (also known as Abdurafi) An estimated 40,000 to 45,000 people of Tigrayan, Amhara, 'Wolkait' and other ethnic origin reside there […]

[516] Atlantic Council, *Calls for negotiation are driving Ethiopia deeper into war*, 13 November 2020
[517] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021
[518] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state*, 12 November 2020

People of non-Tigrayan ethnic origin, and especially of Amhara and Wolkait origin, have been subjected to great fear and pressure from the day the conflict between the Federal and the Tigray regional governments broke out on November 4th, 2020. The seasonal labourers, in particular, were altogether prohibited from moving freely in the town, from going to work and even from returning to their usual place of residence. A few days before the attack, when the Ethiopian Defence Forces were said to be nearing the town, the local administration police and militia forces shut all the exit points from Maikadra. (Militia refers to armed community security personnel who are not part of the regular police force but are set up by regional/local administration within the structure of, as applicable, either the Regional Peace and Security Bureau or the Regional Police Commissions. They are therefore part of the government security apparatus. In rural towns and villages with no regular police, in particular, militia serve as first security responders.) Some of the Maikadra residents who attempted to escape to the 'desert plains' or the nearby Sudanese town of Berehet, fearing attacks by a defeated and retreating Tigrayan militia and special force, were forced back home by the local militia. Around the same time, members of "Samri" - an informal Tigrayan youth group -set up and manned checkpoints at all of the town's four main exits. On November 9, 2020, the day of the attack, from around 11:00 AM onwards, the town police started checking identity cards to differentiate people of non-Tigray origin from the rest and raided all the houses/huts, stretching from the neighbourhood known as "Genb Sefer" up to the area called Wolkait Bole (Kebele 1 Ketena 1) which is largely resided by ethnic Amharas. They detained up to 60 people they profiled as Amhara and Wolkait and who were said to use Sudanese SIM cards on their mobile phones and destroyed said SIM cards. Ethiopian SIM cards had already stopped working by then and the motive for confiscating and destroying the Sudanese SIM cards was to prevent any communications or call for help during the attack, according to testimony of the people in the area. Women and children of Tigrayan ethnic origin were made to leave the town a few hours ahead of the attack.

On the same day (November 9th, 2020), around 3:00 P.M., the local police, militia and the informal Tigray youth group called "Samri" returned to "Genb Sefer" where the majority of people of Amhara ethnic origin live and began the attack against civilians.

According to eyewitnesses and families of victims who spoke with EHRC, the first act committed by the perpetrators was to execute an ethnic Amhara former soldier called Abiy Tsegaye in front of his family and outside his house and set the house on fire. Afterwards, they threw his body into the fire. Residents said Abiy Tsegaye was a former soldier and militia member who had declined a request to re-join the militia as tensions began to rise. They surmise that this might be why he was targeted. The victim's wife and eyewitnesses have given a detailed account of how the group of perpetrators forced Abiy Tsegaye out of his house and had him shot in front of his family by a local militia and former colleague called Shambel Kahsay, before throwing his body into the raging fire that engulfed their house. The EHRC team also visited said house, still smouldering, and the area around it, still heavy with burned body smoke.

Immediately after the attack on Abiy Tsegaye's house, members of Samri, with the help of the local police and militia, moving from house to house and from street to street, began a cruel and atrocious rampage on people they pre-identified/profiled as Amharas and Wolkaits. They killed hundreds of people, beating them with batons/sticks, stabbing them with knives, machetes and hatchets and strangling them with ropes. They also looted and destroyed properties.

While Samri, comprised of several groups consisting of 20 to 30 youth, each accompanied by an estimated 3 to 4 armed police and militia, carried out the massacre, police and militia - strategically posted at street junctions - aided and directly participated in the carnage by shooting at those who attempted to escape.

> It has been made apparent that the attack was ethnicity based and specifically targeted men the attackers profiled through, amongst other things, identification cards, as Amharas and Wolkaits; but a certain number of people from other ethnic groups have also been killed. Moreover, it was men who were the specific targets in the attacks. While it can be verified that women and children were spared, some women, including mothers who have tried to shield their families, have suffered physical and mental injuries. Eyewitnesses also said women received threats from the perpetrators that "tomorrow, they will come after the women. It will be their turn". […]
>
> EHRC spoke with victims who suffered grave physical and mental injuries, including people whose bodies were maimed by sharp objects or severely bludgeoned, as well as others who were dragged on the ground with their necks tied to a rope. The team also talked to survivors who described how the attackers tied them to other people before attacking and of being the only ones to come out alive. […]
>
> While it is not possible yet to verify the exact numbers of the dead, the physically injured and/or those who suffered property damage, the members of the Burial Committee, set up after the attack, eyewitnesses and other local sources, estimate a minimum of 600 have been killed and say the number is likely to be higher still.[519]

In September 2021, Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported that "Disturbing video and still pictures continues to emerge of severe ethnicity-based violations, including from Gondar of a young man being assaulted due allegedly for being a Tigrayan, and of the bodies of at least ten men of Tigrayans and Qemant ethnicity - the latter tribe is deemed to be related to Tigrayans". [520]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas, despite the Ethiopian Government's expressed commitment to accountability for sexual violence […], rape and other sexual violence against women and girls continue to be widely used by Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara regional armed forces in addition to […] the use of ethnic slurs".[521]

i. Situation of Eritrean refugees in Tigray

In December 2020, African Arguments published an article on Eritrean involvement and Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia during the Tigray conflict, written by Mesfin Hagos, a founding member of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in the 1970s and former Minister of Defense in the 1990s. The article described that:

> When the current conflict broke out, there were close to 100,000 officially registered refugees in the four camps in Tigray alone and many thousands more in Tigrayan towns. While the refugees in the Afar region of Ethiopia have all along been in precarious conditions, those in Tigray were suddenly caught in the crossfire when the conflict broke out. It was first rumored that several refugees were either killed or wounded in the fighting close to their camps around the town of Shire. The fact that UNHCR personnel were ordered to leave Tigray and employees of Ethiopian federal government's Agency for Refugee & Returnee Affairs (ARRA) simply did not show up left the camps unattended to. The total communications blackout made it impossible to find out what exactly was going on in the camps. But as the war dragged on, we are able to piece together the grave danger that the refugees are facing.

[519] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings*, 24 November 2020
[520] Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), *Ethiopia: Violence in Tigray*, September 2021, *p. 1*
[521] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, D*

> To begin with, all the camps have now run out of the measly supplies of basic necessities that they were left with. Sources have also reported that the Eritrean military entered some of those camps and marched an unknown number of refugees out of camp at gun point. The Shimelba refugee camp is even reported to be under the control of the Eritrean military that is preparing to send a large number of them back to Eritrea. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, said on November 29 [2020] that he was very concerned about the fate of the Eritrean refugees in the war zone amid reports that some have been abducted by the Asmara government, a regime that has absolutely no regard for international norms or opinion.[522]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect wrote in December 2020 that:

> On 11 December the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, expressed alarm about the situation facing almost 100,000 Eritrean refugees trapped in Tigray. High Commissioner Grandi highlighted an "overwhelming number" of reports that refugees had been killed or forcibly returned to Eritrea where they could face persecution. The refugees have also been cut off from life-saving assistance since the fighting in Tigray first began in early November. Although the federal government and the UN signed an agreement to allow the resumption of humanitarian aid on 2 December, the government claims insecurity has hampered access, with the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle only receiving its first convoy of medical supplies on 12 December.
> […] As the communications blackout in the region has slowly been lifted, fresh reports have emerged of war crimes and other violations and abuses of human rights, including eyewitness accounts of the massacre of hundreds of people in Mai-Kadra on 9 November. Survivors recount a systematic, planned attack against ethnic Amhara civilians by Tigrayan youth groups, local police and militias.[523]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in January 2021 that: "At least 2.2 million people have been displaced by the recent war and two of the four camps hosting Eritrean refugees, Shimelba and Hitsats, have been inaccessible since November. Raising alarm about the grave threat facing Eritrean refugees in Tigray, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, said that he continues to receive reports of "grave and distressing human rights abuses, including killings, targeted abductions, and forced return of refugees to Eritrea""[524]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in February 2021 that:

> DX Open Network, a UK-based research organization, has released satellite images revealing the systematic destruction of two refugee camps in Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region. The images document the ongoing destruction, looting and razing of both Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps, which previously hosted around 25,000 refugees, most of whom were from neighboring Eritrea.
> According to DX Open Network's analysis of the images, the camps appear to have been targeted between 24 November 2020 and 17 January 2021, despite their protected status under international law. The damage appears more extensive than previously reported, with over 1,000 structures destroyed or burned down, including schools, homes and food stores, as well as buildings operated by the World Food Programme, International Rescue Committee and the Norwegian Refugee Council. The Ethiopian government announced today that it is closing the two destroyed camps, stating one is an inhospitable location and the other is too close to the Eritrean border.

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[522] African Arguments, *Eritrea's Role in Ethiopia's Conflict and the Fate of Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia*, 4 December 2020

[523] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 233: Ethiopia, Yemen and Nigeria*, 16 December 2020

[524] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 236: Sudan, Ethiopia and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, 20 January 2021

> The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, has stated that as many as 20,000 Eritrean refugees from Hitsats and Shimelba remain unaccounted for following the destruction of the camps. The satellite images reveal that military vehicles and troops were present near the camps at the time of their destruction. There are also numerous reports that refugees may have been forcibly returned to Eritrea.[525]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in July 2021 that: "The situation facing the large Eritrean refugee population in Ethiopia is also grave. On 15 July the Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Ethiopia, Ann Encontre, released a statement regarding Eritrean refugees in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps in Tigray, who have been trapped by intense fighting in the area. Encontre stated that the refugees have also been subject to reprisal attacks, abductions, arrests and violence. The area where the camps are located is now inaccessible to the UN and aid agencies".[526]

An interview with Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa director Laetitia Bader discussed updates on the conflict in Tigray at the end of July 2021. Bader reported that:

> Two weeks ago, we heard alarming reports that the two remaining camps for Eritrean refugees in Tigray were caught in the fighting between Tigrayan and Ethiopian government forces. The warring parties need to protect these vulnerable people, and the international community should be thinking about how to support and protect them as well.
> Earlier in the conflict, two other refugee camps hosting roughly 20,000 Eritrean refugees were destroyed by Eritrean forces, the military from the country where they fled repression and persecution. Tigrayan militias also killed and sexually assaulted refugees in late 2020, in what appears to be unlawful revenge attacks because of abuses Eritrea's forces committed in Tigray at the time, including massacres, widespread pillaging, and sexual violence.[527]

In September 2021, in a report about Eritrean refugees in Tigray, Human Rights Watch reported that:

> Eritrean government forces and Tigrayan militias have committed killings, rape, and other grave abuses against Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia's Tigray region, Human Rights Watch said today. All warring parties should cease attacks against refugees, stay out of refugee camps, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.
> Between November 2020 and January 2021, belligerent Eritrean and Tigrayan forces alternatively occupied the Hitsats and Shimelba refugee camps that housed thousands of Eritrean refugees, and committed numerous abuses. Eritrean forces also targeted Tigrayans living in communities surrounding the camps. Fighting that broke out in mid-July in Mai Aini and Adi Harush, the two other functioning refugee camps, again left refugees in urgent need of protection and assistance.
> […] Since January, Human Rights Watch has interviewed 28 Eritrean refugees: 23 former residents of Hitsats camp and 5 former residents of Shimelba camp, and 2 residents of the town of Hitsats who had witnessed the abuses by Eritrean forces and local Tigrayan militia. Human Rights Watch also interviewed aid workers and analyzed satellite imagery.
> […] On November 19, Eritrean forces arrived in the town of Hitsats and indiscriminately killed several residents. They occupied and pillaged the town and took over the refugee camp. Some refugees took part in the looting, contributing to community tensions.

[525] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 239: Ethiopia, China and Iraq*, 10 February 2021
[526] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 262: Ethiopia, Myanmar (Burma) and Afghanistan*, 21 July 2021
[527] Human Rights Watch, *The Latest on the Crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 30 July 2021

On November 23, Tigrayan militia entered Hitsats camp and attacked refugees near the camp's Orthodox church. Clashes between the militia fighters and Eritrean soldiers ensued in and around the camp, lasting several hours. Nine refugees were killed and 17 badly injured.

[…] Two dozen residents in Hitsats town were also reportedly killed during and after the clashes that day. The Tigrayan militia retreated from Hitsats after the fighting.

Eritrean forces later detained approximately two dozen refugees in the camp and took them away in military vehicles. Their whereabouts have not been revealed. Eritrean forces also removed the 17 injured refugees from the camp, taking at least one – and likely others – back to Eritrea, ostensibly for treatment.

The Eritrean forces withdrew from the camp in early December. Tigrayan forces returned on the evening of December 5, shooting into the camp, and sending hundreds of refugees fleeing. In the ensuing days, Tigrayan militia attacked, arbitrarily detained, and sexually assaulted some of the refugees who had fled, notably around Zelazle and Ziban Gedena, north of Hitsats. They then marched the refugees back to Hitsats.

[…] In Hitsats, Tigrayan militias and special forces, and members of an unidentified armed Eritrean group, arbitrarily detained hundreds of refugees, apparently to identify refugees who collaborated with the Eritrean forces or who were responsible for looting in the town.

On January 4, following heavy clashes near the camp, Tigrayan forces withdrew from Hitsats. The Eritrean forces returned and ordered all remaining refugees to leave along the main road toward Eritrea. Between January 5 and 8, Eritrean forces destroyed and burned shelters and humanitarian infrastructure in the camp, leaving significant parts of the camp in ruins.

Most refugees then faced an arduous days-long trek to the Ethiopian town of Sheraro and the contested border town of Badme, then under Eritrean control. Refugees said that once there, many felt they had no choice but to return to Eritrea, despite the risks of being detained and facing indefinite forced conscription. Witnesses said hundreds boarded buses headed to Eritrea in January.

Other refugees managed to escape back into Ethiopia, some toward urban areas or the two still-functioning Eritrean refugee camps in southern Tigray, Mai Aini, and Aid Harush. UNHCR reported that 7,643 out of the 20,000 refugees known to have been in Hitsats and Shimelba camps in October 2020 are unaccounted for as of late August 2021. Many of the refugees that have been accounted for fled to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, but neither the Ethiopian government nor international partners have provided any assistance to date. Refugees who are not receiving assistance are more vulnerable to further abuse, including exploitation, Human Rights Watch said.

[…] As of October 2020, Ethiopia hosted approximately 149,000 registered Eritrean refugees. Many were in the northern Tigray region, bordering Eritrea, in four camps, with approximately 20,000 in Hitsats and Shimelba in northwestern Tigray and about 31,000 in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps in southern Tigray.

[…] For almost five months after the start of the conflict in November 2020, UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies were unable to access Hitsats and Shimelba camps due to insecurity and federal government restrictions. When UNHCR visited the camps in late March, they found them destroyed and empty of refugees.

[…] For refugees who found a way to remain in Ethiopia, survival has been hard. In December the deputy head of ARRA [Ethiopia's Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs] told the media that the government was returning hundreds of refugees who had fled from Tigray to Addis Ababa back to the two functioning refugee camps, Mai Aini and Adi Harush. In January UNHCR raised concerns about refugees being returned against their will after ARRA informed them that 580 Eritreans had been taken back to Tigray. In its September 10 response letter, ARRA said that refugees arriving in Addis Ababa from Tigray had created logistical complications and that the refugees were returned after an ARRA assessment team found the two southern camps to be safe.

Most of the refugees identified had moved to or been moved to Mai Aini, Adi Harush, and Addis Ababa. UNHCR told Human Rights Watch that as of late August, of the refugees who are known to have received food rations in Hitsats and Shimelba in October 2020, 12,611 have been identified, while 7,643 remain unaccounted for. ARRA, however, said that the great majority of refugees from Hitsats and Shimelba have been accounted for, but the agency acknowledged that refugees could have been counted twice.

Human Rights Watch found that refugees outside of camps lacked access to urgent assistance. For several months, those who had made their way to Shire, a town in central Tigray, received no food

> assistance other than some high-energy biscuits. All the refugees interviewed by Human Rights Watch who had fled to Addis Ababa said that they needed urgent assistance, including medical care, food, and shelter.
>
> In May, UNHCR said that many refugees needed urgent assistance, but that discussions with the government were ongoing about providing this assistance outside the camp setting. In August UNHCR reported that ARRA had agreed to provide refugees who had arrived in Addis Ababa from Hitsats and Shimelba with temporary identification documents for three years, which would enable them to open bank accounts and receive support through cash transfers. ARRA confirmed this to Human Rights Watch. At the time of writing, refugees in Addis Ababa had still not received this support.
>
> Refugees in Adi Harush and Mai Aini, along with UNHCR, raised concerns about armed men engaged in crime in both camps. In February, for instance, unidentified armed men attacked three refugees as they lined up for scarce water at about 5 a.m., wounding one and stealing their belongings.
>
> On July 12, fighting broke out in and around Mai Aini and Adi Harush between the Tigrayan Defense Forces and Amhara regional forces, killing at least one refugee, according to UNHCR. The insecurity in the area caused access to aid, including food and water, to be cut off. UNHCR said that emergency assistance started again on August 5 but warned that "basic services such as health care remain unavailable, and clean drinking water is running out." ARRA said on September 10 that, given the insecurity, they currently do not have a presence in the camps. While Tigrayan forces reportedly control the camps and vicinities, reports of insecurity and clashes in the area persist. Responding to a query about plans to relocate Eritrean refugees out of Tigray, Getachew Reda, the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] spokesman, questioned whether there were any credible security concerns for Eritrean refugees remaining in Tigray.[528]

Indicative of attacks against Eritrea refugees, the monthly *Protection in Danger* news brief produced by Insecurity Insight document individual, but non-exhaustive, incidences of such nature. See for example the September 2021[529], July 2021[530] and May 2021[531] editions.

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".[532] The full report report can be accessed here.[533] With regards to 'Refugees', the report found:

> Between November 2020 and January 2021, the TSF and EDF, violated the civilian character of refugee camps in Tigray by their presence in Shimelba refugee camp, which shelters Eritrean refugees. The TSF and EDF put the security and lives of thousands of refugees at risk by fighting around the camp, resulting in the displacement of thousands of refugees, the disappearance of hundreds of refugees, and the destruction of the refugee camp. The EDF violated the fundamental principle of non-refoulement by

[528] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Eritrean Refugees Targeted in Tigray*, 16 September 2021
[529] See Insecurity Insight, *Protection in Danger, Monthly News Brief*, September 2021, *p. 1*
[530] See Insecurity Insight, *Protection in Danger, Monthly News Brief*, July 2021, *p. 2*
[531] See Insecurity Insight, *Protection in Danger, Monthly News Brief*, May 2021, *p. 2*
[532] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[533] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021

forcefully returning at-risk Eritrean refugees to Eritrea. Tigrayan forces looted private properties of refugees and of humanitarian organizations.[534]

n. Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons

In its report *Humanitarian Needs Overview*, published in February 2021, UNOCHA reported on the situation of trafficking in Ethiopia "[…] 58 per cent of the IDP population are children, of whom 21,659 are Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) at particular risk of child labor, child trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). Hazardous child labor is prevalent in Ethiopia, with staggering 7 per cent of IDP children (predominantly in Tigray, Oromia and Somali) involved in exploitative and hazardous forms of child labor. Of particular concern, repeated disasters and protracted displacement erode coping capacities, forcing more people to adopt negative coping mechanisms such as child labor and unsafe shelter conditions […] UASC are extremely vulnerable, and at greater risk of exposure to child labour, transactional sex, or child trafficking […] Most returning migrants have been exposed to abuse and violence by human smugglers and traffickers during their journeys […] Trafficking in persons, while mentioned on several occasions in the document linked to displacement, in-depth analysis was not possible due to limited available information".[535]

In a report published in April 2021, CARE International documented that "Women in the FGDs [Focus Group Discussions] reported that there is no safe space for them in the IDP [Internally Displaced People] camps. They also described risks of kidnapping, abduction, and attacks when traveling outside of the camps as well as within the camps. Child/human trafficking is the other challenge that they live in fear of when they travel."[536]

The 2020/2021 U.S. Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* found that:

> Since November 2020, ongoing internal conflict in the Tigray region has resulted in more than 63,000 Ethiopians seeking asylum in Sudan, where protection services are limited; this population is increasingly vulnerable to trafficking as displacement, food insecurity, and lack of economic opportunity continue. International organizations increasingly report armed actors, including Eritrean forces, regional forces, the ENDF, and the TPLF are reportedly responsible for committing human rights abuses and gender-based violence and gender-based violence against women and girls in Tigray, including potential trafficking crimes. […] individuals in resettlement camps or otherwise affected are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking due to a lack of access to justice and economic opportunity. [537]

The same source further reported that:

> In response to the pandemic, the government imposed a state of emergency (SOE) from April to September 2020. During this time, officials reassigned all anti-trafficking police units to enforce the SOE and closed all courts, except those hearing cases related to gender-based violence. The government also redeployed anti-trafficking police units to enforce a six-month SOE that began in November 2020 in response to the ongoing conflict in Tigray. [538]

The U.S. Department of State further noted:

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[534] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[535] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021 (February 2021)*, February 2021, *p. 8/28/71/106*
[536] CARE International, *Tigray Conflict Rapid Gender Analysis*, 4 April 2021, *p. 24*
[537] U.S. Department of State, *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ethiopia*, 1 July 2021
[538] U.S. Department of State, *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ethiopia*, 1 July 2021

> The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking offenses; however, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action during the year. Corruption among police and judicial officials, especially the solicitation of bribes, remained of significant concern. Since the Tigray conflict began in November 2020, international organizations increasingly reported armed actors, including Eritrean forces, regional forces, the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) were reportedly responsible for committing human rights abuses and gender-based violence. and gender-based violence in Tigray, including potential trafficking crimes. Observers reported unspecified military personnel and other officials forced women to have sex in exchange for basic commodities and humanitarian assistance.[539]

o. Treatment of deserters and former soldiers

In November 2020, BBC News reported that "federal police announced arrest warrants for 76 army officers, some of whom are reportedly retired. They are accused of conspiring with the TPLF and 'committing treason', according to AFP news agency".[540]

In September 2021, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reported that "700 Tigrayan serving and retired soldiers and their families are reportedly held in a camp in the Oromia region". [541]

V. Humanitarian Situation in Tigray in 2021

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[542] The "26 maps in this atlas provide detailed information at the scale of districts (woredas) or sub-districts (tabiyas). Besides background information related to administrative divisions, social and natural resources - locations of internally displaced people, massacres and civilian casualties receive due attention. Humanitarian access and needs are particularly addressed; official data on humanitarian aid distribution are mapped, and contrasted to ground evidence related to such distributions. The final outlook, links up the emergency and famine conditions in Tigray to the current crop status and to the blockade and siege of the region".[543] In particular the following maps may be of interest:

- Map 10 (p. 30); Reported conflict incidents from November 2020 to September 2021, including battles, ambushes, air strikes, drone attacks and shelling;
- Map 11 (p. 31): Approximate territorial control on 31 August 2021;
- Figure 4.1 (. 33) Graphic representation of fully documented civilian casualties, by the end of September 2021;

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[539] U.S. Department of State, *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ethiopia*, 1 July 2021
[540] BBC News, *Ethiopia crisis: Arrest warrants for officers amid Tigray fighting*, 19 November 2020
[541] Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), *Ethiopia: Violence in Tigray*, September 2021, *p. 1*
[542] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography
[543] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, *p. 1*

- Map 13 (p. 37): Heatmap of civilian casualties and massacres in the Tigray War between 4th November 2020 and 28th September 20201;
- Map 14 (p. 38): Occurrence of massacres in the Tigray War up to 3rd October 2021 and Annex A (p. 89-95): Chronological overview of the 260 reported massacres in the Tigray War between November 2020 and September 2021;
- Map 15 (p. 40): Restricted humanitarian access due to the ongoing conflict (as of 31st July 2021)
- Map 16 (p. 46): Sites with IDPs due to the Tigray War (November 2020 to June 2021);
- Map 22 (p. 68): Current (June 2021) and projected (January 2022) food security outcomes in Tigray.[544]

a. Overview

In April 2021 the International Crisis Group reported: "Tigray suffers from chronic food shortages. Even before the war, these had been aggravated by the worst desert locust invasion in decades. Fighting then broke out around harvest time. The shutdown of telecommunications, closure of banks and, seemingly primarily at Eritrean troops' hands, destruction of more than two thirds of health facilities and widespread looting of public and private property – including food stores and oxen for ploughing – has exacerbated the hardship".[545]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that:

> United Nations (U.N.) Secretary-General António Guterres has called the humanitarian situation in Tigray, where 5.2 million people need food aid and hundreds of thousands are facing starvation, "hellish." U.N. and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officials have described a de facto humanitarian blockade on Tigray. Aid agencies reported their food stocks in Tigray depleted in August [2021]. Health facilities have been damaged and looted, and lack basic medicines and supplies. Humanitarian access has been a problem throughout the conflict. Aid agencies say they now have access to deliver assistance inside Tigray, but their ability to bring aid supplies into the region is extremely restricted. Without sufficient supplies, the U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator warned in early September that the humanitarian situation was set to worsen dramatically[546]

A statement released by the UN Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia on 2 September 2021 noted that "an estimated 5.2 million people, or 90 percent of the population across the Tigray region, urgently need humanitarian assistance, including 400,000 people already facing famine-like conditions".[547]

In its monthly Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) covering the month of September 2021, ACLED reported:

> Before June 2021, the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia was largely contained within the Tigray region. The expansion of the conflict into the Amhara and Afar regions has increased the number of people in need of humanitarian aid.[548]

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[544] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, [*various pages]*

[545] International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021

[546] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*

[547] UNOCHA, *Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, on the operational constraints and de facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray*, 2 September 2021, *p. 1*

[548] ACLED, *Ethiopia Peace Observatory (EPO) Monthly: September 2021*, 13 October 2021

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas, even before the fighting began, there were 15,2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia, 2 million of whom in the Tigray region; whereas nearly one million people are living in famine-like conditions and 5,2 million out of 6 million people in Tigray are facing acute food insecurity as a direct consequence of the violence; whereas 91 % of the population is in extreme need of humanitarian aid and 100 000 children will face life-threatening severe acute malnutrition over the next 12 months; whereas in June 2021 the UN had already warned that 5,5 million people in Tigray and the neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar were in need of food aid and 350 000 were facing starvation".[549]

b. Food Security Situation

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in January 2021 that: "more than 4.5 million people in Tigray – 75 percent of the region's population – are now in need of emergency food assistance".[550]

In early February 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) stated that "latest estimates indicate that 2.5 to 3 million people require emergency food assistance in Tigray region. Reports indicate that the nutrition situation requires greater attention, with young children and pregnant and lactating mothers the most vulnerable".[551]

African Arguments wrote in a February 2021 article on humanitarian access in Tigray that: "There has been no trade with the region since November [2020] and the harvest season has been impacted by the conflict, with crops and equipment destroyed and farmers fleeing from their land. The situation is particularly acute in rural areas where humanitarian access has been even more difficult due to the continued fighting and where banks and markets are still closed".[552]

The World Peace Foundation published a report in April 2021 that suggested that "the coalition of Ethiopian Federal forces, Amhara regional forces, and Eritrean troops are committing starvation crimes on large scale".[553] The report puts forward "evidence for starvation crimes committed in Tigray. It is a detailed list based on public sources augmented by some confidential information from interviews. The evidence listed is not intended to identify specific starvation crimes nor to identify specific perpetrators. Rather, it points to evidence indicative of various criminal acts that warrant further investigation. It includes a summary account of looting and asset stripping, asset destruction, and the pillage and vandalism of health facilities, schools, homes, banks, offices, hotels, water and sanitation services, and additional private and public infrastructure. It describes the obstruction of essential activities including

[549] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *B*

[550] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 236: Sudan, Ethiopia and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, 20 January 2021

[551] WFP, *Statement on humanitarian assistance and food and nutrition security in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 6 February 2021

[552] African Arguments, *Ethiopian government must allow full humanitarian access to Tigray*, 4 February 2021

[553] World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray: How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, 6 April 2021, *Executive Summary, p. III*

through ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, impeding labor migration and destroying opportunities for employment".[554] The report concludes that:

> Our stark conclusion is that the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea are starving the people of Tigray. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this is intentional, systematic and widespread.[555]

In a press release published in May 2021, OXFAM stated that:

> Six months since the conflict erupted in Tigray, thousands of farmers have nothing to plant ahead of the rainy season as the crisis compounded by climate-fueled locust devastated their tools and livestock and pushed over 5 million people to extreme levels of hunger […]
> Gezahegn Kebede Gebrehana, Oxfam's Country Director in Ethiopia said: "Farming should begin now ahead of the rainy season in June [2021], but it has come to a total halt due to conflict and the absence of rain. Many farmers have no seeds to plant, and their oxen and tools were looted or destroyed in the conflict. Trade and market exchanges have stagnated as people fear a resurgence of fighting." More than 25% of the total production of Tigray was already destroyed in the last harvest, mostly by locust swarms. Most families have already depleted their food stocks. If this agricultural season is missed, the next harvest opportunity will not come for an additional 18 months.[556]

The Brookings Institute reported in May 2021 that: "According to both the U.N. and the Ethiopian government, at least 5.2 million people out of 5.7 million in the Tigray region are in need of emergency food assistance".[557]

In its *Tigray Region Humanitarian Update* of early June 2021, UNOCHA noted that "levels of food insecurity and malnutrition remain alarming. Screening of children for malnutrition has doubled during the reporting period, with more than 21,000 children screened, compared to nearly 11,000 a week earlier. Children aged 6-59 months identified with severe wasting accounted for 21 per cent, alarmingly above the 15 per cent prevalence threshold set by WHO".[558]

The Council on Foreign Relations reported in June 2021 that: "The man-made famine that the humanitarian community warned of for months is underway".[559]

In July 2021 the UN's top humanitarian official, Mark Lowcock, "accused Eritrean forces of 'trying to deal with the Tigrayan population by starving them'" in an interview he gave to Reuters.[560] During the same interview he further was reported as stating "Eritrean soldiers and local fighters are deliberately blocking supplies to the more than 1 million people in areas outside government control. 'Food is definitely being used as a weapon of war'".[561]

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[554] World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray: How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, 6 April 2021, *Executive Summary, p. V*
[555] World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray: How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, 6 April 2021, *Executive Summary, p. V*
[556] OXFAM , *Over 5 million people face extreme hunger as the Tigray conflict surges past six months*, 3 May 2021
[557] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Wildlife, Horn of Africa, and infrastructure updates*, 15 May 2021
[558] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Situation Report, Last updated: 3 Jun 2021*, 3 June 2021, *p. 2*
[559] Council on Foreign Relations, *As Policymakers Raise Alarm about Tigray Crisis, More Action is Needed*, 6 June 2021
[560] Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021
[561] Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021

According to a report published in July 2021 by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) it was noted that "there was clear evidence to support the Analysis Team findings that roughly 400,000 people are acutely food insecure in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe). Additionally, according to the IPC Analysis Team, there are around 2.2 million people in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), and 1.8 million people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) who are facing critical food insecurity conditions" located in Tigray and neighbouring zones of Amhara and Afar regions.[562] Similarly, the WHO reported that "'across Tigray, 4 million people—70 percent of the population— have high levels of acute food insecurity and need emergency assistance".[563]

Commenting on the issue of food accessibility, the World Food Programme (WFP) stated, also in July 2021, that "with almost 4 million people in need of emergency food assistance in Tigray, WFP needs to transport over 10,000 metric tons of food and 150,000 litres of fuel every week on behalf of the humanitarian sector".[564]

In July 2021, the International Crisis Group summarised the food situation since the start of the conflict as follows:

> The war has come at a staggering cost to Tigray's population. Fighting erupted around harvest time, worsening already chronic food shortages. Checkpoints set up by Eritrean and Ethiopian forces barring entry to areas under TDF control blocked aid for months. Partly due to international pressure, federal authorities eased some access restrictions in March. Since 1 May [2021], they, the World Food Programme and U.S. agencies have delivered food to over 3.7 million people, well below their target of 5.2 million. In early June, aid agencies said 353,000 people were experiencing "famine conditions". A multi-partner food security assessment warned in June that if the conflict intensified, hampering humanitarian aid, people in three zones – North-Western, Central and Eastern Tigray – would face famine, and an additional 2.1 million people in Tigray would be living in "emergency conditions", the step before "famine" level. The UN now estimates that 400,000 face "famine conditions".[565]

In the same month, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) noted that "conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, as well as below average rainfall in some parts of Ethiopia has disrupted the planting season. If planting continues to be disrupted, we could see catastrophic levels of hunger within months. Now that one of the main supply routes into Tigray has been destroyed, we are concerned with access to the 4.5 million people in need in the region. The risk of renewed desert locust outbreaks also pose a threat to the harvesting season in East Africa".[566]

According to a report by UNOCHA covering the first half of August 2021, "More than 5.2 million people across Tigray—more than 90 per cent of the region's population—require lifesaving assistance, including nearly 400,000 people already facing famine-like conditions"[567] – reports and allegations which the

[562] IPC, *Famine Review of the IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis: Conclusions and Recommendations for Tigray Region, Ethiopia*, July 2021 , *p. 1* and *3*
[563] WHO, *WFP sends first humanitarian passenger flight into Tigray, as famine edges closer in the region*, 22 July 2021
[564] WFP, *World Food Programme convoy reaches Tigray, many more are vital to meet growing needs*, 12 July 2021
[565] International Crisis Group, *As Ethiopian Troops Exit Tigray, Time to Focus on Relief*, 9 July 2021
[566] International Rescue Committee (IRC), *Conflict, erratic weather, economic crises and COVID -19 driving extreme food insecurity and humanitarian need in East Africa, warns IRC*, 12 July 2021
[567] UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia, Issue #11 2-16 August 2021*, 16 August 2021, *p. 1*

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has denied: "'There is no hunger in Tigray,' Mr Abiy told the BBC's Catherine Byaruhanga after he had voted [in Ethiopia's national election]. 'There is a problem and the government is capable of fixing that'".[568] Around the same time UNICEF also reported that ""four million people are in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity in Tigray and adjoining regions of Afar and Amhara".[569] With regards to those adjoining regions, UNOCHA stated in its briefing early September 2021 that "the spillover of the conflict in Tigray into neighbouring Afar and Amhara continues to affect civilians resulting in food insecurity, displacement, and the disruption of livelihoods. Some 1.7 million people are estimated to be facing food insecurity in Afar and Amhara".[570]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted with reference to a range of sources:

> USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) reported in May [2021] that some Tigrayans were experiencing famine conditions, and in June, the U.N. and aid partners released analysis indicating that over 350,000 people were facing catastrophic conditions and warning that the situation was expected to worsen.[85] After the Ethiopian government challenged that analysis, an international committee of humanitarian experts concluded in July [2021] that, despite data gaps, there was clear evidence to support an estimate of 400,000 people in catastrophic conditions.[86] USAID assesses that the number already in famine conditions may be up to 900,000 people.[87] The U.N. Secretary-General has described the situation
> as "hellish."[88]
> UNICEF reports that over 2.2 million children in northern Ethiopia are acutely food insecure and estimates a ten-fold increase in Tigray's annual caseload of children needing treatment for acute malnutrition over the next year.[89] UNICEF also reports that almost half of all pregnant and breastfeeding women in Tigray are acutely malnourished. Farmers in much of the region missed the planting season, and the next harvest is expected to be a fraction of normal yields.
>
> 85 A famine declaration requires evidence of that at least 20% of the population in an area faces an extreme lack of food, 30% of children are acute malnourishment in 30% of children, and a crude death rate over 2 deaths per 10,000 people in the affected area per day. Households may be facing famine conditions even if the area is not classified as in famine. Data limitations can constrain famine declarations. FEWS NET, "Many in Tigray face food security Emergency as national needs reach five-year high," May 17, 2021.
> 86 IPC Global Famine Review Committee, Famine Review of the POC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, July 2021.
> 87 USAID, Statement by Administrator Samantha Power on the Humanitarian Situation in Ethiopia, August 19, 2021.
> 88 "UN says humanitarian conditions 'hellish,'" AP, August 19, 2021.
> 89 UNICEF, Press Briefing, Geneva, July 30, 2021.[571]

In August 2021 UNICEF reported that "families across northern Ethiopia face emergency levels of malnutrition and food insecurity […] More than 100,000 children in Tigray could suffer from life-threatening severe acute malnutrition in the next 12 months".[572]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in September 2021 that: "According to the Tigray External Affairs Office – the foreign affairs department of the regional government in Ethiopia's war-torn northern Tigray province – at least 150 people starved to death in the province during

[568] BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Abiy Ahmed denies reports of hunger*, 21 June 2021
[569] UNICEF, *Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore on reported killing of hundreds of civilians, including children, in Afar, northern Ethiopia*, 9 August 2021
[570] UNOCHA, *Daily Noon Briefing Highlights: Ethiopia*, 1 September 2021
[571] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 14/15*
[572] UNICEF, *Conflict and crisis in northern Ethiopia*, 18 August 2021

August. International aid agencies have reported that at least 400,000 people are living in famine conditions in Tigray".[573]

In early October 2021 the World Food Programme's spokesperson, Tomson Phiri, told journalists that "'Up to seven million people across the three regions (Tigray, Amhara and Afar) are now in dire need of food assistance; 5.2 million people in Tigray and the rest are in Afar and in Amhara'".[574]

In the situation update published on 22 October 2021, UNOCHA remarked that:

> Food continues to be urgently needed in Tigray Region, with at least 5.2 million people in need of emergency food assistance, including over 400,000 people in famine-like conditions (IPC 5: 'catastrophic' level of food insecurity) and more than 4 million people - 70 per cent of the population – experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC 3 or above). As the conflict continues and humanitarian and commercial supplies remain sporadic and insufficient, more people could slide into famine like condition. [...] Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that a few summer-bred swarms of Desert Locust are likely to have formed in parts of Afar and adjacent areas of southeast Tigray and eastern Amhara regions, which will further affect the already dire food security situation.[575]

c. Access to Basic Services

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that:

> The war has left the regional governmental structures in shambles and caused physical damages to key infrastructural systems. This has led to serious gaps in provision of local administrative, safety and security as well as basic social services. Although the newly established Interim Administration is making significant strides, despite the complex challenges, there is still a long way to go in terms of ensuring the peace and security of the region and fully resuming local administrative services. The Interim Administration also deplores that in many of the region's areas water, electricity, transport, health and telecommunication supply are yet to be restored.
>
> […] Residents say that the ongoing conflict in some areas of the regions has limited day to day movements. It has also impeded the circulation of basic goods, provision of humanitarian assistance and slowed the full resumption of humanitarian aid transport services. The security situation is also hindering the deployment of technicians to repair damaged infrastructure, as a result of which public/government structures and basic social services have also not been able to resume operations.
>
> As at the time of release of this report, infrastructure services (water, electricity, telecommunications...) are yet to be fully restored in some parts of the region which means banking services have not fully resumed in parts of Tigray region. Some residents are, therefore, still not able to access their accounts.[576]

Considering access to communication services, Freedom House noted that during the reporting period of 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021 "in February 2021, a high-voltage power line was attacked, causing a

[573] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 269: Ethiopia, Guinea and Education Under Attack*, 8 September 2021
[574] UN News Centre, *Tigray: Food aid reaches Afar and Amhara, but situation still 'dire'*, 5 October 2021
[575] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 22 October 2021, *p. 4*
[576] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *pp. 1-2*

week-long power outage in Tigray that the government attributed to the TPLF. The Ethiopian government also enforced a month-long blackout in Tigray as the conflict escalated, exacerbating the effects of the connectivity disruption".[577]

In March 2021, an article in African Arguments on major challenges faced by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed observed that: "Reliable reports suggest there is neither security nor the rule of law in many parts of Tigray, and the government is still unable to provide basic services for most Tigrayans who remain, let alone those who fled into Sudan. Humanitarian support is beginning to reach some in Tigray, as the government has advertised, but not enough and not to all areas".[578]

ACDI/VOCA noted in May 2021 that "this [Tigray] conflict, which now has vaulted over international borders, is having a massive humanitarian impact in the northern region. Access to essential services, food, water, medicines, humanitarian aid, and cash remains disrupted".[579]

In its 'Daily Briefing' on 28 July 2021, UNOCHA mentioned that "fuel shortages have particularly affected health assistance, including vaccinations and other life-saving services, and risk disrupting access to safe water for up to 450,000 people. At least 200,000 litres of fuel (4-5 tankers) are needed every week to enable operations to continue".[580]

In July 2021 Human Rights Watch reported that:

> Since late June [2021], Ethiopian authorities have blocked roads into the region, and access is sporadic. Even now, electricity and fuel supplies are rapidly dwindling, communications and banking have been shut down, and access to cash is severely limited, including for aid agencies operating in the region. [….] The phone lines are once again down in the region. The internet has been cut off since the beginning of the conflict. No phone service makes it difficult for people to receive key information, like which areas may be safe, or where to go if they need medical help. People also can't get information about family and friends.[581]

UNOCHA provided an update on 22 October 2021 where it was noted that "since 11 October [2021], out of the seven main active food partners, for instance, at least three have already forced to cease food distribution. The other four will also have to cease distribution outside of Mekelle within one week if fuel is not received. Water trucking and dislodging by some partners have almost seized, as well as the distribution of WASH items".[582]

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[583] They found with regards to access to "essential public and private services after June 2021":

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[577] Freedom House, *Ethiopia: Freedom of the Net 2021*, 21 September 2021, *A. Obstacles to Access*
[578] African Arguments, *Ethiopia: PM Abiy's three big challenges*, 16 March 2021
[579] ACDI/VOCA, *Tackling food security COVID-19 and Armed Conflict in Ethiopia*, 20 May 2021
[580] UNOCHA, *Daily Noon Briefing Highlights-Ethiopia*, 28 July 2021
[581] HRW, *The Latest on the Crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 30 July 2021
[582] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 22 October 2021, *p.3*
[583] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography

> Several essential public and private services have not been (fully) operational since the outbreak of the conflict in November 2020. These services include but are not limited to banking and telecommunication services, including internet access. While occupying Tigray, the Ethiopian army and allies tried to render some basic services, at least in Mekelle […]
> Over the second half of June, the war entered a new phase. The Tigray Government regained control over most areas, roads and towns of the Region. On 28 June 2021, a unilateral ceasefire was declared by the Ethiopian Government. Unfortunately, as of that date, all banks were closed and all communication lines were blocked again (Map 21), returning to the situation at the beginning of the conflict in November 2020. In addition, VSAT equipment of multiple (I)NGOs in Mekelle and other towns was dismantled by the Ethiopian National Defence Forces while withdrawing143, and large amounts of money were taken from the banks by the withdrawing army, so that people cannot access cash and salaries cannot be paid to government employees. Some bank agencies reopened, but without any means of transferring money. People who have kept their economies as cash in their house have been encouraged by the regional authorities to deposit it in the bank, so that other people can withdraw small amounts.
> Simultaneously with the disruption of communication lines, the electricity supply was interrupted as well, even though it is necessary for urban water supply and many other services. Since 5 July [2021], power has been partly restored in Mekelle and other towns, via electricity produced at the Tekeze hydropower dam. Due to near-absence of power generation during the war, the reservoir of the Tekeze dam was nearly full, and important releases of excess water needed to take place. When such releases take place, no power can be generated due to specific characteristics of the hydropower plant.[584]

d. Medical Situation and COVID-19

In January 2021, UNHCR provided an update which noted that "the delivery of services including for the prevention of COVID-19 and the response in the four refugee camps in the Tigray Region have been greatly affected due to the ongoing insecurity".[585]

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that:

> An assessment carried out by the regional health bureau shows that the region's health facilities sustained physical damage and/or were looted including looting of ambulances and some health professionals are believed to have lost their lives in the context of the conflict.
> Some people seeking medical help are believed to have died because there were no ambulances to give them emergency medical aid or take them to hospitals. The health service workers who wished to return to their jobs have not been able to communicate with the bureau because of the disruption to telecom services. According to the health sector workers the Commission talked to, there are encouraging signs since mid-January 2021, as more and more workers are reporting to the health bureau to return to their duties.
> The health bureau has also informed the Commission that the health centres in Western, Eastern and Central Tigray are not currently under the Interim Administration. Competing administrative ownership

[584] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 59
[585] UNHCR, *COVID-19 and Operational Update*, 25 January 2021

> claims has led to uncertainties regarding management questions such as budget sources to pay employee salaries and procure medical provisions.
> The Commission's visits and additional information from the bureau also confirm that the health facilities in Mekelle and Adi Gudem are in a relatively better situation. On the other hand, information obtained from the Regional health bureau shows that the ongoing security situation, including in the surrounding areas, has made it difficult to ensure that the health facilities in Adwa, Axum and Shire resume their operations. It also indicates that the health professionals are either themselves in need of emergency humanitarian assistance or that others are themselves internally displaced, or that they are in difficulty because they have not received their salaries or accessed their bank accounts. Some humanitarian assistance has been provided to a certain number of health professions as far as circumstances permitted but parts of the region remain inaccessible as at the time of this report.
> The Regional health bureau also says that it has been able to reach only about 20% of its workforce as of first week of February 2021. The assessment mentioned earlier also shows that not more than 30% of the health facilities are operational as of the writing of this report. Although more efforts are underway in this regard, it will make the task of ensuring that health facilities resume their services if the over 90 Woreda administrations in the more than 7 zones of the region do not establish communication with the Interim Administration soon. The continued disruption to health services might further aggravate the problems of health service provision.
> Even before the war, tension between the federal and former regional government had led to budgetary suspension and hence medical supply shortages. Medical supplies and equipment, including expensive drugs stored in cooling systems have been spoiled for lack of electricity. Other medical supplies have been looted or taken, including by TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front] fighters. Children outside Mekelle and Adigrat are, as a result, not receiving critical compulsory early age vaccinations. Hospitals also reported that deaths occurred due to shortage of insulin and of an alarming lack of medication for chronic illnesses. Although ARV drug scarcity in Mekelle has been addressed to a certain extent, the lives of HIV patients in other parts of the region may be at risk because of the drug shortage.
> Some amount of drug supplies was sent to a number of areas, including Adwa, Axum and Shire but it is currently difficult to evaluate the current needs and use of the supplies sent so far. The epidemiological early warning structures and the systems that were in place to measure medical supply needs are also dismantled. The Regional health bureau fears that, coupled with the lack of clean water and electricity supply, the situation might lead to an epidemic outbreak in these areas and a higher risk of a malaria outbreak in the more arid ones.[586]

With regards to medical care in rural areas, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) observed in March 2021 that "while the situation for displaced people in Shire is difficult, it is even worse for people living in areas outside of Tigray's main towns. […] Most of the health facilities our teams have visited are not functional. Many were vandalized and looted and most staff have left. Most people in the region have not received any medical care since November [2020]".[587]

The same source further highlighted in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic:

> In the clinics that MSF has been running in the sites since January [2021], respiratory tract infections are the most common ailment. Is it COVID-19? Nobody knows for sure. There are no tests available, and there is no way for people to keep a safe distance from each other in the overcrowded sites; no way to buy masks or wash their hands frequently. Compared to the many other issues people are facing, COVID-19 is low on the list of people's worries. Diarrhoea is the second-biggest medical problem due to a lack of clean drinking water and sanitation and unhygienic living conditions. Patients with chronic diseases like diabetes or hypertension face some of the biggest challenges. They have not received any medication for months.

[586] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *pp. 3-4*
[587] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Tigray Crisis "We are suffering from a lack of medical care"*, 5 March 2021

> For some medications like insulin that need [to be kept cold] it is a big challenge—there was no electricity until the beginning of February [2021] in Shire, and it is still not reliable. In the majority of regions outside of Shire there is still no electricity.[588]

In April 2021, Médecins Sans Frontières stated that:

> Of 106 health facilities visited by Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders (MSF) teams between mid-December [2020] and early March [2021], nearly 70 percent had been looted and more than 30 percent had been damaged. […] In many health centres, such as in Debre Abay and May Kuhli in the northwest, teams found destroyed equipment, smashed doors and windows, and medicine and patient files scattered across floors. In Adwa hospital in central Tigray, medical equipment, including ultrasound machines and monitors, had been deliberately smashed. In the same region, the health facility in Semema was reportedly looted twice by soldiers before being set on fire, while the health centre in Sebeya was hit by rockets, destroying the delivery room.[589]

In May 2021 CNN reported on Axum:

> Many aid agencies are still being barred from the besieged city [of Axum], where one of the few hospitals operating for miles is running out of essential supplies, including oxygen and blood, humanitarian workers working in the region told CNN.[590]

The WHO in June 2021 noted that "due to disruption of services in primary health care facilities or lack of access due to security concerns, patients seeking emergency health care and childbirth services have been seeking care in facilities in Mekelle town".[591]

Regarding medical supplies, UNOCHA made a statement in September 2021 which noted that "delivery of health emergency kits for 2.3 million people, for example, is no longer feasible as supplies, cash and fuel are exhausted, while vaccination against measles, polio, and COVID-19 are unavailable, affecting over 1.5 million people".[592]

According to a situation report by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) covering the period 1 to 15 September 2021:

> Across Northern Ethiopia, there are an estimated 3.8 million people in need of accessing health care while the health facilities' capacity remains largely overstretched to provide services due to extensive damage and destruction of infrastructure and medical equipment, shortages of medical supplies and lack of health personnel. As reported by the DPFSPCO, 38 Health Posts, 10 Health Centers and 1 Hospital have been destroyed and looted as a result of the spillover of conflict into Afar region while in Amhara the health service has been interrupted across 12 hospitals and 119 health posts in areas bordering with Tigray. Assessments from the Tigray Regional Health Bureau and humanitarian partners on the ground highlight that out of the 200 assessed health facilities in the region only 96 (48%) are providing Prevention of

[588] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Tigray Crisis "We are suffering from a lack of medical care"*, 5 March 2021
[589] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Tigray crisis: Hospitals and healthcare centres deliberately targeted*, 15 April 2021. See also previous article published in March 2021: Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Widespread destruction of health facilities in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 15 March 2021
[590] CNN, *Eritrean troops disguised as Ethiopian military are blocking critical aid in Tigray*, 13 May 2021
[591] World Health Organization (WHO), *Health workers in Mekelle continue to provide services amid challenges*, 3 June 2021
[592] UNOCHA, *Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, on the operational constraints and de facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray*, 2 September 2021, *p. 1*

> Mother to-Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and 114 (57%) are providing delivery services, further compromising access to maternal and reproductive health services in the region.[593]

The situation report by UNFPA for the last two weeks of September 2021 noted:

> Across Northern Ethiopia, an estimated 3.8 million people need to access health care while the health facilities' capacity remains largely overstretched due to extensive damage and destruction of infrastructure and medical equipment, shortages of medical supplies and shortage of health personnel. According to Amhara DRMC, 14 hospitals, 153 Health Centers, 643 Health Posts and 23 ambulances were damaged in total with an additional 25 ambulances looted in 37 districts as a result of the ongoing hostilities in the region. In Afar, as reported by the DPFSPCO, 38 Health Posts, 10 Health Centers and 1 Hospital have been destroyed and looted as a result of the spillover of conflict into the region. Ongoing hostilities have induced the mass displacement of health service providers with an estimated 7,628 health personnel reported to be displaced from North Wollo, Waghmra and North Gondar zones (Amhara region). In Tigray, the health situation is of particular concern due to the lack of medicines and medical equipment while partners' capacity to sustain services is severely constrained due to the reduced flow of medical supplies, fuel and cash into the region.[594]

In September 2021 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) informed that it had "suspended all activities in the Amhara, Gambella and Somali regions of Ethiopia, as well as in the west and northwest of Tigray region, to comply with a three-month suspension order from the Ethiopian Agency for Civil Society Organizations (ACSO) on 30 July [2021] On receipt of the order, MSF undertook all required action to comply with ACSO's request while their investigation is ongoing, including putting all medical and humanitarian programmes into full suspension for a period of three months. At short notice, patients have been discharged from MSF clinics, leaving people in these locations with even further limited access to healthcare. A team of nearly 1,000 Ethiopian staff are also on standby at home, while nearly all international staff have left the country".[595] The same source further noted that "In the locations where MSF can no longer assist, in west and northwest Tigray, the situation remains extremely precarious and volatile for people, as well as for teams attempting to provide lifesaving assistance".[596]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas the ongoing conflict and humanitarian situation has made COVID-19 prevention and vaccination efforts impossible in many areas".[597]

In the neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar, the International Medical Corps noted in its situation report dated 20 October 2021 that "this expansion of fighting has created an additional 1.2 million IDPs and rendered 1,436 health facilities nonfunctional in the Amhara and Afar regions, including 271 health

[593] UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *Ethiopia response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis Situation Report, 1 to 15 September 2021*, 6 October 2021, *p. 3*
[594] UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *UNFPA Ethiopia response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis, Situation Report 16 to 30 September 2021*, 22 October 2021, *p.4*
[595] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Amid enormous needs in Ethiopia, MSF forced to suspend majority of healthcare*, 10 September 2021
[596] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Amid enormous needs in Ethiopia, MSF forced to suspend majority of healthcare*, 10 September 2021
[597] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *I*

centers, 1,143 health posts and 22 hospitals. Out of the affected health facilities, 163 health centers, 642 health posts and 14 hospitals have been destroyed and looted of equipment and supplies".[598]

e. Humanitarian Access

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in January 2021 that: "Sarah Hunter, Communications and Digital Media Officer at the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, said that, "Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government is using the delivery of aid as a weapon against its own people in Tigray, with catastrophic consequences. We call on all states with ties to Ethiopia to raise the cost of these actions by withholding military aid and financial support to the government until unrestricted humanitarian access is granted and alleged war crimes are properly investigated"".[599]

In a press release in January 2021 Oxfam stated that "the conflict in Tigray compounded by climate-fueled locust infestations and coronavirus has left millions of people in desperate need of humanitarian aid yet access to those affected continues to be restricted".[600]

African Arguments wrote in a February 2021 article on humanitarian access in Tigray that:

> Relief agencies are ready to help, but the Ethiopian government is refusing to allow full humanitarian access to Tigray. When the region was locked down at the start of the conflict, many expected that humanitarian assistance would be an exception. They were sadly proved wrong. International humanitarian law requires that parties to armed conflict allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief for civilians in need, but humanitarian access to Tigray remained completely blocked for almost a month after the conflict began. In December, the UN announced that an agreement had been reached with the Ethiopian government to allow "unimpeded, sustained and secure access" into the areas under its control. Despite this agreement, access remains highly constrained to date.
>
> Instead of allowing full access, the Ethiopian government introduced two separate approval processes for aid shipments and personnel. These approval processes have been slow, and many requests have been denied. So far, a majority of entry requests for relief workers have been denied too, making it incredibly difficult to distribute the very little aid that has been allowed in. An aid worker with more than 40 years of experience recently said that he had "rarely seen an aid response so impeded".[601]

At the end of March 2021, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) documented that "there are still rural areas in Tigray that neither MSF, nor any other organisation, has been able to reach; MSF can only assume that people living in these areas are also without access to healthcare".[602]

The U.S. Department of State raised its 'grave concern' in May 2021 of the "increasing number of confirmed cases of military forces blocking humanitarian access to parts of the Tigray region".[603]

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[598] International Medical Corps, *Ethiopia–Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report #20*, 20 October 2021, *p.1*

[599] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 236: Sudan, Ethiopia and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, 20 January 2021

[600] Oxfam , *Conflict compounded by Covid-19 and climate change pushes millions in Tigray to the brink* , 22 January 2021

[601] African Arguments, *Ethiopian government must allow full humanitarian access to Tigray*, 4 February 2021

[602] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Ethiopia: Tigray's cities fill with displaced people in need of aid*, 29 March 2021

[603] U.S. Department of State, *Continuing Atrocities and Denial of Humanitarian Access in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 15 May 2021

Also in May 2021, IOM noted that "many sections of the Tigray region's Northwestern, Central, Eastern and Southern zones remain out of reach to humanitarian partners due to continuing insecurity". [604]

The Brookings Institute reported on 15 May 2021 that:

> […] this week, the United Nations confirmed that Eritrean troops, often donning old Ethiopian military uniforms, were blocking the delivery of aid to the Tigray region. In fact, on May 13, U.N. spokesperson Stephane Dujarric confirmed that aid was not reaching its intended recipients: "Of the three million people targeted to receive emergency shelter and nonfood items, only 347,000 people, that is about 12 percent, had been reached since 3 May. With the start of the rainy season, our humanitarian colleagues warn that it is critical that aid agencies can provide minimal dignified shelter for the displaced," he said. According to both the U.N. and the Ethiopian government, at least 5.2 million people out of 5.7 million in the Tigray region are in need of emergency food assistance. [605]

In June 2021, UNICEF reported that "members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces entered our [UNICEF] office in Mekele, Tigray, Ethiopia today and dismantled our VSAT [Very Small Aperture Terminal needed for satellite communication] equipment".[606]

In its *Humanitarian Access Overview* released in July 2021, ACAPS noted that "as at 2 July [2021], movement into Tigray was restricted, communication was cut off, and humanitarian response was largely on hold […] the [humanitarian] response continues to be hampered by looting, diversion, and confiscation of aid. Checkpoints and curfews are leading to delays and obstruction of aid. Goods and services such as communication, fuel, electricity, and banking are intermittent or lacking".[607]

The East African reported in July 2021:

> A convoy bearing food for Ethiopia's war-hit Tigray came under attack at the weekend [..] dealing a further blow to aid distribution in a region threatened with famine. The 10-vehicle World Food Programme convoy was attacked on Sunday about 115 kilometres from the town of Semera "while attempting to move essential humanitarian cargo into Tigray region". [...] WFP has suspended movement of all convoys from Semera until the security of the area can be assured and the drivers can proceed safely." Semera is the capital of Afar region, which borders Tigray to the east.[608]

UNOCHA commented in July 2021 that "all roads into Tigray from the Amhara region remain closed due to restrictions and insecurity, with the only possible road through the Afar region inaccessible since 19 July [2021], following an attack on a WFP convoy". [609]

A report by the IPC published in July 2021 noted that:

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[604] IOM , *Over 1.7 Million People Displaced Due to Conflict Need Urgent Assistance in Northern Ethiopia*, 25 May 2021
[605] Brookings Institute, *Africa in the news: Wildlife, Horn of Africa, and infrastructure updates*, 15 May 2021
[606] UNICEF, *Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore on obstruction of UNICEF humanitarian action in Mekele, Ethiopia*, 28 June 2021
[607] ACAPS, *Humanitarian Access Overview*, July 2021, *p. 7*
[608] The East African, *Food aid convoy headed for Ethiopia's Tigray attacked*, 20 July 2021
[609] UNOCHA, *Daily Noon Briefing Highlights-Ethiopia*, 28 July 2021

> the Western zone and the Northern part of woredas bordering Eritrea remain mostly inaccessible. In the Southern zone, there is limited access to the populations located in the woredas bordering the Amhara region […]
> Besides the previously accessible, now unusable, routes used to access Tigray, the protocols set up for the approval of humanitarian supplies and personnel entering Tigray are a major impediment to a much needed regular and sustained access into the region. Reports of humanitarian vehicles and personnel being searched and temporarily held constitute another significant constraint to the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance. Additionally, Mekelle airport has been shut down and flights have been suspended for weeks, thereby impeding movements of humanitarian staff and supplies into Tigray.[610]

At the end of July 2021 Human Rights Watch reported that "after the government's unilateral ceasefire declaration, humanitarian workers said that roads, notably through the neighboring Amhara region, were blocked off. On July 1 [2021] a bridge you have to cross to enter central Tigray was destroyed and a convoy of 29 trucks carrying food aid was forced to turn back. One aid convoy made it into Tigray two weeks ago but another was attacked ten days ago in the Afar region. Another convoy is currently blocked in Afar awaiting government clearance".[611]

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[612] They found that:

> Considering the terrain accessibility (Map 3), the pre-war population figures at woreda level and the number of internally displaced people (see section 5.3 and Map 16), we estimate that in early June 2021, only 32% of the Tigrayan population was living in areas that were fully accessible to humanitarian organisations (i.e. the towns and surroundings of Shire, Aksum, Adwa, Adigrat, Wukro, Mekelle and Alamata). Of this 32%, nearly half of the people originatesfrom other areas, and hence are fully dependent on aid. This also left 68% of the population in partially accessible and hard-to-reach areas.[613]

In mid-August 2021, The Africa Report reported that "there has been limited movement of aid vehicles towards Tigray as violence intensifies in Afar". [614]

The Guardian reported in early August 2021 that "the Ethiopian government has suspended the work of two international aid organizations (NRC [Norwegian Refugee Council] and MSF) for three months, including in the conflict-hit Tigray region, accusing them of spreading misinformation".[615] Reporting on the same suspension, The New Humanitarian reported that "Several aid officials working on the Tigray response told The New Humanitarian they were unsure how to interpret the timing of the suspensions

[610] IPC , *Famine Review of the IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis: Conclusions and Recommendations for Tigray Region, Ethiopia*, July 2021, *p. 3* and *5*
[611] Human Rights Watch, *The Latest on the Crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 30 July 2021
[612] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography
[613] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 41
[614] The Africa Report , *Ethiopia: Food insecurity high as Tigray conflict spreads to Amhara and Afar*, 14 August 2021
[615] The Guardian, *Ethiopia suspends aid groups for 'spreading misinformation'* , 6 August 2021

but believe the organisations have been singled out either for their humanitarian work or for running advocacy campaigns the government didn't like".[616]

According to reporting by UNOCHA covering the first half of August 2021, "In the face of increasing conflict and increasing difficulty getting aid into northern Ethiopia, the Under-Secretary-General said that 'we need to change the circumstances that have led to the slow movement of aid – we need the conflict to stop'".[617]

In its August 2021 *Crisis Watch Digest*, the International Crisis Group reported that: "The U.S. development agency (USAID) accused the federal government of creating food shortages in Tigray by obstructing humanitarian operations, and blamed Tigray forces for looting aid warehouses in Amhara region".[618]

In its bulletin covering the period 16 August to 5 September 2021, UNOCHA noted that the "displaced persons in Afar and Amhara have started receiving little humanitarian assistance".[619]

In a report covering 1 to 15 September 2021, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) noted that "humanitarian actors' capacity and presence in both [Tigray and Afar] regions to deliver aid remains limited within the government-led scale up efforts due to active confrontations, insecurity, access constraints and lack of funds to secure supplies to the humanitarian response".[620]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that:

> Humanitarian access has been a problem throughout the conflict. Aid agencies say they now have access to deliver assistance inside Tigray, but their ability to bring aid supplies into the region is extremely restricted. Without sufficient supplies, the U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator warned in early September [2021] that the humanitarian situation was set to worsen dramatically[621]

The same source, referencing its information through a number of sources, further specified:

> The humanitarian response to the crisis in Tigray has been constrained not only by armed actors, but by bureaucratic impediments. A temporary ceasefire declared by the Ethiopian government in late June 2021 has not improved the humanitarian outlook: U.N. officials have since described Tigray as under a de facto humanitarian aid blockade.[9] The government has cut electricity, telecommunications, and banking services for the region and blocked commercial transit, and aid agencies face extensive hurdles in moving supplies and personnel into Tigray.[10]
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> 9 U.N. Security Council, Remarks by U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, August 26, 2021; U.N., Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia Grant Leaity, September 2, 2021.
> 10 "EU decries Ethiopia 'siege of Tigray,'" AFP, July 6, 2021; ICG, "The Dangerous Expansion of Ethiopia's Tigray War," July 30, 2021; Declan Walsh, "This Ethiopian Road is a lifeline for millions. Now it's blocked." New York Times,

[616] The New Humanitarian, *Tigray aid response hit by suspensions, blockade*, 9 August 2021
[617] UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia, Issue #11 2-16 August 2021*, 16 August 2021, *p. 1*
[618] International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch Digest August 2021: Ethiopia*, Unknown
[619] UNOCHA , *Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia Issue 12* , 5 September 2021, *p. 2*
[620] UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *Ethiopia response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis Situation Report*, 1 to 15 September 2021, *p. 3*
[621] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 2*

July 29, 2021; Philip Kleinfeld, "Tigray response hit by suspensions, blockade," New Humanitarian, August 9, 2021.[622]

UNOCHA's statement in September 2021 by its Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, remarked that "there is only one road via Afar that humanitarian partners can use but logistical and bureaucratic impediments including long delays for clearance of humanitarian supplies render passage extremely difficult".[623] In a UN news article published on the same day it reported "Since 12 July [2021], less than 10 per cent of the trucks that should have reached desperate populations affected by months of fighting, have managed to get through, according to the UN aid coordination office OCHA. It noted that the only access route to Tigray, via Afar region using the Semera-Abala corridor, has been inaccessible since the 22nd of August [2021]. Humanitarian partners estimate that 100 trucks of food, non-food items, and fuel need to enter Tigray every day to sustain an adequate response".[624]

On 15 September 2021, the Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia stated that:

> The war that began in the northern part of the country in the Tigray region has spread to the neighboring Afar and Amhara regions causing destruction and death of innocent civilians. In these locations, particularly around Northern Wollo and Wag Himra, the displacement of citizens has led to severe humanitarian crises. The problem has exacerbated since the area was in a recovery state after being hit by a natural disaster. According to reliable sources in the area, we have learned that thousands of children, elders, and women are under severe crisis and in need of urgent food aid and other emergency assistance. In addition to this, in areas that are under the control of TPLF looting and destruction of property has made citizens unable to access adequate food and medical assistance and worsened the conditions.[625]

International Crisis Group's *Crisis Watch Digest* of September 2021 noted that "In late September [2021], Addis expelled seven senior UN officials, citing 'meddling'".[626] Covering September 2021, the same source in its *Crisis Watch* noted: "UN humanitarian agency 2 Sept [2021] reported less than 10% of required aid had entered Tigray region since mid-July [2021]".[627]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas only 10 % of humanitarian supplies for the embattled Tigray region have been allowed to enter the area over the past month; whereas 100 trucks are needed daily to provide sufficient humanitarian supplies to Tigray; whereas since 12 July 2021, only 525 trucks have entered Tigray because of closed borders, controlled access by armed forces, the destruction of infrastructure such as bridges, insecurity for drivers, a severe lack of fuel and cash to return to the supply points and extended delays in searching and clearing humanitarian supplies".[628]

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[622] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 6*

[623] UNOCHA *Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, on the operational constraints and de facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray*, 2 September 2021, *p. 1*

[624] UN News Centre, *Tigray aid situation worsening by the day, warn UN humanitarians*, 2 September 2021

[625] Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, *The cases of innocent citizens in war-torn parts of the country need immediate attention*, 15 September 2021

[626] International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch Digest September 2021: Ethiopia*, 14 October 2021

[627] International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch*, September 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]

[628] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *J*

The same source further noted: "whereas on 30 September 2021, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared seven UN staff members (from UNICEF, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNOCHA) *personae non gratae* in Ethiopia".[629]

On 22 October 2021, UNOCHA stated that "Inside Tigray, some areas in Eastern Zone remain inaccessible. In Tigray, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate due to the continued restrictions imposed on the delivery of humanitarian supplies into the region via the route through Afar (Semera-Abala-Mekelle)". [630]

f. Attacks on aid workers

In mid-December 2020 ACLED reported that "Ethiopian forces shot at and then detained UN staff near Sheraro, after they refused to stop at two checkpoints".[631] Similarly, Amnesty International reported in December 2020:

> Amnesty International is also concerned that the lives of humanitarian workers are at risk in the region, following confirmation that four aid workers have been killed since the conflict began. Last month, three Danish Refugee Council security guards were killed, and a member of staff of the International Rescue Committee also died in the Hitsats refugee camp. The circumstances of their death, and who was responsible, remains unknown.
> On 7 December [2020], a vehicle carrying UN security staff was shot at by members of the Ethiopian security forces close to the Shimelba refugee camp in Tigray. On 9 December [2020], a government spokesperson said the vehicle was shot at because it was travelling to the area without appropriate clearance from the Ethiopian government, and also claimed the vehicle had failed to stop at two security checkpoints.[632]

In its situation report dated 3 June 2021 covering the period from 22 to 28 May 2021, UNOCHA noted that "since the start of the conflict, nine aid workers have been killed in Tigray, all Ethiopian nationals. The latest incident occurred on 28 May [2021] when a humanitarian worker working with an INGO was killed together with the Mayor of Adigrat town and another victim during an attack outside the Government building in Adigrat Town, Eastern Zone".[633]

At the end of June 2021, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia condemned "in the strongest term the killing of three Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff members nearby Abi Adi in the Tigray region. The three staff members were murdered while implementing their humanitarian mission to alleviate the suffering of the local population affected by the conflict".[634]

In its report dated July 2021, ACAPS noted that "Humanitarian responders face serious security incidents. Since November 2020, at least 12 aid workers have been killed in the [Tigray] region".[635]

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[629] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *P*
[630] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report*, 22 October 2021, *p.3*
[631] ACLED, *Regional Overview: Africa -12 December 2020*, 16 December 2020
[632] Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: International humanitarian aid must be allowed into Tigray refugee camps amid food shortage warning*, 11 December 2020
[633] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update*, 3 June 2021 , *p. 2*
[634] UN Ethiopia, *Statement on the killing of three MSF aid workers in the Tigray Region*, 26 June 2021
[635] ACAPS, *Humanitarian Access Overview*, July 2021, *p. 7*

An interview with Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa director Laetitia Bader discussed updates on the conflict in Tigray at the end of July 2021. Bader reported that: "To make matters worse, humanitarian workers have been threatened and attacked. Since the conflict began, 12 aid workers have been killed, including three Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) staff killed in late June. Ethiopian defense forces entered and raided UNICEF offices in late June, dismantling critical communication equipment. Warring parties, notably Eritrean government forces, have deliberately attacked and occupied medical facilities. Over the last three weeks, social media influencers have repeatedly made false online claims against aid workers, putting them at greater risk".[636]

In a UN Security Council session at the end of August 2021, the United States Mission to the United Nations remarked that "one humanitarian worker was killed by TPLF forces in Amhara region last week [August 2021], and humanitarians have observed the looting of NGO offices and warehouses by the TPLF, with the supplies being taken into Tigray".[637]

In a press release by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia *ad interim* in early September 2021, it was reported that:

> The total number of humanitarians killed in Tigray since the outset of the conflict has climbed from 12 to 23 as reports of the murder of an additional 11 aid workers from the Relief Society of Tigray (REST, an NGO based in Tigray) have now emerged.[..] There was a total of 10 trucks from REST that were commandeered by armed forces in the week of 22 June 2021, from which 5 of the drivers returned safely, 2 were killed in separate incidents and 3 are still missing and unaccounted for. Information was also received confirming an additional 9 fatalities which had not yet been reported, dating back to January.[638]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that:

> Threats and violence against aid workers have increased over the course of the conflict, during which at least 23 aid workers in Tigray have been killed. Drivers transporting aid cargo have reported increasing harassment, threats, and looting along the route to Tigray. U.N. officials have warned that accusations by Ethiopian authorities alleging that aid workers are biased or "arming the other side" are dangerous; USAID Administrator Power has called rhetoric from Ethiopian officials against humanitarians "troubling and harmful.".[639]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that:

> Whereas targeting aid workers is considered a war crime and a crime against humanity; whereas three staff members of Médecins Sans Frontières were killed on 25 June 2021 while delivering aid to those needing it most; whereas 23 aid workers have been killed in the region since November 2020; whereas on 22 June 2021, Ethiopian Government forces had blocked ambulances from responding to an airstrike at a market in Togoga; whereas the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that on 17 June 2021, Eritrean Government forces had stopped and assaulted a vaccination team in Asgede Woreda; whereas the looting of health facilities is reported to be recurrent in Tigray;

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[636] Human Rights Watch, *The Latest on the Crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 30 July 2021

[637] United States Mission to the United Nations, *Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Ethiopia and the Situation in Tigray*, 26 August 2021

[638] UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, *HC a.i. statement on the killing of 23 aid workers in the Tigray region since the start of the crisis*, 2 September 2021

[639] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 17*

whereas government forces and officials have harassed and threatened humanitarian organisations and national health providers which support survivors of sexual violence.[640]

VI. Displacement within Ethiopia and beyond

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[641] The "26 maps in this atlas provide detailed information at the scale of districts (woredas) or sub-districts (tabiyas). Besides background information related to administrative divisions, social and natural resources - locations of internally displaced people, massacres and civilian casualties receive due attention. Humanitarian access and needs are particularly addressed; official data on humanitarian aid distribution are mapped, and contrasted to ground evidence related to such distributions. The final outlook, links up the emergency and famine conditions in Tigray to the current crop status and to the blockade and siege of the region".[642] In particular the following maps may be of interest:

- Map 10 (p. 30); Reported conflict incidents from November 2020 to September 2021, including battles, ambushes, air strikes, drone attacks and shelling;
- Map 11 (p. 31): Approximate territorial control on 31 August 2021;
- Figure 4.1 (. 33) Graphic representation of fully documented civilian casualties, by the end of September 2021;
- Map 13 (p. 37): Heatmap of civilian casualties and massacres in the Tigray War between 4th November 2020 and 28th September 20201;
- Map 14 (p. 38): Occurrence of massacres in the Tigray War up to 3rd October 2021 and Annex A (p. 89-95): Chronological overview of the 260 reported massacres in the Tigray War between November 2020 and September 2021;
- Map 15 (p. 40): Restricted humanitarian access due to the ongoing conflict (as of 31st July 2021)
- Map 16 (p. 46): Sites with IDPs due to the Tigray War (November 2020 to June 2021);
- Map 22 (p. 68): Current (June 2021) and projected (January 2022) food security outcomes in Tigray.[643]

a. Internal Displacement of people from Tigray and adjacent regions in 2021

i. Overview

Early January 2021 Reuters reported that "about 2.2 million people have been displaced within Ethiopia's Tigray region since fighting erupted there in November [2020] with about half fleeing after their homes were burned down".[644]

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[640] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *D* and *K*

[641] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography

[642] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, *p. 1*

[643] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, [*various pages]*

In early March 2021, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that "tens of thousands of people have arrived in Shire, a large town in Northwest Tigray, since fighting broke out in November [2020]. Most are from Western Tigray. The majority stay with the host community, but almost 20,000 people live in informal sites".[645]

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary of internal displacement of people from Tigray:

> Accurate figures regarding internal displacement after the commencement of the conflict on 4 November 2020 in Tigray are not available, and as of 28 February 2021, humanitarian access in Tigray was still impeded by insecurity in areas such as Southern and South Eastern Tigray, and Mekelle.[171] Existing reports show that, between 4-20 November 2020, 'several thousands' of people' had already been internally displaced in Tigray.[172] Meanwhile, on 15 December 2020, UN OCHA reported that 'thousands of people living along the Amhara-Tigray and Afar-Tigray border areas' had been affected by fighting, while some 63 600 people had been displaced into Amhara and Afar region.[173] In January 2021, UN OCHA quoted figures released by the Tigray Emergency Coordination Center (ECC), of some 2.2 million people displaced by the conflict.[174] However, more recent estimates of 8 February 2021, were of around 521 200 IDPs 'mainly concentrated in Northern Woredas of Western Tigray (493 300)', while some 23 680 IDPs were recorded in Afar region, and
> 3 850 in Amhara region.[175] […]
>
> 171 UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 28 Feb 2021, url, p. 3
> 172 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia Issue #19 2 Nov. – 20 Nov. 2020, 20 November 2020, url, p. 1
> 173 UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Access Snapshot - Tigray region, 15 December 2020, url
> 174 UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 6 January 2021, url, p. 2
> 175 UNHCR, Tigray Situation Update, 8 February 2021, url, p. 2 […][646]

According to IOM in May 2021, "the assessment, conducted between 01-22 April [2021], shows that there are some 1,645,944 IDPs in Tigray region, another 48,420 in Afar region and 20,812 in Amhara region. [...] The highest concentration of displaced persons is in Shire, where 575,115 IDPs are residing in overcrowded collective shelters, including schools, within the host community and in open spaces. The majority are from Western and Northwestern Tigray. Other urban areas with high displacement concentrations included Adwa (188,910), Sheraro (165,223), and Mekele Zone (200,909)".[647]

According to highlighted statistics, originally sourced by UNHCR, IDMC, and IOM and published by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies in June 2021: "Ethiopia saw the largest jump in size of its forcibly displaced population in the past year with an estimated 1.8 million people dislocated due to the conflict in Tigray".[648]

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[644] Reuters, *Over 2 million people displaced by conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 6 January 2021
[645] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Tigray Crisis "We are suffering from a lack of medical care"*, 5 March 2021
[646] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.3.3 Displacement*
[647] IOM , *Over 1.7 Million People Displaced Due to Conflict Need Urgent Assistance in Northern Ethiopia*, 25 May 2021
[648] African Center for Strategic Studies, *32 Million Africans Forcibly Displaced by Conflict and Repression*, 17 June 2021

In a recent assessment carried out between June and July 2021 by IOM's *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, it was reported that "through this assessment, a total of 2,105,387 (449,492 households) have been identified to be displaced across 377 sites in Tigray, Afar and Amhara regions thus far. However, it is important to state that this does not reflect the total number of persons displaced due to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis as inaccessibility and insecurity continue to pose challenges to the data collection".[649]

Commenting on the issue of displacement, UNHCR stated in July 2021 that "close to 2 million people are estimated to have been internally displaced by the conflict in Tigray, now in its eighth month. Hundreds of thousands of those forced to flee have sought refuge in the region's main cities. Some are staying within communities while others are sheltering in overcrowded public sites like schools".[650]

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[651] They found that:

> with an estimated total of 1.95 million people, nearly one out of three Tigrayans is expected to have been internally displaced. In comparison, the number of IDPs in the whole of Ethiopia was estimated at 1.8 million people for the year 2020 […].
> As of the end of June 2021, the location of nearly 1,950,000 internally displaced people is known, of which 76% was living in the towns of Shire, Mekelle, Sheraro, Adwa and Aksum (ranked in decreasing order) based on confidential sources – according to the Household Level Intention Survey, the towns of Shire, Mekelle, Sheraro, Adwa and Aksum are hosting 93% of the surveyed IDPs. The remaining 24% of IDPs was living in other Tigrayan towns like Adigrat, Adi Daero, Endabaguna, Abi Adi, Selekleka, and several other towns (e.g. Koneba, Aba'ala, Dalol) in the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions (Map 16). Additionally, more than 60,000 people were living in refugee camps in Sudan (e.g. in Hamdayet, Um Raquba and Tunaydbah).[652]

In a press release in August 2021, the UN Secretary General remarked that "more than 2 million people have been displaced from their homes, and millions more are in immediate need of life-saving humanitarian assistance, including food, water, shelter and health care".[653]

According to reporting by UNOCHA covering the first half of August 2021:

> While Tigray remains to be the epicentre of the current crises in Ethiopia with huge humanitarian needs still unmet, there are growing needs as well as protracted emergencies in other areas of the country. Needs are increasing in Amhara and Afar as the Tigray conflict spills over into these regions.[654]

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[649] IOM/ DTM, *Ethiopia — National Displacement Report 9 (June — July 2021),* 24 September 2021, *p. 4*
[650] UNHCR , *Displaced nurses provide vital health care to others displaced in Ethiopia's Tigray,* 5 July 2021
[651] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography
[652] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 42
[653] United Nations, *Humanitarian Catastrophe Unfolding Before Our Eyes, Secretary-General Tells Security Council, Warning Ethiopia's Youth Will Be Ultimate Casualties,* 26 August 2021
[654] UNOCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin: Ethiopia, Issue #11 2-16 August 2021*, 16 August 2021, *p. 2*

Early September 2021, UNHCR reported that "in addition to some 2.1 million internally displaced people in Tigray, there are also 250,000 internally displaced people in Amhara region and 112,000 in Afar region according to the local authorities and the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)".[655] Also reporting on the spill-over effect of the Tigray conflict, in a press briefing on 1 September 2021 the Associate Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General remarked that "our humanitarian colleagues also warn that the spillover of the conflict in Tigray into neighbouring Afar and Amhara continues to affect civilians resulting in food insecurity, displacement, and the disruption of livelihoods".[656]

UNOCHA's humanitarian response bulletin covering 15 August to 5 September 2021 noted that "the number of displaced communities from Afar and Amhara Regions is rapidly increasing since the Tigray conflict spiraled into several areas Afar and Amhara Regions. More than 450,000 people have been displaced from Afar and Amhara according to the latest statement by the Federal Government".[657] According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) "According to Afar regional authorities, more than 140,000 people were displaced in the region by the end of August [2021]. In Amhara Region, the Disaster Risk Management Office reports that over 233,000 people were recently displaced in Dessie and Kombolcha in South Wello Zone".[658]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that:

> Whereas the Tigray region is home to 100 000 internally displaced people and 96 000 Eritrean refugees; whereas it has several large refugee camps in which, according to NGOs, 44 % of those living there are children; whereas as of July 2021, the conflict has displaced around 1,9 million people in Tigray […] whereas more than two million people have been displaced from their homes; whereas nearly 76 500 people in Afar and an estimated 200 000 in Amhara are reported to have been displaced after Tigrayan forces moved into these regions; whereas 55 000 Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers are reported to be seeking shelter in Sudan.[659]

On the 3rd November 2021, "A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Human Rights Office has found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in Tigray have, to varying degrees, committed violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, some of which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity".[660] The full report report can be accessed here.[661] With regards to 'Forcible Displacement of civilians', the report found:

> Thousands of civilians have been forced to flee as a result of killings, rapes, destruction and looting of properties, fear of reprisal attacks, and as a result of ethnic and identity-based attacks, which was

[655] UNHCR, *Ethiopia Operation – Tigray Update* , 6 September 2021, *p. 2*
[656] United Nations, *Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General*, 1 September 2021
[657] UNOCHA , *Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia Issue 12* , 5 September 2021, *p. 2*
[658] UNFPA, *Ethiopia response to the Northern Ethiopia Crisis Situation Report*, 1 to 15 September 2021, *p. 2*
[659] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021, *B* and *L*
[660] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[661] See Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties*, 3 November 2021

> particularly the case in Western Tigray. The forced displacement of ethnic Amharas from their homes by the Tigrayan Samri youth group in Mai Kadra, followed by the widespread retaliatory displacement perpetrated against ethnic Tigrayans by the ASF, Amhara militia, and the Fano were not carried out to protect the security of the victims nor justified by military imperatives as required by international law. The JIT has reasonable grounds to believe that forced displacements were committed on a broad scale and without lawful justification, in violation of conventional and customary international humanitarian law. Such acts may also amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.[662]

ii. Food Security Situation

Amongst the sources consulted limited information was located specifically highlighting the food security situation of IDPs. For reporting on the general food security situation for the overall population in Tigray see section V., *a. Overview* and *b. Food Security Situation*.

UNHCR reported on 21 January 2021 in an update on the Tigray region on the conditions of IDPs who were using schools to shelter: "the greatest challenge among the IDPs is their increasing level of food insecurity".[663]

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that:

> The Commission has visited eight schools in Mekelle city which have currently been turned into temporary shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Commission has learned that the provision of basic services in these IDP shelters is inadequate. IDPs have told the Commission about shortage of safe drinking water and food in these IDP centers.
> […] A. Kisanet School
> Most of the IDPs sheltered in Kisanet school were residents of Humera and Wolkait before their displacement and came to Mekelle city on foot. Of the 510 IDPs in the school at the time of the EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] visit, 270 are women and 71 are children between the ages of 1 and 12. There are at least six unaccompanied children in the shelter.
> […] Most of the IDPs have received mattresses, 30 kilograms of flour and two months' worth of cooking oil and other household items from various organizations and individuals.
> […] They explain that the school has a water tanker but with dirty water and they have to rely on the support of the neighborhood residents who supplied them with clean tap water. But the tap water supply is not regular and the IDPs often have to resort to drinking the non-potable water from the tanker.[664]

iii. Access to Basic Services

Amongst the sources consulted limited information was located specifically highlighting the access to basic services of IDPs. For reporting on the general lack of access to basic services for the overall population in Tigray see section V., *a. Overview* and *c. Access to Basic Services*.

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[662] UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Tigray conflict: Report calls for accountability for violations and abuses by all parties*, 3 November 2021
[663] UNHCR, *Ethiopia Operation - Tigray Update; Tigray Situation Update; 21 January 2021*, 21 January 2021, *p. 3*
[664] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *p. 7*

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>
> A. Kisanet School
>
> Most of the IDPs sheltered in Kisanet school were residents of Humera and Wolkait before their displacement and came to Mekelle city on foot. Of the 510 IDPs in the school at the time of the EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] visit, 270 are women and 71 are children between the ages of 1 and 12. There are at least six unaccompanied children in the shelter.
>
> The IDPs, from Humera and Wolkait, transited through the towns of Adabai and Rawian on their way to Mekelle. Most of the IDPs reported that they left their homes following “shelling of the Humera town by heavy artillery” and stayed at Adabai and Rawina hoping they would “return back to their homes as soon as the war ended." They eventually “chose to come to Mekelle instead of going back to Humera". Many of them report suffering from pain in the leg area from the long journey.
>
> An IDP told EHRC that "they reported their arrival to the police a few days after their arrival in Mekelle, and the town’s businessmen secured permission for them to be sheltered at the school." It is further reported that "residents of Mekelle have been providing assistance to the IDPs for more than a month but that, currently, they are receiving some assistance from various aid agencies and the government."
>
> The IDPs also stated that they left without even carrying their identification cards (IDs). This has restricted their movement to and from the shelters as it is expected to carry ID cards in the city and law enforcement officials do random identification card checks. The IDPs have therefore asked to be provided with IDP identification papers on the basis of other documentation in their possession or witnesses.
>
> […] Although the IDPs have set up their own representative committees and assigned responsibilities to coordinate required support, they report they do not have information yet on mechanisms to coordinate with the government authorities.
>
> Most of the IDPs have received mattresses, 30 kilograms of flour and two months’ worth of cooking oil and other household items from various organizations and individuals.
>
> The regional health bureau has distributed “medical cards” allowing them to get free service in local health centres. But IDPs report that there were not enough medical cards for everyone. They told the Commission of a diarrhea outbreak in the shelter since last Christmas which has worsened due to lack of clean drinking water. They also say they do not have the means to buy medication that health centers cannot provide for free. They explain that the school has a water tanker but with dirty water and they have to rely on the support of the neighborhood residents who supplied them with clean tap water. But the tap water supply is not regular and the IDPs often have to resort to drinking the non-potable water from the tanker.
>
> Women IDPs in the shelter have not received adequate sanitary items. There are 40 people on average sleeping in one room. The IDPs report rooms are assigned on a voluntary basis and that “as far as possible, relatives or people who know each other stay together in a commonly shared room.” They say they fear for their safety because the rooms do not have locks.
>
> The IDPs also say they have not been able to connect with their families who have been displaced to Shire and other towns or fled to Sudan. They have told the Commission that they have sought the help of International Red Cross Society (ICRC) to relocate their lost family members.
>
> […] B. IDPs Sheltered at Ethio-China School

> The Ethio-China school became a temporary shelter for IDPs in mid-January 2021. Most of the displaced persons here are from Central Zone. The IDP Committee coordinating aid efforts for IDPs at the school is divided into six coordinating groups named Temben, Weri Lehe, Adwa, Mereb Lehe, Ahferom, and Axum.
> […] The monitoring team has noted that IDPs at the center have received some assistance from the government and other institutions. The IDPs here have also been provided with a "medical card" for free medical care. There is a shortage of potable water here too. Many of the IDPs in this temporary shelter told EHRC that they did not want to return to their former homes until the security situation in the areas improves.
> The Commission also noted that pregnant women, infants, and nursing mothers were not provided with adequate specialized assistance in any of the camps visited.[665]

Covering events of 11 January to 24 January 2021, UNOCHA reported that "Displaced people at Kissanet School in Mekele explain[ed] their stories":

> Since the Tigray conflict started in November 2020, tens of thousands of civilians left their homes in different directions fleeing shelling and heavy fighting. While more than 60,000 people crossed borders to Sudan, others were displaced internally within Tigray. Kissanet School in Mekele city is one of the sites hosting people internally displaced. Humanitarian partners have provided assistance to the 587 people, including408 children, sheltered there. Food rations were distributed in December for two-months. There are few sanitation facilities on the site and IDPs were initially supported by water tracking from World Vision International and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society. Those people sick are allowed free access to health care in the Ider Referral Hospital, but there were no medical supplies, and IDPs did not have the resources to purchase them. Huge protection concerns have been reported by people who have come from various places in Tigray, mainly Humera and Danesha (Western) and from Shire and Shiraro (Central), and Hawzen (East) areas.[666]

In February 2021, the UNOCHA published a report which covered the issue of the use of classrooms for people who require shelter: "During a focus group discussion with internally displaced people in Mekelle, shelter and household critical items, including kitchen utensils, jerry cans, blankets, mats, and other non-food items (NFI) were identified as a top priority by people who were uprooted by the conflicts. The need for shelter and NFIs is expected to increase further in the coming weeks, as the Regional Government's plan to reopen schools will require urgent solutions for people currently hosted in classrooms".[667]

Similarly, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) published a report in March 2021, which documented living conditions for people living in classrooms in schools and on the campus of Shire University in Shire, North West Tigray:

> Tens of thousands of people have arrived in Shire, a large town in the zone of North West Tigray, since fighting broke out in November [2020]. Most are from the zone of West Tigray. The majority stay with the host community, but almost 20,000 people live in informal sites. They sleep in cramped and often unhygienic conditions in the classrooms of several schools, as well as on the campus of Shire University.
> […] Living conditions in the sites are rough. Dozens of people sleep in each of the former classrooms of local schools, between desks and chairs. Some have received mattresses and blankets from the community while many others just sleep on the floor or on plastic sheeting. […] Diarrhoea is the second-biggest medical problem, due to a lack of clean drinking water and sanitation, and unhygienic living conditions. We have built latrines in a displaced people's site in a primary school and carry out regular

[665] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *pp. 7-8*
[666] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia Humanitarian Bulletin Issue #2 11 - 24 Jan. 2021*, 30 January 2021
[667] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 4 February 2021* , 5 February 2021, *p. 5*

> water trucking. Our teams have also rehabilitated a large toilet and shower building on the university campus. Water supply is not a just an issue in the displaced people's sites, but in the whole of Shire town. […] "We all have trouble sleeping," says 43-year-old Tesfaye* who lives at the high school site with his family. "We are all thinking about our houses, our businesses, our children who are not going to school." "My eldest daughter, who is 14, was one of the best students in her class," Tesfaye continues. "She has not been in school for about a year – first because of COVID-19, then because of the fighting. She is very upset".[668]

USAID reported in March 2021 that "As schools begin to reopen in Shire, relief actors are also becoming concerned about the potential forced relocation of displaced or relocated individuals, the majority of whom are sheltering in educational facilities and other collective sites".[669]

As to numbers, BBC News reported in the same month that "Shire has seen a huge influx of people over the past four months […] Aid agencies estimate some 200,000 people are currently living in the city's makeshift camps. Many of them are women and children".[670]

In March 2021, the ICRC noted that "through the [Tigray] region, displaced people and the communities hosting them face multiple needs including clean water, food and shelter. As displaced people continue arriving in major towns, essential public services and infrastructures are struggling to cope with the increasing demand".[671]

With regards to access to basic services, UNHCR noted also in March 2021 that "in Shire town, western Tigray, 30,000 IDPs are sheltered in school premises requiring urgent shelter solutions and life-saving assistance".[672]

At the end of March 2021, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) documented the conditions of Tigray's cities which use schools to house displaced people:

> In recent weeks, tens of thousands of displaced people have arrived in cities in the conflict-hit region of Tigray, northern Ethiopia. They join others who arrived earlier and are staying in schools and empty buildings, in poor conditions and without basic services. Many have already been displaced multiple times since November [2020]. […]
>
> primary and secondary schools in towns and cities across the entire Tigray region, such as Adwa, Axum and Shire, are the epicentre of a huge displacement crisis, numbering hundreds of thousands – although no one knows the real number. In recent weeks, this crisis has taken on a desperate shape, with tens of thousands of people moving into cities in search of safety and humanitarian assistance as resources become depleted in host communities and the more remote rural areas. […]
>
> A 30-minute drive from Adwa is the historical university city of Axum. On the outskirts, surrounded by fields and construction sites in indefinite suspension, is the Basin school, the first destination for most new arrivals in the city since the conflict started. People staying here say the movement of people is constant, but the influx has intensified since early March. There are currently 12 sites in Axum like this one, together hosting several thousand displaced people. […]

[668] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *People in Tigray, Ethiopia, are lacking medical care*, 5 March 2021
[669] USAID, *Ethiopia – Tigray Conflict Fact Sheet #4 Fiscal Year (FY) 2021*, 18 March 2021
[670] BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: A rare view inside the conflict zone*, 20 March 2021
[671] ICRC, *Operational Update on Ethiopia: ICRC concerned about humanitarian situation in rural areas of Tigray*, 12 March 2021
[672] UNHCR, *COVID-19 and Operational Update* , 9 March 2021 , *p. 4*

> there are still rural areas in Tigray that neither MSF, nor any other organisation, has been able to reach; MSF can only assume that people living in these areas are also without access to healthcare.[673]

In April 2021, CARE International published the following Rapid Gender Analysis which draws from focus group discussions and individual and key informant interviews with 94 people (67% of whom are women), secondary data sources, and CARE's research in the region which aims to understand the specific challenges people of all genders are facing. The report was conducted in the Northern Amhara region at sites for IDPs in Debark and MayTsebri (Formerly under Tigray region). The source's key findings indicate that:

> Shelter is one of the highest priority needs. […] There are no separate places for families or for women and girls to sleep safely. Women and girls experience rape while they sleep, due to the collective and overcrowded living and sleeping arrangement.[674]

In May 2021, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that "With insecurity still ongoing, displaced people continue to arrive in large numbers. Many of the newcomers have no choice but to sleep outside or in makeshift shelters in the sites. Most have fled with few possessions, many just with their clothes on their backs. Some still wear the same clothes they left their homes in more than three months ago. Some women say they had to tear apart their clothing to make sanitary pads, which is a source of humiliation".[675]

In the July 2021 report by ACAPS, it was noted that "many of the estimated two million IDPs and people in rural areas lack access to services because of insecurity, limited response, and widespread destruction and looting of basic infrastructure".[676] Similarly, UNHCR stated in the same month that "resources are scarce across the board, including of the necessities of food, shelter and water, and the displaced rely heavily on help from the local community".[677]

Academics from the University of Ghent (Belgium) and Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia) have developed an *Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation* to "document and map the situation in which approximately 6 million Tigrayans currently find themselves".[678] They found that:

> In line with the total blockade of Tigray, many of the displaced people do not have secure access to food, clean water and sanitation. Due to the below-standard living conditions, many people also require urgent medical assistance (Fig 5.5). At multiple IDP sites, people are prone to diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia…, pregnant women are in need of medical follow-up, and many people require urgent psychological assistance after experiencing traumatic incidents. Unfortunately, the access to health care for the IDPs had even slightly decreased between May and June 2021. Meanwhile, the access to basic needs of the IDPs such as food assistance and clean water had improved. Besides the dire living conditions, internally
> displaced people have for months also not been (fully) safe at the displacement sites […]
> .

[673] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Ethiopia: Tigray's cities fill with displaced people in need of aid*, 29 March 2021
[674] CARE International, *Tigray Conflict Rapid Gender Analysis*, April 2021
[675] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Tigray Crisis: "We are suffering from a lack of medical care"*, 5 May 2021
[676] ACAPS, *Humanitarian Access Overview*, July 2021, *p. 7*
[677] UNHCR , *Displaced nurses provide vital health care to others displaced in Ethiopia's Tigray*, 5 July 2021
[678] See Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography

> After the retreat of ENDF and allies from larger parts of Tigray on 28 June,2021 […], a yet unknown number of "short range" IDPs have returned home trying to salvage the production of their farm, but great challenges await (e.g. the reconstruction of houses).[679]

iv. Medical Situation and COVID-19

Amongst the sources consulted limited information was located specifically highlighting the health situation of IDPs. For reporting on the general health situation for the overall population in Tigray see section V., *a. Overview* and *d. Medical Situation and COVID 19*.

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that:

> The Commission has visited eight schools in Mekelle city which have currently been turned into temporary shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs). […] The situation in the two temporary shelters described below illustrate the problems.
> A. Kisanet School
> Most of the IDPs sheltered in Kisanet school were residents of Humera and Wolkait before their displacement and came to Mekelle city on foot. Of the 510 IDPs in the school at the time of the EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] visit, 270 are women and 71 are children between the ages of 1 and 12. There are at least six unaccompanied children in the shelter.
> […] The regional health bureau has distributed "medical cards" allowing them to get free service in local health centres. But IDPs report that there were not enough medical cards for everyone. They told the Commission of a diarrhea outbreak in the shelter since last Christmas which has worsened due to lack of clean drinking water. They also say they do not have the means to buy medication that health centers cannot provide for free.
> […] B. IDPs Sheltered at Ethio-China School
> The Ethio-China school became a temporary shelter for IDPs in mid-January 2021. Most of the displaced persons here are from Central Zone. The IDP Committee coordinating aid efforts for IDPs at the school is divided into six coordinating groups named Temben, Weri Lehe, Adwa, Mereb Lehe, Ahferom, and Axum.
> […] The monitoring team has noted that IDPs at the center have received some assistance from the government and other institutions. The IDPs here have also been provided with a "medical card" for free medical care.
> […] The Commission also noted that pregnant women, infants, and nursing mothers were not provided with adequate specialized assistance in any of the camps visited.[680]

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[679] Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Ghekiere, R., Haegeman, K., Temmerman, D., Nyssen, J., 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation. Version 2.1*. Ghent (Belgium): Ghent University, Department of Geography, p. 45

[680] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *pp. 7-8*

> Access to health is limited. Only 31 of 260 health centers in the region are functioning, and there are no health services in the camps, especially for sexual and maternal health or care for chronic illnesses. Mental health is a critical need.[681]

In May 2021 ACDI/VOCA noted that "despite COVID-19-related movement restrictions, 2.2 million Ethiopians have fled their homes in response to the conflict in Tigray".[682]

In September 2021 the ICRC reported that "working in close cooperation with the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS), the ICRC has increased its presence in Amhara and Afar, delivering emergency supplies, improving shelter and sanitation for the displaced and helping health facilities deal with the influx of wounded and other conflict-related health needs".[683]

v. Attacks on IDPs *en route* or in camps

In February 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission released a monitoring report on the current situation of residents in the Tigray region, based on an investigative mission carried out in Mekelle and Alamata, Mehoni and Kukufto cities in the Southern Zone between 10 and 23 January 2021. The report found that:

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> […] A. Kisanet School
> Most of the IDPs sheltered in Kisanet school were residents of Humera and Wolkait before their displacement and came to Mekelle city on foot. Of the 510 IDPs in the school at the time of the EHRC [Ethiopian Human Rights Commission] visit, 270 are women and 71 are children between the ages of 1 and 12. There are at least six unaccompanied children in the shelter.
> […] IDPs also told the Commission that they do not feel safe in the shelters because they are unguarded. They say that some individuals, under influence of alcohol or wanting to rob them, have tried forcing their way into the shelters.
> […] The IDPs report rooms are assigned on a voluntary basis and that "as far as possible, relatives or people who know each other stay together in a commonly shared room." They say they fear for their safety because the rooms do not have locks.[684]

In April 2021, a public communication released by the multiple UN Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in the Tigray region wrote that:

> The conflict has triggered mass displacement from Tigray region as civilians have been forced to abandon their homes to flee the fighting in Tigray. While it is currently not possible to identify the total number of displaced persons, reports indicate that around 950,000 people have been displaced within Ethiopia because of the crisis in Tigray. People have been displaced from western Tigray but also other areas such

[681] CARE International, *Tigray Conflict Rapid Gender Analysis*, April 2021
[682] ACDI/ VOCA, *Tackling Food Security, COVID-19, and Armed Conflict in Ethiopia*, 20 May 2021
[683] ICRC, *Operational Update on Ethiopia :Shifting frontlines in the north push more people to flee their homes*, 7 September 2021
[684] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, *p. 7*

> as north-western zones or central zones, and have taken refuge in other parts of Tigray or in Afar or Amhara regions.
> […] Internally displaced persons have endured exhausting and dangerous journeys in search for safety, some walking for weeks to reach their destination. During their journey, some have reportedly been killed or beaten, especially young men. There are reports of women who were raped during the journey, or pregnant women who had to deliver on the way and lost their babies. Increasing reports of sexual violence against women and girls indicate heightened risks of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
> Allegations have been received suggesting that there is an ongoing widespread systematic campaign by Amhara Regional Forces and Amhara militia to forcibly displace Tigrayans from Western Tigray to the east of Tekeze river, where they have reportedly been subjected to atrocities by ARF, Eritrean and Ethiopian forces, including killings.[685]

Covering May 2021, the International Crisis Group's *CrisisWatch* noted: "Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers overnight 24-25 May [2021] reportedly beat up and detained over 500 IDPs in four camps in Tigray's Shire town, 27 May [2021] reportedly released most of them following international pressure".[686]

In its situation report dated 3 June 2021, UNOCHA reported that:

> On the night of 24 May [2021], more than 200 people were arrested during military raids into Tsehaye and Adi Wonfito internally displaced collective sites in Shire, North-Western Zone, hosting a combined 12,000 internally displaced persons. Most of the men detained have been reportedly released on 27 May [2021]. The humanitarian community, through an official statement released by the Humanitarian Coordinator on 28 May, condemned the arbitrary arrest, beatings and other forms of ill-treatment of civilians by members of the armed force.[687]

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported in May 2021 that: "The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) continues to monitor reports of raids of IDP shelters in Shire, Tigray and the detention of a large number of IDPs by security officials since May 24, 2021. These shelters are the only safe havens for persons forced to leave their place of residence by the ongoing conflict in the region and the humanitarian needs in these shelters remain dire".[688]

The U.S. Department of State's annual human trafficking report, covering 2020/2021, noted "that international organizations report the Hitsats and Shimelba camps closed after being destroyed as a result of conflict in the Tigray region during the reporting period".[689]

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[685] Mandates of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, *Public communication on allegations related to violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the Eritrean Army in the Tigray region of Ethiopia*, 19 April 2021, *pp. 5-6*

[686] International Crisis Group, *CrisisWatch*, May 2021 [Note: The following search filters were used: Ethiopia, September 2020 – October 2021 on 15th October 2021]

[687] UNOCHA, *Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update*, 3 June 2021 , *p. 2*

[688] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, *Raids on IDP shelters in Shire, Tigray*, 27 May 2021

[689] U.S. Department of State, *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ethiopia,* July 2021

Reporting in August 2021 the UN reported about the spill-over effects of the conflict in Tigray and noted that "UNICEF was extremely alarmed by the reported killing last Thursday of over 200 people, including more than 100 children, in attacks on displaced families sheltering at a health facility and a school in Afar [adjoining region to Tigray]".[690] Borkena news reporting on the same incident further stated: "Afar Human Rights Organization said this week, as reported by DW Amharic service, the International Community has ignored internal displacement, destruction and killings of civilians in the region after the TPLF took the war to the region several weeks ago".[691]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect reported in September 2021 that: "According to a CNN report on Humera town in Western Tigray, which is currently controlled by Amhara regional forces, thousands of Tigrayan men, women and children are being held in detention camps. Escaped detainees who fled to Sudan recall men being taken at night to the banks of the Tekezé River and never returning. Since early August Sudanese officials reported finding over 60 bodies floating downstream from Humera. Forensic experts in Sudan have indicated that many of the recovered bodies had execution-style bullet wounds or exhibited signs of torture".[692]

Indicative of attacks against Eritrea refugees, the monthly *Protection in Danger* news brief produced by Insecurity Insight document individual, but non-exhaustive, incidences of such nature. See for example the May 2021 edition.[693]

b. Cross-Border Displacement

A *COI Query* response compiled by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) focusing on the security situation in Tigray between 1 March 2020 and 28 February 2021 and consulting a range of sources, provided the following summary on cross-border displacement of people from Tigray:

> Along with internal displacement, the conflict that began on 4 November 2020 in Tigray region caused significant numbers of people to flee across the border into Sudan, using three border points: Hamdayet in Kassala State, and Lugdi and Aderafi in Gedaref State.[178] As of 28 February 2021, approximately 62 200 Ethiopian refugees from Tigray had arrived in Kassala and Gedaref states of Sudan, settling in Um Rakuba camp, Tunaydbah and Hamdayet settlements, and in Village 8.[179]
> A February 2021 report by MSF highlighted that many of the Ethiopian refugees in Sudan were lacking adequate humanitarian aid. For instance, according to MSF, around 10 000-12 000 refugees 'scattered in and around Hamdayet' had not been 'provided with proper shelter, and their basic needs such as water, food, blankets and sanitation' were 'barely met'.[180] A UNFPA assessment found acute respiratory infections, malaria and dysentery, among others, across all refugee sites, as well as the presence of the COVID-19 virus in Village 8.[181] […]
>
> 178 UNFPA, Sudan Response to the Ethiopian Refugees Situation, 1 March 2021, url, p. 2
> 179 UNHCR, Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region) 15- 28 February, 28 February 2021, url, p. 1
> 180 MSF, For refugees in Hamdayet, Sudan, "everyone is hungry, and everyone is tired", 19 February 2021, url
> 181 UNFPA, Sudan Response to the Ethiopian Refugees Situation, 1 March 2021, url, p. 2[694]

[690] UN News Centre, *Tigray: Intensified fighting across borders 'disastrous' for children*, 9 August 2021
[691] Borkena, *Ethiopia: Tigray rebels reportedly slaughtered over 100 children in Afar region*, 9 August 2021
[692] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 269: Ethiopia, Guinea and Education Under Attack*, 8 September 2021
[693] See Insecurity Insight, *Protection in Danger, Monthly News Brief*, May 2021, *p. 2*
[694] European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *COI Query, Ethiopia, Security situation in Tigray region between 1 March 2020 – 28 February 2021*, 30 March 2021, *2.3.3 Displacement*

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) noted in February 2021 that "since November 2020 more than 61,000 people who fled violence in Tigray, Ethiopia, have registered as refugees after crossing the border into Sudan. Since then, many have been relocated from the border town of Hamdayet to Um Rakuba and Al Tanideba, permanent refugee camps in Sudan's Gedaref state".[695] In September 2021, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) noted that "currently, 18,660 refugees currently reside in the camp [of Um Rakuba]. The primary development of this camp began in late 2020 with influxes and relocation of people fleeing the conflict in Tigray exceeding 20,000 by January 2021".[696]

The Atlantic Council reported in March 2021 that: "In nearly four months of fighting across Ethiopia's Tigray region, more than sixty thousand Tigrayan refugees have fled into neighboring Sudan and 80 percent of the region's six million citizens have been cut off from life-saving humanitarian access".[697]

As at July 2021, UNHCR Sudan situation report noted that there were 18,522 refugees from Tigray region in Um Rakuba refugee camp and 19, 466 refugees from Tigray in Tunaydbah Refugee Settlement.[698]

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) noted in September 2021 that "Sudan hosts over 60,000 refugees from Tigray, and tensions between Ethiopia and Sudan have risen in the past year over al-Fashaga, a contested border area that runs along the western edge of Tigray and Amhara regions".[699]

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect wrote in September 2021 on its 'Populations at Risk' profile on Ethiopia that: "The resulting conflict [of the military offensive in Tigray since 4 November 2020] has […] caused over 63,000 to flee to Sudan".[700]

In its resolution of 7 October 2021, the European Parliament acknowledged that "whereas 55 000 Ethiopian refugees and asylum seekers are reported to be seeking shelter in Sudan".[701]

[695] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Sudan: Refugees from Tigray face hunger and inadequate shelter in Hamdayet*, 19 February 2021
[696] Norwegian Refugee Council, *NRC Sudan | Um Rakuba Refugee Camp Vulnerability Analysis* , September, 2021
[697] Atlantic Council, *The unintended consequence of Ethiopia's civil war might be a border war with Sudan*, 3 March 2021
[698] UNHCR Sudan, *Ethiopia Emergency Situation Profile*, 1 July 2021
[699] U.S. Congressional Research Service, *Ethiopia's Transition and the Tigray Conflict*, 8 September 2021, *p. 25*
[700] Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Ethiopia: Populations at Risk*, 1 September 2021
[701] European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray (2021/2902(RSP))*, 7 October 2021*, L*