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The federal government continued to impose restrictions on humanitarian aid to Tigray and halted all deliveries in August until November. Thousands of Tigrayan detainees were held arbitrarily in dire conditions, often in unofficial places of detention without access to lawyers. Opposition leaders were held in violation of court orders for their release. Government security forces and armed groups were responsible for the unlawful killings of civilians, which in some cases may have amounted to war crimes. Promises to investigate these crimes remained unfulfilled. Multiple incidents of conflict-related rape and other sexual violence were committed by Tigrayan forces in the Afar region. The right to freedom of expression was significantly eroded.

Background

The conflict in Tigray spread to other regions of the country, primarily Amhara and Afar. Armed conflict and violence in the Somali, Southern, Gambela, Oromia, Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regions killed thousands of civilians and displaced communities. Conflict and climate change-related drought in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali and other regions left millions in need of humanitarian assistance.

Denial of humanitarian access

Since the start of the conflict in November 2020, the government had imposed restrictions on humanitarian aid to Tigray. In March 2022, it declared a humanitarian truce that allowed the number of aid convoys to the region to increase significantly but delivery was stopped completely in August until November, following the resumption of fighting. The government's closure of banking and communications services in Tigray compounded the humanitarian crisis. In November, however, the cessation of hostilities (Pretoria) agreement was signed and deliveries, phone communication and passenger flights to Tigray partially resumed. According to the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, the government used starvation as a method of warfare.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

The government's mass detentions, targeting ethnic Tigrayans in many parts of the country including Western Tigray, Afar, Addis Ababa and Amhara, could have amounted to war crimes. Thousands of detainees were held in official and unofficial places of detention without judicial oversight of their

detention and without access to lawyers. Detention conditions in Western Tigray were particularly dire because the authorities did not provide food and water for the detainees. Local communities provided some food and water, but it was insufficient.

In January, security forces forcibly transferred thousands of Tigrayan residents from Afar to a detention camp near Semera city, where they remained for months. The forced transfer of civilians, when not justified for their protection, and their subsequent arbitrary detention may amount to a war crime. Tens of thousands of the Tigrayan residents of Addis Ababa and other cities, who had been detained since the state of emergency was declared in November 2021, were released without charge after it was lifted in February.

The government continued to unlawfully detain Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) senior leaders Michael Boran, Kenesa Ayana, Geda Aoljira, Dawit Abdeta, Lemi Benya, Geda Gebisa and Abdi Regassa. They had been in detention since 2020, despite multiple court orders for their release. Following an order by the Federal Supreme Court in May, the police released Colonel Gemechu Ayana, another senior OLF official, who had been detained for nearly two years on terrorism charges. Dawud Ibsa, the OLF chair, was released from house arrest in March after the National Election Board of Ethiopia demanded his release. He had been under house arrest since May 2021.

In March and April, police arrested at least 30 members and leaders of the Balderas for True Democracy, an opposition political party, while they were celebrating public holidays in Addis Ababa. They were released without charge days later. In June, Sintayehu Chekol, a senior leader of Balderas, was arrested in Bahir Dar. The court ordered his release on bail, but the police moved him to Addis Ababa, where he was kept in detention and repeatedly moved to different police stations until his release in November.

Unlawful attacks and killings

Security forces and armed groups carried out multiple unlawful killings, targeting civilians in the Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Amhara, Tigray and Gambela regions, many of which may have amounted to war crimes. In March, the Ethiopian Government Communications Service promised to conduct investigations and prosecute those responsible for the killings, but by the end of the year there was no public information on the progress of those investigations or prosecutions.

In March, a video was circulated on social media showing security forces burning three people alive. In June, a video of a mass killing in Oromo Special Zone in Amhara region was widely circulated. It showed Amhara militias shooting and killing dozens of people after forcing them from the back of a truck.

Also in June, at least 400 Amhara civilians, mainly women and children, were summarily killed during a five-hour attack in the Tole locality of West Wellega Zone, allegedly by Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) forces. Security forces near the area and local authorities failed to intervene to stop the attack. In July, similar attacks on Amhara residents in Qelem Wellega Zone, allegedly by OLA forces who targeted hundreds of ethnic Amhara residents, were also reported.

In August and September, Amhara Fano militias and OLA forces killed hundreds of ethnic Amhara and Oromo civilians in an attack in the Horo Guduru Wellega Zone of Oromia. On 30 and 31 August, Amhara Fano forces attacked Agamsa, a town in Horo Guduru, killing at least 60 Oromo civilians. In

September, hundreds of Oromo and Amhara civilians of three districts in Horo Guduru were killed, allegedly in retaliatory attacks, again by Amhara Fano militias and OLA forces.

In January, in Abala, a town in Afar region which borders Tigray, hundreds of civilians were killed by Tigrayan forces and Afar police and militias. During the fight for control of Abala, Afar forces killed Tigrayan civilians in the town and the Tigrayan forces shelled it with artillery, indiscriminately killing dozens more, which amounted to war crimes.

Multiple air strikes in Tigray killed hundreds of civilians. According to the UN, air strikes in January, allegedly carried out by government forces, killed more than 100 civilians in Dedebeit. Following the resumption of hostilities between the federal army and the Tigrayan forces in August, air strikes on Mekelle and Adi Daero in August and September killed hundreds of civilians, including children. One air strike on a kindergarten in Mekelle on 26 August killed at least nine civilians, including children.

Sexual and gender-based violence

Multiple incidents of conflict-related rape and other sexual violence were carried out by Tigrayan forces in Afar region. Four survivors reported that they were raped and abused by members of the Tigrayan forces. One survivor said she was raped with her teenage daughter, who became pregnant as a result. Survivors faced health and psycho-social complications as a result of their ordeals, including abandonment by their husbands and social stigma. Many survivors felt unable to report their experiences due to the potential risks to their livelihoods and families.

Freedom of expression

The right to freedom of expression was significantly eroded, with authorities arresting at least 29 journalists and media workers in Tigray, Addis Ababa, Amhara and Oromia. The Tigrayan authorities charged five journalists with “collaboration with the enemy”; elsewhere, detained journalists and media workers were rarely formally charged. When detained journalists were granted bail, the police delayed their release by appealing against bail decisions.

In May, the police arrested Temesgen Dessalegn, editor of Feteḥ magazine, and subsequently charged him with disclosing military secrets and spreading false rumours. He was released on bail of ETB 30,000 (about USD 560) in November. Journalists including Gobeze Sisay, Meskerem Abera and Yayesew Shimelis were arrested by security forces in May; Yayesew Shimelis was re-arrested on 28 June, a week after his release. They were held for days without access to family or lawyers, before being released. In May, the authorities also expelled Tom Gardner, a journalist working for The Economist newspaper based in Addis Ababa, after he experienced online harassment by government supporters for his reporting on Ethiopia. Meskerem Abera remained in detention after being re-arrested in December by the federal police on allegations including incitement to violence and defamation of the national defence forces.

On 30 December, police arrested musician Tewodros Assefa and held him for a day for lyrics that criticized corruption by local authorities in Addis Ababa.

In September, Alemu Sime, a senior government official, called a meeting of civil society organizations and gave 35 of them an official warning for publicly calling for a ceasefire and peace talks to end the conflicts ahead of the Ethiopian New Year. Days before, security forces had prohibited a media

conference organized by civil society organizations and individuals to publicize their joint call for peace.

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