



# THE TIGRAY WAR & REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

(VOLUME 2)

July 2021 to December 2021

## CONTENTS

<b>1.</b>	<b>Foreword</b>	4
<b>2.</b>	<b>Preface</b>	6
<b>3.</b>	<b>Introduction: An end to the Ethiopian civil war?</b>	7
<b>4.</b>	<b>An overview of the Tigray conflict: June to December 2021</b>	
4.1	Introduction	13
4.2	Operation Alula Abanega	17
4.3	Operation Tigray Mothers	22
4.4	Operation Sunrise	27
4.5	The Federal Government Coalition strikes back	29
4.6	TDF “Territorial Adjustment” and “Recalibration”	30
4.7	The TDF-OLA link up and the march on Addis Ababa	33
4.8	TDF experiences a major setback on the Afar front	35
4.9	Ethiopia’s use of combat drones and the ENDF’s resurgence	36
4.10	TDF “Territorial Adjustment” and “Recalibration” II	38
4.11	Conclusion	39
<b>5.</b>	<b>The Humanitarian Situation: Aid, Food Security and Famine</b>	
<b>5.1</b>	Famine in Tigray	41
<b>5.2</b>	Pre 28 June-Ceasefire	44
<b>5.3</b>	July: The Ceasefire and Blockade (Day 0 - 33)	48
<b>5.4</b>	August: The Blockade (Day 34 – 64)	59
<b>5.5</b>	September: The Blockade Continues (Day 65 – 94)	64
<b>5.6</b>	October: The Blockade Tightens (Day 65 – 94)	76
<b>5.7</b>	November: The Blockade and Famine (Day 126 – 155)	83
<b>5.8</b>	December	91
<b>5.9</b>	Humanitarian Access Tracking in Pictures	92
<b>5.10</b>	Conclusion	95
<b>6</b>	<b>Survivors of sexual violence</b>	
<b>6.1</b>	The spread of conflict-related sexual violence	97
<b>6.2</b>	<b><i>Six months of institutional reporting on sexual violence</i></b>	
6.2.1	Report of the EHRC and OHCHR	100
6.2.2	Amnesty International August 2021 report	102
6.2.3	Amnesty International report November 2021	104
6.2.4	Human Rights Watch report November 2021	105
6.3	Discussion	106
6.4	International inertia	107
6.5	Future action – an international commission	110
6.6	Conclusion	112
<b>7.</b>	<b>Sanction Regimes and Eritrea</b>	
7.1	Eritrea and its economy	112
7.2	Corruption	121
7.3	United Nations Commission of Inquiry (COI)	125
7.4	The Eritrea/Ethiopia War Pact	128
7.5	Eritrea’s involvement in the Tigray War	132

7.6	About Sanctions .....	133
7.7	Eritrea and Sanctions .....	147
7.8	Concluding Remarks and Recommendations .....	153
<b>8.</b>	<b>Diplomatic attempts to end the war</b>	
8.1	Introduction .....	156
8.2	The United States under President Biden .....	157
8.3	The European Union .....	163
8.4	United Kingdom .....	166
8.5	Turkey, Iran, and the UAE .....	167
8.6	Africa .....	170
8.7	China .....	172
8.8	Conclusion .....	175
<b>9.</b>	<b>Ethiopia's foreign relations and the Tigray war</b>	
9.1	Introduction .....	177
9.2	Claims and counter-claims: the propaganda war .....	178
9.3	Foreign relations before 2018 .....	180
9.4	The new Horn axis - Addis Ababa-Asmara- Mogadishu .....	182
9.5	The dam: Egypt, Sudan, and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam .....	187
9.6	Ethiopia on the periphery of the Middle East security arena .....	189
9.7	The weakness of regional bodies: IGAD and the AU .....	190
9.8	Concluding remarks .....	191
<b>10.</b>	<b>The Tigrayan and Eritreans diasporas</b>	
10.1	General overview .....	192
<b>10.2</b>	<b><i>Eritrean diaspora mobilisation</i></b>	
10.2.1	Introduction .....	196
10.2.2	Mobilisation of Eritrean diaspora since the start of the Tigray war .....	197
10.2.3	Eritrean diaspora challenges and ineffectiveness .....	201
10.2.4	The need for a legitimate global leadership .....	202
10.2.5	Initiatives to form a legitimate global leadership .....	204
10.2.6	The formation of Eritrean National United Front (ENUF) .....	204
10.2.7	Summary and Conclusion .....	
<b>10.3</b>	<b><i>The mobilisation of the Tigrayan diasporas in North America</i></b>	
10.3.1	Introduction .....	205
10.3.2	"Diaspora" – a review of the literature .....	206
10.3.3	Tigrayan diaspora in North America .....	209
10.3.4	Summary, Conclusions, and Policy Implications .....	215
	Table 1: Vision, Mission, and Objectives of Tigrayan Diasporas in North America	217
	Table 2: Economic, Social, and Political mobilisation of Tigrayan Diaspora .....	219
<b>11.</b>	<b>Targeting Tigray's Heritage and Values</b>	
11.1	A survey of churches, monasteries, and other historically significant sites ....	222
11.2	Al Nejashi: Targeting Tigrayan religious symbiosis .....	235
11.3	Fracture of church authority .....	235
11.4	Destruction and theft of Tigrayan intangible heritage .....	236
11.5	A culture, heritage, and people under attack .....	238
<b>12.</b>	<b>Glossary .....</b>	<b>239</b>

## 1. Foreword

By Right Honourable Helen Clark<sup>1</sup>

### *The Tigray crisis*

In the fifteen months since the war in the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray erupted in November 2020, it has become the bloodiest conflict in the world. It is also among the least reported. It is thought that some 100,000 people have died, but no-one can be certain. The region is hermetically sealed off from the outside world. This is no accident: it is a strategy adopted by the governments of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia to prevent information from reaching the outside world.

For the people of Tigray, this has meant that their plight has gone all but unreported. Cameras and television crews have seldom managed to gain access to the frontlines, and even then, have mostly reported from the Ethiopian side of the war. Rarely have reports come from inside Tigray itself; none have been received on the conflict from Eritrea or Somalia.

Volume 1 of "Tigray War and Regional Implications" provided a rare glimpse into the situation with chapters by regional experts. Its publication was welcomed by scholars across the world, with almost 5,000 making use of the report. Volume 2 builds on that work. It is urgently needed: the situation in Tigray could hardly be more critical.

Tigray is now under the equivalent of a medieval siege. It seems that there is a deliberate attempt to starve Tigray's six million people into submission. The 100,000 Eritrean refugees who were sheltering in Tigray at the start of the war, in camps under the protection of the UNHCR, have been scattered, conscripted, and/or killed. Those who remain survive in the most appalling conditions.<sup>2</sup>

The United Nations and international aid agencies have done their best to reach the neediest. They have – occasionally – been allowed to move vital supplies by truck or planes, but the quantities are so small that they hardly amount to more than a drop in the ocean of need.

As the World Food Programme said in a statement on 24 February 2022: Nearly 40% of people in Ethiopia's Tigray are suffering "an extreme lack of food."<sup>3</sup> Their assessment found that found 4.6 million people in Tigray -- or 83% of the population -- were food-insecure, two million of them "severely" so. "Families are exhausting all means to feed themselves, with three quarters of the population using extreme coping strategies to survive," the WFP said.

In the largest hospital in Tigray region, a child wounded in an air strike recently bled to death after doctors ran out of gauze and intravenous fluids. A baby died because there were no fluids for dialysis.<sup>4</sup> Doctors at the Ayder Referral Hospital in the

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Clark was Prime Minister of New Zealand, (1999 – 2008). Since then she has been Administrator of the UN Development Programme (2009 – 2017), Chair of the UN Development Group, and President of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House).

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR - Deteriorating conditions putting Eritrean refugees at grave risk in Tigray

<sup>3</sup> Nearly 40 percent of Tigrayans face 'extreme lack of food' | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News — World — The Guardian Nigeria News – Nigeria and World News

<sup>4</sup> Doctors say lives are lost in hospitals in Ethiopia's Tigray due to dwindling supplies, blame blockade | Reuters

regional capital Mekelle, told Reuters by phone the lack of supplies is largely the result of a months-long government aid blockade on the northern region. "Signing death certificates has become our primary job," the hospital said.

With images appearing on social media of the elderly and children close to starvation, no-one can be in any doubt of the seriousness of the situation. Yet still the people of Tigray are undefeated, with their army largely intact. Complex negotiations are now under way involving the African Union and many international actors, including the United States.

### *Tigray War & Regional Implications (Volume 2)*

Volume 1 took the narrative from the start of the war in November 2020 until June 2021. Volume 2 takes it from June 2021 until the end of December 2021.

Written by experts inside Ethiopia and in the outside world, it attempts both to build on the information in Volume 1 and to provide fresh information on topics that have not previously been explored. Volume 2 includes:

- A first cataloguing of the tragic looting and destruction of Tigray's unique religious and cultural sites – some of which have global significance;
- The first consideration of the potential role of sanctions against Eritrea to halt President Isaias Afwerki's continued attempts to exercise dominance in the Horn of Africa;
- An authoritative explanation of how the war unfolded and the deepening food insecurity situation in the months to the end of 2021
- The questions of sexual violence and international diplomacy that were chronicled in Volume 1 have been updated and looked at afresh.

There is an urgent need for this information to spur the international community to action.

While the Biden administration has led international efforts to resolve the crisis, others have been poorly engaged, or have gone out of their way to exacerbate the situation. The role of Turkey and China in providing drones to the Ethiopian military via the UAE is reprehensible. Their drones have not only hit military targets; they have also killed dozens of civilians.<sup>5</sup> Russia and China have consistently kept the question of Tigray off the agenda of the UN Security Council, while the African Union has been ineffective in settling a conflict on its doorstep. The European Union has allowed the United States to take the lead, while Britain – stripped of European influence – has been reduced to a bit-player.

The lessons learned from the atrocities in the Balkans or Rwanda appear to have been largely forgotten. The 'Responsibility to Protect,' which allowed for an international intervention in critical situations even if the action overrode questions of sovereignty, is seldom discussed.<sup>6</sup> If the Tigray war – largely invisible and therefore

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<sup>5</sup> [Tigray conflict: What do we know about drone strikes in Ethiopia? - BBC News](#)

<sup>6</sup> [United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect](#)

off the world's radar – is to be ended, this trend needs to be reversed. Engagement, not indifference, need to be the watchword of capitals from Beijing to Washington.

## 2. Preface

By Habte Hagos and Martin Plaut<sup>7</sup>

This report builds on the work that was done for *The Tigray War and Regional Implications (Volume 1)* that was published by Eritrea Focus and Oslo Analytica in June 2021. Both reports are driven by a single motivation: a concern for the tragic consequences for the people of Ethiopia and Eritrea in particular, and the Horn of Africa at large, of the war that erupted in November 2020. The conflict pitted the Tigrayans people against troops from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia with the support of the UAE, Turkey, Iran, and China, amongst others. The warring factions have paid a very heavy price; so too have the civilians caught up in this brutal war.

None of the tragic suffering has been as under-reported as the death and casualties inflicted on the people of Eritrea. Already trapped in Africa's worst dictatorship, without recourse to independent courts, judiciary or a functioning constitution, Eritreans have also had to endure pain that is little recognised by the outside world. The dictatorship of President Isaias Afwerki has meant that the media – local and international – are either suppressed or so tightly controlled that only the government's version of events emerges. Faint whispers emerge from inside Eritrea; families have heard from their loved ones; brave individuals smuggle truths out of the country, but overall, the country suffers in silence.

What we know is that Eritreans in their tens of thousands have been sent to the front lines as "National Service" conscripts. They have only two options: fight or flee. Some have fought in Tigray and have been responsible for appalling atrocities that have certainly been tolerated by, and probably been encouraged by, their officers. Some have fled to Sudan or deserted from the Eritrean army while inside Tigray or Ethiopia. Many have paid with their lives; still more have returned to Eritrea to live with their disabilities as best they can. This report contains information about the financial underpinnings of the Eritrean regime, much of which has never been brought together before. We are determined to continue collecting information about the intolerable persecution Eritreans face and making it public.

Having said this, the majority of this report focusses on the war and its consequences for the people of Tigray and their neighbours. We are enormously grateful to everyone who has contributed, but are particularly grateful to the Right Honourable Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, for her unstinting support and encouragement. Some of the authors must unfortunately remain anonymous, or rely on nom de plumes, but we are happy to acknowledge the contributions of Prof. Araya Debessay, Prof. Desta Asyehgn, G. E. Gorfu, Dr. Hagos Abrha Abay, Sally Keeble, and Felicity Mulford. We are very grateful for the work of Reclaim Eritrea<sup>8</sup> in providing the maps which are a graphic guide to the development of the war in Ermias Teka's chapter on the Progress of the War. Prof. Kjetil Tronvoll,

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<sup>7</sup> Habte Hagos is a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, and a founding member of Eritrea Focus and its current Chairman. Martin Plaut is a journalist and author, Senior Research Fellow at the University of London, and a member of Eritrea Focus.

<sup>8</sup> About Us – RECLAIM ERITREA

who is our co-publisher, had played a vital role in backing the report and contributing an important and insightful introduction.

As the report is published there has been a lull in the fighting. There are reports of intensive negotiations to end the war: we hope they are productive and end the suffering, allowing the political and physical reconstruction to begin. If this opportunity is not seized there is every indication that the conflict will become entrenched and could last for years. This tragedy must be avoided at all costs.

The views expressed in this report is that of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of Eritrea Focus or Oslo Analytica.

### **3. Introduction: An end to the Ethiopian civil war?**

By Professor Kjetil Tronvoll<sup>9</sup>

The Ethiopian civil war, which unleashed devastation and horrors since it began in November 2019, continues unabated in 2022. The frontlines have continuously shifted, displacing millions of civilians and ruining infrastructure across Tigray, northern Amhara, and Afar regional states. Attempts to facilitate a secession of hostilities and peace negotiations by international envoys have all failed, as the political objectives of the various belligerent parties appears irreconcilable.

The Ethiopian war theatre was the largest armed conflict in the world in 2021. Tens of [thousands of combatants](#) have perished on the battlefields, thousands of civilians have been [massacred](#), and [rape](#) and [famine](#) have been weaponised. A confounding element in the Ethiopian war is the involvement of a host of belligerent parties, the key being the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) as allies on one side, fighting against Ethiopian federal and regional government troops and militias, irregular Amhara militias (Fano), and - not least - the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF). Furthermore, minor resistance movements and localised militia or vigilante groups have allied themselves with one or other of the key belligerents, further complicating the analysis of the war, the attribution of war crimes and atrocities committed, as well as the pursuit of an overall peace process.

This report is a sequel to last year's study (Volume 1) which inter alia detailed the outbreak of the conflict, its humanitarian impact, and diplomatic efforts to end the hostilities. Through this volume we continue our efforts to document and expose the devastating ramifications of the war. A detailed overview of the evolvement of the war, including illustrative maps, is presented by Ermias Teka. The dire humanitarian impact, with millions in need of aid and hundreds of thousands starving, is analysed by Felicity Mulford. Sally Keeble focuses on the horrendous sexual assaults inflicted upon girls and women by the warring factions as part of their war strategy. The war in Tigray also involves eradicating the region's cultural and religious heritage. The looting and destruction of religious and cultural artefacts have been widespread, an issue investigated by Hagos Abrha Abay. The US sanctions on Eritrea for its atrocity warfare on Tigray is discussed by Habte Hagos. The internationalisation of the Ethiopian civil war is also notable with the involvement of the Eritrean and Tigrayan

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<sup>9</sup> Professor of peace and conflict studies, Oslo New University College  
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diaspora in either furthering the conflict abroad, or trying to assist their communities back home, an issue analysed by a group of prominent scholars. Ethiopia's diplomatic contacts and influence across the region are discussed by an expert in the subject matter who wishes to remain anonymous.

Finally, since the outbreak of the war, various diplomatic initiatives have been launched and special envoys tasked to try to bring the belligerent parties to the negotiation table, a process examined by Martin Plaut.

Volumes 1 and 2 of the Tigray War and Regional Implications provide the most comprehensive and up to date analysis on the tragic civil war currently unfolding in Ethiopia.

### *The ebb and flow of war*

After reclaiming control of Mekelle and central Tigray in June 2021, the TDF's steady march towards Addis Ababa surprised many observers. When the strategic towns of Dessie and Kombolcha fell under TDF control at the end of October, it created [widespread concern](#) of a potential collapse of the Federal Government. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared a nationwide State of Emergency. A month later, at the end of November, the combined TDF/OLA forces reached Debre Sina, a town only [220 km north of Addis Ababa](#). The diplomatic community scrambled to evacuate their citizens and Addis Ababa's [authorities asked](#) alarmed inhabitants to be prepared to defend the city at any cost. In response to the imminent threat, PM Abiy declared a 'total war' against the rebels and vowed to go to the [frontlines to lead](#) the fight himself. Thenceforth, however, a set of factors contributed to a shift in the tide of war in favour of Ethiopia government and its allies.

In early December, TDF started what they called a tactical retreat of its forces from the southern frontline, easing the pressure on the capital Addis Ababa. By calling it a 'tactical' retreat, it signalled that the strategic objective of their struggle remained unchanged, but the military tactics to achieve them had to be revised. Subsequently, the TDF announced that all its [forces were withdrawing](#) from the Amhara and Afar regional states to return to Tigray.

It appears that there were three key reasons for the TDF tactical withdrawal, rooted in military, political, and diplomatic concerns. First and foremost, it seems clear that the military balance on the battlefield tilted in the Ethiopian government's favour. A key factor for this change was the massive arms purchases undertaken by the government during 2021; acquiring among other equipment [combat drones](#). The long TDF supply route from Tigray to the southern front was particularly vulnerable for drone attacks and destroyed lorries supplying fighting units. Furthermore, the extended TDF lines offensive made their flanks vulnerable from attacks from the east by Afar units and from the west by Amhara forces. At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the effect of PM Abiy's call for a total war and his encouragement of civilians to join him on the frontline. This created a surge of national fervour among his supporters, who willingly offered to sacrifice themselves in combat. Although Tigrayan officials claimed that they had their [fighting army remains intact](#), as they pulled back without engaging in battle, it seems plausible that a sustained high attrition rate would be difficult to sustain, given the comparatively smaller TDF recruitment base.



As [alluded to by Tigrayan](#) officials, however, there were diplomatic and political concerns as well, which compelled them to withdraw, which are key to a possible negotiated solution to the war. Politically, a coherent and consolidated agreement on a possible transitional government with their [ally OLA](#) and representatives from the [‘federalist alliance’](#) seemed to be wanting. The TPLF has been clear that they have no interest or ambition in regaining central rule over Ethiopia. The responsibility to lead a possible transitional government, achieved militarily or politically, would thus rest on a broader Oromo led political opposition. This has yet to be consulted, because of the political context in the country. No doubt there is deep political distrust of the TPLF among many of the pro-federalist political opposition fronts in Ethiopia; mistrust based on their experiences of the draconian rule of EPRDF over 27 years. To craft a new joint political platform among former adversaries in haste during a war turned out to be difficult. A stable Tigrayan-Oromo political relationship would have to be carefully mended, and then extended to other movements, before a creditable alternative to the Prosperity Party rule could emerge.

In the end it was the diplomatic pressure brought to bear on the TPLF that was the most important factor in halting the final offensive on Addis Ababa. The US administration has been critical in this regard, with its special envoy ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, giving an unequivocal messaging to TPLF. He [declared](#) in November: “We oppose any TPLF move to Addis or any TPLF move to besiege Addis.” The TPLF leadership are, perhaps a little paradoxically, astute internationalists who put considerable efforts into maintaining and balancing international relations. They therefore seemed hesitant to continue an advance on Addis in the face of broad international opposition. Speculation is rife about the possibility of a [confidential agreement](#) between US and Tigray government on a peace deal with the Ethiopian government. However, none of the parties have confirmed this.

### *‘National dialogue’ without peace?*

The TDF withdrawal created an opportunity for political dialogue between Mekelle and Addis Ababa. This could have led to a cessation of hostilities, paving the way for peace negotiations to find a durable solution to Ethiopia’s intrinsic political challenges. President [Debretsion Gebremichael](#) of Tigray has explicitly stated that only an all-inclusive negotiation process can solve the mounting challenges facing Ethiopia.

In a letter to UN Secretary-General Guterres on 19 December 2021, the Tigray regional president [Debretsion Gebremichael](#) made a notable proposal, without any preconditions, for “an immediate cessation of hostilities followed by negotiations.” In the letter, however, the TDF leader lists a set of issues that should be addressed by the UN Security Council and resolved as integral part to a peace process. Among these are restoring the full legal authority of the Tigrayan government over all its territories and lifting of the siege. The Ethiopian government did not officially respond to the call, but instead, according to TDF spokesperson [Getachew Reda](#), continued its military operations against Tigrayan, including reportedly bombing Mekelle. This is apparently to deflect international attention from a call for a cessation of hostilities and peace negotiations. In spite of this, the Ethiopian government has fast-tracked its attempt to establish a so-called “National Dialogue Commission” that is tasked to

reconcile the deeply politically divided country. The objective of the Commission is supposedly to create an inclusive and participatory process to reach a consensus on how to tackle the challenges facing the nation. However, when presenting the proclamation establishing the Commission, the speaker of the House of Representatives [Tagesse Chafo](#), firmly rooted its work and vision in the Prosperity Party's ideology and programme. He framed it as a political tool to gather support for the incumbent's agenda, and not as a vehicle to establish an all-inclusive dialogue process fostering a common understanding among the manyfold political opinions and groupings in the country to be enshrined in a new social contract with the citizenry. Tagesse concluded stating that the "terrorists" i.e., TPLF and OLA cannot participate in the national dialogue and will be dealt with according to the law that relates to them. A similar sentiment was later echoed by Prime Minister [Abiy Ahmed](#), calling the TPLF and OLA "devil forces." In this vein, state minister [Redwan Hussein](#), has claimed that there are actors other than the TPLF who represent the Tigrayan people. He said that one might expect government friendly Tigrayan parties, such as the Tigray Democratic Party and the Tigray People's Party might represent Tigrayan interest in the national dialogue process.

In early January 2022, the Government dropped charges against, and released some key opposition leaders, who had been in detention for a year and a half, with the stated intention that their participation was needed in the national dialogue. On the day of his release, Eskinder Nega from Baldaras for Democracy party praised the ENDF and the Fano militia's war against Tigray. Bekele Gerba and Jawar Mohammed from Oromo Federalist Congress, on the other hand, contemplated the situation. After several days they issued a statement calling for an all-inclusive dialogue process and declined to participate if the OLA and TPLF were not included. At the same time, TPLF leaders captured during the war were also released from prison, most notably Sebhat Nega, the "father" of the Front, and Abay Woldu, the former party chair and regional president. They were released on 'humanistic ground' due to their old age and ill health. Their participation in a national dialogue were not wanted, and the government's "terrorist stigma" on TPLF remains in place.

*If not peace negotiations now, then what?*

It seems clear that western pressure on Ethiopia to accept negotiations has failed, as Ethiopia has [obdurately rejected](#) what they term neo-imperialists interference into their sovereign affairs and has accused the US and EU of being [supporters of the TPLF's](#) agenda. An additional element of concern is the obvious fact that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed does not exercise authority over all his allies in the war against Tigray. It seems equally doubtful that President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea or the Amhara leadership will accept a peace process which, for instance, entails Eritrean political concessions or the return of west Tigray under the control of Mekelle. So even if Abiy Ahmed and some individuals in the Prosperity Party leadership might, hypothetically, be interested in settling the dispute with the Tigrayan leadership, the Prime Minister may be prevented from doing so by his brothers in arms.

For the time being, it seems that the Ethiopian leadership and their allies have abandoned the prospect of defeating the TDF. Abiy Ahmed admitted that the war on Tigray had turned its people against the central government. Instead, Ethiopia and its allies have settled on conducting a siege warfare against Tigray by halting their

advances and blocking all access to the region. At the same time, they have continued their aerial bombardment of cities and important sites across the region. The objective of the siege is to grind the Tigrayan people and leadership into submission. The Prime Minister hopes that the people will eventually [revolt](#) against the TPLF leadership. A similar strategy was previously attempted by Mengistu Hailemariam and the Derg military junta in the war against the Tigrayan insurgency in the 1980s, without success. There is no sign that it will be any more successful today.

Facing siege warfare, the TDF cannot afford to remain idle for long. Their only option, apart from surrender, will therefore be to re-engage militarily to try to shift the balance of power on the battlefields once again. President Debretsion informed this author in a satellite conversation in late December that the window of opportunity is brief: “We have a huge army intact and cannot sit idle to watch our population starve to death.” The Ethiopian government did not respond to Tigray’s call for a cessation of hostilities and the siege of the region remains in force.

The TDF started a new offensive in Afar region in late January 2022. At the time of writing the military and political objectives of this offensive are unknown. Speculation is rife that the TDF may launch a new offensive to recapture (parts) of west Tigray, to create a corridor to the Sudanese border. Retaking west Tigray, constitutionally defined as part of the territory of the Tigray regional state, would not breach with the international consensus that TDF should remain within the region of Tigray. West Tigray would connect the region to Sudan and provide the Tigrayans access for humanitarian supplies. The Sudan cross-border circumvent the siege imposed by the Ethiopian government. At the same time, necessary military supplies might also reach Tigray from potential allies in the region that would enable the TDF to strengthen their defence and anti-drone capacities, rendering the siege war outmoded. If such a shift of military strategy is successful, it might compel the Ethiopian government to acknowledge the Tigray government as a counterpart in a genuine peace negotiation process.

#### *After war – Ethiopia reconfigured?*

There are few signs today that a comprehensive peace process between the TDF/OLA and the government alliance will take place in the near future. Hence, the likelihood of a sustained civil war is high. However, if all-inclusive peace negotiation were to take place, it is hard to envisage that ‘Ethiopia’ as we knew it before the outbreak of the war would be re-established. The war has partly been fought over competing visions of what Ethiopia is, and how it should be organised, mainly along a continuum of centralised vs a devolved model of statehood. Finding a durable solution to this question is a daunting task that peace negotiators will need to tackle. The fundamental issue is how the Ethiopian state ought to be reconfigured to create sustainable peace between the “nations, nationalities, and peoples” of the territory. Is it at all possible to achieve a compromise which will allow a “living-together” model, after what many perceive to be a genocidal war? Many observers doubt this and are warning of a Balkanisation of Ethiopia, at par with former Yugoslavia.

The 1991 “Transitional Charter”, which provided the framework for the 1995 Ethiopian Constitution, was supposed to serve as a forward-looking peace

agreement. The two main architects of the Charter, the TPLF (led by the late PM Meles Zenawi, PM at that time) and the OLF (led by Leenco Lata), designed a multinational (ethnic) federal state model with the objective of creating permanent trust between the central government and the “nation, nationalities, and peoples” of the land. They did so – at least on paper – by reversing the direction of authority and the repository of sovereignty. “All sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia” states the Ethiopian Constitution (Art. 8.1); as such the country is defined as a ‘coming-together’ federation. Furthermore, by including an ‘exit-clause’ (Art. 39.1) allowing any group to leave the federation, it was assumed that there would be no reason to harbour distrust towards a potential power-abusing central government.

The genocidal warfare waged against Tigrayans by the combined forces of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Amhara, (with Somali support) has possibly created such a deep schism between Tigray and rest of Ethiopia that it will be impossible for the majority of Tigrayans to live in trust and safety among their former adversaries. Concomitantly, the continued Oromo insurgency will also take its toll on the Ethiopian state model. The Tigray government has stated that the status of Tigray in Ethiopia after the war must be left to the Tigrayan people to decide through a referendum. If the question in the referendum will be yes or no to independence, it seems likely that a majority of Tigrayans will vote ‘yes.’

However, no internationally facilitated peace negotiations could entertain a process which would lead to the break-up of the Ethiopian state. A break-up of Ethiopia, or the secession of Tigray and possible Oromia, could only be achieved, (if it is desired) through a military victory of these forces and the establishment of a transitional government in Ethiopia which would accept such a solution. It would be on a par with the arrangement in 1991 which endorsed the independence of Eritrea.

If secession is out of the question, what model of government can be designed to appease the Tigrayan and Oromo (and others) who are distrustful of a centralised Ethiopian state, while at the same time preserving the territorial integrity of Ethiopia? A possible model maintaining the polity of Ethiopia intact is to transition into a confederate state model (or a so-called ‘loose federation’). A split-sovereignty confederation, where sovereignty rests with the member states of the confederation and the confederate government holds power over a limited number of issues (like fiscal/currency, aviation, etc), will preserve the integrity of “Ethiopia” while concomitantly guaranteeing the political self-governing rights and security interests of the member states.

Reaching a consensus on a new Ethiopian state model would be an uphill task, considering the antagonistic, divided, and confrontational political context existing in the country today. A state model is also a reflection of the identity it represents. Presently there is no common, all-embracing understanding of what “Ethiopianess” consists of. It is a defining characteristic that is fiercely contested by the many belligerent parties to the conflict.

International actors can only serve as facilitators of a peace process at the behest of the warring parties; a sustainable solution must be found and agreed upon by the Ethiopians themselves. At every other crossroads in Ethiopian political history, the

victors have imposed their solutions on the vanquished, whose interests have been neglected and suppressed. As the current discourse suggests, this seems to be the approach being taken by the current powerholders in Addis Ababa. How durable it will be this time around, remains an open question. The outcome of the war is uncertain at the time of writing, but one thing seems clear – Ethiopia is unlikely to ever return to the status quo ante.

#### **4. An overview of the Tigray conflict: June to December 2021**

By Ermias Teka

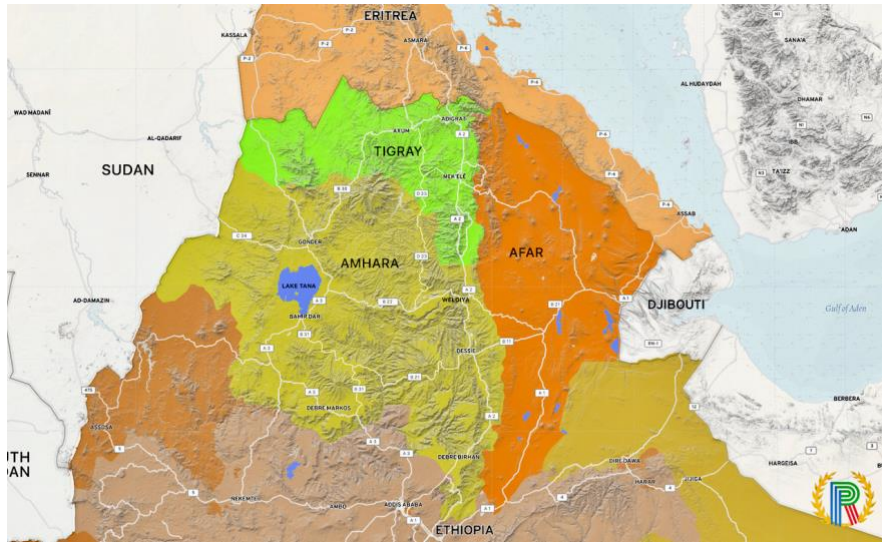
##### **4.1 Introduction**

Barely seven months after facing military annihilation at the hands of the Ethio-Eritrean army, Tigrayan forces pulled off one of the most significant military reversals in recent African history.<sup>10</sup>

The Tigrayans avoided, as much as possible, prolonged fighting. Unless strategically significant, maintaining defensible territories was never their priority. Upon facing a stronger, determined offensive, they retreated quickly to save their strength and countered by choosing the time and place when the opponent was vulnerable. Unlike the EPLF's military tradition, the 'Woyane' as the Tigrayans were known, adopted highly mobile guerrilla strategies which were honed and perfected by TPLF military commanders during the 17 years armed struggle which ended with their capture of Addis in 1991. Even during conventional battles, TDF's units employed quick and focused attacks preceded or followed by constant shifting of positions using similar principles as in a guerrilla warfare. They rarely deployed larger than battalion sized units at a time but used several of them from multiple sides to launch coordinated attacks. To this end they employed the wealth of experienced medium and high-level military leaders had at their disposal to pull off remarkably well orchestrated manoeuvres between their units.

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<sup>10</sup> Note on Tigrayan tactics: The technical terms like 'Koretsa' [cutting off], 'Mizibae' [destabilizing], 'Mishab' [luring enemy force into false pursuit], 'Kurmim' [isolating and carving off enemy units from the main body] predate TPLF's years of insurgency and are embedded in Tigrayan military tradition. They have been an integral part of their organised battlefield engagements.

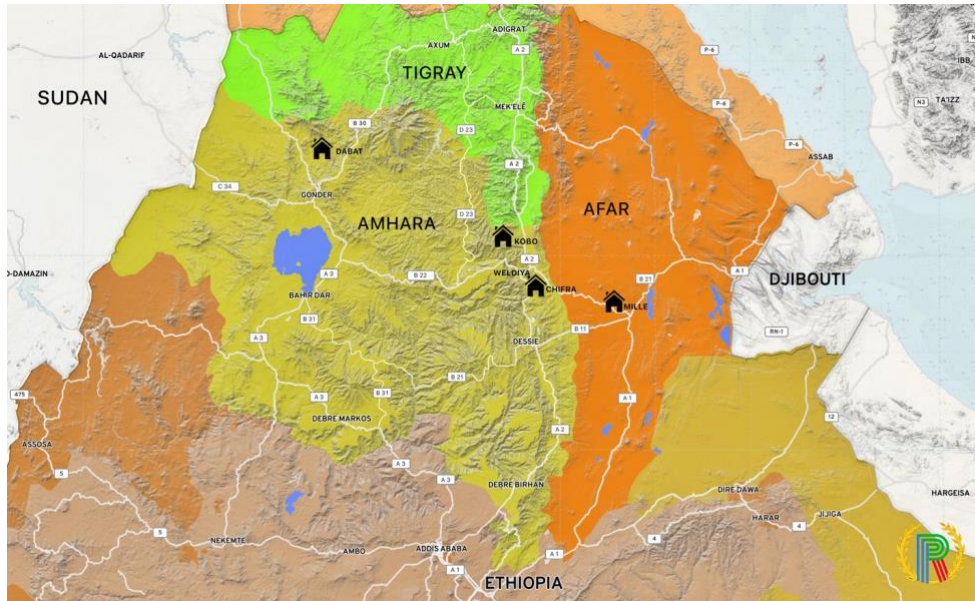


In a series of battles in central Tigray, the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF), led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), succeeded to neutralize some of the best trained and highly-experienced divisions within the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF). The ENDF subsequently withdrew from the Tigray. Determined to break what the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) labels a 'de facto aid blockade' and to regain lost territories, Tigrayan forces then went further and launched operation "Tigray Mothers." It was their first in a series of conventional battles to retake southern and southwestern Tigray which remained under federal government and Amhara control. A series of brief but intense battles with the ENDF and Amhara forces saw the TDF recapture areas around Mai Tsebri in southwestern and southern Tigray – territories fiercely claimed by the government of the Amhara Region.

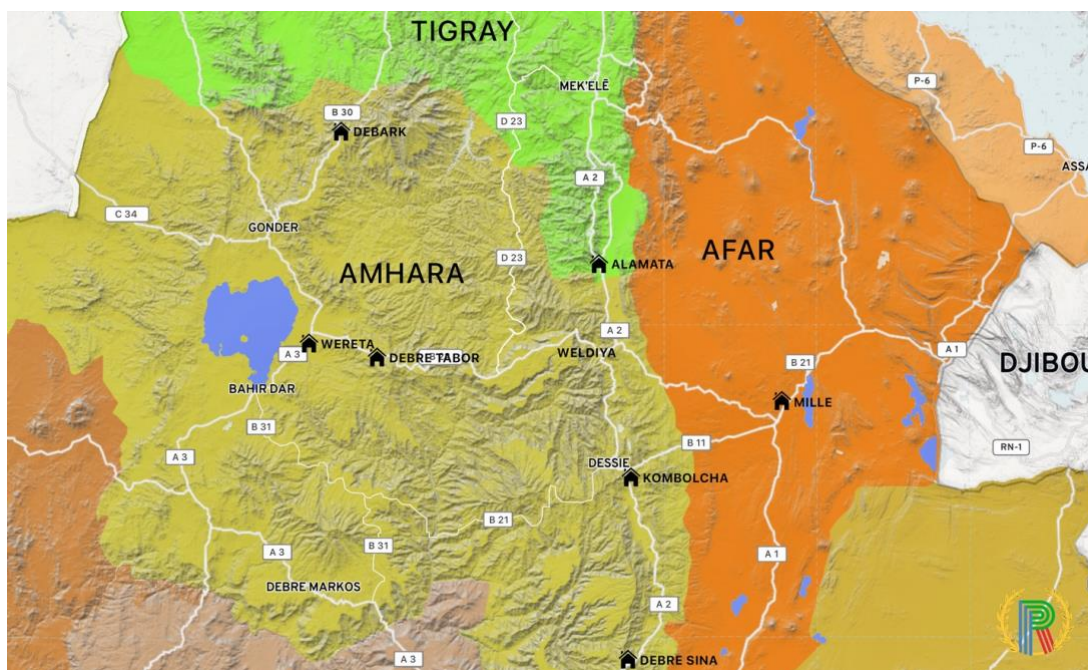
Contrary to the expectations of many, the TDF refrained from carrying out major operations to take back western Tigray which would have served as a crucial supply corridor to Sudan. Similarly, territories to the northwest remained firmly under the control of Eritrean forces and the Tigrayans made little or no effort to reclaim them militarily.

This meant that, despite the relatively significant TDF military successes against the formidable Ethio-Eritrean alliance, Tigray remained under siege. The federal government insisted the withdrawal of its forces showed its commitment to peace and rejected accusations that it was intentionally facilitating man-made starvation in Tigray. However, all services; including banks, telecommunications, electricity, and land transportation remained largely blockaded by federal authorities and lifesaving humanitarian aid was largely denied access.

The de-facto siege and humanitarian blockade gave the Tigrayan forces the justification to reject the government-declared unilateral ceasefire and to launch offensives into Amhara and Afar regions "to break the siege." Accordingly, the Tigrayan leadership mobilised its forces on the region's southwestern and southern fronts. The short-term goals of the operation were to neutralize the bulk of the ENDF and Amhara forces that were allegedly planning to re-invade Tigray, and to set up a buffer zone to prevent future offensives.



The Tigrayans' southwestern offensive was probably aimed at capturing the historic town of Gondar, once the capital of the Ethiopian Empire. By achieving this, the TDF hoped to sever the supply route for the bulk of the ENDF entrenched in western Tigray and force its capitulation without resistance. The TDF's southwestern offensive succeeded in pushing deep into northern Amhara as far as Dabat, 53 kilometres from Gondar. The southern offensive succeeded in capturing the strategic town of Kobo and its surroundings, cutting off the A2, the main north-south highway between Addis Ababa and the Tigrayan capital, Mekelle. This inflicted a major blow to the ENDF.



Meanwhile, another TDF detachment had quickly deployed to the southeast into the Afar region and after a number of brutal battles, took control of Yalo, Golina and Aura woredas and advanced halfway into Chifra. The TDF's offensive into Afar was ultimately aimed at capturing Mille – a town along the Addis Ababa-Djibouti highway

that serves as the main commercial artery for the federal government, linking the capital with the Red Sea. By capturing Mille, the Tigrayan command appeared to have intended to force the central government to open negotiations. However, the TDF's repeated attempts to capture Mille failed; a serious blow for the Tigrayan forces. They were held up by the combined ENDF and Afari Special Forces (ASF) at Chifra, and later at Garsa Gita, and were forced to abandon the Mille operation entirely.

Similarly, fierce resistance and counterattacks forced the TDF to retreat from the vicinity of Dabat to Zarima.

With the TDF advance on both the Gondar and Afar fronts grinding to a halt, Tigrayan forces then resorted to another offensive directly southwards along the B22 highway aimed at capturing Wereta. The objective appeared to have been to facilitate the TDF advance on Gondar by cutting off the supply route from Bahir Dar to Gondar, while simultaneously forcing the redeployment of some of the Ethiopian and Amhara forces from the heavily-manned Debarik frontline, in north of Gondar. The TDF southern offensive along the Weldia-Wereta highway progressed as far as Debre Tabor.

The TDF's rapid advance left its forces exposed with lengthy supply routes. The Ethiopian forces took advantage of this weakness. A major ENDF-ASF counteroffensive was launched at Gashina, aimed at cutting off the bulk of Tigrayan forces that had been concentrated around Debre Tabor. It forced a rapid TDF withdrawal, and they eventually abandoned their objective to capture Wereta, which would have cut off the road to Gondar. The mass mobilisation and deployment by the Ethiopians of highly-motivated but poorly-armed civilians in unprecedented human waves of battlefield attacks appears to have forced the TDF to abandon its operations on the southwestern front. A public statement by the TDF military command confirmed the complete withdrawal of the Tigrayans from Afar and a major pullback from Debre Tabor and Debarik.

The TDF claimed these withdrawals and pullbacks were no more than a strategic re-deployment to consolidate their territory. However, Federal and Amhara forces presented it as a major triumph. Soon rumours of an inevitable demise of the TDF and the subsequent recapture of Tigrayan held territories started to circulate. Indeed, after a period of latency when both sides made extensive preparations, the ENDF, Amhara Fano, and Amhara Special Forces launched a series of massive offensives from three directions aimed at capturing Weldia and progressing to Mekelle.

However, Tigrayan forces, who had been well prepared for the anticipated offensives, weathered the storm. Subsequent counterattacks saw the TDF quickly advance to take over Dessie and Kombolcha. The capture of these two strategic cities of South Wollo opened the gateway to Shoa and, with the ENDF seriously weakened, for the first time since the war began, the federal government's hold on power was threatened.

Tigrayan forces then linked up with Oromo Liberation Front (OLA) to launch offensives on Mille and north Shoa. The attacks on the Mille front, however, proved futile and were repulsed by the ENDF and Afar Special Forces who were provided



with aerial cover by drones. To the south, the TDF, joined by OLA, quickly captured areas along the A2 highway and managed to advance as far as Debre Sina.

Nevertheless, coordinated drone attacks on the TDF's supply lines, the mass mobilisation of Amhara civilians, and concerted diplomatic pressure eventually forced Tigrayan forces to pull back to Tigray's constitutionally-defined territory.

Ethiopian coalition forces quickly recaptured territories vacated by the TDF and marched all the way to Alamata.

Contrary to high expectations among Abiy loyalists of an imminent ENDF march to Mekelle, as 2021 ended the federal government announced its decision not to advance into Tigray. However, frequent, yet intense fighting continues to be reported on the Tigray/Amhara border.

Below are details of the main operations in the six months of bitter warfare.

## **4.2 Operation Alula Abanega**

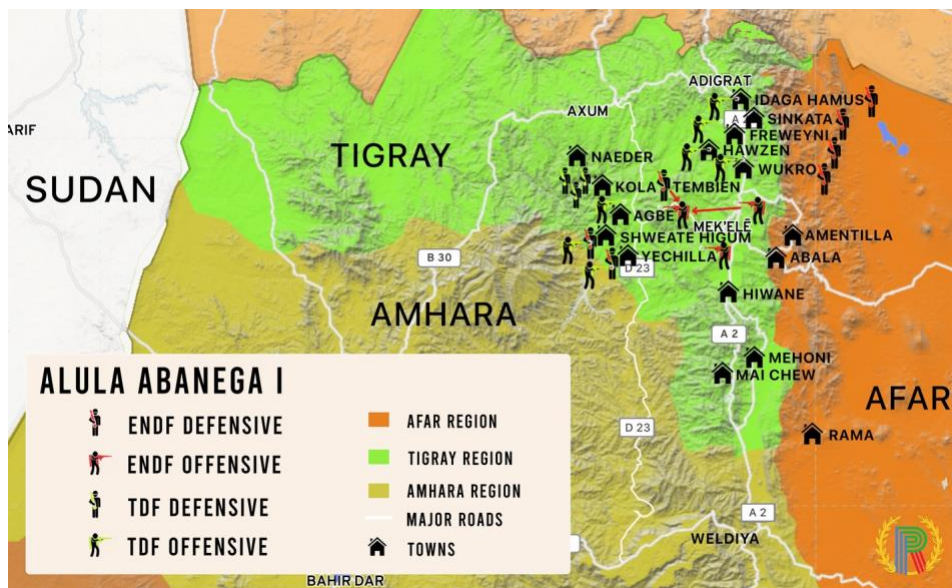
Operation Alula Abanega was the first major Tigrayan offensive that succeeded in reversing the course of the war.

By the beginning of June 2021 there was a huge build-up of ENDF presence in central Tigray. Some sources claimed more than seven divisions of the ENDF were mobilised<sup>11</sup>. There were widespread rumours of a major Ethio-Eritrean offensive to conclusively defeat the Tigrayan forces before the Ethiopian winter set in. Moreover, it was the week of a national election and there were indications that the federal government was seeking a major battlefield triumph up north to bolster its prospects of an election victory.

The ENDF plan appears to have involved undertaking a huge area in central Tigray, which had hitherto remained a TDF stronghold, and to gradually tighten the chokehold while simultaneously deploying specialised assault units on search-and-destroy missions. It was apparent that the Ethiopian government was determined to “cleanse” every square inch of central Tigray of Tigrayan militants. This, however, required a massive deployment of ground forces as well as accompanying mechanised units on unfamiliar and indefensible terrain, making them susceptible to TDF attack.

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eSKE5\\_WAwQ&t=1150s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eSKE5_WAwQ&t=1150s)



The Tigray forces for their part were well aware of ENDF's impending all-out offensive and were making preparations of their own. By this time, their numbers had grown considerably, reportedly with a huge force organised at corps and army levels. Sources close to the Tigrayan resistance indicated that the TDF had as many as four separate armies at its disposal.

Yet, despite the growing impatience of the Tigrayan public, who were eager for news of a significant victory to lift their spirits, the military command of Tigrayan forces had so far resisted the urge to engage in full-frontal battles, preferring instead to pursue strategies of asymmetrical warfare. Since shifting to the insurgency in December 2020, the TDF's strategy was to target ENDF weak spots while avoiding direct confrontations. The catchword "attack them at the place and time of our choosing," often repeated in the central command's public statements and chanted during army meetings, reaffirmed that the TDF was not about to abandon insurgency any time soon.

This gave crucial time for the TDF command to work on building the army's capability while wearing down its more formidable enemies. TDF commanders gave interviews during which they highlighted the recent growth in manpower and capability of Tigrayan forces but insisted that it still lacked some essentials for conventional warfare - presumably a reference to the absence of motorised and mechanized units.

The ENDF operation was fundamentally at a disadvantage from the outset as it had very little information regarding its unconventional opponents, and whatever information it had regarding TDF positions and military strength was largely inaccurate. By contrast, Tigrayan generals appeared to have been sufficiently aware of details of ENDF deployments and strength. Ethiopian forces had reportedly assumed the TDF to have no more than 13 inexperienced and unmotivated battalions and had thus adopted lofty plans to complete its defeat of them in a couple of weeks. Grossly underestimating the TDF's capability had been an ENDF blind spot, but that was not the only one. The Ethiopian forces had assumed the bulk of the Tigrayan army to be concentrated in central Tigray - around Adet, Naeder, and Kola Tembien. According to one high-level TDF commander, the Tigrayans decided

to play to ENDF's expectations and deployed a handful of units around Kola Tembien as decoys to preoccupy Ethiopian forces, while the majority of Tigrayan forces were quietly withdrawn to southcentral Tigray.

On 18 June 2021, Tigrayan forces carried out sudden well-coordinated offensives against Ethiopia's 11<sup>th</sup> division which was stretched from Yechilla to Shewate Higung. This was to be the start of "Operation Alula." Nearly all Tigrayan forces participated in this offensive that was simultaneously carried out from all directions. Ethiopian prisoners-of-war from the 11<sup>th</sup> division of the ENDF describe an intense but rapid series of battles during which their units were carved apart by the TDF. The 21<sup>st</sup> division of the ENDF was sent from around Mekelle to provide support for the 11<sup>th</sup> division, but faced a well-positioned TDF ambush around Addi Eshir, about 10 km from Yechilla. Similarly, the 31<sup>st</sup> Division which was deployed around Kola Tembien was mobilised to the rescue but was intercepted by a TDF detachment around Agbe.

The ENDF divisions were prevented from coming to each other's aid by well-orchestrated and successful TDF offensives. Moreover, the sudden, multi-pronged nature of the TDF attacks, beyond their disorienting effects, over-extended the ENDF frontline causing splits between their units along several nodes. Eyewitnesses described chaotic scenes, with the chain of command completely collapsing, leaving soldiers to fend for themselves.

On 21 June 2021, three and a half days after the start of the offensive, the 11<sup>th</sup> division was completely neutralised. Many of its heavy artillery weapons, as well as its stores of food and ammunition, fell into the hands of Tigrayan forces. The commander of the division, Colonel Hussain, was captured. The 21<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> divisions were also more or less decimated.

Tigrayan forces, which until then lacked mechanised units, were now in possession of scores of heavy artilleries as well as transport vehicles. These were rapidly serviced and put back into service by ex-ENDF operatives, who were protected from harm by the Tigrayan leadership for precisely this purpose.

Not willing to concede defeat, and probably hoping to recover or neutralise the weapons and vehicles they had lost to the TDF, the Ethiopian military leadership apparently decided to overwhelm the area with yet more forces. Accordingly, the 20<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 25<sup>th</sup> divisions were reportedly mobilised in quick succession to recapture the area. However, the Tigrayan forces had already familiarised themselves with the terrain, adequately fortified the area, and had further reinforced themselves with their newly acquired weapons and ammunition. The ENDF divisions were walking into a near-certain defeat.

Over three days of fierce fighting, the additional ENDF divisions were routed. In the heat of battle, the TDF anti-aircraft unit shot down a Lockheed C-130 Hercules of the Ethiopian Air Force, further boosting the spirits of the Tigrayans. During the 10-day battle Tigrayan sources claimed around 30,000 Ethiopian forces were neutralised, of whom around 6,000 were taken prisoner.

As the tides were turning in TDF's favour at Yechilla and Shewate Higung, other Tigrayan forces started to swiftly mobilise to take control of several towns in central and southwestern Tigray. Correspondingly the ENDF began to withdraw from many

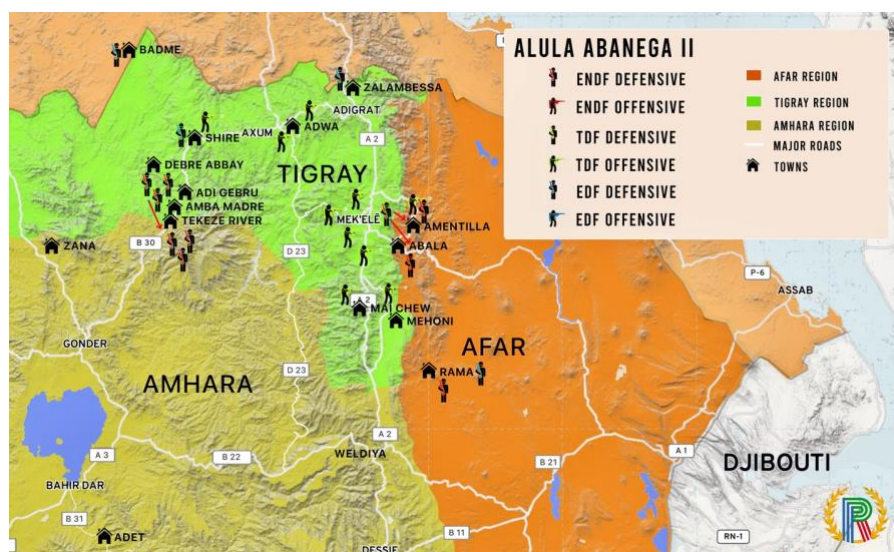
of these towns, and to concentrate around Mekelle. Consequently, the towns of Hiwane, Mekoni, Hawzen, Freweyni, Sinkata, and Edaga Hamus quickly fell into the hands of Tigrayan forces, largely without fighting. A TDF detachment cut the A2 highway and captured Wukro which reportedly left a brigade-sized ENDF unit isolated and surrounded near Negash.

The reaction of the Eritrean army to the ENDF losses was unexpected, to say the least. Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) units situated around Shire were initially included in the ENDF plans and were supposed to complete the encirclement of Tigray between Zana and Adet, as well as to carry out offensives towards central Tigray. But since the Tigrayans had withdrawn most of their forces to participate in the fighting further south, the Eritreans did not participate in the Ethiopian planned encirclement of central Tigray.

What is more significant is the apparent reluctance of the EDF to provide the Ethiopian army with a crucial lifeline when it was facing devastating losses around Yechila. Some Tigrayan sources have claimed that a few brigades of the EDF were indeed mobilised to come to the rescue of their allies but were intercepted by TDF detachments placed at key junctions, forcing them to abandon their plans. The EDF's lack of determination to come to ENDF's rescue was probably caused by fear of sustaining defeat similar to that inflicted on their Ethiopian allies. Self-preservation had kicked in.

The crunch came on 28 June 2021. As Tigrayan forces, who had already taken control of much of the surrounding area, approached Mekelle from several directions, the Tigrayan political leadership which had been put in place by Prime Minister Abiy, were airlifted out of the regional capital to the midlands. Ethiopian forces garrisoned inside the city withdrew, amidst visible chaos, taking everything, they could carry with them.

Tigrayan forces entered Mekelle to a rapturous welcome. As most of the A2 highway, both to the north and south of Mekelle, had fallen into the hands of Tigrayan forces, the ENDF hastily retreated to the east heading for the Afar region through the border town of Abala. However, Tigrayan forces claimed to have caught up with them near Amentilla and allegedly inflicted significant losses.



The ENDF and EDF withdrawal from much of central and southern Tigray accelerated after the fall of Mekelle. The very next day, Tigray forces quickly entered Adwa, Axum, and Shire to the northwest. To the south, the TDF's advance continued as far as Mehoni and Mai Chew.

The federal government said its unexpected withdrawal was due to its decision to declare an immediate and unilateral ceasefire, in response to a request from the Tigrayan interim administration that it had installed, and to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid. The ceasefire, it claimed, was to last until the farming season ended. The Tigray forces however rebuffed the federal government's claims and insisted that major battlefield defeats had forced Ethio-Eritrean forces to flee.

The Eritrean army also withdrew its forces without major clashes from most of central Tigray and established defensive fortifications around the border. However, it retained several areas in the northeast, including large towns such as Rama and Zalambessa, as well as Badme.

Similarly, Amhara forces, which had established a presence in central Tigray around Debre Abay and Adi Gebru, retreated to the other side of Tekeze river, what the Amharas consider their traditional boundary with Tigray. Moreover, they established defensive positions near Amba Madre and destroyed the Tekeze bridge connecting Amba Madre with Adi Gebru, probably to prevent the pursuit of Tigrayan forces. All territory to the west and south of the Tekeze remained firmly under the control of ENDF and Amhara forces.

In rapidly withdrawing from much of central and southern Tigray and establishing defensive lines in areas claimed by the Amhara regional state, Ethiopian forces made their intentions clear. Having failed to root out the TDF from central Tigray, and after sustaining one of the biggest battlefield losses in recent Horn of Africa history, the ENDF's plan B was containment. It would make its stand among the people Abiy Ahmed identified as ENDF-friendly, in contrast to the people of Tigray who were deemed "hostile."

Consequently, Ethiopian, and Eritrean forces rapidly vacated most of the territories of Tigray except for the contested areas. They established a wide envelopment around central and southern Tigray in an attempt to strangle the resistance into submission. Banking, telecommunications, and electricity, were among the services that were discontinued soon after the ENDF withdrawal. Humanitarian aid delivery became increasingly scanty and politicized. The Prime Minister, in his public statement after the ENDF's withdrawal, explained the reason behind the federal government's decision as a determination not to repeat the Derg's mistake<sup>12</sup>.

"The main reason why Woyane [the Tigrayans] defeated the Derg during the war of 'Ethiopia first' was by using the Derg's weapon and food. So, given the current situation, if we stay there for long, we are going to provide them with many weapons. When it comes to food [aid], if one family has five children, they register that they have 7, 8, or 10 children. Then they receive the rations of ten. They use five of it themselves and give the remaining five to the

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xvv-YSRy3Y>

Junta... So, we discussed this issue for a week and decided not to accept this any longer.

Abiy made it clear in no uncertain terms his intentions to politicise the delivery of humanitarian aid into Tigray. A senior UN official later conceded that starvation was being used as a weapon while OCHA, a UN humanitarian agency, described the situation in Tigray as a 'de facto aid blockade'<sup>13</sup>.

The TPLF, for its part, quickly re-established its administrative structure after re-entering Mekelle. Key political figures, such as Debretsion Gebremichael, who had remained hidden since the start of the insurgency, made a triumphal entry to the city. The regional House of Representatives resumed its sessions.

The newly re-established TPLF-led Tigray administration soon made its rejection of the federal government's 'unilateral ceasefire' public. It claimed that the Addis Ababa regime was in fact, under guise of a ceasefire, enforcing a siege on the people of Tigray, and announced its determination to break the siege through force if necessary.

### **4.3 Operation Tigray Mothers**

Operation Tigray Mothers consisted of phased offensives which took the battle to protect Tigray into surrounding areas, some of them annexed in previous conflicts.

#### *Phase 1: TDF offensive to retake annexed territories*

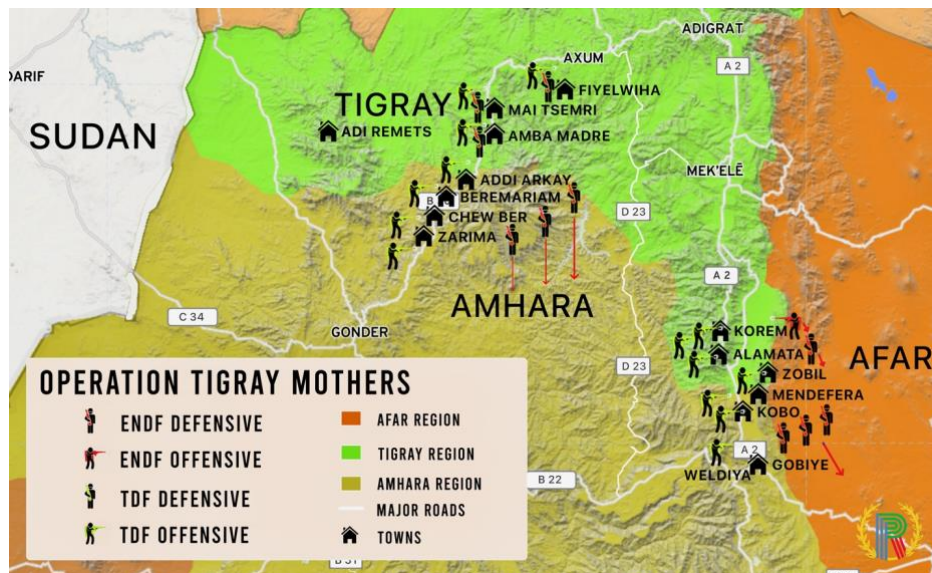
It became increasingly clear that the ceasefire wasn't going to hold, and the Tigray forces were going to launch an offensive. The question was in which direction? Western Tigray was obviously the big prize as it would open up the crucial corridor to Sudan that would be vital for supplies. But the Ethio-Eritrean alliance was fully aware of its importance and was determined to prevent TDF penetration into western Tigray at all costs. Consequently, large detachments of the EDF and ENDF were deployed in the area along with several lines of trenches and minefields. Moreover, tens of thousands of Fano and Amhara militia, mainly from Gondar, were mobilised into the area and entrenched there to provide reinforcements. The flat terrain of western Tigray favoured the Ethio-Eritrean forces with superior firepower. The ENDF's in depth defence along with extensive artillery support would spell disaster for TDF operations in the area. Consequently, although there were unofficial reports of skirmishes, probably involving TDF reconnaissance units, around Adi Remets, the anticipated large-scale TDF operation to western Tigray did not materialise.

There was also a brief anticipation that the TDF might take advantage of its winning momentum, as well as the EDF's disorganised retreat, to go north. But any plans the Tigrayans might have had to confront the Eritrean army were shelved, at least temporarily, probably for the same reason as the decision to abort a military operation into western Tigray.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/statement-acting-humanitarian-coordinator-ethiopia-grant-leaity-operational>

Contrary to expectations, TDF offensives focused on regaining lost territories on the southwestern and southern fronts. Preparations were relatively quick for operations of such a magnitude. It seemed the Tigrayan military command didn't want to lose momentum. The Tigrayans had acquired significant quantities of heavy artillery during their successes in central Tigray and had been able to form multiple mechanised units that could support conventional offensives, which were rapidly launched.



On 12 July 2021, a massive series of offensives, dubbed 'operation Tigray Mothers', were launched on both fronts. On the southern front, the TDF's immediate objective was to capture Korem and Alamata. The Ethio-Amhara defensive line was on and around Grat-Kahsu, a strategic mountain range near Korem, which made a southward offensive along the A2 highway nearly impossible.

Tigrayan combat forces, instead of going straight for Korem, which would have put them at a disadvantage, made their primary direction of attack to the east, mobilising from areas around Chercher to take Bala and Ger Jala towns, before arcing around to launch an offensive on Korem from the rear. Fighting in the vicinity of Korem was very intense and lasted an entire day. Both sides were said to have suffered heavy losses. Amhara sources reported that Tigrayan forces encountered strong resistance from the ASF and that the initial offensive was repulsed. The relatively unexpected direction of the TDF attack had threatened to cut off large sections of the defending force. Consequently, faced with the inevitable fall of Korem, the ENDF command ordered their remaining forces to withdraw past Alamata and set up a new fortification near the more defensible Kobo.

The capture of Grat Kahsu meant the TDF had artillery control over Alamata and surrounding areas, which in turn forced the ENDF and its allies to give up the capital of southern Tigray without a fight. The TDF entered Alamata on 13 July 2021, and then quickly retook areas as far as Waja. This meant that after several months under occupation of Amhara forces, the contested territories of southern Tigray were back under the control of Tigrayan troops.

On the southwestern front, TDF offensives were aimed at capturing Amba Madre and Mai Tsemri towns. Even prior to the start of operation *Tigray Mothers*, Amhara sources had claimed that a small-scale TDF attack was repulsed around Amba Madre. This meant Tigrayan reconnaissance units had already crossed the Tekeze river and secured safe zones on the southern bank. On 12 July 2021, Tigrayan infantry units swam through Tekeze river at several places. To the east the TDF offensive focused on driving out Amhara forces from Fiyelwiha and the surrounding Dima district. Similarly, a well-coordinated TDF attack from several directions succeeded in breaking through ASF and ENDF defensive lines near Amba Madre. The next day, Amba Madre, Mai Tsemri, and Fiyelwiha were captured. Tigray's southwestern territories were now back under Tigrayan control.

### *Phase 2: Expansion of the war into Amhara and Afar regions*

#### Southern Front: TDF operation on Kobo

The TDF's victory in the first series of conventional battles sent shockwaves through the Ethiopian and Amhara leadership. A day after Tigrayan forces captured Alamata and Mai Tsebri, PM Abiy Ahmed released a statement that basically revoked the declaration of unilateral ceasefire and called on Ethiopians to support the national army<sup>14</sup>. Regional administrations responded with ceremonies mobilising their special forces and sending them off to the battlefield. Footage of these was carried on national television, emphasising the federal government's backing from all of Ethiopia's regional states, as well as the public. The war against the TPLF was portrayed as a national, patriotic endeavour.

Tigray's leadership, on the other hand, made it clear that it didn't have any intention of stopping its offensives as long as the de facto siege of the region remained in effect and Amhara forces and ENDF occupied western Tigray.

Fighting along the Tigray-Amhara border intensified from 16 July 2021. The TDF deployed several infantry and mechanised divisions in an attempt to penetrate the eastern border and take control of the Zobil heights. Located along the border between Amhara and Afar regions, Zobil mountains, with an estimated elevation of over 2000 metres, separates the broad fertile plains of Raya Kobo from the lowlands of the Afar region.

The ENDF and Amhara forces primarily concentrated their defence around Chube Ber, a few kilometres north of Kobo. Moreover, heavy artillery batteries of the ENDF were established around Gira'amba Lancha, Mendefera, and Chube Ber from where they conducted a relentless bombardment of the mountainous terrain north of Zobil. According to a TDF commander, this was followed by a series of counter-offensives by the ENDF to cut off and neutralize the bulk of TDF units that had concentrated near Zobil heights. TDF detachments which had been well placed in strategic areas in anticipation of such attacks managed to halt the ENDF counterattacks. An ensuing TDF offensive eventually breached the defensive lines of Amhara forces on the Zobil heights and took control of the strategic mountain range. Subsequently, the Tigrayan forces quickly moved around Mendefera district and severed the Kobo-Woldiya Road around Aradum, thereby blocking off a means of retreat for several battalions of the ENDF that were left stranded at Chube Ber. An attempt by the now isolated

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/message-from-prime-minister-abiy-ahmed-on-the-current-situation-in-tigray/>



Ethiopian forces to withdraw to Lalibela through Ayub was also blocked and eventually neutralised by another TDF detachment which was positioned for that purpose resulting in a massive loss for the ENDF. On 23 July 2021, Tigrayan forces took control of Kobo town. In the meantime, another detachment advanced further south and took control of Kobo Robit and Gobiye, with minimum resistance from retreating Ethiopian forces.

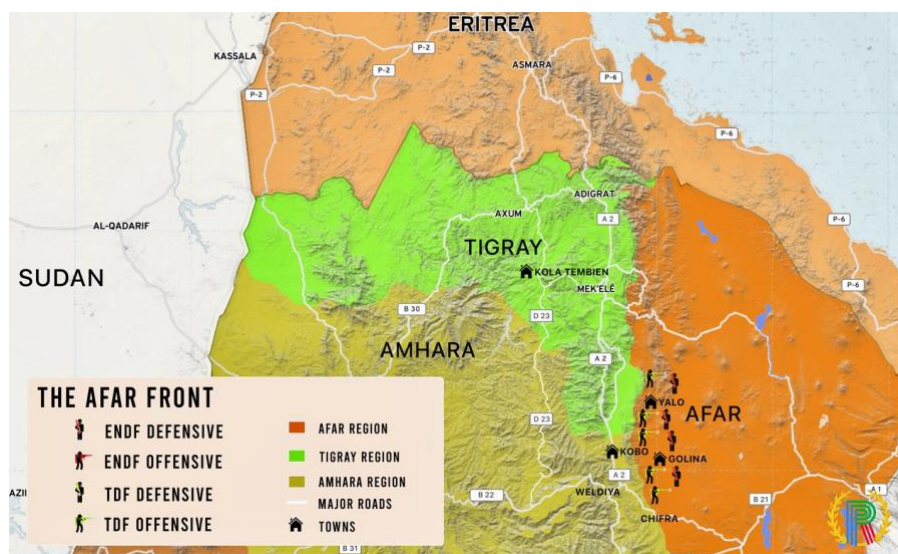
*Southwestern front: the TDF advance towards Gondar*

After initially being forced to retreat from Mai Tsebri by determined resistance from Amhara forces, the TDF launched a successful counteroffensive enabling it to penetrate into North Gondar Zone of the Amhara region and capture Addi Arkay on 23 July 2021. General Tadesse Worede, commander of the TDF, claimed that the terrain had made their advance very challenging. Indeed, the presence of several easily defensible commanding heights on one of the most mountainous areas of northern Ethiopia put the advancing force at a distinct disadvantage. However, rugged and mountainous terrain also prevented large-scale battles and reduced the impact of the ENDF's superior firepower.

In addition, the TDF's general strategy of mobilising smaller units and launching coordinated attacks from several fronts, enabled it to isolate and overcome pockets of Amhara resistance. Consequently, Tigrayan forces advanced rapidly deeper into the area north of Gondar and within the space of three days, seized Beremariam, Chew Ber, and Zarima towns.

*Afar front: TDF push towards Chifra*

At about the same time as Tigrayan forces were locked in fighting to capture Kobo, another army-sized TDF detachment crossed into Yalo woreda of Afar region and waged a major offensive against the ENDF and Afar Forces. There was already a heavy build-up of federal and regional forces in the area, which, in the eyes of the Tigrayan leadership, was in preparation for a renewed invasion of Tigray. The flat landscape of the Afar region meant that the TDF had to deploy a sizeable percentage of its infantry against ENDF defensive lines on open ground, making it vulnerable to the opponent's superiority in firepower and numbers.



This also meant that the TDF infantry risked sustaining much higher casualties inflicted by ENDF heavy artillery batteries, which were superior to anything the Tigrayans had at their disposal. The absence of rugged terrain meant that Tigray forces were not able to deploy their favoured strategy of carving up enemy forces piecemeal and compelled them to face the massively entrenched infantry of ENDF in a full-frontal battle, where numerical superiority counted. The ENDF's extensive use of air raids also compounded the challenge.

However, an attack on the right flank, coordinated with a massive frontal assault, reportedly destabilised ENDF lines and ended up in another TDF victory. By 23 July, the TDF had captured Yalo, Golina and Awra Woredas of Zone 4 penetrating deeper south, to within a few kilometres of Chifra. In the course of their advance Tigrayan forces claimed to have completely destroyed the 23<sup>rd</sup> division of the ENDF and seized large quantities of heavy and medium-sized weapons.

The TDF's successes in the Afar region were deemed so significant by the Tigrayan leadership that the next day General Tsadkan Gebretensae, a member of the central command, reportedly said, "The TDF can move swiftly to control the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Road and will be in a position to accept humanitarian assistance directly."<sup>15</sup>

On 26 July 2021, General Tadesse Worede, TDG commander, announced the successful conclusion of "Operation Tigray Mothers."<sup>16</sup> It was apparent that, though the fighting was still ongoing, the Tigray military leadership believed it had inflicted enough damage on its adversary to achieve the primary objective of the operation - containing the ENDF's threat of re-invasion.

It had set out to nullify what it saw as an impending ENDF offensive from Gondar, Wollo and Afar. The TDF's official statement claimed to have neutralised over 30,000 Ethiopian forces<sup>17</sup>. Political analysts, who closely followed the progress of the war, agreed that the ENDF capability had been seriously compromised due to its major losses, especially in Tembien and Kobo.

Moreover, a staggering quantity of heavy and light weaponry fell into the hands of the Tigrayans. This was enough to transform it into a well-equipped army with a greatly enhanced combat capability. The spoils of war, combined with its highly-experienced military leadership at all levels, and the ex-ENDF weapons operators it had at its disposal, had turned the TDF into a formidable military force that was now a real threat to both Addis Ababa and Asmara.

The response from the Ethiopian side also reflected just how seriously the national army had been affected. Agegnehu Teshager, vice president of Amhara Regional State, made an unprecedented call to "all young people, militia, non-militia in the region, armed with any government or personal weapons, to join the war against TPLF"<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2021/07/25/tigray-Defense-forces-commander-says-addis-ababa-within-reach/>

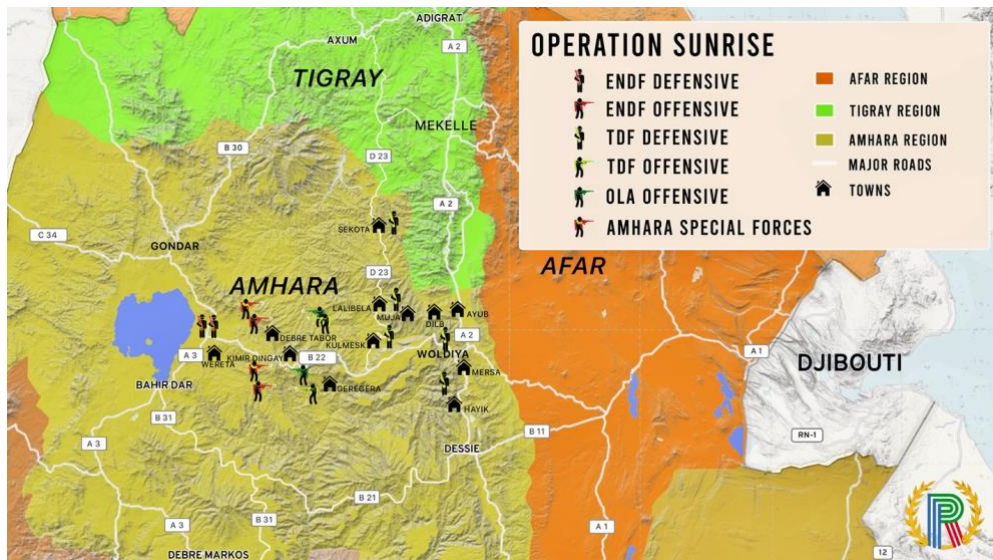
<sup>16</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/375713289640371/posts/970805050131189/?app=fbl>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=275316064360786](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=275316064360786)

<sup>18</sup> [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1594513697390285&id=1186971749719525&i](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1594513697390285&id=1186971749719525&i)

## 4.4 Operation Sunrise

Tigray forces maintained their offensives on all fronts but now with a new operational title “Operation Sunrise.” By August 2021, the Tigrayan central command appears to have believed that it had sufficiently degraded the military capabilities of its adversaries to have a go at the capital. The name “Sunrise” hinted that the TDF’s objectives had evolved to include possible regime change.



### *Southern front: Gobyte to Meket*

The TDF continued its advance down the A2 highway relatively unchallenged, until it reached the gates of Woldiya. Much to the indignation of the town’s residents, ENDF detachments were ordered to withdraw from Woldiya without a fight, choosing instead to retreat to the hills to the south, between Woldiya and Sirinka, to try to halt the TDF’s advance.

In the vicinity of Woldiya, Tigrayan forces encountered determined resistance from local militia and Amhara Fano militia, led by the town’s mayor, who called upon every able-bodied person to fight, and the residents appeared determined not to let their hometown fall into the hands of the Tigrayans. After several days of skirmishes outside the town, during which both sides were reported to have used artillery, the TDF finally took control of Woldiya on 9 August 2021.

Woldiya’s popular resistance was widely promoted by the Amhara government and political activists as a model of urban resistance, to be replicated by other towns of Amhara region that faced the threat of TDF occupation. The residents of Debre Tabor and Debarik organised similar urban resistance, which played no small part in staving off an TDF advance.

The battle of Woldiya-Sirinka was the biggest engagement along the A2 highway since Kobo. According to Tigrayan sources it involved two ENDF divisions, more than 11,000 Oromo Special Forces (OSF), Amhara Fano, ENDF special Commando battalions, and mechanized divisions. TDF also reportedly deployed, among others, its ‘Remets’ and ‘Maebel’ divisions. After a fierce encounter, Tigrayan forces emerged victorious, amassing large quantities of heavy and medium weapons. Video

footage of the aftermath, aired on Tigray TV, showed scores of ENDF vehicles and weapons destroyed or captured.

By the end of August, after facing sporadic resistance around Mersa, Tigrayan forces had penetrated as far as the rural areas around Hayik, a town 28 km from Dessie.

### *Opening a new front*

Towards the end of July, another battlefield had already opened up to the west of Kobo. Several TDF divisions had advanced to the southwest, probably via a byway through Ayub, encountering only Amhara forces along the way. By the beginning of August, Tigrayan forces had advanced rapidly and were already in control of Muja and Kulmesk towns. From there they rapidly advanced northwest and, after a period of sporadic fighting with Amhara forces, took control of the historic town of Lalibela. Capturing Lalibela denied the Ethiopian Air Force decisive access to Lalibela's strategic airport, which it had been using extensively to support the ENDF's ground assault around North Wollo and Wag Himra.

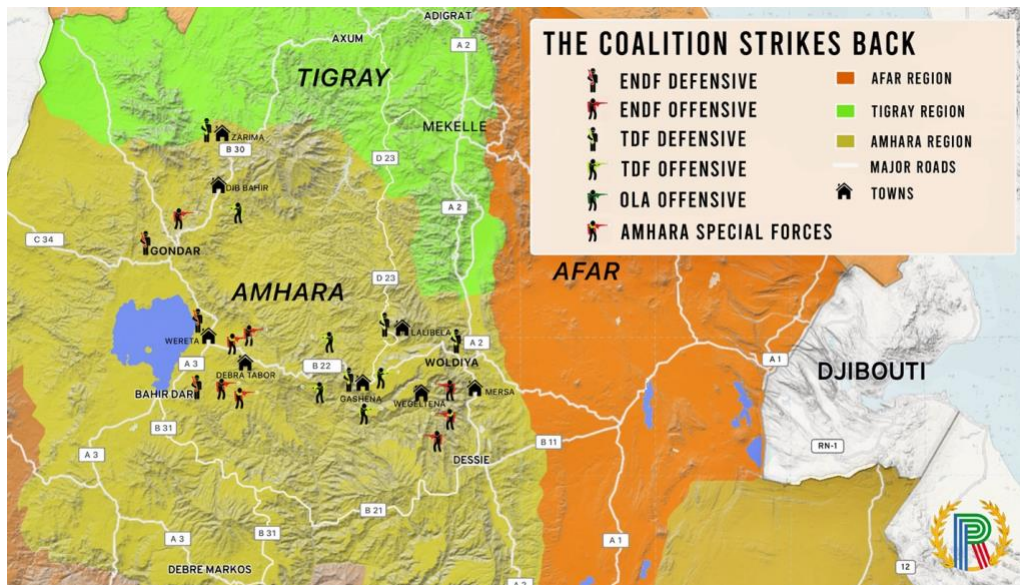
Part of this TDF detachment then moved from Muja southeast to Dilb, where it sought to sever the Woldiya-Woreta Road. After reportedly sweeping away the massive ENDF detachment entrenched around Dilb it advanced in the direction of Woldiya, as far as Sanka. To the east of Dilb, TDF forces made a rapid advance along the B22 highway and captured the strategic towns of Gashina and Geregera, as well as all the towns in between. It appears that at least part of the detachment that captured Lalibela was re-routed via Dubko, a small town along a secondary road connecting the Lalibela to Muja route with the B22 highway, to take part in the capture of the strategic town of Gashina. Hence, by mid-August, the TDF had already taken control of most areas of North Wollo and was advancing along the B22 towards neighbouring Lay Gayint woreda of South Gondar Zone.

By this time, it was apparent that the objective of TDF operations along the B22 highway was to sever the Bahir Dar-Gondar Road at the strategic town of Woreta which, if successful, would choke off the supply line to the northwest, putting the entire Ethiopian western command in jeopardy. Determined not to let this happen, the Ethiopian coalition deployed a huge force, including several divisions of the standard army and Amhara Special Force, in the highly mountainous area between Nifas Mewcha and Kimir Dingay. A two-day brutal battle that started on 15 August 2021 culminated in a major defeat for the Ethiopian side and enabled the TDF to establish control all the way to Kimir Dingay. Moreover, Mount Guna, the most strategic high ground located a few kilometres from Kimir Dingay, came under the control of Tigrayan forces. This crippled ENDF chances of mounting a meaningful resistance as far as Debere Tabor.

Meanwhile, a new front opened up to the northwest, as Tigrayan forces, in alliance with a few battalions of the newly formed Agaw Liberation Army (ALA) (which drew its support from ethnic Agaw populations in Wag Himra and Agew Awi Zones of Amhara region) attempted to wrestle control of Sekota from the hands of Amhara SF. The TDF-ALA offensive reportedly took place around mid-August as a joint TDF-ALA detachment advancing from Korem, was joined by another TDF detachment from Lalibela. By 17 August 2021, Sekota, the capital of Wag Himra zone came under the control of TDF-ALA troops.

## 4.5 The Federal Government Coalition strikes back

However, it wasn't long before the coalition of ENDF and their allies struck back in offensives with fluctuating results until the end of 2021.



Firstly, from mid-August, they launched well-planned, massive counteroffensives on several fronts in an attempt to reverse TDF gains. On the 19 August 2021, as the TDF was making preparations to take Debre Tabor, Ethiopian coalition forces launched a major counteroffensive that aimed to slice through and surround the bulk of TDF detachments in Lay Gayint and South Wollo. One Ethiopian counteroffensive involved a sizable detachment of ENDF and Amhara forces which were mobilised from Wegeltena to capture Gashina and thus cut off the supply route of the huge Tigrayan detachment that was heading for Wereta. Another ENDF counteroffensive sought to break through at Sirinka, to destroy a large proportion of the TDF that had gathered around Mersa. Tigrayan sources claimed that on the Gashena front alone, as many as five divisions of the ENDF and more than 10,000 Amhara forces, took part in the counteroffensive. The encirclement of the TDF detachment encamped around Mersa involved several brigades of the elite Republican Guard, Special Commando, Federal Police forces as well as the militia of South Wollo. The plan was for specialised assault units to surround and neutralize the enemy.

It appears that the ENDF plan initially worked. Gashina was captured and the B22 highway was severed leaving the bulk of Tigrayan forces in Gayint and Debre Tabor with no way out. Similarly, the Woldiya-Mersa road was severed at Sirinka leaving TDF's southern detachment stranded.

However, TDF detachments soon converged on the Ethiopian forces occupying Gashina from three sides: from Arbit [Debre Tabor], Dubko [Lalibela], and Istayish [Woldiya]. After at least two days of intense and brutal fighting in which both sides suffered immense losses, the Ethiopian forces retreated towards Kon. Similarly, Tigrayan forces were also able to repel the Ethiopian forces from Sirinka and reconnect with their units in Mersa.

Towards the end of August, ENDF and Amhara forces began a series of counter-offensives on the southwestern front that intensified through the early days of September. By this time, the TDF had reached Dib Bahir, near the great escarpment of Limalimo. Moreover, TDF reconnaissance units had penetrated the rural areas of North Gondar as far as Dabat. However, numerous “human wave” attacks, involving large, mobilised units of local militia and barely-armed farmers, became a formidable challenge to the TDF’s advance. At least one counter-offensive on Tabla, between Dib Bahir and Zarima, involving several brigades of ENDF units attempted, but allegedly failed, to cut off TDF forces deployed south of Dib Bahir. The Chenna massacre, where more than 100 civilians were allegedly massacred by TDF units in retribution for guerrilla attacks, was also reported at this time<sup>19</sup>. It was increasingly apparent that the TDF was finding it ever harder to sustain its advance on Gondar.

All in all, even though the Tigray’s army command was able to save most of its forces, which had become stranded and faced annihilation, it was nevertheless forced to relinquish significant parts of the hard-fought territorial gains on Woreta-Woldiya and Gondar fronts. Subsequently, Tigrayan forces under sustained offensives by local militia and ENDF units rapidly withdrew from Debre Tabor and Lay Gayint. They retreated all the way to the edge of North Wollo and concentrated around Filakit and Gashena. Eventually, the TDF operation to take Wereta and sever the Bahir Dar – Gondar highway was abandoned. Similarly, the TDF’s rapid advance towards Gondar came to a grinding halt around Dib Bahir and Tigrayan forces were eventually forced to retreat to Zarima.

#### **4.6 TDF “Territorial Adjustment” and “Recalibration”**

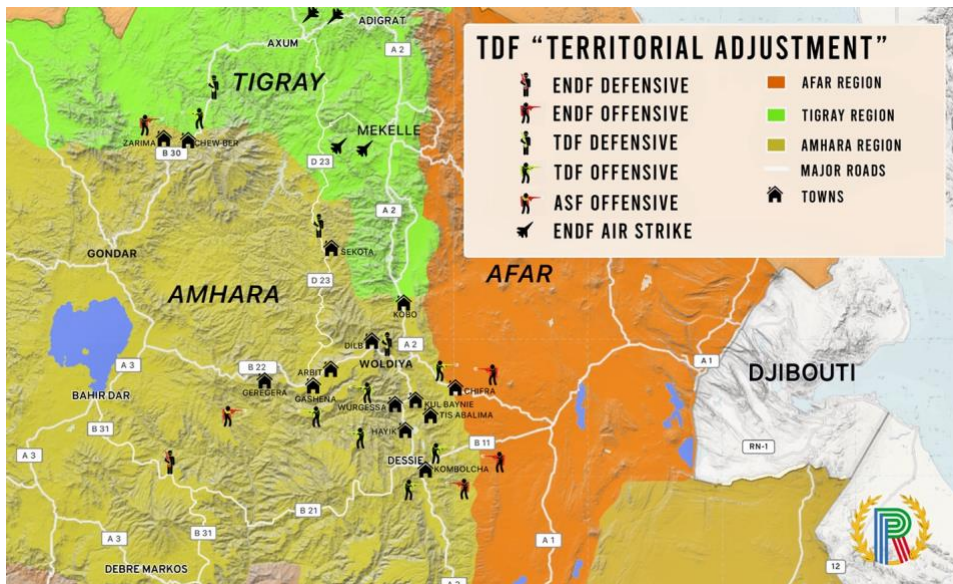
On 9 September 2021, the TDF released a statement announcing that it has decided “to make limited territorial adjustments temporarily from areas it had been in control of”<sup>20</sup>. It was apparent that the Tigrayans were finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their control of some of the less defensible areas of Amhara and Afar. The TDF gave two main reasons for its decision: Amhara region’s mass mobilisation of barely trained civilians “in hundreds of thousands,” who were then used in human wave attacks, and the deployment of Eritrean forces “to rescue Amhara forces”<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210915-stench-of-death-villagers-flee-site-of-ethiopia-mass-killings>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/dimtsiweyane/posts/4246453625452781>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/dimtsiweyane/posts/4246453625452781>



The former implied that the Amhara region’s mass mobilisation strategy had borne fruit. Moreover, there were unofficial reports of local insurgencies around Kobo and north Gondar emerging from rural areas that had been largely left unoccupied by the Tigrayans. These were obviously causing problems for TDF supply lines, making further advances difficult. In addition, there were unofficial reports from Tigrayan sources of a significant level of EDF deployment in Gondar and Dessie aimed at protecting the two important cities from falling into TDF hands. Nevertheless, the EDF’s involvement in Amhara region has so far not been independently verified.

Following the announcement, Tigrayan forces made further withdrawals including a complete pull-out from Afar. Moreover, Ethiopian sources confirmed TDF retreats from Flakit and Gashina on the Woldiya-Woreta front; from Hayik on the Dessie front; from Sekota and its surrounding on the Wag front; as well as from Zarima and Chew Ber on the north Gondar front.

*The failure of ENDF’s ‘irreversible offensive’ and TDF’s advance to Dessie*

By the beginning of October, reports started to emerge that Ethiopian forces had planned a massive offensive across the Amhara region. Abiy’s government had just been formally inaugurated following his election victory and was apparently determined to assert its power with some solid gains on the battlefield. An Amhara regional official spoke of an impending “irreversible operation” to be carried out “on all fronts”<sup>22</sup>.

On 8 October 2021, major air and ground offensives were launched by the combined ENDF and Amhara forces around Geregera, Wegeltena, Wurgessa, and Haro. The main objective of the operation seemed to be to capture Woldiya and Kobo with a possible advance further north. From the Haro front, an ENDF detachment was mobilised from Arerit probably aiming to enter Woldiya from the northeast. Similarly, a major offensive was launched at Geregera intended to advance along the B22 highway all the way to Dilb and then descend to Woldiya. In the meantime, another ENDF and Amara detachment was carrying out a comprehensive offensive in

<sup>22</sup> <https://twitter.com/GizachewMulune2/status/1446119558482305027>

Wegeltena, ultimately aiming to cut off the Woldiya-Gashena Road at Dilb by advancing across the high hills of the Ambasel range to the northwest. This would cut the TDF's supply route to Gashina and isolate the Tigrayan forces at Geregera and Gashena. On the Wurgessa front, ENDF and Amhara coalition forces attempted a major penetration and assault along the A2 highway in an attempt to break through TDF fortifications around Mersa and advance to Woldiya.

After several days of intense and brutal fighting on all fronts, it was becoming increasingly clear that the ENDF offensives were not achieving their objectives. By 12 October 2021, after four days of fighting, no appreciable progress had been made by coalition forces, apart from a few gains around Arbit of Gashena front. Around this time, Getachew Reda, spokesperson for the Tigray government, claimed that the ENDF had suffered "staggering losses" and General Tsadkan, a member of TDF's central command, predicted: "I don't think this will be a protracted fight - a matter of days, most probably weeks. The ramifications will be military, political and diplomatic"<sup>23</sup>. It was apparent that the Tigrayan side was confident that it had inflicted significant damage on its adversary and that the ENDF's offensives had all but failed.

On 12 October 2021, after absorbing waves of ENDF's offensives for several days, the TDF launched its counterattacks. Emboldened by the 'staggering losses' the Ethiopian forces suffered during its offensives, the objectives of TDF counterattacks were predictably ambitious: capturing of the strategic cities of Dessie and Kombolcha.

Brigadir General Haileselassie Girmay, one of the commanders in charge of Tigray's forces on the southern front revealed<sup>24</sup> that the TDF had executed an attack from four directions to take Dessie. One TDF detachment moved from around Faji and Kul Bayine toward Tis Abalima and by following the hills to the east of the A2 highway took a turn to the right of Haiq lake and advanced on Tita. Another detachment mobilised from the TDF stronghold around Mersa and kept a course to the west of the A2 highway all the way to Marye heights and then turned to Kutaber. Another "piercer" detachment moved down the middle, along the A2 highway, between the two adjacent TDF offensive units. It sought to destroy the ENDF's multi-layered and dense entrenchments at Sudan Sefer, Wuchale and Wurgessa and then to progress towards Borumeda. To the far west, another TDF detachment, which had neutralised Ethiopia's forces around Wegeltena, advanced to the southeast and converged with the TDF detachment from Marye. The two then co-ordinated their assault with the piercer division to mount an attack on the ENDF's base at Borumeda. The triad then headed straight for Dessie.

Yet another TDF detachment was making steady advances into the Afar region through Habru and on 18 October 2021, was in the vicinity of Chifra.

The Tigray military command claimed to have destroyed 27 of the 34 ENDF divisions that took part in the 'irreversible offensive'. The major battles that decided the fate of Dessie were carried out near Borumeda, Tita and around Mount Tosa and ended with the TDF's victory.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/12/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-offensive.html>

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lb\\_HtkFil74&t=1190s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lb_HtkFil74&t=1190s)



The TDF was left in control of such strategically significant towns as Wegeltena, Wuchale and Chifra. Two days later, with the fall of Bistima, Haiq and the strategic heights of Marye, Dessie and Kombolcha were reportedly within the TDF's artillery range.

When it was evident that Dessie and Kombolcha would fall, the Ethiopian side responded with a series of air raids on Tigray, starting on 18 October and lasted until 28 October. Mekelle was bombed more than five times during this period while other towns like Adwa, Agbe and Mai Tsemri towns also sustained significant damage from air raids.

By the end of October, the TDF was on the outskirts of Dessie. After sporadic fighting against Amhara forces, they slowly took control of several parts of the city, starting from Wollo University. However, after taking control of most of the city, a quick ENDF counteroffensive on 30 October momentarily forced them to withdraw to the surrounding hills. In the meantime, another TDF detachment, which probably advanced from Tita, took control of Kombolcha town.

By 3 November, despite widespread fears that Dessie would become the scene of prolonged urban fighting, the TDF was back in control of the city after minimal urban combat. With the fall of Dessie and Kombolcha, the next defensible terrain was 177 kms further which implied the road to Shoa was suddenly wide open. The fall of the federal government appeared inevitable. Many recalled that Mengistu Hailemariam, former leader of Ethiopia during the Derg regime, had fled the country after the TPLF had captured Dessie. The eerily similar situation caused them to feel that a re-enactment of 1991 was unfolding.

The federal government was becoming desperate. The Prime Minister called on all citizens to "March with any weapon and resources they have to defend, repulse and bury the terrorist TPLF"<sup>25</sup>.

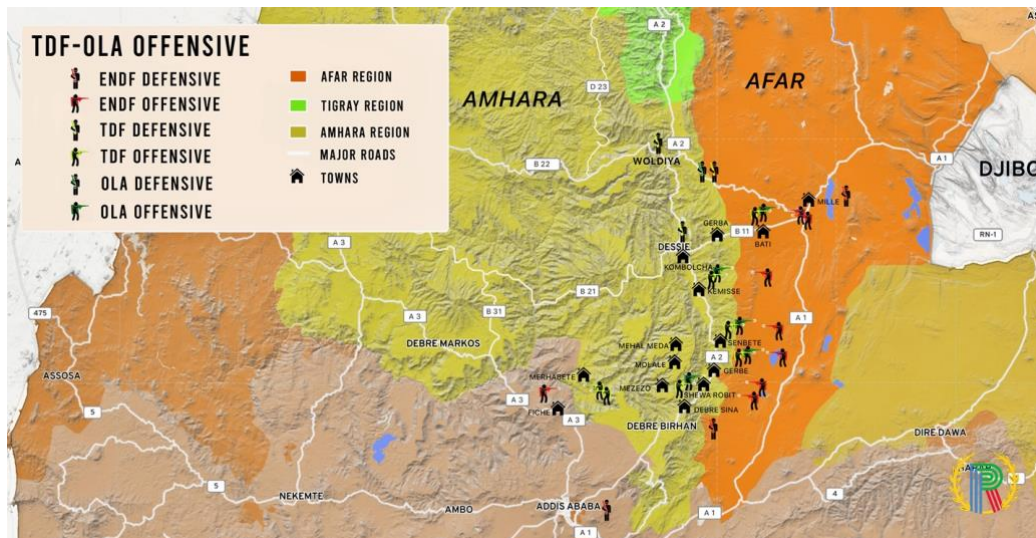
The OLA, meanwhile, took control of Kemisse town, cutting off the A2 highway from Addis Ababa to Dessie.

#### **4.7 The TDF-OLA link up and the march on Addis Ababa**

After consolidating their control of Dessie and Kombolcha, the TDF launched offensives in three directions along the B11, A2, and B21 highways. The TDF advance along B11 highway was intended to capture the town of Mille and sever the Addis Ababa – Djibouti highway, the main economic artery of the federal government. The latter two offensives were intended to advance to Addis Ababa, the country's capital, and unseat Abiy's government.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tigrayan-forces-say-they-have-seized-another-town-ethiopias-amhara-region-2021-10-31/>



By early August, the TDF and OLA had announced that they had struck a military alliance to bring down the incumbent federal government. They had since been synchronising their offensives to maximise the impact on the federal forces. After the fall of Dessie, reports indicated that the TDF and OLA had made a physical link-up around Bati and Habru, areas dominated by ethnic Oromos who had strong sympathies with the OLA.

On 1 November 2021, a joint TDF-OLA operation captured the towns Gerba and Bati. No information has been disclosed regarding how their alliance translated into action on the battlefield. However, since the OLA lacked combat experience, the involvement of its units in conventional battles was likely limited to reinforcing gains and conducting ambushes to distract the adversary.

Along the A2 highway, Tigrayan forces advanced unimpeded all the way to Kemissee where they joined the OLA forces which had secured the town a couple of days previously. The TDF-OLA alliance significantly facilitated TDF relations with the locals of Oromo Special Zone. Consequently, the TDF-OLA advance along the A2 highway to Gerbe and Senbete, border towns of Oromo zone, was swift and unobstructed by any local resistance.

On 5 November 2021, the TDF and OLA jointly announced the formation of a new coalition, the [United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederal Forces](#), to include seven other military organisations representing Afar, Gambella, Agaw, Sidama, Benishangul, Somali and Qimant nationalities. The coalition was intended to take over federal power, after the removal of the incumbent, and pave the way for a transitional government

By this time the international consensus was that with the collapse of a number of ENDF units, the federal army was no longer in the position to protect the capital and the central government from the TDF-OLA offensives. Consequently, several countries, including the USA, UK, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, began calling on their citizens to leave the country, and evacuated non-essential embassy personnel. With TDF-OLA advance into Addis Ababa becoming increasingly likely, the federal

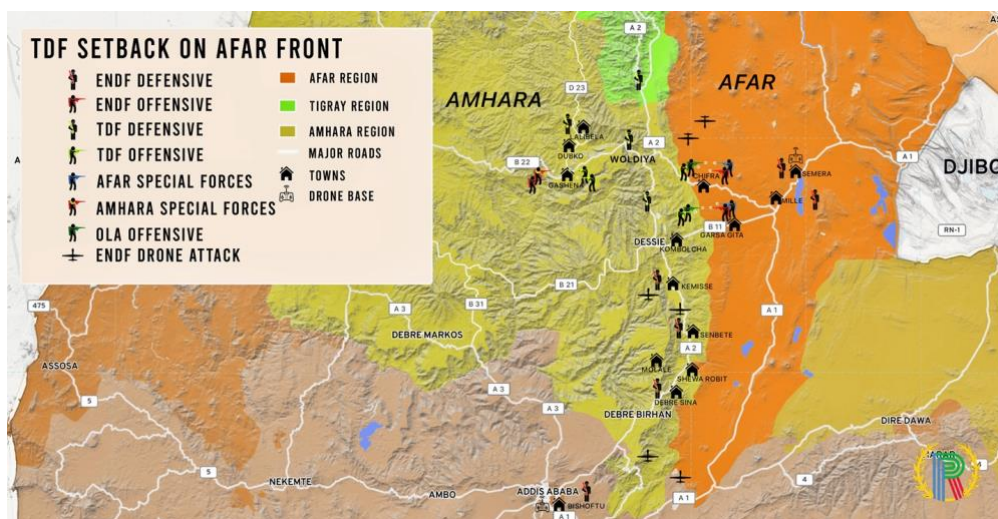
government declared a state of emergency and again called on “Its citizens to pick up arms and prepare to defend the capital.”<sup>26</sup>

While one arm of the TDF was on the verge of capturing Shewa Robit, after a bitter fight with determined ENDF and Amhara resistance, another detachment moved south of the B21 highway into the rural area of South Wollo, capturing the towns in its path. Consequently, Were-Illu and Degolo fell into the hands of Tigrayan forces. One arm then proceeded towards Merhabete, likely in order to cut into the A3 highway at Fiche and advance on the capital from this side. Another arm made a sharp turn southwards from Degolo and penetrated into North Shoa, seizing Mehal Meda, Molale, and Mezezo.

Just 20 days after the capture of Dessie, Tigrayan forces had advanced an astonishing 209 km and were in the vicinity of Debre Sina. Debre Sina is located at the very high altitude of 2,700 m, even higher than Dessie, and combined with its rough terrain, was the most suitable spot for the ENDF and allies to make their last stand. There were fears that if Debre Sina were to fall, nothing was likely to prevent the TDF from advancing to Addis Ababa.

#### 4.8 TDF experiences a major setback on the Afar front

As early as mid-July, Tigrayan forces had been repeatedly attempting to penetrate the Afar region and sever the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Road. During the first round of operations, an army-sized detachment of the TDF had taken control of Yalo, Golina, and Ewa woredas and tried to advance to the Chifra-Mille road. However, successive TDF offensives were repulsed by the determined resistance of the Afar Special Forces and ENDF. This eventually prompted a complete pull-out of Tigrayan forces from Afar.



After the failure of the ENDF’s October offensives, however, the TDF carried out a series of counteroffensives, one of which managed to advance through Habru woreda of Amhara region and capture Chifra. Nevertheless, despite Tigrayan claims of inflicting heavy losses on the ENDF’s defending units, TDF attempts to further

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/addis-ababa-government-urges-residents-register-arms-media-2021-11-02/>

advance to the strategic junction at Mille faced dogged resistance. The Tigrayans failed to move beyond Chifra.

Following the fall of Kombolcha, Tigrayan forces, in alliance with the OLA, made yet another attempt to progress towards Mille, this time through Bati. Again, after advancing as far as Elli Wuha of Afar, they encountered another round of determined resistance forcing them to retreat to Garsa Gita. Unofficial reports claimed that Tigrayan forces suffered heavy losses, much greater than on other fronts, during last-ditch effort to break ENDF defensive lines and progress to Mille.

The TDF's repeated failure to advance to Mille was perhaps the consistently odd note in an otherwise predominantly successful campaign. The main reasons for the TDF's setbacks in Afar are likely very similar to their reluctance to attempt to retake western Tigray: determined resistance from local militants, artillery-friendly terrain and the ENDF's efficient use of combat drones. Of the three, the drone factor was by far the most potent and significantly contributed to the TDF's eventual pullback from the other fronts.

#### **4.9 Ethiopia's use of combat drones and the ENDF's resurgence**

The use of combat drones by the Ethiopian Air Force intensified after August 2021. At that time, Ethiopia was alleged to be in possession of only a handful of mainly Iranian-made Mohajer-6 armed drones, which had a limited operating radius of less than 200km. Consequently, since the frontlines of the war had been significantly farther away from the base of drone operations, at Semera and Bishoftu, the impact of drones on the progress of the war, especially on the Dessie front, was minimal. The frontlines at Chifra and surrounding areas, however, were much closer to Semera. Hence it appears that drones, along with other aerial strikes and heavy artillery support, contributed significantly to impeding the TDF's advance on Mille. Coincidentally, there were several reports of drone activity in Semera during the same period, which strengthen the claim that drones made the difference in Afar.

As the frontlines moved towards the Addis Ababa, drone attacks became far more effective and lethal against the TDF advances. By mid-October, when it was becoming apparent that the Ethiopian defence of the strategic cities of Dessie and Kombolcha was not going to hold, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed a major weapons deal with Turkey which reportedly included at least half a dozen Turkish Bayraktar TB2 armed drones<sup>27 28</sup>. Despite their limited range capability, TB2 drones had a track record of being more effective when they are operated in areas closer to their base.

Ethiopia's drone capability was further enhanced following UAE's active involvement in support of the Abiy's government. Credible sources reported that by early November 2021, the United Arab Emirates had deployed at least six Chinese Wing Loong I UCAVs, along with Emirati operators, from Harar Meda air base at Bishoftu. This enabled the Ethiopian Air Force to carry out UAV surveillance and bombing operations over very long distances, which were previously beyond their reach.

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<sup>27</sup> [https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-and-southern-africa\\_diplomacy/2021/11/15/addis-set-to-deploy-turkish-combat-drones-against-tigray-rebels--offensive,109704605-art](https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-and-southern-africa_diplomacy/2021/11/15/addis-set-to-deploy-turkish-combat-drones-against-tigray-rebels--offensive,109704605-art)

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-expands-armed-drone-sales-ethiopia-morocco-sources-2021-10-14/>

Consequently, drone bombings in Tigray and northern Wollo intensified around the same time.

At this pivotal time, when on one hand, the seemingly unstoppable advances of the TDF towards the capital had created an ominous feeling that the fall of Addis was imminent, and on the other hand, when the purchase of sophisticated weapons had sparked hopes among the regime's loyalists that all was not yet lost, PM Abiy announced he would be joining the army to lead from the front lines<sup>29</sup>. The PM's announcement invoked a great deal of public sentiment and mobilisation in support of the government's war effort.

By this time, the TDF were strung out along the A2 highway, which runs south to north connecting Addis Ababa to Mekelle. The TDF had advanced southwards on five fronts and – rather like the fingers of a glove – were highly vulnerable to an attack from either east or west. Prime Minister Abiy chose to launch his most powerful remaining forces against the TDF from the Afar region, attempting to cut off the Tigrayan supply lines.

At the end of November 2021, news of major counteroffensives by the Ethiopian coalition started to emerge. ASF and Fano attempted a major offensive through Dubko to capture Lalibela. Though it momentarily succeeded in cutting off the Lalibela-Muja Road, a TDF counteroffensive quickly reversed the territorial gains. On the Afar front, the ENDF and Afar forces re-captured Chifra. This was another major victory for the Ethiopian coalition after Garsa Gita and made it clear that TDF ambitions of capturing Mille had been irreversibly foiled.

On 1 December 2021, reports emerged of an ongoing set of major offensives by the Ethiopian coalition forces on several fronts. Quite surprisingly, it was claimed that within a single day, Amhara forces and the ENDF recaptured Gashena, Arbit, Dubko, Molale, Mezezo, Degolo, Were Ilu, Aketsa, and Shewa Robit. In the midst of this, eyewitnesses reported that Tigrayan forces in Kombolcha, Dessie and Lalibela had started packing up and withdrawing without “a single bullet fired”.

In less than a week, the ENDF and regional forces were able to recapture Dessie, Kombolcha, the A2 highway to the south as well as the entirety of the B11 highway from Bati. Few actual battles took place during the clearance operations beyond a rather fierce exchange of artillery fire. Several videos showing destroyed TDF vehicles and heavy weapons appeared on social media and revealed how targeted drone strikes on TDF supply routes had succeeded in constraining its capability. Though both sides claimed to have inflicted heavy losses on their adversaries, neutral observers saw little evidence to suggest major battles took place during this period.

The Ethiopian government claimed to have inflicted heavy losses on the Tigrayan forces. The Prime Minister, when announcing the recapture of Garsa Gita and Chifra on state media asserted, “The enemy has been defeated. We scored an unthinkable

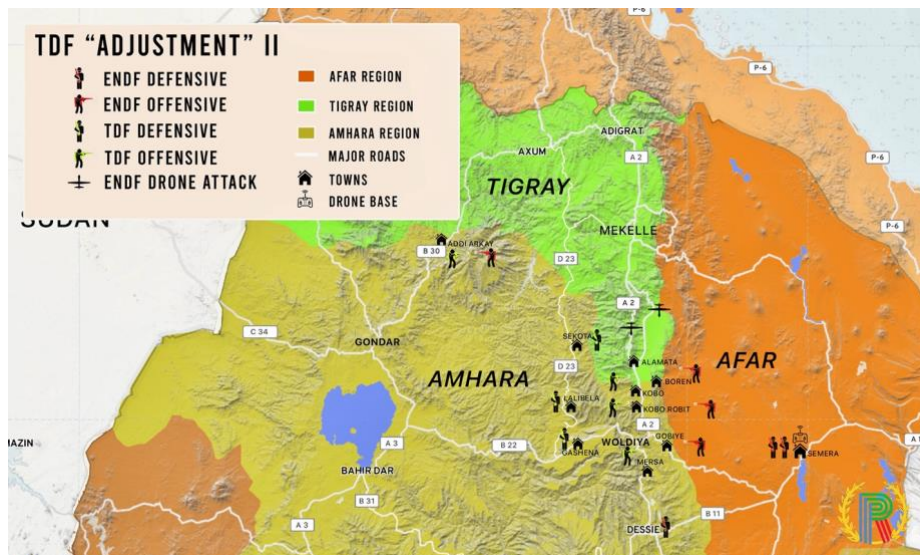
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<sup>29</sup> <https://twitter.com/AbiyAhmedAli/status/1462858774633332736>

victory with the eastern command in one day... Now in the west, we will repeat this victory”<sup>30</sup>.

#### 4.10 TDF “Territorial Adjustment” and “Recalibration” II

The Tigrayans, on the other hand, claimed that they were withdrawing their forces for strategic purposes and not because they suffered a defeat. The military command of the TDF said: “we are making territorial adjustments on our own terms and so as to pave the way for strategic offensives...”<sup>31</sup>



Though it rejects the Ethiopian government’s notion that the TDF faced military defeat, it nonetheless mentioned its intention to “quickly deal with the obstacles posed by Amhara expansionists” as among its reasons for the pullback, thereby affirming that the mass mobilisations, combat drones and multi-fronted offensives spearheaded by Amhara forces had been a significant factor in the decision.

In early December, with only a partial withdrawal in place, the Tigrayan leadership had maintained that the ‘pullback’ was merely “a limited territorial and strategic adjustment”<sup>32</sup>. This had caused the anticipation, among observers, that the TDF would not pull out of Amhara region completely, but would retain strategic areas of northern Wollo, mainly territories beyond Woldiya, and mount its defence from there.

However, on 10 December 2021, an Ethiopian offensive was able to advance from Afar through Boren and cut off the Mekele-Woldiya road. This left the bulk of TDF forces to the south of Kobo in a precarious situation. They faced imminent encirclement in hostile territory.

Two days later, the Tigrayan forces launched a massive set of offensives to the west and southwest, as the result of which they were able to recapture, after heavy fighting, the areas around Lalibela and Gashena. Pro TDF sources claimed that Ethiopian coalition forces suffered huge losses, but this was not independently verified. The objective of the TDF offensives appears to have been to secure the

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211130-ethiopia-pm-claims-war-gains-urges-rebels-to-surrender>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/dimtsiweyane/posts/4509582432473231>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/dimtsiweyane/posts/4509582432473231>

Lalibela-Sekota road for the withdrawal of its forces in and around Woldiya. The TDF units around Gashena held off attacks from the direction of the B22 highway while the bulk of Tigrayan forces undertook an orderly withdrawal into Tigray.

Over the next week, Ethiopian forces rapidly advanced north through the A2 highway quickly recapturing Mersa, Woldiya, Gobiye, Hara Gebeya, Kobo Robit and Kobo.

Around the same time, drone bombing of Alamata began and intensified over the next couple of days. This was followed by a fairly strong aerial and ground offensive through Timuga which enabled the ENDF and their allies to quickly capture Alamata. An attempt to advance further and capture Korem, however, faced stiff resistance from Tigrayan forces from well-fortified positions.

The ENDF's determined offensives and advance on the southern border appeared to have caused a stir among the Tigrayan leadership which released a statement claiming that the TDF's withdrawal was in order to give "priority for peace" and called on the International Community to take firm measures to force the Ethiopian government to desist its assault.<sup>33</sup> However, over the next few days, fighting intensified and expanded onto Abergelle [bordering Wag Himra] and Abala [bordering Afar].

After repeated calls by international bodies as well as concerned citizens for a ceasefire, on 24 December 2021, the federal government announced that it has ordered its forces "to maintain the areas it has controlled" meaning any plans to advance to Mekelle had been aborted<sup>34</sup>. After 13 months of continuous fighting, this was the first time both sides officially announced a ceasefire. At the end of December 2021, however, unofficial reports indicate fierce fighting is still continuing on the southwestern front around Addi Arkay as well as on the Afar front.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

The Tigray war is one of the most devastating conflict Ethiopia has faced in its recent history. It started out as a small-scale policing operation that would be concluded in "a couple of weeks." However, even after more than a year, it is showing no signs of ending any time soon. Tens of thousands of civilians and combatants have been killed and wounded<sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup>. Millions have been displaced, have seen their homes destroyed and are now completely reliant on humanitarian aid. Thousands of children in the conflict zone are facing acute malnutrition and hundreds are dying of hunger every day. Starvation is being used as a weapon of war. The Tigray conflict has become a medieval siege warfare in its ferocity and characteristics.

It is now abundantly clear the war has been internationalised with involvement of a number of foreign actors. Besides the Eritrean army, which has directly involved the bulk of its forces in an ongoing fighting, there is solid evidence that many international actors are providing technical expertise, financial and military support to the Ethiopian federal government in its war effort in Tigray.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/TigrayCAB/posts/918819825498805>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/24/ethiopia-govt-says-army-will-not-go-deeper-into-tigray-for-now>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58450223>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/4/a-year-on-ethiopia-decimated-by-civil-war>

On the Tigrayan side, the resistance has evolved into a truly popular movement. The TDF now boasts among its ranks fighters from all sections of Tigrayan society: opposition leaders, scholars, farmers, and urban dwellers. It enjoys near unanimous support from the masses. Vocal supporters of the armed resistance include religious leaders, the elderly, human rights advocates, and international personalities. Backing for the resistance, and the corresponding rejection of pro-government voices, has been so intense that even avowedly anti-TPLF parties like Arena have preferred to remain silent.

The federal government, for its part, has relentlessly worked at gaining the support of the non-Tigrayan population for its ongoing operations against what it has labelled a 'terrorist organisation.' Its war propaganda has increasingly resorted to rhetoric that not only doesn't differentiate between the people of Tigray and the armed resistance of the TDF, but blatantly accuses the entire people of treason. As a result, deeply engrained hostility has emerged between Tigrayan and Amhara society, which threatens to have an enduring impact on the entire region.

Both sides to the conflict have shown remarkable efficiency in utilising their strengths to shift the tide of the war in their favour. The TDF drew upon Tigray's rich military tradition, the remarkable solidarity which characterises Tigrayan society, and its experienced military leadership. This allowed them to chart a course that saw the Tigrayan resistance re-fashioned from an apparently defeated force after its withdrawal from Mekelle in November 2020. Then it was forced to withdraw into the mountains of central Tigray to be refashioned until it was ready to re-emerge. Today it is a highly capable army that could not only wrestle most of Tigray from the grip of two of the largest and most experienced armies of East Africa, but also rapidly advance towards the gates of Addis Ababa.

The Ethiopian government, on the other hand, appears to have recognised from early on that its greatest strength lay in the huge human and material resources of the country. Consequently, it invested heavily in propaganda and in the purchase of advanced weapons that enabled it to survive despite the near destruction of its national army. By the end of 2021 it had managed to reverse the TDF's gains and drive its enemy from Shoa, all the way to Tigray's borders. It achieved a remarkable success in the sustained mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of militia forces and barely-trained civilians from all over the country, and delivering them to the battlefields, where they fought with bravery and determination. At the same time, the Ethiopian authorities were adept at making the best use of their geopolitical opportunities to acquire game-changing drones and other advanced weaponry. Combining mass (if poorly-trained) armies with sophisticated weaponry, maintained by foreign technicians, has allowed the Ethiopian government to turn the tide of this war once again in its favour.

In terms of military strategies, the TDF appears to have recalibrated its engagements by choosing techniques and environments conducive to their military capability. Acutely aware that it has a very limited population from which to recruit combatants, it has avoided large-scale full-frontal battles and flat, open landscapes where superiority in manpower and artillery would be decisive. Even in conventional battles, its forces performed manoeuvres that followed principles similar to those adopted in a guerrilla warfare. Unless the TDF was forced by geography, as they were when attempting to cut off the vital Addis-Djibouti Road, they sought to use strategies that



took advantage of their expert knowledge of operating in mountainous terrain, as well as the flexibility and mobility of their forces to destabilise and sometimes defeat, the numerically superior and extensively armed ENDF.

Although it has required the sacrifice of almost its entire professional army and resulted in disastrous economic consequences, the Ethiopian leadership, with the assistance of Eritrea, has managed to foil TDF's primary objectives: liberating western Tigray and attempting to cut off the Addis-Djibouti Road. The former would have given the Tigrayan resistance a crucial supply line to Sudan. However, the EDF's heavy deployment in western Tigray and large mobilisation of Amhara militants, meant that the corridor to Sudan remained sealed. The TDF's operation to sever the Addis-Djibouti Road was an attempt to gain a strong bargaining chip to force Abiy into negotiations. The federal government successfully countered the TDF's repeated offensives into Afar by securing the allegiance of locals, deploying the bulk of its forces on this front, and employing advanced weaponry, especially drones.

Ultimately, diplomatic leverage and successful utilisation of combat drones played a disproportionate role in reversing what had appeared to be the TDF's near-certain victory.

There is now a military stalemate. The Ethiopian coalition forces appear incapable of advancing further into Tigray without risking another military catastrophe. Tigrayan forces, too, are unlikely to attempt another offensive into Amhara or Afar unless they find an antidote to the drone problem. Yet, as long as Tigray remains in a de facto siege, and its disputes with the neighbouring Amhara region are not resolved, the prospect looms of another round of even more brutal warfare.

## **5. The Humanitarian Situation: Aid, Food Security and Famine**

By Felicity Mulford<sup>37</sup>

### **5.1 Famine in Tigray**

Since November 2020, Tigray, once a bustling region in northeastern Ethiopia, has been gripped in a brutal conflict. However, the horrors are ongoing. For those living in Tigray, the improvement in food security and standard of living seen over the past decades now feels like a distant memory. Despite avoidable predictions and early warnings,<sup>38</sup> Tigray is facing a human-made famine.<sup>39</sup>

Volume 1 outlined events from November 2020 - June 2021, a period which was characterised by widespread and systematic starvation crimes, seen through the destruction of food systems, attacks on healthcare and economic viability. When information dripped out from behind the communications blackout, it was rarely good news. Towns were pillaged, civilians massacred, and markets bombed. Shops and businesses were looted and destroyed. Crops were burned, seeds stolen,

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<sup>37</sup> Hilary Rodham Clinton scholar, Swansea University

<sup>38</sup> Deckers, Nyssen and Lanckriet (2020) 'Ethiopia's Tigray region has seen famine before: why it could happen again', *The Conversation*, available at: <https://theconversation.com/ethiopia-tigray-region-has-seen-famine-before-why-it-could-happen-again-150181>

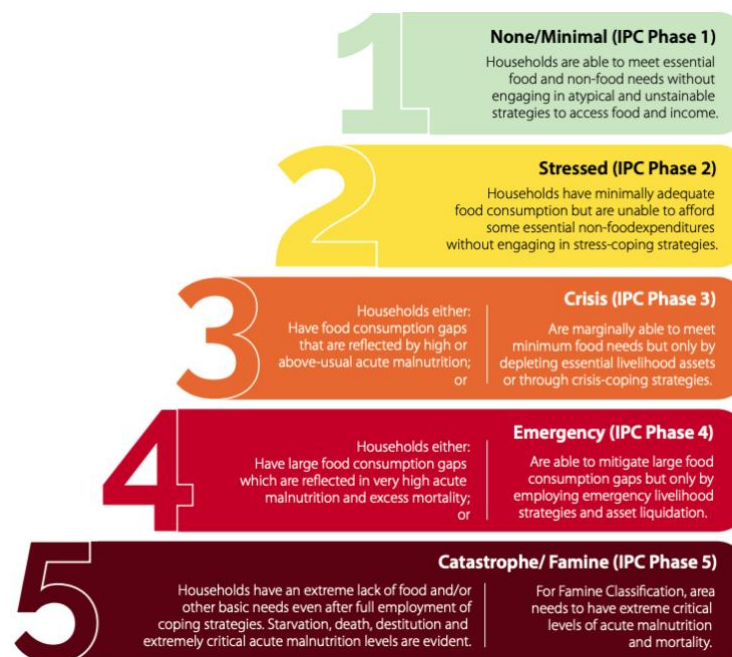
<sup>39</sup> Like others in the field, I believe we should be using the word famine, despite no official declaration. E.g. See Mark Lowcock, see, BBC (2021), Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: UN aid chief says there is famine, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57432280>

farmers threatened, and livestock slaughtered. Women and girls have been subjected to pervasive sexual violence. Both parties to the conflict have been accused of recruiting child soldiers. This inexhaustive list of atrocities has devastated a previously food secure region.

This Volume is marked by a different wave of events. Since the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) retreat from Mekelle in June 2020, the violations seen in Volume 1 have largely stopped within Tigray. However, as the Tigrayan forces advanced into neighbouring Afar and Amhara, claims of similar atrocities have been levied against their forces.<sup>40</sup> The crimes are the same, but the perpetrators and victims are different. During this next phase of the war, the Tigray region has faced a government imposed, de-facto blockade, which many commentators have labelled as a siege.<sup>41</sup> Starvation crimes, although different, have continued unabated since Volume 1 of this report. Humanitarian access has been restricted and aid obstructed. Humanitarian workers have been harassed and assaulted and, by December 2021, at least 24 brutally murdered.

Despite the deteriorating situation on the ground, no official famine declaration has been made. Famine is a term used to reflect a state of extreme widespread food insecurity. The lack of verifiable information coming out of Tigray is providing a smokescreen for Abiy's Government, as famine cannot be officially denied or confirmed. For a famine to be declared, the 'Integrated Food Security Phase Classification' (IPC) outlines that the following three conditions must be met:

1. Two in 10,000 people die each day from malnutrition
2. More than 30% of children under five are acutely malnourished
3. At least 20% of the population has highly inadequate food consumption or near exhaustion of livelihoods<sup>42</sup>



<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2022: Events of 2021, pp. 238 - 239  
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022>

<sup>41</sup> Burns (14 July 2021) 'Tigray: Time for the UN to Report on Attacks on Humanitarian Facilities and Personnel' The World Peace Foundation, available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/07/14/tigray-time-for-the-un-to-report-on-attacks-on-humanitarian-facilities-and-personnel>

<sup>42</sup> IPC, 'The IPC Famine Fact Sheet' (IPC, December 2020),  
<[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IPC\\_Famine\\_Factsheet\\_2020Nov\\_0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IPC_Famine_Factsheet_2020Nov_0.pdf)> Accessed 28 June 2021.

In June, the IPC updated its analysis to indicate that 350,000 people were already facing 'catastrophic' levels of hunger (IPC Level 5).<sup>44</sup> By July the United Nations (UN) estimate rose to more than 400,000 people.<sup>45</sup> By September USAID reported 90% of the Tigrayan population – 5.2 million of the 6 million inhabitants – were facing critical food insecurity, and that up to 900,000 people were facing famine-like conditions.<sup>46</sup> Even if the lowest of these estimates is correct, more people are suffering from catastrophic food insecurity in Tigray than in the rest of the world combined.<sup>47</sup> It is hard to believe that there is not famine in Tigray.

Despite the IPC's analysis, the lack of access to the region and verifiable data meant that it has been impossible to determine whether all three criteria had been met for a famine to be declared. While the definition of famine does not place legal obligations on states, the political designation would increase attention on the conflict. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, has masterfully kept this information out of the reach of those who could have made this declaration. Without this data, no official declaration of famine can occur.

For fear of losing access to the region, the ability to deliver life-saving aid and to ensure the safety of their staff, aid agencies have not used the word 'famine' for fear of alienating the Ethiopian government.<sup>48</sup> However, experts have suggested that arguments over the peculiarities of this technical definition are counter-productive.<sup>49</sup> By further politicising widespread and systematic starvation, these discussions obscure the action and attention needed on the ground. For example, in June, Mark Lowcock, - Former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)<sup>50</sup> - highlighted the devastating situation: *"There is famine now... there is famine now in Tigray. The number of people in famine conditions, in IPC 5 conditions, is higher than anywhere in the world, at any moment since one quarter of one million Somali's lost their lives in 2011."*<sup>51</sup>

Since June, food security in the region has deteriorated. While the Ethiopian Government has actively denied the presence of famine in Tigray throughout the conflict,<sup>52</sup> the mounting evidence is stark. The current food crisis has hit all levels of

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<sup>43</sup> IPC, 'The IPC Famine Fact Sheet' (IPC, December 2020), Available at:

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IPC\\_Famine\\_Factsheet\\_2020Nov\\_0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IPC_Famine_Factsheet_2020Nov_0.pdf)> Accessed 28 June 2021

<sup>44</sup> BBC (2021), Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: UN aid chief says there is famine, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57432280>

<sup>45</sup> United Nations Security Council (2 July 2021), 'Tigray, Ethiopia: Peace and Security in African – Security Council, 8812<sup>th</sup> meeting', available at: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1q/k1q18hu2ku>

<sup>46</sup> USAID (4 November 2021) On One Year Of Conflict In Northern Ethiopia, Statement By Administrator Samantha Power, available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/nov-4-2021-one-year-conflict-northern-ethiopia#:~:text=In%20Tigray%20alone%2C%205.2%20million,people%20have%20fled%20their%20homes.>

<sup>47</sup> Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General (10 June 2021) Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210610.doc.htm>

<sup>48</sup> De Waal (17 June 2021) 'Steal, Burn, Rape, Kill', The London Review of Books, Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n12/alex-de-waal/steal-burn-rape-kill>

<sup>49</sup> De Waal (24 September 2021) 'See No Evil: How the United Nations is Blind to the Famine in Tigray', World Peace Foundation, available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/09/24/see-no-evil-how-the-united-nations-is-blind-to-the-famine-in-tigray/>; BBC (2021), Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: UN aid chief says there is famine, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57432280>

<sup>50</sup> Hereafter referred to as the UN's senior aid co-ordinator

<sup>51</sup> BBC (2021), Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: UN aid chief says there is famine, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57432280>

<sup>52</sup> Office of the Prime Minister (9 June 2021) Ethiopia Live Stream, available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISmTarD16Y8>; Paravicini and Hourelid (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses

Tigrayan society as bank closures have made savings inaccessible. With little cash in circulation, reduction of local markets and little aid entering the region due to the Government blockade, inflation has skyrocketed, making household items and food out of the reach of many. In August, the TPLF reported that *“It is now common to witness middle income families with sufficient savings struggling to feed their children and cover medical and other expenses. Stock of merchandise is depleted, quadrupling the price of basic items and sentencing the absolute majority of Tigrayans to await humanitarian aid.”*<sup>53</sup>

After already writing many warnings, reports and op-eds, sounding exasperated Alex de Waal, a prominent academic on famines wrote: *“If this isn’t a famine then the word has no meaning.”*<sup>54</sup> By tracing the deterioration in the food security within the region, it is clear the famine is intentional, systematic, and widespread - all indicators that starvation as a weapon of war, or starvation as a crime against humanity, is occurring in Tigray. This chapter will outline how the conflict’s development has impacted the delivery of humanitarian aid, restricted humanitarian operations and limited access to those in need of life-saving relief.

## 5.2 Pre 28 June-Ceasefire

In June, when asked if parties to the conflict were preventing aid from reaching over 1 million people in areas controlled by the TPLF, the UN’s former senior aid co-ordinator Mark Lowcock answered, *“Food is definitely being used as a weapon of war.”* He continued to say that the Eritrean forces were *“trying to deal with the Tigrayan population by starving them.”*<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, the pattern of using food to subjugate the Tigrayan people has continued. By mid-June more than 60% of the population of Tigray was facing high levels of food insecurity.<sup>56</sup>

With communications down and information hard to obtain, many regions were silent prior to the ceasefire on 28 June. The extent of the suffering was largely unknown. A harrowing cry for help arrived in Mekelle on 16 June. It was a letter from Mai Kinetal, a district which had been cut off from humanitarian relief due to the fighting. It reported that people were *“falling like leaves”* with more than 125 people having already starved to death.<sup>57</sup> Only one aid delivery had made it to Mai Kinetal; an aid delivery which was based on an outdated census, resulting in many inhabitants receiving no relief. To make matters worse, the aid was subsequently looted by Eritrean troops.<sup>58</sup>

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Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>53</sup> The National Government of Tigray, (25 August 2021) Extraordinary Briefing From The National Government of Tigray, Available at: <https://www.tghat.com/2021/08/25/extraordinary-briefing-from-the-national-government-of-tigray/>

<sup>54</sup> De Waal (17 June 2021) ‘Steal, Burn, Rape, Kill’, The London Review of Books, Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n12/alex-de-waal/steal-burn-rape-kill>

<sup>55</sup> Paravicini and Houreld (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF (no date) Crisis grips families in northern Ethiopia, Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/stories/nutrition-crisis-grips-families-tigray>

<sup>57</sup> Anna (30 June 2021) Trapped in Ethiopia’s Tigray, people ‘falling like leaves’, AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/only-on-ap-united-nations-ethiopia-africa-9540b17507dcb58dd78b79116e6d9aa7>

<sup>58</sup> Anna (30 June 2021) Trapped in Ethiopia’s Tigray, people ‘falling like leaves’, AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/only-on-ap-united-nations-ethiopia-africa-9540b17507dcb58dd78b79116e6d9aa7>

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*Letter from Mai Kinetal*

Despite such reports, in an interview with the BBC just days before the ceasefire, Abiy Ahmed told the BBC: *“There is no hunger in Tigray, there is a problem in Tigray, and the Government is capable of fixing that”*.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the head of the Ethiopian National Disaster Risk Management Commission told reporters in June 2021 that there was no food shortage, and 90% of the Tigrayan population had received food aid.<sup>60</sup> These statements directly contradict reports from the region by humanitarians and UN agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP) who reported that by this time 91% of the Tigrayan population was in need of emergency food.<sup>61</sup>

The notion that the Ethiopian government is knowingly using hunger within its campaign against the Tigrayans was supported by Abiy Ahmed’s own remarks during an interview. He told a journalist that in 1984-85 the continuation of aid flows into the region supported the TPLF’s rise to take down the Derg regime. He noted that this mistake would not be made again.<sup>62</sup> This sinister message has permeated his war strategies and culminated in a policy of starvation. Aid has been obstructed at all levels, leaving millions of innocent people to starve.

Prior to the ceasefire on 28 June, OCHA had recorded over 130 incidents of humanitarians being turned away at checkpoints, as well as harassment and assault

<sup>59</sup> BBC (21 June 2021) ‘Ethiopia’s Abiy Ahmed: ‘There is no hunger in Tigray’, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-57551057>

<sup>60</sup> Paravicini and Houreld (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>61</sup> Paravicini and Houreld (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>62</sup> Fana Television (23 June 2021) በወቅታዊ ጉዳዮች ላይ ከጠ/ጊ.ዐ.ቤ.ይ አሕመድ (ዶ/ር) ጋር የተደረገ ቃለ መጠይቅ#በቀጥታ #FANA\_TV #FANA\_NEWS #ፋና\_ቤና, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmOMyRa72t8&feature=youtu.be>

of humanitarian staff. According to internal UN reports, throughout June, Amhara forces, ENDF and EDF were turning away aid vehicles and detaining aid workers across northern, central, and southeastern zones of Tigray.<sup>63</sup> Only one of these access violations was attributed to the Tigrayans.<sup>64</sup> The international community was made aware of these violations of international humanitarian law and condemned the actions. Following an EU-US roundtable on the humanitarian emergency in Tigray, the following statement was released: *“Deliberate and repeated hindrances by the military and armed groups, the regular looting of humanitarian assistance is driving the population towards mass starvation.” EU-US Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Emergency in Tigray, 10 June*<sup>65</sup>

During mid-June, as the ENDF and EDF troops were facing significant military defeats and retreating from the Tigray region, families rushed to their fields to try to salvage what was left of the planting season. Markets were reportedly extremely busy across Tigray as people hastened to acquire seeds to plant.<sup>66</sup> For many families, markets underpin the ability of Tigray to support its own food security. On 22 June, the Government of Ethiopia bombed a market in Togoga, where civilians were buying and exchanging much needed seeds. Not only was this attack on a Tuesday (market day), but the bombing came on a significant day in Tigray. The day marked the 33<sup>rd</sup> ‘martyrs’ day’, when Tigrayans commemorate the loss of 1000 Tigrayans during the Hazwen Massacre at the end of the Ethiopian Civil war.<sup>67</sup> One woman, whose husband and young daughter were injured by the airstrike, told *Reuters*, “We didn't see the plane, but we heard it... When the explosion happened, everyone ran out - after a time we came back and were trying to pick up the injured.”<sup>68</sup>

Although the Government claims it targeted TDF leaders, the attack killed between 50 and 80 civilians and injured many more.<sup>69</sup> Birhan Gebrehiwet, a 20-year-old Tigrayan whose house was destroyed in the strike, told *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), “There were lots of injured people and dead people... We were stepping on them and in their blood.”<sup>70</sup> At the same time, a bomb hit a school 20km away in the market town of Addilal. Commentators have suggested that the target was likely the market.<sup>71</sup>

At this point in June, although the Government forces were retreating and facing significant military losses, they had not entirely left the region. It was reported that

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<sup>63</sup> Paravicini and Houreld (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, *Reuters*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>64</sup> Plaut, Slotznick, Habte, Mulford and Keeble (2021) *The Tigray War and Regional Implications Volume 1*, Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The\\_Tigray\\_War\\_and\\_Regional\\_Implications\\_Volume\\_1](https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The_Tigray_War_and_Regional_Implications_Volume_1)

<sup>65</sup> The EU-US Roundtable (10 June 2021) *The humanitarian emergency in Tigray*, Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/content/us-eu-high-level-roundtable-humanitarian-emergency-tigray\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/content/us-eu-high-level-roundtable-humanitarian-emergency-tigray_en)

<sup>66</sup> The Tigray Media House (7 September 2021) *Ethiopia's Starvation Policy: 70-180 Tigrayans die daily 09-067-2021*, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivwgDCLsFrS>

<sup>67</sup> Griffith (24 June 2021) *Airstrike on market kills 43 in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, AOAV, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/airstrike-market-kills-43-ethiopia-s-tigray-region>

<sup>68</sup> Aljazeera (23 June 2021) *'Market air raid kills dozens in Ethiopia's Tigray, say witnesses'*, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/23/airstrike-kills-dozens-in-ethiopias-tigray-region-say-witnesses>

<sup>69</sup> Binding (23 June 2021) *Ethiopia: Dozens reportedly killed and injured after airstrike on Tigray village*, Sky News, Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/ethiopia-dozens-reportedly-killed-and-injured-after-airstrike-on-tigray-village-12339922>; Aljazeera (23 June 2021) *'Market air raid kills dozens in Ethiopia's Tigray, say witnesses'*, Available at:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/23/airstrike-kills-dozens-in-ethiopias-tigray-region-say-witnesses>

<sup>70</sup> Aljazeera (23 June 2021) *'Market air raid kills dozens in Ethiopia's Tigray, say witnesses'*, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/23/airstrike-kills-dozens-in-ethiopias-tigray-region-say-witnesses>

<sup>71</sup> Nyssen (22 June 2021) *Humanitarian situation in Tigray (22 June 2021)*, Available at: <https://emnetnegash.wordpress.com/2021/06/22/humanitarian-situation-in-tigray-22-june-2021/>

ENDF troops at checkpoints near the town of Togoga prevented ambulance services from accessing the site for more than 24 hours, sending at least six ambulances and more than 20 health workers back to Mekelle.<sup>72</sup> One medical worker told *Sky News*, "They told us we couldn't go to Togoga. We stayed more than one hour at the checkpoint trying to negotiate, we had a letter from the health bureau - we showed them. But they said it was an order."<sup>73</sup> Similarly, after being shot at by ENDF soldiers, a Red Cross team was held for 45 minutes before being ordered to turn back.<sup>74</sup> One of the doctors in the Red Cross vehicle said that the ENDF warned them that "whoever goes, they are helping the troops of the TPLF".<sup>75</sup> The wounded were denied timely medical access by Ethiopian Government forces.<sup>76</sup> It is unclear how many people died of their injuries at the scene, who could have been saved had medical access been granted. Blocking ambulances from providing medical attention to wounded civilians is a grave violation of international Humanitarian law.

Tigray provides an example of the incredible bravery that humanitarians must have to work in areas of live conflict. Despite international law protecting humanitarian actors, and resolutions to affirm their protected status,<sup>77</sup> throughout this conflict the security of humanitarian actors within the region has been precarious. On 25 June, just three days before the ceasefire, three Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff were brutally murdered while moving between locations.<sup>78</sup> On 26 June, MSF released a statement stating, "Maria Hernandez, our emergency coordinator, Yohannes Halefom Reda, our assistant coordinator and Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael our driver was travelling yesterday afternoon when we lost contact with them. This morning the vehicle was found empty and a few metres away, their lifeless bodies."<sup>79</sup> The loss of three personnel led to MSF momentarily halting its response in the region. At this point, it was believed that these deaths raised the death toll of humanitarians working in the region to 12. It was later revealed that this number was actually far higher.

In response to these brutal murders, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres released a statement, stating "I am deeply shocked by the murder of three Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) humanitarian workers in Tigray, Ethiopia. This is totally unacceptable and an appalling violation of international humanitarian law. The perpetrators must be found and severely punished... I stand in solidarity with our

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<sup>72</sup> Binding (23 June 2021) Ethiopia: Dozens reportedly killed and injured after airstrike on Tigray village, *Sky News*, Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/ethiopia-dozens-reportedly-killed-and-injured-after-airstrike-on-tigray-village-12339922>

<sup>73</sup> Binding (23 June 2021) Ethiopia: Dozens reportedly killed and injured after airstrike on Tigray village, *Sky News*, Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/ethiopia-dozens-reportedly-killed-and-injured-after-airstrike-on-tigray-village-12339922>

<sup>74</sup> Binding (23 June 2021) Ethiopia: Dozens reportedly killed and injured after airstrike on Tigray village, *Sky News*, Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/ethiopia-dozens-reportedly-killed-and-injured-after-airstrike-on-tigray-village-12339922>; Aljazeera (23 June 2021) 'Market air raid kills dozens in Ethiopia's Tigray, say witnesses', Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/23/airstrike-kills-dozens-in-ethiopia-tigray-region-say-witnesses>

<sup>75</sup> Binding (23 June 2021) Ethiopia: Dozens reportedly killed and injured after airstrike on Tigray village, *Sky News*, Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/ethiopia-dozens-reportedly-killed-and-injured-after-airstrike-on-tigray-village-12339922>; Aljazeera (23 June 2021) 'Market air raid kills dozens in Ethiopia's Tigray, say witnesses', Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/23/airstrike-kills-dozens-in-ethiopia-tigray-region-say-witnesses>

<sup>76</sup> OCHA (24 June 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202024%20Jun%202021.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> For an interesting discussion of Resolution 2286 see: Burns (2021) 'Tigray: Time for the UN to Report on Attacks on Humanitarian Facilities and Personnel' *The World Peace Foundation*, available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/07/14/tigray-time-for-the-un-to-report-on-attacks-on-humanitarian-facilities-and-personnel>

<sup>78</sup> Plaut, Slotznick, Habte, Mulford and Keeble (2021) *The Tigray War and Regional Implications Volume 1*, Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The\\_Tigray\\_War\\_and\\_Regional\\_Implications\\_Volume\\_1](https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The_Tigray_War_and_Regional_Implications_Volume_1)

<sup>79</sup> MSF (25 June 2021) MSF horrified by the brutal murder of three colleagues in Ethiopia, Available at: <https://msf.org.uk/article/msf-horrified-brutal-murder-three-colleagues-ethiopia>

humanitarian partners who are risking their lives to provide protection and relief to people in Tigray.”<sup>80</sup>

Other brutal murders of humanitarians also emerged. For example, on 20 May, the US Embassy released a statement saying that an employee of the Relief Society of Tigray, a partner of USAID in the region, had been shot by the ENDF and EDF on 28 April. The statement said, “According to eyewitnesses, he clearly identified himself as a humanitarian worker and pleaded for his life before he was killed”.<sup>81</sup> At the United Nations Security Council meeting on 15 June, Mark Lowcock told the Security Council that “Aid workers have been killed, interrogated, beaten, blocked from taking aid to the starving and suffering and told not to come back.”

Journalists reporting on the conflict have also been targeted. By March, at least five people working for international media outlets had been arrested, including two translators and a reporter for the BBC’s Tigrinya service.<sup>82</sup> Despite statements condemning the spate of arrests in February and March, the intimidation of journalists continued.<sup>83</sup> In late June, 12 journalists from two independent media companies were arrested,<sup>84</sup> including Abebe Bayu, a journalist for Ethio Forum, who was forced into a car by armed men. Abebe Bayu and his colleague Yayeew Shimelis were both charged with spreading fake news. On the 30 June, 10 journalists were arrested during raids on the office of Awlo Media Centre. While at first no charge was given, later the police stated that these journalists were arrested for their affiliation with a terrorist organisation.<sup>85</sup> Even international journalists have been threatened; Simon Marks an American Journalist who wrote for the New York Times and Voice of America had his accreditation revoked in May, accused of spreading false information.<sup>86</sup> The attacks on humanitarians and journalists reflects a worrying trend. This provides evidence that the Abiy Government seeks to control the narrative on the conflict and curtail access to the region.

### 5.3 July: The Ceasefire and Blockade (Day 0 - 33)

#### *The ceasefire*

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<sup>80</sup> United Nations (26 June 2021) Secretary-General Deeply Shocked by ‘Unacceptable’ Killing of Humanitarian Workers in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region, Saying Perpetrators Must Be Found, Punished, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20799.doc.htm>

<sup>81</sup> Paravicini and Houreld (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>82</sup> Fröhlich (1 March 2021) Ethiopia’s Tigray region: War behind a ‘steel wall’, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-tigray-region-war-behind-a-steel-wall/a-56737354>

<sup>83</sup> Fröhlich (1 March 2021) Ethiopia’s Tigray region: War behind a ‘steel wall’, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-tigray-region-war-behind-a-steel-wall/a-56737354>

<sup>84</sup> Abera and Fasil (2 July 2021) 12 Journalists Arrested In Two Days ; Media Authority Unaware Of The Arrests; Fed. Police Says Arrests Linked To Association With Terrorist Organization, Available at: <https://addisstandard.com/news-12-journalists-arrested-in-two-days-media-authority-unaware-of-the-arrests-fed-police-says-arrests-linked-to-association-with-terrorist-organization/>

<sup>85</sup> International Federation of Journalists, (8 July 2021) Ethiopia: Relentless crackdown on journalists covering military conflict, Available at: <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/ethiopia-relentless-crackdown-on-journalists-covering-military-conflict.html>; Embassy of Ethiopia (30 July 2021) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia Demeke Mekonen confers with new Under-Secretary-General for UNOCHA Martin Griffiths, Available at: <https://ethiopianembassy.org/deputy-prime-minister-and-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-ethiopia-demeke-mekonen-confers-with-new-under-secretary-general-for-unocha-martin-griffiths-july-30-2021/>

<sup>86</sup> Solomon (8 June 2021) Tigray War Exposes Limits to Abiy’s Promises of Press Freedom, Available at: [https://www.voanews.com/a/press-freedom\\_tigray-war-exposes-limits-abiy-promises-press-freedom/6206789.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/press-freedom_tigray-war-exposes-limits-abiy-promises-press-freedom/6206789.html)



On 28 June 2021, the TDF retook Mekelle, the capital of Tigray.<sup>87</sup> The retreat of federal forces out of the region was met with celebrations across Tigray. However, the celebrations in Tigray were short-lived. As the federal forces retreated, the Ethiopian Government declared a unilateral ceasefire.<sup>88</sup> With the ceasefire came a de facto blockade on the region. Since early July, electricity, internet, banking services and communications have been down. Access by road or air is controlled by the Ethiopian Government. The delivery of aid into the region is reliant upon a bureaucratic game with multiple hurdles.

The Government of Ethiopia claimed to be calling a ceasefire for humanitarian reasons, withdrawing troops to allow farmers to tend to their fields. They declared that the ceasefire would end once the planting season in Tigray was over (September).<sup>89</sup> While preventing the loss of the next harvest within a region with intense conflict-induced food insecurity is important, it is unlikely that this was Abiy Ahmed's priority.<sup>90</sup> Commentators following the conflict have questioned the sincerity of the 'humanitarian ceasefire', indicating that this was more likely to cover up their military defeat while keeping up their façade.<sup>91</sup>

If the ceasefire was truly for humanitarian reasons, then it came too late. Gebremariam Hadush, a farmer and father of five, told the *Associated Press*, "We should be tilling this land for the second or third time... But we couldn't till at all until now because we haven't had peace. So now all we can do is just scrape the surface."<sup>92</sup> For the best harvests, the land should have already been tilled. The timing of the ceasefire left a very narrow window for farmers.

To make matters worse, as the ENDF and EDF forces retreated, they removed cash from the banks, destroyed bridges and roads into the region and dismantled communications equipment. On 28 June, the same day as Mekelle was taken back under TPLF control, ENDF soldiers dismantled the satellite equipment in the Mekelle office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF),<sup>93</sup> an important centre for coordinating the relief effort within Tigray. According to the World Peace Foundation, "These acts amount to clear violations of the Geneva Conventions and its Additional

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<sup>87</sup> Security Council Report (2 July 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Open Briefing, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/07/ethiopia-tigray-open-briefing.php>

<sup>88</sup> Security Council Report (2 July 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Open Briefing, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/07/ethiopia-tigray-open-briefing.php>

<sup>89</sup> Anna (29 July 2021) US genocide expert to press Ethiopia on Tigray aid blockade, Associated press, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-ethiopia-blockades-c70f207418d1f291689b58aaa037a22e>

<sup>90</sup> Raspoet (7 July 2021) 'Starving Tigray is Abiy's new strategy', in English: <https://emnetnegash.wordpress.com/2021/07/07/starving-tigray-is-abiy-s-new-strategy/>; Originally published in Dutch here: [https://www.knack.be/nieuws/wereld/burgeroorlog-ethiopia-tigray-uthongeren-is-de-nieuwe-strategie-van-abiy/article-normal-1754189.html?cookie\\_check=1639572441](https://www.knack.be/nieuws/wereld/burgeroorlog-ethiopia-tigray-uthongeren-is-de-nieuwe-strategie-van-abiy/article-normal-1754189.html?cookie_check=1639572441)

<sup>91</sup> Nunis (22 July 2021) Ethiopia Tigray crisis: New front opens as aid fears grow, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57926832>; De Waal (8 July 2021) De-escalating the War in Ethiopia: Start with the Rhetoric, World Peace Foundation, Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/07/08/de-escalating-the-war-in-ethiopia-start-with-the-rhetoric/>; Endeshaw (16 July 2021) Three more regions reinforce Ethiopia army, Amhara against Tigray forces, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/three-more-regions-reinforce-ethiopia-army-amhara-against-tigray-forces-2021-07-16/>

<sup>92</sup> Muhumuza (14 June 2021) In Tigray, food is often a weapon of war as famine looms, Associated Press, Available at: <https://apimagesblog.com/blog/2021/6/11/in-tigray-food-is-often-a-weapon-of-war-as-famine-looms>

<sup>93</sup> Security Council Report (2 July 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Open Briefing, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/07/ethiopia-tigray-open-briefing.php>

Protocols, which prohibit attacks on humanitarian personnel, equipment, and materials in both international and non-international armed conflicts.”<sup>94</sup>

The Tekezé river forms a natural boundary separating western Tigray from the rest of the region. As the Amhara militia and Federal forces retreated on 1 July, two key bridges over the Tekezé were destroyed.<sup>95</sup> These routes were essential for the delivery of aid. The World Food Programme (WFP) reported that “While WFP is adjusting its supply lines and exploring alternative routes into Tigray, the destruction of the bridges had an immediate impact on moving food into the region from Gondar.”<sup>96</sup> The attacks on infrastructure essential for the humanitarian response provided further evidence of the desire to hamper the aid effort.

In this instance, calling a ceasefire for ‘humanitarian’ reasons is a fallacy. The Ethiopian Government has an obligation to protect civilians during armed conflict. For example, international humanitarian law requires warring parties to ensure that the civilian population and objects indispensable to their survival are protected and that they can access humanitarian assistance.

In a statement, the Tigray government outlined their fears about the ceasefire: “the so-called unilateral ceasefire was simply a coverup for misleading the Ethiopian people and the international community into believing that it was not militarily defeated while also buying time to prepare for the reinvasion of Tigray. Furthermore, it aimed at triggering international pressure on Tigray to reciprocate the ‘unilateral ceasefire’ it declared as it prepares for its counter offensive.”<sup>97</sup> This view was mirrored by academics who claim that the unilateral ceasefire was no more than a pause in fighting to allow the Governments forces to regroup and rearm.<sup>98</sup>

At the UN Security Council Meeting on 2 July, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: “It is essential to have a real ceasefire paving the way for a dialogue able to bring a political solution to Tigray”. He continued to say that “The presence of foreign troops is an aggravating factor of confrontation. At the same time, full humanitarian access, unrestricted humanitarian access must be guaranteed to the whole territory. The destruction of civilian infrastructure is totally unacceptable.”<sup>99</sup> While some UN Officials were optimistic, for example the Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia said that “unilateral cease-fire that the Ethiopian government announced gives us a light glimmer of hope”,<sup>100</sup> others were more direct, outlining the high risks

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<sup>94</sup> Burns (14 July 2021) ‘Tigray: Time for the UN to Report on Attacks on Humanitarian Facilities and Personnel’ The World Peace Foundation, available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/07/14/tigray-time-for-the-un-to-report-on-attacks-on-humanitarian-facilities-and-personnel>

<sup>95</sup> United Nations (2 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210702.doc.htm>

<sup>96</sup> World Food Programme (2 July 2021) WFP resumes operations to reach 2 million people with emergency food assistance in Tigray, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/world-food-programme-changing-supply-routes-to-tigray-after-bridges-destroyed>

<sup>97</sup> Plaut (5 September 2021) Debretsion Gebremichael lays out Tigray’s policies, Eritrea Hub, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/debretsion-gebremichael-lays-out-tigrays-policies>

<sup>98</sup> Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe (22 September 2021) Ethiopia: Definition and politics of ceasefire, Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/09/22/ethiopia-definition-and-politics-of-ceasefire/>

<sup>99</sup> Falk (2 July 2021) “Tragedies of historic proportions”: U.N. confronts Ethiopia as famine grips Tigray region, Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tigray-ethiopia-famine-united-nations-meeting/>

<sup>100</sup> Falk (2 July 2021) “Tragedies of historic proportions”: U.N. confronts Ethiopia as famine grips Tigray region, Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tigray-ethiopia-famine-united-nations-meeting/>

of future confrontations.<sup>101</sup> These fears proved justified as evidence emerged during July as officers from Oromia, Sidama and the Southern Nations Nationalities and People's region all acknowledged that their special forces were moving north to reinforce the national army despite the ceasefire.<sup>102</sup> Internationally, fears were mounting that the conflict would no longer be contained to the Tigray region but engulf neighbouring regional states in an ethnically motivated war.

### *The blockade*

Since the ceasefire, conditions have continued to deteriorate for those living within Tigray. While fighting was less of a concern due to the partial retreat of the ENDF and EDF, according to UN officials, food security in the region continued to deteriorate. In early July, 400,000 people were already living in famine conditions, while 1.8 million were on the brink. At a UN Security Council meeting on 2 July, the UN's Under Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo told the Council that, "Basic services to support humanitarian delivery are absent. Mekelle has no electrical power or internet. Key infrastructure has been destroyed, and there are no flights entering or leaving the area."<sup>103</sup> Ramesh Rajasingham (Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) warned the Council that since the ceasefire declaration they had not been able to move any aid into the region. He stated that within Tigray there was only enough aid for a 1-month supply for 1 million people, out of the 5.2 million food insecure people in Tigray. He continued to stress that "over 2.5 million people in rural Tigray have not had access to essential services over the last six months, including those facing famine."<sup>104</sup>

The Ethiopian government has continually rejected the claim that they are imposing a blockade, despite overwhelming evidence from organisations on the ground. In a statement by the US Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, she reflected the rising concerns felt by the international community: "Humanitarian workers are reporting that it is more difficult to reach desperate people in Tigray now than it was just a week ago. Such acts, if verified, are not an indication of a humanitarian ceasefire, but of a siege. The Ethiopian government can and should prove this analysis wrong by providing unhindered movement of humanitarian supplies, commodities, and personnel into, and throughout Tigray. If they do not, we believe hundreds of thousands of people could starve to death."<sup>105</sup>

On 8 July, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Abiy Ahmed discussed the situation. Abiy Ahmed gave assurances that there would be immediate access for humanitarian staff and the resumption of essential services, including power and communications.<sup>106</sup> These promises were not kept. The blockade on electricity,

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<sup>101</sup> Falk (2 July 2021) "Tragedies of historic proportions": U.N. confronts Ethiopia as famine grips Tigray region, Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tigray-ethiopia-famine-united-nations-meeting/>

<sup>102</sup> Endeshaw (16 July 2021) Three more regions reinforce Ethiopia army, Amhara against Tigray forces, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/three-more-regions-reinforce-ethiopia-army-amhara-against-tigray-forces-2021-07-16/>

<sup>103</sup> Falk (2 July 2021) "Tragedies of historic proportions": U.N. confronts Ethiopia as famine grips Tigray region, Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tigray-ethiopia-famine-united-nations-meeting/>

<sup>104</sup> United Nations (2 July 2021) Security Council 8812<sup>th</sup> Meeting: Consequences of Not Acting Now to End Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region Could Be 'Disastrous', Warns Under-Secretary-General, Briefing Security Council, Available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14572.doc.htm>

<sup>105</sup> Elbagir and Roth (3 July 2021) Food and fuel running out in capital of Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region, CNN, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/07/03/africa/tigray-ethiopia-food-shortage-intl/index.html>

<sup>106</sup> United Nations (9 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210709>

communications, fuel, and humanitarian assistance has had an immeasurable impact on the region.

Without electricity, banks cannot function, homes have no light or power, medical facilities cannot use essential machinery. Without communications, families do not know if their loved ones are alive, or where they are. Aid workers cannot coordinate their efforts, collect data necessary for the relief effort or monitor the situation.<sup>107</sup> The media is restricted, as if information is able to leave the region, it cannot be corroborated. Without fuel, flour mills, water pumps and vehicles for the humanitarian response cannot run. This means that areas far from main cities become increasingly inaccessible. By July, most petrol stations had either run out of fuel or had extensive lines of people waiting to purchase fuel.<sup>108</sup>

### *Spread of conflict*

If Abiy's plan was to starve Tigray into submission, or worse, from existence, then this plan backfired. While the conflict had been contained to the Tigray region, since July, the fighting spread to neighbouring Amhara and Afar.<sup>109</sup> The TDF advanced into neighbouring regions, marching towards strategic points. Although commentators have argued that this offensive was to capitalise on military gains, or disrupt trade,<sup>110</sup> the TDF claimed this advance was to gain leverage over the Government of Ethiopia, to force a negotiated ceasefire (rather than a unilateral one) and peace negotiations. Had the TDF remained within Tigray, then they would have had to rely upon the Ethiopian Government allowing aid to enter the region, an assurance which they did not have.<sup>111</sup> This push to reopen and control the supply lines into Tigray and end the siege, included a push for North Wollo Zone, Lalibela and Gondar – sites of significance and roads which go to Sudan and Eritrea.<sup>112</sup> To the TDF, each territorial gain may represent a bargaining chip with the Ethiopian Government to ensure aid supplies and negotiations, or perhaps one step closer to Addis Ababa.

However, as the conflict has spread, so have the increasing humanitarian needs. Rising insecurity has created new dilemmas for aid workers and new obstacles for relief operations. By 23 July, more than 54,000 people in the adjoining Afar region was thought to have been displaced due to clashes with TDF.

### *Impact on farming*

Although the ceasefire was apparently put in place to support farming within Tigray, farmers faced significant challenges as they raced against the seasonal weather.

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<sup>107</sup> On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July OCHA reported that communication is only possible in a number of UN agencies compounds within Mekelle, Shire and May Tsebri via satellite phones and VSAT connections.

<sup>108</sup> OCHA (1 July 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update - Flash Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-flash-update-1-july-2021>

<sup>109</sup> Nunis (22 July 2021) Ethiopia Tigray crisis: New front opens as aid fears grow, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57926832>

<sup>110</sup> Nunis (22 July 2021) Ethiopia Tigray crisis: New front opens as aid fears grow, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57926832>

<sup>111</sup> Plaut (20 July 2021) A critical moment in the Tigray war, Eritrea Hub, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/a-critical-moment-in-the-tigray-war>

<sup>112</sup> Aboudouh (15 October 2021) Fears for humanitarian crisis engulfing Tigray as Abiy Ahmed launches make or break war, The Independent, Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-war-humanitarian-population-b1938975.html>

Before the ceasefire, farming was a dangerous act of resistance, performed mostly at night, out of sight of the EDF or ENDF. Research has found that farming was interrupted by several factors, including fear. Farming equipment had been looted, seeds were destroyed or stolen, fertilisers were inaccessible, and oxen for ploughing had been slaughtered.<sup>113</sup> “All our farm tools, including ploughs, were looted and taken away on trucks,” Birhau Tsegay, a young Tigrayan farmer told *AP* news, “they left nothing.”<sup>114</sup>

In June, as Government forces retreated and the TDF took control of large swathes of Tigray, there was a surge in agricultural activity, as farmers were rushing to plant crops before they missed the planting window ahead of seasonal rains. If crops were sown prior to August, there would be something to harvest in November. This was corroborated by research using satellite imagery, which showed that much farmland was tilled at least once, except for western Tigray where it seems last year’s sorghum harvest remained unharvested.<sup>115</sup> However, despite the unilateral ceasefire, there were still challenges for farmers. Abebe Gebrehiwot (deputy head of the Tigray interim Government) told *Reuters* that Eritrean soldiers were still preventing farmers from planting crops, while Amhara regional forces were blocking routes into Tigray, preventing seeds and agricultural supplies reaching farmers.<sup>116</sup>

By July, it was clear that shortages of seeds and fertiliser meant that many farmers missed the peak planting month of June.<sup>117</sup> While driving through the region, aid agencies reported a high number of deserted villages and large areas of untilled and abandoned land.<sup>118</sup> In many areas, local food production had been brought to a standstill according to the FAO.<sup>119</sup> With over two million IDPs now living in camps away from their homes and lands and unable to return, it was likely that food security would get worse before it got better.

### *Road Access*

Although access within the Tigray region has improved greatly since the ceasefire (see section on access maps), entry to the region was severely restricted. Roads through Amhara were blocked, and bridges destroyed, leaving just one functioning route from Afar, via Semera.<sup>120</sup> With the escalation of conflict in Afar, the safe passage of trucks and humanitarian actors was of great concern. Several checkpoints were set up on the main routes into Tigray. At these checkpoints,

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<sup>113</sup> Plaut, Slotznick, Habte, Mulford and Keeble (2021) *The Tigray War and Regional Implications Volume 1*, Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The\\_Tigray\\_War\\_and\\_Regional\\_Implications\\_Volume\\_1](https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The_Tigray_War_and_Regional_Implications_Volume_1)

<sup>114</sup> Muhumuza (14 June 2021) In Tigray, food is often a weapon of war as famine looms, Associated Press, Available at: <https://apimagesblog.com/blog/2021/6/11/in-tigray-food-is-often-a-weapon-of-war-as-famine-looms>

<sup>115</sup> Ghebreyohannes Asfaha, Nyssen, Negash, and Meaza (September 2021) August 2021 status of cropping in the wider surroundings of Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia), Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966\\_August\\_2021\\_status\\_of\\_cropping\\_in\\_the\\_wider\\_surroundings\\_of\\_Mekelle\\_Tigray\\_Ethiopia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966_August_2021_status_of_cropping_in_the_wider_surroundings_of_Mekelle_Tigray_Ethiopia)

<sup>116</sup> Paravicini and Hourel (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, *Reuters*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>117</sup> World Food Programme (2 July 2021) WFP resumes operations to reach 2 million people with emergency food assistance in Tigray, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/world-food-programme-changing-supply-routes-to-tigray-after-bridges-destroyed>

<sup>118</sup> Paravicini and Hourel (14 June 2021), EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray, *Reuters*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/>

<sup>119</sup> United Nations (14 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210714.doc.htm>

<sup>120</sup> United Nations (23 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210723.doc.htm>

humanitarians have faced bureaucratic delays, ongoing insecurity, rigorous checks, and searches, as well as demands for additional approvals.<sup>121</sup> Further restrictions on journalists were imposed by the Ethiopian Government, including warnings that “measures” would be taken if international journalists refer to the TDF within reporting. However, what these measures would be remained unclear.

In early July, a 29-truck aid convoy was forced to turn back to the depot, while a further convoy of 200 trucks was pending government clearance.<sup>122</sup> Another UN convoy in early July was obstructed, with Tigrayan drivers detained overnight in Afar, and western aid workers extensively searched. The trucks were impounded and released after two days, however the convoy was made to turn back around.<sup>123</sup> Critical food aid has been delayed from entering the region, while embargoes on healthcare, cash and fuel have left trucks sitting pending approval. Tommy Thompson, WFP’s Emergency Coordinator in Mekelle, said in a statement: “We have the teams on ground, trucks loaded and ready to go to meet the catastrophic food needs in the region. What we need now is free, unfettered access and secure passage guaranteed by all parties to the conflict so we can deliver food safely”.<sup>124</sup> He continued: “The fact is that people have died, people are dying, and more people will die if we are not allowed the ability to prevent it from happening and provide assistance.”<sup>125</sup>

In early July, nine WFP branded lorries were prevented from reaching Tigray by local militia in Amhara.<sup>126</sup> Local youth refused the trucks passage, claiming that the food should instead be going to IDPs in Amhara. The trucks were held at a Police Station for three days before being forced to return. While there was disagreement over whether an order to hold these trucks came from the North Wollo Peace and Security bureau, this action is an example of rising tension and the obstruction of lifesaving aid reaching Tigray. Similarly, on 18 July, a 10-truck convoy came under fire in Afar. Gunmen open fired at the trucks, stopping the convoy. One truck was looted, and a truck driver harassed and robbed of his personal belongings.<sup>127</sup> While Abiy blamed the TPLF, the aid workers thought it was more likely that they were pro-Government militia. This led to the suspension of aid deliveries over this route until security could be guaranteed.

### *Air Access*

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<sup>121</sup> USAID (30 July 2021) United States Strengthens Efforts To Fight Famine In Tigray, Ethiopia With More Than US \$149mn In Additional Humanitarian Assistance, Press Release, Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jul-30-2021-united-states-strengthens-efforts-fight-famine-tigray-ethiopia-more>

<sup>122</sup> Bader and Braunschweiger (30 July 2021) The Latest on the Crisis in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region, Human Rights Watch, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/30/latest-crisis-ethiopia-tigray-region>

<sup>123</sup> News Leader (29 July 2021) An Ethiopian Road Is a Lifeline for Millions Now It’s Blocked, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujb8eTxxLro>

<sup>124</sup> World Food Programme (2 July 2021) WFP resumes operations to reach 2 million people with emergency food assistance in Tigray, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/world-food-programme-changing-supply-routes-to-tigray-after-bridges-destroyed>

<sup>125</sup> Deutsche Welle (2 July 2021) Ethiopia denies blocking aid to Tigray, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-denies-blocking-aid-to-tigray/a-58135316>

<sup>126</sup> Addis Standard (9 July 2021) World Food Program Trucks En Route To Mekelle And Semera Forced To Return From North Wollo, Available at: <https://addisstandard.com/news-world-food-program-trucks-en-route-to-mekelle-and-semera-forced-to-return-from-north-wollo/>

<sup>127</sup> OCHA (29 June 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2026%20Jul%202021.pdf>

On 5 July, the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) received approval from the Ethiopian Government to resume flights to Tigray.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps too optimistically, on 12 July, the EU Commission's Vice President Josep Borell announced plans to open an air bridge to the region: "The Tigray region is in a serious humanitarian crisis, with almost 1, 850,000 at risk of famine...The Tigray region is being cut from the rest of the world by destroying critical infrastructure and transportation. This could bring the region to a mass famine. We at the European Union, the Commission, will organise an air-bridge to try to bring support to the region."<sup>129</sup> Two days later, this plan was rejected by Abiy Ahmed's National Disaster Risk Management Commission which ruled that "activities to deliver humanitarian assistance to Tigray Region through direct flight or any other means that violates the sovereignty of the country is not permitted."<sup>130</sup> This statement has raised concern, as delivering life-saving aid should not represent a violation of sovereignty.<sup>131</sup> In fact, according to the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) - an international principle which was unanimously endorsed within the World Summit Outcome Document in 2005<sup>132</sup> - sovereignty is inherently conditional and reliant upon the upholding of human rights.<sup>133</sup> Destroying entire food systems and depriving a whole region of objects indispensable for their survival represent War Crimes which fall under the remit of the R2P norm. The international community should be considering whether the delivery of life-saving aid without approval from the Ethiopian Government could be achieved under R2P.

Interestingly, in 1984-85, the Ethiopian Government allowed the British Royal Air Force to drop food parcels to those starving in Tigray, in 'Operation Bushel'.<sup>134</sup> The present-day prohibition directly contrasts action taken in 1984-85, and reaffirms Abiy Ahmed's statement that this time, they will not make the same mistakes that were made before, by allowing aid to reach the region.

The first UNHAS flight touched down in Tigray on 22 July, carrying more than 30 employees from multiple humanitarian organisations.<sup>135</sup> However those on the flight were extensively searched in Addis Ababa. OCHA reported that "essential medicines, including anti-malaria, pain killers, heart and diabetes drugs were not allowed on the plane, leading two passengers who depend on them to stay behind."<sup>136</sup> Humanitarian staff told the *New York Times* that they faced harassment

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<sup>128</sup> OCHA (19 July 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>129</sup> Plaut (15 July 2021) European Union and Ethiopia clash over an air-bridge for aid to Tigray, Eritrea Hub, Available at:

<https://eritreahub.org/european-union-and-ethiopia-clash-over-an-air-bridge-for-aid-to-tigray>

<sup>130</sup> ENA (14 July 2021) Air Drop Relief Aid, Direct Flight to Tigray to Provide Humanitarian Aid Not Permitted: NDRMC, Available at: <https://www.ena.et/en/?p=26515>

<sup>131</sup> Plaut (15 July 2021) European Union and Ethiopia clash over an air-bridge for aid to Tigray, Eritrea Hub, Available at:

<https://eritreahub.org/european-union-and-ethiopia-clash-over-an-air-bridge-for-aid-to-tigray>

<sup>132</sup> UN General Assembly. (2005). *World Summit Outcome: Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005*. Geneva: UN General Assembly.; UN General Assembly. (2009). *Report of the Secretary-General: Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*. Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit. Geneva: UN General Assembly.

<sup>133</sup> UN General Assembly. (2005). *World Summit Outcome: Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005*. Geneva: UN General Assembly.; International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2001). *The Responsibility to Protect*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.; Welsh, J. (2010). Implementing the "Responsibility to Protect": Where Expectations Meet Reality. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 24(4), pp.415-431.; Welsh, J. (2013). Norm Contestation and the Responsibility to Protect. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 5(4), pp.365-396.

<sup>134</sup> Plaut (15 July 2021) European Union and Ethiopia clash over an air-bridge for aid to Tigray, Eritrea Hub, Available at:

<https://eritreahub.org/european-union-and-ethiopia-clash-over-an-air-bridge-for-aid-to-tigray>

<sup>135</sup> United Nations (21 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at:

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210721.doc.htm> ; United Nations (22 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210722.doc.htm>

<sup>136</sup> OCHA (29 June 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202026%20Jul%202021.pdf>

and intimidation at the airport with six hour delays due to the intensive searches.<sup>137</sup> As the *New York Times* reports, the flights “confirmed fears among aid workers that the Ethiopian authorities were pursuing a strategy of officially permitting humanitarian access while in practice working to frustrate it”.<sup>138</sup> Heavy restrictions on the amount of cash allowed to enter the region and the closure of banks has also hampered the aid effort. The Ethiopian Government restricted the amount of cash per aid worker to US\$250, and per plane to a maximum of US\$432,000. This is far below the US\$6.5mn that the UN estimated is needed every week to carry out the humanitarian response. Many organisations were already having to work in credit or had to scale back their response. The Government of Tigray stated that this restriction on cash “is primarily motivated by a pedantic desire to interrupt the circulation of monies within the Tigrayan economy.”<sup>139</sup>

Michael Dunford, WFP’s Regional Director for Eastern Africa, welcomed the bi-weekly flights which would transport humanitarian personnel in/out of the region, he said that “WFP and our fellow emergency responders on the ground in Mekelle are all enormously relieved to see this UNHAS flight arrive today, bringing in colleagues who are all essential in our collective efforts to scale up the humanitarian response and for WFP to reach 2.1 million people with life-saving food assistance”.<sup>140</sup> The statement did not reflect on the delays or the harassment of staff, indicating the fine line that the UN and its agencies were treading in order to keep access to the region and the 5.2 million food insecure inhabitants.

### *25 days after the ceasefire (23 July)*

By the end of July, there were growing concerns over the rising hate speech in the country and the deteriorating humanitarian situation within Tigray. The war on the ground was increasingly coupled with a war over competing narratives. As well as designating the TPLF and its forces the TDF, a ‘terrorist’ group - a political designation which signals his refusal to negotiate with the TPLF - statements made by Abiy Ahmed and his close advisors have raised concerns of genocidal intent. On 18 July, Abiy called for all able-bodied men across Ethiopia to come together to fight the ‘cancer’, exorcise the ‘demon’ and uproot the ‘weeds’.<sup>141</sup> In a public address, similarly dangerous rhetoric was used by Daniel Kibret, his close aide. It stated that the TDF “should be erased and disappeared from historical records” and that those who wish to study the TDF should only find evidence of them by “digging the ground.”<sup>142</sup> Calls to action by Amhara officials have outlined Tigrayans as the “enemy” of Ethiopia, and the President of Amhara has asked Amharas to leave their work and education and head to the frontlines, where they should be “determined to destroy the TPLF” and “eliminate the terrorist TPLF”.<sup>143</sup> The international community

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<sup>137</sup> News Leader (29 July 2021) *An Ethiopian Road Is a Lifeline for Millions Now It’s Blocked*, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujb8eTxxLro>

<sup>138</sup> News Leader (29 July 2021) *An Ethiopian Road Is a Lifeline for Millions Now It’s Blocked*, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujb8eTxxLro>

<sup>139</sup> The National Government of Tigray (25 August 2021) *Extraordinary Briefing From The National Government of Tigray, Tghat*, Available at: <https://www.tghat.com/2021/08/25/extraordinary-briefing-from-the-national-government-of-tigray/>

<sup>140</sup> WFP (22 July 2021) *WFP sends first humanitarian passenger flight into Tigray, as famine edges closer in the region*, Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-sends-first-humanitarian-passenger-flight-tigray-famine-edges-closer-region>

<sup>141</sup> Abiy Ahmed Ali (18 June 2021) *Tweet*, Available at: <https://twitter.com/abiyahmedali/status/1416666228907728906?s=21>

<sup>142</sup> Global Centre For the Responsibility to Protect (22 September 2021) *Atrocity Alert No. 271: Ethiopia, Burundi and Philippines*, Available at: <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/atrocity-alert-no-271/>

<sup>143</sup> Plaut (18 October 2021) *An urgent appeal from the Amhara National Movement – “Everything to the front!”*, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/an-urgent-appeal-from-the-amhara-national-movement-everything-to-the-front>



has condemned the rise in dangerous language and has even drawn parallels with the rhetoric used before the Rwandan Genocide.<sup>144</sup> In a statement on the 30 July, the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, warned about the use of “inflammatory statements” and “pejorative and dehumanising language”.<sup>145</sup>

While both sides to the conflict became more vocal, the situation within Tigray remained dire. Only one convoy of 54 trucks had reached Tigray since the ceasefire, carrying food, fuel, medical supplies and other vital items.<sup>146</sup> To respond to the growing needs on the ground, the UN estimated that 200,000 litres of fuel needed to enter Tigray weekly and over 100 trucks of food and non-food items daily.<sup>147</sup> To avert catastrophic famine, twice as much food as arrived during the whole of July is needed each day.

As well as limited aid, the challenges humanitarians were facing within the region were mounting. By the end of July, only five out of OCHA’s 20 nutrition partners were able to reach communities due to a lack of fuel, food and cash. By scaling down the response, vital data could not be collected, and humanitarians lacked the information they needed for scaling up of response.<sup>148</sup> Due to restrictions and banking closures, most people had not been paid for month, including aid workers and civil servants.<sup>149</sup>

The frustrations felt by humanitarians in the country and internationally were becoming more vocalised. On 27 July, David Beasley, WFP Chief tweeted the following:



After significant pressure on 28 July a convoy 44 trucks, the first since 12 July, was given permission to head towards Tigray.<sup>150</sup> The convoy delivered less than half the daily requirement for aid, while

200 additional trucks remained on standby in Semera, pending Government authorisation to cross into Tigray.<sup>151</sup> In the daily noon-briefing, the UN Secretary-General’s Spokesperson warned that without a drastic and sustained change in the procedures regulating the movement of aid, humanitarian efforts would have to end

<sup>144</sup> Omna Tigray (September 2021) Hate Speech and the Tigray Genocide, Available at: <https://omnatigray.org/hate-speech-and-the-tigray-genocide/>

<sup>145</sup> United Nations (30 July 2021) Statement by Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the continued deterioration of the situation in Ethiopia, Available at: [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/2021-07-30\\_Statement-on-situation-in-Ethiopia.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/2021-07-30_Statement-on-situation-in-Ethiopia.pdf)

<sup>146</sup> United Nations (19 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210719.doc.htm>

<sup>147</sup> United Nations (28 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210728.doc.htm>

<sup>148</sup> OCHA (19 July 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>149</sup> OCHA (29 July 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202026%20Jul%202021.pdf>

<sup>150</sup> United Nations (28 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210728.doc.htm>

<sup>151</sup> USAID (30 July 2021) United States Strengthens Efforts To Fight Famine In Tigray, Ethiopia With More Than US\$149mn In Additional Humanitarian Assistance, Press Release, Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/jul-30-2021-united-states-strengthens-efforts-fight-famine-tigray-ethiopia-more>

by mid-August.<sup>152</sup> Lack of humanitarian supplies, fuel and communications equipment were cited as priority needs.

Tigray once boasted one of the most effective healthcare systems in Ethiopia prior to this conflict; however, attacks on healthcare services have been rife throughout this conflict.<sup>153</sup> Prior to the ceasefire, previously functioning hospitals had been converted into military bases, housing weapons, personnel and prisoners.<sup>154</sup> Back in March, MSF reported that 1/5 of the health facilities that they visited were used by soldiers, some even housed women kept in sexual slavery.<sup>155</sup> Following the ceasefire, assessments found that 9/10 health facilities were looted, with equipment vandalised and destroyed. These facilities needed to be restocked and restored, and supply chains to be restored.<sup>156</sup>

By the end of July, the systematic damage to services which children rely upon, including “food, health, nutrition, water and sanitation systems” was causing a significant rise in the number of malnourished children.<sup>157</sup> UNICEF predicted a ten-fold increase in the number of children who would face life-threatening Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) within the next 12 months.<sup>158</sup> This is more than 100,000 children. Reports from doctors in Mekelle were increasingly alarming: “Though there is no killing in the street by bullet, people are dying in other ways. They’re dying of lack of medication and also food ... People in Tigray are now in the complete dark, with no access to electricity, no phone, with no medical access, with no food supply. Everything is depleted. If this siege continues for a week or two weeks more, you will see that people will die in just the whole [place] – especially those in IDP [camps] will die. I think, the international community, it’s time now to intervene, at the moment. Otherwise, we’ll see the catastrophe, which is coming in the next month, probably.”<sup>159</sup>

The high level of internal displacement within Tigray places an additional pressure on the healthcare services. Reports began emerging of overcrowded IDP camps with unsanitary conditions, including lack of latrines or no functioning water pumps. These conditions dramatically increase the risk of disease outbreak, making restoring hospitals a huge priority in the humanitarian response. In a statement to the UN Security Council, Ramesh Rakasingham an UN OCHA official, stressed the importance of a comprehensive humanitarian response: “Food alone does not avert a famine. Water, sanitation, and nutrition supplies are essential in such a response.

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<sup>152</sup> United Nations (28 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210728.doc.htm>

<sup>153</sup> Rubenstein and Gebregziabher (14 August 2021) The assault on health care in Tigray, The Hill, Available at: <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/567825-the-assault-on-health-care-in-tigray>

<sup>154</sup> Burns (14 July 2021) ‘Tigray: Time for the UN to Report on Attacks on Humanitarian Facilities and Personnel’ The World Peace Foundation, available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/07/14/tigray-time-for-the-un-to-report-on-attacks-on-humanitarian-facilities-and-personnel>

<sup>155</sup> MSF (15 March 2021) Widespread destruction of health facilities in Ethiopia’s Tigray region, Available at: <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/widespread-destruction-health-facilities-ethiopia-tigray-region>

<sup>156</sup> OCHA (19 July 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>157</sup> United Nations (30 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210730.doc.htm>

<sup>158</sup> United Nations (30 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210730.doc.htm>

<sup>159</sup> World Peace Foundation, as cited in: Dannenbaum (26 July 2021) Famine in Tigray, Humanitarian Access, and the War Crime of Starvation, Just Security, Available at: <https://www.justsecurity.org/77590/famine-in-tigray-humanitarian-access-and-the-war-crime-of-starvation/>

We also desperately need to prevent a cholera outbreak or people dying from other communicable diseases.”<sup>160</sup>

#### 5.4 August: The Blockade (Day 34 – 64)

The already dangerous position humanitarians were facing within Ethiopia was made even worse in early August when Abiy Ahmed’s Government accused humanitarians of supporting the TPLF.<sup>161</sup> The UN SG Antonio Guterres, condemned these accusations, saying they were “*dangerous*.” Similar calls were made in a press conference by Martin Griffiths - Mark Lowcock’s successor as the UN’s senior aid co-ordinator - following this first mission to Ethiopia. Martin Griffiths said, “Blanket accusations of humanitarian aid workers need to stop,” he continued “They are unfair, they are unconstructive, they need to be backed up by evidence if there is any and, frankly, it’s dangerous.”<sup>162</sup> On the perilous journey through inhospitable terrain from Semera to Mekelle, humanitarians have been “interrogated, intimidated and in some instances detained” reported the UN.<sup>163</sup>

During the first week of August more than 175 trucks arrived in Mekelle, a drastic increase on the previous month. These trucks had been held in Semera for weeks, and two trucks were attacked and looted by civilians at a checkpoint in Afar.<sup>164</sup> While the delivery of aid was welcomed by the international community, it was still nowhere near the 100 trucks a day required. To many, this was considered too little and too late. On 4 August, Samantha Power, USAID’s Administrator, told the press, “I visited a local staging centre for USAID’s food aid not far from the capital. Warehouses were full of wheat and lentils and split peas and trucks lay idle in the mud because deliveries had been backed up for weeks due to ongoing blockades. In my conversation with the Minister of Peace just now, I stressed these values, called yet again for a cessation of hostilities and unfettered humanitarian access, and reiterated the United States’ care and concern for the people of Ethiopia, no matter their identity or affiliation.”<sup>165</sup>

Despite calls for unfettered access and increased international attention, the situation for humanitarians and those they were trying to support continued to deteriorate. On 4 August, the Dutch branch of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) were expelled for three

months.<sup>166</sup> The Ethiopian Government released a statement saying that both MSF and NRC were “disseminating misinformation in social media and other platforms

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<sup>160</sup> Elbagir and Roth (3 July 2021) Food and fuel running out in capital of Ethiopia’s war-torn Tigray region, CNN, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/07/03/africa/tigray-ethiopia-food-shortage-intl/index.html>

<sup>161</sup> Anna (29 July 2021) US genocide expert to press Ethiopia on Tigray aid blockade, Associated press, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-ethiopia-blockades-c70f207418d1f291689b58aaa037a22e>

<sup>162</sup> Corey-Boulet (3 August 2021) UN condemns ‘dangerous’ claims of bias against aid workers in Tigray, AFP, Available at: <https://news.yahoo.com/un-condemns-dangerous-claims-bias-160715515.html>

<sup>163</sup> Corey-Boulet (3 August 2021) UN condemns ‘dangerous’ claims of bias against aid workers in Tigray, AFP, Available at: <https://news.yahoo.com/un-condemns-dangerous-claims-bias-160715515.html>

<sup>164</sup> United Nations (5 August 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210805.doc.htm>

<sup>165</sup> USAID (4 August 2021) Administrator Samantha Power Holds Press Conference, Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/aug-4-2021-administrator-samantha-power-holds-press-conference-ethiopia>

<sup>166</sup> AFP (4 August 2021) Aid groups in Tigray suspended for ‘misinformation’: Ethiopia, Available at:

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/aid-groups-in-tigray-suspended-for-misinformation-ethiopia/ar-AAMVw1O?ocid=st;> Associated Press (3 August 2021) Ethiopia Suspends Work of Two Aid Groups Active in Tigray, Available at:

outside of the mandate and purpose for which the organisations were permitted to operate."<sup>167</sup> Jan Egeland, NRC's chief had been vocal on twitter, warning about the dire situation within Tigray. A tweet in February stated: "No more whitewashing: Aid is still NOT reaching civilians in desperate need in Ethiopia's Tigray". The Ethiopian Government later accused MSF of illegally importing communications equipment and both companies [organisations] of not gaining the correct work permits.<sup>168</sup>

The expulsion of humanitarians from the region draws startling parallels to the 1984 famine, when MSF was also expelled for revealing that conflict was the key driver of the famine.<sup>169</sup> The MSF clinic in Sheraro closed on 8 August. The clinic had been treating 70 emergency cases per day.<sup>170</sup> Despite this reduction in services, the UN reported that 29 mobile health teams continued to work tirelessly to reach over 50,000 people at 72 health facilities and 47 of the IDP camps.<sup>171</sup> While this was not enough to tackle the growing needs, it was an impressive feat considering the mounting challenges and risks the humanitarian actors were facing in the region. The Government of Ethiopia has made other worrying claims which place humanitarians at greater risk. For example, the unsubstantiated claim that humanitarians were arming the TDF,<sup>172</sup> and that WFP trucks were being used to transport both fighters and arms.

On 9 August, the WFP stated that "severe shortages of food, cash, fuel and functioning telecommunications equipment mean that WFP has only reached half of the people it planned to assist, including communities on the verge of famine".<sup>173</sup> Due to a lack of cash several humanitarian partners within Tigray were operating in debt and facing a halt in services if cash is not allowed to be brought into the region.<sup>174</sup>

A review of regional food production predicted that the upcoming harvest (September-November) may do little to improve food security in Tigray. Only 25-50% of land in surveyed areas has been planted.<sup>175</sup> Considering that more than 80% of the 2020 harvest was destroyed, and that 80% of the population relies on local food production for their main source of food, the UN warned that a small harvest could

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[https://www.voanews.com/a/ethiopia-tigray\\_ethiopia-suspends-work-two-aid-groups-active-tigray/6209128.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/ethiopia-tigray_ethiopia-suspends-work-two-aid-groups-active-tigray/6209128.html)

<sup>167</sup> Ethiopian Embassy (14 July 2021) Summary | Government Statement Issued by Ambassador Redwan Hussein, Available at: <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/summary-government-statement-issued-by-ambassador-redwan-hussein/>

<sup>168</sup> AFP (4 August 2021) Aid groups in Tigray suspended for 'misinformation': Ethiopia, Available at:

[https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/aid-groups-in-tigray-suspended-for-misinformation-ethiopia/ar-AAMVw1O?ocid=st;Associated Press \(3 August 2021\) Ethiopia Suspends Work of Two Aid Groups Active in Tigray, Available at:](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/aid-groups-in-tigray-suspended-for-misinformation-ethiopia/ar-AAMVw1O?ocid=st;Associated%20Press%20(3%20August%202021)%20Ethiopia%20Suspends%20Work%20of%20Two%20Aid%20Groups%20Active%20in%20Tigray)

[https://www.voanews.com/a/ethiopia-tigray\\_ethiopia-suspends-work-two-aid-groups-active-tigray/6209128.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/ethiopia-tigray_ethiopia-suspends-work-two-aid-groups-active-tigray/6209128.html)

<sup>169</sup> The New York Times (4 December 1985) Expelled Doctors Accuse Ethiopia, Available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/04/world/expelled-doctors-accuse-ethiopia.html>

<sup>170</sup> OCHA (13 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-august-2021>

<sup>171</sup> United Nations (18 August 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210818.doc.htm>

<sup>172</sup> <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/summary-government-statement-issued-by-ambassador-redwan-hussein/>

<sup>173</sup> United Nations (9 August 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210809.doc.htm>

<sup>174</sup> OCHA (13 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-august-2021>

<sup>175</sup> OCHA (13 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-august-2021>;

Ghebreyohannes Asfaha, Nyssen, Negash, and Meaza (September 2021) August 2021 status of cropping in the wider surroundings of Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia), Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966\\_August\\_2021\\_status\\_of\\_cropping\\_in\\_the\\_wider\\_surroundings\\_of\\_Mekelle\\_Tigray\\_Ethiopia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966_August_2021_status_of_cropping_in_the_wider_surroundings_of_Mekelle_Tigray_Ethiopia)

have catastrophic effects. Despite the threats associated with farming within a region with sporadic violence, research has shown the resilience of Tigrayan farmers, who have come together to plant crops across Tigray.<sup>176</sup> Where planting was possible, this was mainly short cycle crops, rather than high yielding long cycle crops, as the planting season was missed for the latter.<sup>177</sup> Using community knowledge, farmers planted fast-growing cereals which require minimal management – with less management, there is less need to be tending to the farms and encountering soldiers. While Maize is often grown in years with high food insecurity because it is lean and directly consumable, research by Mekelle University and the University of Ghent found that little Maize was grown, as the window for planting it had been missed. They also reiterated claims by aid agencies that a large amount of agricultural land has been left fallow.<sup>178</sup> With no food stocks from the previous harvest to tie families over, only a trickle of food aid entering the region due to the blockade, and banking closures preventing families accessing savings or remittances, the outlook for food security was looking bleak. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) have predicted that there will be need for critical food aid will last well into the next year.<sup>179</sup> The discovery of desert locusts in at least 14 woredas within Tigray threatens the harvest further.<sup>180</sup>

It's clear that the humanitarian response is a painstaking task. From 15 July - 15 August, only 318 trucks with humanitarian supplies entered Tigray.<sup>181</sup> This is only 7% of the aid needed since the ceasefire began. There is nowhere near enough humanitarian aid for those in need. Humanitarian reports speak of the difficult "prioritisation exercise;" they are having to decide where to prioritise with the lifesaving aid.<sup>182</sup>

Even those who previously were financially secure are struggling. With no commercial supplies entering the region, banking closures and limited aid, prices at markets rose considerably during July.<sup>183</sup> Many employees have not been paid since the beginning of the war, including 27,516 displaced civil servants from western and

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<sup>176</sup> Eritrea Hub (9 August 2021) "Tigray region of Ethiopia continues to experience one of the worst food security emergencies globally", Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/tigray-region-of-ethiopia-continues-to-experience-one-of-the-worst-food-security-emergencies-globally>

<sup>177</sup> Ghebreyohannes Asfaha, Nyssen, Negash, and Meaza (September 2021) August 2021 status of cropping in the wider surroundings of Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia), Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966\\_August\\_2021\\_status\\_of\\_cropping\\_in\\_the\\_wider\\_surroundings\\_of\\_Mekelle\\_Tigray\\_Ethiopia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966_August_2021_status_of_cropping_in_the_wider_surroundings_of_Mekelle_Tigray_Ethiopia); OCHA (14 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>; Eritrea Hub (9 August 2021) "Tigray region of Ethiopia continues to experience one of the worst food security emergencies globally", Available at:

<https://eritreahub.org/tigray-region-of-ethiopia-continues-to-experience-one-of-the-worst-food-security-emergencies-globally>

<sup>178</sup> Ghebreyohannes Asfaha, Nyssen, Negash, and Meaza (September 2021) August 2021 status of cropping in the wider surroundings of Mekelle (Tigray, Ethiopia), Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966\\_August\\_2021\\_status\\_of\\_cropping\\_in\\_the\\_wider\\_surroundings\\_of\\_Mekelle\\_Tigray\\_Ethiopia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354385966_August_2021_status_of_cropping_in_the_wider_surroundings_of_Mekelle_Tigray_Ethiopia)

<sup>179</sup> Eritrea Hub (9 August 2021) "Tigray region of Ethiopia continues to experience one of the worst food security emergencies globally", Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/tigray-region-of-ethiopia-continues-to-experience-one-of-the-worst-food-security-emergencies-globally>

<sup>180</sup> OCHA (19 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>181</sup> OCHA (19 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>182</sup> OCHA (19 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>183</sup> Eritrea Hub (9 August 2021) "Tigray region of Ethiopia continues to experience one of the worst food security emergencies globally", Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/tigray-region-of-ethiopia-continues-to-experience-one-of-the-worst-food-security-emergencies-globally>

southern Tigray.<sup>184</sup> According to the TPLF, since June, over 709,000 people who work at federal institutions and universities, civil servants and private sector employees as well as retirees were not paid their salaries or pensions.<sup>185</sup> By August, purchasing power was significantly reduced. This was coupled with inflation of household goods and food items. For example, the price of vegetable oil in markets had increased 5 times compared to the price at the end of June, from 300 birr per litre (US\$6.5) to 1,500 birr (US\$32.5).<sup>186</sup>

### *50 days after the ceasefire (17 August)*

Although the ceasefire was said to be in place till the end of the planting season, it became evident that not all the troops had withdrawn. Fano militia and Amhara regional forces remained in control of much of western Tigray, with increasing reports of ethnic cleansing, concentration camp style detention centres, and mass executions on the banks of the Tekezé river.<sup>187</sup> Despite assurances from the Ethiopian Government, UN officials were adamant that neither the UN, nor its agencies had seen proof of the withdrawal of Eritrean troops. Instead, Mark Lowcock told the UN Security Council that they had received reports that the Eritrean soldiers were caught swapping into ENDF uniforms. While some claim that Eritrean soldiers never properly left, by the end of August internal EU memorandums and US statements outlined that there were signs that Eritrean forces were re-entering Tigray, taking up defensive positions in the contested region of western Tigray.<sup>188</sup>

By mid-August, the conflict continued to widen. The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) had come out in support of the TPLF, forming an alliance with them.<sup>189</sup> The spread of the conflict into neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar continued to increase humanitarian needs on the ground and create new grievances. The Government of Ethiopia have said that the insecurity caused by the TDF advance into neighbouring regions was causing the delays in aid entering Tigray. Although the Ethiopian Government claimed to be assisting with the relief effort, the Tigrayans reported that 66% of aid delivery was carried out by USAID, 25% by WFP and the remaining 9% by non-Governmental Organisations.<sup>190</sup> Both parties to the conflict blame the other for the severe access delays. Humanitarians have reported that the “primary

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<sup>184</sup> The National Government of Tigray (25 August 2021) Extraordinary Briefing From The National Government of Tigray, Tghat, Available at: <https://www.tghat.com/2021/08/25/extraordinary-briefing-from-the-national-government-of-tigray/>

<sup>185</sup> The National Government of Tigray (25 August 2021) Extraordinary Briefing From The National Government of Tigray, Tghat, Available at: <https://www.tghat.com/2021/08/25/extraordinary-briefing-from-the-national-government-of-tigray/>

<sup>186</sup> OCHA (2 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-2-sep-2021>

<sup>187</sup> United Nations (26 August 2021) Catastrophe ‘unfolding before our eyes’ in Ethiopia’s Tigray region – UN chief, Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/08/1098582>; Bader and Braunschweiler (30 July 2021) The Latest on the Crisis in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region, Human Rights Watch, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/30/latest-crisis-ethiopia-tigray-region>; Harding (16 July 2021) Ethiopia’s Tigray crisis: Fleeing for fear of new ethnic conflict, BBC, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57818673>; Eritrea Hub (25 September 2021) Statement by Debretsion Gebremichael, President of Tigray, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/statement-by-debretsion-gebremichael-president-of-tigray>; Hutson (25 September 2021) Eyewitness accounts, video confirm reports of Tigrayan children held in concentration camp, Salon, Available at: <https://www.salon.com/2021/09/25/eyewitness-accounts-video-confirm-reports-of-tigrayan-children-held-in-concentration-camp/>

<sup>188</sup> Aljazeera (25 August 2021) US, EU warn of influx of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia’s Tigray, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/25/us-eu-influx-eritrea-troops-ethiopia-tigray>

<sup>189</sup> Security Council Report (25 August 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Briefing and Consultations, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/08/ethiopia-tigray-briefing-and-consultations.php>

<sup>190</sup> The National Government of Tigray (25 August 2021) Extraordinary Briefing From The National Government of Tigray, Tghat, Available at: <https://www.tghat.com/2021/08/25/extraordinary-briefing-from-the-national-government-of-tigray/>

obstacle is the Government.” A senior USAID official told the *Associated Press*, “what we are seeing is (aid) convoys being turned around at checkpoints manned by Ethiopian soldiers or their proxies.”<sup>191</sup>

On the only viable route into the region via Semera, under the Ethiopian Government’s procedures, officials only had the capacity to scan 30 trucks a day. This is less than 1/3 of the aid that was needed, daily. To frustrate the issue further, from 13 - 17 August the scanner at the Silsa checkpoint broke, halting the movement of aid and leaving 102 trucks without the authorisation to move.<sup>192</sup> During a time critical period, the delay of trucks due to scanners malfunctioning seems wholly unacceptable. On 19 August, Samantha Power, the Administrator of USAID, stated that there is a shortage of food “not because food is unavailable, but because the Ethiopian government is obstructing humanitarian aid and personnel, including land convoys and air access”.<sup>193</sup>

As well as logistical and bureaucratic delays, trucks have faced attacks from local groups on routes from warehouses into Tigray.<sup>194</sup> While all parties to the conflict have been accused of looting aid since the start of the conflict, on 31 August, USAID’s mission director Sean Jones told *EBC* that “several of our warehouses have been looted and completely emptied in the areas, particularly in Amhara, where TPLF soldiers have gone into.”<sup>195</sup> At the same time there were reports of TDF stealing food from neighbouring regions to send back to Tigray. For the first time since the start of the conflict, humanitarian providers within Tigray had depleted their food stocks entirely.<sup>196</sup> Warehouses in Mekelle stood empty. Food distributions halted.

Unfortunately, the toll of over 50 days of living under an aid blockade was becoming more evident. Malnutrition in pregnant and breastfeeding women had reached 77%,<sup>197</sup> while the number of children under 5-years old with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) had risen from 33,000 to 160,000 in just three months.<sup>198</sup> To make matters worse, these restrictions on humanitarian actors due to the lack of fuel and cash means that many children and women would not have been screened; thus, these figures likely reflected the tip of the iceberg. Between February and

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<sup>191</sup> Anna (29 July 2021) US genocide expert to press Ethiopia on Tigray aid blockade, *Associated press*, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa- united-nations-ethiopia-blockades-c70f207418d1f291689b58aaa037a22e>

<sup>192</sup> OCHA (19 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>193</sup> Security Council Report (25 August 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Briefing and Consultations, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/08/ethiopia-tigray-briefing-and-consultations.php>

<sup>194</sup> OCHA (26 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-26-august-2021>

<sup>195</sup> Reuters (1 September 2021) U.S. agency says Tigrayan forces looted aid warehouses in Ethiopia’s Amhara region, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-agency-says-tigrayan-forces-looted-aid-warehouses-ethiopias-amhara-region-2021-08-31/>

<sup>196</sup> Plaut (20 August 2021) US Statement on aid situation in Ethiopia – “only a small trickle of convoys has been allowed into Tigray”, *Eritrea Hub*, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/us-statement-on-aid-situation-in-ethiopia-only-a-small-trickle-of-convoys-has-been-allowed-into-tigray>; OCHA (26 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-26-august-2021>

<sup>197</sup> OCHA (13 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-august-2021>

<sup>198</sup> Del Conte (13 August 2021) 7 Facts you need to know about the famine in Tigray, *Refugees International*, Available at: <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/7-facts-you-need-to-know-about-the-famine-in-tigray>

August 2021, 18,600 children under five were admitted for treatment for SAM, compared to 8,900 the previous year, reflecting an 100% increase in SAM.<sup>199</sup>

By mid-August there were 458 UN staff from 10 UN Agencies operating in Tigray, as well as 35 NGOs.<sup>200</sup> For example, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has coordinated 33 national and international NGOs, including two UN Agencies to provide shelter and non-food items, including blankets, to the 2.1 million IDPs within Tigray, who are spread across 116 IDP sites.<sup>201</sup> On the 26 August, WHO managed to get emergency health kits into Tigray to 14 hospitals, enough for 300,000 people for three months as well as 136 cholera investigation kits for 116 hotspots to strengthen Cholera management.<sup>202</sup> This was a small breakthrough considering the Government has prevented medical supplies from entering the region.

By the end of August, the precarious situation for humanitarians was yet again made clear when reports of additional atrocities surfaced. Between January and June, 11 aid workers from the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) were murdered while delivering aid. This took the total known number of humanitarian deaths in the field to 23.<sup>203</sup>

## 5.5 September: The Blockade Continues (Day 65 – 94)

Although conflict had continued throughout the ceasefire, with the planting season drawing to a close, the fears of mounting violence were increasing. The Tigrayan authorities had rejected the ceasefire from the start, outlining its unilateral nature and providing their own demands for a negotiated ceasefire. A key objection was the continued presence of Amhara forces within western Tigray.<sup>204</sup> In September the Tigray government warned of the existential nature of this conflict. The conflict had become about more than the survival of a political group. In a statement, Debretsion Gebremichael, former President of Tigray said, “We also would like to underscore that our military engagement in areas outside Tigray is not an act of aggression but a last-ditch attempt at breaking the aforementioned siege, which has caused catastrophic famine, as well as to stave off another round of brutal invasions once our adversaries have regrouped and rearmed themselves.”<sup>205</sup>

By September, less than 10% of the required humanitarian aid, 2.2% of the cash, and 28% of the fuel had reached Tigray.<sup>206</sup> From 12 July - 1 September, only 282,000 litres of fuel had entered Tigray.<sup>207</sup> However the UN needed 200,000 litres

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<sup>199</sup> OCHA (14 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>200</sup> OCHA (13 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-august-2021>

<sup>201</sup> United Nations (17 August 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210817.doc.htm>

<sup>202</sup> OCHA (26 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-26-august-2021>

<sup>203</sup> Annys, VandenBempt, Negash, Sloover, Ghekiere, Haegeman, Temmerman, and Nyssen (October 2021) Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation, Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

<sup>204</sup> Davison (30 July 2021) The Dangerous Expansion of Ethiopia's Tigray War, The International Crisis Group, Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/dangerous-expansion-ethiopia-tigray-war>

<sup>205</sup> Plaut (19 September 2021) Can the Biden sanctions strategy end the Tigray war?, Eritrea Hub, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/can-the-biden-sanctions-strategy-end-the-tigray-war>

<sup>206</sup> OCHA (2 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-2-sep-2021>

<sup>207</sup> United Nations (1 September 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210901.doc.htm>



every week to maintain its relief effort within the country. Without fuel, humanitarian vehicles cannot move around, essential information cannot be collected, water pumps cannot work, generators in hospitals have to be turned off, medical teams cannot reach those outside the cities. The price of the remaining fuel within Tigray had increased by 185% compared to the end of June.<sup>208</sup> The repeated denial of permissions to move fuel into the region and prohibition of telecommunication equipment and generators has hampered the aid effort, leaving people without food, water, healthcare, or sanitation.<sup>209</sup>

Food supplies within Tigray ran out on 20 August, despite over 172 trucks sitting idle in Semera, and more trucks held up in Djibouti, Adama and Kombolcha due to administration delays.<sup>210</sup> Aid agencies had to significantly scale back their response or cease operations altogether. By the start of September, it was estimated that 90% of the population of Tigray urgently needed humanitarian assistance.<sup>211</sup> Fears were mounting over the low agricultural yields and the sustained impact on food security. Although earlier predictions said that 25-50% of the harvest would be available, a more pessimistic review found that of the 1.3 million hectares of farmland, only 320,000 hectares had been cultivated.<sup>212</sup> This would produce a maximum of 13% of the normal harvest. To make matters worse, sightings of desert locusts had been seen in at least 19 woredas across Tigray, as well as parts of Afar and Amhara.<sup>213</sup>

Starvation deaths were being reported in every district of Tigray.<sup>214</sup> One aid group told the *Associated Press* that without an urgent solution, many lives will be lost to hunger. They had run out of fuel and food. The same aid group wrote to donors back in April, noting that “People’s skin colour was beginning to change due to hunger; they looked emaciated with protruding skeletal bones.” Using data from the World Food Programme, the IPC, USAID, and population statistics, a group of researchers from the University of Ghent estimated that between 425 and 1201 people could be dying per day from starvation, or starvation related deaths.<sup>215</sup> Although these deaths may not be from bullets or battlefields, they are directly related to this conflict. This famine is human made.

In a rare video clip from the region, a videographer speaks to women in Woreda Slowa, Dela City.<sup>216</sup> The deprivation of food is evident. An elderly mother tells the

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<sup>208</sup> OCHA (19 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>209</sup> OCHA (2 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-2-sep-2021>

<sup>210</sup> United Nations (2 September 2021) Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, on the operational constraints and de facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Statement%20by%20Acting%20Humanitarian%20Coordinator%20on%20the%20Operational%20constraints%20Tigray.pdf>

<sup>211</sup> United Nations (2 September 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210902.doc.htm>

<sup>212</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>213</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>214</sup> Anna (20 September 2021) 'I just cry': Dying of hunger in Ethiopia's blockaded Tigray, AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-ethiopia-kenya-ef9fe79cc0cf35917fd190b6e9bd0f46>

<sup>215</sup> Email correspondence with author

<sup>216</sup> David Alton (20 September 2021) Tigray: 19 September 2021 – Translation of disturbing video report by journalists from Tigray TV on famine in Tigray, Available at: <https://www.davidalton.net/2021/09/20/tigray-september-19th-2021-translation-of-disturbing-video-report-by-journalists-from-tigray-tv-on-famine-in-tigray/>

videographer: “I spend my days sleeping. Even to speak to you now I am so tired. Those who used to help us are no longer here. Farmers have nothing, they are also in distress, so I have nothing, I have nothing. There is no breakfast, no dinner. Come into the house and see, there is nothing to eat in the house.” Another woman says, “We have nothing, nothing. There is nothing. We just pray that the government and God may bring some kind of solution. I don’t know.” The narrator sounds exasperated, he continues to say that, “Extraordinarily, people are competing with animals to consume the vegetation in the area to sustain their life. Now, that is also quickly dwindling.”<sup>217</sup>

On 7 September, 147 trucks arrived in Tigray, bringing the total to 482 trucks since the 12 July. While the World Food Programme welcomed this arrival, Michael Dunford, Regional Director for Eastern Africa, said “But much more is needed, and this momentum must be sustained otherwise we cannot hope to deliver enough food to save millions from falling deeper into hunger”.<sup>218</sup> Scholars have calculated that based on the amount of aid that has entered the region, people within Tigray are surviving on 40g of food per person daily.<sup>219</sup> This is an estimated 17.2% of their caloric needs,<sup>220</sup> and the equivalent to a small handful of rice. However, this figure might be optimistic for some, as the food aid has not been equally distributed across the region due to access restrictions, the fluid security situation and fuel shortages.

### *Healthcare*

According to doctors working in the region, the situation in hospitals was critical. Responding to the needs on the ground was being obstructed by the lack of fuel for ambulances, essential medicines, vaccines and hospital equipment, electricity for medical machinery and food to feed patients. One Doctor told reporters that Surgeons were having to use one medical glove during operations, due to low stocks.<sup>221</sup> After a visit to Tigray, Martin Griffith warned of the lack of medical supplies.<sup>222</sup> He described the bare hospital and medical facilities, which had been looted, vandalised and destroyed during the first phase of the war.<sup>223</sup> In an interview with Al Jazeera, Dr Sentayhu said, “We don’t know how many people are dying across the region from malnutrition. We are disconnected with the health centres due to the telecommunications blackout. We could only know about patients who managed to arrive here. Only a few can make it.”<sup>224</sup> Dr Abrha noted that with no

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<sup>217</sup> David Alton (20 September 2021) Tigray: September 19th 2021 – Translation of disturbing video report by journalists from Tigray TV on famine in Tigray, Available at: <https://www.davidalton.net/2021/09/20/tigray-september-19th-2021-translation-of-disturbing-video-report-by-journalists-from-tigray-tv-on-famine-in-tigray/>

<sup>218</sup> United Nations (7 September 2021) ‘Unprecedented funding gap’ for 7 million facing hunger in Ethiopia: WFP, Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099272>

<sup>219</sup> De Waal (17 September 2021) The world watched as Abiy loses it – and risks losing Ethiopia, too., Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/09/17/the-world-watches-as-abiy-loses-it-and-risks-losing-ethiopia-too/>

<sup>220</sup> The Author’s calculation based on the World Food Programme’s food baskets between April and September (22 weeks). If people were given one food basket during this time (as was stated by OCHA) which contained 63% of the populations caloric needs and was expected to last just 6 weeks, however, it has been stretched to last 5 months, then this would contain just 17.2% of the populations’ caloric needs, see: OCHA (20 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-sept-2021>

<sup>221</sup> Emnet Negash (28 September 2021) Unique pictures show the conditions in the Peace Prize laureate’s country, Available at: <https://emnetnegash.wordpress.com/2021/09/28/unique-pictures-show-the-conditions-in-the-peace-prize-laureates-country/>

<sup>222</sup> Anna and Lederer (29 September 2021) The AP Interview: Ethiopia crisis ‘stain on our conscience’, AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-health-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-a2b1639797c2a31973ce12985d82b865>

<sup>223</sup> OCHA (20 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-sept-2021>

<sup>224</sup> Kassa (23 September 2021) Tigray mothers share shocking accounts of dire famine conditions, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/tigray-mothers-share-shocking-accounts-of-dire-famine-conditions>

change, nutritional treatment would soon have to be suspended as “The stock of therapeutic milk [for children] will run out in three weeks.”<sup>225</sup>

In other hospitals, the food had already run out. Dr Hayelom Kebede at Ayder Hospital in Mekelle told AFP that, “We used to supply nutrients for these children, but now we have run out of medicine, and we have run out of any food stock, so we couldn't support them.” He continued, “It's a silent killing. People are just dying... With starvation, the bad thing is you will see people in the throes of death, but they will not die immediately... It takes time, after their body is weakened and weakened and weakened. It's more horrific than bullet deaths.”<sup>226</sup> Even doctors and Nurses who have worked throughout the conflict are surviving on a handful of roasted barley each day, as they have been unable to access their salaries due to the suspension of banking services. Their own children are malnourished.

While medical supplies were continually denied entry overland,<sup>227</sup> in rare, good news on 10 September, the largest shipment of medical equipment was airlifted to Ethiopia from WHO's logistics hub in Dubai. This included 83 metric tons of life-saving medical supplies including “*essential medicines, trauma and emergency surgery kits, infusions, consumables, equipment, and cholera kits*” the UN said. This shipment would be enough to support 150,000 people's urgent needs.<sup>228</sup> While a major step forward for medical aid deliveries, the WHO estimated that 2.5 million people were in need of health assistance. This shipment was enough to support just 16% of those in need. WHO's Representative in Ethiopia Dr Boureima Hama Sambo welcomed the delivery stating that, “*This delivery will help bolster our efforts to provide relief to hundreds of thousands of families who are grappling with a difficult humanitarian situation*”.<sup>229</sup> At the same time, OCHA reported that lack of fuel and medical supplies meant that 2.3 million people could no longer receive medical support, while 1.5 million people were not vaccinated against diseases such as measles, polio and COVID-19.<sup>230</sup>

The risk of disease outbreak was particularly acute in IDP camps, where Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities could not be constructed or maintained due to resource shortages.<sup>231</sup> An aid worker told the Associated Press that “toilets in the crowded camps are overflowing because there's no cash to pay for their cleaning, leaving thousands of people vulnerable to outbreaks of disease”.<sup>232</sup> Life for IDPs was getting drastically worse, as shortages in resources, cash, firewood, cooking energy

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<sup>225</sup> Kassa (23 September 2021) Tigray mothers share shocking accounts of dire famine conditions, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/tigray-mothers-share-shocking-accounts-of-dire-famine-conditions>

<sup>226</sup> France 24 (23 September 2021) 'Silent killing': Starvation stalks Ethiopia's Tigray, Available at: <https://news.yahoo.com/silent-killing-starvation-stalks-ethiopias-102608984.html>

<sup>227</sup> OCHA (23 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-23-sept-2021>

<sup>228</sup> United Nations (13 September 2021) Multiple reports of alleged human rights violations in Tigray, Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099812>

<sup>229</sup> United Nations (13 September 2021) Multiple reports of alleged human rights violations in Tigray, Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099812>

<sup>230</sup> United Nations (2 September 2021) Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, on the operational constraints and de facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Statement%20by%20Acting%20Humanitarian%20Coordinator%20on%20the%20operational%20constraints%20Tigray.pdf>

<sup>231</sup> United Nations (2 September 2021) Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, on the operational constraints and de facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Statement%20by%20Acting%20Humanitarian%20Coordinator%20on%20the%20operational%20constraints%20Tigray.pdf>

<sup>232</sup> Anna (20 September 2021) 'I just cry': Dying of hunger in Ethiopia's blockaded Tigray, AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-kenya-ef9fe79cc0cf35917fd190b6e9bd0f46>

and water, as well as food and sanitation were being reported from IDP camps.<sup>233</sup> Unfortunately, this was leading to some worrying stories of people using ‘negative coping strategies’, including a rise in the number of children begging and recruitment of child labour, as well as reports of survival sex - where sex is traded for commodities.<sup>234</sup>

### *75 days since the ceasefire (11 September)*

The humanitarian community began voicing increasing concerns over the militarisation of the key aid supply routes into Tigray. On 11 September, 75 days after the ceasefire and de facto blockade began, Michelle Bachelet updated the UN Human Rights Council on the situation in Tigray, she reported on “multiple and severe reports of alleged gross violations of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law”.<sup>235</sup> While the full findings of the investigation were still being analysed, she confirmed that “incitement to hatred and discrimination were also documented targeting people of Tigrayan ethnicity, as well as attacks on journalists and the suspension of media outlets’ licenses and shutdowns of Internet and telecommunications in Tigray.”<sup>236</sup>

The Ethiopian Penal Code (2004), notably article 270(i) “War Crimes Against the Civilian Population” declares enforced starvation a crime. It makes illegal: “the confiscation, destruction, removal, rendering useless or appropriation of property such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, health centres, schools.”<sup>237</sup> Yet the joint investigation made no reference to starvation crimes, or the War Crime of Starvation. At present, starvation might be the most prolific, widespread and systematic of the crimes committed during this year-long conflict. Interestingly, neither Michelle Bachelet or Mr Daniel Bekele, head of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), referred to starvation crimes, or mentioned the inclusion of starvation crimes within the remit of the investigation during their addresses to the Human Rights Council. For those concerned with the deliberate destruction of food systems within Tigray, and accountability for the War Crime of Starvation, this was greatly concerning.<sup>238</sup>

Over 75 days after the ceasefire was announced for ‘humanitarian’ grounds, the flow of humanitarian aid into the region continued to be obstructed and delayed. By 16 September, 10 new checkpoints had been set up on the route between Kombolcha,

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<sup>233</sup> OCHA (2 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-2-sep-2021>

<sup>234</sup> OCHA (2 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-2-sep-2021>

<sup>235</sup> United Nations (13 September 2021) Multiple reports of alleged human rights violations in Tigray, Available at:

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099812>

<sup>236</sup> United Nations (13 September 2021) Multiple reports of alleged human rights violations in Tigray, Available at:

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099812>

<sup>237</sup> Odinkalu, Tesfagiorgis, de Waal and Burns (11 October 2021) Neither Impartial nor Independent: The Joint UN-EHRC Human Rights Investigation in Tigray, World Peace Foundation, Available at:

<https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/10/11/neither-impartial-nor-independent-the-joint-un-ehrc-human-rights-investigation-in-tigray/>

<sup>238</sup> Odinkalu, Tesfagiorgis, de Waal and Burns (11 October 2021) Neither Impartial nor Independent: The Joint UN-EHRC Human Rights Investigation in Tigray, World Peace Foundation, Available at:

<https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/10/11/neither-impartial-nor-independent-the-joint-un-ehrc-human-rights-investigation-in-tigray/>; Aboudouh (15 October 2021) Fears for humanitarian crisis engulfing Tigray as Abiy Ahmed launches make or break war, The Independent, Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-war-humanitarian-population-b1938975.html>

where the humanitarian cargo hub is located, and Semera.<sup>239</sup> In direct contradiction to reports from the ground, Abiy Ahmed's spokesperson Billene Seyoum released a statement stating that the Government had "opened access to aid routes by cutting the number of checkpoints from seven to two and creating air bridges for humanitarian flights".<sup>240</sup> By 15 September, 12 UNHAS flights had operated and one EU Humanitarian Air Bridge flight.<sup>241</sup> However, they also faced significant bureaucratic challenges and rigorous checks on both departure and arrival. A number of the flights were delayed by days and humanitarians provided with an ever-expanding list of contraband items. Medical supplies were removed from the EU's plane during inspections in Addis Ababa.<sup>242</sup> Personnel could not take a range of items, from personal medicines or multivitamins, flash drives and hard drives, to items including can openers and dental floss.<sup>243</sup> Aid workers' phones are checked on the way in and out of the region to ensure that there are no pictures on them when they leave. This high level of control over the information coming in and out of the region is a sign that Abiy does not want the world to see what is happening. This paralleled the prohibition on independent journalists (local and international) visiting and reporting from the war zone. As a result, there has been a reduction in the number of photos and videos on social media since June, as aid workers are concerned that authorities will catch them with images on their devices.<sup>244</sup> Abiy's Government is working hard to silence Tigray. On 30 September UNHAS flight, more than half of the humanitarian staff were refused to board the plane due to the requirement of new documentation from the Ministry of Peace.<sup>245</sup> This echoed earlier claims that the Ethiopian Government was obstructing the relief effort.

There has been further evidence that rather than facilitating aid delivery, the Ethiopian Government seeks to frustrate the relief effort. While one of the bridges over the Tekezé river that was destroyed during the ENDF retreat remained largely inoperable, after the TDF re-gained control of May Tsebri, they had been repairing the Imbamadre bridge. On 21 September it became operational for vehicles. Although this gave humanitarians an extra route into the region, it has remained largely unused due to access restrictions imposed by the Government.<sup>246</sup> With the needs on the ground not only increasingly daily, but exceeding the daily approved caseloads into the region, the lack of movement of trucks cannot be viewed as anything other than an attempt to starve the region.

### *Shortages in fuel, trucks and cash*

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<sup>239</sup> OCHA (16 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-16-sept-2021>

<sup>240</sup> Anna (20 September 2021) 'I just cry': Dying of hunger in Ethiopia's blockaded Tigray, AP News, Available at:

<https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-kenya-ef9fe79cc0cf35917fd190b6e9bd0f46>

<sup>241</sup> United Nations (15 September 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210915.doc.htm>

<sup>242</sup> OCHA (16 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-16-sept-2021>

<sup>243</sup> Anna (20 September 2021) 'I just cry': Dying of hunger in Ethiopia's blockaded Tigray, AP News, Available at:

<https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-kenya-ef9fe79cc0cf35917fd190b6e9bd0f46>

<sup>244</sup> Anna (20 September 2021) 'I just cry': Dying of hunger in Ethiopia's blockaded Tigray, AP News, Available at:

<https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-kenya-ef9fe79cc0cf35917fd190b6e9bd0f46>

<sup>245</sup> OCHA (7 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-07-oct-2021>

<sup>246</sup> OCHA (30 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-sept-2021>

On 17 September, the final WFP fuel tanker in Mekelle was totally depleted. This tanker was supporting a range of humanitarian organisations within Tigray, making those outside the cities more isolated and the growing needs immeasurable. Lack of fuel at the airport has impacted the running of the UNHAS flights, and hospitals have had to turn off generators. Since the TDF took back Tigray, some of the larger towns have had intermittent electricity, provided by the Hydropower Dam on the Tekezé.<sup>247</sup> However intermittent electricity in hospitals has meant that even simple procedures can be life-threatening. The shortage of fuel has prevented the creation, renovation, and repair of IDP camps within Tigray.<sup>248</sup> At the same time, nine tankers of fuel sat idle in Semera, pending Government authorisation for them to move into Tigray.<sup>249</sup>

From 12 July - 23 September, of the 445 trucks which entered the region, only 38 returned.<sup>250</sup> All sides to the conflict agree that the shortage of trucks is hampering the flow of aid; however, the narrative differs. The Government of Ethiopia claimed that the TDF have requisitioned the trucks and are using them to transport fighters (unconfirmed claims). UN officials on the ground have clearly cited the lack of fuel and harassment of drivers as reasons for the trucks non-return. Multiple aid convoys have been targeted by pro-Government militias before reaching Tigray, their contents looted and drivers assaulted.<sup>251</sup> In some cases, drivers were held hostage for several days. However, the Ethiopian Government's National Disaster Risk Management

Commissioner, Mitiku Kassa, rejects claims that the lack of fuel is responsible for increasing hardship. Ethiopia's mission to the UN in New York said that, "any claim on the existence of blockade is baseless," suggesting instead that aid agencies "faced shortage in trucks as a result of the non-return of almost all trucks that travelled to Tigray to deliver aid."<sup>252</sup>

The situation remains critical. The shortage of trucks is limiting the amount of aid which can enter the region, while the fuel blockade is preventing the aid that has made it into Tigray from being distributed. In a statement the Tigrayan authorities voiced their frustration, "truck drivers are provided with fuel that's only [enough] for a one-way trip to Tigray. They are not provided [with] reserve fuel [to return] that is



<sup>247</sup> Email correspondence with author

<sup>248</sup> OCHA (14 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>249</sup> OCHA (23 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-23-sept-2021>

<sup>250</sup> Kassa (23 September 2021) Tigray mothers share shocking accounts of dire famine conditions, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/tigray-mothers-share-shocking-accounts-of-dire-famine-conditions>

<sup>251</sup> AFP (19 July 2021) Food aid convoy headed for Ethiopia's Tigray attacked: UN, Available at: <https://news.yahoo.com/food-aid-convoy-headed-ethiopia-143621227.html>

<sup>252</sup> Nichols (29 September 2021) U.N. aid chief to Ethiopia on famine in Tigray: 'Get those trucks moving', Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-aid-chief-ethiopia-famine-tigray-get-those-trucks-moving-2021-09-28/>

customary on such trips.”<sup>253</sup> This claim was reiterated in meetings with UN and aid personnel within Tigray, who confirmed that truck drivers were only given enough fuel for a one-way trip and banned from carrying cash. This prevented drivers from purchasing more fuel for the return trip. The agencies reported that due to “the limitation of cash and the added difficulties in finding fuel... it is highly challenging for the trucks to return from Mekelle.”<sup>254</sup>

Those with the fuel to return risk intimidation, harassment, and detention. The UN reported that drivers, many of which are ethnic Tigrayans, cited a number of reasons for non-return, including, “fear for their security as they were subjected to beating, harassment, intimidation and theft on the route from Semera to Mekelle.”<sup>255</sup> Even UN officials had reported been harassment and abuse by Afar armed police. In September at least two separate convoys were shot at, with the Tigrayan drivers arrested.<sup>256</sup> Whether trucks are not returning due to security concerns or lack of fuel, these are man-made reasons, and they are preventing life-saving aid reaching those in Tigray.

OCHA estimates to sustain humanitarian operations, the relief effort requires US\$6.5mn every week. This could be achieved if more cash was permitted to enter the region, or by resuming banking services.<sup>257</sup> However, by 23 September, less than 5% of the required weekly money had entered the region. In Mekelle, residents are only allowed to withdraw 1,000 birr per month. This is the equivalent of US\$22. However, with the inflation of food and household commodities, this is not sustainable. “Economic activities are stuck,” Micheal Gebreyesus, a 36-year-old resident of Mekelle, told *Al Jazeera*. “Teff (essential grain to bake injera) is 6,000 birr (US\$130.43) per quintal (220 pounds). Cooking oil is 700 (US\$15) birr and that is if you are lucky to get it in the market. Essential vegetables like tomato and onion are 100 birr (US\$2.17) per kilo.”<sup>258</sup> This has had a severe impact on the ability for Tigrayans to support each other. Tesfay Gebretsadik, who had fled to Mekelle from Humera in western Tigray, told *Al Jazeera* that “Up until the siege, we were in a relatively better condition because the residents of Mekelle used to bring us food,” he continued, “After the siege, all donations stopped. The inflation, and everything gets heavy. Residents are focused on saving their own life.”<sup>259</sup> By the end of September the prices in Mekelle and Shire had continued to soar, with cooking oil price

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<sup>253</sup> Mwai (27 September 2021) Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Why are hundreds of aid trucks stranded? BBC, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/58681797>

<sup>254</sup> Mwai (27 September 2021) Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Why are hundreds of aid trucks stranded? BBC, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/58681797>; Logistics Cluster (3 September 2012) Ethiopia - Meeting Minutes - Semera, 20 August 2021, Available at: <https://logcluster.org/document/ethiopia-meeting-minutes-semera-20-august-2021>

<sup>255</sup> Mwai (27 September 2021) Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Why are hundreds of aid trucks stranded? BBC, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/58681797>; Logistics Cluster (3 September 2012) Ethiopia - Meeting Minutes - Semera, 20 August 2021, Available at: <https://logcluster.org/document/ethiopia-meeting-minutes-semera-20-august-2021>

<sup>256</sup> Nichols (29 September 2021) U.N. aid chief to Ethiopia on famine in Tigray: 'Get those trucks moving', Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-aid-chief-ethiopia-famine-tigray-get-those-trucks-moving-2021-09-28/>

<sup>257</sup> United Nations (2 September 2021) Statement by Acting Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia, Grant Leaity, on the operational constraints and de facto humanitarian blockade of Tigray, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Statement%20by%20Acting%20Humanitarian%20Coordinator%20on%20the%20operational%20constraints%20Tigray.pdf>

<sup>258</sup> Kassa (23 September 2021) Tigray mothers share shocking accounts of dire famine conditions, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/tigray-mothers-share-shocking-accounts-of-dire-famine-conditions>

<sup>259</sup> Kassa (23 September 2021) Tigray mothers share shocking accounts of dire famine conditions, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/tigray-mothers-share-shocking-accounts-of-dire-famine-conditions>

increased by 433%, salt by 567%, rice by 167%, teff by 90%,<sup>260</sup> and fuel fluctuating between 200%-2,300%.<sup>261</sup>

Items	Price inflation	Items	Price inflation
Shire		Mekelle	
Benzine	2,300 %	Benzine	363%
Diesel	1,200 %	Diesel	666%
Kerosene	275 %	Kerosene	200%
Cooking oil	220 %	Cooking oil	433 %
Coffee	600 %	Coffee	255 %
Sugar	186 %	Sugar	100%
Flour	300 %	Flour	36%
Rice	167 %	Rice	100%
Bread	150%	Bread	140%
Salt	567 %	Beans	180%

*Results of rapid market surveys in Mekelle and Shire, showing price inflations from mid-June to present.*

OCHA<sup>262</sup>

### Sanctions

By September, the US had only placed sanctions on one Eritrean military leader, General Filipos Woldeyohannes (Filipos), under their Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, in August.<sup>263</sup> However, on 17 September President Biden signed an Executive Order allowing the US Government to sanction those preventing the delivery of aid, in a bid to get the parties to the conflict to the negotiating table.<sup>264</sup> While no names were officially added, the US Government indicated that it is monitoring the situation closely.<sup>265</sup> The US Government said that sanctions could be avoided if parties to the conflict took clear and concrete steps towards a ceasefire and ensuring the delivery of aid. The White House indicated that this could include: “accepting African Union-led mediation efforts, designating a negotiations team, agreeing to negotiations without preconditions, and accepting an invitation to initial talks.” Steps towards ensuring humanitarian access could involve: “authorizing

<sup>260</sup> OCHA (30 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-sept-2021>

<sup>261</sup> OCHA (30 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-sept-2021>

<sup>262</sup> OCHA (7 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-07-oct-2021>

<sup>263</sup> US Department of the Treasury (23 August 2021) Press Releases, Treasury Sanctions Eritrean Military Leader in Connection with Serious Human Rights Abuse in Tigray, Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0329>

<sup>264</sup> Bader (17 September 2021) US Authorizes Sanctions in Ethiopia’s Tigray Conflict, Human Rights Watch, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/17/us-authorizes-sanctions-ethiopia-tigray-conflict>; The White House (17 September 2021) FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Actions in Response to Ongoing Crisis in Northern Ethiopia, Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/17/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-actions-in-response-to-ongoing-crisis-in-northern-ethiopia/> ; The White House (17 September 2021) Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons With Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia, Available at: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R\\_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusfVAFhR2ouseobQ](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusfVAFhR2ouseobQ)

<sup>265</sup> The White House (17 September 2021) Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons With Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia, Available at: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R\\_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusfVAFhR2ouseobQ](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusfVAFhR2ouseobQ)



daily convoys of trucks carrying humanitarian supplies to travel overland to reach at-risk populations; reducing delays for humanitarian convoys; and restoring basic services such as electricity, telecommunications, and financial services.<sup>266</sup> While the TDF spokesperson Getachew Reda supported Biden's attempts to start a negotiation process,<sup>267</sup> President Abiy Ahmed responded through an open-letter published on Twitter.<sup>268</sup> His anger at the latest development was visible, as he compared the Tigray conflict to the US' War on Terror and criticised the international community for misrepresenting the situation on the ground.<sup>269</sup>

As the month of September progressed, the rise in dehumanising language and patriotic rhetoric had become increasingly worrying. The zero-sum language leaves little room for grievance resolution or negotiations. Another statement by the former President of Tigray, Debrestion Gebremichael reinforced earlier beliefs that they are fighting for their existence: "This can be resolved peacefully. The political issue too can be dealt with politically. But this is not like that. It is genocide. Since it is genocide, unless we are exterminated it won't be resolved. But this won't happen. That's why we have to be strong and destroy their forces. We have to make him yield. If it gets to that point, then it means it has ended. When we get near [to that point] he may accept peace and negotiation. If so, that's good too. We won't insist on destroying them all. It is genocide that they want; we have to show them that [carrying out] genocide is not possible."<sup>270</sup>

On 23 September, The House of Representatives in the USA passed a bill that would require Secretary of State Antony Blinken to determine whether the humanitarian crisis in Tigray amounts to genocide, but the senior administration official indicated that the State Department has already initiated the review, which had not been published as 2021 drew to a close.<sup>271</sup>

### *The deterioration in food security*

According to USAID, the reality in June was far worse than the IPC predictions. USAID suggests that almost 1 million people were facing famine conditions (IPC Level 5) and 5 million were suffering from 'emergency' levels of food security (IPC Level 4).<sup>272</sup> USAID's findings are corroborated by reports within the region, which paint a grim picture of life in Tigray. A group from Mekelle University wrote to the UN on 27 September, warning that the situation was a "man-made form of famine that

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<sup>266</sup> The White House (17 September 2021) Background Press Call By Senior Administration Officials on Ethiopia, Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/09/17/background-press-call-by-senior-administration-officials-on-ethiopia/>

<sup>267</sup> Tekle (19 September 2021) Ethiopia: Tigray Rebels Say Ready to Cooperate With Us to End Conflict, All Africa, Available at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202109190040.html>

<sup>268</sup> Abiy Ahmed Ali (17 September 2021) Tweet: 'An Open Letter to President Joseph R. Biden Jr, Available at: <https://twitter.com/abiyahmedali/status/1438869469464567808?s=27>

<sup>269</sup> Plaut (19 September 2021) Can the Biden sanctions strategy end the Tigray war? Eritrea Hub, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/can-the-biden-sanctions-strategy-end-the-tigray-war>

<sup>270</sup> Eritrea Hub (25 September 2021) Statement by Debrestion Gebremichael, President of Tigray, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/statement-by-debrestion-gebremichael-president-of-tigray>

<sup>271</sup> Congress (2 July 2021) H.R.4350 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4350/text>; Harris (24 September 2021) Biden administration considering Tigray genocide determination, The National News, Available at: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/us-news/2021/09/24/biden-administration-considering-tigray-genocide-determination/>

<sup>272</sup> AP News (26 June 2021) Up to 900,000 in Ethiopia's Tigray face famine, US Says, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-africa-famine-262c0faa72a9eb20fd0151c5ba7a7e91>

belittles the 1984 famine in its severity”.<sup>273</sup> In late September, Martin Griffiths raised fears that the situation “is likely to get far worse before it gets better” noting that desert locusts, low yielding harvests, lack of humanitarian aid and spreading conflict, posed a threat to food security in the north of Ethiopia.<sup>274</sup>

By 30 September, just 606 trucks had arrived since 12 July, 11% of the required aid.<sup>275</sup> Within these deliveries, there was one week’s supply of fuel, no medical supplies, and enough food to feed 360,000 people for one month, just 6% of the population. For many, food baskets which are meant to last six weeks were delivered once in five months.<sup>276</sup> At least 38% of the population had received food aid just once since the conflict began. This is much lower than the caloric needs.<sup>277</sup> To feed the 5.2 million people in need of food assistance, in a 6-week food cycle, 870,000 people must be reached each week. However, between 23-29 September, due to lack of food, fuel, and cash, only 260,000 people received food aid.<sup>278</sup> Considering the challenges that the aid agencies face, this should be hailed as a success. Considering that the challenges are man-made and can be removed by an act of government, this should also be seen as a tragedy.

As a result, by the end of September, Tigray was facing unprecedented levels of malnutrition, exceeding the global emergency threshold of 15% Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) and 2% SAM for children under five.<sup>279</sup> Of those screened, 30% of children under 5-years and 80% of pregnant and breastfeeding women were malnourished.<sup>280</sup> Aid agencies fear that this is just the tip of iceberg, as not all areas were accessible to aid agencies due to fuel shortages. Girmanesh Meles, a 30-year-old mother, told Al Jazeera that since food ran out in August, she has gone days without eating. She was unable to breastfeed Haftom, her 18-month-old child.<sup>281</sup> Even medical staff in hospitals in Mekelle have been skipping meals, while patients are dying from preventable deaths. “No matter what we do, their wounds don’t heal. They get infected. In the end, you see patients dying. In the past, these were patients one took for granted. Their operations were simple, of course they would survive,” Dr Sinatayehu explained to the Associated Press. He continued, “Now we are doomed to fail in whatever we do. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of Mekelle are lucky. In the villages, the situation is far worse.”<sup>282</sup>

### *The expulsion of UN officials*

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<sup>273</sup> Anna and Lederer (29 September 2021) The AP Interview: Ethiopia crisis ‘stain on our conscience’, AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-health-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-a2b1639797c2a31973ce12985d82b865>

<sup>274</sup> United Nations (29 September 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210929.doc.htm>

<sup>275</sup> OCHA (30 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-sept-2021>

<sup>276</sup> Annys, VandenBempt, Negash, Sloover, Ghekiere, Haegeman, Temmerman, and Nyssen (October 2021) Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation, Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

<sup>277</sup> OCHA (23 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-23-sept-2021>

<sup>278</sup> OCHA (7 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-07-oct-2021>

<sup>279</sup> AFP (1 October 2021) Ethiopia famine: UN reports ‘unprecedented’ malnutrition in Tigray, Available at: <https://globoenewsnet.com/news/ethiopia-famine-un-reports-unprecedented-malnutrition-in-tigray/>

<sup>280</sup> Anna (20 September 2021) ‘I just cry’: Dying of hunger in Ethiopia’s blockaded Tigray, AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-kenya-ef9fe79cc0cf35917fd190b6e9bd0f46>

<sup>281</sup> Kassa (23 September 2021) Tigray mothers share shocking accounts of dire famine conditions, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/23/tigray-mothers-share-shocking-accounts-of-dire-famine-conditions>

<sup>282</sup> Emnet Negash (28 September 2021) Unique pictures show the conditions in the Peace Prize laureate’s country, Available at: <https://emnetnegash.wordpress.com/2021/09/28/unique-pictures-show-the-conditions-in-the-peace-prize-laureates-country/>

With convoys of trucks pending authorisation, fuel tankers poised and enough aid in the country to prevent famine, the frustration among humanitarians and UN Officials was mounting. In an interview with Reuters on 28 September, the UN's senior aid co-ordinator, Martin Griffiths warned of impending famine should aid not get through the blockade, stating that Tigray would become a "stain on our conscience".<sup>283</sup> When asked what was needed, he replied "Get those trucks moving". He continued, "This is man-made, this can be remedied by the act of government".<sup>284</sup> His words were clear... people are starving to death under the de-facto Government blockade on food, medical supplies and fuel.<sup>285</sup> In a similar interview with the Associated Press, Martin Griffiths also mentioned the unacceptable allegations made against humanitarians, calling for the Ethiopian Government to provide evidence of misconduct so that a proper investigation by the UN could occur. However, on this he noted that "so far as I'm aware, we haven't had such cases put to us."<sup>286</sup> The Ethiopian Government rejected his claims, stating that there was no blockade and instead repeated their stance that the lack of trucks returning from Tigray was holding up the aid effort.<sup>287</sup>

On 30 September, seven high-level UN humanitarian officials were given 72 hours to leave the country.<sup>288</sup> Amongst those expelled were officials leading the humanitarian response and documenting ongoing human rights abuses. The Ethiopian Government accused them of "meddling in the internal affairs of the country" and claimed to have warned the UN previously of their misdemeanours.<sup>289</sup> The Ethiopian Government stated their belief this would not impact the aid effort and accused the international community of downplaying the TPLF's violent advance.<sup>290</sup> Among the complaints, the Ethiopian Government accused the individuals of several violations of the professional code of conduct, including:

- Diversion of humanitarian assistance to the TPLF;
- Violating agreed-upon security arrangements;
- Transferring communication equipment to be used by the TPLF;
- Continued reticence in demanding the return of more than 400 trucks commandeered by the TPLF for military mobilisation and for the transportation of its forces since July 2021; and
- Dissemination of misinformation and politicisation of humanitarian assistance.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Nichols (29 September 2021) U.N. aid chief to Ethiopia on famine in Tigray: 'Get those trucks moving', Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-aid-chief-ethiopia-famine-tigray-get-those-trucks-moving-2021-09-28/>

<sup>284</sup> Nichols (29 September 2021) U.N. aid chief to Ethiopia on famine in Tigray: 'Get those trucks moving', Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-aid-chief-ethiopia-famine-tigray-get-those-trucks-moving-2021-09-28/>

<sup>285</sup> Anna and Lederer (29 September 2021) The AP Interview: Ethiopia crisis 'stain on our conscience', AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-health-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-a2b1639797c2a31973ce12985d82b865>

<sup>286</sup> Anna and Lederer (29 September 2021) The AP Interview: Ethiopia crisis 'stain on our conscience', AP News, Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/africa-health-united-nations-only-on-ap-famine-a2b1639797c2a31973ce12985d82b865>

<sup>287</sup> Security Council Report (1 October 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Meeting under "Any Other Business", Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/10/ethiopia-tigray-meeting-under-any-other-business-3.php>

<sup>288</sup> Ethiopian Embassy in the UK (1 October 2021) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release on the Expulsion of UN Officials, Available at: <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-press-release-on-the-expulsion-of-un-officials-ethiopia/>

<sup>289</sup> Security Council Report (1 October 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Meeting under "Any Other Business", Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/10/ethiopia-tigray-meeting-under-any-other-business-3.php>

<sup>290</sup> Ethiopian Embassy in the UK (1 October 2021) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release on the Expulsion of UN Officials, Available at: <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-press-release-on-the-expulsion-of-un-officials-ethiopia/>

<sup>291</sup> Ethiopian Embassy in the UK (1 October 2021) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press Release on the Expulsion of UN Officials, Available at: <https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-press-release-on-the-expulsion-of-un-officials-ethiopia/>

Many have speculated that this action was a reaction to Martin Griffiths remarks just days earlier.<sup>292</sup> This led to an emergency UN Security Council meeting on 1 October.

## 5.6 October: The Blockade Tightens (Day 65 – 94)

On 1 October, following the expulsion of UN humanitarian officials, an emergency meeting was held at the UNSC. This was the ninth time the UNSC has met to discuss the crisis in Ethiopia. This led to an interesting interaction between the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Ethiopia's Ambassador to the UN. The Secretary-General outlined how 'persona non grata' does not apply to UN staff and that this act was a breach of Ethiopia's commitment to the UN Charter.<sup>293</sup> He continued to state that Ethiopia had no legal right to expel the seven UN officials and that this act breached the UN's grievance mechanisms. When the Ambassador for Ethiopia outlined how they had warned the UN many times about these individuals, Secretary-General Guterres responded that he had not been made aware of the issues and demanded that evidence be provided of the individuals' transgressions.<sup>294</sup> The Secretary-General reaffirmed his "full confidence" that these UN officials had acted with the core UN principles of "humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence."<sup>295</sup> This bold dismissal of the Ethiopian Government's claim was a political statement by the UN Secretary-General.

The international community came out in support of the UN Secretary-General's position, including Human Rights Watch which said, "The expulsions reflect a broader trend of government hostility toward aid agencies and obstruction of humanitarian assistance in violation of international humanitarian law."<sup>296</sup> Additionally, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki conveyed that the US Government "condemns in the strongest possible terms the government of Ethiopia's unprecedented action" and called upon the Security Council to consider placing sanctions on Ethiopia and "to take urgent action to make clear to the government of Ethiopia that impeding humanitarian operations and depriving your own citizens of the basic means of survival is unacceptable."<sup>297</sup> These expulsions provide further evidence that the Ethiopian Government does not want the international humanitarian community operating in the region, or the crimes it is committing to be seen.

Retirement has allowed Mark Lowcock, to be more candid with his views on the conflict, and in an opinion piece he wrote: "Abiy has two objectives in Tigray. The first is to starve the population either into subjugation or out of existence. The second is to do that without attracting the global opprobrium that would still, even in today's

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<sup>292</sup> Gebrehiwot Berhe (1 October 2021) Not Impartial, Not Principled, Non-Starter: African Union Mediation in Ethiopia, Globe News Net, Available at: <https://globenewsnet.com/opinion/not-impartial-not-principled-non-starter-african-union-mediation-in-ethiopia/>; Kumar (1 October 2021) Millions at Risk as Ethiopia Expels UN Officials, Human Rights Watch, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/01/millions-risk-ethiopia-expels-un-officials>; Security Council Report (1 October 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Meeting under "Any Other Business", Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/10/ethiopia-tigray-meeting-under-any-other-business-3.php>

<sup>293</sup> Lederer (2 October 2021) UN says Ethiopia has no legal right to expel seven UN officials, AP News, <https://apnews.com/article/africa-united-nations-ethiopia-antonio-guterres-abiy-ahmed-f5c9015472474462081a8fd769e5b18e>

<sup>294</sup> United Nations (1 October 2021) Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/content/security-council/meetings-coverage>

<sup>295</sup> United Nations (30 September 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210930.doc.htm>

<sup>296</sup> Kumar (1 October 2021) Millions at Risk as Ethiopia Expels UN Officials, Human Rights Watch, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/01/millions-risk-ethiopia-expels-un-officials>

<sup>297</sup> Security Council Report (1 October 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Meeting under "Any Other Business", Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/10/ethiopia-tigray-meeting-under-any-other-business-3.php>

fractured geopolitical environment, arise from deliberately causing a massive famine taking millions of lives. It is also clear that the second objective is less important than the first. That is the message to be taken from the threatened expulsion last week of UN humanitarian leaders from Ethiopia. Abiy would rather take the criticism for that than allow them to see what he is trying to do.”<sup>298</sup> In an interview with *PBS* he was equally direct, telling the reporter that “There is not just an attempt to starve six million people but an attempt to cover up what’s going on.”<sup>299</sup>

### *Escalation of conflict*

Despite attempts to bring the Ethiopian Federal Government and the TPLF to the negotiating table – including through the withholding of budgetary aid,<sup>300</sup> and the threat and preparation of sanctions by the US<sup>301</sup> and EU<sup>302</sup> – reports were mounting of recent airstrikes,<sup>303</sup> more clashes,<sup>304</sup> new arms deals,<sup>305</sup> and a surge in recruitment.<sup>306</sup> President Biden’s sanctions threat was bolstered by similar cautions from the European Union. The European Parliament voted overwhelmingly for a resolution in early October which would request sanctions to be placed on those prolonging the conflict and contributing to humanitarian suffering if conditions had not improved by the end of the month.<sup>307</sup> Yet, during October the conflict escalated further.<sup>308</sup> The Government of Ethiopia had begun airstrikes on Mekelle, supposedly targeting TPLF strategic sites, however in reality killing civilians including children, while hitting close to hospitals, the university, crop fields, residential areas and industrial complexes, including a tyre warehouse, which went up in flames.<sup>309</sup> It appears civilians from across Ethiopia are heeding the calls of the leaders. Reporters have witnessed new government-allied militias armed not with guns, but with hoes, axes, and machetes, walking towards the front lines.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Lowcock (6 October 2021) How to Destroy a country: does Ethiopia have a future? Centre For Global Development, Available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/how-destroy-country-does-ethiopia-have-future#.YV3ZTEtrM8h.twitter>

<sup>299</sup> Schifrin (6 October 2021) Ethiopia’s ‘sophisticated campaign’ to withhold food, fuel and other aid from Tigray, *PBS*, Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ethiopias-sophisticated-campaign-to-withhold-food-fuel-and-other-aid-from-tigray>

<sup>300</sup> Plaut, Slotznick, Habte, Mulford and Keeble (2021) The Tigray War and Regional Implications Volume 1, Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The\\_Tigray\\_War\\_and\\_Regional\\_Implications\\_Volume\\_1](https://www.academia.edu/49552576/The_Tigray_War_and_Regional_Implications_Volume_1)

<sup>301</sup> The White House (17 September 2021) Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons With Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia, Available at: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R\\_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusVAFhR2ouseobQ](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusVAFhR2ouseobQ)

<sup>302</sup> European Parliament (7 October 2021) European Parliament resolution of 7 October 2021 on the humanitarian situation in Tigray, Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0421\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0421_EN.html)

<sup>303</sup> BBC (21 October 2021) Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cr2pnx1173dt/tigray-crisis>

OCHA (14 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>305</sup> The Economist (9 October 2021) Ethiopia is deliberately starving its own citizens, Available at: [https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/10/09/ethiopia-is-deliberately-starving-its-own-citizens?gclid=Cj0KQCqAweaNBhDEARIsAJ5hwbeTBCY1tewwLYqjM6tpzhADW3qJknEd1Yb4HcbTnNn-uFhKyl03F0aAiptEALw\\_wcB&gclid=aw.ds](https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/10/09/ethiopia-is-deliberately-starving-its-own-citizens?gclid=Cj0KQCqAweaNBhDEARIsAJ5hwbeTBCY1tewwLYqjM6tpzhADW3qJknEd1Yb4HcbTnNn-uFhKyl03F0aAiptEALw_wcB&gclid=aw.ds)

<sup>306</sup> BBC (21-25 October 2021) Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cr2pnx1173dt/tigray-crisis>

<sup>307</sup> European Parliament (7 October 2021) Tigray: MEPs call for sanctions if situation fails to improve by end of month, Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210930IPR13939/tigray-meps-call-for-sanctions-if-situation-fails-to-improve-by-end-of-month>

<sup>308</sup> Security Council Report (5 November 2021) Ethiopia Meeting, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/11/ethiopia-open-briefing-and-closed-consultations.php>

<sup>309</sup> BBC (21-25 October 2021) Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cr2pnx1173dt/tigray-crisis>; OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>310</sup> BBC (21-25 October 2021) Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cr2pnx1173dt/tigray-crisis>

As the TDF and allied OLA forces gained ground, taking control of Dessie and Kombolcha, strategic sites in Amhara, there was increasing concern that the TPLF would take over the capital. The march towards Addis has been reminiscent of the TPLF advance a few decades earlier.<sup>311</sup> According to sources within Ethiopia, the TDF had enough firepower to take over the capital but were instead pushing for a negotiated end.<sup>312</sup> The TPLF spokesperson, Getachew Reda told Reuters that they pledged to minimise casualties on their route to Addis Ababa, “We don't intend to shoot at civilians and we don't want bloodshed. If possible, we would like the process to be peaceful.”<sup>313</sup> With the TPLF drawing nearer to Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian Government began a new co-ordinated ground and air offensive.<sup>314</sup> Abiy Ahmed's supporters have even been quoted calling this new wave of violence their “final offensive”<sup>315</sup> indicating the severity of the next wave of attack.

The TPLF remained adamant that their advance was to remove the chokehold on the region, and to re-establish control over humanitarian supply lines. However, in early October, ENDF and allied forces were positioned along the main routes into Sudan and Djibouti which could have offered the TDF with cross-border supply routes.<sup>316</sup> Additionally the heavy presence of Eritrean soldiers along the Ethiopian-Sudanese border and along the Tekezé river has prevented additional humanitarian corridors from being possible.<sup>317</sup>

During the TDF's offensive, they too have been accused of atrocities, increasing the complexity, humanitarian needs and the grievances within this war. The Tigrayans deny targeting civilians. Instead, they blame Amhara officials “for mobilising people on mass to fight against them”.<sup>318</sup> However, looting of property, food and livestock, the killing of civilians, rape and looting of humanitarian warehouses has been reported in Afar and Amhara during their advance.<sup>319</sup> A father of five, Baye Girme, told reporters that his family had been surviving on just potatoes after the TDF's invasion of their village. The TPLF “took the chicken, the goats, even the sheep,” he said.<sup>320</sup> A lecturer in Amhara said that universities were destroyed, health centres looted, and livestock slaughtered. “Why destroy the student record files? Why do

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<sup>311</sup> The Economist (4 November 2021) Ethiopia's capital is under threat, Available at: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/ethiopias-capital-is-under-threat/21806092>

<sup>312</sup> Mackintosh (3 November 2021) Rebels threaten Ethiopian capital as UN slams atrocities committed in Tigray conflict, CNN, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/rebels-threaten-ethiopian-capital-as-un-slams-atrocities-committed-in-tigray-conflict>

<sup>313</sup> Reuters (3 November 2021) Ethiopian leader, marking year of war, says he will bury foes 'with our blood', Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopian-leader-marking-year-war-says-he-will-bury-his-foes-with-our-blood-2021-11-03/>

<sup>314</sup> BBC (11 October 2021) Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Army launches offensive on all fronts – rebels, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-58869970>;

Karam (13 October 2021) US considers sanctions on Ethiopia's military commanders and commercial entities, The National News, Available at: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/us-news/2021/10/13/us-weighs-sanctions-on-ethiopias-military-commanders-and-commercial-entities/>

<sup>315</sup> Aboudoub (15 October 2021) Fears for humanitarian crisis engulfing Tigray as Abiy Ahmed launches make or break war, The Independent, Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-war-humanitarian-population-b1938975.html>

<sup>316</sup> Rynn and Hassen (22 October 2021) Ethiopia: What next? RUSI, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/ethiopia-what-next>

<sup>317</sup> Annys, VandenBempt, Negash, Sloover, Ghekiere, Haegeman, Temmerman, and Nyssen (October 2021) Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation, Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

<sup>318</sup> Gerth-Niculescu (4 October 2021) Ethiopia conflict sees hunger and atrocities spread from Tigray to Amhara, The New Humanitarian, Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/10/4/Ethiopia-conflict-hunger-atrocities-Tigray-Amhara>

<sup>319</sup> FEWS NET (14 October 2021) Concern for northern Ethiopia increases amidst widening conflict and limited delivery of assistance, Available at: <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/alert/october-14-2021>

<sup>320</sup> Gerth-Niculescu (4 October 2021) Ethiopia conflict sees hunger and atrocities spread from Tigray to Amhara, The New Humanitarian, Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/10/4/Ethiopia-conflict-hunger-atrocities-Tigray-Amhara>

they kill animals?” He told the New Humanitarian, “Their plan is to create poverty in Amhara.”<sup>321</sup>

While aid is available within Amhara and Afar, transporting this aid to those in need has been hampered by continued insecurity.<sup>322</sup> The TDF’s advance has widened the relief response to most of northern Ethiopia. While some have criticised the TPLF for their advance and its widening of the conflict to neighbouring regions, others have outlined how if they had not, Tigray would have been starved to death, reflecting the existential nature of this conflict.

### *100 days after the ceasefire*

Sixth October marked 100 days since the start of the government blockade on the region. In the week leading up to the<sup>n</sup>, only 146,000 of the 870,000 people targeted for food aid were reached, and due to lack of stocks, many households received reduced rations.<sup>323</sup> The spread of the conflict within Amhara and Afar has also impacted local resilience, according to Michael Dunford, WFP’s Regional Director for Eastern Africa, who reported that in all three regions “food insecurity is rising as families flee from their homes and have their livelihoods destroyed”.<sup>324</sup>

The second EU Humanitarian Airbridge flight touched down on the 6 October, carrying 10.6 metric tons of humanitarian supplies and 4.4 metric tons of ready-to-use therapeutic food for children.<sup>325</sup> UNICEF distributed the nutritional supplements to hospitals, but stressed that this was not enough to deal with the demand.<sup>326</sup> In early October, reports from hospitals were increasingly severe. The remaining oxygen machine in Mekelle hospital broke, with no spare parts available to repair it. There was a rise in preventable deaths from the lack of haemodialysis catheters and an increase in women dying during childbirth from post-partum haemorrhages.<sup>327</sup> Outside of Mekelle, hospitals had run out of therapeutic supplies for children with SAM.<sup>328</sup> Nearly 200,000 children had missed critical vaccinations<sup>329</sup> – something of even more importance during a food crisis, when the immune system is less able to fight off diseases. Nutrition partners were working at 20% capacity, unable to reach

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<sup>321</sup> Gerth-Niculescu (4 October 2021) Ethiopia conflict sees hunger and atrocities spread from Tigray to Amhara, The New Humanitarian, Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/10/4/Ethiopia-conflict-hunger-atrocities-Tigray-Amhara>

<sup>322</sup> United Nations (1 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211101.doc.htm>

<sup>323</sup> OCHA (14 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>324</sup> WFP (5 October 2021) WFP completes first round of food distributions in Afar and Amhara; still lacks necessary supplies to reach targeted populations in Tigray, Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-completes-first-round-food-distributions-afar-and-amhara-still-lacks-necessary-supplies>

<sup>325</sup> OCHA (14 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>326</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>327</sup> OCHA (7 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-07-oct-2021>

<sup>328</sup> OCHA (7 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-07-oct-2021>

<sup>329</sup> United Nations (4 October 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211004.doc.htm>

many SAM and MAM children and mothers.<sup>330</sup> NGOs working to support the healthcare services in the region had to scale back their operations due to no fuel, supplies or cash, only reaching 13 health facilities in October compared to 125 health facilities in September.<sup>331</sup>

On 14 October, following significant pressure from the international community, fuel tankers were authorised to enter the region. However, the celebrations were short-lived. The tankers were denied entry at the border checkpoint as they did not have a specific letter from the Federal Police Commissioner in Addis Ababa.<sup>332</sup> The trucks returned to Semera, where 16 tankers of fuel sat idle.<sup>333</sup> At the same time, 3/7 UN food partners had ceased all distributions outside of Mekelle due to a lack of fuel. The remaining 4 partners had only one week of fuel supply remaining.<sup>334</sup> Similarly, UN Agencies delivering water had to temporarily suspend operations in Abi Adi, Adigrat, Axum and Sheraro, while partner agencies reduced their response in Adwa, Shire and Mekelle.<sup>335</sup>

While the UN repeatedly warns that 100 trucks of food, non-food items and fuel are needed per day to prevent the monumental loss of life from hunger, between July - 18 October, only 15% of the humanitarian aid required within Tigray was allowed through.<sup>336</sup> Since 18 October, the Secretary-General's office has reported no movement of convoys with humanitarian supplies into the region.<sup>337</sup> Worryingly, OCHA calculated that between April and October 2021, the food aid that was delivered comprised only 29% of the minimum calorific needs of the population.<sup>338</sup> This shocking statistic paints a picture of the real situation on the ground.

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<sup>330</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>331</sup> OCHA (7 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-07-oct-2021>

<sup>332</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>333</sup> United Nations (26 October 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211026.doc.htm>

<sup>334</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

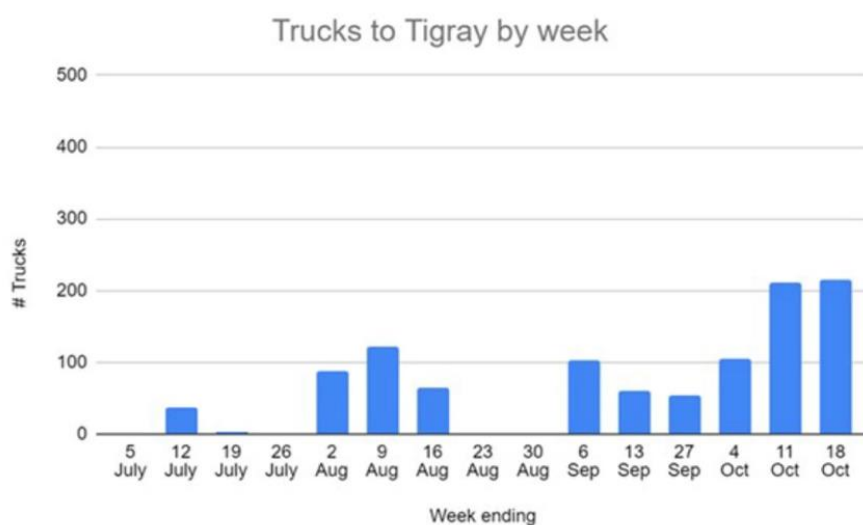
<sup>335</sup> OCHA (14 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>; OCHA (7 October 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-07-oct-2021>

<sup>336</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>337</sup> Between 18<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> October, no movement: United Nations (26 October 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211026.doc.htm>

<sup>338</sup> OCHA (14 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>





OCHA, 18 October<sup>339</sup>

### Flights and Money

During October, new Government regulations meant that on average, each UNHAS flight had 10-15 humanitarian workers refused to board because they did not possess correct documentation from the Ministry of Peace.<sup>340</sup> New requirements insisted that international staff working for international agencies held a resident ID issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while those working for NGOs needed a resident ID issued by the Immigration Authorities, temporary staff need different documentation again, requiring approval and supporting letters from the Ministry of Peace.<sup>341</sup> The bureaucratic hoops get even more elaborate at each change in policy. However, things took a turn for the worse on 22 October, when an UNHAS flight was unable to land in Mekelle due to ongoing Government airstrikes.<sup>342</sup> The subsequent flights (intended to be bi-weekly) were suspended until further notice.<sup>343</sup>

The suspension of UNHAS flights is critical for the supply of cash to region. Between 16 October and the end of the month, no cash entered the region.<sup>344</sup> The lack of food entering the region and minimal harvests has led to market dependency and inflation. In October in Mekelle, the price of sorghum was 70% higher than

<sup>339</sup> OCHA (14 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202014%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>340</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>341</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>342</sup> BBC (21-25 October 2021) Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cr2pnx1173dt/tigray-crisis>

<sup>343</sup> United Nations (26 October 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211026.doc.htm>; Security Council Report (5 November 2021) Ethiopia Meeting, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/11/ethiopia-open-briefing-and-closed-consultations.php>

<sup>344</sup> OCHA (4 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%20204%20Nov%202021.pdf>

average.<sup>345</sup> However, financial difficulties were no longer restricted to Tigray. The spread of conflict to neighbouring Afar and Amhara has also had impact on food security by interrupting the harvest and farming. In Amhara, at Dessie market, the price of maize and sorghum increased by 60-80% between July and late September.<sup>346</sup>

Economic decline can be seen across the country, as the grip of war takes its toll on neighbouring regions and the capital. The Ethiopian Government appealed for debt cancellation from the G20 Common Framework for debt restructuring. This appeal was rejected, and Moody's credit agency downgraded Ethiopia's rating to signal the increased financial risk.<sup>347</sup> The whole country is facing inflation, impacting ordinary Ethiopians' purchasing power and food security, even in areas where conflict is not raging. This is increasingly concerning against the backdrop of new arms deals with the UAE, Turkey, and Iran.<sup>348</sup> Money that could be spent on development and food security within the country is being directed to arms for the ongoing conflict.<sup>349</sup>

As the threat of sanctions hadn't brought the parties to the conflict to the negotiating table, the US has tried to increase financial pressure. The US halted Ethiopia's membership of the African Growth and Opportunity Act in January 2022. This would end its access to duty free imports, trade preferences and financial support which would impact up to 100,000 Ethiopians working in the textile industry.<sup>350</sup> The AGOA is linked to human rights compliance. For the US to revoke this decision, the Ethiopian Government would need to end human rights abuses across the country. The US followed through with this threat on the 23 December.<sup>351</sup>

### *The deterioration in food security*

The blockade has prevented the reporting of timely and accurate data. As a result, humanitarian operations are working with predictions. According to FEWSNET, by 14 October, most households were likely facing a minimum of 'Emergency' (IPC Phase 4), or worse.<sup>352</sup> By stifling information gathering and reporting, Abiy's Government have ensured that the real extent of malnutrition is unknown. This has also meant that an official declaration of famine has not been made. Despite the lack of designation, there is no doubt that Tigray is facing a human-made famine.

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<sup>345</sup> FEWS NET (14 October 2021) Concern for northern Ethiopia increases amidst widening conflict and limited delivery of assistance, Available at: <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/alert/october-14-2021>

<sup>346</sup> FEWS NET (14 October 2021) Concern for northern Ethiopia increases amidst widening conflict and limited delivery of assistance, Available at: <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/alert/october-14-2021>

<sup>347</sup> Rynn and Hassen (22 October 2021) Ethiopia: What next? RUSI, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/ethiopia-what-next>

<sup>348</sup> The Economist (9 October 2021) Ethiopia is deliberately starving its own citizens, Available at:

[https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/10/09/ethiopia-is-deliberately-starving-its-own-citizens?gclid=Cj0KCQiAweaNBhDEARIsAJ5hwbeTBCY1tewwLYqjM6tpzhADW3qJknEd1Yb4HcbTnNn-uFhKyl03F0aAiptEALw\\_wcB&gclid=aw.ds](https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/10/09/ethiopia-is-deliberately-starving-its-own-citizens?gclid=Cj0KCQiAweaNBhDEARIsAJ5hwbeTBCY1tewwLYqjM6tpzhADW3qJknEd1Yb4HcbTnNn-uFhKyl03F0aAiptEALw_wcB&gclid=aw.ds)

<sup>349</sup> Lang and Del Conte (4 November 2021) The Tigray Conflict at One Year: Ethiopia's Descent into Famine and Civil War, Just Security, Available at: <https://www.justsecurity.org/78876/the-tigray-conflict-at-one-year-ethiopias-descent-into-famine-and-civil-war/>

<sup>350</sup> Felbab-Brown (1 October 2021) The exemplary US Sanctions regime for Ethiopia's Tigray conflict and its limitations, Brookings Institute, Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/10/01/the-exemplary-u-s-sanctions-regime-for-ethiopias-tigray-conflict-and-its-limitations/>

<sup>351</sup> AGOA (23 December 2021) US Terminates duty-free trade access to Ethiopia over conflict, Available at: <https://agoa.info/news/article/15942-us-terminates-duty-free-trade-access-to-ethiopia-over-conflict.html>

<sup>352</sup> FEWS NET (14 October 2021) Concern for northern Ethiopia increases amidst widening conflict and limited delivery of assistance, Available at: <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/alert/october-14-2021>

The reports which had emerged were not promising. Organisations working on malnutrition in the region were reporting levels of SAM in children consistently above the emergency threshold, while malnutrition among pregnant and breastfeeding women has exceeded 60% over the past months, and sometimes reached 90%.<sup>353</sup> For those that survive, malnutrition at this level will have repercussions including physical and mental stunting in children, higher risks for mothers during childbirth and more risks of children being born with complications. By the end of October, doctors had reported at least 186 children under five had died in hospitals from SAM.<sup>354</sup> They reminded reporters that these children were just the tip of the iceberg, as many children did not make it to the hospitals. The doctors condemned the Ethiopian Government's blockade on the region, calling it "*collective punishment*."<sup>355</sup>

According to doctors, the blockade on medicines, lack of electricity and fuel, as well as the damage to the healthcare facilities, had increased deaths from treatable illnesses, including pneumonia and diarrhoea. In most places, treatments for HIV, Cancer and Diabetes have been put on hold.<sup>356</sup> Since the beginning of August, nine trucks with medicines have been waiting for approval in Semera. Within the stranded cargo are vital Polio and Measles vaccines. The lack of authorisation is increasing the risk of the spread of preventable, treatable, and communicable diseases.<sup>357</sup> More than 900,000 children needed urgent Polio vaccines and 800,000 children need measles vaccines. Without this protection, an outbreak could occur.

At the same time as Abiy Ahmed hosted extravagant parties in Addis Ababa to celebrate his inauguration – after a contentious election victory during a year of civil unrest - at least two people were dying every minute from starvation in Tigray.<sup>358</sup>

## 5.7 November: The Blockade and Famine (Day 126 – 155)

With the TPLF and OLA forces nearing Addis Ababa, Prime Minister Abiy's discontent and fear was increasingly evident. On the 2 November, the Ethiopian Government declared a nationwide state of emergency.<sup>359</sup> The state of emergency grants more power to the Ethiopian Government, including restricting free assembly, movement, and the media.<sup>360</sup> It also grants the Ethiopia Government the power to force citizens to undergo military training and accept military duty.<sup>361</sup> The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) expressed its concern that these new measures

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<sup>353</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>354</sup> Akinwotu (16 November 2021) Scores of children killed by starvation in Tigray, says health official, The Guardian, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/16/children-starving-to-death-in-ethiopia-tigray-conflict-report>

<sup>355</sup> Akinwotu (16 November 2021) Scores of children killed by starvation in Tigray, says health official, The Guardian, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/16/children-starving-to-death-in-ethiopia-tigray-conflict-report>

<sup>356</sup> Akinwotu (16 November 2021) Scores of children killed by starvation in Tigray, says health official, The Guardian, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/16/children-starving-to-death-in-ethiopia-tigray-conflict-report>

<sup>357</sup> OCHA (14 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>358</sup> Annys, VandenBempt, Negash, Sloover, Ghekiere, Haegeman, Temmerman, and Nyssen (October 2021) Tigray: Atlas of the Humanitarian Situation, Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

<sup>359</sup> Security Council Report (5 November 2021) Ethiopia Meeting, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/11/ethiopia-open-briefing-and-closed-consultations.php>

<sup>360</sup> The Economist (4 November 2021) Ethiopia's capital is under threat, Available at: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/ethiopia-capital-is-under-threat/21806092>

<sup>361</sup> Reuters (8 November 2021) Ethiopians denounce US at rally to back military campaign, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/rally-back-military-campaign-ethiopia-denounce-us-2021-11-07/>

were being used to arrest people of Tigrayan ethnicity, following a wave of new arrests across Addis Ababa.<sup>362</sup> This was denied by the Police Spokesperson, Fasika Fante, who said that those detained were either directly or indirectly supporting the TPLF.<sup>363</sup> Despite this, reports have emerged of the detention of mothers with young children and the elderly, without a court order.<sup>364</sup>

By 3 November, the TPLF and OLA announced that they had reached the town of Kemise, just 325km from Addis Ababa. Ordinary citizens as well as old military veterans were encouraged to buy and register weapons to help defend their neighbourhoods.<sup>365</sup> In a Facebook post, Abiy stated that, "Our people should march... with any weapon and resources they have to defend, repulse and bury the terrorist TPLF." The post was later removed from Facebook, as a spokesperson for Meta said, "We were made aware of a post by Ethiopia's Prime Minister and removed this for violating our policies against inciting and supporting violence."<sup>366</sup> He used similar rhetoric in a speech at the Ethiopian Military headquarters, where he told forces that, "The pit which is dug will be very deep, it will be where the enemy is buried, not where Ethiopia disintegrates... with our blood and bones and make the glory of Ethiopia high again."<sup>367</sup> The Ethiopian conflict looked set to expand into a civil war, with ordinary citizens and other regional forces drawn into the fray. On 5 November, this was realised when the TPLF and OLA alliance was enlarged to nine anti-government groups from across Ethiopia. Its aim is to remove Abiy's Government by either force or negotiation.<sup>368</sup>

### *The OHCHR-EHRC Investigation*

On 25 March 2021, the UN Human Rights Council announced a joint investigation between the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC).<sup>369</sup> Despite challenges and criticisms,<sup>370</sup> on 3 November it released its report.

Many people within Tigray and the international community are concerned about the independence of the investigation. In June, the former President of Tigray rejected

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<sup>362</sup> Reuters (8 November 2021) Ethiopians denounce US at rally to back military campaign, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/rally-back-military-campaign-ethiopians-denounce-us-2021-11-07/>

<sup>363</sup> Reuters (8 November 2021) Ethiopians denounce US at rally to back military campaign, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/rally-back-military-campaign-ethiopians-denounce-us-2021-11-07/>

<sup>364</sup> Nichols (10 November 2021) UN says at least 16 staff, dependents detained in Ethiopia, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-says-least-nine-staff-dependents-detained-ethiopia-2021-11-09/>

Reuters (8 November 2021) Ethiopians denounce US at rally to back military campaign, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/rally-back-military-campaign-ethiopians-denounce-us-2021-11-07/>

<sup>365</sup> BBC (5 November 2021) Ethiopia urges ex-soldiers to join fight against Tigray rebels, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59175404>;

Security Council Report (5 November 2021) Ethiopia Meeting, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/11/ethiopia-open-briefing-and-closed-consultations.php>

<sup>366</sup> Mackintosh (3 November 2021) Rebels threaten Ethiopian capital as UN slams atrocities committed in Tigray conflict, CNN, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/rebels-threaten-ethiopian-capital-as-un-slams-atrocities-committed-in-tigray-conflict/>

<sup>367</sup> Reuters (3 November 2021) Ethiopian leader, marking year of war, says he will bury foes 'with our blood', Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopian-leader-marking-year-war-says-he-will-bury-his-foes-with-our-blood-2021-11-03/>

<sup>368</sup> Eritrea Hub (4 November 2021) Ethiopia: United Front comprising all forces fighting the government to be launched Friday, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/ethiopia-united-front-comprising-all-forces-fighting-the-government-to-be-launched-friday>

<sup>369</sup> Human Rights Watch (June 11, 2021) NGOs Call for UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Tigray, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/11/ngos-call-un-human-rights-council-resolution-tigray>

<sup>370</sup> Odinkalu, Tesfagiorgis, de Waal and Burns (11 October 2021) Neither Impartial nor Independent: The Joint UN-EHRC Human Rights Investigation in Tigray, World Peace Foundation, Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/10/11/neither-impartial-nor-independent-the-joint-un-ehrc-human-rights-investigation-in-tigray/>

the announcement of the joint investigation, outlining fears of impartiality.<sup>371</sup> The EHRC is funded by the Ethiopian Government and has close ties to the Government in Addis Ababa. The EHRC is accountable to the Ethiopian Government's House of People's Representatives, from which the Tigrayan representatives have been excluded.<sup>372</sup> Additional claims have been made that the EHRC does not have the institutional capacity,<sup>373</sup> nor the trust from Tigrayans,<sup>374</sup> to carry out an independent investigation. Further reports have emerged that the EHRC has cleared some its findings with the Government of Ethiopia,<sup>375</sup> questioning their independence. Additionally, one staff member representing the OHCHR within the investigative team was among those expelled by the Ethiopian government at the end of September for 'meddling in internal affairs.'<sup>376</sup>

The investigative team were unable to reach many of the sites of the most violent massacres, including Axum.<sup>377</sup> The reasons for these access restrictions were not clearly explained within the report or publicly leading commentators to criticise the Ethiopian Government for curating the investigation and limiting its scope.<sup>378</sup> Although there were credible reports of the systematic and widespread use of starvation crimes within the conflict,<sup>379</sup> as aforementioned, the report's mandate did not cover Starvation Crimes. One of the most prolific and ongoing atrocities in the region was not investigated.

While the report did not look at starvation crimes per se, the report did make findings which relate to the 'elements' of the War Crime of Starvation.<sup>380</sup> Global Rights Compliance, a group of international lawyers who work on accountability for starvation crimes, identified the following findings as relevant to starvation crimes:

- The Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) looted public and private property, including objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population in southern Tigray, including Keih Emba, Samre, Adi Gibai, Adi Awsa, Bora, and Wukro in eastern Tigray.

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<sup>371</sup> Walsh (12 October 2021) I didn't expect to make it back alive, *The New York Times*, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/03/world/africa/tigray-leader-interview-ethiopia.html>

<sup>372</sup> Gebrekiros Temare (12 April 2021) Justice will not be served by a joint Ethiopian-UN inquiry into Tigray atrocities, *Ethiopia Insight*, Available at: <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/04/12/justice-will-not-be-served-by-a-joint-ethiopian-un-inquiry-into-tigray-atrocities/>

<sup>373</sup> Gebrekiros Temare (12 April 2021) Justice will not be served by a joint Ethiopian-UN inquiry into Tigray atrocities, *Ethiopia Insight*, Available at: <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/04/12/justice-will-not-be-served-by-a-joint-ethiopian-un-inquiry-into-tigray-atrocities/>

<sup>374</sup> *The Guardian* (2 June 2021) Ethiopia's human rights chief as war rages in Tigray: 'we get accused by all ethnic groups', Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jun/02/ethiopia-human-rights-chief-as-war-rages-in-tigray-we-get-accused-by-all-ethnic-groups>

<sup>375</sup> Gramer and Lynch (27 August 2021) U.N. Officials Downplayed Sexual Violence in Ethiopia in Leaked Call, *Foreign Policy*, Available at: [https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/27/united-nations-officials-downplayed-sexual-violence-ethiopia/?tpcc=recirc\\_trending062921](https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/27/united-nations-officials-downplayed-sexual-violence-ethiopia/?tpcc=recirc_trending062921)

<sup>376</sup> Security Council Report (5 October 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Open Briefing, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/10/ethiopia-tigray-open-briefing-2.php>

<sup>377</sup> Amnesty International (26 February 2021) Ethiopia: The Massacre in Axum, Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/3730/2021/en/>

<sup>378</sup> Odinkalu, Tesfagiorgis, de Waal and Burns (11 October 2021) Neither Impartial nor Independent: The Joint UN-EHRC Human Rights Investigation in Tigray, *World Peace Foundation*, Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/10/11/neither-impartial-nor-independent-the-joint-un-ehrc-human-rights-investigation-in-tigray/>

<sup>379</sup> The World Peace Foundation (6 April 2021) Starving Tigray, Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/files/2021/04/Starving-Tigray-report-final.pdf>

<sup>380</sup> ICRC (no date) IHL Database, Rule 53, Available at: [https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2\\_rul\\_rule53](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v2_rul_rule53) ; Global Rights Compliance and the World Peace Foundation (no date) The Crime of Starvation and Methods of Prosecution and Accountability, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Legal%20Paper%20Starvation.pdf>; The International Criminal Court, Rome Statute, Elements of the Crimes, Available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf>;

- The systematic looting by the EDF was accompanied by large scale appropriation of crops and livestock.
- Between 6-9 November 2020, Tigray forces attacked farms belonging to non-Tigrayans in nearby areas to Mai Kadra. The attackers burnt the harvest of 5,000 quintals of sesame.
- Serious access restrictions, including multiple checkpoints by the EDF and ENDF, impeded or delayed delivery of humanitarian assistance to parts of Tigray and Amhara region impacting food security.<sup>381</sup>

As a result of the OHCHR-EHRC report, Abiy Ahmed claimed he was cleared of using Starvation as a Weapon of War.<sup>382</sup> By not investigating 'starvation crimes' as their own distinct category the OHCHR-EHRC has given Abiy the impression that his inhumane use of food as a weapon throughout this conflict can continue. Deaths from bullets, bombs or on the battlefields are given more priority for accountability than those who die from starvation. This only serves to reinforce a hierarchy of atrocity victims.<sup>383</sup> For example, Starvation deaths are often referred to as 'indirect' deaths. However, there is nothing indirect or natural about starvation in this case. As the academic Jenny Edkins wrote, "Starvation is no more 'natural' than suffocation; the former is no more a shortage of food than the latter is a shortage of air."<sup>384</sup>

Starvation is being used as a weapon. Alex de Waal, a leading academic on famines, stated Abiy's "hunger plan is an international crime to be exposed, sanctioned and punished, not appeased." He continued, "The aid should flow now, no matter what. That is the law, and the UN should uphold it."<sup>385</sup> The term 'hunger plan' was no doubt intentionally used by Alex De Waal to compare the use of hunger by Abiy Ahmed, to the Nazi Hunger Plan during World War Two, where many millions were killed using the cruel tool of starvation.<sup>386</sup> Nuremberg has left a legal legacy which downplays the role starvation within atrocities, contributing to a dearth of prosecutions on starvation grounds. However, one of the few countries to prosecute on the grounds of starvation was Ethiopia in 2006, which pleaded starvation as distinct crime. We have seen a previous ruler of Ethiopia on trial for similar crimes. Perhaps Abiy should bare this in mind.

### *The Security Council*

The conflict is the first major test for the UN Security Council Resolution 2417 (UNSC 2417) on Conflict and Hunger.<sup>387</sup> However, more than one year into this conflict and the resolution has not been implemented effectively. Through UNSC

<sup>381</sup> Mulford and Murdoch (4 November 2021) Tigray One Year On: An Anniversary of Famine and Conflict, Starvation Accountability, Global Right Compliance & The World Peace Foundation, Available at: <https://starvationaccountability.org/news-and-events/tigray-one-year-on-an-anniversary-of-famine-and-conflict>; OHCHR-EHRC Report (3 November 2021) Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ET/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf>

<sup>382</sup> De Waal (4 November 2021) Tigray is Starving, it is time for the UN to act, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/11/4/tigray-is-starving-it-is-time-for-the-un-to-act>

<sup>383</sup> De Waals book 'Mass Starvation' he speaks about the implicit hierarchy of atrocity victims, see: De Waal (2018) Mass Starvation, (Polity Press, Cambridge).

<sup>384</sup> Jenny Edkins, The Criminalization Of Mass Starvations: From Natural Disaster To Crime Against Humanity, In The New Famines: Why Famines Persist In An Era Of Globalization, Within The New Famines: Stephen Devereux Ed., (2007).

<sup>385</sup> De Waal (4 November 2021) Tigray is Starving, it is time for the UN to act, Aljazeera, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/11/4/tigray-is-starving-it-is-time-for-the-un-to-act>

<sup>386</sup> Bruaas (19 May 2021) Hitler's Hunger Plan, The Nobel Peace Centre, Available at: <https://www.nobelpeacecenter.org/en/news/hitler-s-hungerplan>

<sup>387</sup> Global Rights Compliance and The World Peace Foundation (4 March 2021) Ethiopia: A Test Case for UN Security Council Action Under Resolution 2417, Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/files/2021/03/GRC-WFP-Ethiopia-test-case-for-UNSC-under-Resolution-2417-FINAL9.pdf>

2417, the Security Council requests the Secretary-General to “report swiftly to the Council when the risk of conflict-induced famine and wide-spread food insecurity in armed conflict contexts occurs” and outlines the need to “give its full attention to such information provided by the Secretary-General when those situations are brought to its attention”.<sup>388</sup> Although UNSC 2417 was created to provide a mechanism for Security Council action,<sup>389</sup> little action has occurred.

By November, the Security Council had met eight times to discuss the situation, only twice publicly. There has been no decisive action at the UN Security Council, and only one non-binding Presidential Statement has been issued.<sup>390</sup> OCHA has provided at least one confidential white paper to the Security Council in May, linking the situation to UNSC 2417.<sup>391</sup> The Security Council report revealed that OCHA estimated “that 20% of the population in the Tigray region is in a state of emergency food insecurity and establishes a link between the levels of food insecurity and the ongoing hostilities. It notes that Ethiopian authorities estimate that over 90% of the harvest for 2020 was lost due to looting, burning or other forms of conflict-related destruction, while some 80% of livestock was looted or slaughtered. The paper also lists other drivers of food shortage in the area, such as recent below-average rainfalls, locust infestation, and the adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.”<sup>392</sup> Additionally it reported that “humanitarian operations continue to face attacks, obstruction, seizure of cargo and delays. Military movements, fighting and non-cooperation of armed elements have also been impeding aid delivery.”<sup>393</sup> To date, Abiy’s Government has rejected international pressure to abide by international norms (including UNSC 2417 on hunger and UNSC 2286 on humanitarians).

The Security Council remains deeply divided. Some states – including the USA, UK, and Ireland – have sought to link the discussions with UNSC 2417 and referenced the resolution within their remarks.<sup>394</sup> Russia, China and the A3 plus one (Kenya, Niger, Tunisia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) sought to keep discussions to a minimum. While Russia and China have argued that the conflict is a domestic matter and sovereignty must be upheld, the A3 plus one have suggested that there must be African solutions to African problems.

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<sup>388</sup> Security Council Report (14 June 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Humanitarian Situation, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/06/ethiopia-tigray-informal-interactive-dialogue-on-the-humanitarian-situation.php>

<sup>389</sup> Global Rights Compliance (19 May 2021) Pandemic of Hunger Symposium: Reflections on UNSC 2417 – A Preventative Tool, an Accountability Response, or Both? *Opinio Juris*, Available at: <http://opiniojuris.org/2021/05/19/pandemic-of-hunger-symposium-reflections-on-uns-2417-a-preventative-tool-an-accountability-response-or-both/#:~:text=Scope%20and%20purpose%20of%20UNSC,part%20of%20their%20annual%20reporting>.

<sup>390</sup> <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14501.doc.htm>

<sup>391</sup> Security Council Report (14 June 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Humanitarian Situation, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/06/ethiopia-tigray-informal-interactive-dialogue-on-the-humanitarian-situation.php>; United Nations (22 April 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14501.doc.htm> ; The Human Rights Council (2 July 2021) UN Security Council: End Inaction on Ethiopia, Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/02/un-security-council-end-inaction-ethiopia>

<sup>392</sup> Security Council Report (14 June 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Humanitarian Situation, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/06/ethiopia-tigray-informal-interactive-dialogue-on-the-humanitarian-situation.php>

<sup>393</sup> <sup>393</sup> Security Council Report (14 June 2021) Ethiopia (Tigray): Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Humanitarian Situation, Available at: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/06/ethiopia-tigray-informal-interactive-dialogue-on-the-humanitarian-situation.php>

<sup>394</sup> US Mission to the UN (26 August 2021) Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Ethiopia and the Situation in Tigray, Available at: <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-ethiopia-and-the-situation-in-tigray/>

In an act which has raised further concern about the Ethiopian Government's aims to disregard international law and international norms, in November, Ethiopia expelled four of the six Irish diplomats based in Addis Ababa. Ireland has held the 'penholder' position on the Ethiopian case, a role which is responsible for the initiating and drafting of resolutions.<sup>395</sup> This has led some to suggest that this was retribution for Ireland's role in putting Ethiopia on the agenda at the Security Council.<sup>396</sup>

### *The deterioration in food security*

From 18 October = 24 November, no UN-organised humanitarian supplies entered Tigray.<sup>397</sup> Humanitarian workers, over 360 trucks with relief and sixteen fuel tankers, each with a capacity of 45,000 litres of fuel,<sup>398</sup> were stranded in Semera waiting for Government authorisation to enter the region.<sup>399</sup> With just 10,000 metric tons of food stocks available within Tigray, and fuel and cash shortages limiting its distribution, the imminent threat of a total depletion was rising.<sup>400</sup> Another of the UN's food partners had to cease food distributions, leaving just three operating. Malnutrition rates continued to soar, with OCHA estimating that 1.6 million children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women needed nutritional interventions.<sup>401</sup> As the situation got even more desperate and demonstrating a sign of both resilience and solidarity, local transporters who still had fuel came to the aid of the relief effort, distributing aid where possible.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Security Council Report, '*Security Council working methods: A tale of two Councils?*' Special Research Report No. 1, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/specialresearch-report/security-council-working-methods-a-tale-of-two-councils.php>, accessed 8 August 2019.; Jason Ralph and Jessica Gifkins, 'The purpose of United Nations Security Council practice', *European Journal of International Relations*, 23(3), 630-653 (2017).

<sup>396</sup> United Nations (24 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211124.doc.htm>

<sup>397</sup> OCHA (18 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-18-nov-2021>

<sup>398</sup> United Nations (26 October 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211026.doc.htm>

<sup>399</sup> United Nations (11 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211111.doc.htm>

<sup>400</sup> OCHA (18 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-18-nov-2021>

<sup>401</sup> OCHA (4 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%204%20Nov%202021.pdf>

<sup>402</sup> OCHA (11 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2011%20Nov%202021.pdf>





By this point, it was estimated that that 80% of essential medication had run out at most health facilities across the region.<sup>403</sup> Only 16/47 Mobile Health and Nutrition Teams were still operating. Vaccination campaigns were suspended.<sup>404</sup> Disease surveillance teams were reporting high levels of Malaria, Dysentery and Scabies. With little choice left, medical teams resorted to using out of date scabies medicines to treat cases within IDP camps in Shire.<sup>405</sup> More than 500 cancer patients could no longer access treatment.<sup>406</sup> Doctors at Ayder hospital in Mekelle, reported the deaths of 47 patients from kidney failure. Shortages of dialysis equipment meant they could not be treated.<sup>407</sup>

Without fuel, access to safe drinking water was disrupted. Water trucking was suspended, rehabilitation of permanent water sources mostly stalled, and many generators for water pumps had been turned off. An estimated 2.3 million people do not have access to safe drinking water.<sup>408</sup> To reach the 1.2 million IDPs targeted

by the UNs water response, the UN would need 4,873 litres of fuel per day.<sup>409</sup> By the end of November, only 11/46 WASH partners were operational, in a reduced number of Woredas. This meant that many received no WASH support.<sup>410</sup> In Adi Hagerary, sustainable water supplies had totally run out, leading people to walk 20km to fetch water. Many people were relying on untreated water sources, greatly increasing their risk of getting waterborne illnesses, a factor which ultimately contributes to higher levels of malnutrition.

In early November, at least 16 UN staff and their dependents were detained in the capital Addis Ababa, within widespread arrests under the new emergency

<sup>403</sup> OCHA (4 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%20204%20Nov%202021.pdf>

<sup>404</sup> OCHA (18 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-18-nov-2021>

<sup>405</sup> OCHA (4 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%20204%20Nov%202021.pdf>

<sup>406</sup> OCHA (11 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202011%20Nov%202021.pdf>

<sup>407</sup> OCHA (11 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202011%20Nov%202021.pdf>

<sup>408</sup> OCHA (4 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%20204%20Nov%202021.pdf>

<sup>409</sup> OCHA (4 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%20204%20Nov%202021.pdf>

<sup>410</sup> OCHA (25 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-25-nov-2021>

measures.<sup>411</sup> Additionally, at least 70 UN-contracted truck drivers were detained in Semera.<sup>412</sup> The UN Secretary-General called for their immediate release, and his spokesperson said, “As far as the Secretary-General is aware, the staff members are being held without charge, and no specific information has been provided regarding the reasons for their arrest. United Nations personnel carry out critical and impartial work in Ethiopia. The Secretary-General stresses the obligation of respecting the privileges and immunities of United Nations personnel, both international and Ethiopian, as well as protecting United Nations personnel and other humanitarian workers in Ethiopia, including from arbitrary detention.”<sup>413</sup> A few days later, on 12 December, six of those detained in Addis were released, while 34 of the truck drivers were also released.<sup>414</sup> According to the UN, the detention of drivers was a primary obstacle in the delivery of aid during this time, as without drivers the convoys were stranded in Semera.<sup>415</sup> On 18 November, six more UN personnel in Addis Ababa were released as well as the remaining drivers in Semera.<sup>416</sup>

By mid-November, the spread of conflict and increased instability had displaced 840,000 people and left a further million 1.8 million people food insecure in Amhara and Afar.<sup>417</sup> The WFP reported that humanitarian warehouses in Kombolcha (Amhara) had been looted, equipment destroyed, and storage facilities vandalised, however they did not attribute these crimes to a specific party to the conflict.<sup>418</sup> Despite this, humanitarians scaled up operations to respond to increased demands within Amhara and Afar. The humanitarian response now was targeting 8 million people with food aid across northern Ethiopia (Tigray, Amhara and Afar).<sup>419</sup>

### *150 days after the ceasefire*

In rare, good news, following a month-long suspension due to security concerns, the UNHAS flights resumed on 24 November, bringing humanitarian staff and small supplies of much needed cash into the region.<sup>420</sup> Additionally, almost 40 trucks started to head towards Tigray, the first convoy since 18 October.<sup>421</sup> Although a great relief, this would not be enough to stop catastrophic suffering. To frustrate matters further, on 25 November, OCHA reported that the warehouse capacity in

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<sup>411</sup> Nichols (10 November 2021) UN says at least 16 staff, dependents detained in Ethiopia, Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-says-least-nine-staff-dependents-detained-ethiopia-2021-11-09/>

<sup>412</sup> United Nations (10 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211110.doc.htm>; BBC (10 November 2021) Ethiopia conflict: Tigray aid lorry drivers arrested, UN says, Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59233516>

<sup>413</sup> United Nations (16 November 2021) Statement: Reiterating Call for Immediate Release of United Nations Staff in Ethiopia, Secretary-General Urges Parties to End Hostilities, Prioritize Civilians, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm21029.doc.htm>

<sup>414</sup> United Nations (15 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211115.doc.htm>

<sup>415</sup> United Nations (16 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211116.doc.htm>

<sup>416</sup> United Nations (18 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211118.doc.htm>

<sup>417</sup> United Nations (5 October 2021) Tigray: Food aid reaches Afar and Amhara, but situation still 'dire', Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102182>

<sup>418</sup> World Food Programme (23 November 2021) WFP Geneva Palais Briefing Note: Humanitarian Operations in northern Ethiopia, Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-geneva-palais-briefing-note-humanitarian-operations-northern-ethiopia>

<sup>419</sup> OCHA (18 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-18-nov-2021>

<sup>420</sup> United Nations (24 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211124.doc.htm>

<sup>421</sup> United Nations (24 November 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db211124.doc.htm>

Semera was 100% full of humanitarian relief.<sup>422</sup> The UN was searching for more warehouses to store incoming cargo. While there was more aid in Semera than space to store it, there were thousands of people dying of starvation within Tigray, just 488km away.

## 5.8 December

As December set in, the whole country was caught in the crossfire. With more people heading to the frontlines, from doctors, to professors, Olympians, and even the President [Prime Minister] himself (if you believe him...);<sup>423</sup> a negotiated solution felt far away. For many the scenes were reminiscent of a not-too-distant past. A diplomat in Addis summed up the situation well: “Addis appears to believe that if a couple of hundred thousand Tigrayans die from famine, that the TDF will give up. Mengistu tried the same tactic in attempting to drain the sea to catch the fish of the guerrilla. This never worked, and the fish came to Addis in flip-flops.”<sup>424</sup> As the TDF advanced closer to Addis, it felt like history was repeating itself and lessons had not been learnt from the past.

On 17 December, defying the concerns of the Ethiopian government, the UN Human Rights Council voted in favour of an independent investigation into the human rights abuses within Ethiopia.<sup>425</sup> While the Ethiopian government has expressed its outrage and intentions not to cooperate with the investigation, the announcement provides hope for future accountability. All sides to the conflict have engaged in serious human rights abuses and continue to do so.

By mid-December, the situation on the ground had changed again. Tigrayan forces announced that they were retreating to Tigray, in an attempt to foster peace talks and a ceasefire. “We trust that our bold act of withdrawal will be a decisive opening for peace,” Debrestion Gebremichael told the UN in a letter on the 19 December.<sup>426</sup> He also called for a no-fly zone over Tigray (excluding humanitarian or civil flights) and an arms embargo on both the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments. He continued to say that they were not interested in controlling Afar or Addis Ababa, but instead “[w]e are only interested in ensuring that the siege that was ruthlessly imposed on our people is broken.” However, the Ethiopian Government have claimed that the retreat was merely to cover up weeks of military defeats. Reports concur that the ENDF and Amhara forces have gained considerable ground, aided by foreign drones.<sup>427</sup> While this change of events could provide a rare opportunity for peace, since the Tigrayan withdrawal, airstrikes on Tigray have increased.<sup>428</sup> Targets

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<sup>422</sup> OCHA (25 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at:

<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-25-nov-2021>

<sup>423</sup> Reuters, (25 November 2021) Ethiopian leader heads to war's front lines as Olympians join the military, CNN, Available at:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/24/africa/ethiopia-abi-olympians-front-lineAs-intl/index.html>

<sup>424</sup> Mills (June 2021) The Plough and the Kalashnikov: Ethiopia After the Election, Available at:

<https://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/downloads/ethiopia-after-the-election-dm-81-.pdf>

<sup>425</sup> OHCHR (17 December 2021) 33<sup>rd</sup> Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the grave human rights situation in Ethiopia, Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/SpecialSessions/Session33/Pages/33rdSpecialSession.aspx>

<sup>426</sup> Debrestion Gebremichael (19 December 2021) Letter to Mr Antonio Guterres, Available at: <https://eritreahub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Debrestion-appeal-to-the-UN-19-Dec-21.pdf>

<sup>427</sup> Aljazeera (17 December 2021) UN Rights Council orders probe into abuses in Ethiopia's conflict, Available at:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/17/un-rights-council-orders-international-probe-of-ethiopia-abuses>

<sup>428</sup> OCHA (30 December 2021) Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 30 Dec 2021, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-dec-2021>

included electric power stations and towns, leading to power disruption and “mass civilian casualties.”<sup>429</sup>

The Ethiopian Government announced that they had taken back the strategic towns of Dessie and Kombolcha.<sup>430</sup> With the Tigrayan forces no longer in control of the key aid supply lines or humanitarian distribution sites, questions remain over how the next phase of this conflict will unfold. Even when they had control of these locations, aid flows into Tigray were heavily restricted. However, from 14 December to the time of writing<sup>431</sup> no humanitarian aid has entered Tigray. After more than a year of fighting and seven months of a de-facto blockade, the situation on the ground is no doubt agonising.

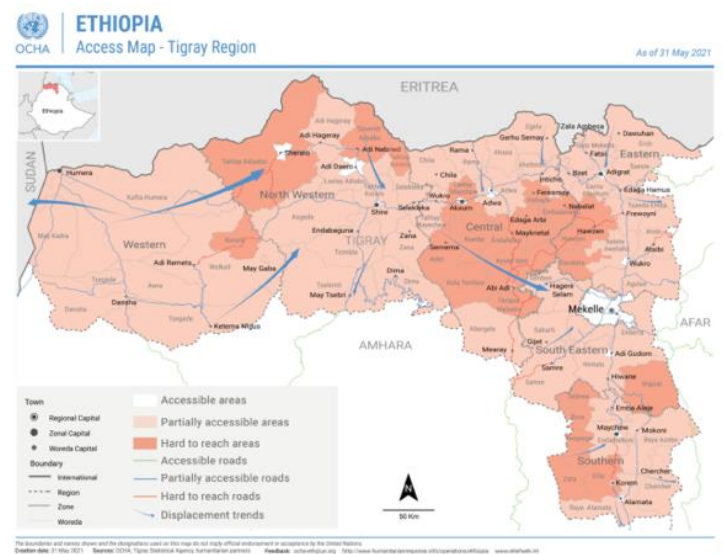
## 5.9 Humanitarian Access Tracking in Pictures

The following UN OCHA maps depict the changes in humanitarian access over the course of the conflict. The map for May 2021 indicates that most of Tigray was either partially accessible or hard to reach for the humanitarian response. By July, access has significantly changed, making a large proportion of Tigray accessible, except from western Tigray where Amhara militia were still holding ground and the borders with Eritrea where EDF forces remained. After the de-facto blockade, the access maps shift again. Tigray becomes totally encircled.

### MAY – JUNE

Prior to the ceasefire, access within Tigray was hard for humanitarians, with almost all areas partially accessible or hard to reach. Only the main cities including Mekelle were easily navigable for humanitarians, however even these had risks.

This was the only map available up until the Ceasefire for humanitarian access on OCHA’s website. Following the ceasefire, humanitarian staff were allowed to leave, but only a few were allowed to enter the region.



### Early JULY

<sup>429</sup> OCHA (30 December 2021) Ethiopia - Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 30 Dec 2021, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-30-dec-2021>

<sup>430</sup> Aljazeera (6 December 2021) Ethiopian Forces recapture two key towns from Tigrayan forces, Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/6/ethiopia-recapture-dessie-kombolcha-tigrayan-rebels>

<sup>431</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> of January 2022.

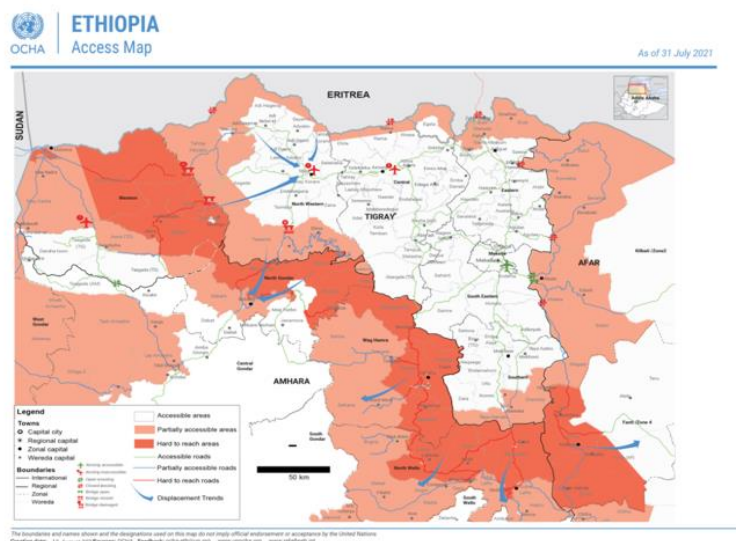
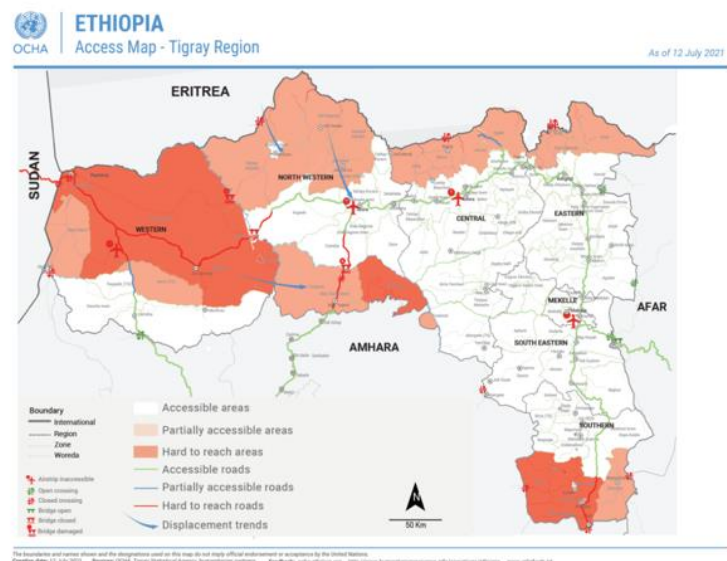
In early July, following the ceasefire and with the withdrawal of ENDF and EDF troops to the region's borders, the humanitarian access situations shifted. Most areas within Tigray became accessible to humanitarians and 75% of the population was now in areas where relief operations could occur, compared to 30% in May.<sup>432</sup>

Although access within the area had improved, stocks were depleting within the region<sup>433</sup> as access into the region was being severely restricted. The banning of commercial flights,<sup>434</sup> new checkpoints, heavy controls on the only functioning road into the region (Semera-Mekelle),<sup>435</sup> supposedly to check for illegal weaponry, and the destroyed bridges across the Tekezé river, all were hampering the relief effort.<sup>436</sup> Additionally, the lack of fuel, cash, banking services, telecommunications and electricity was hampering aid delivery.<sup>437</sup>

## JULY-AUGUST

By August, over 75% of the population remained in the reach of humanitarian relief, however the embargo on fuel and lack of aid reaching the region due to the strict border checks meant that humanitarian response was being scaled down.<sup>438</sup> While more areas in the north of Tigray were accessible to humanitarians than the previous month, there was still a fluid security situation along the border with Eritrea.<sup>439</sup>

Northwestern Tigray, including Mai Tsebri Town, Tselemeti and Dimma Woredas, remained inaccessible to



<sup>432</sup> United Nations (19 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210719.doc.htm>

<sup>433</sup> OCHA (21 July 2021) Daily Noon Briefing Highlights: Ethiopia, Available at: <https://www.unocha.org/story/daily-noon-briefing-highlights-ethiopia-20>

<sup>434</sup> United Nations (6 July 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210706.doc.htm>

<sup>435</sup> OCHA (19 July 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-19-july-2021>

<sup>436</sup> OCHA (21 June – 11 July 2021) Humanitarian Briefing Ethiopia, Available at: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/110721\\_humanitarian\\_bulletin\\_final.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/110721_humanitarian_bulletin_final.pdf)

<sup>437</sup> OCHA (9 July 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-july-2021>

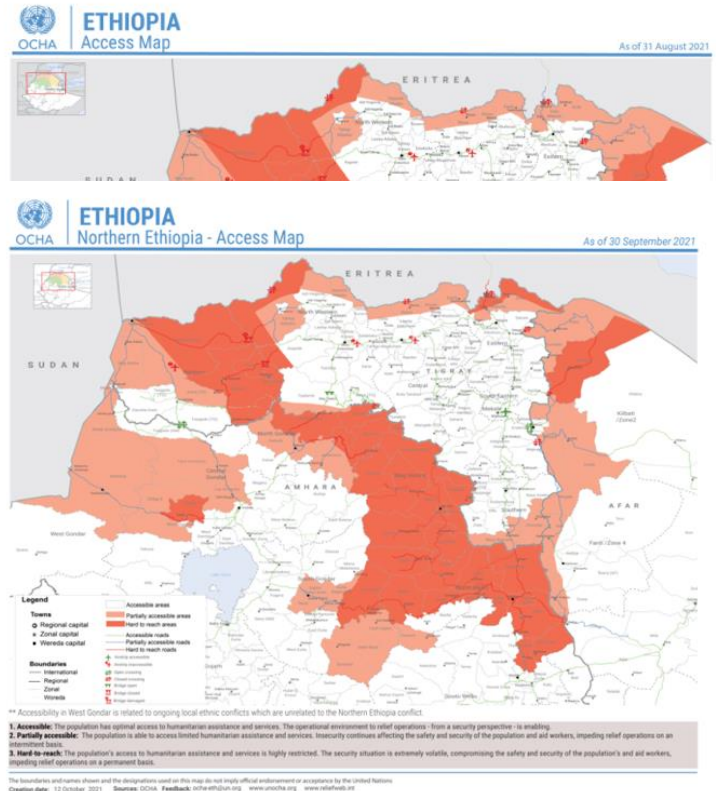
<sup>438</sup> United Nations (11 August 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210811.doc.htm>

<sup>439</sup> OCHA (13 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-august-2021>

relief staff as the Tekezé bridges had not yet been repaired due to high water levels and Amhara militia were still occupying the area.<sup>440</sup> The Semera-Mekelle road remained the only route into the region and was only partially open during this period due to insecurity, thorough searches and extended delays.<sup>441</sup> In positive news, the UNHAS flights operating twice weekly during this period, rotating staff in/out of the region, while UN Staff were able to enter the road via the Semera-Mekelle road at least twice in early August.<sup>442</sup>

## AUGUST -SEPTEMBER

By September, humanitarian supplies within Tigray were all but depleted. During September, the situation in Tigray remained similar to the previous month, with areas now accessible however aid supplies into the region severely restricted by the Ethiopian Government's de facto blockade. Areas in western Tigray remained inaccessible to humanitarian staff due to the physical access challenges as well as the presence of Amhara militia.<sup>443</sup> UNHAS flights and the first EU Air Bridge were given access.<sup>444</sup> However, the expansion of the TDF into neighbouring Afar and Amhara, widening the areas in need of humanitarian response. By mid-September 140,000 people in Afar and 233,000 people in Amhara were displaced.<sup>445</sup>



## SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

During October, the Semera-Mekelle road remained the only viable route into the region. However, from 18 October, no aid entered via this route due to Government restrictions. No fuel had entered since August.<sup>446</sup>

Flights were cancelled during this month after a UNHAS flight was unable to land due to airstrikes on Mekelle in early October. The flight was forced to return to Addis

<sup>440</sup> OCHA (13 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-13-august-2021>

<sup>441</sup> OCHA (11 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210811.doc.htm>

<sup>442</sup> OCHA (11 August 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210811.doc.htm>

<sup>443</sup> OCHA (2 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-2-sep-2021>

<sup>444</sup> OCHA (16 September 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-16-sept-2021>

<sup>445</sup> United Nations (15 September 2021) Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/db210915.doc.htm>

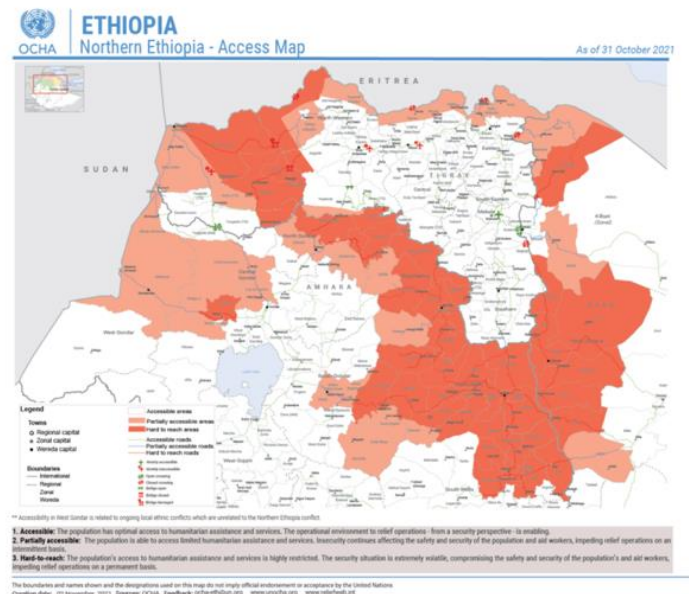
<sup>446</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

Ababa mid-flight and UNHAS flights were suspended.<sup>447</sup> Hostilities within Afar and Amhara was contributing to increasing aid needs within these regions, while insecurity was preventing safe delivery of aid.<sup>448</sup>

## OCTOBER-NOVEMBER

The situation within Tigray remained similar to the previous month. Areas in western Tigray remained inaccessible to humanitarian staff due to the physical access challenges as well as the presence of Amhara militia. From 18 October - 18 November, no aid entered the region as the Semera-Mekelle road due to restrictions imposed by the regional and federal authorities.<sup>449</sup>

By the end of November, access in Amhara was challenging for humanitarians. With more than 500 medical facilities damaged in Amhara due to recent fighting during the TDF's advance, the situation was becoming particularly acute. In Afar, ongoing fighting was impacting the relief services reaching displaced people in need of food aid and non-food relief items.<sup>450</sup>



## 5.10 Conclusion

With hostilities ongoing, Tigray is being subjected to a brutal human-made famine. From the attacks on food systems, the obstruction of aid, the denial of access, the detention and expulsion of humanitarians, the harassment of delivery drivers, to the expulsions of UN officials and brutal murders of humanitarian staff. At every stage of this conflict the Starvation Crimes have been both widespread and systematic. Will the world continue to sit back and allow the Ethiopian Government to starve Tigray in the darkness, till there is nothing but dust to prove the crimes?

While warehouses are overflowing with aid in Semera, across the border in Tigray 6 million people's lives are at risk. Since the blockade began, only 13% of the necessary humanitarian aid for survival has reached Tigray. Despite officials avoiding labelling the situation a famine due to fears of retribution, a famine of catastrophic proportions is taking place. Although information has not been free flowing, this chapter provides ample evidence of the grim situation. How many people will starve before this famine is ended? This famine is human-made. It can also be resolved by humans. While it is too late for the thousands who have already

<sup>447</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>448</sup> OCHA (21 Oct 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202021%20Oct%202021.pdf>

<sup>449</sup> OCHA (25 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-25-nov-2021>

<sup>450</sup> OCHA (25 November 2021) Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-25-nov-2021>

died of starvation or starvation-related deaths, and some may be permanently impacted by mental and physical stunting from prolonged lack of food, if the obstructions on aid are lifted, many lives could still be saved.

The conflict in Ethiopia demonstrates several things. Not only does this highlight the fractures in our international systems and mechanisms for maintaining international peace and security, but without political will to act, the world will do nothing much more than watch. International pressure is doing little to change the course of events. However, as the international community does a diplomatic dance with the faminogenic<sup>451</sup> Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 6 million people in Tigray could die from starvation. Many could also die in Amhara and Afar.

The international community has tools at its disposal which it must exhaust, including the Responsibility to Protect. Over the past year the international community has done little more than condemn the Governments actions. In October, the European Parliament gave the Ethiopian Government one month before sanctions would be placed. This time is up. The AU has reiterated its desire for African solutions to African problems. The AU's statute boasts the most comprehensive provisions for atrocity prevention than any other regional organisation.<sup>452</sup> However, with the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa, the AU appears unwilling or unable to act and their responses have been both slow and inadequate.

When this ends, will the international community regretfully use the oft-repeated mantra of 'never again'? For many, patience is wearing thin. In September, Martin Griffiths' warned the international community. Now his warning is a reality. This will be a lasting "stain on our conscience."<sup>453</sup>

## 6. Survivors of sexual violence

By Sally Keeble<sup>454</sup>

Behind the humanitarian and communications blockade of Tigray, survivors of the vicious sexual violence during the 14-month war are putting their trauma on hold to confront the immediate challenge of survival: 90% of people in the region are at risk of famine. Meanwhile the sexual violence has spilled out beyond the borders of Tigray with reports of attacks on women in the Amhara and Afar regions. Relief for survivors of the tsunami of human rights atrocities is finally in prospect with plans

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<sup>451</sup> Faminogenic is a term coined by David Marcus in his 2003 journal article. It is used to explain actions which create famine, see: Marcus (April 2003) Famine Crimes in International Law, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol 97, No.2, pp.245-281, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3100102>

<sup>452</sup> The AU was the first regional organisation to put intervention within their charter. This was also prior to the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect; in particular, Article 4h of the AU's constitutive Act goes further than other regional agreements, it establishes: 'the right of the Union to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely, war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity'. This was later extended to cover the right of intervention for 'a serious threat to a legitimate order to restore peace and stability to the member state of the Union upon the recommendation of the Peace and Security Council' see: African Union 'Protocol on Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union' 11 July 2003 para 4(h).; Amvane (January 2015) Intervention pursuant to article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union without United Nations Security Council authorisation, *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 15(2) 282-298, Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295248601\\_Intervention\\_pursuant\\_to\\_article\\_4h\\_of\\_the\\_Constitutive\\_Act\\_of\\_the\\_African\\_Union\\_without\\_United\\_Nations\\_Security\\_Council\\_authorisation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295248601_Intervention_pursuant_to_article_4h_of_the_Constitutive_Act_of_the_African_Union_without_United_Nations_Security_Council_authorisation);

Makau Mutua, "The African Human Rights System: A Critical Evaluation" Human Development Occasional Paper, Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Program (2000), Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/mutua.pdf>

<sup>453</sup> Nichols (29 September 2021) U.N. aid chief to Ethiopia on famine in Tigray: 'Get those trucks moving', Reuters, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-aid-chief-ethiopia-famine-tigray-get-those-trucks-moving-2021-09-28/>

<sup>454</sup> Former Labour MP for Northampton North and a Minister in the Department for International Development



from the UN Human Rights Council for a special investigative commission. Whether it will come in time for the starving people of Tigray and other parts of the country remains to be seen.

While the number of attacks on women in Tigray has declined, the plight of the survivors appears to have grown worse in the past six months. The trauma of survivors has been exacerbated by the lack of medical and psycho-social services, the impact of births of children as a result of the rapes, and the all-pervasive problem of famine. Meanwhile there is also evidence of the widening of the problem of conflict-related sexual violence in Ethiopia with serious allegations of Tigrayan forces abusing women in Afar and Amhara. All this despite the body of international law, conventions, and resolutions by which the international community has made clear its opposition to the use of sexual violence in conflict. While global voices have raised in horror at the scale of the abuses unleashed in Ethiopia, the lack of enforcement to date has enabled impunity.

## 6.1 The spread of conflict-related sexual violence

### *Sexual violence against women in Tigray*

A timeline setting out the growing number of sexual assaults on women in Tigray during the first six months of the war was set out in volume one of this report.<sup>455</sup> Incidents were reported of kidnap and detention of women repeatedly raped over a period of time, gang rapes by groups of soldiers, rapes of girls as young as eight years old, extreme violence including mutilation of women's genitals, men being forced to rape family members, sexual violence being linked to attacks on Tigrayan men attempting to protect women from assault, and rape being used to "purify" or "cleanse women." There were reports of soldiers threatening their victims with further violence if they should seek help, thereby adding to the reluctance of women to access medical care. It was denounced across the international community as the worst sexual violence deployed in conflict in many decades.<sup>456</sup> Women who have spoken out about the attacks on them and their subsequent hardship have had to overcome their own fear, suffering and stigma, and their courage is respected.

Numbers of attacks have been hard to establish. In June 2021 the UN's population fund, the UNFPA estimated there were 26,000 women aged 15 to 26 in Tigray who were expected to seek services for sexual violence arising from the conflict.<sup>457</sup> Whilst it appears that the numbers of sexual assaults in Tigray have declined since the departure of the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amharan soldiers in June 2021, new cases have come to light of women who had initially been afraid to report their experiences.<sup>458</sup> These included 70 assaults on women at the Adigrat camp for internally displaced people (IDPs).

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<sup>455</sup> "The Tigray War and Regional Implications," Volume I published by Eritrea Focus and Oslo Analytica, June 2021 pages 220 - 222

<sup>456</sup> Robert Mardini quoted in Red Cross condemns 'horrific' sexual violence in Ethiopia's Tigray | News24

<sup>457</sup> "Response to the Tigray Crisis" Situation Report 15 to 30 June published by UNFPA Ethiopia, June 2021 page 6

<sup>458</sup> "I Always Remember That Day" Access to services for survivors of gender-based violence Ethiopia's Tigray Region published by Human Rights Watch November 2021 page 60

Most notably inside Tigray have been the reports of the decimation of services for survivors of the sexual violence and the brutal impact of the de facto blockade imposed by the Ethiopian government. A recent report from Tigray set out the scale of the hardship being experienced. Some details have been removed to protect the identity of the author:

“Medical care has been difficult, medication and resources not being able to come into Tigray, medical facilities have been destroyed, transport is basically not there, and the few transports are so expensive it’s beyond the capacity of the women. Banks being closed they don’t even have access to their own saving and are suffering in isolation.

The community cannot help due to the fact that the community itself is under stress and cannot provide resources or emotional support, making it very hard for sick people to ask for help.

The entire population is also suffering from hunger.

The enclosure caused desperation and two survivors we know (who had faced very complex gender-based violence atrocities) have now committed suicide.

Fistula cases are so many due to the destruction of health facilities and the rape injuries. The only specialised hospital has not been able to handle the cases that have come (they have been only able to handle 34 cases this year and have been forced to turn away many survivors).

The number of survivors reporting (after sexual violence) has been decreasing and the reasons are:

- Cultural stigma,
- Economic, fuel, transportation challenges
- Clients are not coming back for follow-up
- We are running out of medication
- Air strikes are also creating a fear to travel to Mekelle as Mekelle is considered as a target.

Some women have reported that girls and women are being thrown out of their homes due to rape pregnancies and these pregnant mothers are being forced to give birth in unsafe conditions at neighbours or out in the open. These mothers and babies come sick and malnourished to the hospitals. With the siege and lack of communication it is hard to give you a picture of the whole of Tigray, but within Mekelle itself there were four babies abandoned at one hospital alone, and 12 babies have been given to social services. There may be isolated cases of abandoned babies in bushes, but as there are legal consequences and follow up from the communities, it is not easy for the mothers to do that. It is far easier for them to go to churches and social services. Overall though we need to create awareness and do sensitization works on the ground, which is being hampered by the siege.

Child survivors - we do not have recovery plans for work done with very young survivors and we do not have trained child counsellors. We do not have any male safe houses, and child friendly spaces and safe houses for children.

*Factors specific to sexual assault survivors:*

- (At one centre) Half of the survivors on post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) missed their follow up and two thirds not on PEP have missed their follow up schedule. Due to the fact that they did not come back for follow up, the survivors are missing important evaluations such as pregnancy testing, evaluation for sexually transmitted infection (STI) and medication use. The main reason for the lack of follow up is probably the financial issue; as a minimum they can't afford the transportation cost to the health facility as they need to travel far to come.
- Lack of treatment for rape-related comorbidities. A significant number of patients are suffering from consequences of rape/gang rape. There are patients suffering from kidney failure, cardiac problems, and unstoppable vaginal bleeding following oophorectomy. They require services like dialyses, medications for cardiac patients and surgical corrections. However, none of the mentioned services are available, due to the lack of medication and supplies. Even patients who can afford to pay are dying from similar problems as medication and supplies are totally not available in the whole of Tigray.
- STI Treatment. Services for treatment of syphilis and other sexually transmitted illness stopped early in November. It has been impossible to treat STI patients for the past 28 days.
- Post exposure prophylaxis and Hepatitis B vaccine. For the past three months, we were providing these services intermittently by requesting medication from lower-level health facilities, which still had some in stock. But this month the service has completely stopped since every facility and pharmacy is out of stock for these medications.
- Shortage of materials for fistula patients. We have survivors suffering from fistula and excessive vaginal discharge for unknown reasons. It has not been possible to support them by supplying adult-diaper and other sanitation materials that could help them protect their hygiene. Even the simplest things have now become scarce and impossible to find."<sup>459</sup>

*Sexual violence against women in Amhara and Afar*

The new phase of the war, with the Tigrayan forces moving back into Mekelle and then extending into Amhara and Afar, was followed by reports of serious sexual violence by the Tigrayans. One report, by Amnesty International, is discussed further below. The other, published in the Canadian newspaper the Globe and Mail, was by respected journalist Lucy Kassa, one of the journalists responsible for the extensive coverage of sexual violence against Tigrayan women, and Geoffrey York, the paper's Africa Bureau Chief. It documented attacks on women and girls, one a 12-

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<sup>459</sup> Private communication with the author December 2021

year-old who was gang-raped by Tigrayan troops after they captured the village of Geregera, 100 km from Lalibela, in late August. “They ordered me to take off my clothes,” The Globe reported the girl as saying: “When I refused, one of them slapped me in the face and stripped off my clothes. My father tried to defend me, but they beat him and threatened to kill us all. ...They raped me in front of my father,” the girl said. “They would get angry and beat me when I tried to fight back, so I stopped. I was so scared they would kill me and my father.” The girl’s mother was present for the interview and consented to her daughter’s participation.

Other survivors described some Tigrayan soldiers going from village to village raping women and girls, including kidnaping and gang-raping them with extreme violence. The Globe reported that none were able to get access to services. The rapes ended when the forces left the area.<sup>460</sup>

Although the Tigrayan regional government did not provide a response to the Globe, it later released a statement which gave a lengthy critique of the article and the methodologies used, committed to bringing any perpetrators to justice and called for an independent investigation by an impartial body of all allegations of atrocities.<sup>461</sup>

Lucy Kassa appeared on the BBC World Service Newshour defending her article and the investigations that underpinned it<sup>462</sup>.

There have also been reports – as yet unverified – of Tigrayan women being subject to sexual violence in western Tigray, where Humera has been the focus for a number of reports of atrocities committed against Tigrayan people.

## **6.2 Six months of institutional reporting on sexual violence**

If the first six months of the conflict was marked by sexual violence, the last six months has been marked by a series of reports and meetings that have highlighted the need for justice for the women – but so far not resulted in substantial action. There are four key reports to consider. The joint report from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, two reports published by Amnesty International produced specifically on conflict-related sexual violence one in August 2021<sup>463</sup>, the other, a much shorter report, in November 2021<sup>464</sup>, and a report published by Human Rights Watch on the health impacts of sexual violence, also in November 2021.

### **6.2.1 Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

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<sup>460</sup> “Sexual violence as weapon of war spreads to new regions in Ethiopia” by Lucy Kassa and Geoffrey York, published by The Globe and Mail, Canada, 29 November 2021

<sup>461</sup> “Response to The Globe and Mail’s ‘Report’ on Sexual Violence in Amhara Region,” published by Tigray External Affairs Office 30 November 2021

<sup>462</sup> BBC World Service – Newshour, interview with Lucy Kassa broadcast 1 December 2021

<sup>463</sup> “I Don’t Know If They Realised I Was a Person” published by Amnesty International, August 2021

<sup>464</sup> Ethiopia: Troops and militia rape, mutilate and abduct women and girls in Tigray conflict - New Report | Amnesty International UK November 2021

The long-awaited landmark report of the joint investigation by the UN and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission<sup>465</sup> includes an important section on sexual violence. The report was already the subject of controversy before its publication on 3 November 2021. There were questions about the impartiality of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and further doubts cast on the investigation's validity when it was disclosed that the investigators had been unable to visit sites of some of the most notable atrocities, in particular Axum<sup>466</sup>. Despite its limitations, the report gives a clear description of the legal framework that applies to sexual violence in conflict, provides graphic descriptions of some of the most serious cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and provides conclusions and recommendations for further action. Importantly it pointed to the possibility of an independent international mechanism, which could complement action taken by national mechanisms. "Building on the work of the JIT, an international, independent investigative mechanism can also be established to collect evidence on the most serious violations committed during the conflict and prepare files for criminal prosecution by either a national or international tribunal. The investigative mechanism can build on the work of the JIT. Such initiatives have been undertaken in various configurations in Syria, Iraq and Myanmar."<sup>467</sup>

The report said that the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) found "harrowing" evidence of, "Various acts of SGBV including physical violence and assault; attempted rape; rape including gang rape, oral and anal rape; insertion of foreign objects into the vagina; intentional transmission of HIV; verbal abuse including ethnical slurs; abduction; and other violations have been committed. Some of the reported accounts of rape were characterized by appalling levels of brutality. Acts of rape were frequently intended to degrade and dehumanize an entire ethnic group."<sup>468</sup>

Its findings confirmed previous reports of

- Gang-rapes, with nearly half the women survivors interviewed reporting such attacks.
- Violence against women and girls associated with fighters of parties to the conflict
- Violence against women and girls fleeing conflict
- Rape in detention with reports from women who were abducted, detained, and raped for a period ranging from three days to three months
- Violence against older women and women with disability
- Women and girls made vulnerable to sexual assault due to lack of basic services

<sup>469</sup>

It also reported that there had been sexual violence against men and boys. "One male survivor was raped by an Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) soldier and another by a civilian. The two were later provided assistance in Mekelle. The JIT was told that a

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<sup>465</sup> Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia published 3 November 2021

<sup>466</sup> "Update on Joint UN and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Investigation on Tigray" news release published by UN Office of High Commissioner on Human Rights published 10 September 2021

<sup>467</sup> 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 to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, published by Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 3 November 2021, Page 95

<sup>468</sup> Ibid page 8

<sup>469</sup> Ibid pages 47 - 50

16-year-old boy was raped by nine EDF soldiers in Humera but did not receive any support. The victim later committed suicide.”<sup>470</sup> There were reports of men being humiliated by being publicly stripped naked.

All parties to the conflict were identified as perpetrators of sexual violence against women. The JIT found that the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) committed acts of sexual violence in Mekelle, Wukro, Bora, Mekoni, Shire, and Bizet; the Eritrean Defence Force committed acts of sexual violence in Ahferom Samre, Werie-Leke (in Edega Hamus), Shire, Tembien, Adet, Humera; the TSF (Tigray Special Forces) committed acts of sexual violence in Adi Hageray, Mai Laha (in Shimelba), and Mekelle. It identified the Eritrean forces as being associated with sexual attacks marked with extreme brutality, and also reported that the Amhara Special Forces (ASF) were implicated in acts of sexual violence.<sup>471</sup> In her news conference in Geneva to mark the release of the report, Michelle Bachelet, the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, said that the Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers were the main perpetrators of the sexual violence in the early stages of the conflict.<sup>472</sup>

The report found that physical and mental health impacts of sexual violence on the women were profound, especially for those subjected to gang rapes, and included depression, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, and physical disabilities as well as unwanted pregnancies. The lack of relevant support services was compounded by poor living conditions and lack of basic supplies of food and water.<sup>473</sup>

The joint report concluded that: “Based on the information available to it, there are reasonable grounds to believe that violations of international human rights and humanitarian law related to sexual violence, including rape, have been committed by all parties to the conflict and require further investigation. Some of these may further constitute war crimes and, in view of their widespread and systematic nature, crimes against humanity.”<sup>474</sup>

Sections of the report on refugees<sup>475</sup>, children<sup>476</sup>, older persons and people with disabilities<sup>477</sup> also concluded there had been sexual violence against these groups of people.

### **6.2.2 Amnesty International report August 2021 “I Don’t Know If They Realised, I Was a Person,”**

This meticulously researched and written report by Amnesty International identified Ethiopian and Eritrean national force, Amhara Regional Police Special Forces and Fano militia as being the prime perpetrators of the brutal levels of sexual violence that characterised the first six months of the Tigray conflict.<sup>478</sup> It was based on interviews with 63 women and girl survivors, 15 of the interviews at refugee camps in

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid page 50

<sup>471</sup> Ibid, page 52

<sup>472</sup> Video of UN Office of High Commissioner on Human Rights, news conference, Geneva, broadcast 3 November<sup>d</sup>, 2021, <https://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2680/2680184/>

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, page 52

<sup>474</sup> Ibid, page 52

<sup>475</sup> Ibid, page 53

<sup>476</sup> Ibid, page 86

<sup>477</sup> Ibid page 86

<sup>478</sup> Op Cit page 5

eastern Sudan, and 48 interviews over secure channels with survivors in Shire, Axum and Mekelle, as well as interviews with doctors, nurses, midwives and humanitarian workers who treated or assisted survivors of sexual violence in Shire and Adigrat, and refugee camps in eastern Sudan. Supplementing this was data from humanitarian organisations operating in Tigray relating to sexual violence and health services.<sup>479</sup> The report documented in painstaking detail the impact of the destruction of health services, and the unfolding mental health crisis among survivors.

“There are limited, if any, protection, rehabilitation, and livelihood services available to survivors of sexual violence in Tigray, because health facilities have been damaged and looted in the conflict and medical personnel have fled. Post-rape care, in particular, has been limited or non-existent. Recovery for survivors of sexual violence is thus elusive as many are dislocated from core support systems — family and friends — because of the active conflict in Tigray and fear of stigmatisation and reprisals. The conflict has also dismantled other support and response systems that were previously available, such as health facilities, protection, and local police. The conflict has displaced survivors of sexual violence together with other Tigrayan residents from their homes and localities.”

The report identified gang rapes, extreme, sadistic brutality, rapes in front of family members and mutilation of women’s genitals. Some of the rapes were motivated by a desire to generate births of Amharic rather than Tigrayan children. “They said if you were male we would kill you, but girls can make Amhara babies.”<sup>480</sup> In addition to the well-documented damage to health services by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers during the early months of the conflict, the report also sets out the very limited access to psycho-social services for survivors of rape. “According to the WHO health services monitoring platform, as of July 2021 there were only five health facilities providing mental health services in all of Tigray. There were no psychological first aid services in Shire town, where Amnesty International interviewed 46 survivors of sexual violence.”<sup>481</sup>

It noted the reluctance of some women to access psychological services for cultural reasons, or because of their focus on other needs, and recorded a woman in a refugee camp in Sudan saying, “I lost my husband, my home and my livelihood and I was violated, and nothing can wipe that away or make me feel better. The conditions here for me and my children are miserable, and I try to put all my energy into looking after my children and providing for them because they don’t have anyone else. Even if I talk to psychologists about what happened to me, they cannot solve my problems. I hope we can go back home soon and find my husband and rebuild our lives. That is what we need.”<sup>482</sup>

Amnesty made 33 recommendations for action to provide services and justice to survivors of sexual violence and prevent further attacks, and for a full investigation of events to the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, the African Union, the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights

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<sup>479</sup> Op Cit page 8

<sup>480</sup> Op Cit page 18

<sup>481</sup> Op Cit page 26

<sup>482</sup> Op Cit page 27

and the United Nations. The report concludes with an important point about command responsibility. “In addition to those who directly perpetrated the acts, military commanders knew or should have known about the conduct of their forces, notably patterns of widespread rape and other sexual violence, given that by January 2021 reports of such abuses were widely circulating in the media. As documented in chapter 4 of this report, military commanders not only failed to take reasonable steps to prevent and repress the conduct but tolerated it. These military commanders may therefore be criminally responsible for the crimes against humanity of rape, sexual slavery, torture and persecution.”

### **6.2.3 Amnesty International report November 2021**

Amnesty produced a second, very much shorter, report on sexual violence related to the Tigray conflict in November 2021<sup>483</sup> in which it found that Tigrayan forces had raped Amharan women after attacking the town of Nifas Mewcha. The report was based on interviews over secure channels with 16 survivors, the head of the local hospital, and local and regional officials. A local government desk officer for Women, Children and Youth Affairs put the number of attacks at 71, while a Federal Ministry of Justice official said a total of 73 women were assaulted. All the attacks took place in August 2021. The survivors reported gang-rapes, rapes in front of children, and robbery and looting by the soldiers of items including food, jewellery, and mobile phones.

Among the sexual assaults described in the report was one of a 30-year-old food seller who told Amnesty:

“It is not easy to tell you what they did to me. They raped me. Three of them raped me while my children were crying. My elder son is 10 and the other is nine years, they were crying when [the TPLF fighters] raped me. [The fighters] did whatever they wanted and left. They also assaulted me physically and took shiro and berbere [local food items]. They slapped me [and] kicked me. They were cocking their guns as if they are going to shoot me.”

Another described the ethnic slurs used by the for soldiers who raped her. “The one who raped me first is their superior. He was saying ‘Amhara is a donkey, Amhara has massacred our people (Tigrayans), the Federal Defence forces have raped my wife, now we can rape you as we want’.”

All but one of the women interviewed by Amnesty reported physical and mental health problems after the attacks including back pain, bloody urine, difficulty walking, anxiety, and depression. Two had sought basic private medical treatment. But none had been able to get emergency contraception, post emergency prophylaxis for HIV and sexually transmitted infections, treatment for injuries or psychological services. They said this was due to damage to the town’s health facilities by the Tigrayan soldiers. A humanitarian organisation that normally provides such services said it couldn’t access the area because of security concerns prompted by the Ethiopian government’s hostile statements about international NGOs.

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<sup>483</sup> Op Cit



Amharan regional government officials told Amnesty that they had already provided 54 of the survivors with livelihood support, would provide them with psychosocial services, and would also restock and re-equip the looted medical facilities. Amnesty called for a speeding up of support for the survivors and other victims of the conflict, provision of humanitarian access to all parts of northern Ethiopia, and prosecution of perpetrators.

#### **6.2.4 Human Rights Watch report published November 2021 “I Always Remember That Day”**

Published at the same time as the Amnesty report, Human Rights Watch provided a detailed and searing critique of the health impacts on survivors of sexual violence in Tigray. It identified the Ethiopian Government as bearing a prime responsibility for the hardship due to its blocking of aid to health facilities damaged or destroyed during the occupation of Mekelle by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces.<sup>484</sup> Most critical was survivors’ lack of access to time-sensitive services for HIV and pregnancy testing post rape.

The report was based on interviews over secure channels between June and November 2021 with 21 local and international healthcare workers, service providers, humanitarian aid workers, members of community organisations, and government donor agencies. The organisation also conducted desk reviews of 43 individual cases of sexual violence and drew from interviews it had conducted between January and June 2021 with two Eritrean refugee sexual violence survivors and five health workers, service providers, and witnesses. It interviewed members of the Tigray Regional Health Bureau, and the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Assessment and Rehabilitation Committee of the Tigray Women’s Affairs Bureau and sought, but did not receive, information from the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Peace, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, and the National Disaster Risk Management Commission.<sup>485</sup>

The report set out graphic, detailed descriptions of the impact of sexual violence on the women and reached some stark conclusions. Women who survived ferocious conflict-related sexual violence were unable to get access to healthcare and other support due to the destruction of services, stigma and, in the first six months of the conflict, the presence of armed personnel in healthcare facilities and the wider community. It noted: “Human Rights Watch shared several instances of harassment and intimidation by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers and Amhara fighters over the first six months of 2021. These included their presence at checkpoints and health facilities, and because they took targeted actions against rape survivors, health workers, and other service providers. The presence of soldiers at health facilities also deterred survivors from seeking health services, as their presence was frightening and retraumatizing.”<sup>486</sup>

Since Tigrayan forces retook Mekelle in June 2021, Human Rights Watch noted that the Ethiopian government had “tightened their effective siege of the Tigray region, including shutting down essential services such as banking, telecommunications,

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<sup>484</sup> Op Cit. page 1

<sup>485</sup> Op Cit. page 2

<sup>486</sup> Op Cit. page 54

and electricity. They are severely restricting the entry of food, fuel, cash, and medical supplies, hobbling the humanitarian aid effort in Tigray, including the rehabilitation of the health sector.”<sup>487</sup> This, it noted, has had a devastating impact on the provision of services to survivors of sexual violence, with a lack of medicines and other medical supplies, lack of payment for health workers, lack of resources for the one-stop centres, lack of fuel to reach survivors in outlying areas, lack of communications, lack of trained staff, and lack of visas for trainers to enter Ethiopia and travel to Tigray.

The report ends with 61 recommendations to the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, international donors humanitarian providers, the African Union, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to All of Ethiopia’s International Partners including Canada, the European Union and its Member States, United Kingdom, and United States and to Humanitarian Agencies, including the UN’s population fund (UNFPA) , the UN’s Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the UN’s Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).<sup>488</sup>

### 6.3 Discussion

Much of the evidence in these four reports is deeply contested. The Joint Investigation Team conducting investigations for the UN/EHRC report said some witnesses alleged evidence was fabricated for lobbying purposes. The Ethiopian Attorney General said some reports of rape should be taken “with a pinch of salt.”<sup>489</sup> The Tigray External Affairs Office criticised Amnesty International’s report of Tigrayan forces assaults on women, and said that if there were any, they were the actions of “bad apples.”<sup>490</sup> The Eritrean government said the Joint UN/EHRC report was the product of “visceral disdain and enmity towards Eritrea.”<sup>491</sup> However, there is a consistency to the depiction of what has happened to women in the conflict in Tigray and beyond.

#### *Sexual violence was used as a weapon of war*

The reports all present sexual violence as being used as a weapon of war, targeting women identified as coming from the ethnic group as the opposition forces, and designed to humiliate and degrade them on the basis of their ethnicity as well as their gender. This is evidenced by the language used, terms such junta or woyane or donkey used derogatively, and also by explicit statements such as: “We were sent here to clean out Tigrayans, they will be replaced by real Ethiopians; we are cleansing this country of people like you.”<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Op Cit. page 63

<sup>488</sup> Op Cit. pages 82 – 88

<sup>489</sup> Ethiopia Attorney General **Gedion Timothewos** press conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3 June 2021

<sup>490</sup> “Response to Amnesty International’s Report on Sexual Violence in Amhara Region,” statement released by Tigray External Affairs Office, 10 November 2021

<sup>491</sup> “Eritrea’s Preliminary Response to Joint ‘EHRC/OHCHR’ Report,” news release issued by Ministry of Information Eritrea, 5 November, 2021

<sup>492</sup> 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 to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, published by

### *Extreme brutality deployed against women*

All the reports describe in explicit terms extreme brutality used, resulting in severe injuries to the women. The joint UN/EHRC report points to the most extreme violence being deployed by soldiers from Eritrea,<sup>493</sup> a country with a record of sexual violence within its armed forces.<sup>494</sup>

### *Lack of access for survivors to medical and other support services*

All the reports identify a lack of services and describe the additional hardship this has caused to the survivors of sexual violence. All but the lesser of the Amnesty International reports, pins most of the blame for this on the Ethiopian Government blockade of Tigray and give priority to the lifting of the blockade and provision of humanitarian access to the region. The de facto blockade itself has been described as “likely to constitute a war crime” by UK Africa minister Vicky Ford MP.<sup>495</sup>

### *Calls for further investigations*

All the reports call, to a greater or lesser extent, for further investigation of atrocities during the conflict. The three most substantial reports cite the international laws and conventions that prohibit sexual violence in conflict and open up the possibility of the sexual violence constituting war crimes or crimes against humanity. In her press conference marking the release of the joint report Michelle Bachelet picked up on the proposal that if national governments were unable to take forward their own investigations and actions, then an international mechanism should be developed.<sup>496</sup>

## **6.4 International inertia**

In the face of the stream of eye-witness accounts and media coverage of sexual violence during the first six months of the war, and substantial institutional reports during the latter part of the year, the international community has expressed consistent concerns about events in Ethiopia. There have been repeated calls for a ceasefire, efforts to broker negotiations, or at least a halt to the atrocities, with the use of sexual violence featuring among the roll call of human rights violations. Key among the international actors have been:

### *Africa*

African institutions and leaders have made repeated efforts to find a way through the crisis. The initial peace initiative of the African Union in the form of a three- person delegation of the former presidents of Liberia, Mozambique and South Africa in

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Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 3 November 2021, page 48

<sup>493</sup> Ibid page 52

<sup>494</sup> “Sexual Violence in the Eritrean National Service” by Gaim Kibreab, published online by Cambridge University Press, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>495</sup> Letter from Vicky Ford MP to Lord David Alton, published online by Lord Alton on 18 December 2021

<sup>496</sup> Op Cit

November 2020 was rebuffed.<sup>497</sup> In June 2021 a commission of inquiry into the alleged human rights violations was set up under the auspices of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.<sup>498</sup> It began its work in Banjul, the capital of Gambia, with a mandate to investigate allegations and determine whether there had been violations of human rights. The Ethiopian government called on the AU to scrap the commission and proposed a joint probe instead.<sup>499</sup> Two months later, the AU took a further initiative under Olusegun Obasanjo, the former Nigerian President, to persuade the Tigrayan regional and Ethiopian federal governments to end hostilities and come to the negotiating table. He held constructive meetings during his visit to Ethiopia with the Ethiopian President, Sahle-Work Zewde and Tigrayan leader Debretsion Gebremichael.<sup>500</sup> In the same month Kenyan Prime Minister, Uhuru Kenyatta made high profile visits to Addis Ababa to meet his Ethiopian counterpart and call on all parties to cease hostilities<sup>501</sup>.

### *United Nations*

After repeated statements by the UN on Ethiopia, including on the scale and nature of the sexual violence, and the detention and expulsion from Addis Ababa of UN officials, the most senior group of human rights experts issued a call for action in early December.<sup>502</sup> Building on the joint UN and Ethiopian Human Rights Council report, they called on authorities in Ethiopia, Eritrea and beyond to ensure that victims of sexual violence were offered full support and redress, and that perpetrators were brought to justice.

“We would like to remind State and non-State actors parties to the conflict of their duty to respect and protect human rights, and to prevent violations in any territory under their jurisdiction or effective control, whether by State or non-State actors.

“In particular, we reiterate the recommendations made by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Joint Investigation report to end all forms of sexual violence, and to issue clear, public and unequivocal instructions to all armed forces and groups to forbid sexual and other gender-based violence and render these acts punishable on the basis of direct and command responsibility.

“We also reiterate the need for Ethiopia and Eritrea to implement the report's recommendations – to take immediate measures to protect women and girls from

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<sup>497</sup> “The Tigray War and Regional Implications,” Volume I published by Eritrea Hub and Oslo Analytica, June 2021 page 12

<sup>498</sup> Press statement on the official launch of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, published online by African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 16 June 2021

<sup>499</sup> Ethiopia calls on AU to stop Commission of Inquiry on rights abuse in Tigray says outside scope of agreement, lacks legal basis, article in Addis Standard 17 June 2021

<sup>500</sup> “AU special envoy Obasanjo holds talks with Tigray leader,” article by Eliud Kibij published in the Star, 8 November 2021

<sup>501</sup> “Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta Arrives in Addis Ababa,” article in Ethiopian Monitor 16 November

<sup>502</sup> “Tigray conflict: UN experts call for urgent action to stop violence against women” statement by Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; Melissa Upreti (Chair), Dorothy Estrada Tanck (Vice-Chair), Elizabeth Broderick, Ivana Radačić, and Meskerem Geset Techane, Working Group on discrimination against women and girls; Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; Mr. Felipe González Morales, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Mr. Nils Melzer, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Tlaleng-Mofokeng, Special Rapporteur on the right to health; Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues. Endorsed by Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, published by UN 3 December 2021

rape and other forms of gender-based violence; provide redress to victims; facilitate immediate access to adequate health care, including the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, and psychosocial support; ensure proper documentation and investigation of all incidences of sexual violence by independent and impartial bodies and hold perpetrators to account.”

### *United Kingdom*

The UK’s claim to global leadership of the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative was described in Volume I of this report. Whilst the action at that stage was limited, the initiative has continued to be a focus for repeated calls to the UK government to act over the sexual violence in the Tigray conflict. Parliamentarians Lord Alton in the House of Lords and MPs Helen Hayes and Sarah Champion in the House of Commons have pressed the UK government to prioritise support and services for survivors. The appointment of Rt Hon Liz Truss MP as the new foreign secretary gave a fresh impetus to the PSVI work with her announcement in November 2021 of £20mn to tackle violence against women, and a Preventing Sexual Violence Against Women Summit to be hosted by the UK in 2022.<sup>503</sup>

“We’re going to tackle the abhorrent practice of the use of sexual violence in war. It is grotesque that sexual violence and rape is used as a weapon of war, and it’s used to exercise power over women. It’s wrong that it’s treated less seriously than chemical warfare or landmines,” she said, declaring there had to be an end to impunity for perpetrators.

Further, she said that she would consider a new international convention on the use of sexual violence in conflict, a move which is currently being promoted by a body of international lawyers and which would give a focus to the gender dimension of atrocities and genocide.<sup>504</sup>

In response to a question from Lord Ray Collins in the House of Lords, the UK government announced it would be taking forward its PSVI work in Ethiopia through the appointment of a specialist role based at the Embassy in Addis Ababa starting in January 2022.<sup>505</sup>

### *European Union*

The European Union has continued its diplomatic pressures with suspension of aid to Ethiopia, the threat of sanctions and two missions by special envoy Finnish foreign minister Pekka Haavisto, to press for peace talks and humanitarian access. EU crisis-management commissioner Janez Lenarčič told European Parliament in July: “Atrocities”, such as systematic rape and extra-judicial killings, were also being seen in the conflict,” in what “may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.”<sup>506</sup> Haavisto’s comments were described by the Ethiopian foreign ministry as a “hallucination of sorts or a lapse in memory of some kind.”<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict: Foreign Secretary’s speech at the Gender Equality Advisory Council of the G7, published by Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, 17 November 2021

<sup>504</sup> “Gender and Genocide in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” published by New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, Washington DC, 2021

<sup>505</sup> Lord Goldsmith response in House of Lords, UK parliament, 22 November 2021

<sup>506</sup> “Ethiopia Creating ‘Famine’ in Tigray, EU warns,” article in EU Observer, Brussels, 7 July 2021

<sup>507</sup> Ibid

Frustrations in the EU over the lack of progress boiled over on 13 December 2021 when the block's top diplomat Josep Borrell criticised member states for failing to agree on sanctions against those suspected of war crimes in Ethiopia's civil war and complained about Europe's failure to give an effective policy response to "large scale human rights violations," or to stop "mass rapes using sexual violence as a war aim."<sup>508</sup>

However, despite its internal challenges, Europe led the calls for a special session on Ethiopia of the UN Human Rights Council which was held on Friday 17 December.

## 6.5 Future action – an international commission

Finally, at the tail end of 2021, came action from the UN. More than 50 countries, members and observers of the UN Human Rights Council, supported moves initially proposed by Slovenia, in its capacity as head of the EU's Council, to set up an international commission of human rights experts. Its mandate included investigating and collecting evidence of human rights violations, with a "gender perspective and survivor-centred approach" throughout its work. The proposal was consistent with that set out in the joint UN/EHRC report and referred to by Michelle Bachelet in her news conference.

A resolution setting up another investigation might seem too little too late for women waiting for medical treatment for life-changing injuries or justice for the horrific abuses inflicted on them. However, it drew an immediate and angry response from the Ethiopian government which slammed it as an "unjust and counterproductive attempt by some to exert political pressure,"<sup>509</sup> unsupported by African council members. In the event, a number of African nations abstained in the vote on the motion which was carried by 21 votes for with 15 against and 11 abstentions.

Sharp divisions were expressed at the meeting. Those who supported the Ethiopian government in opposing the motion, spoke largely, sometimes vituperatively, of concerns about interference in Ethiopian national sovereignty, politicisation of human rights and neo-colonialism by western powers. Those who supported the proposal, recognised the importance of the African Union peace initiative and of Ethiopian measures to implement the joint report recommendations, but argued that the progress made was too slow. Meanwhile, they said, there had been mass detentions of Tigrayans, including of UN Staff, and the continuing blockade of Tigray.

Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy human rights commissioner told the meeting that the impact of the conflict on civilians was "increasingly dramatic" with 9.4 million people in northern Ethiopia affected by "acute food insecurity," including 5.2 million people in Tigray – 90% of the population. In July there were 400,000 people in Tigray living in conditions of famine. No recent estimates were possible because of the lack of access, but she noted that the situation was likely to be even worse, with the

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<sup>508</sup> "EU's Borrell criticises countries over reaction to Ethiopia conflict," article published online by Politico 13 December 2021

<sup>509</sup> "Africa backs Ethiopia protest against UN Human Rights Council session, article by Aggrey Mutambo, published by the Daily Nation, 19 December 2021

blockade compounded by widespread anti-humanitarian rhetoric.<sup>510</sup> She warned all parties against the use of hate speech which she said risked further violence.

Three speakers in particular highlighted the gender dimension to the investigations and the appalling toll of sexual violence in the conflict.

Victor Madrigal-Borloz, Chair of the Co-ordination Committee of Special Procedures, said all parties to the conflict had engaged in sexual violence which constituted “egregious violations of human rights and humanitarian law.” These appeared to be part of a deliberate strategy to terrorise, degrade and humiliate” the victims on the basis of their ethnicity, and were carried out with the “acquiescence of state and non-state actors.” The sexual violence especially affected internally displaced women and girls and those in refugee camps for Eritreans, and also young women, with one treatment centre reporting that 90% of the survivors it treated were underage.<sup>511</sup>

The widespread use of sexual violence was condemned by Simon Manley, the UK’s permanent representative to the UN in Geneva, who said, “We have heard the most horrific accounts of the widespread use of rape and sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war. Most recently, we have seen the mass detention of people based on their ethnic origin, alongside inflammatory and hateful rhetoric from public figures. No one, I repeat no one, can seriously argue that this situation does not deserve the urgent attention of this Council.... A sustainable peace requires respect for human rights.”

Finally, a call for a stronger focus on gender-based violence came from Dr Ewelina Ochab. Speaking for the Human Rights Institute of the International Bar Association she said: “The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in Ethiopia is a fact reported by the UN on several occasions and not a claim yet to be proven. The new mechanism may only elaborate on the true scale of the issue. The omission of the issue from the resolution is a significant failure that must be addressed.

“We appreciate the reference to integrating a gender perspective, however, we consider that this is not enough and explicit language on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is crucial. The issues surrounding SGBV are omnipresent in Ethiopia. A breakdown of traditional accountability mechanisms, increased exposure to and normalisation of SGBV, lack of economic opportunities, under-prioritisation of SGBV, lack of SGBV reporting mechanisms and inadequately-trained healthcare workers are highlighted as contributing factors to widespread SGBV. As such, the response to SGBV must be comprehensive and must be fully incorporated by the new mechanism.”<sup>512</sup>

The establishment of a mechanism was clearly foreshadowed in the joint report, which was generally welcomed on all sides of the debate. Yet Ethiopia and others expressed visceral opposition. Zenebe Kebede Korcho, the Ethiopian ambassador to Geneva, said the country would not “co-operate with any mechanism imposed on it,” as a result of the UN special session, and that the country was being targeted and

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<sup>510</sup> “First meeting, 33<sup>rd</sup> special session of Human Rights Council on Tigray, live broadcast by UN Web TV, 17 December 2021

<sup>511</sup> Ibid

<sup>512</sup> Ibid

singled out at the Human Rights Council. "Multilateralism, after all these years, is once again being hijacked by a neocolonialist mentality."<sup>513</sup>

Meanwhile the Tigray administration welcomed the meeting and the resolution, said it was establishing a high-level task force with full authority to manage its cooperation with the commission and "reiterates its resolve to assure Human Rights Council members and Observer States of its highest regard and sustained constructive engagement on this matter."<sup>514</sup>

## 6.6 Conclusion

*"Only justice can break the cycles of violence,"* EU Ambassador Lotte Knudsen told the UN Human Rights council's special meeting<sup>515</sup>. After a conflict marked by some of the most egregious sexual violence witnessed for many years, there is a prospect that the curtain might be lifted on events in Tigray during the blockade. It is possible that the sexual violence that has taken place in Tigray, Amhara and Afar, might finally be properly evidenced and prosecuted, and that the commanders responsible by order or oversight might be held to account. That will rely on many circumstances, above all the survival of those affected, the women, girls, and boys attacked and their families, and the health workers who have treated the brutal physical and mental injuries inflicted. For survival they need the medical and psychosocial services set out at the start of this report and protection. They also need food. All of these rely on the lifting of the Ethiopian government's humanitarian blockade. If all these circumstances are met, and they are many difficult ifs, then there might yet be justice for the survivors in Tigray and beyond. And proof of the international community's determination to make good on its commitment to stop sexual violence being used as a weapon of war.

## 7. Sanction Regimes and Eritrea

By Habte Hagos<sup>516</sup>

Other chapters in this volume discuss detailed aspects of the war in Tigray, including Eritrean involvement. Some provide an update to Volume 1 covering the period July - December 2021; others cover fresh topics. This chapter will focus on sanctions, both unilateral and multilateral, which could potentially be imposed on Eritrea - a country that has subjected its own people to gross human rights abuses for three decades and is a catalyst for the horrific war currently unfolding in Ethiopia.

### 7.1 Eritrea and its economy

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<sup>513</sup> "Ethiopia Decries UN Creation of Team to Monitor Rights Abuses in War-Torn Country" article by Aymi Davis by Newsweek online on 17 December 2021

<sup>514</sup> "Press Release by the Government of Tigray on the adoption of UN-HRC Resolution on the situation of Human Rights in Ethiopia," News Release issued by Tigray External Affairs Office 18 December 2021

<sup>515</sup> Op cit

<sup>516</sup> Habte Hagos is a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, and a founding member of Eritrea Focus and its current Chairman





### a) *The President and the Eritrean Constitution*

The Eritrean post-independence constitution was ratified by the National Assembly on 23 May 1997 as the fundamental law of the country after active popular participation by the people. Article 16 enshrines the inalienable human rights of its citizens stating that; (a) the dignity of all persons shall be inviolable [unbreakable], (b) no person shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and (c) no person shall be held in slavery or servitude nor shall any person be required to perform forced labour not authorised by law.” Article 19 further underpins these fundamental human rights, adding “every person shall have freedom of conscience, religion, expression of opinion, movement, assembly and organisation.”

Under Article 41 the term of office of the President shall be five years, limited to no more than to two terms. The President shall execute the authority vested in him in consultation with the Cabinet, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. Following the independence referendum in 1993, the National Assembly appointed Isaias Afewerki as the Interim President of Eritrea until such time a new constitution could be drawn up and elections held.

The Interim President has refused to implement the constitution, despite the fact that it was ratified by the National Assembly and formally presented to him for his signature. He has in effect proceeded to nullify it. No elections have ever been held; the National Assembly has not met since 2001. Isaias Afwerki has effectively appointed himself President for life. He has ruled the country with an iron fist for almost three decades, accountable to no one else but himself. Even the ruling party – the PFDJ – has held no conference to which he might report.

When asked by Al Jazeera on 23 May 2008, when elections will be held in Eritrea, the President replied rhetorically: “What elections?”<sup>517</sup> He then added “we will see what the elections in the United States will bring and then wait for about three to four decades for a genuine, natural situations [to] emerge in Eritrea.” In short, he said the people of Eritrea will have to wait between 30 and 40 years before they can elect their own President.

In December 2010, the then US ambassador to Eritrea, Ronald McMullen, wrote a secret diplomatic cable<sup>518</sup> explaining how awful the situation in Eritrea really was; “Weird, dysfunctional Asmara, reminiscent of an Evelyn Waugh novel, is notorious among western diplomats as a hardship posting. Young Eritreans are fleeing their country in droves, the economy appears to be in a death spiral, Eritrea's prisons are overflowing, and the country's unhinged dictator remains cruel and defiant. Eritreans' strong sense of nationalism and their capacity to withstand great suffering and deprivation allows Isaias to cling to power.” The situation Ambassador McMullen witnessed in 2010 has worsened exponentially since then. No diplomat can adequately describe how horrific life has become for the Eritrean people. Eritrea is a prison state.

#### *b) Economy*

The World Bank, the IMF, the African Development Bank amongst others, have struggled to come up with reliable economic data on Eritrea since the country gained its independence in 1993. The country has never published an annual budget, official statistics and data are scanty and notoriously unreliable. Some of the information in this report cannot, therefore, be sourced. The author, who is of Eritrean extraction, has always remained informed of the situation in his homeland. Some of the information has been obtained over many years by working with and speaking to Eritreans, and others, who are well informed, some of whom have previously been part of the government or civil service.

In March 2018, in its 1999 -2016 report to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, the Eritrean government revealed that the country has a population of 3.65 million<sup>519</sup>. This is considerably smaller than the UN estimate figure of 4,954,645 (2016) or CIA estimate of 5,918,919 (2017)<sup>520</sup>. Anecdotally, the government has deliberately understated the population size to improve GDP per capita which is one of the lowest in the world but inadvertently this has made its national debt per capita look a lot worse.

Eritrea has a command economy that is under the absolutely control of the President and a handful of his inner circle. There are three key components to the Eritrean economy; (i) Agriculture, (ii) Extractive Industries, and (iii) Remittances and Diaspora Tax. Manufacturing, once the envy of the region, has been in steep decline due to manpower, material and power/electricity shortages. Hardly any private sector construction takes place in the country since the necessary but scarce material and manpower are requisitioned by the government and party autocrats. The vast majority of the population are enlisted in the open-ended and inaptly called “national

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<sup>517</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAXKsZ8OsWo>

<sup>518</sup> WikiLeaks cables: Eritrean poverty and patriotism under 'unhinged dictator' | Eritrea | The Guardian

<sup>519</sup> Population Archives - Eritrea Hub

<sup>520</sup> 404 - CIA

service” where they work in slave-like conditions for meagre pay, unable to support their parents or start a family of their own.<sup>521</sup>

### *i. Agriculture*

According to the FAO (2019)<sup>522</sup>, the country’s agricultural sector employs 60 - 80% of the population but contributes less than 20% of the national GDP. Production is hampered by harsh climatic conditions, erratic and inadequate rainfall, soil erosion, recurrent locust swarm and lack of modern farming equipment. This is exacerbated by frequent wars with neighbouring countries which sucks huge numbers of people away from productive activities, to fight in destructive conflicts. For example, the border conflict with Ethiopia in 1998-2000, and the current tragic war in Tigray where the people of Eritrea have been forced at gunpoint to fight and die en mass in another country’s civil war.

According to the World Bank (2018)<sup>523</sup>, the agriculture sector meets between 60 and 70% of the food needs of the people even in years of good rainfall. The food shortfall is largely met through food aid from the international community, making the regime’s self-reliance ideology a myth.

### *ii. Extractive Industries*

Eritrea’s vast and largely untapped mineral reserves have been the key sector that has attracted foreign direct investment which peaked at US\$74mn in 2020<sup>524</sup>, a fraction of its huge revenue stream potential. The country’s geology hosts a variety of precious metals, base metals, and industrial minerals, most notably gold, copper, nickel, chromite, potash, sulphur, marble, and granite. Gold is said to be present in many parts of Eritrea. A major belt of sulphide deposits with gold and base metal mineralization extends over a length of 250 kms from north of Asmara, the capital, to the Eritrean border to the south. This belt includes the Bisha high-grade zinc-copper-gold deposit<sup>525</sup>. There are indications of similar base metal deposits further north of Kerkebet and Harabsuit and a belt of copper mineralization in Raba-Semait area, sulphide-rich gossanous rock in Mt Tullului (Bedeho) in the north and in Mt Seccar and Sheib areas in the eastern Lowlands<sup>526</sup>.

In spite of the economic and investment climate, there are still a number of international companies from Canada, UK, Australia and China doing business in Eritrea, almost exclusively in the extractive sector. The sector is increasingly dominated by Chinese companies, who own approximately 75% of all operations. In January 2020, Nevsun Resources Ltd of Canada was acquired by a Chinese company – Zijin Mining Group Co Ltd - for US\$1.86bn in a friendly takeover<sup>527</sup>.

The Eritrean regime largely maintains itself through mining revenues. Much of Eritrea’s foreign exchange income comes from foreign gold/copper mining company

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<sup>521</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=20067&LangID=E>

<sup>522</sup> SOFI-2019-full-report.pdf (unicef.org)

<sup>523</sup> Eritrea Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank

<sup>524</sup> Investing in Eritrea - International Trade Portal International Trade Portal (lloydsbanktrade.com)

<sup>525</sup> Mining & Repression in Eritrea (Download Report) | Eritrea Focus (eritrea-focus.org)

<sup>526</sup> ‘Mineral Potential of Eritrea,’ 5 October 2012, <http://www.shabait.com/categoryblog/11200-mineral-potential-of-eritrea>

<sup>527</sup> Chinese firm Zijin Mining successful in takeover of Nevsun Resources - BNN Bloomberg

projects, in which the Eritrean Government holds at least a 40% stake.<sup>528</sup> Nevsun's 2016 financial statement states the company has contributed US\$1bn to the Eritrean government in various forms of taxation, dividends, and other payments<sup>529</sup> and that the contents of Bisha mine alone are worth a combined total of US\$2.7bn<sup>530</sup>.

Western financial institutions and companies listed in stock exchanges in London, Toronto, New York, and Australia have major stakes in mining companies operating in Eritrea. These institutions and companies are complicit in the horrific and sustained human rights abuses in Eritrea. They are also helping finance the current appalling war in Ethiopia that has brought the country to the brink of fragmentation.

### *iii. Remittances and Diaspora Tax*

In 2019, the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) in exile, estimated the number of Eritreans in the diaspora at "at least 2 million" scattered around the globe including; 850,000 in Sudan, over 500,000 in Ethiopia, 200,000 in North America, 125,000 in Italy, 80,000 in Germany, 50,000 in Sweden, 40,000 in the UK, 39,000 in Switzerland, 25,000 in Sweden, 20,000 in Norway, 6,000 in Australia, 4,000 each in Denmark and Finland and 3,000 each in France and Belgium<sup>531</sup>. These numbers have increased significantly since 2019. Going into exile is the only option to preserve life for a large segment of the Eritrean population<sup>532</sup>. And for the children of Eritrea "refugee status" in the west is now seen as a "profession" to aspire to.

#### *Remittances*

Remittances to family and friends from the diaspora are one of the main drivers of the Eritrean economy and are said to contribute, together with the diaspora tax, around a third<sup>533</sup> of GDP. Approximately a third of the population in Eritrea rely on remittances for their basic daily needs such as food and housing<sup>534</sup>. This inflow of cash also generates a substantial amount of hard currency for the government and is likely to increase as the number of refugees, especially those of productive age (under 40 years of age) accelerates year-on-year.

Apart from remittances to support family and friends, there is no direct investment by the Eritrean diaspora in their homeland due to a lack of confidence in the government. This is in contrast to other African countries e.g., Ethiopia where diasporas invest large sums of money in their country, and are actively encouraged, and indeed incentivized, to do so by the government. The lack of diaspora inward investment in Eritrea, to some extent stems, from the "Eritrean Bond Scheme" issued in the 1990s. Eritreans, in good faith, invested their hard currencies in government bonds, only to find the government "default"<sup>535</sup>.

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<sup>528</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/eritrea>

<sup>529</sup> [Mining-and-Repression-in-Eritrea-Corporate-Complicity-in-Human-Rights-Abuses-EMBARGOED-COPY.pdf](#) (eritreahub.org) page 20

<sup>530</sup> 'Resource and reserves', <http://www.nevsun.com/projects/bisha-main/>

<sup>531</sup> EPDP Assessment Shows Eritreans In Exile/Diaspora to be over Two million (harnnet.org)

<sup>532</sup> Young Eritreans would rather risk death at sea than let their leaders take their freedom | View | Euronews

<sup>533</sup> Understanding Remittances in Eritrea: An Exploratory Study (wmich.edu)

<sup>534</sup> Understanding Remittances in Eritrea: An Exploratory Study (wmich.edu) Page 14

<sup>535</sup> Based on professional advice the author provided to members of the diaspora when the bonds were launched and since.

In the early stage after independence, the Eritrean diaspora's "social remittance" in terms of a transfer of ideas, skills and expertise, technology and research were significant. Some high skilled Eritreans in diaspora abandoned well paid jobs and comfortable lives in the west to return to their country to help build its economy pro bono. This was not well received nor welcomed by the government, which saw it as a threat to its monopolistic control. Over time the "social remittance" simply fizzled away, and even those who relocated to the country were gradually forced to return to exile and rebuild their lives all over again.

### *Diaspora Tax*

On 10 December 1991, the Transitional Administration of Eritrea issued Proclamation No. 17/1991 for the Collection of Rehabilitation Tax. This was subsequently amended by Proclamation No. 67/1995 to include the Collection of Tax from Eritreans who "Earn Income while Living Abroad". The main purpose of the tax, as stated in Proclamation No. 17/1991, was "Social Security" such as supporting families of martyrs, war disabled and victims of natural disaster.

Proclamation No. 67/1995 identifies a taxable person as "any person [Eritrean] who lives outside the country and who earns income from employment, rental of moveable or immovable property, or any other commercial, professional or service rendering activity, shall pay a 2% tax on net income on a monthly or yearly basis." The tax is therefore levied to the members of diaspora although the original Proclamation does not specifically refer to diaspora tax and the constitution ratified in 1997 states "only the National Assembly has the authority to impose taxes", in effect repealing Proclamations No. 67/1995. This raises the question of the legality of the diaspora tax under Eritrean law. Similarly, western countries have increasingly questioned the legality of the taxes over the last decade.

The Eritrean government 2% Diaspora Tax rate has remained unchanged since it was first enacted. It is difficult to know the total diaspora tax the government collects each year. But it is thought to be one of the main sources of hard currency earner for the country and contributes, along with remittances, about 33% to GDP<sup>536</sup>.

According to Proclamation 67/1997, responsibility for the diaspora tax lies with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the tax is payable to the Ministry of Finance through diplomatic missions. The transactions take place outside the formal channels of the Inland Revenue and Treasury Departments of the Ministry of Finance and are believed to be used to finance covert activities by the President.

The diaspora tax is collected by coercion, extortion, and threats of violence by members of Embassy staff and government agents sometimes going house to house in an attempt to persuade or intimidate members of the diaspora to pay the levy. Taxes collected this way are then transferred to various Eritrean embassy bank accounts or to privately held offshore accounts. Some of the tax is repatriated to Eritrea in diplomatic bags, or by couriers. Increasingly the levy is paid in hard currency on arrival in Asmara.

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<sup>536</sup> Rapid fragility and migration assessment for Eritrea ([gsdrc.org](http://gsdrc.org)) pages 1 and 2

In July 2011, the UN Security Council noted “that Oakland, California, and the Washington, D.C., area host some of the largest Eritrean communities in the United States, and therefore provide major sources of funding for PFDJ. Some of this cash is deposited in Eritrean embassy bank accounts, but much of it is moved through increasingly opaque financial networks, employing money transfer companies and individual couriers. According to Eritrean sources, Tesfay (or Adey) Mariam is suspected of being one such financial facilitator. While working as a taxi driver in Arlington, Virginia, Tesfay Mariam - an Eritrean citizen with dual United States nationality - has organised the transfer of hundreds of thousands of dollars to Eritrean individuals and PFDJ-linked businesses in Dubai.” Tesfay is on the list of 95 Eritrean individuals with significant real estate interest in Dubai that the author anonymously received in January 2022.

In December 2011, the UN in accordance with the international law S/RES/2023 (2011) 4 11-62278, declared “that Eritrea shall cease using extortion, threats of violence, fraud and other illicit means to collect taxes outside of Eritrea from its nationals or other individuals of Eritrean descent. It added that States [host countries] shall undertake appropriate measures to hold accountable individuals on their territory who are acting, officially or unofficially, on behalf of the Eritrean government or the PFDJ. It called upon States to take such action as may be appropriate consistent with their domestic law and international relevant instruments, including the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, to prevent such individuals from facilitating further violations; (UN Security Council, 2011b).”

The UN Commission of Inquiry reported the 2% Tax was a tool used by the government of Eritrea to carry out surveillance and control over the diaspora communities. Some countries including Canada and the Netherlands have expelled Eritrean envoys over diaspora tax. However, the regime continues to flagrantly abuses its own and international law to collect diaspora tax through its embassies and agents across the world.

Failure to pay the diaspora tax can result in the denial of consular services, access to services in Eritrea for self or family members (including food vouchers), property rights (including home repairs), remittances and gift packages to family members. At worst it could result in social exclusion, vilification or even imprisonment. Proponents of the Eritrean diaspora tax argue the tax is the same as that levied by western governments on their own citizens living and working abroad. This could not be further from the truth. To begin with, western governments do not coerce or threaten violence against their citizens to force them to pay tax anywhere in the world in the way Eritrea does. Moreover, western citizens living and working abroad in most cases pay tax to their home governments, usually under Double Taxation Treaties.

Double Taxation Treaties are agreements between two states which are designed to protect against the risk of double taxation where the same income is taxable in two states. For example, the US and the UK governments signed on 24 July 2001 [last updated 9 August 2021] a Double Taxation Relief Treaty which entitles their

taxpayers to pay tax in only one country<sup>537</sup>. Similarly, Italy and the UK have a Double Taxation Treaty for the avoidance of double taxation between their two countries which was signed in 1988 that came into effect at the start of 1990<sup>538</sup>. Eritrea currently has no Double Taxation Treaty with any other country in the world; hence it cannot legally levy tax on its diaspora. This assertion by the author is supported by Michael Rubin, an Enterprise scholar, who states “the American [western] analogy is simply inaccurate. The US negotiates double taxation treaties with various governments. That the Eritrean regime will threaten the family members of its nationals abroad to compel diaspora tax payments likewise places it firmly in the camp not of the US but rather of North Korea, Turkmenistan, or, in the past, Moammar Gadhafi’s Libya or Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.”<sup>539</sup>

### *No other viable economic sector in Eritrea*

Apart from the three economic sectors noted above, Eritrea has minuscule fishery activities despite its 1,200 km Red Sea Coast and a number of populous landlocked neighbouring countries to which it could market its fish produce. Eritrean ports stand idle and decaying. There are almost no tourists and diaspora visits have declined steadily due to lack of amenities, restrictions, and human rights abuses at the hands of the security services.

Manufacturing is virtually non-existent in today’s Eritrea, which has been systematically and deliberately destroyed or neglected into state of disrepair by the regime. The once vibrant private sector, which was the envy of neighbouring countries, has been decimated by the President. The “private sector” now comprises of the self-employed workers in village farms, market stalls, bars/restaurants or corner shops dotted in towns and cities around the country. It is next to impossible for the self-employed to access hard currency and the transactions are carried out almost exclusively in Nakfa, which are rigidly controlled by the regime.

### *The overall state of Eritrea’s finances*

Eritrea struggles to attract inward investment due to corruption, excessive foreign and local currency controls, low-skilled workforce drained by mass migration and delapidated infrastructure. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2020 was a meagre US\$74mn (2019: US\$67mn)<sup>540</sup>. There is also an endemic and systematic human rights abuses and indefinite slave-like national service in the country. As a result, Eritrea remains one of the world’s most difficult places to do business, ranking second last (before Somalia) out of 190 countries in the 2020 Doing Business report published by the World Bank (same ranking as in 2019)<sup>541</sup>.

According to the FCDO factsheet dataset published in October 2021<sup>542</sup> show the following stats:

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<sup>537</sup> [Uk/USA Double Taxation Agreement - 2002 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

<sup>538</sup> [Italy-UK Double Taxation Treaty \(lawyersitaly.eu\)](https://lawyersitaly.eu)

<sup>539</sup> <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/the-state-department-can-and-should-stop-eritreas-illegal-diaspora-tax-in-the-us>

<sup>540</sup> [Investing in Eritrea - International Trade Portal International Trade Portal \(lloydsbanktrade.com\)](https://lloydsbanktrade.com).

<sup>541</sup> [Doing Business 2020](https://www.doingbusiness.com)

<sup>542</sup> [Factsheets Dataset \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

✓ GDP	US\$2.1bn
✓ GDP per capita	US\$587.70
✓ Inflation	4.8%
✓ Current account balance	10.9% of GDP
✓ Debt	184.9% of GDP
✓ Govt revenue	31.4% of GDP
✓ Govt spend	36.4% of GDP
✓ Deficit	5% of GDP
✓ Forex Reserves	US\$200mn [approx. 1.25 months cover]

In 2020 Eritrea was affected by locust swarms and the COVID–19 pandemic which hampered economic activities. As a result, GDP declined by 0.6% compared to prior year. COVID affected supply chains working hours and travel. The fiscal deficit widened by 5% of GDP in 2020, compared with a deficit of 1.6% in 2019.

The amount of debt Eritrea owes is significant in relation to its small economy: US\$ 3.9bn<sup>543</sup> in 2020. This equates to 184.9% of the national GDP, making the country one of the most debt-ridden nations in the world. This is likely to worsen as the country borrows even more money (mostly from the Chinese) to finance its war efforts in Tigray.

Today, Eritrea is almost always near the bottom of international social and economic indicators. The Human Development Index (HDI) for 2019<sup>544</sup> ranked Eritrea in 0.434, which is below the average of 0.504 for countries in the low human development group and below the average for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2019, Eritrea was ranked at 182 out of 189 countries in terms of HDI. Poverty remained high at 69% in 2019 with the majority of the population facing significant challenges in food security.

In the early post-independence years, President Isaias promised to transform Eritrea’s economy into the “Singapore of Africa” or “Switzerland of Africa” depending on his erratic and at times childlike mood. Instead, the country today is widely labelled as the “North Korea of Africa.” The Eritrean economy is on its knees and the country is one of the fastest emptying nations, producing one of the largest number of refugees per capita in the world year-on-year over the last decade.<sup>545</sup>

In a televised interview<sup>546</sup> President Isaias gave to the nation in February 2021, which was subsequently translated by the author from Tigrinya into English<sup>547</sup>, he said “there is no economic or trade problem in this country but the way we think has been the root cause of our difficulties. Nobody can say our economy is an economy. What economy? It is a hand to mouth economy.” On COVID-19, he adds “to say COVID has had a negative impact on our economy is an exaggeration because we had no economy in the first place. This is why I say there has not been any business in Eritrea that has been interrupted or closed down because of COVID. Which ones?

<sup>543</sup> Figure extrapolated by the author

<sup>544</sup> Eritrea Human Development Index (HDI) for 2019 - Search (bing.com)

<sup>545</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/08/wikileaks-eritrea-president-asaias-afwerki> and <http://www.afrol.com/articles/37033>

<sup>546</sup> <https://asenatv.com/a-complete-english-translation-of-isaias-afwerkis-eritrean-tv-interview-17-february-2021/>

<sup>547</sup> A complete English translation of Isaias Afwerki’s Eritrean TV Interview, 17 February 2021 - Eritrea Hub



None, because they did not exist in the first place. Our economic capability currently is zero, but we have big ideas and policies for a sustainable solution.”

The President further reiterated these economic calamities in a speech he apparently gave to a selected group of army officers and cadres in a town south of Asmara (on the road from the capital to Massawa) in September 2020. He said “the country had to accept that it has a small and not very viable economy and a long Red Sea coast, which Eritrea cannot patrol on its own. Hence it is imperative to think of some sort of union with Ethiopia, at least in terms of economic co-operation and maritime security.”<sup>548</sup>

The President is delusional and shameless. He fails to accept that the Eritrean economic calamity happened in his 30-year watch, which he has transformed a relatively prosperous, developing country into an economic wasteland. It’s no wonder a neighbouring country foreign minister said, “this man is a lunatic” and another added “all of Africa is fed up with him.”<sup>549</sup>

## 7.2 Corruption

Eritrea’s economic woes are the direct result of endemic, systematic and rampant corruption as will be explained in the paragraphs that follow. Corruption is at the heart of the regime in Asmara, which in turn deters foreign direct investments from international entities and Eritrean diasporas alike.

The government and its proponents claim Eritrea has zero tolerance for the crime<sup>550</sup> and experiences little corruption<sup>551</sup>. However, international data such as the Corruption Index paints a different picture. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, Eritrea score ranged between 18/100 and 25/100, averaging 21/100 in the period from 2012 to 2020<sup>552</sup>, where the average score for the least corrupt country (Denmark) is 89/100. The corruption trend in Eritrea over the period has worsened rather than improve.

In 2011, the UN Somalia/Eritrea Monitoring Group (SMEG)<sup>553</sup> reported that “Essentially, Eritrea manages two parallel economies: a formal economic sphere ostensibly managed by the State, and an opaque, largely offshore financial system controlled by elements of the ruling party and their supporters.”<sup>554</sup> The first part of the economy managed by the State is almost exclusively a “cash economy” which is used by the population and government departments to run services. In 2015, the government issued new Nakfa (ERN)<sup>555</sup> notes pegged at a fixed US\$1 to ERN15 , and restricted the amount its citizens can withdraw from the bank to ERN 5000 (US\$330) per month<sup>556</sup>. There are no ATMs (automated cash withdrawal machines)

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<sup>548</sup> "Eritrean troops to be integrated into Ethiopian army and talks on Federation to commence soon" - report - Eritrea Hub

<sup>549</sup> Personal communication with the author

<sup>550</sup> <http://www.shabait.com/news/local-news/25314-eritreas-anti-corruption-experience-speech-by-mr-hagos-gebrehiwet-head-of-economic-affairs-of-the-pfdj-at-the-world-political-parties-meeting-in-beijing-the-peoples-republic-of-china>

<sup>551</sup> <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/eritrea/corruption.htm>

<sup>552</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index - Wikipedia

<sup>553</sup> S/2011/433 - E - S/2011/433 -Desktop (undocs.org) page 85, paras 315-317

<sup>554</sup> Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 1916 (2010), 2011, S/2011/433, paragraph 378

<sup>555</sup> Eritrea Issued Legal Notice to Regulate New Currency! | Mdre-Bahri (wordpress.com)

<sup>556</sup> Eritrea - where ATMs are unknown and Sim cards are like gold dust - BBC News

in Eritrea<sup>557</sup>, a facility that has become increasingly common in the region, including across the border in Tigray, Ethiopia. There are no card transactions in the country, be they credit or debit cards. Carrying hard currency, unless a member of the ruling elite or a visiting member of the diaspora, is not permissible. The cash economy is rigidly controlled by the regime and any breach can result in an indefinite imprisonment, without the due process of the law, or worse.

The second sphere i.e., the opaque economy, is conducted almost exclusively in hard currency and largely through offshore bank accounts to carry out the government's illicit activities or to procure essential commodities such as fuel. This "off balance sheet" economy is under the absolute control of the President. There are about three dozen party-owned enterprises in the country that are involved in all sectors of the economy; ranging from construction to import and export, agriculture, manufacturing, transport, communication and financial services. These entities are organised under the Hidri Trust Fund and run by Hagos Ghebrehiwet, aka 'Kisha' [moneybags], PFDJ's head of economic affairs who is also the de facto finance minister and a close confidant of the President. As reported by the UN Commission of Inquiry (2016) "Only the President and three members of his inner circle, alone and with no [other] oversight, run state finances<sup>558</sup>. One important and undisputed source of revenue is proceeds from mining operations owned jointly by the Eritrean state and a transnational corporation."<sup>559</sup> Despite this closed network, some specific and damaging details of corruption by the inner circle and their associates have emerged over the years.

*i. UN Security Council Somalia/Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG)*

In 2011, the SEMG identified Eritrean businessman in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan linked with millions of dollars collected by the Eritrean embassy in Nairobi. These illicit funds being used to support the Eritrean government's activities, including human rights violations. The SEMG recommended travel restrictions against those involved as deterrent and thereby removing this lucrative financial stream for the Eritrean government.

*ii. South Sudan (The Sentry Report)<sup>560</sup>*

In October 2019, *The Sentry* investigators reported Eritrean businessmen own hundreds of companies in South Sudan. Eritrean traders in South Sudan have been awarded contracts between 2012 and the present worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Besides being involved in import and export, Eritreans own several hotels in Juba, as well as power and construction companies.

For example, "The Sentry reports that out of the US\$922mn letter of credit programme in South Sudan, US\$57mn was contracted to companies registered to a certain Ghebremeskel Tesfamariam Ghidey (Gebre) [a major property investor in Dubai]<sup>561</sup>. The money borrowed mainly from the National Bank of Qatar was meant

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<sup>557</sup> [ATMS in Eritrea - Search \(bing.com\)](#)

<sup>558</sup> [A\\_HRC\\_32\\_CRP.1\\_read-only.pdf \(ohchr.org\) page 17, para 154](#)

<sup>559</sup> United Nations, Detailed Findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, June 2016,

<sup>560</sup> <https://eritrea-focus.org/how-eritrea-rips-off-south-sudan/>. and [Breaking Investigative Report: International Profiteers Looted Billions from South Sudan - The Sentry](#)

<sup>561</sup> Based on information the author received in January 2022 from anonymous source that lists Gebre along with other 94 individuals of Eritrean extraction with significant real estate investments in Dubai.

for emergency food and other essential consumables. There is no evidence that any of the contracted companies delivered the promised goods. Reportedly, Gebre is affiliated with Eritrea's ruling party and has been mentioned in the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea as one of the recipients of "illicit funds" originating from the USA<sup>562</sup>.

Sources in Eritrea indicate that following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between northern and southern Sudanese, contract deals were made between the Government of South Sudan under John Garang and the Eritrean Government for PFDJ construction companies to take part in infrastructure construction in the new country. The contracts estimated at US\$1.3bn were cancelled by Salva Kiir's new administration following the accidental death of John Garang. By then Eritrea had already invested US\$33mn in machinery and other materials and had some construction companies (e.g., the party-owned Segen) and personnel on the ground, which became a major issue of contention between the two governments and personally between Isaias and Kiir".

### *iii. Human Trafficking*

The UN Human Rights Inquiry on Eritrea (2017)<sup>563</sup> reported that Eritrean army officials were involved in human trafficking. One of these is General Tekle Kiflai (Manjus) who then controlled the smuggling across the western border with Sudan. Manjus is reported to be one of richest army officers in the country, second only to General Filipos Woldeyohannes, the army Chief of Staff and a member of the President's inner circle. According to Eritrea's former Deputy Minister of Finance, Kubrom Dafla Hasabay "[all of] the money doesn't stop with Manjus, but it goes all the way up to the President."

General Filipos was sanctioned by the US government in November 2021.

### *iv. World Bank – Aid money misappropriated by corrupt government official*

According to the World Bank (February 2020), Eritrea is one of the top corrupt countries in the world where foreign aid is diverted to individual offshore accounts in large amounts, especially when compared to GDP. The report was prepared by the World Bank Policy Research and is contained in Working Paper 9150.<sup>564</sup>

This report examined whether there is a visible and verifiable correlation between receipt of foreign aid from the World Bank by certain countries, and money flows from these countries to foreign banks. A correlation means corrupt elites are capturing the aid and pocketing it rather than using it to develop their nation. This research found that in a quarter when a country received aid equivalent to 1% of GDP, its deposits in havens/offshore accounts increase by 3.4% relative to a country receiving no aid. In Eritrea, World Bank aid flows account for 3.2% of the annual GDP, the nation has eight known deposit accounts in foreign bank 'havens,' and it

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<sup>562</sup> <https://eritrea-focus.org/how-eritrea-rips-off-south-sudan/>.

<sup>563</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/17/eritrean-regime-arms-human-trafficking;>  
<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/eritrea-ending-the-exodus.pdf>

<sup>564</sup> Jørgen Juel Andersen, Niels Johannesen, Bob Rijkers, World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 9150, Elite Capture of Foreign Aid Evidence from Offshore Bank Accounts, February 2020  
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/493201582052636710/pdf/Elite-Capture-of-Foreign-Aid-Evidence-from-Offshore-Bank-Accounts.pdf>

showed a 2.29% quarterly growth rate in deposits to foreign accounts when aid is paid by the World Bank.<sup>565</sup>

The World Bank report demonstrates aid money given for the development of the country (Eritrea) and the wellbeing of the people is being siphoned off to offshore bank accounts by corrupt Eritrean government officials for their own personal gain and/or to prop-up the authoritarian regime.

It is unfathomable why the World Bank cannot stipulate mandatory monitoring and reporting mechanisms to ensure its foreign aid is used for its intended purposes. In this regard and following the publication of its February 2020 report, Eritrea Focus in partnership with other organisations submitted such a proposal to the World Bank but received no reply<sup>566</sup>.

#### v. HSBC

When the whistle-blower, Hervé Falciani, exposed the secret accounts in HSBC's Swiss private banking arm in 2015, Eritrea was among the top four African countries with the largest dollar deposits, US\$699mn<sup>567</sup>. In addition, a single Eritrean client appeared to have US\$695.2mn deposited, making it HSBC's biggest single client in Africa, (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists 2015). The dollar accounts appeared to be under the names of individuals domiciled in Asmara. Given the level of control the Eritrean Government has on all aspects of economic life in the country, it is widely assumed that the deposit is related to party-controlled funds. The government has not made any official attempts to identify the account holder and the source of the money or deny the report<sup>568</sup>.

President Afwerki and his inner circle maintain accounts separate from the official government bank account. Ghebreselassi Kidane Habte [then aged 37]<sup>569</sup> deposited more than US\$106mn in the bank while Hassan Abdalla Bashir, the "Banker" [then aged 24] deposited more than US\$209mn. Their collective secret deposit at the HSBC exceeds US\$315mn<sup>570</sup>. There has been no attempt to explain their extraordinary wealth.

#### vi. Qatar's National Bank

In August 2021, Qatar National Bank asked a Washington, D.C. court to order Eritrea to pay about US\$300mn of debt after the country refused to respond to two lawsuits<sup>571</sup>. Eritrea borrowed US\$200mn from Qatar in 2009/2010 and only returned US\$45mn of the amount in May 2012. In 2018, the Qatar bank took legal action in the UK and in 2019 a judge ordered Eritrea to pay its lender, Qatar Bank, US\$254mn, including interest accrued. Eritrea stopped responding to lawyers. This prompted Qatar Bank to request a judgement from a US Federal court.

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<sup>565</sup> Ibid. Table 1, page 23

<sup>566</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/open-letter-to-the-president-of-the-world-bank-eritrean-government-corruption>

<sup>567</sup> Exposed: The Africans named in the HSBC Swiss Leaks - The Mail & Guardian (mg.co.za)

<sup>568</sup> <https://www.tesfanews.net/eritreans-stash-us-695-2-million-in-swiss-accounts/>

<sup>569</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/EritreanPress/photos/the-name-of-eritreans-who-deposited-millions-in-swiss-hsbc-bankin-1981-hassan-ab/337608809765053/>

<sup>570</sup> <https://erena.org/32-un-identified-eritreans-reported-to-be-owners-of-a-combined-over-half-billion-us-dollars-in-hsbc-bank-in-switzerland/>

<sup>571</sup> <https://www.dohanews.co/qnb-asks-us-court-to-order-eritrea-to-pay-300-million-debt/>

Qatar Bank said in its court filing that staff at the Eritrean embassy in London even locked one of the Bank's lawyers in the diplomatic [Embassy] building until he agreed to leave without handing the court documents to officials. Another representative was apparently "physically assaulted" by a receptionist who threw the court papers onto the pavement outside the Embassy's building. A British judge [perhaps fearing the worst] subsequently allowed the documents to be sent via email or post.

In August 2021, the US Federal court ordered Eritrea to pay the debt and the court's decision enables Qatar Bank to identify and seize Eritrea's overseas assets. The whole Qatar Bank episode would be laughable, if it was not true. It demonstrates the typical characteristics of the regime in Asmara.

It is no wonder Eritrea has been consistently identified as highly corrupt by Transparency International, and was ranked the 21<sup>st</sup> most corrupt nation in the world in 2020<sup>572</sup> (the same ranking as 2019).<sup>573</sup> Furthermore, the 2017 Natural Resource Governance Index, which measures the governance standards of developing countries' extractive industries, ranks Eritrea in 89<sup>th</sup> place- last- and the country's state-owned mining company is categorised as the worst governed state enterprise.<sup>574</sup>

The above are some of many examples that unequivocally demonstrate Eritrea, under its self-appointed President for life, is one of the most fraudulent and corrupt nations<sup>575</sup> on earth. The Eritrean people have been denied their human rights to live under the rule of law and enjoy the democracy they fought so hard to establish. They have also been denied their economic and social development rights under Article 8 of the constitution: "The State shall strive to create opportunities to ensure the fulfilment of citizens' rights to social justice and economic development and to fulfil their material and spiritual needs".

There is no question about it: Eritrea is and has become a mafia state<sup>576</sup> under the dictatorial and brutal regime of President Isaias.

### **7.3 United Nations Commission of Inquiry (COI)**

In 2014, the United Nations established a Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COI), with a mission "to investigate systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights in Eritrea with a view to ensuring full accountability".

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<sup>572</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/eritrea>

<sup>573</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index 2019 Results," Transparency International, available at: [https://www.transparency.org/files/content/pages/2019\\_CPI\\_Report\\_EN.pdf](https://www.transparency.org/files/content/pages/2019_CPI_Report_EN.pdf) [accessed 6 June 2020].

<sup>574</sup> National Resource Governance Institute, *2017 Resource Governance Index*, 12 July 2017, available at: <https://resourcegovernance.org/analysis-tools/publications/2017-resource-governance-index> [accessed 11 June 2020].

<sup>575</sup> The Eritrean Mafia Thriving in Juba (asmarino.com)

<sup>576</sup> (PDF) Eritrea: a mafia state | Martin Plaut - Academia.edu

Eritrea has been under the one-man rule of President Isaias since its independence. According to a World Bank report (2020) Eritrea “is one of, if not the most, repressive nations on the African continent, and is a repetitive perpetrator of human rights violations”<sup>577</sup>. The Asmara regime commits grotesque human rights violations on its own citizens. Some of these inhumane violations include:

- Absence of freedom of speech and expression, and targeting of journalists;
- Harassment and mass imprisonment of religious groups, and closures of houses of worship;
- Banned opposition parties and civic societies;
- Enforced disappearance, torture, other inhumane acts, including extrajudicial executions;
- Arbitrary and indefinite detention in overcrowded prisons with no access to legal representation;
- Enslavement in an open-ended mandatory national service at the age of 17, and sometimes 15, where conscripts are paid meagre wages and endure unbearable working conditions;
- Endemic and systemic rape and other sexual abuses by army officers and others;
- Forced to fight in foreign wars, including in the Tigray conflict;

The COI has had three Special Rapporteur since its inception; Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth (2014 – 2017), Ms. Daniela Kravetz (2018 – 2019) and the current Special Rapporteur, Dr. Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, who was appointed in 2020. All three Special Rapporteurs were denied access to the country by the Eritrean government although Ms Keetharuth was able to meet the Eritrean Ambassador to the UK and Republic of Ireland in London in January 2017. Accordingly, all the COI reports were based on testimonials gathered outside the country and information collated from human right groups, experts, diplomats, media reports, members of the Eritrean diaspora and others.

To date, and since June 2015, the COI Special Rapporteurs have submitted annual reports<sup>578</sup> to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and their mandate routinely extended for an additional 12 months, with the next report due in June 2022. Each of these reports contain common themes of gross human rights abuses in Eritrea and the reports have become predictable in their contents by the international community and human rights activists. The findings of the seven COI reports so far can be summarised as follows:

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<sup>577</sup> Jørgen Juel Andersen, Niels Johannesen, Bob Rijkers , World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 9150, Elite Capture of Foreign Aid Evidence from Offshore Bank Accounts, February 2020  
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/493201582052636710/pdf/Elite-Capture-of-Foreign-Aid-Evidence-from-Offshore-Bank-Accounts.pdf>

<sup>578</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/ColEritrea/Pages/ReportColEritrea.aspx>

- The constitution of 1997 has never been implemented, and that the judiciary is not independent;
- Systematic, widespread, and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed by the government of Eritrea and that there is no accountability for them (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 66);
- The violations in the areas of extrajudicial executions, torture (including sexual torture), national service and forced labour may constitute crimes against humanity (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 66);
- The PFDJ, the ruling party in Eritrea, has held on to power by progressively dismantling or refraining from implementing reforms aimed at establishing democracy and the rule of law” (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 67);
- The PFDJ has established a system by which an extraordinary number of individuals have the power to spy on Eritreans and conduct investigations and arrests often without observing the law (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 67);
- Eritreans are unable to move at will, to express themselves freely, to practice their religion without undue influence, to enjoy unrestricted access to information or to have the liberty to assemble and associate (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 71). It notes the government’s use of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions to prevent the rise of any opposing views;
- Arbitrary detention is ubiquitous in Eritrea, and raised explicit concern about the number of officials misusing the power of arrest (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 73);
- The practice of keeping detainees in incommunicado detention or in isolation with total disregard for international standards is widespread (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 73) - and are routinely subject to forms of ill-treatment that, in many cases, amount to torture (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 74); and
- The duration of national service is indefinite; its conditions violate international standards and conscripts are severely underpaid. As such, it is an institution where slavery-like practices take place, COI (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 77).
- The use of forced labour is so prevalent in Eritrea that all sectors of the economy rely on it, and all Eritreans are likely to be subject to it at some stage in their lives, from which the government profits (A/HRC/29/42, paragraph 78).

In June 2016 and subsequent reports, the COI reported it had “reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity, namely: enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, other inhumane acts, persecution, rape, and murder, have been committed in Eritrea since 1991 (A/HRC/32/47, paragraph 59).

In his June 2021 report<sup>579</sup> to the UN Human Rights Council, Dr Babiker, asked, in addition to highlighting the above findings, for accountability for the alleged serious human rights violations committed by Eritrean army in Tigray, including abduction and forced return of Eritrean refugees. The Special Rapporteur urged international organisations and business enterprises to avoid financing projects in Eritrea “that

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<sup>579</sup> G2110621 - Special Rap - June 21.pdf

may potentially violate or have an adverse impact on human rights.” Page 7, para 26.

There is always, without exception, an outcry from the international community, including the UN, each year these COI reports are released repeating the same human rights abuses year after year, and the mandate extended by the UN for another year. No concert action has ever been taken against Eritrea for flagrantly ignoring the COI recommendations and its international obligations. It makes a mockery of the COI and impossible to fathom the purpose of the COI for human rights groups and the Eritrean people.

The UN and the international communities’ inaction encourages the regime in Asmara to carry out even more grotesque atrocities on its own people and now in the region with impunity, setting a bad precedent to other bad actors in the continent and beyond.

#### **7.4 The Eritrea/Ethiopia War Pact**

When asked by Reuters in May 2008 about Eritrea normalisation relations with Ethiopia, President Isaias incoherently remarked "It's too late. It could have been mended a long time ago without going and resorting to this unnecessary war ... If you can be an angel or someone like Christ, maybe."

In September 2018, over two years before the start of the Tigray war in November 2020, President Isaias and PM Abiy met with the then President of Tigray, Debretsion. President Isaias asked Debretsion: “why are you preparing for war?” Debretsion apparently replied “it won’t happen.” Isaias follows up this engagement in a televised interview<sup>580</sup> he gave in February 2021 in which he says, after listening what Debretsion had to say, “we started to carefully study the situation and to make our own preparations [for war].” Adding “the TPLF seemed concerned about potential attacks from the south and Eritrea in the north.”

President Isaias and PM Abiy were therefore preparing for war just over two months after signing the agreement and over two years before the start of the Tigray war, thus making the agreement a war pact against the Tigrayans rather than a peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

##### *The genesis of the war pact*

It must be recalled that the Eritrean government unashamedly blamed Ethiopia and the international community for all its problems and refused to take any responsibility for the economic collapse and international isolation of the country. In its African Commission on Human and People’s Rights report (2017)<sup>581</sup>, the Eritrean government blamed its failures on "the border war with Ethiopia and the subsequent ongoing existential threat against Eritrea". This threat was used as an excuse to subject the Eritrean people to grotesque human rights abuses for almost two decades leading up to the agreement between the two countries in 2018.

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<sup>580</sup> A complete English translation of Isaias Afwerki’s Eritrean TV Interview, 17 February 2021 – ASENA TV

<sup>581</sup> Africa-Charter-Eritrea-Report.pdf (eritreahub.org) Pursuant to Article 62, African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights



Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was elected on 2 April 2018. Within 64 days of his election, on 5 June, he waved an olive branch to the Eritrean government declaring Ethiopia's full acceptance of the 2002 Ethiopia–Eritrea Boundary Commission ruling, without preconditions<sup>582</sup>. The two countries had fought an all-out war around the border town of Badame between 1998 and 2000 in which approximately 100,000 lives were lost, no one knows the exact numbers.

The announcement caught the Eritrean Authorities off-guard. When contacted by Reuters on the day of the announcement, Eritrea's Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel said he had not yet seen the Ethiopian government's statement, so could not immediately comment. A day later, he tweeted "Our position is crystal clear and has been so for 16 years". Nevertheless, the agreement was signed on 9 July 2018. Following the signing of the agreement, PM Abiy Ahmed said "Now there is no border between Ethiopia and Eritrea.<sup>583</sup> That borderline has gone today...love is greater than modern weapons. War is not an option for the people of Eritrea and Ethiopia. What we need now is love."<sup>584</sup> He was loudly applauded by the audience for his remarks, including President Isaias who stood next to him.

*The so called "peace agreement" welcomed around the world*

**UNSC<sup>585</sup>:** The Security Council in a statement said, "this represents a historic and significant development with far-reaching positive consequences for the Horn of Africa and beyond." It added that members "stand ready to support Eritrea and Ethiopia in their implementation of the Joint Declaration."

**African Union<sup>586</sup>:** The chairperson of the AU praised the two leaders for "choosing the courageous path of reconciliation, in the interest of their people, the region and Africa as a whole." He further remarked the agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia is "a milestone in Africa's efforts to silence the guns by 2020".

**European Union<sup>587</sup>:** "The signing of the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship represents an historic and courageous move by Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and paves the way for enhanced regional cooperation and stability in the Horn of Africa." It added, the EU stands ready to mobilise the support needed ....".

**United States<sup>588</sup>:** Said "We commend Prime Minister Abiy of Ethiopia and President Isaias of Eritrea for courageously leading their citizens towards peace, prosperity, and political reform. The normalization of relations and the adoption of the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia will provide their peoples with the opportunity to focus on shared aspirations for closer political,

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<sup>582</sup> Ethiopia says will 'fully accept, implement' 2000 deal with Eritrea | Reuters announced it would fully accept and implement - Search (bing.com)

<sup>583</sup> Explained: What did Nobel Peace winner Abiy Ahmed do to end 20-year-old Ethiopia-Eritrea war? | Explained News, The Indian Express

<sup>584</sup> After making peace, Ethiopia and Eritrea now focus on development | Africa Renewal (un.org)

<sup>585</sup> Security Council Press Statement on Signing of Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia on 9 July 2018 | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

<sup>586</sup> Statement of the Chairperson of African Union Commission on the relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia | African Union (au.int)

<sup>587</sup> 2018 Eritrea–Ethiopia summit - Wikipedia

<sup>588</sup> 2018 Eritrea–Ethiopia summit - Wikipedia

economic, and social ties. The United States stands ready to support this process ....”

*United Kingdom*<sup>589</sup>: Said “Prime Minister Abiy and President Isaias have taken a momentous step towards building a lasting peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea”

The exact contents of the “peace agreement” remain a mystery for both the Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples. Nevertheless, the announcement was welcomed by a significant majority of the Eritrean people both in the country and in diaspora with minor opposition from the residents of the border town of Tsorena and Irobs. In Asmara thousands danced on the street in jubilation and Eritreans in diaspora celebrated to welcome the start of the new relation between the two countries. In Ethiopia, various events were held to celebrate the mystery peace accord in which the two leaders held hands and blew kisses to the crowds. At one such event President Isaias and PM Abiy even exchanged rings in what has been subsequently dubbed as the “first gay marriage in Africa.” The border between Ethiopia and Eritrea opened and flights between Addis and Asmara resumed enabling citizens of both countries to see their loved ones for the first time in two decades.

At country level, the UN sanctions imposed as a result of Eritrea’s dealings with Djibouti and its support for Al Shabaab (extremists’ group) in Somalia, were declared “likely to become obsolete”<sup>590</sup> by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres. The UN sanctions were formally lifted in November 2018, President Isaias’ achieving one of his objectives, hence removing his isolation from the international community which he so desperately desired for many years despite his outwardly denial.

#### *PM Abiy Nobel Peace Prize Award*

On 10 December 2019 (exactly 11 months before he declared war on Tigray), PM Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian Nobel Committee apparently to “embolden him to make further reforms in his country”.<sup>591</sup> The award looked premature then, undeserved now and akin to awarding full marks to students before they actually sit their examinations.

In his award ceremony in Oslo, PM Abiy roared to the delight of his hosts making comments that have since transpired hollow and deceitful. He said, “War is the epitome of hell for all involved and I know because I was there.”<sup>592</sup> This while he was in the middle of planning a catastrophic war in Tigray. Furthermore, he said “he accepts the award on behalf of Africans and citizens of the world for whom the dream of peace has often turned into a nightmare of war.” This was the time when the AU was proactively campaigning to “silence guns in Africa by 2020”.

PM Abiy declared war on Tigray in November 2020 causing the death of tens of thousands of civilians and displacement of millions of people.

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<sup>589</sup> 2018 Eritrea–Ethiopia summit - Wikipedia

<sup>590</sup> UN chief says sanctions on Eritrea likely to become obsolete - Africa - World - Ahram Online

<sup>591</sup> Nobel Peace Prize should encourage Abiy on reform path - African Business and Abiy's reforms embolden Ethiopian regionalists - African Business

<sup>592</sup> PM Abiy Ahmed Becomes First Ethiopian to Receive Nobel Prize at Tadias Magazine – full transcript of Abiy's acceptance speech. In hindsight it has proved to be fake speech.

On 1 December 2020, Eritrea Focus wrote to the Nobel Committee<sup>593</sup> asking them to rescind the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize from Prime Minister Abiy because of his “failure to secure a comprehensive peace with Eritrea and to bring peace to his own country—the promise of which was the explicit reason the Nobel Committee gave for the award.” Eritrea Focus received no reply.

In July 2021, Ms Hebrat Berhe, a prominent former Eritrean Ambassador to Scandinavia and a brave woman who fought courageously for the independence of her country for a quarter of a century, wrote to the Nobel Committee<sup>594</sup> asking them to withdraw the prize awarded to PM Abiy. That request, along with many others, failed on the deaf ears of the Norwegian Noble Committee.

The most the Norwegian Nobel Committee has done so far is to call on all parties “to end the escalating violence and to solve disagreements and conflicts by peaceful means”<sup>595</sup>. The Committee has refused to revoke PM Abiy’s award. This leaves a lasting and ugly stain on the Nobel Committee, especially since November 2021 when PM Abiy said, “he was going to the warfront to lead his troops”. A peace laureate turned a warlord.

#### *The peace agreement that transpired to be a war pact*

Within months of the peace agreement the borders between Eritrea and Ethiopia closed once again without any explanation from either government. The actual reason (s) remain unknown to this day, as are the terms of the peace arrangement. The people of Ethiopia and Eritrea have not seen any tangible benefits from the peace agreement - there is no trade and the border between the two countries remains unmarked. The only link between the two countries is by intermittent flights that are out of bounds and unaffordable for most of the peoples.

The ending of the “no peace, no war” between Ethiopia and Eritrea that seemed to bring the 20-year-old stalemate was welcomed by the people. However, the peace negotiations between the two countries did not involve the key stakeholder, the Tigrayans (TPLF), whose territory borders the disputed area. The TPLF were rightly concerned by PM Abiy’s insistence to resolve the border dispute with Eritrea without involving them. PM Abiy could not involve the TPLF even if he wanted to (although there is no evidence of that) because President Isaias had repeatedly called for the destruction of the TPLF. And he blamed the TPLF for the 1998-2000 border war, which Eritrea lost, the sanctions imposed on Eritrea by the UN leading to its 20-year isolation from the international community.

The TPLF concerns and suspicions were real and based on numerous statements President Isaias made before and after the peace agreement. In May 2018, a few weeks before the Joint declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia, he declared, “It was Game Over” and that ‘the junta’ [TPLF] was “dead”. This wish to annihilate the Tigrayans is further supported in President Isaias’ February 2021 televised interview<sup>596</sup> in which he says, “we were monitoring the

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<sup>593</sup> [Appeal to the Nobel Committee: Remove PM Abiy's Peace Prize - Eritrea Hub](#)

<sup>594</sup> [Open letter to the Norwegian Nobel Committee from former Eritrean ambassador - Eritrea Hub](#)

<sup>595</sup> [Nobel body slams Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed over war & humanitarian disaster in Tigray \(republicworld.com\) and Nobel Body Criticizes Nobel Peace Prize Winner Abiy Over War | Time](#)

<sup>596</sup> [A complete English translation of Isaias Afwerki's Eritrean TV Interview, 17 February 2021 – ASENA TV](#)

situation in Tigray and preparing ourselves [for war] since 2018, and now supporting Ethiopia in its efforts.”

The above assertions by President Isaias and PM Abiy’s decision to exclude the TPLF from the peace negotiations, clearly demonstrate the agreement the two leaders signed was not for peace but rather a pact for the destruction of their common enemy, the TPLF. It was a war pact and a catalyst for the horrific Tigray war.

## 7.5 Eritrea’s involvement in the Tigray War

Eritrea under the rule of President Isaias is known as a trouble-maker country world-wide. In 2003, the then Prime Minister of Ethiopia remarked “It is a fact that Eritrea has problems with all its neighbours”<sup>597</sup> and the then President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh echoed his comments adding “Eritrea has problems with neighbouring countries, and the only way out is for it to have dialogue and not confrontation.” Alas, the lesson has not been learned and Eritrea continues to cause mayhem in the region and beyond unabated.

Since independence in 1993, after 30-year war with Ethiopia, Eritrea has fought wars with<sup>598</sup>; Sudan (1995), Yemen over the Hanish Islands (1995), the Republic of Congo (1997), the border war with Ethiopia (1998 – 2000), border war with Djibouti (2008 -), support for al-Shabaab in Somali (2011) and its alleged involvement in the Civil War in Yemen between the Houthi and Sunni (2014 -) and of course the current Tigray war (2020 -). A total of eight wars over a 27-year period. This means Eritrea gets involved in one war on another almost every three years under the warmonger and trigger-happy ruler, President Isaias.

Following the signing of the peace accord between Eritrea and Ethiopia, President Isaias declared it was “game over” and that the TPLF, whom he repeatedly promised to destroy and had a long-held grudge, was “dead.” He went further in his February 2021 televised interview and said “In the last two to three years, as corrective measures were taken in Ethiopia, we had an obligation, not a choice, to support the country and to help bring peace and stability. We have been monitoring the situation in Tigray and preparing ourselves [for war] since 2018, and now supporting Ethiopia in its efforts”. The President made these remarks despite repeated denial at that time of Eritrea’s involvement in the Tigray war. For example, when the US Embassy tweeted on 5 February 2021 saying “The United States has asked the Eritrean government to withdraw its forces from Tigray immediately and adding, we continue to call for independent and transparent investigations into reports of looting, sexual violence, assaults on refugee camps and other human rights abuses and accountability for those responsible.”<sup>599</sup> Predictably, the Ministry of Information in Eritrea tweeted “Eritrea rejects the unwarranted statement posted on Facebook today by the US Embassy in Asmara and the false and presumptive allegations that it floats.” This denial by the Eritrean Ministry of Information was contradicted by

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<sup>597</sup> [BBC NEWS | World | Africa | Eritrea 'region's trouble-maker'](#)

<sup>598</sup> [List of wars involving Eritrea - Wikipedia + support for Al Shabaab and the Yemeni civil war](#)

<sup>599</sup> [Eritrean government's fury after US Embassy posts call for Eritrean troops to leave Tigray - Eritrea Hub](#)

Prime Minister Abiy's statement a few weeks later, 26 March 2021, saying that "Eritrea had agreed to withdraw its forces from the Tigray region."<sup>600</sup>

On 17 April 2021, Eritrea acknowledged for the first time its forces were taking part in the Tigray conflict and "promised to pull them out" in a letter written by its Ambassador to the UN and addressed to the Security Council, which was posted online by the country's Information Minister<sup>601</sup>. On 4 June 2021, Ethiopia announced that "the Eritrean forces had begun their withdrawal from the northern region of Tigray". Most recently, following the imposition of sanctions on Eritrea by the United States on 12 November 2021, the Ethiopian government<sup>602</sup> said "The Government of Eritrea has evacuated its military forces from Ethiopia following the declaration of the Unilateral Humanitarian Ceasefire by the Government of Ethiopia at the end of June 2021."

In the initial stages of the conflict, Eritrea had reportedly deployed as many as three-quarters of its armed forces reaching Tigray from many fronts making it impossible for the Tigrayans to maintain their defensive lines. Eritrean forces active engagement in the conflict has somewhat declined over the last six months. However, it is evident Eritrean troops remain in large numbers in the west and north of Tigray. There are also reports of Eritrean troops and security services operating alongside Amhara forces and the federal army on the Ethiopia-Sudan border as well as in the Oromia region, including Addis Ababa.

To those who closely follow political developments in the Horn of Africa, Eritrea's involvement in the Tigray war did not come as a surprise. Isaias will continue to destabilise the region unless he sees sense and accepts diplomacy (which is unlikely) or through the use of force. In 1998, Isaias rejected a peace proposal negotiated by the United States, Rwanda, and the African Union. It was the use of force that finally got him to sign the "Cessation of hostilities agreement in Algiers in 2000."<sup>603</sup> It is unlikely it will be any different this time too.

## 7.6 About Sanctions

### *Introduction*

Sanctions programmes, as we know them today are a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. The first sanctions were imposed in 1935 by the League of Nations, precursor to the UN, against Italy for the invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia). The sanctions failed to force change in Italy because France and Britain refused to implement them<sup>604</sup>.

*Types of sanctions:* There are several types of sanctions, including:

*Diplomatic sanctions* - political measures taken to express disapproval of the target country's action. They include limitations or cancellations of high-level government visits and/or expelling or withdrawing diplomatic missions or staff.

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<sup>600</sup> [Ethiopia announces the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from the Tigray region \(easternherald.com\)](https://www.easternherald.com)

<sup>601</sup> [Eritrea confirms its troops are fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray | News | Al Jazeera](https://www.aljazeera.com)

<sup>602</sup> [Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea responses to US sanctions - Eritrea Hub](https://www.eritreahub.com)

<sup>603</sup> [Why Eritrea Won't Leave Ethiopia \(foreignpolicy.com\)](https://www.foreignpolicy.com)

<sup>604</sup> <https://thesentry.org/reports/beyond-carrots-better-sticks/>

*Economic sanctions* - commercial and financial restrictions applied by one or more countries against a state, entities or individuals, and may include trade barriers, such as tariffs. Food and medicine are exempt.

*Military sanctions* - can range from carefully targeted military strikes to arms embargo and threats of military action.

*Sport sanctions* – prevent or disqualify of one country's people/teams from competing in international events.

*Environmental sanctions* - preserving the environment and the safeguarding of natural resources.

*Travel sanctions* – restrictions on travel for all or some nationals of a country, a ban on travel to rebel-held territory within a country, an aviation ban on all flights into or out of a country, etc.

### *UN Sanctions Regime*

After the UN was founded in October 1945, sanctions were added to its Charter (VII), “giving the UNSC responsibility for imposing and monitoring sanctions”. In the initial stages of the Charter, sanctions were rarely used. Only two sanctions were imposed in the first 45 years to 1990 both in Africa; Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) and apartheid, South Africa<sup>605</sup>.

The UN has the authority and responsibility to respond to global threats by implementing sanctions according to its Charter (VII)<sup>606</sup>, to prevent “a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression.” The sanctions must pass the UNSC with a majority vote and without a veto. This i.e., veto has hampered sanctions efforts with notoriously human rights abuser countries such as China and Russia vetoing proposals largely for their own self-interest. Opponents of sanctions argue the veto power is undemocratic and a tool for the permanent members to advance to advance their international sphere of influence.

UN sanctions are currently imposed on a number of countries, including Afghanistan, North Korea, Iran, and Yemen. At least six African countries are under UN sanctions, The Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo), Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Somalia, and South Sudan. According to a 2015 UN study on sanctions, 68% of sanctions imposed between 1991 and 2013 were on African states.

The UN sanctions must be complied with by all UN member states (Article 2.2) and, as a result they are the most powerful sanction tools. The EU adopts all UN sanctions, and also has the ability to impose its own sanctions in line with the stated objectives of the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy i.e., promoting EU interest, international peace, and security.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Eritrea confirms its troops are fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray | News | Al Jazeera

<sup>606</sup> Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51) | United Nations

<sup>607</sup> Restrictive measures (sanctions) | European Commission (europa.eu)

## *US, EU and UK Sanctions Regimes*

Along with the UN sanctions regime, which is applicable to all UN members states, the US, the EU, UK operate additional sanctions regimes, alongside, in some limited cases, the African Union. They deal with a specific area, often referred to as “thematic” sanctions regimes, for example, human rights and corruption, and “country” sanctions regimes that focus on one specific country, although the underlying reasons for the sanctions’ designations are often similar, including human rights and rule of law. Since the three key tools the UN and the international community have to get bad actors to change behaviour is through; (a) diplomacy engagement, (b) sanctions and (c) as a last resort a threat and/or use of a military action. Sanctions are therefore seen to be “doing something” to avoid a conflict where there is lack of diplomatic progress, or it has failed. As such and according to Wikipedia, international sanctions are “political and economic tools that are part of diplomatic efforts against countries, entities and individuals that are applied unilaterally or multilaterally to protect international law, end conflicts and deter human right abuses [including corruption]”<sup>608</sup>. Sanctions can; name and shame, isolate perpetrators from the international community, draw attention to expected norms and reduce revenue streams that can be used to finance conflicts/wars and human rights abuses.

Sanctions are often referred to as either “targeted” or “comprehensive” in nature. Targeted sanctions are applied against individuals and entities, and are generally considered to be more effective in combating bad actors than comprehensive sanctions that target an entire state which can have unintended consequences and

Potentially harm the people rather than the perpetrators and are also perceived to hamper humanitarian aid.

### *European Union Sanctions*

Given that all EU member states are UN members, the EU automatically adopts UN sanctions. In addition to its obligations under the UN sanctions regime, the EU also operates a number of additional sanctions regimes, including both country and thematic regimes. In December 2020, the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime or the European Magnitsky Act came into effect. Whilst the EU has for decades-imposed sanctions on individuals and entities for human rights abuses under country sanctions regimes, this is the first time the EU had a thematic regime specifically designed to target human rights abusers, wherever they are in the worlds. The Act makes provisions for targeted sanctions against any individual involved in gross human rights violations outside the EU borders<sup>609</sup>. As with the US Global Magnitsky Act, the EU Act permits the EU to maintain a list of human rights violators around the globe, imposing on them various sanctions, such as visa bans or asset freezes, on behalf of the entire bloc.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51) | United Nations

<sup>609</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-imposes-further-sanctions-over-serious-violations-of-human-rights-around-the-world/>

<sup>610</sup> Habemus a European Magnitsky Act – European Law Blog

The EU adopts all UN sanctions, and also has the ability to impose its own sanctions in line with the stated objectives of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy i.e., promoting EU interest, international peace and security.<sup>611</sup>

According to its sanctions policy, the EU imposes sanctions "to uphold respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance." The EU currently has sanctions regimes with regards to 26 countries around the world, including arms embargoes, trade restrictions, financial restrictions, and travel and visa bans. EU member states must unanimously agree on sanctions. In Africa, the EU country regime include; Burundi, CAR, Congo, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

EU member states may also impose their own individual sanctions programs without EU approval.

### *United States Sanctions*

The United States maintains several tools to deter and hold accountable human rights abusers and corrupt officials across the globe. The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability (The Magnitsky) Act<sup>612</sup> was signed into law in December 2016 with initial jurisdiction on Russia only. In December 2017, the Magnitsky Act scope was expanded into the "Global Magnitsky sanctions program" and relevant human rights and anti-corruption guidelines.

The Global Magnitsky Act gives power to the US Treasury (Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)) to "block or revoke US visas and to freeze all US-based property and interests in property of foreign persons (both individuals and entities)" who have engaged in; (a) serious human rights abuse and (b) acts of corruption including the transfer or the facilitation of the transfer of the proceeds of corruption.<sup>613</sup>

The US has used this tool extensively. As of November 2020, 215 individuals and entities, from 28 countries, had been designated under the Global Magnitsky Program; 128 persons have been designated for corruption only, 72 for human rights abuses only, and 15 on both grounds.<sup>614</sup>

Examples of US sanctions on grounds of Human Rights abuses are:

*Gambia (December 2017)* - 14 persons were sanctioned for killing and torturing political opponents and journalists as well as for abuses and mistreatment of detainees.

*Myanmar (July 2021)* - 11 persons affiliated with Burmese military forces were sanctioned for their involvement in the "Rohingya Genocide, specifically ethnic cleansing in Rakhine State and other widespread human rights abuses in Kachin

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<sup>611</sup> Restrictive measures (sanctions) | European Commission (europa.eu)

<sup>612</sup> Sanctions Fact Sheet No. 2 - Global Magnitsky (humanrightsfirst.org)

<sup>613</sup> Sanctions Fact Sheet No. 1 - General Overview (humanrightsfirst.org)

<sup>614</sup> Sanctions Fact Sheet No. 1 - General Overview (humanrightsfirst.org) and Where is OFAC's Country List? What countries do I need to worry about in terms of U.S. sanctions? | U.S. Department of the Treasury



and Shan States, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence and torture against civilians<sup>615</sup>.”

China (July 2020) - 6 high-ranking Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials, for their involvement in human rights abuses committed against Uyghers and other minorities in Xinjiang Province.

The United States has used both comprehensive and targeted sanctions. However, after the failure in Iraq, the United States has enacted more targeted rather than comprehensive sanctions to mitigate unintended consequences of harming innocent civilians and/or hinder humanitarian aid.

### *United Kingdom*

In July 2020, the UK enacted its own Magnitsky-style sanctions regime, the Global Human Rights Sanctions regime (GHR)<sup>616</sup> which allows the UK to freeze the assets of and impose travel bans on any individual or entity determined to have seriously violated: (a) right to life, (b) right to not be subjected to torture or cruel, unusual, or degrading treatment; or (c) right to be free from slavery, to not be held in servitude, or not be required to perform forced or compulsory labour. Whilst the number of human rights currently covered by the GHR is relatively limited, the conduct that is covered, often referred to as the “involved person test” is wide and allows for sanctions designation not only on those who commit violations within the scope of GHR but also, inter alia, those who facilitate, incite, promote, provide support or profit from such violations.

According to UK government guidance, “A range of activity could potentially result in designation, including:

- Rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and enforced sterilisation;
- Enforced disappearances;
- Extrajudicial killings;
- Human trafficking, in so far as it constitutes slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or forced and compulsory labour; and
- Killings of or violence against human rights defenders, media workers, journalists, as well as violence or killings motivated on the grounds of an individual’s religion or belief.

Sanctions may also be imposed on entities that are owned or controlled by those involved in violations. There is no requirement to demonstrate that violations were perpetrated by or on behalf of a state. As of December 2020, a total of 65 individuals and three entities had been sanctioned under the UK regulations<sup>617</sup>.

### *Do sanctions work?*

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<sup>615</sup> [The United States Takes Further Actions against the Burmese Military Regime - United States Department of State](#)

<sup>616</sup> [Magnitsky legislation - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

<sup>617</sup> [Magnitsky legislation - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

There is no sanctions effectiveness metric or measure given the number of sanctions and how their impact may be influenced by other factors. Therefore, the effectiveness, both pros and cons, have been hotly debated for many years<sup>618</sup>.

In 2019, The Sentry examined seven African countries for which sanctions are or were imposed by the UN, EU, and US to assess their effectiveness to achieve the desired outcome. The result of the study was published in a report: “Beyond Carrot, Better Sticks” in October 2019<sup>619</sup>. The author, with the permission of The Sentry, has tabulated below a summary of the purpose/reason and indicative outcome of the sanctions programme for each of the seven countries analysed by The Sentry. This is to help inform what the potential implications might be if similar sanctions were to be imposed on Eritrea for its gross human rights abuses on its own people for a generation, and its involvement in the horrific Tigray war currently unfolding in Ethiopia.

The summary tables below, extracted from “beyond Carrots, Better Sticks, report shows the different types of sanctions imposed by the EU, UN, and US against the seven countries, the intended purpose and outcome. Any error in the tabulation and misinterpretation are that of the authors, hence the summary must be read in conjunction with The Sentry’s full report.

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<sup>618</sup> Examining The Impact Of U.S. Sanctions Against Other Countries : NPR and Transcript-HFAC-Impact-of-Sanctions-in-Africa-Hrg-2021.pdf ([charityandsecurity.org](https://charityandsecurity.org))

<sup>619</sup> Beyond Carrots, Better Sticks - The Sentry

Country Sanctioned	Sanctioned By & Date	Sanction Type & Purpose/Reason	Outcome
Liberia	<p>Imposed by the UN (2001), EU (2006), UN (added diamond trade embargo and human rights) in 2003 and the US in 2004.</p> <p>The US lifted its sanctions in 2015 and the rest were removed in 2016.</p>	<p>Diamond embargo unless certified, travel bans for government and military officials and from 2003 violation of existing sanctions and human rights abuses.</p> <p>Multilateral effort, with strong UN action and enforcement by members states. The sanctions goals were to end violence in Liberia and neighbouring Sierra Leone.</p>	<p>Generally accepted as a success. The programme was reviewed and updated regularly, and the sanctions were lifted when behaviour changed.</p> <p>The Fowler Report to UNSC (2000) was used to identify loopholes in the programme by a panel of experts and “name and shame” the war revenue stream through diamond trade and arms coming through Sierra Leone. The breach was halted after the “naming and shaming” of the preparators.</p> <p>President Charles Taylor, who was actively involved in the financing of the war, was replaced by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in 2006. The new President extradited Taylor and he stood trial in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, found guilty on 11 counts and sentenced to 50 years in prison for “crimes against humanity”.</p>
Zimbabwe (Under President Mugabe)	EU (2002) and lifted in 2011, US (2003) and lifted in 2011 and 2014.	An arms embargo and targeted sanctions on selected individuals and entities, included asset freezes and travel bans for targeted ZANU-PF officials. The sanctions were imposed against Zimbabwe to institute democratic reforms, improve human rights and transparency around	The consensus among experts is that the sanctions against Zimbabwe were ineffective in changing the behaviour of the elite ZANU-PF members. Opponents of the programme argue “The measures have neither brought down the Mugabe government nor influenced its behaviour.”

		<p>elections, following what western observers described as “deeply flawed” 2002 general election.</p>	<p>In 2009, however, there was a limited success with the government agreeing to power-sharing with opposition groups. By and large, it appears sanctions were ineffective because of poor messaging, inconsistent attention, and little enforcement by the US and EU governments. The US and the EU were not sending the same message and as a result the sanctions could not gain multilateral support for UNSC sanctions.</p> <p>President Mugabe also effectively countered played the inconsistent and uncoordinated messaging from the EU and the US - labelling it as a racist western-meddling in Zimbabwe’s internal affairs, designed to bring down the government. This powerful “Africanisation” message worked, and many African leaders were united behind Mugabe, hence the sanctions were not supported by the AU.</p> <p>The lack of multilateral and regional support, inconsistent and uncoordinated messaging by the US and AU, effective counter-messaging by the Zimbabwean government and ineffective enforcement were, arguably, the key reasons for the failure of the Zimbabwe sanctions programme.</p> <p>However, the country’s economic collapse may be attributable to corruption and mismanagement rather than sanctions because the crises continued well after the sanctions were lifted, and to this day.</p>
Sudan	US (State sponsor of terror) in 1993, US (comprehensive	Sudan has been under; State sponsor of terror, Darfur-related human rights and arms embargo or	Despite the combined US, UN, and EU sanctions the Bashir regime remained in place, hence the sanctions regime against Sudan is often deemed a failure,

	<p>sanctions) in 1997 which was lifted in 2017, EU and UN (Darfur arms embargo) in 2004, US (Darfur related sanctions) in 2006, UN (Darfur Human rights related sanctions) in 2006.</p>	<p>human rights sanctions by the US, UN, and the EU since 1993.</p> <p>Although the aim of the sanctions was not stated, it was perceived to be regime change i.e., for President Bashir to step down.</p> <p>Officially, the sanctions were imposed against Sudan for its ties to Islamist terrorist groups, including al-Qaida, ongoing efforts to destabilise neighbouring governments, gross human rights violations and the Darfur conflict.</p>	<p>especially the US “comprehensive sanctions” that prohibit commercial activity with an entire country. Sudanese banks were unable to trade in US. dollars due to sanctions causing liquidity crisis and as a result a large dollar’s black market emerged.</p> <p>Sudanese government officials consistently raised sanctions with US officials, an indication perhaps that the programme was hurting. Over time marked behaviour changes by the Sudanese government occurred that showed some success of the international community’s strategy to force Sudan to cut ties with terrorists and end its grave human rights abuses. Sudan ended its destabilising activities in South Sudan and cessation of hostilities in Darfur.</p> <p>The Sudanese economy continued to deteriorate despite the lifting of sanctions fueled by endemic corruption. In December 2018, peaceful protests across the country started demanding change and lasted for months despite security forces’ violent attempts to silence them. In April 2019, Bashir was removed from power by the military.</p> <p>The Sudanese government constantly blamed sanctions, despite the rampant corruption, for the failing economy. But it later became apparent that the sluggish economy was largely due to corruption and mismanagement by the elite.</p> <p>Arguably, sanctions by themselves did not bring down the Bashir regime but were catalysts and helped to isolate the regime.</p>
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<p>South Sudan</p>	<p>The UN, US, and EU (South Sudan sanctions program) in 2014 - imposes targeted sanctions on individuals for threatening peace, security, or stability. UN and EU (arms embargo) in 2018.</p>	<p>After a long struggle for freedom, South Sudan gained its independence from Sudan in July 2011. Two years after independence, the new nation descended into a bloody civil war that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions.</p> <p>The UN, US and the EU have all used sanctions to address the crisis, punish officials for gross human rights abuses and the theft of public money intended for the country's development</p>	<p>Most experts tend to agree the sanctions against South Sudan were ineffective at bringing about peace to the country and stopping the civil war. This may be because, a "strong political signal" was not sent clear enough to the South Sudan elite responsible for the violence but also corruption.</p> <p>South Sudanese government officials were, however, fearful of more sanctions although behaviour change has been scant. All of the sanctions programmes remain in place but are not being closely monitored nor enforced.</p> <p>The Sentry report concludes by saying "Unfortunately, the United States and other governments do not exhibit the same backbone when enforcing sanctions for human rights abuses as they do for terrorism. In the case of South Sudan, where abusive leaders had siphoned stolen money into Kenyan and Ugandan banks, the United States and other members of the Security Council failed to put the same kind of pressure on the Kenyan and Ugandan governments to freeze those funds as they did with, for example, Al Shabaab's funds."</p>
<p>Burundi</p>	<p>The EU and US (2015) imposed targeted sanctions on selected individuals and entities.</p> <p>AU did not impose sanctions despite its Peace and Security Council recommendation.</p>	<p>Targeted sanctions against those found to undermine democracy, obstruct the search for a political solution and human rights abuses.</p> <p>After a long civil war, a peace accord was signed in 2005 and President Pierre Nkurunziza came to power. In April 2015 and after serving two</p>	<p>UNSC passed a resolution in 2016 to establish a Commission of Inquiry on Burundi to investigate human rights violations. Based on its findings, the ICC to open an investigation into crimes against humanity committed in Burundi. But the Burundian government decided to leave the ICC before prosecutions.</p> <p>The referendum to extend the president's term to 2034 passed but President Nkurunziza announced he would</p>

	UNSC could not impose sanctions on Burundi due to Russia's opposition.	terms - the constitutional maximum for Burundi, he announced he would run for re-election. A mass protest erupted and security forces violently cracked down on protesters.	step down after the 2020 presidential election. General Évariste Ndayishimiye was elected and became President of Burundi on 18 June 2020.  The goal of the Burundi sanctions programme was to end violence, prevent genocide (similar to that in Rwanda a few years before) or ethnic cleansing. And bring President Nkurunziza and the opposition to the negotiating table. To that extent, the Burundi sanctions are generally seen to be successful.
Central African Republic (CAR)	UN and EU (arms embargo (2013), UN (travel bans and assets freeze to select individuals and entities) in 2014, and US sanctions program (2014).	Arms embargo, travel ban and assets freeze. The conflict in CAR since 2012 prompted the UN, AU, US, and EU to impose sanctions against sanctions on individuals and entities that "undermine the peace, stability, or security of the country, or that threaten or impede the political transition process, or fuel violence."  The crisis began when armed groups (Séléka), started communal conflict and eventually their leader, Michel Djotodia, declared himself president. This turned into intercommunal violence which practically partitioned the country into two.	While the sanction programme was multilateral, they have been few in numbers and poorly enforced to be effective. CAR has largely cash-based economy, and very few of the designated militia leaders held bank accounts outside of local banks.  The stigma associated with sanctions had limited impact. While sanctions were not successful from financial point of view and hurt the perpetrators of mass atrocities, they did help draw world attention to the conflict and humanitarian aid/resources flow to the country.
Democratic Republic of Congo	The UN and EU (arms embargo) in 1993, UN (targeted travel and financial sanctions) in 2004, US (sanctions	Arms embargo and other sanctions mainly due to violence, human rights abuses by both the government and rebel groups, and government corruption.	Sustained international pressure against the regime through, consistent messaging and multilateral cooperation seemed to have worked. The sanctions were more effective because of the multilateral collaboration between, the EU, UNSC and the US.

	<p>program) in 2006 and EU (targeted sanctions for human rights violations) in 2016.</p> <p>The EU has partially removed the sanction imposed in 1993.</p>	<p>During and after the Rwandan genocide in 1994, millions of refugees fled to neighbouring DRC (then Zaire). The refugee camps were infiltrated by exiled Rwandan genocide perpetrators who terrorised the local population. President Mobutu then ordered all Rwandans out of DRC in 1996. This led to the eventual overthrow of President Mobutu and Rwanda and Uganda invading eastern Congo in 1998. A ceasefire agreement was signed in 1999 and established the UN to DRC Mission.</p> <p>In 2006, Joseph Kabila was elected president of DRC but ended up creating a corrupt regime. Rebel activities continued.</p>	<p>The multilateral nature of the sanctions raised concerns for the DRC government and caused economic hardship for the regime. In June 2017, the UNSC extended existing sanctions for another year, including the arms embargo, asset freezes, and travel bans. This may have contributed to President Kabila’s decision to step down at the end of 2018.</p> <p>The sanctions were said more impactful because DRC is a “highly dollarized economy” although some of Kabila’s associates switched from dollar to Euros to circumvent the sanctions. The EU Global Magnitsky Act was enacted in 2020 making it impossible to switch from dollar to EU or vice versa for bad actors.</p> <p>General election was held in December 2018 and Felix Tshisekedi became president in January 2019.</p>
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Some of the key messages/recommendations from the study<sup>620</sup> into the seven sanctioned African countries were; (a) the need for improved sanctions strategies, (b) effective coordination between governments and regional organisations, enhanced monitoring and (c) enforcement of sanctions. Targeted networks rather comprehensive sanctions were found to be more effective. Networks use local and international facilitators to track down illicit finances by bad actors e.g., money laundering to offshore bank accounts and disguised ownership of overseas assets to avoid sanctions.

In some African countries that are “cash based” - informal economies - the majority of the population have no bank accounts and it is generally the elite who have bank accounts. The termination of US dollar clearing as a result of sanctions would therefore hurt the elite more than the general public.

To improve sanctions programme, the study concluded; (i) multilateral sanctions were most effective, (ii) the intended goal must be clear, (iii) a pre-defined exit strategy will be needed, and (iv) sanctions must be enforced, reviewed and updated as necessary to remain effective.

#### *Unintended consequences:*

In formulating a sanctions programme, it is important that a careful assessment is made to ensure the disadvantages do not outweigh the advantages. As with most medicine, sanctions have their own “side effects,” but it would be foolish to argue they must not be imposed on bad actors provided the risks are properly evaluated and assessed. Some of the key areas that need proper risk-assessments before sanctions are imposed include:

- *Bank de-risking* - to mitigate the regulatory requirements that comes with sanctions, de-risking by banks can cause humanitarian crises because NGOs and others rely on the international financial system. Without access to this system at the local and international levels, it can be very difficult to distribute aid. Diaspora remittances may encounter difficulties leading to extortionate black markets or people carrying large quantities of cash to move to the intended destination, risking themselves in the process. In Somalia (2011), bank de-risking became one of the catalysts that is reportedly to have caused a fully blown famine that claimed the lives of 0.25 million people<sup>621</sup>. In some Horn of Africa countries, including Somalia, remittances represent about 1/3 of GDP.
- *Sanctions may hurt the people they are meant to help* - to mitigate against this risk, timely messaging to the population is critical and targeted network sanctions will be necessary. Even then, sanctions, especially in vibrant economies e.g. Ethiopia, may hurt some people. However, in countries where there are egregious violations, sanctions may be the necessary price to pay to bring conflicts and

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<sup>620</sup> <https://thesentry.org/reports/beyond-carrots-better-sticks/>

<sup>621</sup> [Transcript-HFAC-Impact-of-Sanctions-in-Africa-Hrg-2021.pdf \(charityandsecurity.org\)](https://www.charityandsecurity.org/transcript-hifac-impact-of-sanctions-in-africa-hrg-2021.pdf)

human rights abuses to an end.

- *Sanctions fatigue* – sanctions are less impactful if they go on for too long. Neighbouring countries will be unwilling to support sanctions. South Africa, for example, is said to have never supported the sanctions on Zimbabwe because of its impact on its own economy and the risk of refugees' influx.

Although the above three concerns largely apply to comprehensive sanctions rather than targeted sanctions on specific individuals and entities, in the case of Eritrea the distinction between the two (i.e. targeted v comprehensive) is non-existent. Eritrea is unique in that there is no private sector, and the economy is entirely in the hands of the government elite and the entities that they control. Thus, the impact of sanctions falls squarely on them rather than harming the general public who have no purchasing power and largely live on subsistence farming.

On banks de-risking specifically, international NGOs are not allowed to operate in Eritrea, hence there should be nil impact on humanitarian assistance because it does not exist. However, careful consideration will be needed with regards to diaspora remittances to family and friends that could be adversely affected by de-risking.

## Conclusion

Sanctions have long been the subject of controversy and debate on their impact on citizens and effectiveness, particularly in the guise of “comprehensive” type regimes. Opponents claim sanctions imposed by a single country or by an intergovernmental body like the United Nations are “illegal” or “criminal” due to, in the case of economic sanctions, the right to development<sup>622</sup> or in the case of military sanctions, the right to self-defence<sup>623</sup>. In its 1996 report, the International Progress Organisation, criticised sanctions as “an illegitimate form of collective punishment of the weakest and poorest members of society, the infants, the children, the chronically ill, and the elderly”<sup>624</sup>.

Proponents of sanctions, say when designed well, imposed multilaterally (by the UN, US, EU, and others in unison), implemented and enforced effectively, they can bring conflicts to an end and deter human rights violations. Sanctions should always be used along with other tools, such as diplomacy, aid, effective messaging, military signalling and if necessary actual force, in order to achieve the desired goals.

It is important however to draw a distinction between “comprehensive” sanctions regimes, which have tended to be used in previous decades, and newer “targeted” sanctions that sanction individuals and entities not entire countries. The ultimate objective of sanctions is behavioural change. To achieve this, targeted network of sanctions, anti-money laundering measures, prosecutions, and enhanced travel bans must be applied in a multilateral manner. The UN sanctions can be highly effective because they are multilateral in nature and the member nations have the legal powers to enforce them.

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<sup>622</sup> [Right to development - Wikipedia](#)

<sup>623</sup> [Right of self-defense - Bing](#)

<sup>624</sup> [International Progress Organization - Bing](#)

Supporters of sanctions further argue that, regardless of sanctions' effects on people, those citizens are already being oppressed by their government. Thus, they argue, sanctions are the best alternative international tool, as opposed to taking no action or military action. In the absence of sanctions, oppressive regimes have no incentive to reform. In terms of effectiveness of the sanctions, supporters concede that multilateral sanctions have been found to work 33% of the time.<sup>625</sup> Even this low achievement level, saves 33 out of 100 people's lives from the worst kind of atrocities, genocide and extrajudicial killings.

Morally, it would be a sad world where preparators of rape of women and girls, extrajudicial killings, theft, corruption, and other heinous human rights abuses were to go scot-free. Sanctions may therefore be the best tool, short of military action, available to the international community to uphold the rule of law wherever it may be breached.

## 7.7 Eritrea and Sanctions

### *Overview*

President Isaias is the chief architect of the current conflict in Ethiopia and has been a destabilising force in the Horn of Africa since Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia in 1993. The regime in Asmara has subjected its own people to grotesque human rights abuses year-in and-year-out for 30 years.

On the other hand, and despite their problems and diversity, the Ethiopian people have not had internal wars for the last 30 years, until President Isaias got involved in their country's internal affairs in the name of a "peace agreement". The 2020 war in Tigray may not in fact have started by the Federal government in Addis Ababa, or the TPLF in Mekelle. Arguably, the war started by President Isaias in Asmara who had been planning it for well over two decades and started to execute it in 2018 by seizing the opportunity provided by the election of the inexperienced Prime Minister in Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed. Until then, Ethiopia was the envy of Africa and beyond, with one of the fastest growing economies in the world for at least a decade<sup>626</sup>. All this was sadly destroyed by Prime Minister Abiy as the result of his unholy alliance with the notoriously destructive, President Isaias. In the end, Prime Minister Abiy's Prosperity Party has in effect become the "Poverty Party" with a large segment of the population unable to meet their basic needs and the country on the brink of fragmentation.

It is in the light of the above and other additional information in the Tigray War and Regional Implications Report, Volumes 1 and 2, the author advocates for strong, multilateral sanctions to be imposed on Eritrea, even before any measures are considered against Ethiopia. This is so for the simple reason that the root cause of the human rights abuses and destabilisation in the Horn Africa is none other than President Isaias. There cannot be peace in the region unless his wings are drastically clipped, and he is tamed once and for all.

### *UN Security Council Resolution 1907*

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<sup>625</sup> [16] - Bing

<sup>626</sup> Ethiopia is Africa's fastest-growing economy | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

In 2009, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1907<sup>627</sup> which imposed on Eritrea an arms embargo and targeted sanctions, including travel restrictions and asset freezes on a small number of senior government officials. The sanctions were imposed on Eritrea for its role in arming and training rebel movements across the Horn of Africa, from Somalia to Ethiopia, including attempts to bomb the African Union summit in Addis Ababa in January 2011. The resolution noted that Eritrea had “provided political, financial and logistical support to armed groups engaged in undermining peace and reconciliation efforts in Somalia and regional stability” and had “failed to withdraw its forces following border confrontations with Djibouti.”<sup>628</sup> The UN resolution was instigated to a large extent by the AU summit in Sirte, Libya<sup>629</sup> after which the UN issued a warning, stating that: “The Security Council takes note of the decision of the African Union summit in Sirte, calling on the Council to impose sanctions against those, including Eritrea, providing support to the armed groups engaged in undermining peace and reconciliation in Somalia and regional stability. The Security Council is deeply concerned in this regard and will consider expeditiously what action to take against any party undermining the Djibouti Peace Process, based on all available evidence including that submitted to the Monitoring Group and the Committee established pursuant to SCR 751 (1992).”

Eritrea continued to flout the UN resolution making its territory available for “the launching of attacks on Djibouti and Ethiopia, in addition to military recruitment and provisioning campaigns,” supplying weapons and ammunition, and other military materiel (uniform elements, radios), logistics (transport and vehicles) and other support (food rations, medical care).” As late as April 2017<sup>630</sup> and January 2018<sup>631</sup>, Eritrea was importing weapons from North Korea in breach of the UN resolution. Following the peace accord between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the UN General Secretary declared, during his visit to Addis Ababa in July 2018, that the sanctions against Eritrea were “obsolete”<sup>632</sup> despite the numerous flagrant and frequent breach of the UN sanctions programme. Nothing had changed on the ground and the tension with Djibouti remained unresolved. On 6 November 2018, a British draft proposed lifting the resolution 1907 was leaked<sup>633</sup>. On 14 November 2018, the UNSC unanimously agreed to lift<sup>634</sup> the sanctions nine years after they were imposed with no tangible evidence that they had achieved their intended purpose. The lifting of the sanctions of course helped President Isaias to procure more arms in preparation for another war.

In hindsight, the so-called peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, not only duped the Nobel Committee in Norway into awarding the Peace Prize to Prime Minister Abiy, but also deluded the UN Security Council, which should have known better. It may be unfair to say both organisations have blood in their hands for the heinous crimes and killings that have taken place in Ethiopia over the last year, but they certainly have a lot to answer for.

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<sup>627</sup> UN reports - Bing

<sup>628</sup> Security Council Imposes Sanctions on Eritrea over Its Role in Somalia, Refusal to Withdraw Troops Following Conflict with Djibouti | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases

<sup>629</sup> Sirte | African Union (au.int)

<sup>630</sup> US Imposes New Sanctions on Eritrea's Navy Over North Korea Links (voanews.com)

<sup>631</sup> North Korea's Military Partners in the Horn of Africa – The Diplomat

<sup>632</sup> Ethiopia and Eritrea say war over, U.N. hails 'wind of hope' in Africa | Reuters

<sup>633</sup> Reuters - Bing

<sup>634</sup> Eritrea breakthrough as UN sanctions lifted - BBC News

The UN Security Council has had umpteen opportunities to redeem itself since the outbreak of the Tigray war by imposing sanctions against Eritrea to force it to pull its troops out of Ethiopian territory. But it has consistently failed to use its authority due to the vetoing power of the Chinese and the Russians, who are notoriously reluctant to accept sanctions, since they are human rights abusers themselves. This is not the first time the Eritrean people have been abandoned by the UN.

### *European Union*

In December 2018, the EU implemented the lifting of UN sanction on Eritrea by adopting Council Decision (CFSP) 2018/1944 and Council Regulation (EU) 2018/1932, adding another nail to the resolution's 1907 coffin.

The EU's 2012 strategic framework on human rights and democracy<sup>635</sup> commits the EU to "step up its efforts to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law across all aspects of external action," and states that when faced with human rights violations, it will "make use of the full range of instruments at its disposal, including sanctions or condemnation" (Council of the European Union, Outcome of Proceedings 25 June 2012, 11855/12). It adds that "the role the EU takes to oppose activities that result in human rights abuses should be encouraged by all member states."

In March 2021, the EU used its Global Human Rights sanctions regime to impose sanctions<sup>636</sup> for human rights violations, including killings and enforced disappearances on the National Security Office, including its leader, Maj. Gen. Abraha Kassa. The National Security Office, including its leader, Maj. Gen. Abraha Kassa were sanctioned. This is believed to be the first EU sanction against the Eritrean leadership and government based on human rights abuses in spite of the horrific human rights abuses that have taken place in the country for 30 years. Despite his title, General Kassa<sup>637</sup> is a simple messenger who does what he is told to keep himself safe and hardly ever travels outside the country, let alone have offshore bank accounts and/or properties. Nevertheless, the action rightly puts a stigma on Eritrea, which is to be welcomed.

For the last couple of months, the EU has been saying that it is prepared to use sanctions over the Tigray war and the humanitarian crisis there. In early November 2021, the EU Chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, said "The EU remains ready to use all its foreign policy tools, including restrictive measures, to promote peace, adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, and help end conflict."<sup>638</sup> The EU, has been, however, unable to impose any sanctions against the warring factions in Ethiopia due to an apparent disagreement among EU member states. On 13 December 2021, Mr Borell expressed regrets over the EU's failure to impose sanctions saying, "one of my biggest frustrations" of the year, he said was that "the EU had not been able to stop mass rapes using sexual violence as a war aim, killings and concentration camps based on ethnic belonging," pointing to the lack of unanimity among EU governments.

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<sup>635</sup> Microsoft Word - 131169 (europa.eu)

<sup>636</sup> EU Sanctions on Eritrea - Search (bing.com) and <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2021:0991:FULL&from=EN>

<sup>637</sup> Eu sanctions against Eritrea | Deloitte Netherland

<sup>638</sup> EU prepared to issue sanctions over Tigray war, officials confirm – EURACTIV.com

Mr Borrell acknowledged that while sanctions would not have halted the conflict, they “would have, in my view, influenced the behaviour of the actors.” In the meantime, the EU continued to supply humanitarian aid, despite difficulties in aid reaching those in need.

### *United Kingdom*

The UK Parliament, through the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Eritrea and others, has been kept abreast of the situation in Tigray and Eritrea’s unwarranted involvement. The APPG for Eritrea encouraged MPs to raise numerous Parliamentary Questions (PQ) as well as publish Early Day Motions (EDMs)<sup>639</sup> and engage in various official debates and participated in a variety of Zoom discussions and webinars. Their engagement along with the media has kept the Tigray war, and Eritrea’s atrocities therein, in the spotlight.

The UK government, as reported by Reuters in November 2018, was at the forefront and proactively advocated the lifting of UN Resolution 1907 that imposed sanctions on Eritrea for its destabilising role in the Horn Africa. However, in terms of the Tigray conflict, the British government has had very little engagement compared with the US and EU. While President Biden has spoken openly about the conflicts on several occasions, the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has said very little (if anything at all) on what is currently the largest and bloodiest war in the world. This is regrettable, especially in the light of the UK Global Human Rights Sanctions<sup>640</sup> regime and its ability to sanction individuals and entities involved in serious human rights violations which have been regularly reported on as occurring in Eritrea for decades.

In March 2021, when asked about the massacre at Axum allegedly by Eritrea forces, which may constitute crimes against humanity, the British government said<sup>641</sup> it “will consider the full range of policy tools at our disposal, adding “We are keeping the provision of aid to Ethiopia under constant review.”

In September 2021, the Government was asked in a PQ (53252) about its plans to make an assessment of the potential merits of sanctioning; (a) the Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defence Forces, Filipos Woldeyohannes, and (b) individuals responsible for human rights violations in Ethiopia. The Minister replied that: “The UK continues to consider the full range of policy tools at our disposal to protect human rights and deter violations of international humanitarian law. It is longstanding practice not to speculate on future sanctions designations as to do so could reduce the impact of the designations<sup>642</sup>.” This is followed by yet another promise following the US sanctions on Eritrean officials and entities. This time the UK Government said: “We note the statement on 12 November by the US Treasury that they have sanctioned four entities and two individuals. Sanctions are most effective when countries act together. International cooperation is at the heart of UK sanctions policy, and the UK will continue to work with the US and other international partners to tackle shared global challenges<sup>643</sup>.”

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<sup>639</sup> Find in Hansard - Hansard - UK Parliament

<sup>640</sup> Magnitsky legislation - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk)

<sup>641</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/british-government-on-sanctions-over-tigray-war-say-it-will-consider-the-full-range-of-policy-tools-at-our-disposal>

<sup>642</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-09-22/53252/>

<sup>643</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/british-government-promises-to-cooperate-with-u-s-a-over-sanctions-against-eritrean-leaders>

The British government has rightly expressed its “deep concerns about Eritrean involvement in the Tigray conflict” on many occasions but sadly it has, so far, done very little tangible.

### *United States*

Eritrea’s involvement in the Tigray war and the atrocities that followed, although horrific in the extreme, should not come as a surprise to the international community. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, Eritrea, under President Isaias, has been involved in eight separate wars over a period of 27 years. It has consistently and systematically abused its citizens, including; rape, enslavement, torture, extrajudicial killings, and other despicable acts behind closed doors. The UN COI has repeatedly said over a 7-year period that the Asmara regime “may have committed crimes against humanity”. In spite these damning reports, no action has been taken by the UN to bring the preparators of these heinous crimes to the ICC.

What the Eritrean regime has done since November 2020 is in effect to export, in an industrial scale, the atrocities that it meticulously refined on its own citizens, to Tigray and increasingly to the rest of Ethiopia. To its credit, the US government has been engaged proactively to halt the atrocities and the conflict in Tigray from the outset, ably supported by its Chargé d’Affaires, Steven Walker, in Asmara for which peace-loving Eritreans and Ethiopians have expressed their admiration and gratitude to the US government.

The Tigray war continues to rage unabated, with the active involvement of Eritrean forces, despite diplomacy efforts by the AU, US, and the EU to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The US introduced visa restrictions on Ethiopian and Eritrean officials<sup>644</sup> who it considers “responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in Tigray” but to very little effect.

On 23 August 2021, the US Treasury sanctioned the Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defence Forces, Filipos Woldeyohannes, for “being a leader or official of an entity that is engaged in serious human rights abuse”<sup>645</sup> committed during the Tigray conflict. The sanction was imposed under Executive Order 13818, which targets perpetrators of serious human rights abuse and corruption. Thus, all of his property in the US or in control of US individuals are blocked. This is to be welcomed, although the likelihood that Filipos will have any asset and/or offshore bank account in his name or any entity under his control is nil.

In November 2021, the US government went even further and imposed sanctions on four Eritrean entities and two individuals in connection with the conflict in Tigray<sup>646</sup>. The entities sanctioned are; the EDF (the military, led by the Chief of Staff, Filipos Woldeyohannes who was sanctioned by the US in August 2021) and the PFDJ (the only political party in the country and under the absolute control of President Isaias). In addition, two commercial entities were sanctioned; Hidri Trust, and Red Sea

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<sup>644</sup> [24/05/2021 US imposes Ethiopia, Eritrea restrictions over Tigray crisis | Conflict News | Al Jazeera](#)

<sup>645</sup> [Treasury Sanctions Eritrean Military Leader in Connection with Serious Human Rights Abuse in Tigray | U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)

<sup>646</sup> [Treasury Sanctions Four Entities and Two Individuals in Connection with the Crisis in Ethiopia | U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)

Trading<sup>647</sup> Corporation (RSTC). Hidri Trust is a holding company that controls all of the PFDJ's business interests and RSTC funds and provides business assistance to the party.

The two individuals sanctioned are<sup>648</sup>; Abraha Kassa Nemariam (aka Abraha Kassa – sanctioned by the EU in March 2021) - the head of the Eritrean National Security Office, and Hagos Ghebrehiwet W Kidan (aka “Kisha” or moneybags), economic advisor to the PFDJ and CEO of RSTC, who is in effect the finance minister. Through the above actions, the US has taken bold and exemplary initiatives to help bring the conflict in Tigray and the presence of Eritrean forces there to an end. In a statement the US government said, “Eritrean forces in Ethiopia are an impediment to ending conflict and increasing humanitarian access.”<sup>649</sup>

The US government's actions against the Asmara regime are to be applauded by all peace-loving people around the world. In spite of this, however, the US could have gone further to include the following revenue streams, which are financing repression in Eritrea and fuelling the Tigray conflict, and two more bad actors:

1. *Eritrean National Mining Corporation (ENAMCO)* - establishment Proclamation (No. 157/2006<sup>650</sup>). ENAMCO is an autonomous corporate legal entity and engages in all mining operations, including prospecting, exploration and exploitation of mineral resources and marketing of the same. The corporation holds stakes of 40% - 60% of all mining operations in the country. ENAMCO works in partnership with companies and businesses based in the UK, Australia, US, and Canada that raise their finances through the stock exchanges in London, Toronto, New York, and Australia. It is difficult to accurately assess the amount of revenue raised from the extractive sector, but it is said to represent a significant proportion of the country's GDP. Almost all of this hard currency revenue apparently goes to offshore bank accounts under disguised ownership to finance the Asmara regime's illicit activities.
2. *The 2%t diaspora tax* (excluding remittances which are in most cases sent to support family and friends i.e., humanitarian in nature) is illicitly collected from members of the diasporas by Eritrean Embassy staff and government agents. Given the number of Eritrean diasporas in the US, a significant amount of this revenue stream comes from the US. There is evidence to indicate that members of the diaspora are coerced and intimidate in to paying the 2% (backdated to their time of arrival in the US) as recently as September/October 2021<sup>651</sup>.
3. *The two bad actors* – the Eritrean finances are managed and controlled by; President Isaias, his Presidential Advisor, Yemane Gebreab, the Economic/Finance Advisor, Hagos (Kisha) and the army Chief of Staff, Filipos Woldeyohannes. While both Hagos and Filipos have been rightly sanctioned by

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<sup>647</sup> US imposes new sanctions over Ethiopia's Tigray conflict - JURIST - News - Legal News & Commentary

<sup>648</sup> US sanctions Eritrea's military, ruling party over Ethiopia - ABC News (go.com)#

<sup>649</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/12/us-sanctions-eritrean-army-ruling-party-over-ethiopia-conflict>

<sup>650</sup> Eritrean National Mining Corporation Establishment Proclamation (No. 157/2006). | InforMEA

<sup>651</sup> Author's own research and anonymous sources.



the recent US Executive Order, President Isaias and his Advisor, Yemane Gebreab, do not appear to have been sanctioned.

Adding the above to the US targeted network sanctions for orchestrating untold human rights abuses in Eritrea and mass atrocities in Tigray will not only stigmatise the country even more, which it should rightly do, but also drain their revenue streams so they can no longer finance their destabilising activities in the region.

## **7.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations**

Sanction, as with most economic and political issues, has been a divisive topic amongst the Eritrean diaspora ever since the UN enacted Resolution 1907, imposing restrictive measures on their country for its covert destabilising activities in the Horn of Africa. However, an increasing number of Eritreans are now in favour for sanctions designations under current regimes, for example, the UK Global Human Rights Sanctions regime.

Today a majority are in favour of a sanctions programme against the Eritrean government because of its relentless and grotesque human rights abuses on its citizens over decades, and more recently for its unwarranted involvement in the Tigray conflict as documented elsewhere in this report.

Opponents of sanctions on Eritrea, some of whom were prominent freedom fighters, until recently in the civil service e.g., former bank governors and some who represent the country at ambassadorial levels, argue sanctions will hurt the nation's economy and innocent people. These people forget that freedom comes at a price. The Eritrean people lost tens of thousands of their brothers and sisters in the 30-year armed struggle to free their homeland from Ethiopian occupation and oppression. Some families were wiped out completely and villages burnt to the ground by the enemy. The author lost his only brother (Haderyes, aged 26) and almost every single household in the country lost loved ones to free the country from Ethiopian brutality. Despite these losses, however, almost every single Eritrean accepts that those sacrifices were worth paying, to free the people from subjection and servitude at the hands of Amhara militias and Ethiopians in general. Nevertheless, the opponents cite the examples of Iraq and Libya for failed sanctions programmes and foreign interventions, in order to frighten the diasporas, without themselves fully understanding the reasons for the failure of those programmes. In the case of Iraq's sanctions imposed in 1991 after it invaded Kuwait, to a large extent, failed because they were not properly planned nor executed. As a result, the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Iraq, had a significant unintended adverse impact on the people and they suffered economic hardship. The international military action on Iraq was, however (and arguably), successful in getting Iraq out of Kuwait. What followed afterwards, in terms of religious and tribal conflicts, was an utter disaster and inexcusable on the part of the international community. The same could be argued in the case of Libya.

Proponents of sanctions, on the other hand, argue that it would be immoral and indeed inhuman to idly sit by while people are abused, huge numbers slaughtered by their own governments, and unaccountable leaders destabilising entire regions causing war after war, as is the case with Eritrea. They rightly cite the case of the

former Yugoslavia where in the 1990s, the country was tearing itself apart causing misery for its people. The war ended, when in 1995 NATO bombed Bosnian Serbs and the Croats gained grounds. As a result, the warring factions came to the negotiating table. In December 1995, they signed the Dayton Agreement dividing Bosnia into two self-governing bodies and the perpetrators of the atrocities were brought to the ICC<sup>652</sup>. In the case of Liberia (see page 139 above), the international community action brought the conflict to an end and the former president sentenced to 50 years in prison by the ICC. Apartheid in South Africa, to a large extent, ended because of economic sanctions. Some of the South Africans, unfortunately, suffered economically as a result of the sanctions but they were eventually freed from the evils of apartheid. The African National Congress knew that sanctions would cost jobs and incomes but accepted that this was part of the struggle against minority rule. The Darfur conflict and the human rights abuses in Sudan under Bashir ended at least in part because of sanctions. There are many other examples that demonstrate targeted sanctions work and have brought the desired goals.

Inaction by the international community to deal with conflicts and human rights abuses is perhaps the worst scenario that can happen as exemplified in the case of Rwanda. In 1994, the world looked the other way while 1.1 million<sup>653</sup> people were genocidally murdered in an insane period of three months (7 April -15 July 1994 i.e., in about 100 days), leaving a lasting stain on humanity. The scale and brutality of the genocide caused shock waves around the world, but no country intervened to forcefully stop the killings. The ICC subsequently convicted 85 individuals for the genocide in Rwanda and the world vowed “never again” in yet another hollow outcry. In November 2021, when the US government imposed long overdue sanctions on Eritrea, they were widely applauded by members of the diaspora. The Eritrean Global Yiaki grassroots movement along with civic societies wrote to President Biden expressing a “wholehearted support” for the action he and his government took, calling it “exemplary” that other countries ought to emulate<sup>654</sup>. Eritrea Focus<sup>655</sup> issued its own statement expressing gratitude to President Biden and the American people for standing squarely with the Eritrean people in their hour of need, adding “President Isaias and the elite that surround him in the military and the PFDJ are responsible for taking our country into this war and for the death of many of our people. It is not for the first time he has dragged our people into a senseless conflict since 1991.”

### *Recommendations*

In his televised interview<sup>656</sup> in February 2021, President Isaias unashamedly said Eritrea has “no economy” as a pretext for his plans of a “union or federation” with Ethiopia. He then went on to blame the chronic economic crisis in the country, caused by corruption and mismanagement in his 30-year watch, on others. On sanctions he said “Look how they [the west] imposed sanctions on Eritrea in the

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<sup>652</sup> How did the Yugoslavia war end? (wikilivre.org)

<sup>653</sup> Rwandan genocide - Wikipedia

<sup>654</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/joint-letter-by-eritrean-opposition-to-president-biden-supporting-sanctions>

<sup>655</sup> Eritrea Focus statement on the US sanctions and the Tigray war - Eritrea Hub

<sup>656</sup> A complete English translation of Isaias Afwerki's Eritrean TV Interview, 17 February 2021 - ASENA TV

past. They are looking to destroy and weaken us through sanctions. To this end; they lie, bribe, threaten witnesses and then become a judge and jury to impose sanctions on us. If we look back at the last nine years of sanctions [resolution 1907] and the manner they were imposed, those patterns have been identical over the last three months [i.e., since the start of the Tigray war].”

President Isaias clearly made these remarks because sanctions hurt him and his inner circle, not because he cared for the people of Eritrea in the slightest. The Eritrean people have already lost everything under his leadership; they have nothing left to lose. Approximately 80% of the population live on subsistence farming. Some relied on NGOs humanitarian aid until they were expelled from the country in what can only be described in a state of deprived mind on the part of President Isaias. It is in the light of these facts that the recommendations below should be considered and hopefully adopted by the international community:

1. *Further expand US sanctions programme* – the November US sanctions on Eritrean individuals and entities do target some of the key economic organs and bad actors in the country. However, the Eritrean National Mining Corporation (ENAMCO) and the diaspora tax that between them are said to generate at least 50% of the GDP are not covered. Some of the key ENAMCO partners are; Alpha Exploration Ltd, a Canadian Company listed in the Toronto Stock Exchange<sup>657</sup>, Danakali Ltd, an Australian company listed in the Australian stock exchange and until recently in the LSE<sup>658</sup>, Aggreko Plc, power plant provider for Danakali Ltd, based in Glasgow, Scotland and listed on the LSE<sup>659</sup>, and a number of US finances house such as JP Morgan and Blackrock.

Furthermore, the current US sanctions does not include all of the bad actors in the country. Two of the 4 individuals that control the nation’s illicit finances and offshore accounts, namely the President and his advisor (Yemane Gebreab), are not included in the US sanctions. These anomalies need to be addressed for the sanctions to achieve the desired goal.

Finally, the regime in Asmara used diaspora tax to circumvent sanctions in the past and continued to raise significant sums in hard currency to continue to destabilise the region<sup>660</sup>. This revenue stream needs to be controlled and stopped, not least because it breaks host countries laws of collecting money through harassments and intimidations.

2. *The UN, EU, UK, Canada, and others* – should impose their own unilateral or preferably multilateral sanctions on Eritrean individuals and entities. As Laetitia Bader, Human Rights Watch said “For sanctions to work, other countries must join.”<sup>661</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> [Kerkasha Project, Eritrea - Alpha Exploration Ltd - Eritrea Hub and https://finance.yahoo.com/news/alpha-exploration-reports-95-m-13000846.html](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/alpha-exploration-reports-95-m-13000846.html)

<sup>658</sup> [Danakali Ltd \(ASX:DNK\) Share Price | RNS News, Quotes, & Charts | DNK.AX | \(proactiveinvestors.co.uk\)](https://www.rns.com/ASX/DNK/Share-Price/Quotes-and-Charts/DNK.AX)

<sup>659</sup> [Aggreko Archives - Eritrea Hub](https://www.proactiveinvestors.co.uk/ASX/DNK/Share-Price/Quotes-and-Charts/DNK.AX)

<sup>660</sup> [Eritrean diaspora and its impact on regime stability: Responses to UN sanctions | African Affairs | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](https://www.oxfordacademic.com/doi/10.1093/afaf/afaa001)

<sup>661</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/17/us-authorizes-sanctions-ethiopias-tigray-conflict>

3. *Formulate Eritrean international assets tracker mechanism* – sanctions can only freeze assets that are known to exist, but Eritrea maintains an opaque finances to manage its offshore accounts and its assets overseas in disguised ownership. For example, a recent extensive search of “the State of Eritrea” owned assets in the UK<sup>662</sup> revealed only one asset with an estimated value of less than US\$2.5mn. The World Bank in its March 2020 report (see above) identified only eight overseas bank accounts. Concerted efforts by civic societies and others are needed to trace and track Eritrean assets around the world, not least to monitor the funds use but also to stop the regime from fuelling instability in the Horn of Africa and beyond. This information should then be fed into global law enforcement agencies to freeze and ultimately seize those assets.

The world has a moral, and perhaps legal obligations too, to protect the weak and the poor from those who exploit and abuse them with impunity. Short of military action, well planned multilateral targeted sanctions are perhaps the key tools at the disposal of the international community to save innocent lives, prevent wars and genocide.

Eritrea is a hermit; an isolated pariah state. Stigma, “shaming and naming,” will not work - a leopard cannot change its spots. Multilateral sanctions on Eritrea that are effectively enforced will bring the regime to its knees, herald a new era of hope, peace and prosperity for the people of Eritrea, Ethiopia and the region at large.

## **8 Diplomatic attempts to end the war**

By Martin Plaut

### **8.1 Introduction**

Since Tigray Volume 1 was published in June 2021 the conflict in Tigray, the accompanying famine has only intensified in severity. The diplomatic community has attempted to find an adequate respond to the deepening crisis, but to little avail. While the west, led by the United States and the European Union, have offered aid, sent delegations, appointed special representatives, cajoled, threatened, and even imposed sanctions they have next to nothing to show for their efforts. The drumbeat of war only intensifies, ratcheted up by xenophobic propaganda encouraged by the Ethiopian government.

In response to the pressure Prime Minister Abiy has looked for other allies. The UAE has been a solid supporter of the axis that was forged by President Isaias and Prime Minister Abiy in 2018 which planned this conflict, with the Arabs underpinning their support with substantial financial flows. As the war has unfolded, so too has the supply of armaments and munitions.<sup>663</sup> Ties with Turkey, Iran, China, and Russia have been strengthened as the Ethiopian leader reached out to friends who will supply weaponry without asking awkward questions about human rights. In return, China and Russia have used their veto at the UN Security Council to prevent the world body from holding the actors in the Tigray conflict to account.

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<sup>662</sup> Author's own research

<sup>663</sup> <https://gerjon.substack.com/p/the-uae-ethiopia-airlift-the-investigation>  
<https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/uae-air-bridge-supports-ethiopian.html>

These events have taken place at a time when international attention was elsewhere: focussing on the coup in neighbouring Sudan but also the evacuation of Afghanistan and crises in Ukraine, the South China sea and Iran. The Tigray war has therefore only had limited attention from foreign ministries. Yet the war has had appalling consequences, which extend well beyond the battlefield. By the end of September 2021, the UN was warning that the blockade of Tigray has resulted in "unprecedented" malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women.<sup>664</sup> Malnutrition among children had reached "alarming" levels and fears of mass starvation were growing. The need for action had never been more pressing, yet there was little sign of effective pressure or persuasion being applied to end the crisis. Even the most egregious of crimes have resulted in only muted responses. As Human Rights Watch observed on 8 December 2021.<sup>665</sup>

"A full year has passed since Eritrean government forces massacred Tigrayan civilians in Ethiopia's historical town of Axum. But survivors of the massacre and of other atrocities in Tigray are still no closer to accessing justice and redress – an accountability shortfall that is fuelling further abuses as conflict spreads...Concrete measures to pave the way for accountability – such as the establishment of a robust international investigative mechanism – are key. Yet international bodies still seem unwilling to take concrete measures to press warring parties to prevent further atrocities. The Security Councils of both the UN and the African Union – bodies mandated to ensure peace and security – have remained largely paralysed. Each body has made only one public statement condemning abuses and the UN Security Council has not formally included Ethiopia on its agenda."

They reiterated this call in a 9 December report on abuses by Tigrayan forces in the Amhara region in the days from 31 August - 9 September 2021.<sup>666</sup> Overall, this has been a sorry saga: a public display of just how ineffective the international community can be in the face of intransigence, no matter how urgent the crisis.

## 8.2 The United States under President Biden

No-one can question President Biden's personal commitment to the situation in Tigray, Ethiopia. He expended time and political capital to try to intervene to halt the conflict, but with limited success.

In Tigray War and Regional Implications Report Volume 1 we recorded the dramatic transformation that occurred between Presidents Trump and Biden. While Trump had next to no interest in, or knowledge of, Africa, Biden has been engaged and concerned. In this he was spurred on by the interest that Congress took in the issue, with statements from Congressmen within a day of the outbreak of fighting on 4 November. The ranking (i.e., senior minority) member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives (the lower American legislative house) – a Republican voiced his concerns.<sup>667</sup> The following day, six Democrats in the House

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<sup>664</sup> <https://news.yahoo.com/un-reports-unprecedented-malnutrition-tigray-065157680.html>

<sup>665</sup> <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/12/8/how-international-bodies-can-help-prevent-more-Ethiopia-massacres>

<sup>666</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/10/ethiopia-tigray-forces-summarily-execute-civilians>

<sup>667</sup> <https://gop-foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/mccaull-on-escalating-violence-in-ethiopia/>

expressed theirs.<sup>668</sup> Bicameral, bipartisan congressional statements proceeded to gather force, growing more outraged at Ethiopian and Eritrean behaviour as the weeks wore on and as atrocity reports mounted. This reflected concern about the Horn of Africa and pressure from their constituents. The early response from the Trump presidency was to blame the Tigrayans for attacks on the Northern Command base, which was thought to have led to the war. On 17 November 2020, Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo blamed the TPLF, going so far as to praise renegade Eritrea for its forbearance from retaliating against the Tigrayans for missile strikes against Asmara in response to Eritrean attacks on Tigray.<sup>669</sup> Not until 30 November did Pompeo call Prime Minister Abiy to express his "grave concern"<sup>670</sup> at events and then tweet that he had urged Abiy to end the fighting, start a dialogue and allow unhindered humanitarian access.<sup>671</sup>

When President Biden was inaugurated on 20 January 2021 the mood changed. Within days, the State Department reiterated its call for an end to the fighting and for unhindered humanitarian access; but now it added calls for Eritrea to leave Tigray and for a human rights investigation to begin.<sup>672</sup> On 26 January Antony Blinken was confirmed as Secretary of State, and – with something approaching lightning speed, on 4 February – he called Abiy and urged humanitarian access to Tigray to be facilitated.<sup>673</sup> At his congressional confirmation hearing on 19 January – even before Biden took office – Blinken was already expressing his dismay about Tigray and about the safety of Eritrean refugees there. He also had noted that the US was now engaged, rather than "being AWOL" – a pointed rebuke to the preceding administration.<sup>674</sup> On 19 February, the US said that it would tie further economic assistance to Ethiopia to that country's conduct in Tigray.<sup>675</sup> The State Department on 25 February again condemned the human rights violations, again called for the protection of refugees, and again asked that Eritrean forces be withdrawn.<sup>676</sup> On 26 February the *New York Times* reported (presumably by way of a deliberate leak) that the US government had determined that Ethiopian federal forces and allied militia fighters were conducting a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing.<sup>677</sup> Since then, US criticism of and pressure on Addis relative to the war has been loud and persistent; pressure on the TPLF has followed as well, at least since August. All of this appears to have reflected the priority given to the war as an immediate US strategic, diplomatic, and humanitarian concern in sub-Saharan Africa.

While it is important to credit the Biden administration with a change of direction and a vigor that was missing during the Trump era, the primary direction of American policy did not alter dramatically. As was once remarked about Britain, the nation has

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<sup>668</sup> <https://bass.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/members-congress-weigh-regarding-political-instability-ethiopia>

<sup>669</sup> <https://www.barrons.com/news/pompeo-blasts-tigray-forces-praises-eritrea-over-ethiopia-fighting-01605631507>

<sup>670</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-conflict-usa/pompeo-voices-grave-concern-about-ongoing-tigray-hostilities-idUSKBN28A2HA>

<sup>671</sup> <https://twitter.com/SecPompeo/status/1333457228624519170>

<sup>672</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/eritrea-coronavirus-pandemic-africa-ethiopia-kenya-83b90a145d271eb39d664726bd5acbe5>;

<https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-egypt-humanitarian-assistance-ethiopia-kenya-e3f47fc14084da52daea64fe078deaa6>

<sup>673</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-ethiopian-prime-minister-abiy-2/>

<sup>674</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/aman.luul/videos/10222373157296458s>

<sup>675</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-egypt-humanitarian-assistance-ethiopia-kenya-e3f47fc14084da52daea64fe078deaa6>

<sup>676</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/02/25/tigray-eritrea-ethiopia-crime-against-humanity/>

<sup>677</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/26/world/middleeast/ethiopia-tigray-ethnic-cleansing.html>

no permanent friends or allies, only permanent interests.<sup>678</sup> The United States has considered Ethiopia a pivotal power in the Horn of Africa, a region critical to its interests. This is hardly surprising, given the region's proximity to the oil supplies of the Arabian Peninsula, the shipping through the Suez Canal, and its geographical location in relation to the Middle East and Afghanistan. One should not forget the attack on the Kenyan and Tanzanian embassies by Islamists on 7 August 1998 during which more than 200 people died; events which are seared on the memory of the State Department. Ethiopia's role in fighting Islamists of al-Shabaab in Somalia has also been of critical importance to Washington. For the US. (and its western allies), in sum, the prospect of Ethiopian disintegration gravely threatens not only its influence there, but stability and security across a wide region. Even without the possibility of disintegration, the US fears further influence in the region by China and Russia.

Bearing these factors in mind there are four pointers to American policy. They flow from a determination to maintain Ethiopia as a strategic ally.

- The unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia needs to be maintained.
- Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, despite American reservations about his character and his election in 2021 (which Secretary of State Blinken described as “not free or fair”<sup>679</sup>) is regarded as a legitimate and necessary regional partner.
- There is no military solution to the Tigray war and therefore negotiations are the only realistic option.<sup>680</sup>
- The only viable mediator, at least nominally, is the African Union, and its nominated representative, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo,<sup>681</sup> despite the fact that he endorsed the Ethiopian election,<sup>682</sup> which was manifestly flawed.<sup>683</sup> (As noted below, the US. also has a special envoy, Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, on the scene. Obasanjo, meanwhile, appears to have been called on to mediate not only between the Tigrayans and the federal Ethiopian government but between the US and the parties.)

Since Washington has led the western response to the crisis, its policy decisions are particularly important.

To achieve these objectives the US has used a wide range of instruments. The first was to try talking to and reasoning with Prime Minister Abiy and his administration. It should not be forgotten that President Biden asked his personal friend, Senator Chris Coons, to speak to the Ethiopian Prime Minister as early as 23 November 2020.<sup>684</sup> The Senator travelled to Addis in March 2021, holding talks with Abiy and his

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<sup>678</sup> The quote is from Lord Palmerston, British Prime Minister, who observed: “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.” Hansard, House of Commons, 1 March 1848.

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1848/mar/01/treaty-of-adrianople-charges-against>

<sup>679</sup> <https://www.state.gov/building-a-stronger-democracy-in-ethiopia/>

<sup>680</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/aug-3-2021-administrator-samantha-power-holds-press-conference>

<sup>681</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/oct-12-2021-statement-administrator-power-following-high-level-ministerial-northern-ethiopia>

<sup>682</sup> “Obasanjo who heads the AU Mission of 100 observers arrived the country on Thursday. ‘Overall the election and election day processes were conducted in an orderly, peaceful and credible manner,’ he told a news conference in Addis Ababa on Wednesday, as authorities continued counting ballots.

<https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2021/06/23/obasanjo-gives-verdict-on-ethiopian-elections/>

<sup>683</sup> <https://news.yahoo.com/ethiopia-files-terrorism-charges-against-113427482.html>

<sup>684</sup> <https://www.coons.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senator-coons-speaks-with-ethiopian-prime-minister-amidst-escalating-conflict>

ministers.<sup>685</sup> The discussions apparently went nowhere. Senator Coons soon expressed his disappointment at the lack of progress – no ceasefire, no acknowledgment of ethnic cleansing.<sup>686</sup> His initiative was followed by another. On 23 April 2021, Biden appointed Jeffrey Feltman, a seasoned diplomat, as Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa, with a mandate to immediately engage with Ethiopia over the Tigray war.<sup>687</sup> To support this work, Blinken, as Secretary of State, has repeatedly intervened personally: speaking to the Ethiopian administration and attempting to bolster hopes for peace.<sup>688</sup> Blinken also worked closely with the African Union and with Kenyan President Kenyatta directly.<sup>689</sup> The US tried to work in a similar fashion with Sudan, South Africa and other African countries.<sup>690</sup> But at least in public these overtures have failed to be productive, leaving Washington with little option but to continuing work with Kenyatta.

The second strategy has been to offer humanitarian aid to Ethiopia. The aid has apparently had two purposes: both to influence the Abiy government and, reflecting a genuinely humanitarian motive, to meet the increasingly critical needs of the Tigray region (and, more recently, of neighbouring Amhara and Afar). For example, on 13 October Blinken announced additional aid to meet the needs of 6-7 million people in northern Ethiopia. This increase amounted to US\$26mn, bringing total US aid to US\$663mn since the crisis began, while at the same time urging that there be a ceasefire and that the aid be allowed to reach its intended destinations.<sup>691</sup> The “carrot” of aid appears to have had as little impact on the Ethiopian government and discussions or negotiations. This is perhaps hardly surprising: the government is attempting to crush the Tigrayans, although it is worth noting that American assistance goes to the country as a whole, in addition to the aid for Tigray. In any event, aid has only been allowed into Tigray in a trickle. This has left Tigrayans complaining that they are effectively blockaded by the federal government. Nor was there progress on talks, mediation, or negotiations. Rather, Addis Ababa spurned the US’s most senior aid representative, Samantha Power, as *Foreign Policy* reported<sup>692</sup>:

“When Samantha Power, head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), visited Ethiopia last week to seek greater access for humanitarian aid workers in Tigray, she was asked in a press conference why she hadn’t met with the Ethiopian Prime Minister. ‘He was not in the capital today on my day here,’ she said. Behind the scenes, multiple US officials familiar with the matter said that Abiy’s office did not respond to US requests for a meeting with Power, effectively rebuffing the

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<sup>685</sup> [https://www.voanews.com/a/africa\\_us-delegation-top-ethiopian-officials-discuss-tigray-conflict/6203603.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_us-delegation-top-ethiopian-officials-discuss-tigray-conflict/6203603.html)

<sup>686</sup> <https://news.yahoo.com/ethiopia-rejected-u-call-unilateral-225629610.html> ; <https://www.voanews.com/africa/us-appeals-cease-fire-ethiopia-tigray-rejected>

<sup>687</sup> <https://www.state.gov/special-envoy-for-the-horn-of-africa/>

<sup>688</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-ethiopian-prime-minister-abiy-3/>

<sup>689</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-kenyan-president-kenyatta/> and <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-and-kenya-strategic-partners-2/> and <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-second-kenya-u-s-bilateral-strategic-dialogue/> and <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-kenyan-cabinet-secretary-of-foreign-affairs-raychelle-omamo-at-a-joint-press-availability/> and <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/19/world/asia/blinken-africa-china-invest.html> and <https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-u-s-special-envoy-for-the-horn-of-africa-ambassador-jeffrey-feltman-on-the-ongoing-situation-in-ethiopia/> and <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-kenyan-president-kenyatta-2/>

<sup>690</sup> <https://www.state.gov/visit-of-special-envoy-for-the-horn-of-africa-jeffrey-feltman-to-sudan/> and <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-october-12-2021-2/#post-283304-ETHIOPIA2> and <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-meeting-with-south-african-foreign-minister-pandor-2/> .

<sup>691</sup> <https://www.state.gov/united-states-announces-additional-humanitarian-assistance-for-the-northern-ethiopia-crisis/>

<sup>692</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/08/11/ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-samantha-power-usaid-biden-tigray-conflict-humanitarian-crisis/>



senior US cabinet member and underscoring the increasingly strained relationship between Washington and Addis Ababa.”

Just in case President Biden missed this demonstration of defiance, Abiy also snubbed Feltman, who flew to the Ethiopian capital the following week.<sup>693</sup>

With the Biden administration making little headway with the Ethiopians or the Eritreans on any front the US turned to a tougher approach. In May 2021, the US announced a range of sanctions: reducing aid and denying visas to some government and military officials from both countries.<sup>694</sup> This included “Amhara regional and irregular forces and members of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)—responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in Tigray.” Whether and to what extent those sanctions were actually implemented was not publicised. But the move was followed by sanctions specifically against the Eritrean Defence Force Chief of Staff, Filipos Woldeyohannes on 23 August 2021. In taking this step the US cited his role as commander of the forces that were responsible for gross human rights abuses during their campaign inside Ethiopia.<sup>695</sup> Why was only an Eritrean targeted? Presumably, the US wished to warn and coax the Abiy regime to be more accommodating before further rupturing relations.

This gradual ratcheting up of sanctions has had no obvious effect, and so, on 17 September, there followed an announcement of a framework for much wider sanctions against Eritrea and Ethiopia.<sup>696</sup> Again the actual sanctions were delayed, presumably pending negotiations. But on 12 November, under the new framework, specific sanctions were indeed levied: as before, against Eritrean targets, although with a suggestion that federal Ethiopians and Tigrayans would be targeted as well if they failed to begin serious negotiations.<sup>697</sup> The sanctions were applied against key Eritrean officials involved in running the government, the sole political party – the PFDJ – and the Eritrean Defence Force. Critical institutions, including the Red Sea Trading Corporation and the Hidri Trust had sanctions applied against them as well. So too were named individuals: Hagos Ghebrehiwet W Kidan (Ghebrehiwet), the economic advisor to the PFDJ, and Abraha Kassa Nemariam (Kassa), the head of the Eritrean National Security Office. Explaining the decision, Blinken said: “Eritrea’s destabilizing presence in Ethiopia is prolonging the conflict, posing a significant obstacle to a cessation of hostilities, and threatening the integrity of the Ethiopian state.”<sup>698</sup> The sanctions order expressly exempted humanitarian aid activities, thus allowing, and encouraging them to proceed.

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<sup>693</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-envoy-visit-ethiopia-try-halt-fighting-2021-08-13/>

<sup>694</sup> Anthony Blinken, *Press Statement, United States’ Actions To Press for the Resolution of the Crisis in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia*, 23 May 2021

“Today, I am announcing a visa restriction policy under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act on the issuance of visas for any current or former Ethiopian or Eritrean government officials, members of the security forces, or other individuals—to include Amhara regional and irregular forces and members of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)—responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in Tigray. This includes those who have conducted wrongful violence or other abuses against people in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, as well as those who have hindered access of humanitarian assistance to those in the region. Immediate family members of such persons may also be subject to these restrictions.”

<https://www.state.gov/united-states-actions-to-press-for-the-resolution-of-the-crisis-in-the-tigray-region-of-ethiopia/>

<sup>695</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0329>

<sup>696</sup> [https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R\\_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusfVAFhR2ouseobQ](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/?fbclid=IwAR0R_EcOxdMZ8hlvoO0MLUPwvx5i4YK2wh4bitp4bkXusfVAFhR2ouseobQ)

<sup>697</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0478>

<sup>698</sup> <https://thehill.com/policy/international/581299-biden-sanctions-eritrean-forces-over-ethiopia>

The response from the Eritrean government was predictably scathing. The Ministry of Information complained: “That the primary aim of the illicit and immoral sanctions is to inculcate suffering and starvation on the population so as to induce political unrest and instability is patently clear. But adding insult to injury, its architects unabashedly maintain that ‘the sanctions are not aimed at harming the Eritrean people.’ No one can really be deceived by these crocodile tears.”<sup>699</sup> The Americans did not accept the criticism passively.

On 8 November, US Embassy Asmara posted on its Facebook page a lengthy statement (a) rebutting Eritrean government allegations that the US is against the Eritrean people and (b) yet again calling for Eritrea to withdraw from Tigray. The Embassy had asked the government to publish the piece, without success, and so now it has self-published.<sup>700</sup>

The Ethiopian government response to Washington’s action was a little more measured but suggested that the US should have targeted the Tigrayans and not the Eritreans.<sup>701</sup>

Somewhat akin to the sanctions, on 2 November Biden announced that on 1 January the US would remove Ethiopia from the free trade pact known as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) if Ethiopia had not mended its ways by then.<sup>702</sup> The looming threat of tariffs caused considerable distress within Ethiopia’s textile and apparel manufacturing and export industries. On 21 November, Power, in an address to the EU Foreign Affairs Council’s Development committee, mentioned ethnic detentions and the need for humanitarian access. She went on to call for international financial institutions to suspend debt restructuring and new loans for the Ethiopian government, saying that the IMF had taken this step.<sup>703</sup>

So far, US attempts to influence the conflict have had very limited success. Talks, aid, and sanctions have all been attempted, but there are – at least so far – few signs of a breakthrough. But there are some. The Americans appear to have turned to Kenya, in the hope that President Kenyatta can succeed in ending the war, where they have not. Kenyatta visited President Biden in the White House in October – the first African leader to be so received.<sup>704</sup> In the following month Kenyatta visited the Ethiopian Prime Minister and is said to have been told that Abiy is willing to make compromises to stop the fighting.<sup>705</sup> On 5 November, due at least in part to American efforts (including those of Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the American Ambassador to the UN), the Security Council at last called for a ceasefire.<sup>706</sup> Feltman – perhaps attempting to maintain the momentum – was quoted on 23 November as saying that “nascent progress” was being made in talks to end the war, and that all that was lacking was an end to hostilities.<sup>707</sup> In particular, he said that the parties had at last come to identify the key issues and to contemplate the elements of a diplomatic

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<sup>699</sup> <https://shabait.com/2021/11/13/eritrea-deplores-illicit-and-immoral-us-sanctions/>

<sup>700</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/usembassyasmara/photos/pcb.10159714399930120/10159714404645120> and <https://www.facebook.com/usembassyasmara/>

<sup>701</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/MFAEthiopia/posts/5303428403017693>

<sup>702</sup> <https://addisstandard.com/breaking-us-gives-ethiopia-ultimatum-to-access-agoa-privileges/>

<sup>703</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/nov-21-2021-administrator-power-eu-foreign-affairs-council-development>

<sup>704</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/14/uhuru-kenyatta-kenya-white-house-biden/>

<sup>705</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/19/world/asia/blinken-africa-china-invest.html>

<sup>706</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-security-council-calls-for-end-to-fighting-in-ethiopia/6302401.html>

<sup>707</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/military-escalation-ethiopia-risks-undermining-progress-toward-peace-talks-us-2021-11-23/>

process.<sup>708</sup> In addition, late November saw a slight opening of humanitarian access to Tigray after a total shut-down of over a month,<sup>709</sup> for which the US apparently took some credit.<sup>710</sup>

The prediction of progress may yet prove to be accurate, but at the beginning of December 2021 the signs appeared to be pointing in the opposite direction, as the US frankly acknowledged on 1 December.<sup>711</sup> Abiy had been mobilising every resource at his disposal in an attempt to finally crack the Tigrayan offensives. He vowed to lead his country's army from the battlefield. "Those who want to be among the Ethiopian children who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country today. Let's meet at the battlefield," the Prime Minister declared.<sup>712</sup> The offensive was successful; with the Tigrayans retreating back to the borders of Tigray, but despite appeals to the international community for an end to the fighting now that the TDF was no longer outside Tigray there was only a limited response.

The United States ended 2021 by threatening to impose further sanctions against Ethiopia, but the role of Feltman, as special envoy, is coming to an end. He engaged in a final visit to the region in January 2022, but is to be replaced by David Satterfield, the outgoing US ambassador to Turkey.<sup>713</sup>

### 8.3 The European Union

The European Union (EU) has worked closely with the United States in an attempt to halt the war and the accompanying atrocities. Brussels is – of course – in a more difficult position than Washington, since it must reach agreement between all its 27 members before it can act. This has meant it is less agile than its American allies, but Europe is still an important player in the Horn of Africa. Working in unison on the Horn is essential if progress is to be made. In June 2021 there was a push by both in an attempt to try to end the war. US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield pushed for the UN Security Council to meet publicly on Ethiopia's conflict-torn Tigray region. "What are we afraid of? What are we trying to hide? The Security Council's failure is unacceptable. We have addressed other emergent crises with public meetings. But not with this one," Thomas-Greenfield told a US and European Union virtual event on Tigray.<sup>714</sup>

The EU has been sceptical about the Ethiopian trajectory, even if one ignores the war in Tigray. When the 2021 Ethiopian election was held on 5 June, it went ahead without the presence of EU monitors. A month earlier the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, announced that the bloc would also not monitor the election. "The EU regrets the refusal of the fulfilment of standard requirements for the deployment of any Electoral Observation Mission, namely the independence of the Mission and the import of mission communication systems," Borrell said. "It is disappointing that the EU has not received the assurances necessary to extend to the Ethiopian people

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<sup>708</sup> <https://www.state.gov/briefing-with-u-s-special-envoy-for-the-horn-of-africa-ambassador-jeffrey-feltman-on-the-ongoing-situation-in-ethiopia/>

<sup>709</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-northern-ethiopia-humanitarian-update-situation-report-2-dec-2021>

<sup>710</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYApVbp-Kwc> at 48:00 minutes

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/23/ethiopia-abiy-vows-to-lead-army-from-the-battlefront>

<sup>713</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-us-special-envoy-horn-africa-feltman-leave-post-2022-01-05/>

<sup>714</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-06-10/us-pushes-un-security-council-to-publicly-address-ethiopia-tigray>

one of its most visible signs of support for their quest for democracy.<sup>715</sup> The decision was a blow to the credibility of the June election, which nonetheless went ahead. The result produced a “landslide” for the Prime Minister, winning 410 out of 436 contested seats.<sup>716</sup> In Tigray the war prevented the election from being held in the region and several important parties (particularly from Oromia) withdrew from the vote, after their candidates had been arrested and offices vandalised. Despite this the African Union’s election observer mission endorsed the election. “Overall, the election and election day processes were conducted in an orderly, peaceful and credible manner,” former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, the head of the mission, told a news conference in Addis Ababa as authorities continued counting ballots.<sup>717</sup> The former president’s stand did nothing to persuade the Tigrayans that he was anything more than a supporter of President Abiy.

Pekka Haavisto, the Finnish Foreign Minister has been actively promoting a resolution of the Tigray crisis since it began in 2020, making several trips to the region.<sup>718</sup> To his evident frustration he has made little progress with Prime Minister Abiy or President Isaias. In June 2021 Haavisto briefed the European Parliament behind closed doors. What he had to say did not remain confidential for long. The *Associated Press* carried a lengthy report, in which he quoted remarks made in February by the Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other ministers.<sup>719</sup> According to Haavisto his Ethiopian counterparts had warned that “they are going to wipe out the Tigrayans for 100 years.” Haavisto said that such an aim “looks for us like ethnic cleansing.” The remarks, when published, stung Addis Ababa into action. Ethiopia’s foreign ministry dismissed Haavisto’s comments as “ludicrous” and a “hallucination of sorts or a lapse in memory of some kind.”<sup>720</sup> The Ethiopians rejected calls for talks to be initiated, describing the Tigrayan government as no more than a “terrorist cell.”<sup>721</sup> Addis went on to say that henceforth they would find it difficult to consider the special envoy as a “credible intermediary.”

In July 2021 Annette Weber replaced Alex Rondos as new EU Special Representative on the Horn of Africa, and has since taken active part in the EU’s attempts to influence Ethiopia.<sup>722</sup> She also discussed the situation in Ethiopia with other actors, such as Saudi Arabia in November 2021.<sup>723</sup> In addition, the EU has sent others, such as the Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen in October 2021.<sup>724</sup> Following this visit, European Foreign Ministers raised the alarm at the possible disintegration of Ethiopia.<sup>725</sup> However, such rhetoric has not yet led to further concrete action by the EU, although it has threatened to “use all its foreign policy tools, including restrictive measures, to promote peace, adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, and help end conflict”, according to Borrell.<sup>726</sup> Europeans suggest that the US and the African Union need time and

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<sup>715</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/eu-scrap-plan-observe-ethiopia-election-2021-05-04/>

<sup>716</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/10/ethiopia-ruling-party-wins-national-election-in-landslide>

<sup>717</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-election-idAFKCN2DZ1F4>

<sup>718</sup> <https://www.devex.com/news/eu-to-dispatch-humanitarian-negotiator-to-ethiopia-after-aid-suspension-98934>

<sup>719</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/europe-ethiopia-africa-ffd3dc3faf15d0501fd87cafe274e65a>

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>721</sup> <https://addisstandard.com/news-update-ethiopia-calls-claims-by-eu-envoy-irresponsible-undiplomatic-and-outrageous-lies/>

<sup>722</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/21/council-appoints-three-new-eu-special-representatives-for-the-sahel-central-asia-and-the-horn-of-africa/>

<sup>723</sup> <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1974066/saudi-arabia>

<sup>724</sup> <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/12818/10>

<sup>725</sup> <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/12818/10>

<sup>726</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/africa/news/eu-prepared-to-issue-sanctions-over-tigray-war-officials-confirm/>

space to see if they can make progress with the Ethiopians. The EU explains that it continues to rely mostly on “regional and African Union mediation efforts, led by Special Representative Obasanjo, trusting that these will deliver peace.”<sup>727</sup>

The Ethiopian government is not without its supporters in Europe, who have made their presence felt at demonstrations and by lobbying their communities to back Prime Minister Abiy’s stand. In August 2021, for example, the Archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Sweden wrote to his congregation urging people by letter to donate money to the Ethiopian army.<sup>728</sup> In reality the Ethiopian diaspora around the world – estimated to be 2.5 million strong – is divided, just as the Eritrean diaspora is.<sup>729</sup> Some back the government and some do not. Both sides are eloquent, articulate and engaged. “In the 1980s, they mobilised resources and financed and supported armed groups that toppled the Soviet-affiliated Derg regime,” said Merga Yonas Bula, a doctoral student researching Ethiopia’s diaspora at the University of Leipzig in Germany. But it was the advent of social media that led to groups abroad becoming a force to be reckoned with. “Social media platforms became an alternative for them to voice their discontent. And beyond that, social media became a tool for resistance ... to mobilise resources and financing, and also to share their strategies,” Bula said.<sup>730</sup>

As well as attempting to take co-ordinated measures, EU states have taken individual measures in an attempt to put pressure on the Ethiopian authorities. In August 2021, France – which had promised to back plans for the re-birth of the Ethiopian navy in the Red Sea – withdrew its support for the project.<sup>731</sup> The agreement, reached between President Macron and Prime Minister Abiy in March 2019, would have seen US\$100mn being committed by Paris to the project.<sup>732</sup> The Ethiopian navy would have been based in the Eritrean ports of Assab or Massawa – as it was during the days of the Ethiopian empire.<sup>733</sup> The independence of Eritrea, which effectively took place in 1991 with the fall of Asmara, put an end to the navy, even though some vessels continued operating from Yemen and then Djibouti. The re-establishment of the navy was probably one of the ‘wins’ Prime Minister Abiy would have hoped to see flowing from alliance with President Isaias in 2018, when he signed a peace deal with Eritrea. Ireland has been a key player in the war in Ethiopia at the UN Security Council since it gained a seat there. Consequently, it was one of the main drivers for a UN Security Council statement in November 2021 calling for an immediate ceasefire.<sup>734</sup> Following the statement, Irish Ambassador Byrne Nason expressed his frustration at a UN Security Council briefing, stating that “[...] the Council’s voice matters on this issue, and it has the power to deliver change. We remained silent for too long.”<sup>735</sup> Ethiopia reacted by expelling four of Ireland’s six diplomats from Addis Ababa.<sup>736</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/11/04/declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-situation-in-ethiopia/>

<sup>728</sup> <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/ethiopian-orthodox-archbishop-wants-members-in-sweden-to-donate-to-ethiopian-army>

<sup>729</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopias-influential-diaspora-split-on-abiy/a-54209290>

<sup>730</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopias-influential-diaspora-split-on-abiy/a-54209290>

<sup>731</sup> <https://www.barrons.com/news/france-suspends-military-cooperation-with-ethiopia-01628854508?refsec=afp-news>

<sup>732</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-france-idUSKBN1QT2W3>

<sup>733</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_Navy)

<sup>734</sup> <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14691.doc.htm>

<sup>735</sup> <https://www.dfa.ie/pm/un/newyork/news-and-speeches/securitycouncilstatements/statementsarchive/statement-by-ambassador-byrne-nason-at-the-uns-council-briefing-on-ethiopia.html>

<sup>736</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/ethiopia-expels-irish-diplomats-as-eu-uk-citizens-urged-to-flee-civil-war/>

Overall, however, the EU has contributed little to resolving ending the war, beyond lending support to American initiatives at the UN. A former Dutch diplomat, familiar with the Horn of Africa, said he could raise no interest whatsoever from his government.<sup>737</sup> Speaking off the record an EU diplomat complained that while the situation was deteriorating rapidly there was little sign of genuine European engagement: “The EU has so far stayed silent.”<sup>738</sup> Human Rights Watch is scathing about the EU’s inaction.<sup>739</sup>

“[As the] EU’s foreign policy is determined by unanimity, resistance from key member states risks undermining crucial efforts, including calling for a Human Rights Council special session that could establish an investigative mechanism. European and other countries initially said they wanted to first see the outcome of a joint UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) investigation opened in March. The joint report is now out,<sup>740</sup> and recommends an international investigative mechanism, but some EU member states still appear reluctant to heed that call.”

This assessment was supported by the EU’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who pointed to the inability of the bloc to take concerted action as the situation in Ethiopia deteriorated.<sup>741</sup> Borrell this was “one of my biggest frustrations” in 2021 “because we were not able to react properly to the large-scale human rights violations, mass rapes using sexual violence as a war arm, killings and concentration camps based on ethnic belonging.” He added: “We haven’t been able to stop it, and neither to take coercive measures due to the lack of unanimity in the Council.” EU foreign policy decisions, such as the imposition of sanctions, require unanimity among all 27 EU countries. Borrell did not name the nations that were blocking action.

## 8.4 United Kingdom

Since leaving the European Union Britain’s voice has been muted, at best. While continuing to have some influence through its seat on the UN Security Council, London has had little leverage in world affairs. Under Boris Johnson the British have concentrated on winning alternative markets for their exports and Africa has received little attention.

Despite no major steps being taken by the British government, pressure exerted in Parliament has secured some minor concessions. Sustained interest from Members of Parliament in the House of Commons, and by Peers in the House of Lords, has focused on the following areas, securing small but meaningful shifts in government behaviour and engagement:

- UK Parliamentarians were quick to highlight the presence of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia, their destabilising influence, and their alleged human rights abuses and

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<sup>737</sup> Personal communication with the author.

<sup>738</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/africa/news/eu-officials-fear-ethiopian-collapse-amid-dramatic-situation/>

<sup>739</sup> <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/12/8/how-international-bodies-can-help-prevent-more-Ethiopia-massacres>

<sup>740</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27756&LangID=E>

<sup>741</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/josep-borrell-criticizes-eu-for-reaction-to-ethiopia-killings/>

violations of international humanitarian law. The UK's position is firm and resolute in demanding the withdrawal of Eritrean troops.<sup>742</sup>

- UK Parliamentarians expressed their alarm at the use of sexual violence and rape in the conflict. The UK is in theory a global leader on preventing sexual violence in conflict after its 2012 summit on the topic and launch of the PSVI, or Prevention Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. In June 2021 the UK deployed an expert from their PSVI Team of Experts to conduct an initial scoping mission, but tangible outcomes are unclear at this stage.<sup>743</sup> Given the launch of a global summit hosted by the UK in 2022, it is expected that Ethiopia will be a focus.<sup>744</sup>
- As elsewhere, the provision of humanitarian aid has been scrutinised, with the International Development Committee in particular criticising the now combined Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office's approach to Ethiopia, and calling the country a test of the department's newly integrated 'diplomacy and development' approach.<sup>745</sup> Despite scrutiny, the UK cut direct, 'bilateral' aid to Ethiopia from £240.5 million in 2020/2021, to £107.6 million planned for 2021/2022.<sup>746</sup> This was part of a wider package of cuts rather than a halving of aid applied punitively.
- The UK seems to be considering sanctions designations targeting individuals and entities responsible for abuses in Ethiopia, including of Eritrean bodies already targeted by the US. as highlighted above. This would be an early use of the UK's robust Magnitsky sanctions regime.<sup>747</sup>

## 8.5 Turkey, Iran, and the UAE

In Tigray War and Regional Implications Volume 1 we provided an analysis of the critical role the United Arab Emirates (UAE) played in helping Ethiopia and Eritrea sign a peace deal in 2018. The UAE had paved the way diplomatically.<sup>748</sup> Substantial funding was provided to both by the Arab state. It was reported that Ethiopia received an aid and funding pledge of no less than US\$3bn in June 2018.<sup>749</sup> Eritrea would have been likely to also have received promises of the UAE's largess. There were even reports that the UAE was to fund a pipeline from the Eritrean ports to Addis Ababa, but little more of this plan has ever been heard.<sup>750</sup> Indeed, exactly how much either Ethiopia or Eritrea actually received is open to question. The second element of the UAE's relationship with the Horn was its military base in the Eritrean port of Assab. This was used as a springboard for attacks on the Houthi in Yemen, as well as somewhere to torture prisoners of war. The base was closed in February 2021, as the UAE pulled back from involvement in the civil war in Yemen.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-07-22/38277>

<sup>743</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-10-19/58899>

<sup>744</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-launches-campaign-to-tackle-sexual-violence-in-conflict-around-the-world>

<sup>745</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/98/international-development-committee/news/156649/call-for-aid-and-accountability-in-ethiopia-tigray-region/>

<sup>746</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/98/international-development-committee/news/157733/aid-cuts-for-priority-african-region-outrageous-and-hypocritical/>

<sup>747</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-12-08/debates/469D7D0C-1EC6-427C-BCF2-428FC34EF2B6/MagnitskySanctionsHumanRightsAbuses>

<sup>748</sup> <https://agsiw.org/ethiopia-eritrea-reconciliation-offers-glimpse-into-growing-uae-regional-influence/>  
<https://wam.ae/en/details/1395302697325>

<sup>749</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/18/united-arab-emirates-gives-ethiopia-1-billion-lifeline-to-ease-foreign-exchange-crisis.html>

<sup>750</sup> <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/business/uae-to-fund-oil-pipeline-from-ethiopia-to-eritrea-1400106>

<sup>751</sup> [https://www.voanews.com/a/africa\\_uae-dismantles-eritrea-base-it-pulls-back-after-yemen-war/6202212.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_uae-dismantles-eritrea-base-it-pulls-back-after-yemen-war/6202212.html)

When the war erupted between Eritrea and Ethiopia on the one hand and Tigray on the other in November 2020 the UAE was accused of supplying drones that took out much of the Tigrayan armour and military hardware.<sup>752</sup> Some – including Bellingcat – questioned the veracity of this evidence, suggesting that it was not proven.<sup>753</sup> But a year later more substantial evidence was provided, including photographs, which indicated that the UAE had indeed armed the Ethiopians.<sup>754</sup> As one report put it: “Although the exact drone type that forms the basis for the UCAV (unmanned combat aerial vehicles) design is as of yet unknown, they are identical in design to two UCAVs that were shot down by Houthi forces in Yemen.”<sup>755</sup> The drones – and other military equipment – were delivered by what was described on 8 October 2021 as a UAE “air bridge” to support Ethiopia’s war effort in Tigray.<sup>756</sup> They were not the only equipment supplied by Doha. Everything from guns and ammunition to 50 ambulances were flown into Ethiopia by the UAE.<sup>757</sup>

“In 53 days, at least 51 suspicious cargo flights reached Ethiopia, most of them landing at Harar Meda air base. A total of 45 of those cargo flights originated in the UAE while six came from Iran. In the latter case, it can be presumed that the Boeing 747 and Il-76 cargo aircraft used carried Mohajer-6 unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) confirmed to have been delivered to Ethiopia onboard, although the delivery of other types of Iranian weaponry to the ENDF can’t be ruled out either.”

A second source confirmed they had tracked no fewer than 45 flights had been identified from the UAE to Ethiopia.<sup>758</sup> In a later post the source suggested that two flights a day were taking place a day between the UAE and Ethiopia.<sup>759</sup> These drone deliveries were supplemented by the Chinese manufactured Wing Loong I.<sup>760</sup>

The drones were delivered via the UAE from a variety of sources. This included China and Iran, but they were not the only sources of these armaments. The relationship between Addis Ababa and Ankara has been developing for some time. It is part of a drive by Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for influence in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa that has been described as a “neo-Ottoman revival.”<sup>761</sup> This has included a base in Somalia and a planned base in Sudan.<sup>762</sup> Turkey’s relationship with Ethiopia has gradually been gathering pace. In January 2018 it was reported that the value of Turkish investments in Ethiopia had reached US\$2.5bn.<sup>763</sup> In 2005, there were just three Turkish companies in Ethiopia. By early 2021 there are 200, ranging from wire and textiles to beverages.<sup>764</sup> Previously the Turks have been

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<sup>752</sup> <https://www.africanmilitaryblog.com/2020/11/tigray-uae-drones-supports-ethiopia>

<sup>753</sup> <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2020/11/19/are-emirati-armed-drones-supporting-ethiopia-from-an-eritrean-air-base/>

<sup>754</sup> <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/uae-combat-drones-break-cover-in.html>

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/uae-air-bridge-supports-ethiopian.html>

<sup>757</sup> <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/the-cargo-cleared-for-print-uae-wartime.html>

<sup>758</sup> <https://gerjon.substack.com/p/the-uae-ethiopia-airlift-the-investigation>

<https://gerjon.substack.com/p/the-uae-ethiopia-airlift-fly-sky>

<sup>759</sup> [https://twitter.com/Gerjon\\_/status/1458323299843313668?s=20](https://twitter.com/Gerjon_/status/1458323299843313668?s=20)

<sup>760</sup> <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/wing-loong-is-over-ethiopia-chinese.html>

<sup>761</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-and-the-new-scramble-for-africa-ottoman-designs-or-unfounded-fears/>

<sup>762</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Red-Sea-Rivalries-The-Gulf-The-Horn-and-the-New-Geopolitics-of-the-Red-Sea-1.pdf>

<sup>763</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/201801310663.html>

<sup>764</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/0e3cec2a-bd80-499c-a6ab-e5d1a1e768cf>

<https://www.somtribune.com/2021/01/18/erdogans-great-game-turkey-pushes-into-africa-with-aid-trade-and-soaps/>



in competition for influence in the region with the UAE. In recent months, this relationship has gradually improved.<sup>765</sup>

In August 2021 Prime Minister Abiy visited Ankara. He held a meeting with President Erdogan, at which a military deal and accompanying financial arrangements were negotiated.<sup>766</sup> As Al Jazeera put it: “Details of the deals were not immediately available.” The comments made at the press conference gave little away. Perhaps more revealing was the fact that President Erdogan held a phone conference a few days later with the UAE’s de facto ruler, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. A statement released by Erdogan’s office said: “Relations between the countries and regional issues were discussed in the talks.”<sup>767</sup> Did this include the relationship between both countries and Ethiopia, and how both might assist Prime Minister Abiy in his war efforts? We do not know. What we do know is that Turkish drones are reported to have begun being manufactured in Ethiopia.<sup>768</sup> The weapons, which are said to be for both surveillance and tactical use, are being built at a training and intelligence centre of the Information Network Security Agency or INSA.<sup>769</sup> The director-general of INSA – Temesgen Tiruneh – is reportedly in overall charge of the programme, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is said to visit the site frequently. The agency is said to be building a runway from which the drones can be launched, about ten kilometres from the centre of Addis.

It is probably too early to be certain what impact the drones have had on the war. However, Al Jazeera may be right when it concludes that they have been critical in tipping the conflict towards the Ethiopian government.<sup>770</sup>

“All these drones search the battlefield, guided by remote pilots back at base. Analysts, intelligence specialists, military planners and army commanders can see and share the high-resolution images being fed back giving a far clearer picture of the battlefield and the enemy’s intentions. The Tigrayan forces have no such capability and would have armoured units, air defence systems, mobile radar sites and command and control posts destroyed at a far greater rate. The Ethiopian military would also be able to use its meagre air force of 22 MiG-23 and Su-27 fighter jets and 18 Hind attack helicopters to greater effect as the intelligence of the intended target would be more detailed and up-to-date. Chinese Short Range Ballistic missiles, the DF-12, plus Multiple Rocket launcher systems bought from China can also be given far more accurate coordinates because of intelligence gathered by drones.”

The rapprochement between the UAE and Turkey has therefore been important for Prime Minister Abiy. He has been able to rely on them, and the Chinese, for support and for weapons. Together with China and Russia they have provided an alternative pole of international authority at a time when the European Union and the USA, upon whom Ethiopia has traditionally relied, have become increasingly critical.

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<sup>765</sup> [https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/turkey-and-uae-making-amends-talking-business-post-trump?\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_\\_=pmd\\_q0QvpFjfvhc\\_16v0AVy1tzuil9spxT\\_0Jy43o3.\\_kiU-1633963395-0-gqNtZGzNAICjcnBszQjI](https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/turkey-and-uae-making-amends-talking-business-post-trump?_cf_chl_jschl_tk__=pmd_q0QvpFjfvhc_16v0AVy1tzuil9spxT_0Jy43o3._kiU-1633963395-0-gqNtZGzNAICjcnBszQjI)

<sup>766</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/18/erdogan-offers-to-mediate-end-to-ethiopia-tigray-conflict>

<sup>767</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/31/turkey-uae-leaders-hold-phone-call-in-sign-of-improving-ties>

<sup>768</sup> <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/08/missed-opportunities-ethiopia-male-uav.html>

<sup>769</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/breaking-turkish-drones-reportedly-being-constructed-in-addis>

<sup>770</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/12/10/how-armed-drones-may-have-helped-turn-tide-in-ethiopia-conflict>

## 8.6 Africa

Despite the wider Horn being affected by the Tigray war, the interventions from the region, and from Africa in general, have been remarkably muted. The exception to this is, of course, Eritrea, but it is a participant in the conflict, not an observer.

The African Union, as has been mentioned above, has been criticised for failing to be an independent arbiter in the conflict. It should not be forgotten that President Ramaphosa, as chair of the Union, did intervene swiftly in an attempt to find a negotiated end to the war when it first broke out in November 2021. He established a three-person mediation team of former African Presidents, and this was supported by the Ethiopian President, Sahle-Work Zewde.<sup>771</sup> But the initiative was immediately rejected by Prime Minister Abiy.<sup>772</sup> Since then the African Union has done little, apart from appointing former Nigerian President Obasanjo as mediator in August 2021.<sup>773</sup> As former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, pointed out, this has been a real failure.<sup>774</sup>

Coming on top of the immense suffering and destruction this war has caused, particularly in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, one of the tragedies of this conflict is that 10 months after the war had started, the AU Peace and Security Council had not addressed it. This is despite its express mandate to intervene to ensure peace and stability in all the Member States of the AU as well as the fact that Ethiopia hosts the Headquarters of the AU.

The AU's silence on the atrocities committed against the Tigrayans in particular has been sharply criticised.<sup>775</sup>

The voice of the AU was never heard condemning the atrocities targeted against civilians in Tigray. When Tigrayans at the height of the war were being brutally murdered, raped, and cleansed from their places of origin by joint forces of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, the Eritrean Defence Forces, and assorted special police forces and militias, the Chairperson of the Commission, Moussa Faki, was heard congratulating the Ethiopian government for its “bold steps to preserve the unity, stability and respect for the constitutional order of the country; which is legitimate for all states....<sup>776</sup> The Chairperson of the AU and by extension his envoy are rightfully considered partial to its belligerent by the Tigrayan coalition fighting for the survival of its people.”

The AU's failure to be even-handed between the combatants is perhaps unsurprising. Its headquarters is in Addis Ababa and AU chairmen have always taken a deferential attitude to their hosts. It has not made former President Obasanjo's task any easier and has resulted in other mediators being considered – including the Kenyans.

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<sup>771</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/ethiopia-accepts-three-african-union-special-envoys-to-mediate-in-tigray-war>

<sup>772</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/ethiopia-dismisses-mediation-talk-from-african-union-envoy-visit>

<sup>773</sup> <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20210826/appointment-president-obasanjo-high-representative-horn-africa>

<sup>774</sup> <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/21152083/former-president-thabo-mbeki-delivers-the-chief-luthuli-memorial-lecture.pdf>

<sup>775</sup> <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/10/01/not-impartial-not-principled-non-starter-african-union-mediation-in-ethiopia/>

<sup>776</sup> <https://au.int/en/speeches/20201220/remarks-auc-chairperson-38th-igad-extraordinary-summit>

Kenya has been a major player, if for no other reason because it would be vitally affected should Ethiopia suffer a breakup. They have therefore been engaged from the start of the Tigray war. The Kenyans, for example, have acted as hosts to UN and other international meetings, while at the same time playing a significant role at the UN itself. Nairobi has served as an important base from which the international media could operate, since their work in Ethiopia was so constrained by the government. Most of Kenya's efforts have taken place away from the limelight. At the UN, the Kenyans have worked with other nations in the Security Council in the group as "A-3+1." Other members of the group are Niger, Tunisia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines and are the bloc of three elected African states on the Security Council with the addition of a Caribbean state.<sup>777</sup> In July 2021 Kenya's Permanent Representative to the UN Martin Kimani urged all parties to the Tigray war to lay down their arms.<sup>778</sup>

On 26 August 2021 Martin Kimani told the Security Council that what was needed was an "Ethiopian-owned process to mediate the deep divides." But he went on to caution against conflating political opposition with that identity.<sup>779</sup> He urged parties to the Tigray war to lay down their arms. While recommending that the Council call on Eritrea to withdraw forces, he also called on Ethiopia's Government to acknowledge the existence of legitimate grievances and urged armed actors in Tigray to withdraw from neighbouring regions. The targeting of civilians must stop immediately, he said, stressing the need for unfettered humanitarian access before famine returns to any part of Ethiopia.

The Chief of the Kenyan Defence Forces General Robert Kibochi underlined how significant the war was for his country.<sup>780</sup> "The situation in Ethiopia is of great strategic importance to us. We have been raising this issue so that there is some kind of intervention, whether diplomatic or some other way, because Ethiopia - with its population of more than one hundred million - is hugely strategic for us," said General Kibochi. As the Tigrayans and Oromo advanced towards Addis Ababa, Kenya recalled all its police to cope with any possible disruption that could be caused if the conflict spilled over into their country, bringing an influx of refugees and weapons into northern Kenya.<sup>781</sup>

The Kenyan role in the war was underlined by the meeting President Biden held with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta in October 2021.<sup>782</sup> It was the American leader's first face to face meeting with an African leader, but little was revealed about the substance of their discussions. This was followed by contacts with Blinken, who has discussed with the Kenyan leader the urgency of a ceasefire, to allow negotiations to take place.<sup>783</sup> According to the US State Department press statement: "President Kenyatta and Secretary Blinken agreed on the importance of unhindered humanitarian access for all communities affected by the conflict and reiterated their support for an inclusive political dialogue." Despite this, by late November 2021 there were few signs of this coming to fruition.

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<sup>777</sup> <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/03/how-can-african-states-become-more-influential-un-security-council/>

<sup>778</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/202107030146.html>

<sup>779</sup> <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1d/k1ddd3misu>

<sup>780</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/202107290821.html>

<sup>781</sup> <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/police-officers-recalled-to-curb-spillover-of-ethiopia-war-3617660>

<sup>782</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-abiy-ahmed-uhuru-kenyatta-ethiopia-africa-5c9fb5cd1e183b7a7ac065c23c169586>

<sup>783</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-call-with-kenyan-president-kenyatta-2/>

The Somali government's role in the tripartite alliance with Ethiopia and Eritrea was examined in Volume 1 of our Tigray report. The Somali government tried to deny sending troops to support the alliance in Tigray, but the denial held little water.<sup>784</sup> The UN's human rights rapporteur for Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, provided this summary of their role.<sup>785</sup>

In addition to reports of the involvement of Eritrean troops in the Tigray conflict, the Special Rapporteur also received information and reports that Somali soldiers were moved from military training camps in Eritrea to the front line in Tigray, where they accompanied Eritrean troops as they crossed the Ethiopian border. It is also reported that Somali fighters were present around Aksum. The Government of Somalia denied the participation of Somali soldiers in the Tigray conflict. It is further reported that a Somali parliamentary committee has demanded an explanation from the President of Somalia on the whereabouts of the Somali troops sent to Eritrea. The Special Rapporteur was informed that the foreign affairs and defence committee of the Parliament had called on the head of State to dispatch a fact-finding mission to Asmara for an investigation.

Angry Somali parents demonstrated in the capital Mogadishu, demanding that their government disclose the whereabouts of their sons who were taken to Eritrea for military training.<sup>786</sup> Prime minister Roble directed that a fact-finding committee probe the allegations, with Defence Minister Hassan Hussein Haji, Interior Minister Mukhtar Hussein Afrah and Army Chief of Staff Odawa Yusuf Rageh among those selected to be on the commission, which has yet to report.

## 8.7 China

The role of China is among the most important and least discussed in this conflict. With Russia it has repeatedly used its position on the UN Security Council to block discussion of the situation in Tigray and to resist attempts by western powers to impose sanctions of any kind on the combatants, even when UN staff were expelled by the Ethiopian authorities.<sup>787</sup> One of the few measures the Security Council managed to agree on, with Chinese and Russian support, was issuing a press release on 22 April 2021, in which they “expressed their deep concern about allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including reports of sexual violence against women and girls in the Tigray region and called for investigations to find those responsible and bring them to justice.”<sup>788</sup>

Any further action is resisted on the grounds of national sovereignty. As a Chinese statement put it: “China firmly supports Ethiopia's efforts to safeguard national sovereignty and independence, believes that the Ethiopian government has the capacity and wisdom to properly handle its internal affairs, and will continue to support the Ethiopian people in realising national peace, stability, development and

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<sup>784</sup> <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20210609-un-report-says-somali-army-participated-in-tigray-war>

<sup>785</sup> Situation of human rights in Eritrea

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, 12 May 2021, A/HRC/47/21, paragraph 20

<sup>786</sup> <https://hornobserver.com/articles/1057/Somalia-to-investigate-missing-SNA-in-Tigray>

<sup>787</sup> <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2021/10/ethiopia-tigray-meeting-under-any-other-business-3.php>

<sup>788</sup> <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14501.doc.htm>

prosperity. China will adhere to its consistent position and oppose external forces interfering in Ethiopia's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights.”<sup>789</sup>

This is just the tip of the iceberg of Chinese involvement in the conflict. China maintains a major base in Djibouti. It is not alone in this. Japan, the United States, France, Italy, Spain, Germany and (prospectively) India use the Red Sea state as external bases from which to project their military influence.<sup>790</sup> Since 2017 Djibouti has also been central to China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” stretching from Beijing to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Ethiopia has been a major beneficiary of Chinese investment, bringing everything from a renewed railway from Djibouti to Addis to a mass transit system in the capital and factories producing a wide range of goods. Between 2000 and 2018, Chinese investment is said to have reached US\$13.7bn.<sup>791</sup> In August 2021 China pledged to strengthen these ties.<sup>792</sup>

Beijing also has important links with Eritrea, the other major actor in the Tigray war. The country has been building its relationship with Eritrea for years, with investments in the one sector that shows signs of potential growth: mining. China has taken a share of a number of mines, including Danakali Ltd, a potash mine straddling the Ethiopian border which has enough of the mineral to continue production well into the next century.<sup>793</sup> Links were formalised and strengthened when Eritrea joined China’s Belt and Road initiative in November 2021.<sup>794</sup> John Calabrese, director of the Middle East-Asia Project at the American University in Washington, suggested that Beijing was using the war in Tigray as a reason to move away from its reliance on Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa.<sup>795</sup> “As things have unravelled in Ethiopia, Beijing might have decided to further diversify its relations in the Horn by cementing ties with Eritrea,” Calabrese said. As for Eritrea, the recent imposition of US sanctions over its role in the year-long civil war in neighbouring northern Ethiopia, had made it useful, if not necessary for the country to reach out to other willing partners, Calabrese said. “Beijing is, as ever, opportunistic, perhaps even more so with US-China strategic rivalry having heated up,” he said.

These investments have strengthened the Ethiopian economy, enabling Prime Minister Abiy to afford to prosecute the war. The threat of a Chinese veto has blocked action in the Security Council. However, it is China’s weapons supplies that have probably made the greatest contribution to the Ethiopian war effort. Analysts point to the delivery of Chinese drones as an attempt to tip the conflict towards Prime Minister Abiy. China itself has given some indications of this relationship. Chinese media have discussed the training of Ethiopian police in the use of drones.<sup>796</sup> In October 2021 a report appeared suggesting that flights have been tracked between Chengdu in China, where the Wing Loong I is manufactured, to Harar Meda air base in Ethiopia.<sup>797</sup>

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<sup>789</sup> [http://t.m.china.org.cn/convert/c\\_3ihwmm00.html](http://t.m.china.org.cn/convert/c_3ihwmm00.html)

<sup>790</sup> See Elizabeth Cobbett and Ra Mason, *Djiboutian sovereignty: worlding global security networks*, International Affairs, Vol. 97, No. 6, 2021, pp. 1767-1784

<sup>791</sup> <https://eusaleiden.com/2021/01/05/chinese-investment-in-ethiopia/>

<sup>792</sup> [http://t.m.china.org.cn/convert/c\\_3ihwmm00.html](http://t.m.china.org.cn/convert/c_3ihwmm00.html)

<sup>793</sup> The scale of the Chinese investments is outlined in the publication by Eritrea Focus for the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea: *Mining and Repression in Eritrea: Corporate Complicity in Human Rights Abuses*, June 2018 <https://eritrea-focus.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Mining-Repression-Eritrea-V1.pdf>

<sup>794</sup> <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3157654/china-expands-african-reach-eritrea-guinea-bissau-join-belt>

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>796</sup> [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/14/c\\_137606105\\_3.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/14/c_137606105_3.htm)

<sup>797</sup> *Wing Loong Is Over Ethiopia: ChineseUCAVs Join The Battle For Tigray*

The article by Stijn Mitzer and Joost Oliemans suggests that a model of the Chinese drone was shown in an interview with the head of the Ethiopia Air Force. They go on to discuss evidence they have that the Wing Loong I military drone has arrived in Ethiopia. “After the drones' arrival to the air base, they were hastily moved to a nearby hangar to avoid their detection by prying eyes, an effort which nonetheless evidently failed.”<sup>798</sup> Information about the airlift from China was corroborated by another source, who tracked a flight from Chengdu and another from Dalian.<sup>799</sup> It is reported that Chinese have been seen over Mekelle.<sup>800</sup> They quote a video showing a Wing Loong 1 over the Tigrayan city.

A third source provided satellite imagery of the Wing Loong drones at Ethiopia's military airport of Harar Meda, south of Addis Ababa in November 2021.<sup>801</sup> The authors say that: We found a first hit on 2 November 2021, that fits with the measurements of a Wing Loong, namely a wingspan of 14 metres and a length of 9 metres, standing outside the blue hangar. Another Airbus satellite images taken on 11 November, this time a bit blurrier, shows a drone with the same size southwest of the hangar.” They continue: “Last year China joined the Arms Trade Treaty, which obliges exporting states to do a proper risk assessment of the likelihood that the receiving state could use unmanned combat aerial vehicles to violate international humanitarian and human rights law, or that it would endanger peace and security. Considering the multiple reports of airstrikes against civilian targets and other abuses, one wonders how China can justify the export of armed drones to Ethiopia in the context of the ATT.”

These are appropriate issues to raise. Whether Beijing will provide answers is quite another question.

Just how valuable the drones supplied to by Turkey, China or Iran is open to question. An article considering the utility of the Iranian Mohajer-6s suggested that they have not been as effective as had been anticipated.<sup>802</sup> The authors, Stijn Mitzer and Joost Oliemans, provided this assessment of its capabilities.

“Although acquired with much anticipation on the side of Ethiopia, the operational career of the Mohajer-6s in the country ended almost as soon as the drones had been delivered, with both drones acquired almost immediately grounded as problems in their control systems prevented their actual use over Ethiopia... It would take until late October 2021 when the problems with the Mohajer-6s finally appeared resolved, some two and a half months after their arrival to Ethiopia! Throughout early November 2021, both Mohajer-6s were regularly sighted on the runway and tarmac of Semera airport... However, with the Mohajer-6's low flight ceiling the type is vulnerable to ground fire, whereas the low quality of its FLIR turret and the fact that the drone itself is largely unproven in combat could result in poor efficacy. What is more, with the low numbers known to have been produced so far it remains to be

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Oryx Monday, October 11, 2021

<https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/wing-loong-is-over-ethiopia-chinese.html>

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> <http://martinplaut.com/2021/11/15/the-weapons-airlift-that-is-fuelling-ethiopias-tigray-war/>

<sup>800</sup> <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/10/tigray-war-chinese-made-armed-drones.html>

<sup>801</sup> Ethiopia now confirmed to fly Chinese armed drones,

<https://paxforpeace.nl/news/blogs/ethiopia-now-confirmed-to-fly-chinese-armed-drones>

<sup>802</sup> <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/11/unfit-for-service-ethiopias-troublesome.html>

seen if the Mohajer-6s can actually make a difference in a war that has meanwhile entered its second year.”

The authors suggest that the Chinese drones also only have a limited use. “The lack of any armament for its (operational) UCAVs led the Ethiopian Air Force to use its Wing Loong Is to designate targets for Su-27 fighter aircraft instead.”

If this is accurate then the provision of high-tech equipment in an environment as rugged and vast as Ethiopia may be of limited use. It may well explain why the Kalashnikov and the machete are still so widely used: there is little that can go wrong with these tried and tested weapons.

Relations between the Chinese and Eritrea were strengthened further with the visit of China’s State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi in January 2022. He and President Isaias issued a statement in which President Isaias thanked China for its role enhancing a “balanced global order predicated on respect of international law” – code for China’s refusal to allow the Tigray war to be dealt with by the UN Security Council.<sup>803</sup> There was further agreement on the development of Eritrea’s ports of Massawa and Assab, as well as its mining. This – in all probability – indicated further collaboration in the China’s role in the giant phosphate deposit that straddles the Eritrean-Ethiopian border in the Danakil desert. These developments, together with the Chinese decision to appoint a “special envoy” to deal with the Horn of Africa underlines Beijing’s determination to enhance its status as a major player in the region.<sup>804</sup>

## 8.8 Conclusion

Following the withdrawal of TDF within the borders of Tigray the Ethiopian military announced that it would “pause” in the positions they had captured. This was welcomed by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres.<sup>805</sup> He also welcomed the message from the Tigrayan forces stating they had withdrawn from neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions back into Tigray. “The Secretary-General urges the parties to grasp this opportunity, cease hostilities in the year-long conflict, take all steps to ensure the provision of much-needed humanitarian assistance, the withdrawal of foreign fighters, and address political differences through a credible and inclusive national dialogue,” the statement said.

For its part, on 28 December the US made clear that it would continue to press for a diplomatic solution to the war, but would impose further sanctions against Ethiopia on 1 January 2022, unless there was an end to the blockade of Tigray.<sup>806</sup>

With Tigrayan forces having withdrawn into Tigray region and the Ethiopian Government stating it does not intend to pursue those forces into Tigray, we believe this offers an opportunity for both sides to halt conflict operations and to come to the negotiating table. We’ve said repeatedly there is no military solution to this conflict. That is why we support diplomacy as the first, last, and only option to address this

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<sup>803</sup> <https://shabait.com/2022/01/05/eritrea-and-china-agree-to-strengthen-strategic-partnership/>

<sup>804</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-appoint-special-envoy-horn-africa-2022-01-06/>

<sup>805</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1108742>

<sup>806</sup> <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-december-28-2021/>

conflict. We reiterate our calls for the Ethiopian Government to start credible, inclusive national dialogue that includes comprehensive, transparent transitional justice measures, including accountability for those responsible for atrocities.

When it comes to AGOA (the African Growth and Opportunity Act), I don't have any update on – for that for you at the moment. As we announced in November, the AGOA eligibility criteria in US law stipulates that, among other things, a country not engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights and must make continual progress towards establishing the rule of law and political pluralism. We did note in the context of that announcement that the President had determined that three sub-Saharan African countries, including Ethiopia, were out of compliance with eligibility for AGOA, a revocation that would take effect 1 January 2022.

The year 2021 ended without a resolution to the conflict or the blockade. As the UN reported on 30 December, the situation in Tigray had continued to deteriorate.<sup>807</sup> These extracts of the report give a clear indication of the situation.

Between 19 and 24 December, airstrikes on Tigray reportedly lead to mass civilian casualties, including dozens of people reportedly killed, making this the most intense series of air attacks and casualties reported since October. Most attacks and casualties reported in Alamata, Korem, Maychew, Mekoni, and Milazat towns in southern Tigray. Due to limited access and insecurity in the area, humanitarian partners could not verify the exact number of casualties yet...

[Fighting had held up convoys, as a result] no trucks with humanitarian aid cargo entered Tigray since 14 December... Overall, 1,338 trucks have entered the region since 12 July, which represents less than 12% of the required supplies to meet the humanitarian needs.

In Tigray, the humanitarian situation remains dire with more than 5.2 million people or 90% of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. Due to lack of supplies, including medications, fuel, and cash for the humanitarian organisations, only a fraction of the people in need are receiving assistance. The situation is expected to deteriorate further if no additional supplies enter the region immediately. The old caseload of IDPs in Shire, for instance, have not received food aid for the last six months. A partner agency halted its mobile health services in Shire from 28 sites to only six due to lack of essential drugs. Most partners have reduced water trucking operations due to lack of fuel and cash while the number of water and sanitation partners reduced from 46 few months ago to only 12 during the reporting period.

The year ended with many expressions of concern from the US and EU combined with limited sanctions. The UN Security Council is – as ever – impeded from taking decisive action by the threat of a Chinese or Russian veto. Meanwhile, hopes of a diplomatic breakthrough rested with the Kenya's President Kenyatta or former Nigerian President Obasanjo. By the end of 2021 they – together with international actors - had apparently not made substantive progress.

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<sup>807</sup> UN OCHA, *Ethiopia – Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update, Situation Report*, Last updated: 30 Dec 2021 <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia/>



## 9. Ethiopia's foreign relations and the Tigray war

Author's name withheld

### 9.1 Introduction

On 5 February 2022, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, in his opening remarks to the 35<sup>th</sup> African Union summit in Addis Ababa stated that: *“Peace and security are critical issues affecting our continent. Despite the African Union’s intensive engagement in addressing peace and security on the continent, guided by the maxim “African Solutions to African Problems,” new and complex problems that undermine our unity and sovereignty continue to emerge. In this respect the past year was particularly challenging to our continent in general and my own country Ethiopia in particular. Ethiopia’s challenge was internal in nature and a matter of maintaining law and order. But resolution of our internal matters was made exceedingly difficult by the role played by external actors.”*<sup>808</sup>

This chapter looks at what is known about the roles played by some of those external actors, and the politics behind this. It summarises conclusions and impressions which seem to be relatively clear; but it also considers external influences and patterns of material support which remain opaque, or which have been carefully obscured; as well as some of the narratives about external involvement that have been carefully spun, and systematically amplified, since the Tigray war began. The chapter considers the way in which Ethiopian regional foreign relations have evolved, and examines the roles of Ethiopia’s nearest neighbours, its regional allies and suppliers, and inter-state and continental bodies. The chapter complements Martin Plaut’s discussion of wider diplomatic and international relations in this volume, which focuses on the US, EU, and Britain, as well as Turkey and the Gulf States, Africa, and China. It focuses on the changing politics and nature of Ethiopian foreign policy-making within the Horn, with new influences and implications.

The chapter argues that the Ethiopian Prime Minister was correct to conclude that scope for resolution of the war in Ethiopia has been damaged by unprecedented external interference in its political, security and military strategies. But it sets out a different reasoning than his: this increase in interference has had little to do with western pressure or the notion that western states supported his adversaries (they did not). Rather it was the direct consequence of foreign policy decisions taken by the current Ethiopian Prime Minister and his Government since 2018. Ethiopia’s leaders since 2018 invited external actors into Ethiopia, either directly as armed and security actors, or as military facilitators, suppliers, and financiers. It is those decisions that have compromised Ethiopian sovereignty and national interests, in fundamental ways which will likely be difficult or impossible to reverse.

Under its new Prime Minister from April 2018, Ethiopia’s foreign relations were rapidly disrupted. The new Ethiopian government presented its foreign strategy as marking a “new dawn” of peaceful cooperation with its neighbours and the

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<sup>808</sup> Abiy Ahmed, 5 February 2022, ‘Welcoming Remarks at the 35th ordinary session of the African Union Assembly,’ Addis Ababa, emphasis added. <https://twitter.com/AbiyAhmedAli/status/1489894700865753091?s=20&t=q2sphycgleCBdlxAKNjxMw>

international community. Others saw a “crisis of foreign relations”<sup>809</sup> that wrecked Ethiopia’s hard-won status as a contributor to peace and stability across the Horn over several decades. The chapter argues that Ethiopia’s loss of national autonomy and strategic policy coherence marked a return to the more transactional and unstable approach of the past. At the beginning of 2022, the approach looked set to continue to drive conflict domestically and to increase the risks of it regionally. It was also diametrically at variance with a publicly expressed Ethiopian Government commitment to “national dialogue.”

## 9.2 Claims and counter-claims: the propaganda war

Ethiopian Government allegations that the Government of Tigray and its ruling party the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) were widely supported by “the west” echoed throughout 2021.<sup>810</sup> In portraying itself as a victim both of TPLF aggression and “neo-colonial interference” from the US and EU, the Ethiopian Government has simultaneously deployed the resources of incumbency to promote key elements of its narrative. Addis Ababa has maintained, for instance, that the TPLF was exclusively responsible for starting the war with its attack on the National Defence Force’s Northern Command; that its “law and order operation” to detain a small group of TPLF “terrorist leaders” would be easily concluded “in a matter of weeks”; that foreign forces from Eritrea and Somalia were not involved in an “internal matter”; that its operations were respectful of the laws of war, and careful not to target civilians; that its forces had withdrawn from Tigray at the end of June 2021 of their own volition, and to “give peace a chance”; that diplomatic concerns to see progress on peace-making would be met after elections in June 2021, or after the establishment of a newly mandated Federal Government in October 2021, or (as more recently) after the Tigrayan people “came to their senses” and gave up their leaders. None of this was true.

At the time of writing in early February 2022, the Ethiopian government narrative maintained that the military phase of the war had been effectively concluded after the TPLF’s forces had been comprehensively “defeated” in November and December 2021 (whilst at the same time quadrupling federal defence spending in January 2022<sup>811</sup>); and (even more remarkably) that it was the TPLF, not the Federal Government or its allies, that was blocking the delivery of aid to civilians in Tigray.

Intended largely to shore up high levels of domestic support and acquiescence, each of these claims has also had an important impact in silencing diplomatic discussion and criticism. Each claim has been challenged or has unravelled to a greater or a lesser degree over the period from November 2020, and it is unsurprising that international and Ethiopian journalists, academics, and analysts have critiqued them, often robustly.

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<sup>809</sup> Vergee, 24 August 2021, ‘The Crisis of Ethiopian Foreign Relations: from “Imperfect Hegemon” to Occupied State’, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-crisis-of-ethiopian-foreign-relations/>

<sup>810</sup> Amongst multiple reports, see for instance Paravicini for Reuters, 24 May 2021, ‘Ethiopia accuses United States of meddling over Tigray’ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/us-imposes-restrictions-ethiopia-assistance-over-tigray-2021-05-23/>

<sup>811</sup> A supplementary budget of Ethiopian Birr 120 billion was approved in late January 2022, of which 90 billion will go to defence, 5 to rehabilitation and 8 to food security. See Reporter TV News, 29 January 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21gjjwbc3c>

The TPLF's attack on the Northern Command in November 2020 is not in doubt, but further detail about the prior extent and scope of Ethiopian and Eritrean preparations for war – including troop and armaments movements – gradually come to light.<sup>812</sup> The military operation was not quickly concluded; civilians were brutally slaughtered, raped and starved, and Eritrean – and Somali – armed involvement is beyond doubt. Most well-informed commentators concluded that, so far from withdrawing to allow for a unilateral “humanitarian ceasefire” ENDF forces were expelled by force from Tigray in June 2021; and it seemed to most that TPLF forces were not defeated but able to withdraw reasonably intact in November and December 2021: in the face of an escalation of intensive drone attacks and threats to their over-extended supply lines, but well ahead of Ethiopian forces.<sup>813</sup> Meanwhile the inability to deliver food into Tigray from any direction continued to be carefully orchestrated by the Ethiopian Government and its allies on the ground, as the public narrative continues to seek to shift the blame for a policy of deliberate starvation.

Departure from the Government's domestically broadly popular but increasingly absurdist “law and order” narrative about the brutal war on Tigray has been met with aggressive – often abusive – counterclaims: from government officials, loyalist Ethiopian academics, and social media activists of Ethiopian and Eritrean descent. Even mildly critical or questioning commentators (analysts, journalists, and academics) have been deported, expelled, or denied access to Ethiopia.<sup>814</sup> Principled diplomats who have expressed concern about humanitarian access, or human rights abuses and the need for their fully independent investigation have been bullied, cold-shouldered, and accused of “supporting terrorists.” Seven senior UN staff who had expressed concern about the Ethiopian Government's blockade on the delivery of food and medicine to civilians in Tigray were expelled without warning on 30 September 2021, in a move described by the UN Secretary General as “illegal.”<sup>815</sup> Meanwhile more prominent academic critics and Tigrayan social media activists have been subjected to harassment, intimidation, vilification and threats - both reputational and physical.<sup>816</sup>

At the end of 2021, meanwhile, the Ethiopian state seemed keen to reset relations with those it has most strongly criticised, seeking a more emollient strategy vis-à-vis important humanitarian donors in the context of an initial US Dollar 2.5 billion

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<sup>812</sup> New York Times, 15 December 2021, ‘The Nobel peace prize that paved the way for war’

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/15/world/africa/ethiopia-abiy-ahmed-nobel-war.html>

<sup>813</sup> For an authoritative account see Ermias Teka in this volume, and in Volume One of *The Tigray War and Regional Implications*, July 2021, <https://eritreahub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Tigray-War-and-Regional-Implications-Volume-1.pdf>

<sup>814</sup> Crisis Group, 22 November 2020, ‘Ethiopia Expels Crisis Group Senior Analyst’

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=william+davison+deported+from+ethiopia&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>; New York Times, 20 May 2021 ‘Ethiopia Expels New York Times Reporter’

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/20/world/africa/ethiopia-new-york-times-simon-marks.html>

<sup>815</sup> UN, 6 October 2021, Meetings Coverage, Security Council, ‘Secretary General Denounces Ethiopia's Expulsion of Senior UN Officials as Security Council Delegates Differ on Potential Response’ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14657.doc.htm>

<sup>816</sup> See for instance: Norwegian News Agency, 10 February 2021 ‘Norwegian professor received death threats from Ethiopians in exile’ <https://sciencenorway.no/africa-ntb-english-politics/norwegian-professor-received-death-threats-from-ethiopians-in-exile/1811612>; Jeff Stein, 5 August 2021, ‘Secret Agents, Threats, Fake News Target Ethiopian Regime's Critics in US’ [https://www.spytalk.co/p/secret-agents-threats-fake-news-target?r=2hta&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=copy](https://www.spytalk.co/p/secret-agents-threats-fake-news-target?r=2hta&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email&utm_source=copy); many other cases have been less publicised, but include direct threats of violence. A specific campaign has targeted the Head of the World Health Organisation, even including interventions by Ethiopia's official diplomatic representatives, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/who-sets-aside-ethiopia-request-probe-who-chiefs-links-rebellious-tigrayan-2022-01-24/>. For older cases involving Eritreans, cf. also Plaut, 27 November 2019, ‘Eritrean “pro-government activist” carries out another London attack’ <https://eritreahub.org/eritrean-pro-government-activist-carries-out-another-london-attack>

reconstruction bill.<sup>817</sup> In January 2022, a 53-page Amharic document setting out a “Re-engagement Strategy” for Ethiopia’s foreign relations was leaked.<sup>818</sup> It was an unusual paper, remarkably political for the traditionally cautious national Foreign Affairs bureaucracy, and judged to be the work of senior politicians and career diplomats from the Ministry and a Prime Ministerial Foreign Relations Advisory Committee.<sup>819</sup> It combines savvy (and broadly accurate) analysis of the diverse attitudes of the US and European states with a blunt acknowledgement an aggressive foreign policy approach had damaged relations, and a highly political view of how to remedy the “resistance” encountered: *if we choose to fight while negotiate and negotiate while fighting, along with the winning track we are on, it will enable us to fulfil our interest. Since the course we had been proceeding in doesn’t seem to bring about an agreement, it is necessary to adopt a different engagement strategy.*<sup>820</sup>

How did Ethiopia get to the point where it has been forced to acknowledge the need to reset its foreign diplomatic relations, and abandon its accusations of “neo-colonial meddling,” in order to buy the time and space to continue its war in Tigray “while negotiating”?

### **9.3 Foreign relations before 2018**

Before 1991 Ethiopia’s foreign relations were shaped by superpower and cold-war alignment. During the post-war imperial period (1944-1974), as the country emerged from British military administration, Ethiopia was broadly aligned with the US. This changed during the military Marxist Derg government (1974-1991). Ethiopia abruptly realigned with the Soviet Union in 1977 during the Ethio-Somali war in the Ogaden, with the US swinging behind Somalia. The mantra of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” also characterised relations between Addis Ababa and Khartoum with each hosting and supporting armed opponents of the other. As the cold war played out in the Horn, the Ethiopian government became a pariah in the west: destabilising (US-backed) neighbours in Sudan and Somalia; fighting civil wars on several fronts with eastern bloc and Cuban allies; and presiding over conflict-induced famine during the 1980s.

Derg-era foreign policy aimed to counter the animosity of neighbouring countries and the Arab world on the one hand, and on the other to neutralise threats from western powers based on cold war ideological differences. Derg foreign policy, like its domestic approach, blended ultra-nationalism with socialism, seeing threats as both geopolitical and ideological. Heavily influenced by socialist ideology, it was preoccupied to establish robust diplomatic relations only with socialist sister countries, treating others broadly as “enemies.”

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<sup>817</sup> Reuters, 30 December 2021, ‘Impoverished Ethiopian seeks extra US\$2.5bn to rebuild from war’

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/impoverished-ethiopia-seeks-extra-25-bln-rebuild-war-2021-12-30/>

<sup>818</sup> “*BeEthiopia betekesetew gichet sabiya kemereab ageroch ena alemakef tekumat gar yetekezakezewn yetwuch genenynt melesew mashashaya strateji.*” Tir 2014, Addis Ababa, Amharic document

[https://twitter.com/getachew\\_zeki/status/1486813647783403528?s=20&t=Vm8-bnzGRuhh2U7eZ6usOw](https://twitter.com/getachew_zeki/status/1486813647783403528?s=20&t=Vm8-bnzGRuhh2U7eZ6usOw). See also Sajid Nadeem, 28 January 2022, ‘Leaked Ethiopian Foreign Ministry document proposes talks to end Tigray conflict’

<https://myviewsonnews.net/leaked-ethiopian-foreign-ministry-document-proposes-talks-to-end-tigray-conflict/>. Two pages of the Amharic original were missing from the leaked “Re-engagement strategy.”

<sup>819</sup> The uneven document is clearly the product of a committee, and authors are thought to include the Minister and State Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a veteran long-standing Europe-lead diplomat.

<sup>820</sup> Excerpt from the leaked Amharic “Re-engagement Strategy” document, section 4.2 “Actions that should be taken to improve the diplomatic relations with America,” unofficial translation.

Under the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) from 1991 to 2018 the Ethiopian government sought to carve out the basis for greater autonomy in its foreign relations, and new regional stability based on better cooperation and infrastructural linkages. Addis Ababa under EPRDF facilitated Eritrea's independence (1993). This ended a 30-year war but angered domestic opponents of the country's "dismemberment" and loss of access to the sea. The Ethiopian government was lauded for its contributions to regional peace-making (especially in Somalia, Sudan, and later also South Sudan); and to international peacekeeping (in Rwanda/UNAMIR, Liberia/UNMIL, Burundi/ONUB, Abyei/UNISFA, Darfur/UNAMID, South Sudan/UNMISS, and Somalia/AMISOM). It won praise for its consolidation of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), its support to the establishment of the African Union (AU, 2002) with its peace and security architecture (APSA, 2004), and for its global leadership on New Partnerships for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and climate change.

Ethiopia's key foreign policy document of the period, the 2002 Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy identified internal rather than external threats (extreme poverty, structural injustice, and discrimination) as the country's main vulnerabilities. The policy focus was heavily inward looking, emphasising "peace, development and democracy" as pillars for regional harmony. Ethiopia gradually gained outsize influence regionally and globally, not least because of the prominence of its then-Prime Minister as a *de facto* continental spokesperson.

Although admired for many aspects of its 1991-2018 foreign relations strategy, Ethiopia also went to war with Eritrea in 1998 and invaded Somalia in 2006. Relations with post-independence Asmara quickly soured in the 1990s, and a costly war (1998-2000) subsided into a protracted state of no-war no-peace (2001-2018). Eritrea hosted and trained opposition groups fighting the Ethiopian government: the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and *Gunbot 7* (whose members now influence a number of political parties in Amhara and Addis Ababa, including *Ezema*, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice). Addis Ababa actively sought to contain what it viewed as Eritrean destabilisation via proxies, and in 2006 invaded Somalia to oust the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and its Eritrean advisers. In December 2009, not least after heavy Ethiopian lobbying, the UN imposed sanctions on Eritrea (an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze on named individuals).<sup>821</sup>

Although a partner in the international "war on terror" after 2001, the Ethiopian Government trod an independent-minded path, also pursuing what it saw as its more local national interests. The influence of the US over its decision-making was regularly overstated. Addis Ababa allowed US bases to be used to launch drone strikes against targets in Somalia. It refused, meanwhile, to sign the assurances needed to facilitate the deportation of Ethiopian terror suspects from partner countries. Critics argued that the Ethiopian Government's attitude towards groups (from Al-Itihaad in the 1990s to Al-Shabaab in the 2000s) exacerbated conflict in Somalia.<sup>822</sup> The support which Addis Ababa gave during the EPRDF period to

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<sup>821</sup> UN, 23 December 2009, 'Security Council imposes sanctions on Eritrea over its role in Somalia, refusal to withdraw troop following conflict with Djibouti', <https://www.un.org/press/en/2009/sc9833.doc.htm>

<sup>822</sup> Mohammed Haji Ingiriis (2017) "From Al-Itihaad to Al-Shabaab: how the Ethiopian intervention and the War on Terror exacerbated the conflict in Somalia" *Third World Quarterly*, 39 (11) 2033-2052, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2018.1479186?journalCode=ctwq20>

Somaliland and the sub-state Somali actors that became its federal member states (FMSs) was also controversial. Some saw it as an attempt to undermine Somali irredentism and cross-border support to Darod (Ogaadeen) insurgents in the Ethiopian Somali region.

Ethiopia bolstered its foreign policy independence through its diversification of partnerships. Drawing on support from development partners in the west and international financial institutions, Ethiopia also sought to build trade and investment relations with emerging economies and markets, notably China, Korea, Japan, Turkey, Brazil, and India. The government's strategies for state-led development were ambitious, robustly independent, and counter to the Washington Consensus, from where they drew regular criticism (for currency overvaluation, public sector dominance, etc.).

Addis Ababa sought to cement regional and continental integration and alliances with investments in infrastructure. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD, 2011) was the centrepiece of Ethiopia's strategy to reinforce (and control) cooperation and integration in the Horn by building the road, rail, and electricity infrastructure critical to trade and economic growth. Addis Ababa secured the support of upper-riparian Nile states (including Sudan) as a counterweight to the objections of Egypt. It financed the dam from domestic sources and refused international involvement in negotiations over design, filling and operations. IGAD's Horn of Africa Initiative provided the shared regional framework for wider infrastructure planning and investment. By 2015, Ethiopia was being described (arguably with a degree of generosity) as a "benign regional hegemon."<sup>823</sup>

#### **9.4 The new Horn axis - Addis Ababa-Asmara- Mogadishu**

In 2018 the quarter-century constellation of relations in the Horn of Africa suddenly reversed, as the new Ethiopian Prime Minister became part of a new triangular alliance between the three leaders in Addis Ababa-Mogadishu-Asmara. This marked an abrupt departure from Ethiopia's strategy of containing Eritrean influence, building federalism at home, and supporting Somalia's Foreign Ministers and Somaliland. The shift saw Ethiopia pivot to the Federal Somali Government and its President; meanwhile Eritrea and its President were "brought in from the cold" after Ethiopian lobbying to lift UN sanctions. The new triangular alliance fostered multiple geopolitical shifts. At the same time, a cadre of senior foreign relations gurus and career diplomats was side-lined or sacked, some reportedly at the request of Eritrea's President.<sup>824</sup> A Foreign Relations unit at the Office of the Prime Minister took on some of the roles of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A new foreign policy document based on the Prime Minister's new philosophy of *Medemer* (Synergy) was reportedly drafted, and widely discussed.<sup>825</sup>

How and why did the new constellation matter?

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<sup>823</sup> Verhoeven, 12 April 2015, 'Africa's Next Hegemon: Behind Ethiopia's Power Plays', Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ethiopia/2015-04-12/africas-next-hegemon>

<sup>824</sup> Africa Intelligence, 30 July 2018, <https://www.africaintelligence.com/eastern-and-southern-africa/2018/07/13/tekeda-alemu-pays-the-price-for-his-ties-with-seyoum-mesfin,108316882-art>

<sup>825</sup> MFA, 8 November 2019, 'A week in the Horn' <https://mfaethiopiablog.wordpress.com/2019/11/08/a-week-in-the-horn-10/>

**Eritrea.** The potential human, socio-economic and logistics benefits of sustainable peace, an open border and effective trade between Ethiopia and Eritrea (and Somalia) were in principle enormous and were very widely welcomed. But those benefits required detailed negotiation, transparency, and institutionalisation in order that they be captured.<sup>826</sup> The announcement of the peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea in July 2018 was greeted with great joy at the popular level on both sides of the border. After two decades of stalemate and separation, people flocked across the border to meet friends and relatives when it was opened in September 2018. Ethiopians made short visits, but Eritreans often stayed in Ethiopia, with 96,000 refugees in camps in Tigray by 2020. Border crossings were reclosed in December 2018 (Zalambessa/Serha) and April 2019 (Humera/OmHajer, Bure/Assab). Ethiopian moves to negotiate port access seemed to have stalled at the end of 2019, although in January 2021 the Assab road was under rehabilitation. When the Chinese Foreign Minister visited Asmara in January 2022 a rail link with Assab was announced.

The new axis is highly personalised, and tactical, and much depends on one's view of the Eritrean President's intentions. Closer Ethio-Eritrean relations seem to have been a critical driver of the war in Tigray which erupted in November 2020, based on a shared interest in removing the TPLF. The Eritrean President made clear his loathing for the TPLF in speeches in September 2018 ("game over TPLF"), February 2021, and January 2022.<sup>827</sup> The bitterness is long-standing but was reinforced by Ethiopian/EPRDF support for sanctions before 2018. Tigrayan sources had warned since the peace deal was announced that its "real motivation" was as a tactical basis for an eventual concerted "pincer" attack on Tigray from north and south. Observers have seen Eritrean influence as a central factor in hardening the positions both of the Federal Government and of the Tigray Regional Government, feeding mutual paranoia, and escalating suspicion since 2018. Whether or not one saw this as a good thing depended on one's perspective, and many Ethiopians were supportive of the hard line.

The Eritrean role in the war began with its participation in intensive military and security preparations.<sup>828</sup> It then involved the presence of significant numbers of Eritrean forces on the ground in Tigray, something the Ethiopian government finally admitted in March 2021 after a lengthy period of denials.<sup>829</sup> International sources reported a further influx of Eritrean troops into western Tigray in August 2021,<sup>830</sup> and in early 2022 they were estimated to number around 30,000.<sup>831</sup> In mid-January 2022, the OLF-OLA claimed that Eritrean forces had moved into Oromia,<sup>832</sup> and observers

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<sup>826</sup> Stigant & Phelan interviewed for USIP, 29 August 2019 <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/08/year-after-ethiopia-eritrea-peace-deal-what-impact>; Selam Tadesse Demissie for ISS, 11 September 2020, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/the-eritrea-ethiopia-peace-deal-is-yet-to-show-dividends>

<sup>827</sup> Speech 24 May 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMAL\\_f0C2do](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMAL_f0C2do); interview 17 February 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOG-HMKTNXI> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrCkmnEhE24>; interview 8 January 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qaGpf0HsoQ>; see also the summary analysis of van Reisen, 6 December 2021 'The role of Eritrea in the Tigray war', statement presented to a hearing of the European Parliament, <https://eritreahub.org/eritreas-role-in-the-origins-of-the-tigray-war>

<sup>828</sup> See van Reisen, above.

<sup>829</sup> BBC, 23 March 2021 'Ethiopia PM admits Eritrea forces in Tigray,' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-56497168>; see also Al-Jazeera, 17 April 2021, 'Eritrea confirms its troops are fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray' <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/17/eritrea-confirms-its-troops-are-fighting-ethiopia-tigray>

<sup>830</sup> Al Jazeera, 25 August 2021, 'US, EU warn of influx of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia's Tigray', <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/25/us-eu-influx-eritrea-troops-ethiopia-tigray>

<sup>831</sup> Africa Confidential, 20 January 2022, [https://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/13769/After\\_concessions\\_rival\\_armies\\_fight\\_on](https://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/13769/After_concessions_rival_armies_fight_on)

<sup>832</sup> OLF-OLA High Command, 15 January 2022, Press Release, <https://ayyaantuu.org/eritrea-troops-redeployed-into-oromia-press-release/>

saw their hand also in Afar and Amhara. It was reported that a second round of Amhara special forces or irregular Fano were being trained by Eritrean forces in western Tigray.<sup>833</sup> Meanwhile, social media sources had claimed that Eritrean security forces had been involved in the house-to-house searches in November 2021 which saw large numbers of Tigrayans detained.<sup>834</sup>

Some of the rhetoric of the early rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea raised speculation about the potential for a joint future – even a confederation – of the two countries. When he first visited Addis Ababa in July 2018, the Eritrean President stated that he had “given [Prime Minister Abiy] all responsibility of leadership and power; from now on, anyone who says Eritrea and Ethiopia are two people is out of reality.”<sup>835</sup> The Ethiopian Prime Minister made similar remarks in January 2019, emphasising that he saw no need for Ethiopia, Eritrea or Djibouti to have separate armies or embassies.<sup>836</sup> As the war has progressed, many observers have seen an axis of concrete collaboration and training (beyond the influence of Addis Ababa) evolving between Eritrea and radical forces in the Amhara region. The continuing presence of Eritrean forces in areas of northern and western Tigray (and in Oromia, and in and around Addis Ababa), then, reduces prospects for a negotiated settlement and greatly complicates humanitarian access and efficacy.

Many see “revenge” for the military reverses Eritrea suffered in 2000 as a driver of extreme antipathy, and the brutality of the current conflict as driven in part by unfinished business from the earlier war. The Ethiopian Government narrative holding the TPLF/Tigray Government responsible for the ills Ethiopia faces is well entrenched and many support its determination to destroy or exclude the TPLF at all costs. In February 2021, the TPLF announced eight pre-conditions for talks. As war has dragged on, it was hard to see how an inclusive Ethiopian political settlement could emerge. Following the withdrawal north of Tigrayan forces in November/December 2021, TPLF dropped many of its pre-conditions for negotiations, and the government in Addis Ababa made conciliatory noises about peace, releasing prisoners, and halting its ground forces close to Tigray’s borders. Observers once again saw the hand of Eritrea encouraging (and training) more radical Ethiopian voices – and forces – who opposed a negotiated settlement.

Close Ethio-Eritrean relations have also had an influence on decisions about the future of federalism in Ethiopia, tilting the balance in favour of those who prefer more centralised state-building. Eritrean President Isaias has a longstanding antipathy towards decentralised or multinational federal states.<sup>837</sup> He first broke with the TPLF over the issue of nationalities’ self-determination (1983-1989) even during their common struggle against the Derg. In February 2021 he argued again that the

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<sup>833</sup> Africa Confidential, 20 January 2022, above; see also 17 January 2022, [https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/13762/Prisoners%27\\_release\\_sparks\\_war\\_cries](https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/13762/Prisoners%27_release_sparks_war_cries)

<sup>834</sup> see for instance, <https://twitter.com/DestaHHagos/status/1457407944224542722?s=20&t=-ObiHf1OJIV4a99omAmlMA>

<sup>835</sup> Abraham Zere, “Isaias out of character: Why Eritreans are getting nervous”, African Arguments, 18 July 2018,

<https://africanarguments.org/2018/07/why-eritrea-nervous-isaias-abiy-ethiopia/>

See also: <https://twitter.com/Saveritrea/status/1018204071109459968?s=20>

<sup>836</sup> Davos, “A Conversation with Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of Ethiopia,” 23 January 2019

<https://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2019/sessions/a-conversation-with-abiy-ahmed-prime-minister-of-ethiopia>

<sup>837</sup> See for instance, Getachew Gebrekiros Temare, 12 February 2020, ‘Game Over for Ethiopia Ethnic Federalism: Isaias’ article for Tesfa News, available at <https://www.tesfanews.net/game-over-ethiopia-ethnic-federalism-isaias-afwerki/>. For excerpts of President Isaias’ remarks on 7 and 9 February 2020, see <https://www.tesfanews.net/excerpts-president-isaias-afwerki-regional-issues-interview-2/>



federal constitution was “the root of all problems,” repeating the sentiment in January 2022. Meanwhile the 2020 Ethiopian government crackdown marginalised other ethno-nationalist opposition parties (in Oromia, Sidama, Afar and Somali region, for instance) who had in 2019 seemed likely to win significant electoral support. Eritrean influence and the presence of Eritrean operatives were seen as likely to foil attempts to broker an inclusive process of “national dialogue” which involves those who favour federalism.

The future of Ethio-Eritrean relations remains opaque and could further destabilise the balance of power in Ethiopia. If the presence of Eritrean (and Somali) forces on Ethiopian territory consolidates or expands, this has the potential further to sharpen regional tensions, in the absence of forums capable to address this issue. The sovereignty issues raised by the presence of foreign forces could in principle inflame domestic Ethiopian (and Eritrean) public opinion, although there is no evidence or indication of this to date (ironic, given much talk of sovereignty). Ethio-Eritrean reunification in one form or another is an interest shared by many stakeholders – especially but not only pan-Ethiopian nationalists. Ethiopia has a clear interest in restoring its access to the sea; Eritrea in re-establishing influence over what it has long regarded as an Ethiopian “hinterland.”

**Somalia.** The new post-2018 axis also emboldened the federal centre in Somalia drawing Mogadishu more closely into the orbit of Asmara (and Addis Ababa). Both states actively supported the re-election of the President Mohamed Abdillahi Mohamed ‘Farmajo,’ whose presidential term formally expired on 1 February 2021. He was seen as an ally against “regionalism,” but as his credibility waned, in practice the strategy has constrained Addis Ababa’s influence: as one influential commentator has noted “*Ethiopia’s partiality in Somalia limits its ability to be a constructive player there.*”<sup>838</sup> Meanwhile former Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire (ousted in July 2020) sought the support of Djibouti for his presidential bid, and his successor Mohamed Hussein Roble has continued to challenge President ‘Farmajo’’s authority, with mutual recriminations peaking in December 2021. Tensions surrounding delayed elections had already boiled over into gunfire at an opposition march in Mogadishu in mid-February 2021, and the crisis bubbled on unresolved throughout the year. Also, for more than a year, controversy attached to persistent reports that Somali soldiers had been trained in Eritrea and were involved in fighting in Tigray.<sup>839</sup> New evidence to corroborate this emerged in January 2022.<sup>840</sup>

Strong Ethiopian (and Eritrean) support for the Federal Somali Government shifted Ethiopian support away from Somaliland in the north and Jubaland in the south, and disappointed Nairobi which itself had strained relations with Mogadishu. From 1991 Addis Ababa supported Somaliland strongly, with Ethiopia stopping short only of formal recognition of Somaliland as a state. The local relationship was complicated (especially under former Ethiopian Somali Region President Abdi Mohammed Omar (Abdi ‘Illey’, 2010-2018, whose special police carried out abuses and killings at

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<sup>838</sup> Vergee, 24 August 2021, ‘The Crisis of Ethiopian Foreign Relations: from “Imperfect Hegemon” to Occupied State’, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/the-crisis-of-ethiopian-foreign-relations/>

<sup>839</sup> Simon Marks & Mohammed Omar Ahmed, 21 January 2021, ‘Ethiopia denies Somalia forces involved in fighting in Tigray’ Bloomberg, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-01-21/ethiopia-denies-somalia-forces-involved-in-fighting-in-tigray>

<sup>840</sup> Lucy Kassa, 20 January 2022, ‘Somali troops committed atrocities in Tigray as new alliance emerged, survivors say’ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-somali-troops-committed-atrocities-in-tigray-as-new-alliance-emerged/>

Gashamo in 2012 and 2016).<sup>841</sup> Nevertheless, Addis Ababa saw security cooperation as essential, both during its period of heightened counter-insurgency in the Ogaden (2007-2010), and to deter the presence of Egypt, Eritrea, and “Islamist” groups on its northern border.

Addis Ababa’s 2018 overtures to Mogadishu irritated Hargeisa, and the relationship seemed to lapse: to the surprise, chagrin, and alarm of observers there. Ethiopia’s influence in Hargeisa had earlier begun to be eclipsed by heavy Somaliland investment from the Gulf and Turkey. Somaliland’s SNM-era leadership, who had established its post-war compact, and remembered the sanctuary they had found in Ethiopia in 1988, were gradually being succeeded by a new generation with commercial and other interests focused overseas, and on the Islamic world. In this newly antagonistic atmosphere, Ethiopia further disappointed Hargeisa (and the UAE) with its surprisingly lacklustre approach to the Dubai Ports World Berbera port development through 2020 and 2021.<sup>842</sup> Lurid rumours of Ethiopian designs on Somaliland territory at Zeila soured things further at the beginning of 2022.<sup>843</sup> Within weeks Addis Ababa had hurriedly upgraded its Hargeisa consul to full Ambassador.

In the south of Somalia Ethiopia’s new relationship with the Federal Somali President saw it withdraw support to its most notable ally, Jubaland’s Ahmed Madobe (for some time a prisoner in Addis Ababa and seen as having had close connections to the EPRDF government). Before 2018, Addis Ababa saw the establishment of Jubaland as a useful “alternative” Ogaadeen/Darod homeland in the Somali constellation: a valve which reduced secessionist/irredentist pressure on the Ethiopian Ogaden. A former member of the ICU, Madobe’s Ras Kamboni Movement later became a useful ally in Addis Ababa’s pre-2018 fight against Al Shabaab. The changes sharpened when the war began in Tigray at the end of 2020. The Ethiopia crisis as one commentator noted “*hurts counterinsurgency efforts against the potent jihadi terrorist group al-Shabab and exacerbates Somalia’s existing tensions between its capital and regions.*”<sup>844</sup> Ethiopia’s withdrawal of its troops from Somalia has also damaged AMISOM.

**Kenya.** As a result of the tensions, it reinforced in southern Somalia, the 2018 realignment sharpened tensions between Mogadishu (and Addis Ababa) and Nairobi, jangling nerves across the IGAD region, with repercussions (albeit publicly muted) for relationships within IGAD and the AU.<sup>845</sup> The reformulation of the regional constellation of power had a negative impact on Kenya’s relations with Somalia and with Ethiopia. A series of issues (trade imbalances, khat imports, visa restrictions, but also a maritime border dispute, emerging differences over Jubaland, and the

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<sup>841</sup> Mustafe Mohamed Abdi & Haggmann (2020) ‘Relations between Somali Regional State and Somaliland, 2010-2019’, Conflict Research Programme Research Memo, February 2020, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/Conflict-Research-Programme/crp-memos/SRS-Memo-Feb-2020.pdf>

<sup>842</sup> Ethiopia’s lack of interest was all the more surprising given its keen strategic interest in overcoming its landlocked status. See for instance, Cannon & Ash, December 2017, ‘Ethiopia, Berbera Port and the shifting balance of power in the Horn of Africa’ in *Rising Powers Quarterly*, <https://risingpowersproject.com/ethiopia-berbera-port-shifting-balance-power-horn-africa/>

<sup>843</sup> Rubin, 5 January 2022, ‘Is Ethiopia preparing for war on Somaliland?’ <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/is-ethiopia-preparing-for-war-on-somaliland/>

<sup>844</sup> Felbab-Brown, 20 November 2020, ‘What Ethiopia’s crisis means for Somalia’, Brookings <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/20/what-ethiopia-crisis-means-for-somalia/>; in September/October 2021, BBC Africa Editor Mary Harper confirmed the view of Al Shabaab leaders that they had no need to attack Ethiopia as it was destroying itself, ‘Eastern Africa’s Jihadis: Episode 5, Eastern Africa’s Jihadis: “The war on Terror”’ from minute 16 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/horn>

<sup>845</sup> Healy (2009) ‘Peacemaking in the midst of war: an assessment of IGAD’s contribution to regional security’ Crisis States Working Paper no.59, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/PDFs/csrc-working-papers-phase-two/wp59.2-peacemaking-in-the-midst-of-war.pdf>

activities of Kenyan peacekeepers under AMISOM) has seen tensions between Somalia and Kenya escalate.<sup>846</sup> Somalia briefly cut off diplomatic ties with Kenya in December 2020. Meanwhile, Kenyan relations with Somaliland have received a boost. Addis Ababa has sought to stress the positives in its relations with Kenya (the two countries have had a defence pact since 1969), in December 2020 opening the one-stop border post at Moyale on the Addis Ababa – Nairobi - Mombassa highway.<sup>847</sup> But irritations and differences remain: vis-à-vis Jubaland, still a key ally of Nairobi; but also on border security, and the activities of armed factions in those areas of (Oromo) Borana that straddle the border.

Also significant has been the increasingly important role that the Kenyan President has played in working with the US in support of the AU special representative, to seek to broker scope for a cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access, and negotiations between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigrayans.<sup>848</sup> Visits by US Secretary Blinken in November 2021, and Rwanda's President Kagame in February 2022 have kept the focus of activities on Nairobi.<sup>849</sup> US focus on Kenya seems to have encouraged the Ethiopian Prime Minister to seek direct communication with President Biden, resulting in a "candid" call in early January 2022.<sup>850</sup>

## 9.5 The dam: Egypt, Sudan, and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

In 2018 Ethiopia's new Prime Minister agreed to US-led mediation over the GERD, abandoning an earlier diplomatic strategy of simply asserting its rights over the Nile waters, and establishing facts on the ground. Ethiopia's Prime Minister now engaged in a high-risk strategy of direct talks with Egyptian President Sisi, an initiative which quickly undermined the carefully nurtured consensus between Addis Ababa and Khartoum on the dam. The move, described as Abiy's "*first foreign policy blunder*"<sup>851</sup> was remarkable, as the country opened itself up (unnecessarily) to a level of Egyptian diplomatic demand and international influence on the dam, which domestic public opinion would always have found intolerable. Ethiopia's subsequent withdrawal from talks, claiming unfair treatment by US mediators, drew international diplomatic pressure and the suspension of US aid. Talks failed again in Kinshasa in April 2021. In June 2021, tensions rose as Egypt accused Ethiopia of embarking on a second filling of the dam, although the levels reached were not as targeted. In October, the UN pressed all sides to resume talks, but by January 2022 they remained stalled.

**Egypt.** Many Ethiopians (particularly in the Orthodox Christian north) regard Egypt as "the old enemy," and allegations of collusion with it (as for instance levelled against Jawar Mohammed/the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and TPLF) are

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<sup>846</sup> Abdimalik Abdullahi, 11 January 2021 'Somalia and Kenya still have a road to neighbourly cooperation' Opinion piece for Al-jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/11/somalia-and-kenya-still-have-a-path-to-neighbourly-cooperation>

<sup>847</sup> On the background see Kitimo, in *The East African*, 14 December 2020 'PM Abiy, Kenyatta commit to increased trade' <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/business/pm-abiy-kenyatta-commit-to-increased-trade-3228108>

<sup>848</sup> The Africa Report, 15 November 2021, 'Kenyatta and Museveni try to broker peace to avoid regional fall out' <https://www.theafricareport.com/146344/ethiopia-kenyatta-and-museveni-try-to-broker-peace-to-avoid-regional-fallout/>

<sup>849</sup> Wasike Shimanyula, 17 November 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/us-secretary-of-state-visits-kenya-as-part-of-africa-tour/2422827>; the East African, 3 February 2022, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenyatta-kagame-meet-in-nairobi-3704280>

<sup>850</sup> Al Jazeera, 10 January 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/10/biden-speaks-to-ethiopia-abiy-raises-civilian-deaths-arrests>

<sup>851</sup> De Waal, 26 April 2021, 'Abiy's Counter-Revolution' in *The Baffler*, <https://thebaffler.com/latest/abiys-counterrevolution-de-waal>

treated as *prima facie* evidence of treason. There has been little love lost between the EPRDF/TPLF and Cairo over the decades (GERD was the brainchild of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, also leader of the TPLF). Allegations after 2018 that the TPLF was working with Egypt were met with incredulity in Tigray before the outbreak of the war. The horror of the situation that has developed on the ground since November 2020 could have the potential to change this calculation. Radical Tigray diaspora voices have explicitly called for it, but a direct relation seems unlikely. The TPLF and Cairo could become indirectly linked via Khartoum.

Cairo's long-standing alliance with Asmara seems not to have survived the establishment of the new Horn axis. Egypt has longstanding ties with Eritrean movements, notably the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) which was founded in Cairo, but also the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF, forerunner of the ruling PFDJ). The alliance between Asmara and Cairo which persisted during the period of Ethio-Eritrean war and cold war fragmented after 2018. Eritrea maintains its relationships with the UAE and KSA, but recent realignment could potentially undermine longstanding support from these Gulf countries.

Meanwhile, Egypt has reinserted itself into regional politics in Africa, including the Horn, and in the Gulf. Wrong-footed by Ethiopia's rapid moves to create GERD facts on the ground during the Arab Spring a decade ago, Cairo has now been able to push for international processes which broke the tight alignment between Ethiopia and Sudan. Recent joint military exercises with Sudan are only one aspect of a multiple Egyptian initiative of diplomatic and strategic consolidation. Egyptian diplomacy has also targeted other upper riparian African states.

**Sudan.** A fluid, multiple and failing political transition in Sudan has also complicated Ethio-Sudanese relations. A more independent Sudanese approach on the GERD has seen Ethiopia lose what had been its relatively reliable support in tripartite negotiations. Rebuffing the Sudanese Prime Minister's mediation efforts on Tigray in December 2020 antagonised civilian elements of Sudan's Transitional Government. The Sudanese military, meanwhile agreed to close its border at the outbreak of the war in Tigray, but the subsequent escalation of active conflict with Amhara forces on the un-demarcated border at el-Fashaga has infuriated key actors in Sudan, exacerbating tensions and associated risks to Ethiopia.<sup>852</sup> In early 2022, Sudanese army and Amhara militia confronted one another at close range along the border, and observers saw heightened risks of an outbreak of violence, irrespective of concerns to de-escalate at national levels.

As war in Tigray has become protracted this has also carried risks new, with longstanding networks linking the TPLF to Gedaref and Kassala Provinces of eastern Sudan, and around 60,000 Tigrayan refugees hosted there since November 2020. Over the period since late 2020, Ethiopia's complaints about alleged Sudanese support of their Tigrayan adversaries have increased. By early 2022, there were reports of discreet training of several thousand Tigrayan fighters in Sudan, and even limited attacks on Humera from the west.<sup>853</sup> The situation in

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<sup>852</sup> De Waal, 3 January 2021, 'Why Ethiopia and Sudan have fallen out over Al-Fashaga' BBC Africa <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55476831>

<sup>853</sup> Africa Confidential, 20 January 2022, 'Prisoners' release sparks war cries' [https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/13762/Prisoners%27\\_release\\_sparks\\_war\\_cries](https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/13762/Prisoners%27_release_sparks_war_cries)

northeastern Sudan has been complicated by alleged Eritrean activities in support of Beja groups, and against Beni Amer and Tigré (Eritrean) opposition forces. Beja forces blocked deliveries to and from Port Sudan for some months during 2021, lifting their action only after the military takeover in Khartoum towards the end of the year.<sup>854</sup>

Sudanese or Egyptian diplomatic leverage in Abu Dhabi and other Gulf states could be expected to be mobilised to shift Gulf support from Ethiopia were that to become necessary: if so, Khartoum and Cairo's voices could be expected to resonate more strongly in the Arab world than Addis Ababa's.

## 9.6 Ethiopia on the periphery of the Middle East security arena

Countries in the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, are now seen by major Gulf players as part of a middle east security arena, with newly brutal and transactional patterns of warfare. The use of armed **drones** or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and refoulement of refugees evolved in Syria and the Iran-Iraq arena over the last decade and extended to Yemen from the end of 2014. Gulf sponsors of these conflicts became newly influential in the Horn over the same period. United Arab Emirates' (UAE) investments in the region are civil and military: in Somaliland they include the flagship Dubai Ports World project at Berbera (as noted above) and a renovated airport and military base; the military base established at Assab in Eritrea in 2015 was being dismantled in February 2021.<sup>855</sup>

The UAE has become a particularly prominent financial and security partner of Ethiopia since 2018: sponsor of lavish refurbishment and real-estate projects<sup>856</sup> and the Ethio-Eritrea peace deal itself.<sup>857</sup> The potential for the Ethiopian state to seek to win investment from the Gulf in its transformation agenda has been recognised for well over a decade and was clearly articulated as part of a national renaissance agenda in the late 2000s. However, the scope, scale, and lack of transparency, as well as the more informal and transactional nature of Ethiopia's dependence on Gulf finance has shifted very dramatically in the period from 2017/18. It began with a US\$3bn injection by the UAE in response to Ethiopia's growing foreign exchange scarcity, which was quickly announced by the incoming Prime Minister.

Since then, UAE sponsorship of the Ethio-Eritrean peace deal has developed into an important military supply of combat UAVs or drones. Whispers that drones used to devastating effect in the early months of the war on Tigray had been supplied from UAE bases in Assab were initially difficult to verify. As the military campaign turned against Addis Ababa in mid-2021, however, a much clearer pattern of continuous

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<sup>854</sup> Crisis24, November 2021, <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2021/11/sudan-beja-tribal-groups-lift-port-blockade-nov-1-update-4>

<sup>855</sup> Gambrell, 18 February 2021, 'UAE dismantles Eritrea base as it pulls back after Yemen' <https://apnews.com/article/eritrea-dubai-only-on-ap-united-arab-emirates-east-africa-088f41c7d54d6a397398b2a825f5e45a>

<sup>856</sup> Arabian Business, 22 November 2018, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/industries/construction/408367-uae-developer-enters-ethiopia-with-la-gare-mega-project>

<sup>857</sup> Dennehy, 24 July 2018 'former rivals hail UAE role in bringing peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea' <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/former-rivals-hail-uae-s-role-in-bringing-peace-between-ethiopia-and-eritrea-1.753463>

Emirati supply emerged.<sup>858</sup> By the end of the year, drones from Turkey, Iran and the UAE were widely thought to have “tipped the war” in Addis Ababa’s favour.<sup>859</sup>

The relationships with policymakers and key suppliers in Turkey and the UAE are known to be handled at a personal level, and it is noteworthy that very little it said about Ethiopia’s relationships with the UAE, Saudi, Turkey, or Qatar in the leaked Ethiopian Foreign Relations Re-Engagement Strategy document of January 2022. Ethiopia’s Prime Minister has visited both supplier states on several occasions: Ankara in August 2021 and again in December 2021 for the Turkish-Africa summit; Abu Dhabi most recently in late January 2022.<sup>860</sup> Both capitals have become increasingly important stops also for EU and US envoys to the Horn.

It is important to note that Addis Ababa is not the only capital in the region, which has won the support of Saudi Arabia and of the UAE: Cairo and Khartoum (as noted) are also close partners. This will have increasing impact if relations were to deteriorate further between the three. Meanwhile, recent rapprochement between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, and between the UAE and Israel, also has the potential to shift Ethiopia’s wider relations, given the apparently significant influence of the UAE and its security advisors.<sup>861</sup> A reduction of hostility between UAE and Qatar could play out also in the Somali arena. The Federal Somali President has maintained close relations with Qatar and Turkey (in early 2021 reportedly coming under pressure from both sponsors, in the context of the delayed elections), whilst the UAE has courted Somaliland and Puntland. As Somali elections approached in early 2022, patterns of patronage and influence were being closely watched.

## 9.7 The weakness of regional bodies: IGAD and the AU

Neither the African Union nor the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, IGAD, has proved equal to the task of managing shifting alliances or responding to conflict in the context of rapidly evolving changes. The IGAD Executive Secretary since November 2019 is a former Ethiopian Federal Police Commissioner and Foreign Minister, an appointment the Ethiopian government invested significant diplomatic and political capital to secure. As Chairman of IGAD in mid-December 2020, the Sudanese Prime Minister sought to use his influence to mediate in the Ethiopian conflict but was firmly rebuffed and cut short a two-day visit to Addis Ababa. The 38th Extraordinary IGAD Assembly later that month in Djibouti produced little other than a reaffirmation of the primacy of Ethiopian sovereignty and welcome for an agreement for “*unimpeded sustained and secure access for humanitarian support*” (29 November 2020).

There were reports of tension between the delegations of Ethiopia and Kenya at this meeting. The war in Tigray broke out shortly after Ethiopia took over the Chairmanship of the AU’s Peace and Security Council on 1 November 2020. The

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<sup>858</sup> Mitzer & Oliemans, 19 November 2021, ‘UAE airbridge to Ethiopia continues unabated – surpassing 100 flights’ <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2021/11/uae-air-bridge-to-ethiopia-continues.html>

<sup>859</sup> Declan Walsh, 20 December 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/20/world/africa/drones-ethiopia-war-turkey-emirates.html>

<sup>860</sup> AP, 30 January 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/abiy-ahmed-uae-dubai-abu-dhabi-addis-ababa-b2003603.html>

<sup>861</sup> Al-Monitor, 17 January 2021, at <https://tekdeeps.com/in-conjunction-with-the-arrival-of-the-pantsir-missiles-dahlan-in-ethiopia-and-the-renaissance-dam-the-second-filling-begins/>

Chairman of the African Union, South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa sent a high-level delegation (Chissano, Motlanthe, Johnson Sirleaf) to Ethiopia in late November, to little avail.<sup>862</sup> The African Union convened its 14th Extraordinary Session in Addis Ababa in December 2020 under the banner "silencing the guns." Even more extraordinary, in February 2022 as the blockade continued to tighten on Tigray, it held its 35<sup>th</sup> Summit in Addis Ababa under the theme of "food security" – without once making public mention of the crisis. The role of the AU Commission Chairperson had been under the spotlight since remarks endorsing the "*bold steps*" taken by Ethiopia to "*preserve unity*" at the beginning of the war.<sup>863</sup> On 11 November 2020, the Commission fired its Tigrayan head of Security.<sup>864</sup>

Neither IGAD nor the AU seemed keen (or able) to take on a robust peace-making role vis-à-vis conflict involving powerful regional member states. The role of AU Special Representative Obasanjo, however, gradually began to evolve during 2021 into a process around which other international actors (notably US and EU) began to coalesce and invest.

### **9.8 Concluding remarks**

Since 2018 change in Ethiopia's foreign relations with its neighbours across the Horn and the Gulf, and with inter-governmental bodies, were significantly disrupted with the establishment of the new triangular relation between the leaders of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. Changes across the Horn and its wider regional context have been rapid and unpredictable and highly dependent on individual personalities. The upheaval does not seem yet to have stabilised into a new equilibrium, largely because of the shadowy but expanding role of Eritrea. Changes in relations with close neighbours, and also with wider international contacts, all have an impact on Ethiopian stability and cohesion.

The chapter has argued that many of these developments have contributed to the erosion of the Ethiopian state's autonomy and efficacy. It traced the gradual expansion of external leverage over Ethiopia's internal affairs, and suggested that the damage done to its stability, international reputation, and autonomous agency since 2018 incrementally undermined the country's room for sovereign decision-making. The erosion of sovereignty is of course strongly exacerbated by the profound economic impact of the war, the discussion of which lies beyond the scope of this chapter. The negative consequences Ethiopia is experiencing had nothing to do with alleged "meddling" or "western support" for adversaries defined as "terrorists." They resulted from the playing out of a newly transactional approach to regional foreign relations and internal conflict, which has been erratic, superficially informed, and cynical.

Ethiopia's regional relations over the period from 2018 were key to many of its domestic processes, including the war in Tigray and the scope for resolving it

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<sup>862</sup> South African Government, Statement, 30 November 2020, 'The Presidency on visit of the African Union Envoys to Ethiopia' <https://www.gov.za/speeches/envoys-ethiopia-30-nov-2020-0000>

<sup>863</sup> See for instance the critique made by Paulos Tesfagiorgis, 7 January 2021 'The Ethiopian Conflict and the Abrogation of the AU Mandate by the Commission Chairperson', *African Arguments*, <https://africanarguments.org/2021/01/the-ethiopian-conflict-and-the-abrogation-of-the-au-mandate-by-the-commission-chairperson/>

<sup>864</sup> <https://twitter.com/RABdiAnalyst/status/1327136919369764864?s=20&t=ki1F7G8aQm71bG7RC3CvMQ>

peacefully. These external influences and relationships must be expected to continue to play out, in ways that are increasingly hard to predict. The proliferation of interests of an increasing number of external stakeholders – Eritrea, the Gulf States and Turkey foremost amongst them, but also other neighbours, and many others further afield – has not strengthened Ethiopia’s policy independence, its reputation, or its room for manoeuvre. Those Ethiopian voices who may have wished to pursue a negotiated settlement to the war in Tigray have found themselves weakened as they have had to compete with external geopolitical and commercial interests making calculations which have nothing to do with Ethiopia’s national interests – political, social, or economic.

As such, it seems likely that this proliferation of external involvement has done much to obscure the prospects for peace: encouraging processes of transactional balancing, rather than principled or sustainable peace-making. In particular, the presence of Eritrean actors within Ethiopia, often allied with local factions in Afar and Amhara actively involved in the war in Tigray, or the conflict in Oromia, has complicated the picture enormously and reduced Addis Ababa’s agency. To date it has been hard to see that external influences have been able to work in support of processes of peace or the cessation of hostilities, of national dialogue, or of diplomatic re-engagement and development cooperation. Ethiopia’s Prime Minister is right that external influences have greatly complicated matters, but this is not a matter of freeing the country of alleged external “diplomatic pressure.” The divisions that have been sown in Ethiopia, and the autonomy that the country has lost since 2018 as a result of its new foreign relations approach are now integral to its politics and operate at a much more serious and fundamental level.

## **10. The Tigrayan and Eritreans diasporas**

### **10.1 General overview by Martin Plaut**

The Tigray war has left many in the Horn of Africa saddened, angry, helpless, and bereft of hope as they watched their communities torn apart by the conflict. For the diasporas, the mood was even darker. Many had little or no information about the plight of their families and friends. Some felt guilt for being abroad and not being able to contribute more to try to resolve the crisis. It was a time of deep anxiety and stress. Communities that supported the governments of Ethiopia, Eritrea or Somalia could look to their governments for information and leadership. For those who opposed the regimes in power the situation was far bleaker. As this conflict has unfolded, the opposition in the diaspora has reached out to each other and created new networks. The Eritreans, some of whom have been excluded from their country’s affairs since the tragic civil war of 1972 – 1974 and 1980 – 1981, this was a continuation of an exile they had long endured.<sup>865</sup> The divisions of that period between the Eritrea Liberation Front and Eritrean People’s Liberation Front have endured to this day.

After the events of 2001, when President Isaias cracked down on critics inside his own party, as well as crushing all independent journalism, many former supporters of the EPLF joined the ELF living in exile.<sup>866</sup> Yet the divisions of the civil war period

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<sup>865</sup> Dan Connell and Tom Killion, *Historical Directory of Eritrea*, (Second Edition), Scarecrow Press, 2011, p. 150 - 152

<sup>866</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2001/09/20/escalating-crackdown-eritrea>



festered on. The diaspora was unable to form a united front opposing the Isaias government. Gradually, painfully, these rifts are beginning to heal. A new younger generation of Eritrean opposition activists came together in 2019 in the Yiaki (Enough!) movement.<sup>867</sup> On 18 - 20 November 2021, after months of difficult negotiations, this the Eritrean United National Front was founded, supported by many civic societies and opposition groups.<sup>868</sup> The Front declared that it would “embark on armed resistance” against the “totalitarian regime of Isayas/PFDJ” with the aim of freeing Eritrea of repression, and guaranteeing the country’s sovereignty. Importantly, the Front expressed its solidarity with the Tigrayan people. “The Eritrean and Tigrayan people have common enemies in Abiy and Isaias and our two peoples shall conduct a coordinated struggle to defeat these barbaric enemies,” the Front’s political statement declared.

For Tigrayans of all political persuasions the war was a novel and possibly even more shocking experience. No-one could have found it anything but painful. As the crisis unfolded, they found new ways of uniting to express their anger and support for the people of Tigray and Eritrea. There were demonstrations across the world, from Australia to America. This is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive record of these attempts to express this solidarity. Sometimes they took novel forms, including a 24-hour global virtual link-up of the Tigrayan opposition: “24 Hours for Tigray”. Broadcast on 9 March 2021 one segment linked to the next, as the broadcast went around the world.<sup>869</sup> Using pre-recorded messages and live events the programme was hosted by Tigrayans supported by Eritreans who did a remarkably professional job of presenting a live programme of such complexity. Other events used novel forms of protest. Twitter was used in an attempt to pressurise western supermarkets not to sell Ethiopian flowers on Valentine’s Day 2021, whose sale provided revenues for the Ethiopian war effort. In October 2021 Tigrayans in Norway laid toys outside the Nobel Peace Prize offices and the Norwegian Parliament, symbolising the children whose lives have been lost in the war.<sup>870</sup> But most of the time and energy went into organising demonstrations, from Washington to London and beyond. As the BBC reported: “The conflict has deeply divided the Ethiopian community in Washington DC - the largest in the US. Ethiopians abroad watch with dismay.”<sup>871</sup>

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<sup>867</sup> <http://awate.com/eritreas-enoughiyakil-movement-way-forward/>

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<sup>869</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/24HoursforTigray/videos/466971417668773>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtRWI8uAZyA>

<sup>870</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/a-story-in-pictures-how-tigrayans-brought-the-story-of-their-peoples-suffering-to-norway>

<sup>871</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-59702496>



Figure 1 Eritrean and Tigrayan flags at the London demonstration, 25 April 2021

As these demonstrations began to make an impact on public opinion they were matched by protests by supporters of the Ethiopian government under the slogan: [#NoMore](#)

This demonstration in Jerusalem on 13 December 2021 was typical.



**Mahmude Mohammed** @MohammedMahmude · Dec 13

...

[#Ethiopia](#): A large **demonstration** has been held at [#Jerusalem](#) as part of the [#NoMore](#) international movement.

The struggle of [#Ethiopians](#) around the world for their homeland is unforgettable. You are our shield and I am proud of you!

[#NoMoreNeocolonialism](#)



The attempts to mobilise international opinion were perhaps most intense in the United States, where the Biden administration worked hard to try to end the war. (See the chapter on Diplomacy). The protests were supplemented by professional,

paid lobbying of Congress, with considerable sums being paid by both sides in the war.<sup>872</sup> As a result, the battle for public opinion in the United States has been fierce, deeply dividing communities that were once united.

This is how *TRT World* reported on the rifts that have emerged.<sup>873</sup>

The violence is, however, no longer restricted to the Horn of Africa. It is slowly tearing apart the Ethiopian immigrant community and even families some 13,000 kilometres away in the US where more than 300,000 Ethiopia-born immigrants live, mostly in the capital Washington DC, and the neighbouring states of Maryland and Virginia.

For months they have held protests, both for and against the TPLF. They are divided over Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's leadership, the role of the UN, the US and its allies, and the western media. The discord has crept into churches, social gatherings and even onto breakfast tables.

"We used to meet after church prayers every week," an Ethiopian taxi driver of Oromo ethnicity, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said of her Tigrayan friend. "Now, she doesn't come to our church. She goes to a church where most of the worshippers are Tigrayans. We know our politics are different, but changing churches was unbelievable."

Bereket Abay, an Ethiopian immigrant of Tigray roots, has a similar grievance against his non-Tigrayan friends. "I was always insulted and often ignored. There is no point keeping such friendships. How would you feel if you are not served in an Ethiopian restaurant because you are a Tigrayan?" Abay asked...

The war has poisoned inter-ethnic marriages too.

Mekdes Negash Ymesel, an Ethiopian-American of Tigrayan ethnicity, said the conflict has pitted her against her husband, Cherner S Beley, an ethnic Amharan and a church singer. The Ethiopians have been married for 14 years with children, nine and 10 years old. The conflict in Ethiopia, she said, has put a wedge in their relationship.

"For several months, I had no idea where my mother and siblings were. Ethiopia had cut all communications with the Tigray province," Ymesel, who works in a cafeteria in Washington DC, told *TRT World*. "After seven months, I learned that they've moved to Addis Ababa. They are safe but my brother and brother-in-law have been arrested just because they are Tigrayans," she alleged.

She said Beley being an Amhara is pro-PM Abiy and has gone to Ethiopia "citing church services." "It's been four months now. Last time he spent seven months in Ethiopia before flying back to the US," she said. When they last met, the couple fought on the breakfast table.

"He [Beley] told our children that Tigrayans are killing Amharas when the reality is that a genocide is going on against the Tigrayans. Ethiopians are brothers, but it's a

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<sup>872</sup> <http://martinplaut.com/2021/06/10/as-us-congress-debates-tigray-war-rival-lobbying-intensifies/>

<sup>873</sup> <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-ethiopia-war-is-sowing-discord-13-000-km-away-among-us-immigrants-52986>

brother killing brother. It's fratricide," Ymesel said. "If I hurt an Amhara, I consider I'm hitting my children. And if he hurts any Tigrayan, I consider he is hurting his own children," Ymesel said between sobs.

The clashes have perhaps been most intense on social media, with all opinions expressed in the most intemperate – and sometimes abusive – terms. This has begun to be studied by the Shorenstein Centre's Technology and Social Change project at the Harvard Kennedy School.<sup>874</sup> The Tigrayan side focused largely on raising awareness of the conflict, while supporters of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration in Addis Ababa sought to disprove its opponent's claims. And while both made misleading or sometimes false claims, the study found that official communications and pro-government users' posts often sought to discredit any content contradicting the federal government's narrative as disinformation. "It is a complex case that interacts with the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa, historical trauma, activism, hate speech, misinformation, platform manipulation, and propaganda, all in the midst of an ongoing civil conflict," according to research by The Media Manipulation Casebook. "It became a war about the narrative," *Addis Standard* founder and Editor-in-Chief Tsedale Lemma told Voice of America.<sup>875</sup> "They still are concerned about the narrative more than the actual effect of the war."

To try to capture what the Eritrean and Tigrayan opposition movements have been through and how they have organised, we have asked senior members of the diaspora to spell out how they went about this task. Below are two contributions, which will hopefully spark off a wider debate on what has transpired. One looks at the mobilisation of the Eritrean diaspora, the other describes the Tigrayan diaspora in North America.

## **10.2 Eritrean diaspora mobilisation and the Tigray War**

By Prof. Araya Debessay<sup>876</sup>

### **10.2.1 Introduction**

Diaspora Eritreans are all over the world. There are significant numbers of Eritreans who have migrated to the US, Australia, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Israel, Sudan, and other countries. It is difficult to come up with an estimate of the total number of Diaspora Eritreans in the world. Our best guesstimate is around a million, although others, as can be seen in the Sanctions chapter, put it at "at least 2 million".

Diaspora Eritreans in the western countries, particularly those residing in the US, various European countries and the Middle East played a significant role in supporting the Eritrean armed struggle for independence. During the liberation war, almost all Eritreans in Diaspora supported the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in the early stages of the struggle and then the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

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<sup>874</sup> <https://mediamanipulation.org/case-studies/dueling-information-campaigns-war-over-narrative-tigray>

<sup>875</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/how-social-media-became-a-battleground-in-the-tigray-conflict-/6272834.html>

<sup>876</sup> <sup>876</sup> Professor Araya Debessay is one of the 13 scholars and professionals, known as the G-13, who wrote a confidential letter to Isaias Afewerki that later was made public as "Berlin Manifesto." The group met with Isaias Afewerki in 2000 in Asmara to discuss the content of the letter.

Since independence, the Eritrean diaspora have been divided into three distinct groups: (a) supporters of the Isaias government, (b) those who vehemently oppose the Isaias government, and (c) the silent majority - although this majority is gradually being eroded in favour of the opposition.

Following outbreak of the Tigray war, opponents of the Isaias regime have splintered into two camps: Pro-TPLF and Anti-TPLF. This article will endeavor to analyse these two camps:

### **10.2.2 Mobilisation of Eritrean diaspora since the start of the Tigray war**

#### *(a) President Isaias' (Eritrean government) supporters*

Although the number of Isaias' support is dwindling, there are some hardcore supporters including a few highly educated individuals, former government officials and ambassadors currently in exile. It is difficult to understand the rationale of those who still support the government despite the fact that the Isaias regime has literally destroyed the country in every aspect and they themselves have fled the country claiming to "save their lives". The Eritrean regime is one of the most repressive regimes in the world today. Some in the media refer to the Eritrean government as the North Korea of Africa. The Isaias regime has obliterated the Eritrean economy to its knees which, unashamedly, Isaias boasts about in almost every interview he gives. Most Eritreans are surviving through remittances from family members and generous individuals in the Diaspora. The country is fast emptying of its youth, who have taken tremendous risks to escape from indefinite national service that subjects them to slavery-like conditions. The regime has waged wars against all the neighboring countries - in total eight separate wars over a period of 27 years.

Yet, there are some in the Diaspora who still support this repressive regime for fear of reprisals or family interest e.g. to protect their property/homes although many are in a state of decay or are unlivable for lack of water and electricity. Others support Isaias because they see him as one of them. Still others argue that Isaias is the only leader who can keep the country intact despite mounting evidence to the opposite. They fear that if Isaias is removed, there will be infightings that could put Eritrea in the league of Somalia, Libya, Iraq, and other countries that have fragmented after the fall of their respective long-term dictators. The dictator you know, no matter how ruthless, is better than the angel you do not know, they claim.

One finds it ironic that those who support Isaias do so despite the fact that he threatens the very sovereignty of the country that they strongly espouse. The peace agreement with Abiy is one such example where loose federation or some kind of economic union with Ethiopia is openly voiced by Isaias. In spite of this, this group fully backs the reckless intervention of Isaias in the Tigray war. Many in this group have been seen participating in demonstrations in the US and several European countries alongside Abiy supporter Ethiopians. These group deny Eritrean forces presence and the atrocities they have committed in Tigray as unsubstantiated allegations.

Among Isaias' supporters are hardcore elements who by and large are ill-informed of the atrocities Eritrean forces are inflicting on their own Eritrean brothers and sisters. They admit the country is not in good shape economically and that the government is

oppressive but blame it on the Badme border War and the refusal of the Meles Administration to implement the final and binding Algiers Agreement of 2002. This group of Eritrean Diaspora do not blame the Eritrean government for not implementing the ratified Constitution, which was declared dead by Isaias. They blindly accept the government's assertion that it is not time to talk about implementing the Constitution and conducting elections when part of the country is still under Ethiopian occupation.

Isaias supporters are fully behind Eritrea's intervention in the Tigray war, hence their participation in demonstration and social media in support of Abiy, tacitly support the atrocities committed against the people of Tigray and Eritrean refugees.

*(b) Opponents of President Isaias Regime*

This is an increasing majority which has been fueled by the Tigray conflict. There have been numerous and well attended demonstrations organised by Eritreans in several countries, including the US, Switzerland, UK, Germany, and several other countries including Israel, Ethiopia. This group has been actively lobbying governments and campaigning alongside humanitarian organisations to end the Tigray war. As a result of such demonstrations and petitions, the International Community is now more aware of the dire situation Eritreans are facing in their own country. Arguably, the UN decision to establish a UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights violations in Eritrea in 2014 is the result of the many demonstrations and petitions members of the Diaspora have been waging for many years. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights violations has extensively documented the human rights abuses committed by the Isaias government that amounts to crimes against humanity.

*Division among the opponents of the Isaias government.*

As Sara Mengistab writes in her article in December 2021 "Understanding the Complicated Relationship Between Eritrea and Tigray"<sup>877</sup>, the war has created some rift between Isaias opponents and split them between two camps (i) the TPLF sympathisers and (ii) The Anti-TPLF group

*(i)The TPLF sympathisers* - These group see Isaias's involvement in the Tigray war as an extension to the grotesque human rights abused that he inflicted on the Eritrean people for 30 years. The crimes committed in Eritrea, including rape, slavery, extrajudicial killings and the like are now being exported to Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia in an industrial scale with impunity. The Isaias army has caused unimaginable human suffering on the people of Tigray - Countless of innocent people have been massacred, women raped, property looted, and infrastructure mindlessly destroyed brining a lasting stain and shame on our people. These heinous acts which amount to crimes against humanity has shaken the International Community and brought shame on the Eritrean diaspora. The TPLF sympathisers have rightly condemned the wanton killings of innocent civilians, the sexual violence against Tigray women, the pledging and destruction of heritage sights, factories,

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<sup>877</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/understanding-the-complicated-relationship-between-eritrea-and-tigray>

hospitals and universities by the Eritrean army, the Ethiopian Federal government forces and the Amharan militia.

This group of Diaspora Eritrean felt they have a duty as citizens not only of Eritrea but of the world as human beings to take a firm stand against the role the Eritrean military has taken to subject the people of Tigray to such inhumane acts. This group strongly condemn Isaias Afeworki and his close circle for causing the death of many young Eritreans, some of them children, by sending them to a war that has nothing to do with them and know nothing about. Isaias has put the lives of many Eritrean youth on harm's way just to satisfy his personal vengeance against the TPLF. The Eritrean sympathisers of the Tigray people have appealed to the International Community and the United Nations to pressure the Eritrean government to withdraw its forces from Tigray. They have called on the international and regional organisations to pressure the Ethiopian federal government and President Isaias to end the war. They have called upon the international community to pressure the Ethiopian federal government to grant humanitarian access to the people of Tigray and Eritrean refugees in the region, who are in dire need for food and other basic necessities.

The sympathisers of the TPLF understand the concern of the TPLF that the Tigray people will not be able to focus on rebuilding its shattered economy as long as Isaias is around. They also understand the TDF's resolve to return their looted property and also to bring the perpetrators of the heinous acts to justice. These Eritrean sympathisers of the Tigray people fully share the concerns of the Tigray people and are determined to help the Tigray people achieve their rightful objectives. However, this group strongly believes it would be undesirable for the TDF to invade Eritrea to achieve its objectives not because they wish to see Isaias remain in power but the animosity such action may create between our two peoples. Invading Eritrea will mobilise the Eritrean people, including those who are opposed to the Isaias regime to defend the sovereignty of Eritrea, and thereby strengthen Isaias' hands even more. A TDF invasion of Eritrea will be contrary to the long-term interest of both of our peoples. It will alienate the International Community who likely to oppose any aggression by Tigray. In this regard it will be important for the TPLF sympathisers to reach an understanding with the Tigray leadership - a joint approach of removing Isaias from power by all means. Unlike the other groups that mistrust the TPLF leadership, those Eritreans who sympathise with the Tigray people feel comfortable to deal with the current leadership of the TPLF. In the views of this group, the current leadership of the TPLF is friendlier to the Eritrean people and consistently advocated for the sovereignty of the Eritrean people.

This group feels that the success of the TDF means the defeat of the Isaias's regime and his dream of a union or federation with Ethiopia. They feel confident that the TDF understands that it is in its best interest to maintain a healthy and friendly relationship with the Eritrean people. It is also confident that the TDF will not want to lose the support of the International Community in rebuilding its shattered economy by appearing to be an aggressor in Eritrea.

As Sara Mengistab clearly and unequivocally put it in her article, this group passionately believes "It is foolish to dream of building a prosperous Eritrea without

first building a healthy, peaceful relationship with Tigray, Ethiopia, and all other neighbours.”

(ii) *The anti-TPLF group* - The Eritrea Diaspora who belong to this anti-TPLF group have deeply held animosity against the TPLF that can be traced to the role played by TPLF during the civil war between ELF and EPLF, when TPLF sided with EPLF to drive ELF out of Eritrea in the early 1980s. In addition, there are those who have deeply held grievances for the defeat of Eritrea in the border war 1998-2000 in the hands of the Ethiopian army led by former TPLF fighters and the merciless deportation of tens of thousands of Eritrean-Ethiopians following the end of the war<sup>878</sup>.

It is fair to say some within this group have rightly condemned the atrocities committed by Isaias forces against innocent civilians and the looting and destruction caused. Others have refrained from condemning these outrageous atrocities claiming they need to have independent investigation to verify their validity. Still others say the TPLF got what it deserved, and that the Eritrean government is within its rights to recover the Eritrean land that has been occupied by Ethiopia. Many in this group are opposed to any invasion by TDF of Eritrea, claiming that such action will be tantamount to an assault on the sovereignty of Eritrea and that they will support the Eritrean army if that was to happen.

This group is suspicious of the TDF and TPLF and fear that the success of the TDF may have grave consequences for Eritrea and are oblivious that the success of Abiy and Isaias in the Tigray war could mean the loss of Eritrean sovereignty.

According to the US Embassy in Asmara, proponents of the regime in Asmara have been manipulating Ethiopia social media<sup>879</sup>. It said “Another key tactic of pro-government campaigners was to undermine witness credibility. The belief that the TPLF are posing as victims of violence to misinform the world became a central theme in pro-government discourse throughout the conflict. Several of the individuals behind these accounts have links to Eritrea’s ruling party, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), and the young wing in the diaspora. Some accounts in the Eritrean networks list [shabait.com](http://shabait.com) as their website in their Twitter bios, which is the website of the Eritrean Ministry of Information, and have had their work shared by the Eritrean Minister of Information. Zeleke said that the interactions with Eritrean social media campaigns are largely informal. ‘There are some issues where we have common interests and others that are not common, but there is cooperation and communication,’ he said.”

Facebook has been accused of being used to incite violence in Ethiopia<sup>880</sup> and it is a platform that is proactively used by both pro and anti-TPLF groups as well as the Ethiopian Federal government.

In concluding, the position of the pro and anti TPLF camps and as Sara rightly points out in her article, “All Eritreans except fervent Eritrea’s PFDJ supporters will agree

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<sup>878</sup> [The Deportation of Eritreans from Ethiopia: Human Rights Violations Tolerated by the International Community \(unc.edu\)](https://www.unc.edu/)

<sup>879</sup> [U.S. Embassy Asmara Eritrea | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/USEmbassyAsmara/) or [US embassy reveals Eritrea manipulation of Ethiopian social media - Eritrea Hub](https://www.usembassy.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/10/25/business/ethiopia-violence-facebook-papers-cmd-intl/index.html)

<sup>880</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/25/business/ethiopia-violence-facebook-papers-cmd-intl/index.html>



that the Eritrean army had no business interfering in a war that had by all accounts nothing to do with Eritrea. Still, this involvement has left Eritrea vulnerable to attacks by TPLF soldiers that may seek vengeance. And judging by some TPLF soldiers singing this tune on social media, it is not a far-fetched theory.”

*(c) The silent and quickly dwindling majority*

A significant number of Eritrean Diaspora probably fall into this category, However, although they may not be openly critical of the regime, most of them seem to be unhappy with the Eritrea’s involvement in Tigray and are by and large sympathetic to the people of Tigray, if not the TPLF.

Some in this group remain quiet for selfish reasons to protect their property and some for understandable reason to protect family members and elderly parents who depend on their remittance that otherwise the regime would deny them. Others keep silent, so they can visit Asmara to show off the life they live in the west, making it the envy of young children who have become to see refugee status in the west as a “profession” that they need to aspire to.

Unfortunately, a number among the silent group who thought they were safe to go back and forth to Eritrea have been subjected to imprisonment and torture. Some have been falsely accused to have attended meetings of opposition groups. Nevertheless, they may privately condemn the intervention of Isaias in the Tigray war and some indeed abhor the atrocities committed by Isaias’ army against innocent civilians, but they do not dare to publicly condemn the government.

### **10.2.3 Eritrean diaspora challenges and ineffectiveness**

For years, opposition groups and pro-democracy Eritreans in Diaspora have advocated to ending the illegitimate regime in Asmara that has committed heinous crimes on its own people for a generation and is now threatening the very sovereignty of the country for which tens of thousands of our people died to liberate. Justice-seeking Eritreans unanimously agree no positive change can take place in Eritrea and that the country will continue to destabilise the region unless and until Isaias is removed from power.

Unfortunately, and it seems to be a curse of some sort, Eritreans in Diaspora remain fragmented. Eritrean opposition groups in diaspora represent the largest number of political parties per head in the world that made someone to comment “even a man and his dog has an Eritrean political party.” Disunity of opposition groups is in effect what is sustaining Isaias in power and unless and until this fragmentation ends it is difficult to see how the dictatorial regime will come to an end. Only when justice-seeking Eritreans unite or grouped into a manageable number of two or three can they make any meaningful contribution to ending the dictatorship and transform Eritrea into a democratic country.

### **10.2.4 The need for a legitimate global leadership**

Increasingly many in the Diaspora have come to realise that no positive changes can take place in Eritrea unless they work together to remove Isaias. The Tigray war has

shone light for many Eritreans who were previously reluctant to speak out or work together the importance of doing so. There are now a significant number of opposition groups that have come together, and huge number of dialogues are taken place via zoom on almost daily basis.

All this is a step in the right direction but to be effective, Eritreans have to unite if not in one group, in no more than two or three groups, to meaningfully engage with the international community and represent the Eritrean people on world stage.

### **10.2.5 Initiatives to form a legitimate global leadership**

Many in the opposition camp are realising that the only way they can bring about democratic changes in Eritrea is through unity. This realisation has become instrumental to initiate calls for the formation of a body that can represent them. The following are some of the initiatives that are surfacing although none have been successful so far.

#### *a. Global Initiative to Empower Eritrean Grassroots Movement (GI)*

GI was established in 2016, to facilitate the formation of legitimate global representatives, in order to end dictatorship and save the sovereignty of Eritrea. GI has been propagating the formation of local Baitos (forums) in localities with a critical number of Eritreans. The idea is to form local Baitos, then the representatives of the various Baitos in a given country to form a national Baito and the elected representatives to constitute legitimate representatives of the justice-seeking Eritreans in the given country. If this process is replicated in every country, then in the last step, a global conference would be held where the representatives of the various countries elect a legitimate global representative that can speak for all pro-democracy, justice-seeking Eritreans in the Diaspora.

Despite GI's intensive lobbying effort for this to happen, it has not as yet successful created a legitimate global representative group. In 2018, after the secret peace deal between Isaias and Abiy Ahmed, many Eritreans felt the secret deal between Isaias and Abiy might end Eritrean sovereignty. This led to the formation of Yiakl - "enough is enough" movement. Initially, it was hoped that the Yiakl movement will implement the conceptual framework of GI and that a Global representatives will be formed through the Yiakl movement. Unfortunately, even though Global Yiakl was created that incorporated Baitos of justice-seeking Eritreans in 11 countries, there were many political parties, civic organisations and other activist groups that did not join the Yiakl movement. As a result, Global Yiakl was not able to form legitimate global representatives of all justice-seeking Eritreans in the Diaspora.

Lately, GI has come up with a new proposal to form a body, which GI has tentatively called, the "Eritrean National Congress (ENC)." GI proposes that the ENC should be elected by the participation of all justice-seeking, pro-democracy Eritreans in the Diaspora. To this end, GI is proposing the need to establish a Registration and Election Commission through the participation of all the stakeholders in the opposition camp. The responsibility of this Commission is to devise an internet-based mechanism that will enable all justice-seeking, pro-democracy Diaspora Eritreans to register and elect the ENC. GI argues for this to be done in an

expeditious manner which is transparent, all-inclusive, and democratic, using state-of-the-art voting technology. Such an all-inclusive and democratic election process will enable the ENC to justifiably claim to be a legitimate body that represents the interest of all pro-democracy Eritreans world-wide. The role of the ENC will include: (a) facilitating democratic change, (b) winning the hearts and minds of the security/intelligence forces, (c) appealing to democratic forces within the army, (d) coordinating, guiding and supporting Eritrean armed forces in Tigray, Sudan and inside the country, (e) emboldening the civilian population inside the country, (f) advocacy, lobbying and diplomacy, (g) preparing for a smooth transition of governance, (h) advance planning to accelerate the development of the country, (j) fundraising and (i) helping Eritrean refugees and (l) communication, propaganda, and mobilisation.

*b. The Global Yiakl Initiative.*

The leaders of the Global Yiakl Movement have recently come up with a new initiative whose goal is to form a National Force that will represent the Eritrean Diaspora. To this end, they held a virtual meeting on 18 - 19 December 2021 with representatives of political parties, civic organisations, and other activist groups. It is hoped that an agreement when they reconvene at their next virtual meeting on the mechanism to form legitimate global representatives.

The Global Yiakl Movement has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the official representative of the Government of Tigray to collaborate together to bring peace and stability to the region.

*c. The Minnesota Meadi Zete, Tempo Afric, Initiative*

The members of the Minnesota based Meadi Zeta (Tempo/Afric) initiated “Eritrean Reconciliation Forum for Justice – Minnesota (ERFJM)” in September 2019. The goal was to bring all the various stakeholders in the Eritrean opposition camp to agree to work together to bring about fundamental democratic changes in Eritrea. To this end, they invited representatives from Eritrean political parties, civic organisations and study groups. Although some of the civic organisations, and study group who attended the first meeting dropped out, the rest which included political parties, GI, and US Global Yiakl continued meeting every week for over a year. Unfortunately, they could not agree on a mechanism to form a legitimate global representative.

*d. Alliances among political parties*

Because of the number of political parties claiming to represent Eritrea, many countries that are sympathetic to the ordeal of the Eritrean people are unable to work with the opposition groups. In 2011, an attempt was made to unite the various political entities at a meeting sponsored and funded by the Ethiopian government. The meeting was held in Awasa, Ethiopia. It was reported that there were over 600 representatives of political parties and civic associations who attended the Awasa meeting. EPDP, led by Mesfin Hagos, which was a major party, and a London-based civic organisation of intellectuals, named Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea (CDRiE) did not participate at the Awasa conference for fear to be seen working with

the enemy (Ethiopia). The conference elected officers that were expected to represent all opposition groups. Unfortunately, that did not materialise.

More recently, the political parties are making serious attempts to work together but so far it remains work in progress.

*e. The proposal to form Government in Exile.*

Saleh Younis (Awet.com) and associates issued a statement in 2021 advocating the formation of a Government in Exile. Their proposal was to form a unity government in exile representing elected leaders of the former members of ELF and EPLF in partnership with other opposition parties whose roots were in the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). This group expected to “temporarily” assume power once the regime is removed. Many have found this idea perplexing. It is generally assumed that it is change agents inside the country who will play the most crucial role in removing the dictatorial regime. Thus, many have opposed the Government in Exile idea as being unrealistic, adding a provisional government that does not include those who are instrumental in removing the regime will not work.

Another major weakness with this proposal is that the notion of ELF and EPLF is a forgotten concept that has no relevance in today’s Eritrean political sphere. What Saleh Younis and his Associates are proposing ignores many Eritrean activists, including Eritrean youth who are neither member of the EPLF or ELF but who are active members of the Global Yeakl Movement. Dr. Gebre Ghebremariam in a recent seminar he gave on Assenna TV [Part]<sup>881</sup>: made strong arguments why Eritrean opposition parties cannot form a Government in Exile. He has provided political, philosophical, legal, conceptual, and pragmatic reasons why it is inappropriate for Eritrean opposition to have government in exile.

### **10.2.6 The formation of Eritrean National United Front (ENUF)**

A group of nationalist Eritrean organisations announced in November 2021 the formation of the Eritrean National United Front (ENUF)<sup>882</sup> to wage an armed struggle to oust the authoritarian PFDJ regime of Isaias Afeworki. This new organisation is appealing to “all justice and peace-loving people of Eritrea, both in the country and in diaspora, to give it their full and unconditional support.” ENUF has also called on “Eritrean organisations and other political and non-political entities and the Eritrean people at large to join EUNF and direct all available resources towards the struggle at this crucial moment in the country’s history.” They are also appealing to the Eritrean youth, “to free themselves from the endless PFDJ enslavement, and from becoming victims of aimless wars.” The ENUF has called on the International Community, “to take all necessary measures to put pressure on PFDJ, to impose economic and other sanctions against the regime without any fear of hurting the people.” Like all other previous initiatives, the proof is in the pudding and only time will tell if this too comes to fruition because it requires action rather than words.

### **10.2.6 Summary and Conclusion**

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<sup>881</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq93mRkJEUy>

<sup>882</sup> <https://eritreahub.org/founding-conference-of-the-eritrean-unity-national-front-concluding-statement>

Although the majority Eritreans are unhappy with the situation in their homeland and most are opposed to the dictatorial regime of Isaias Afeworki, they have not, unfortunately, been effective in their opposition to the regime due to their fragmentation. The war in Tigray has also created a rift among the just-seeking, anti-Isaias government. The pro-TPLF Eritreans are willing to work with the TDF to remove Isaias. On the other hand, there are some within the opposition group who are willing to support Isaias should the TDF invade Eritrea. Diaspora Eritreans are also divided when it comes to the sanctions imposed on Eritrea and with regard to waging an armed struggle.

Opponents of the Isaias regime are also divided between those who are proponents and those who are opposed to any armed struggle to remove the PFDJ regime. Some of the anti-TPLF group are particularly against the notion of removing Isaias with the assistance of the TDF. But the pro-TPLF and a growing number are already forming armed forces such as the ENUF to remove Isaias and his regime. To this end, attempts are being made to unify armed forces that are operating in Tigray, Sudan and inside the country.

### **10.3 The mobilisation of the Tigrayan diasporas in North America**

By Desta, Asyehgn, Sarlo Distinguished Professor of Sustainable Development, and Engineer G. E. Gorfu

#### **10.3.1 Introduction**

Going beyond the prevalent approach of exploring the role of diasporas' financial remittance to support relatives and social remittance (i.e., the transfer of knowledge, skills, and models of business incubators), it is worth investigating the mobilisation process the diasporas undertake when their original homelands or regional centres are faced with insurmountable internal conflicts. Stated differently, in addition to exploring the impact of financial resources, human capital resources, and social capital provided by diasporas to their original homelands, an exploration of how diasporas get mobilised to act as "long distance human rights advocates" when their original home countries or regional centres are faced with ethnic-related conflict or clad with massive atrocities that amount to crimes against humanity is indispensable (Godwin, 2021; Smith and Hazel, 2007; Koinova, 2017; Ostergaard-Nielsen; 2006, Biden, 21 September 2021).

It was with this postulate that a case study analysis was ventured. The purpose of the study is to review the various mobilisation processes and collective activities that the Tigrayan diasporas are undertaking to challenge the genocidal war that the Ethiopian government and its allied forces have inflicted on the Tigrayan civilians. In short, the study attempts to explore some of the conspicuous mobilisation processes that the Tigrayan diasporas are undertaking to counteract the brutal attacks, war, and starvation that the Ethiopian governments and its allied forces have deployed on the people of the Tigray. In addition, the study endeavours to shed light on the projects that the Tigrayan diasporas have designed to rehabilitate and reconstruct their war-torn ancestral homeland. In short, the major focal points of this study are to:

- Investigate the diverse range of mechanisms utilised by Tigrayan diaspora actors to recruit other diasporas from their original homelands.
- Identify the mobilisation processes used by the Tigrayan diaspora actors to establish the collective identity of other latent Tigrayan diasporas and to awaken them and raise their awareness of the various atrocities inflicted on the Tigray people by Ethiopia's federal government and its allied forces and, by doing so, galvanizing them to take action.
- Pinpoint the engagement strategies used by the Tigrayan diasporas activists to entice other diasporas from their homelands to be involved in the reconstruction and capacity development of their original homeland.
- Assess some of the strategic developmental pathways that have been designed by the Tigrayan diasporas to integrate the internally displaced Tigrayans back into their homeland.

To address the various mobilisation processes undertaken by the Tigrayan diaspora during the Ethio-Tigray conflict period, the study is structured in six sections. Section II briefly reviews the literature to identify the vital mobilising networking and activities that have been undertaken by the diasporas to revitalise their ancestral homelands. Section III develops the conceptual framework (network) needed for the mobilisation processes of diasporas. Section IV reviews case studies of the most effective Tigrayan diaspora-driven ventures used to foster autonomy, self-government, and self-rule in Tigray. Section V depicts a synthesis and interpretation of the mobilising initiatives ventured by the Tigrayan diasporas living in North America. The final section concludes with drawing some policy implications and identifying possible topics for further research.

### **10.3.2 “Diaspora” – a review of the literature**

Due to its multidisciplinary nature, the term diaspora has been defined in several ways. Bostrom, Brown, and Cechvala (2016) refer to a diaspora as a “transnational community”. Using migratory patterns, Brazil (2008) classifies diasporas as “...colonial settlers, postcolonial emigres, refugees, asylum seekers, detainees, and economic migrants”. Koinova (October 2013) uses the term diaspora to designate individuals living in “locations remote from their original territory”. More specifically, Van Hear, Pieke, and Vertovec (2004) define diasporas as the migration of origin people to different host countries and also relates the various mobilisation processes and outreach programs that are used to conduct the flow and exchange of resources between the homelands and destination countries.

While settling in host countries, diasporas could use their sense of distinctiveness of common history and cultural heritage to support their ancestral homelands. That is, diaspora members, either individually or collectively, could effectively use resources (human, capital, shared identities, organisation, networks, etc.) to transform the social and political factors of their original homelands.

As related by Nedelmann (December 1987), the social mobilisation or the marshalling techniques used to activate diasporas are predominantly based on: (1) interest formation (cognitive), (2) community building (affective dimension), and (3) action-oriented (instrumental) dimension. Upon using this conceptual framework, Nedelmann (December 1987) operationalises political mobilisation of diasporas as

an "...attempt to influence the existing distribution of power". Endowed with knowledge, networks, and resources, active diasporas could spark other established groups and use canvassing activities (such as door-to-door soliciting, telephone calls, emails, dialogue, campaigns, political lobbying, and formal interest group organisation) and other forms of transnational networking to mobilise the other inactive diasporas from their homelands to take collective actions (Prasad and Savatic 2021).

More specifically, diaspora activists use ethnicity as a way to bond and mobilise when contending groups in their homelands start fighting for control of central policies, have claims for territory or geographical boundary, or are seriously struggling to secede from the existing union. However, it should be mentioned that as some diaspora's mobilisation groups will resort to building diaspora community resilience and progressive grassroots power to support their ethnic group's position, other groups may take the time to understand the underlying causes of the conflict and attempt to organise mediation processes to settle the arising conflict (Ostergaard-Nielsen, March 2006; Demmers, 2007; Nagel, 1994).

As stated by Sokefeld (2006), there cannot be diaspora community without consciousness or the idea of shared identity. Therefore, as conflict escalates into a protracted crisis in their homelands, some diaspora mobilisers harness the passion of the community to peacefully settle the existing ethnic-related rivalries. Other diaspora activists, on the other hand, may resort to using the community consciousness to address the economic and socio-political strategies needed to empower the victims in their homelands (Williams, R. 1994 and Ostergaard-Nielsen, March 2006).

#### *Economic Mobilisation:*

Beyond sending remittances, in peace time, diasporas transnationally act to effect change in areas such as international trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), and innovative businesses, or they may transfer new knowledge to spur development from the country of destination to their original homelands. For example, through international trade, diasporas could establish connections between producers and consumers in their countries of origin and introduce products to new markets in their settled countries. Furthermore, with the establishment of diaspora bonds, the diasporas could also invest directly in their countries of origin and persuade other non-diaspora investors to have confidence and invest in their ancestral homelands.

In the area of foreign direct investment, diasporas could transfer back to their ancestral homes seeding businesses, boost emerging industries, pursue entrepreneurship, train and mentor native workers, and bridge their countries of origin and destination so that both benefit and are enhanced (Newland and Plaza, 2013).

More specifically, through the vehicle of economic mobilisation, diasporas could organise and marshal the optimal allocation of resources of their homeland. For instance, if a diaspora sees the people in their homeland suffering from regime violence and ethnic conflict, they may feel the obligation to recruit and galvanise other diasporas from their homelands to raise funds, procure war materials, act as

lobbyists, and utilize the political structure of their host countries to spark support for war materials and logistical knowledge in order to benefit their original home countries. As a case in point, Ostergaard-Nielsen (March 2006) demonstrates how the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK in Europe voluntarily contributed and served as an important source of finance for military activities in Turkey.

### *Political Mobilisation*

Democratic states are known for having contextual and structural mechanisms that could be used to resolve conflict (Ragab 2020). That is, through inclusion and peaceful discussions, the citizens of democratic states can influence political processes and address conflicts in other regions of the world. Using this mechanism, diasporas living in democratic host countries could utilise various forms of networks to initiate “long-distance nationalism” in order to support ethnic, nationalistic, and exclusionary movements in their countries of origin (Anderson 1992).

Stressing the concept of political plurality, Ragab (April 2020) strongly advocates that diaspora political actors living in democratic host states should use their acquired experience to act as “long distance human rights advocates”. Furthermore, Godwin (2021) and Anderson (1992) also argue that diasporas living in democratic nations should vigorously try to finance electoral campaigns within their host countries to influence the situations in their original homelands.

More specifically, diaspora activists, acting as lobbyists or members of an advocacy coalition group, could trigger the members of their diaspora living in their host country to lobby the host country’s policy making elites so that the elites see that tackling conflicts in the ancestry homelands of the diaspora can also be in the national interest of the host country (Rubenzer & Redd, 2010; Prasad and Savatic 2021; Godwin, 2021, Koinova 2011; and Haney and Vanderbush, 1999).

It needs to be mentioned that regimes in the original homelands may attempt to introduce long-distance levers, surveillance, intelligence, and intimidation measures to monitor emigrant diasporas and exert direct personal control over them. However, if effectively mobilised, active diasporas living in democratic host nations could use the intimidation process used by regimes of their homelands as a transformative process for further enlightenment. That is, as pervasively argued by Ostergaard-Nielsen, (March 2006), intimidation processes used by former regimes of diasporas can serve as legitimate vehicles to inspire the diasporas to act in solidarity by taking strong collective transformative actions related to galvanizing grassroots-based social movements, organising mass demonstrations, and being actively engaged in order to bring political transformation in the homeland of the diasporas.

### *Social Mobilisation Process*

Social mobilisation is a vital step needed for pre-conflict and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. As the diasporas are masters of local knowledge and have a strong ability to respond quickly to situations in home counties, they could effectively use social mobilisation techniques to galvanise the grassroots to participate and intervene when their original homes are facing conflict and regime aggression.



Having already been helped by various humanistic groups when they initially settled down in their host country, the diasporas have a link to these humanistic groups and other NGO advocacy networks which are necessary to strengthen human and institutional resources development and further enhance asset-building opportunities needed by their original homelands (Mukundan, K.P. 2001).

That is, as part of socialisation processes, the diaspora mobilisers could activate and motivate passive members to organise awareness-building conventions for other humanistic groups that could help the victims within their original homelands since humanitarian groups are anchored upon social capital and networking. Convincingly argued by Hassan et al. (23 February 2021), diaspora mobilisers could leverage their connections to call upon the various humanitarian groups to render developmental services and humanitarian aid needed by victims in the original homelands. Stated differently, supranational organisations working with diasporas can be expected to have access to victims and good knowledge of their situation in their ancestral homelands so that these organisations are able to provide effective means of overcoming the trauma of conflict and provide a rich set of opportunities that are related to social capital, rebuilding infrastructure, and microfinancing support activities (Ostergaard-Nielsen, March 2006).

#### *Analytical framework*

Diasporas involve the migration of members of ethnic and national communities to other host countries. Because many diaspora members have relatives, mastery of local knowledge, and connections in their homelands, they can be mobilised quickly to situations of disaster in their homelands (Bostrom, Brown and Cechvala, 2016; Ionescu's, 2006).

More particularly, as a proxy for the affected civilian in their ancestral homeland, diasporas use informal ties and networks as a driving force to recruit, mobilise, and raise the consciousness of the passive diasporas who originated from their homelands (Ragab, 2020).

Thus, in the process of triggering economic mobilisation, diasporas organise and activate other diasporas from their homelands in order to raise funds, gather resources, procure war materials, and relay vital logistical knowledge necessary for their original home countries. While undergoing a thorough political mobilisation process, activist diasporas socialize their members to be active as an advocacy group in order to pursue the collective political actions needed to influence public opinion, be involved in demonstrations, lobby, and vigorously undertake financing of electoral campaigns in order to affect the voting power of elected officials of their host countries so that these officials can take favourable positions in regard to issues related to their homelands. Moreover, diasporas could be highly encouraged to form strong connections with humanistic groups and NGOs in order to make them pledge their assistance which would be necessary for capacity building and the revitalization of the diasporas' ancestral homelands.

### **10.3.3 Tigrayan diaspora in North America**

Prior to 1974, Ethiopians hardly ventured outside their country to reside permanently in other host countries. The sudden explosion of Ethiopian diasporas in other countries happened after a change of regime in 1974 (Zewde, Yntiso, and Berhanu (2014). That is, the bursting of Ethiopian diasporas started after the military government of Dergue that replaced the *ancient regime* (Haile Selassie's government) unleashed the "Red Terror" against the very forces and groups who brought revolution that toppled Haile Selassie's government. Sadly, following the Dergue's Red Terror campaign, the streets of Addis Ababa and other cities and towns were littered with the dead bodies of young workers and intellectuals.

Many who managed to escape execution or prolonged incarceration challenged the oppressive military junta by joining the forces that espoused pan-Ethiopian ideology, or they teamed up with the ethno-nationalist insurgent groups that were fighting to bring about ethnic self-determination in Ethiopia. The remainder opted to pursue asylum in Europe or North America. For example, more than 2 million nationals of Ethiopian origin were issued special identity cards to settle as Ethiopian diaspora in the United States of America (See Desta, 2014).

Using case studies, the upcoming section discusses the vision, objectives, and strategies of the Tigrayan diasporas in North America that have established various forms of associations to uplift awareness among Tigrayan diasporas, raise funds, involve other professional Tigrayan diasporas to share their experiences and skills with the local Tigrayans in Tigray, and facilitate networking with other development-oriented NGOs.

It needs to be noted that recently the various Tigrayans in North America are regrouping and rallying to strategically challenge Abiy's Ethiopian National Federal Defence Force that has collaborated with the hideous human rights violator, Isaias Afework, the Amhara region's special forces, the genocidal Fano youth squad, Somalia's troops, and the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Chinese drones to wipe out the Tigrayans and their cultural heritage.

It needs to be underlined that the case-studies operating in North America are not only very actively raising funds for the war victims in Tigray and refugees in Sudan but are also very agile at advocacy and lobbying their host country's politicians and international organisations to repudiate the genocidal war that Ethiopia's Federal Government and its allied forces have inflicted on the civilian Tigray population.

Below is a brief discussion of the six Tigrayan Diasporas associations. They are 1) The Tigray Development Association, 2) Security and Justice for Tigrayans, 3) Tigray Communities Forum, 4) Global Society of Tigray Scholars, 5) Asmelash Grant Foundation, and 6) Omna Tigray.

#### a) *The Tigray Development Association of North America*

The major mobilisation processes undertaken by the Tigrayans in North America were initially carried out by the Tigray Development Association. As a pioneer organisation, the Tigray Development Association (TDA) was founded in Washington, D.C., in August 1989 by the Tigrayan diaspora living in North America. As a non-profit, non-political, and charitable organisation, the TDA has ever

dedicated itself to recruiting and effectively mobilising the Tigrayan diasporas in North America to play active roles to reconstruct the physical infrastructure (roads, electricity, water, and telecommunication), re-establish social services (schools and healthcare facilities), and facilitate the settlement of internally displaced Tigrayans. More specifically, the vision, mission, objectives, and strategies of the case-studies selected for study are given below.

*Vision statements:* The vision of TDA is to making Tigray prosperous, free from poverty, and backwardness (Medhanie, 14 October 2021). to set it on the road to prosperity by strengthening infrastructure, providing aid, and building and supporting schools and health care facilities (Amanuel, 28 July 2016).

*Mission Statements:* TDA ventures to be a strong developmental organisation by actively engaging in need-based projects/programs that relate to education, health, and skill development training by soliciting funds from members, supporters, and donors and by enhancing community participation (TDA in North America, 1989).

*Objectives:* To achieve the future vision for Tigray, TDA has initiated the following objectives:

- Improve education, health services, and infrastructure.
- Enable target groups and communities to secure a sustainable livelihood free of poverty.
- Encourage and enhance the availability of gainful employment opportunities.
- Facilitate the ways and means of creating access to credit services and gainful employment opportunities for the poor and the needy.
- Familiarize target groups with new information, production techniques, and appropriate technology (Zewde, Yntiso, and Berhanu, 2014).

*Strategies:* To realise the above stated objectives, TDA designed the following strategies:

- Intensify mobilisation through the vigorous enlistment of members and supporters.
- Embark on the identification of potential donors while maintaining links with existing donors.
- Organise special fund-raising events.
- Undertake information exchange of activities by using different media outlets such as radio broadcasts, quarterly newsletters, and brochures. The TDA has tailored its activities to enable the poverty ridden Tigrayans to lead productive lives.

To summarise, the activities pursued by the TDA to line up Tigray's developmental goals can be categorized into four phases: 1) Recruiting members (1989-92); 2) rehabilitation and reconstruction (1993-1995); 3) collaboration with NGOs, local communities, and donor organisations to undertake various types of development-related activities; and 4) embarking on a three year strategic plan (2019-2021) to enhance coverage and attain quality education and health care facilities (See, Zewde, Yntiso, and Berhanu, 2014 ; and TDA in North America, 14 October 2021).

Starting 4 November 2020, Tigray was faced with catastrophic war that was purposely initiated by the federal government of Ethiopia and its allied forces to wipe

out the Tigrayan people and their cultural heritage. Thereby, the TDA-NA completely changed its strategy. TDA-NA to a large extent focused on leading the effort of mobilising a global fundraising activity and made each Tigrayan diaspora pledge to have their members contribute part of their monthly income to support the displaced Tigrayans in Tigray and the Tigrayan refugees in Sudan (Medhanie, 14 October 2021).

#### *b) Security and Justice for Tigrayans (SJT)*

A non-partisan, non-religious global movement, was initiated in May 2020 by concerned Tigrayan Ethiopian diasporas in North America. The establishment of this initiative was triggered by the dreadful situation that Prime Minister Abiy and his allies had "...waged against all aspects of being Tigrayans – be it physical, social, psychological and emotional – has left the people in the state of Tigray beleaguered on all sides. The survival of the people of Tigray depends on our own collective will and action and that of the greater human family" (Alemayehu, K. 3 May 2020).

*Vision:* The vision of the Security and Justice for Tigrayans, is to make meaningful contributions towards realising a just, peaceful, prosperous, and civilized Tigray that plays a pivotal role in augmenting the democratization process of Ethiopia.

*Mission:* Security and Justice for Tigrayans denounces and stands against any form of coercion and subversion of the rights, interests, and aspirations of the Tigray people. They stand against any acts that compromise their right to justice, economic freedom, self-determination, as well as territorial integrity.

*Core Values:* (a) integrity and honesty, (b) transparency and accountability, (c) public service, (d) inclusiveness, collaboration, and empowerment, (e) excellence, innovation, and dedication, (f) justice, fairness, and equality, and (g) peace and security

#### *Goals/objectives:*

- Advocate for the interest and well-being of the people of Tigray in Ethiopia.
- Defend the rights of Tigrayan political prisoners in Ethiopia detained by the federal government as well as those terminated from their civil service employment and morally humiliated due to ethnicity and political affiliation.
- Alarm the international community of the potential for ethnic conflict and civil war in Ethiopia and seek partnership.
- Campaign against the socio-economic, political, and psychological injustice and violation of human rights committed against the people of Tigray by the Ethiopian federal government and its allies.
- Advocate justice for those of Tigrayan origin whose existence is threatened by the forced border demarcation and seek the immediate release of Tigrayans abducted by the Eritrean forces.

#### *c) Tigray Communities Forum (TCF)*

The forum was established in 2017 by leaders of 10 Tigray community organisations with "a vision to create and sustain the Tigrayan community in North America." The

objectives of TCF are tailored to unite Tegararu in North America, promote growth and education, and preserve identity. Among other things, the TCF focuses on empowering Tigrayan women in the diaspora to ensure sustainable development and security of women in Tigray. However, the war against the people of Tigray was waged on 4 November 2020, by the Ethiopian government and its allies to eradicate the Tigray people. Thereby, in addition to its regular business, the TCF "...started to engage in many ways to defend the people of Tigray." (<http://Tegararu FormNA.org>).

*Vision:* To create and sustain the Tigrayan community in North America, to make it proud of its identity with harmonized and cooperative social life, and to make it educationally and economically viable.

The following briefly describe the activities have been taking place since the start of the war on 4 November 2020:

- The Tigray Communities Forum initiated an establishment of a task force which includes all Tigray organisations in North America to lead the fight against the war.
- The Tigray Communities Forum organised a global candlelight vigil, on 31 December 2020, to honour all Tigrayans who were killed, raped, or injured by the invading forces.
- The Tigray Communities Forum, through its Tegararu Professional Network, has engaged in public diplomacy. As a result, the Tegararu Professional Network has been calling the US representatives on a weekly basis to discuss the situation and to help stop the war. This has brought a deep understanding of the war of Tigray Genocide.
- TPN, as a network of the first generation of Tigray-Americans, connected with their peers across the Atlantic and created a Crisis Control Network which attracted many diplomats and journalists to respond to the humanitarian crisis.
- TPN has been playing a major role in creating awareness of the Tigray Genocide using social media. In addition to that, TPN members continue to play a leading role in leading protests and conveying messages to the international community.
- The Forum has participated in raising funds for the people of Tigray at this trying time. All Tigray Community members are active in organising fundraising, protests, and social media campaigns.
- The Forum's TPN, through its innovative fundraising program called "Double Good Gourmet Popcorn" raised US\$24,249.00 to support the people of Tigray. This was a four-day program that took place on August 2 – 6, 2021.
- As a community organisation, the Forum remains committed to empowering Tigrayans in North America while contributing to the struggle against Tigrayan Genocide.

d) *Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)*

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals was established in 2010 as a non-partisan, autonomous and not-for-profit global knowledge network of over 3,000 Tigray academics and wide-ranging professionals. GSTS seeks to develop a knowledge-based economy in Tigray and works to develop diplomacy and advocacy through humanitarian works. (<https://www.scholars4tigrai.org>).

*Vision:* GSTS aims to build a robust and knowledge-based economy and society in Tigray and beyond through a series of knowledge-induced initiatives, centered on research, sound policy and strategy, effective human capital development, technology and knowledge transfer endeavors, diplomacy/advocacy, humanitarian works and so forth.

*Mission:*

- Serve as leading and enabling hub of world-class scholarly and scientific minds in a wide array of multi-disciplinary fields of study and highly dynamic working environments aiming at playing a significant role towards the development of Tigray.
- Provide a platform for Tigray scholars and professionals residing both in Ethiopia and in the wider diaspora to work as a greater unit to accelerate the development of the Tigray region.
- Provide advisory and think tank functions for shaping Tigray development and prosperity.
- Promote educated and tailored advocacy, diplomatic and humanitarian activities.
- Serve as a primary center and thus liaison for various government and non-government organisations, academic, research institutions and industries.
- Facilitate and strengthen the interaction among members and other stakeholders.
- Work, promote and brand Tigray and its people's interest and aspire at all levels.

*Core Values:*

- Intellectual integrity, excellence, merit, evidence-based decisions, recommendations, and policy making
- Innovation, originality, up-to-datedness
- High level ethical standards, impartiality, inclusiveness, unity of purpose
- Networking, cooperativeness, tolerance, respect for diversity and equality
- Transparency, openness
- Merit-based awards and rewards
- Institutional independence

*e) Asmelash Grant Foundation*

The Asmelash Grant Foundation was founded in September 2014 by Suzani Asmelash Grant and Gary W. Grant. The Asmelash Grant Foundation is a not for profit. Independent, international, humanitarian aid organisation. The Asmelash Grant Foundation provides medical, food, housing, and economic assistance with the intention of creating new horizons for the people of Tigray (<https://thelivesyousave.org/who-we-are/>). The vision, mission, values of the Asmelash foundation is given below.

*Vision:* The Asmelash Grant Foundation supports the safety, health, and economic mobility of every Tigrayan through disaster relief, sustainable programming, and transnational organising.

*Values:* The Asmelash group work with; (a) Integrity - deep sense of responsibility, transparency, and accountability to drive change, (b) Respect –treat people,

communities, and culture with respect and dignity; (c) Passion- believe that generational change is possible through collective effort; and (d) Accountability - take initiatives to their responsibility and to exceed expectations

f) *Omna Tigray*

Omna Tigray was founded by a collective of international Tigrayan professionals from various backgrounds in response to the war and genocide waged on Tigrayan people on 4 November 2020. Omna Tigray is a nonprofit nonpartisan global organisation in the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia with a purpose to effectively advocate for an end to the war, call for unrestricted humanitarian aid to the Tigrayan people, and promote the economic development of Tigray. *Omna* means “our large tree” in Tigrigna. *Om* is a tree with plentiful branches that keeps growing, and this signifies that despite adversity, Tigray will continue to grow, flourish, and reach new heights. The word Omna fully encompasses the mission and vision of our organisation.

*Vision*<sup>883</sup>: to fight injustice, advocate for peace and economic development, and amplify the voices of the people in Tigray, via our sustainable, long-lasting platform.

*Mission*: is to build a global community and resource center advocating for the human rights and economic development of Tigrayans and other oppressed peoples in Tigray. Omna Tigray was formed with the belief that access to educated and inclusive advocacy is key to fighting disinformation and injustice, and it is our mission to create that platform for the Tigrayan community and the wider global community. We believe that strength is in unity and collaboration. In short, Omna believes that strength is in unity and collaboration.

*Goal*: is to ultimately eradicate failures that have prevented the development of Tigray and believes that peace and stability in Tigray are key to fostering stability in the region.

#### **10.3.4 Summary, Conclusions, and Policy Implications**

Going beyond the prevalent approach of exploring the role of the diasporas’ financial and social remittance to support relatives (i.e., the transfer of knowledge, skills, and models of business incubators), the main thrust of the study was to explore some of the economic, social, and political mobilisation processes undertaken by Tigrayan diasporas in North America to subvert the genocidal war that the Ethiopian government and its allied forces have inflicted on the people of the Tigray. Additionally, the study endeavoured to shed light on the projects that the Tigrayan diasporas have designed for the post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction of the war-torn Tigray.

In short, the major focal points of this study were to:

- Investigate the diverse range of mechanisms utilised by Tigrayan diaspora actors to recruit other diasporas from their original homelands.

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<sup>883</sup> <https://www.teomna.com>

- Identify the mobilisation processes used by the Tigrayan diaspora actors to awaken, galvanise, raise awareness, and establish the collective identity of the other latent Tigrayan diasporas by letting them know of the various atrocities inflicted on the Tigray people by Ethiopia's federal government and its allied forces.
- Pinpoint the glaring engagement strategies used by the Tigrayan diaspora's activists to entice the other diasporas from their homelands to be involved in the reconstruction and capacity development of Tigray.
- Assess some of the strategic developmental pathways that have been designed by the Tigrayan diasporas in order to integrate the internally displaced Tigrayans to their regional homeland.

A summary of the vision, mission, and objectives of the Tigrayans in North America is portrayed in Table 1.



**Table 1: Summary of the Vision, Mission, and Objectives of the Tigrayans Diasporas in North America**

	<b>TDA</b>	<b>Security &amp; Justice</b>	<b>Tigray Communities Forum</b>	<b>Global Society of Tigray Scholars</b>	<b>Asmelash Grant Foundation</b>	<b>OMNA</b>
<b>Vision</b>	*Make Tigray Affluent, free from poverty, and backwardness.	*Realising a just, peaceful prosperous and civilized Tigray.	*To create and Sustain Tigrayan community	*Build a robust & knowledge-based economy and society in Tigray.	*Dedicated to changing the lives of Tigrayans from refugee camps in Sudan and re-settle those displaced by the genocidal war in Tigray.	*Fight injustice *Advocate for peace and economic development * Amplify the people of Tigray.
<b>Mission</b>	*Actively engaging in need-based projects/programs that relate to education, health, and skill development training.	*Practice the democratic process to achieve economic freedom and self-determination...	*Practicing harmonized & cooperative social life related to education and viable economics.	*Serve as leading and enabling hub of world-class scholarly and scientific minds and skills in multidisciplinary fields.	*Strives to improve the economic well-being of Tigrayans supporting both immediate financial needs and sustainable growth. *Protect the health and improve the well-being of Tigrayans by responding to emergency health crises and building public health capacity to prevent disease, disability, and death from communicable and non-communicable diseases.	*Build a global community *Establish resources centre advocating for human rights in Tigray.
<b>Objectives</b>	*Target groups and communities to secure a sustainable livelihood.  *Creating access to credit services and gainful employment opportunities.  *Familiarize target groups with new information, production techniques.	*Undergoing through the design and implementation of peaceful struggle.		*Practice knowledge-induced initiatives. *Promote educated and tailored advocacy, diplomatic and humanitarian activities.	<b>*Short term Goals:</b> -Emergency Food during famine crisis. - Counselling and clinical management -medicine, equipment, and health care services -sanitary and famine hygiene products -psychosocial support. <b>*Long term Goals;</b> -improve nutritional status -family support -restore healthcare facilities in Tigray -rebuild water systems -build healing centres	*Fostering stability in Tigray.

A major analysis of the case studies indicates that, in earlier years, the mobilisation of Tigrayan diasporas operating in North America was propelled to raise funds and assist on developmental-oriented projects in Tigray.

Since the Ethio-Tigrayan war of 4 November 2020, the Tigrayan diasporas re-strategised their techniques to playing active roles in order to mobilise and sustain the collective identity of Tigrayan diasporas and make them 1) be aware by using social media and grass-roots tactics about the genocide the Abiy administration and his allied forces are committing in Tigray; 2) lead demonstrations and protests against Abiy's oppressive regime and his allied forces; 3) raise funds and vital assistance (such as food, medical necessities, and sanitary and educational kits) from members, international development partners, and NGOs to help the war victims in Tigray and the Tigrayan refugees in Sudan; 4) organise candlelight vigils on major streets and picket line in front of city halls around the globe in order to educate the public about the atrocities that the local Tigrayans are facing; 5) be advocates and lobby host county's politicians and international organisations to be on their side and repudiate the genocidal war that Ethiopia's federal government and its allied forces have been inflicting on the civilian Tigrayan population; 6) be engaged in public diplomacy; 7) create a Crisis Control Network to galvanise diplomates and journalists to work against the humanitarian crisis in Tigray; 8) file cases with the International Court of Justice (ICC) about the atrocities that the Abiy government has committed on the people of Tigray; and 9) solicit Ethiopian attorneys to defend *pro bono* the various Tigrayans without legal representation in Ethiopian prisons (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Summary of the Economic, Social, and Political Mobilisation Processes of Tigrayan Diasporas**

Groups	TDA	Security & Justice	Tigray Communities Forum	Global Society of Tigray Scholars	Asmelash Grant Foundation	OMNA
Mobilisation						
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Embark on identification of potential donors,</li> <li>*Organise special fund-raising events,</li> <li>*Identification of potential donors,</li> <li>*Organise special-fund-raising events,</li> <li>*Help internally displaced persons through financial donation, food, and shelter.</li> <li>*Access to credit services</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Participate in fund raising activities, for example from August 2-6, 2021, raised US\$24,249.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Build a robust &amp; Knowledge-based economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Work with donors and philanthropic organisations Around the globe</li> </ul>	Economic development
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Enlistment of members and supporters,</li> <li>*Undertake information exchange of activities using different media outlets – radio broadcasts, --quarterly newsletters, Brochures etc.</li> <li>*Help refugees in Sudan with food, medical necessities, educating kids,</li> <li>*Helping raped victims</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Defend the rights of Tigrayan political prisoners in Ethiopia,</li> <li>*Campaign against injustice and humanitarian violations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Organise a global candlelight vigil to honour all Tigrayans killed, raped, and injured by the invading forces,</li> <li>*Create awareness of the genocide in Tigray using social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Practice knowledge induced initiatives, human capital development, technology, and knowledge transfer endeavors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Emergency Food during famine,</li> <li>*Counseling &amp; Psychological services,</li> <li>*Medical equipment,</li> <li>*Health services,</li> <li>*Rebuild water systems,</li> <li>*Built 275 temporary housing units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Access to educated group.</li> <li>*Form platform for Tigrayan community</li> </ul>

Political	*Lobbying	<p>*Alarm the international community of potential for ethnic conflict and civil war in Ethiopia.</p> <p>*Advocate justice for those Tigrayan origin whose existence is threatened by forced border demarcation</p> <p>*Seek the immediate release of Tigrayans abducted by Eritrean forces.</p>	<p>*Engaged in public diplomacy,</p> <p>*Call weekly United States representatives to stop the war in Tigray,</p> <p>*Establish resistance task force</p> <p>*Use Crisis Control Network to get in touch with diplomats and journalists to respond to humanitarian crisis in Tigray,</p> <p>*Establish connection with peers across the Atlantic,</p>	<p>*Establish advocacy and diplomatic activities and filled cases about Genocide with the int. Court of Justice.</p>		<p>*Access to educated and advocacy group,</p>
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Despite undergoing sleepless nights, having ideological differences, and facing the COVID-19 pandemic, the entrepreneurial Tigrayan diaspora in North America needs to be applauded for being able to mobilise the other diasporas from their homelands to be involved in different forms of galvanizing structures.

With the assistance of the drones obtained from United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, China, and Iran, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces is intermittently bombarding Tigray. Nonetheless, thanks to the heroic efforts of Tigrayan fighters, Tigray seems to be on the verge of achieving its autonomy and eventually the people of Tigray will have the right to declare self-determination—the legal right to decide their own destiny.

As the drivers of change before and during the Ethio-Tigrayan conflict, the Tigrayan diasporas need to play more than ever before as stakeholders in post-conflict reconstruction of Tigray. Thus, being the inevitable stakeholders and co-development actors, the Tigrayan diasporas need to play in the reconstruction and consolidation processes of their original regional homeland (See Suh-Nwji, 17 July 2013).

Though not planned until now, the sharp-eyed Tigrayan diasporas need to be proactive and focus on designing sustainable post-conflict reconstruction developmental plans that can be gallantly used for the invigoration of their war-torn ancestral homeland, Tigray.

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## 11. Targeting Tigray's Heritage and Values

By Hagos Abrha Abay<sup>884</sup>

It is impossible to know precisely how many thousands of Tigrayans have been killed in the war that began in November 2020. The atrocities took place without regard to age, gender, social class, health or any other factor, and justice will require careful, systematic research which cannot currently be conducted. These murders were accompanied by land grabbing, ethnic cleansing, and widespread and genocidal rape. As Ethiopian and Eritrean government forces and private militia attacked Ethiopian citizens living in the northernmost region of Ethiopia, Tigray, they also attacked religious, historical, and cultural sites of immense value including museums, archaeological sites, mosques, churches, and monasteries. Tigray heritage icons were deliberately and systematically targeted, especially those that were popularly celebrated and held historical significance.

To appreciate the full weight of these attacks, the role and influence of the Church in Ethiopia which has underpinned historical and modern claims of political and military authority, shaped community identity, and informed cultural narratives, must be understood. Bombing, terrorising, and otherwise degrading churches and monasteries strikes at traditional Ethiopian power structures, cherished multifunctional gathering places, sacred spaces, and represents a grave dishonouring of cultural values and works of great beauty.

### 11.1 A survey of churches, monasteries, and other historically significant sites

Tigray is a land of precious heritages with thousands of monasteries and churches, about 150 of them rock hewn. Tourists from around the world and pilgrims from

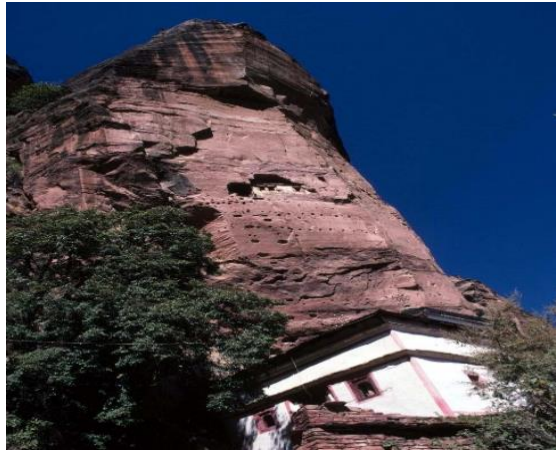
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across the country have travelled to visit these sacred spaces. These are the Tigray heritage icons and they; their historical objects, sacred items, priests, and congregations have been intentionally targeted. At the time of writing at least 40 churches and monasteries have had a general assessment of damages, but we assume that hundreds of monasteries and churches have been affected in one way or another by the hostilities. A detailed report from the Tigray Orthodox Church Diocese just three months into the war in February 2021, showed 326 members of the priesthood had been killed; we do not have clear data on how many members of the clergy were killed in the many months that followed. At least 112 priests and deacons of Tigray origin have been detained in Addis Ababa, many of whom were arrested during the Ethiopian Meskel festival in September 2021. The atrocities have been perpetrated by joint forces: Ethiopian National Defence Forces, Eritrean Defence Forces, and Amharan forces (Amhara Militia and Amhara Special Forces) and have been supported by drones and military personnel from various countries, most significantly the UAE, Turkey, and China.

On the eve of the popular annual celebration of St. Mary which draws crowds to the holy city of Aksum every year, a bloody massacre began. Aksum; Tsion, the holy city, is the Head of Churches and Monasteries in Ethiopia. The chapel at the Church of Our Lady Mary of Tsion in Aksum is trusted as the treasury of the biblical Ark of the Covenant. The faithful were participating in a unique monthly 7-day supplication [ritual](#) where they surround and circle the sacred church of Mary Tsion three times, reflecting how Zion in the Old Testament is described as being surrounded by protective mountains, when they were suddenly interrupted by force. Eritrean troops had arrived, many congregants stayed on the church compound hoping to protect the Ark of the Covenant and they were massacred. Over the course of two days on 28 - 29 November 2020 there are estimates 800 civilians, [see also this](#), were killed, including priests and children. Aksum, the ultimate spiritual and historical pride of the people of Tigray, not to mention Orthodox Christian Ethiopia as a whole, was disgraced.

*Maryam Dengelat* is a monastery and church complex with a newer church stationed in front of and below an ancient rock hewn church. Significantly, an unvoiced Aksumite Geez inscription was recently found near here. The ancient rock hewn church was also recently reopened after being inaccessible for 200 years, revealing unique and precious heritage items. Eritrean soldiers arrived on the day of Maryam Dengelat's most popular annual festival, Saint Mary's Feast Day on Nov 30th 2020, looted property and conducted a ruthless [execution](#) of civilians including elders, children and priests.



Maryam Dengelet (courtesy of Michael Gervers, 2002)

The Firedashum Massacre is one of the underreported massacres in eastern Tigray; after destroying the village houses and the only millhouse nearby, Eritrean troops massacred more than sixty-one civilians, more than five of them priests. More than 32 civilians and priests were said to have been killed in the church of *Medhanie'alem Gu'tolo* (a church dedicated to Jesus) during its holyday on January 4, 2021. Moreover, another church nearby, named *Enda Qirkos Firedashum* (source: Mahibere Deqiqe Estifanos), a church dedicated to St. Cyriacus, was [burned](#) and its heritage, both ecclesiastical materials and manuscripts, destroyed at the same event. The Firedashum villagers were horrifically killed, intimidated and there are reports of villagers being tied down for days in front of their killed relatives. Detailed identities and stories of all the individuals killed in this village are known and well documented by the locals.



These first few incidents listed indicate a pattern of targeting churches on their holy days and festival days when large numbers of congregants and priests were in attendance. Ethiopian Christmas Day 2020 for example, is known to have been one of the deadliest days for civilians in the war so far, with the- Debre Abay Massacre, and multiple churches and communities attacked at the same time. During the Ethiopian Christmas week of 2021 between the 4-8 January, Eritrean troops are believed to have executed 300 Saho speaking civilians of the Irob minority group alone, in a horrifying door-to-door campaign. 72 of the individuals are well known, however the northeastern area of Tigray where the Irob people live has been under continuous Eritrean occupation the entire course of this war and some of the atrocities have been hard to verify.

Most of the brutalities in eastern Tigray were committed by Eritrean soldiers. *Qirkos Ligat* in Zalambessa was one of the first reported churches to be destroyed by them ([as you can see in the video](#)). Targeting churches and sacred spaces became worse as the soldiers advanced to the centre of the state with numerous churches and monasteries in central Tigray and eastern Tigray defaced by Eritrean forces.





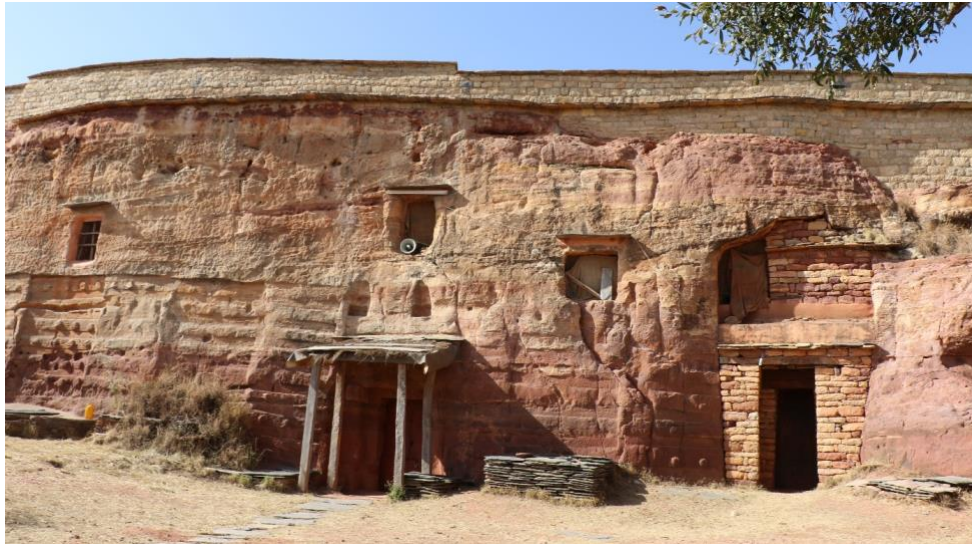
The church of Qirqos Ligat (source: social media)

The renowned 6th century monastery of *Debre Dammo*, a compound only accessible by rope up a sheer cliff on a flat-topped mountain, is the first Christian monastery in Ethiopia (sixth century) home to a rich collection of manuscripts, and it is where various prestigious Ethiopian monks got their monkhood from. Although no fighting was taking place in its vicinity, and while the site was of no strategic advantage, it was deliberately shelled by Eritrean soldiers. While there is some variance in local reporting, it is clear that the monastery was bombed, buildings around the complex were damaged and one monk was killed. More than five Eritrean soldiers were reported to have climbed up to the monastery, vandalized the space and intimidated the monks.



The first Christian Monastery in the Sub-Saharan Africa, Debre Damo  
(Courtesy of Michael Gervers, 2004)

The famous rock hewn Ger'alta churches in east Tigray were damaged by shelling, including the 14th century church *Abuna Abraham* known for its diverse architectural features and wall paintings; members of the monastic community were threatened and beaten. Priests and civilians were intimidated in the monastery of *Abuna Yematta of Guh*, a place dedicated to one of the sixth century Nine Saints and known for its impressively detailed, ancient frescos. This rock hewn church and the beauty of its surrounding mountains drew many tourists to Ger'alta and made it a well-loved tourist destination. 19 civilians were killed and two injured here on 7 May 2021.



The Monastery of Abune Abraham (Hagos Abrha Abay, 2018)

*Wuqro Qirqos* is an iconic church that sits on a very important part of the historic trade route leading to the Red Sea. Local residents [filmed](#) the historic church as it appears to be shelled by invading forces. The church of Debre Medhanit Amnuel Ma'go, in the Wereda Kiltewla'lo district of Negash, was Shelled twice on 24 November 2020 by the Eritrean soldiers. The church building and its ecclesiastical materials were destroyed; the image of Emanuel/Jesus, after whom the church is named, was also damaged, as can be seen in the photograph.



The church of Debre Medhanit, Amanuel Ma'go (Source: Dimtsi Weyane Tigray)

The rock hewn church and monastery complex of *Maryam Yerefeda* in Digum (eastern Tigray) is historical church with three *tabots*, dedicated to St. Mary, St. Gabriel, and St. Michael; the church is said to have been attacked three times, especially on 25 December 2020, and 14 January 2021. Eritrean troops are believed to be primarily responsible. According to [testimony](#), two generators, two amplifiers, and a bell were destroyed. *Maryam Yerefeda's* library is totally ruined. Throughout the length of their occupation of Tigray, Eritrean soldiers became known for looting any property they found. The full extent of private property, church materials, icons that were looted by the Eritreans forces are not yet well documented.

*Waldibba* in northwestern Tigray is one of the biggest, and most well-established monasteries in Ethiopia. It had a strong link with Debre Bonkol of Aksum, which was

a place of Bahre Negasi of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by a Tigrayan monk from Aksum named Abba Samuel. *Waldibba* was among the monasteries that historically remained untouched during conflict, even by Ahmed b. Ibrahim al-Gazi, who notoriously caused widespread destruction of sacred spaces in his 16<sup>th</sup> century invasion of Ethiopia. More than one thousand monks and a few hundred nuns are believed to live in the monastery, belonging to more than 18 distinct monastic communities. These coenobitic monastic communities hail from all over Ethiopia with a majority of them being from Tigray.

Many of the monks who live on the compound never leave it, devoting their lives to study and prayer. The *Waldibba* compound is sizeable and is not only a monastery. It also contains a vast hermits' desert with a wilderness that is surrounded by rivers including the Ensiya and Zarema rivers. This compound has been used as a sanctuary for destabilised individuals; members of the Derg Regime who were believed to have hidden themselves in the monastery because monasteries are independent entities, and historically and culturally considered to be untouchable by the secular community.

That belief has been shattered during this war. Hundreds of ethnically Tigrayan monks were cast out of the monastery by Amhara forces and their Amhara 'brethren.' Some were actually killed inside the monastery while they were praying. Most monks of Tigrayan origin were evicted and displaced to cities and other monasteries across Tigray.



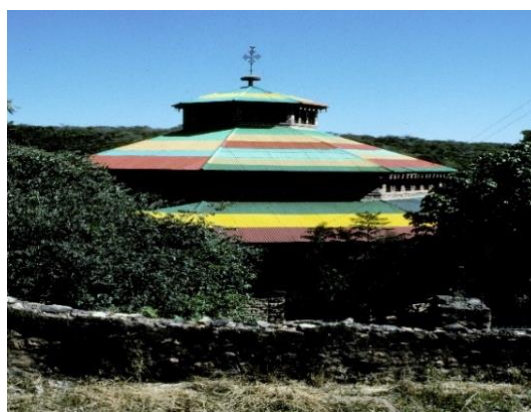
Destabilized Monks of Waldibba (source: Tsegaze'ab Kidane)

The monastery of *Mer'awe Kirstos* in northwestern Tigray became known as an asylum for many of these monks. However even here where *Waldibba* monks sought refuge, more than 50 civilians, ten of them priests, are reported to have been massacred by Amhara forces (Source: Mergeta Qetsela). Precious manuscripts and heritages from this monastery were also looted. Some of the monks of *Waldibba*, many of whom were elderly, did not recover from the beatings endured while being expelled from the monastery. Others, having had such limited contact with the outside world for years until their expulsion, quickly became sick and died during their exile. Seventy-one-year-old Abba Gebrewahid, is one example of a revered monk who was troubled, became sick, died, and was buried in Aksum. According to local reports and eyewitness testimony, the Amhara forces committed all these atrocities at *Waldibba* in collaboration with some of the non-Tigrayan origin monks from the monastery itself.



A Gospel book from the Monastery of Mer'awe Kirstos  
(Courtesy of Michael Gervers, 2005)

The monastery of *Debre Abay*, which was established by Samuel of Waldibba at the end of 14<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Dawit II, is a famous centre of excellence for Ethiopian orthodox traditional schooling, providing education in a variety of disciplines and preeminent in the field of church liturgy mass service (Qəddase). It was attacked by Ahmed b. Ibrahim al-Gazi in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the church in the monetary compound was bombed by the Italians in the Second-Italian-Abyssinian War. The mid to second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a very significant period for Debre Abay and for its reputation as a monastery. Throughout modern times it has remained a popular school. Any Ethiopian deacon who graduates from *Debre Abay* is as proud of his education as any of today's most renowned university graduates. This icon of Tigray's and Ethiopia's heritage was vandalized by the Amhara and ENDF forces. Civilians, priests, and students were ferociously killed, its heritage was looted, and fabric of the monastery's traditions was erased. Access to northwestern and western areas of Tigray is limited. Western Tigray, where ethnic cleansing and horrific brutalities like the Mai Kadra massacre and the extrajudicial executions in Humera continue, much of the territory is still under occupation by the ENDF and their allied forces. Consequently, no report about monasteries and churches from there is included in this article.



The Monastery of Debre Abay (Courtesy of Michael, Gervers, 2005)

In Wejjerat in southeastern Tigray, as they were preparing one evening for the anniversary day of *Ezgi'na Mam'at Church*, the faithful were interrupted. Their evening meal was purposely destroyed, and elders were taunted inside the church; this was committed a few weeks after about seven elders were massacred nearby, in Tsehafti. Ethiopian soldiers who had been camping in the surroundings of *Abune*

*Aregawi Church* of Quiha for a short time, and used to smoke cigarettes inside the church, and they are said to have entered the *St. Mary Church* of Quiha during the service of the mass, threatening civilians and priests.

Even though the degree of damage is not yet clear, local reports show the *Yeha Monastery* was affected and manuscripts were looted; it may also be connected to the Ahsi'a Massacre where more than 117 civilians, 19 of them in Addi Gitaw alone, including priests, were massacred (source: Qol'a Baray). In the church of Debre Anbessa, *Kidanamihret* church alone, more than 10 civilians and priests including the church administrator Abba Gebremeskel, were brutally killed by Eritrean soldiers. The guardian of the Ahsi'a secondary school whose name was Gebre'aregay, escaped the violence and he claimed asylum in Debre Anbessa, but he was still killed inside the church. A university student and one operator from Sur Construction company were among the murdered youth. Sexual abuse was also committed here. We do not yet have clear data about the church building and its heritages.

The monasteries of *Endabba Tsihna* (a church dedicated to one of the Nine Saints in Edaga Arbi), *Tseftsef Kidanamihret* (Nebelet), *Maryam Wuqro* (Nebelet) among the other churches in Central Tigray, in one or another way, were attacked by the Eritrean forces. Civilians were killed around the monastery of *Endabba Thishma*. Some monasteries in Qola Temben (central Tigray) like *Endaba Noba*, *Endaba Yohanni*, *Jiwamare Mika'el* were part of the target. The church of *Jiwamare Mika'el*, had precious manuscripts looted by the Amhara and ENDF forces.

Northwest, central, and eastern parts of Tigray are relatively the most attacked zones in case of heritage; this is mainly because these areas were the main gains of the Amhara and the Eritrean forces, who were described to be more brutal; many other churches and monasteries in northwestern Tigray were attacked by Amharan forces and ENDF. The targets in the Mahbere Dego Massacre, for example, were members of a local congregation traveling together to a religious feast called a *Tsebel*. Local reports describe the civilians as being brutally murdered by ENDF and Amhara forces and thrown off the edge of a cliff.

The Church of *Maryam Medhanit* in northwest Tigray (Addi Da'ero), as you can see in the picture, has been destroyed by the Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers; Christians congregated in the church and sang the [prayer](#) "O Lord, Have mercy on us" after its destruction. The church of *Enda Abune Aregawi* (Addi Da'ero) is also affected from shelling.



*Kidanemihret Amburko* (Tselemti) and *Abune Zer'abruk* both in the northwestern Tigray were damaged from shelling by Amhara forces. Another monastery called *Abune Tadewos* was damaged by bombing (by a zu-23) and heritage objects, including manuscripts, were looted. Many civilians were also killed and their heritage, including manuscripts, were looted in the monastery of *Abune Thomas* in northwestern Tigray. More than 12 monasteries, at least in this article, were yet reported to have been damaged in northwestern Tigray, mainly by Amhara and ENDF forces; the reports are from local sources.

*Enda Amanuel Samre* and *Qeretsa Maryam* of Seharti are among the churches known to have been damaged by shelling in southwestern Tigray. *Qeretsa Maryam*

was bombed from the air. The grounds surrounding the church of *Maryam Korem* were recently bombed by drones and we know that many civilians died in the attack. We do not yet have a report on the physical damage to the church. Brutalities in the south and southwestern Tigray have not yet been well reported. According to local reports and Dimtsi Weyane Tigray Television, reported recently, 175 civilians including priests were killed during the Bora Massacre on 23 November 2020; according to the report, until the first three months of 2021, another 179 civilians were injured; 438 goats and sheep, and 46 cattle were looted or slaughtered there. Moreover, 387 quintals of grain were burned; 180 houses were burned down, 17 women raped; unspecified church located in Neqsege areas was totally burned; in the church of *Eguyat* St. Mary, a monk named Abba Hiluf was executed. In Gedefena in the St. John Church area, a priest named Mamu and three deacons were killed, with a total of nine priests reported to have been killed around that village. All this destruction was committed by ENDF and Amhara forces. I was in southern Tigray during the first three months after the war started, I am a witness, among other things, for an unimaginable destruction of agricultural investments in southern Tigray. In Rayya, massive farmlands, dairy farming (including estimated to 500 Holstein-Friesian cows from a single farm of Haleka Moges) were made out of use; this can be covered in detail in a separate article.

Archaeological sites, museums and memorial sites were affected, in addition to the damage inflicted on religious buildings and their environments. Aksum Archaeological Museum was looted on 1 February 2021 by the Eritrean soldiers; according to the curator of the museum Layn Mawcha. Among other things, 26 Aksumite coins (10 gold, 16 silver) were looted by the Eritrean soldiers. Cars with heavy loads were said to have been in many of the restricted areas around the Aksumite stelaes; this could be one of the most frustrating issues in case of the stelaes, which were already endangered after the one returned from Italy was erected. The office of Wuqro Archaeological Museum is reported to have been damaged by Eritrean soldiers. Two other archaeological sites around Wuqro and in Aksum, Addi Gutay have also reported that their shelter, fences and related archaeological materials have been looted and vandalized by the Eritrean forces.

The *Emperor Yohannes IV Palace*, the home of a significant Ethiopian king from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is found in the Tigrayan capital, Mekelle. The palace was renovated and transformed into a [museum](#) with UNESCO's assistance. Today most of the cultural artifacts in the museum have been destroyed or looted by federal Ethiopian forces. *Tigray Martyr's Memorial Museum* found in Mekelle near the Tigrayan Martyrs Monument, a symbolic and educational site commemorating Tigray's revolutionary struggle in the 1980's, has been completely [devastated](#). When these two heritage sites were attacked, the city of Mekelle was totally controlled by the Ethiopian National Defence Force. There were no skirmishes, battles or shots fired anywhere near these culturally significant sites, yet they were intentionally obliterated by Ethiopian soldiers. The same is true for the statue of *Qeshi Gebru*, a female fighter against the Derg Regime in the 1980's. Members of ENDF and Amhara forces applauded and knocked it over in Humera; the event is documented in [video](#) footage that has been circulated on social media.

Upon the destruction of development infrastructure like textile factories, large agricultural assets, schools, health centres and the list here could on, private

properties and heritages were looted. There are widespread reports of Eritrean soldiers looting private property so exhaustively that they even took cooking utensils. There are also many reports indicating that Eritrean soldiers would then burn whatever was left behind, even a family's food items. Heritage antiquities were looted both for economic gain (with many items containing silver and gold) and for the intentional discarding of Tigrayan values. Antiquity shops in and outside the Ethiopian borders must now have received looted Tigray heritage items. A friend of mine from Kenya informed me that someone approached him to sell Tigray antiquity objects. Our vigilance in documenting online heritage selling, and general assessments of heritage loss in Tigray can be important for accountability and repatriation (if possible) after the war.

The "Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention" (UNESCO, 2015) treats cultural heritage rights as being human rights. A draft policy of the International Criminal Court (ICC) published on 22 March 2021 article 8:41 says, "War crimes fall under the Court's jurisdiction under article 8 of the Statute, and at present may offer the most straightforward means to address intentional harm to cultural heritage—not least since it is well established that these crimes not only address violence to the person but also to property." As Tigray heritage, including the world registered heritages like Aksum, are part of our shared global heritage and history, it is incumbent upon the responsible and capable international bodies to be well concerned about the targeted destruction and theft of Tigray heritage icons, to advocacy for accountability, and for everything from restitution up to rehabilitation. *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church's historical influence on the state*

Church and State have been closely connected throughout Ethiopian history, dating back to the time of King Ezana of the Aksumite Empire who converted to Christianity c. CE325. The Church became more dominant in Ethiopian literature after the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the story of the *Kəbre Negest* (lit. Glory of Kings), a textual masterpiece outlining the foundation of the Solomonic Dynasty, was produced.

While there is no current known record of Aksumite kings claiming to be direct descendants of the Biblical King Solomon, the narrative of *Kəbre Negest* was instrumental in denouncing their predecessors, the Lasta/Agaw kings of the so called Zagwe Dynasty (post Aksumite era that ended in the 13<sup>th</sup> century). The texts also validated the Shewan Kings' claims to being direct descendants of the Aksumite legacy, which according to the *Kəbre Negest*, was a part of the Solomonic line. While the intended purpose of the *Kəbre Negest* is not yet well understood, the idea that it documented a dynastic Solomonic royal entitlement through Aksum indicates an intention to claim historical legitimacy. The colophon of the manuscript reports that the *Kəbre Negest* was composed by *Nəbure Id Yishaq* of Aksum at the order of *Ya'bike Egzi'* then governor of Enderta, Tigray. The Aksumite church of that time (late 13<sup>th</sup>-early 14<sup>th</sup> century) and their narrative values made their own contribution to the authentication of the Aksumite claim. Most importantly, the belief that the Ark of the Covenant is housed and protected in Aksum, was significant for the kings, and their claims to divine ordination. The *Kəbre Negest* provided a strong legal foundation for the Church and the governing state, especially after the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Even when medieval and modern Tigrayan nobles were perceived as competitors and threats by the Shewan kings, the Solomonide kings of Shewa persisted in glorifying their connection to Aksumite kings and the Ark of the covenant. Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434-68) introduced strong concepts of Mariology to the church, and elements of that focus combined with the Ark of the Covenant became the anchor for the whole royal package. The 15<sup>th</sup> century was a golden age for Gə'əz literature and hagiographic tradition across the whole of northern Ethiopia and Eritrea. From this crucial period onwards, the Ethiopian Judaeo-Christian (Orthodox) belief is highly packed with folklore as the medieval oral and hagiographic traditions were influenced by myth and legend, which were instrumental for identity branding, power legitimacy and religious canonization. The existing folklore intermingled with a strong tradition that followed of manuscript production, translation, and adoption mainly from Syriac and Arabic sources, and brought the discourses of eschatology and prophesy into the Ethiopian religious state. The intermingling of the near east, and its religious and diplomatic relation with the Ethiopian state was influential during the medieval time. The Egyptian influence on the church has always been present and all Ethiopian patriarchs were from Egypt until 23 April 1891 when the first Ethiopian Archbishop Abba Basilius was ordained.

When a revolutionary group of Tigrayan monks called the Stephanites (14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> cent.) led by their founder Estifanos, formed a movement against King Zara Yaqob's religious reforms, they were perceived as a real threat to King Zara Yaqob's power, and he dealt very harshly with them. The Stephanites mainly rejected King Zara Yaqob's excessive veneration of the cross, the festivals of St. Mary and the millenarian doctrine of Debre Şəyon (lit. *Mount Zion*, Ethiopian eschatology). When they also strictly opposed the idea of bowing down to a king, Zara Yaqob characterised them as ፀረ ማርያም which literally translates to mean "enemies of Mary" in order to detach them from the Head of Churches and Monasteries in Aksum Tsion; he then massacred hundreds of them in broad daylight. Elements of their movement existed for one hundred years but they were brutally hunted down and tortured, clearly to be made an example of. Interestingly, most of the monasteries in Tigray which are linked to the Stephanites are dedicated to St. Mary: *Gunda Gundo Marya*, *Asira Metira Maryam*, and *Maryam Dibo* are some of them. The monastery of *Samuel Qoyetsa*, a well-known monastery in northwestern Tigray, named after Abba Samuel, the spiritual father of Estifanos, was attacked by the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and the Amhara Forces (AF). Priests were massacred and its heritage looted. The nunnery and church of *Asira Metira St. Mary* in eastern Tigray, one of the places where the Stephanites established their sect, was also targeted and the church's heritage was looted. Monasteries with monks from the Stephanite tradition are renowned for their habit of doing good work. *Asira Metira St. Mary* is known to produce fruit, like oranges and apples. According to local reports, Eritrean soldiers destroyed some of their property.





The monastery of Samuel Qoyeşa (Hagos Abrha Abay, 2017)

Modern Ethiopian kings and their chroniclers were often preoccupied with prophecy and myth. Emperor Tewodros II (1855- 1868) for example, who was known as a modern Ethiopian reformist, was also known to consider himself as the prophesied “King Tewodros”, a king written about in the Ge’ez prophetic literature as Fikare Iyesus and talked about in oral prophecies. The prophesied King Tewodros was expected to be a king who would peacefully rule all of Ethiopia for 40 years and would be known as the “Lord of Peace”. Emperor Tewodros II was far from peaceful, destroying and burning many Christian churches because of the clergy's reluctance to approve of his reformation; and his 13-year reign was riddled with battles and conflict.

#### *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church's current political influence*

Today, complex and conservative oral traditions and beliefs of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church are intermingled with the religion and politics that is still alive in Ethiopia. It seems that Ethiopia has encountered a miscarriage of social revolution and sidelined a real moderniaation process in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are many ordinary Ethiopians who are still waiting to see “The Lord of Peace” who will rule them for 40 years. Of course, it is easy to understand why a society fed up with a long history of civil wars would be eager to see a “Lord of Peace” and hence create a literary displacement foreshadowing stability. Even in the last decade there have been elders, mostly monks and hermits, in different Ethiopian monasteries and deserts, who claim themselves to be, or use oracles to prophesy about, the coming of “Emperor Tewodros.” 40 years is a significant number associated with any narrative about the “Lord of Peace” in Ethiopia.

This is a good moment to recapitulate some of the speeches of Ethiopia's current Nobel Peace Prize winning Prime Minister, who is drenched in blood. The day Abiy Ahmed came to power, he said that his mother had told him a prophecy that he would be the seventh King of Ethiopia. Of course, he would be the seventh Ethiopian king/leader after Emperor Tewodros, but we are not sure what he meant by that. The Prime Minister's political speeches frequently allude to Ethiopian Kings, he even commissioned a new statue of Emperor Menelik II in his palace. From the very beginning Abiy Ahmed seemed intent on manipulating Amhara activists desiring to be perceived as a king. In Abiy Ahmed's [recently released](#) ten years' strategic plan he said they had “Not only a ten-year plan, but also we have outlined a 30 years plan and in 2050 Ethiopian Calendar (2057) Ethiopia will be one of the most famous countries in the world. There is also a plan that says, ‘there will be two super-powers [in the world], one of them will be Ethiopia’. [Now] if we agree on the ten years' plan,

we will discuss the thirty years' [another time];" and here we see that the idea of "forty years" is present.

After Abiy came to power, there have been various fresh and complex stories of prophecy that should not be overlooked when seeking to understand Ethiopian politics. Among many other mysticisms, a book has been written in Amharic about a monk from eastern Tigray called *Abba Zewengel [Zäwängel]* who is said to have lived for more than 610 years. He died on 21 October, 2019, just after he finished



overseeing the building of his beautiful new church called *Mesqele Kirstos* (Cross of Christ) on the 30th of September 2019. Many Ethiopians had visited Abba Zewengel and consulted with him, relying on his wisdom and advice during the course of his lifetime. The Ethiopian Patriarch himself visited Abba Zewengel during the inauguration of the church, when it was named *Debre Sina* (lit. Mount Sinai). According to the book and related

fragmented oral stories, after three years of hostility and brutality in Ethiopia, Abba Zewengel said: "The Lord of Peace" called Tewodros will come to power by 2015 EC (a year from now in 2023) and will rule Ethiopia peacefully from that church for the next forty years. The prophecy says there will be war and a plague in the whole world, and Ethiopia will become a global destination for displaced people. There are plenty of social media narratives circulating today that relate to this. Even the reluctance of some people to be vaccinated against Covid-19 has been twisted into this narrative. I myself for a moment wondered about the prophecy when at the beginning of 2021 I met an American living at the same hotel as was I in Addis Ababa. He informed me that he came to Ethiopia, which he called a "world destination," to escape the Covid vaccinations in the US. I am not sure whether he evacuated from Addis Ababa when many diplomats recently left the city, because of the war.

According to the popular, oral stories of Abba Zewengel (we are not yet sure if he is the source of his own stories after all), 2056 EC will be the end of the peaceful life, the "False Messiah", and two super beasts who will come to fight each other in the world. Is it not ironic then that Abba Zewengel's own church *Mesqele Kirstos* was shelled many times, and destroyed by Eritrean soldiers at the beginning of January 2021, for Prime Minister Abiy does not want his 'monarchy' challenged by the prophesied "Lord of Peace?" It is a paradox that Ethiopia is currently one of the most destabilized countries in the world. Like many other churches, *Mesqele Kërstos Ma'abino* was damaged on Ethiopia's Christmas Day; Mahibere Deqiqe Estifanos, source of the data, made [documentary](#) film of it; almost all its ancient artefacts, including manuscripts were damaged. This is a good example of how prophecies, apocalyptic stories and mysticism can be instrumental in deceiving the community.



The Ethiopian Prime Minister and his associates have been obsessed with Ethiopian public opinion, which is strongly associated with religious apocalyptic narratives. This is a manipulative and deceptive approach to gain legitimacy in the eyes of both the Ethiopian church elites and feudal politicians. Together, the Prime Minister, his

associates, the Ethiopian church elite, and the feudal politicians are influential in constructing and orchestrating messaging and propaganda in the Ethiopian media. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's advisor, Daniel Kibret, for example, is amongst the church deacons known to narrate deceptive stories, while lacing them with bigotry. His ambitious claims, which rely on the Aksumite legacy, with its powerful religious, historical and mystical heritage, continues to this day.

### **11.2 Al Nejashi: Targeting a symbol of Tigray's religious symbiosis (or coexistence/freedom)**

While the Muslim population in Tigray remains a minority, they have a very significant historical mosque located in Negash. Some of Muhammad's first followers found refuge with the Christian Aksumite Empire when they were facing persecution in Mecca. The King at the time welcomed the Muslims with open arms, provided them with protection and freedom to worship, and refused to expel the refugees even when rulers in Mecca sent lavish gifts and delegations to persuade him. 15 tombs of the first immigrants from the First Hegira in Islam are located on the grounds of the *Al Nejashi Mosque* in eastern Tigray. It is considered to be an important symbol of the first Islamic settlement in Africa; today the oldest known Arabic inscription in Ethiopia and Eritrea is actually found in Quiha, Enderta in eastern Tigray and dates back to 972; studies tell us that some of the Arabic inscriptions discovered in Enderta were brought to the Archaeological Museum in Addis Ababa during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this war, the minaret of Al Nejashi Mosque was intentionally severely damaged; its dome partially [collapsed](#) and its façade was ruined. Civilians near the mosque were also killed.



Photo source: from [BBC News](#)

### **11.3 Fracture of church authority**

In the traditional sense of Christianity in Ethiopia, most believers rely on the practical deeds of their religious leaders and their confession fathers rather than on the scriptures. A priest in Tigray is multifunctional: a farmer, church servant, manuscript producer, traditional schoolteacher, etc. Not only were they massacred; the farmlands they plough are soaked with blood; the churches they serve are damaged,

the manuscripts they produce have been looted or burned, the religious students they teach have been hunted down and murdered.

Many religious preachers, priests, and monks of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church participated in the brutalities in one or another way. Hence, the tradition of fearing God, respecting elders, kissing the hands/crosses of the clergy, and trusting religious leaders has been challenged in Ethiopia and especially in Tigray. It has resulted in cultural shock and may undermine or damage societal values. Hence, proactive rehabilitation is called for before the people of Tigray descend into a social and cultural collapse.

Already there are stories of women who were raped in front of their parents, who have committed suicide. Women who have become pregnant after being sexually abused have suffered deep, life changing, psychological trauma. Many interethnic marriages (mainly Tigray and Amhara, who had good mutual co-existence) have been so badly damaged the couples have divorced. Families have suffered from serious social crises.

Tigrayan society is now immersed in depression and frustration. They feel betrayed by both the state and the church. They have been denied recognition and justice from church leaders, federal representatives and from the global community.

As stated earlier, Aksum Tsion is the head of the church; it is the source of church's law in Ethiopia, a holy city which is home to the Ark of the Covenant. More than 45 thousand arks in Ethiopia (one in the sanctuary of each church) are believed to be its replicas. The Ethiopian Patriarch is as the title of the Pope of Aksum. Yet the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) was silent when Aksum was disgraced; while Christian churches were destroyed, priests murdered, and ecclesiastical materials and manuscripts burned and/or looted. Except for the Patriarch, Abune Mathias, who is originally from Tigray, none of the members of the church council (synod) have officially condemned the brutalities. The Ethiopian Patriarch remains censored and under house arrest by the Ethiopian government, which collaborates with some members of the EOTC.

Subsequently, the Tigray Orthodox Tewahido Church became discontented after the EOTC position was found to be well below expectations. The Tigray Orthodox Tewahido Church Diocese stated its concerns and issued press releases to complain to the EOTC many times. Finally, on 7 January 2021, the International Orthodox Tewahido Church Association of Tigray Clergies sent an official letter to the EOTC in Addis Ababa announcing that the Tigray Church was severing its ties with the Ethiopian Church.

#### **11.4 Destruction and theft of Tigrayan intangible heritage**

In modern Ethiopia, there have always been disputes over the values ascribed to the cultural and historical objects and beliefs of different identities and political groups. This is especially true between Tigray in the north and the Amhara in the centre of the country. Throughout the country, there is also strong competition. Each group claims to have the best, the first, the oldest of everything. This sometimes becomes

xenophobic, not only amongst Ethiopia's nations states, but also for many Ethiopian's perceptions of their superiority in global esteem and importance.

It is important to understand that there is a tradition of moving both tangible and intangible objects of cultural significance into the centre of the country. This has been a common phenomenon which long predates the current war. There are various royal artifacts and ecclesiastical material which have been removed from Tigray and rehoused in areas of the Amhara Region or Addis Ababa. The *Museum of Entoto St. Mary Church* is a good example of this. Several ancient royal objects were taken from Aksum. There is a growing tendency to call this church the "Head of Churches and Monasteries" and demonstrates the trend of shifting Aksum Tsion's position away from its historical home and to central Ethiopia. Irrespective of the displacement of cultural artifacts and the distortion of oral narratives of Aksumite values, the Aksumite Empire and its historical significance in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is a well-established concept. It has, furthermore, remained popularly unchallenged because of the existent physical existence of buildings and statues, the written evidence, both in manuscripts and inscriptions, which has made it difficult to alter the historical narrative, despite media manipulation. The Ethiopian government's objective appears to be the physical destruction of this heritage and the material documentation that supports it. Every effort is being made to eradicate the vital historical record that makes Tigray central to Ethiopia's spiritual and emotional life.

*Ashenda* ([Tigray women's festival](#)) is a long-celebrated folkloric and religious tradition in Tigray, in some parts of Eritrea, and some Agaw areas. It is one of the most colourful events of social performing folk arts that lasts for two weeks starting every 22 August. It is a beautiful, multigenerational celebration with dancing and singing and it is considered to be the 'Day of Freedom' for Tigrayan women. Almost a decade ago, the Ethiopian government took the initiative to register *Ashenda* as one of UNESCO's world cultural heritages. As soon as this began, officials of Tigray and Amhara Culture and Tourism Bureaus, under intense pressure from political activists, engaged in a complicated conspiracy to try to take ownership of the festival. This festival had never been celebrated in a central Amhara in the past. Despite this, *Ashenda* was celebrated in August 2018 in Amhara's capital city, Bahir Dar. This was the very first time it happened, and apparently the last; it was mostly believed to aimed at foregrounding *Ashenda* in Amhara for the registration only. There was, furthermore, a movement cultivated and strengthened by the Federal Government and Amhara politicians to call this festival the "Ethiopian Women's Festival," rather than "*Ashenda*" its authentic, historically correct name, during the registration process. This was intentional; an attempt to disassociate the festival from Tigray. While the application for registration was being processed, the Ethiopian government officially suspended it at the end of 2021. *Ashenda* itself, as it is celebrated in Tigray, is part of the intangible heritages of Tigray, which has been damaged during the war. Far from celebrating freedom, the conflict has denied Tigrayan women their freedom; has starved them and left tens of thousands sexually abused. Tigray health facilities [reported](#) 1,288 cases of gender-based violence during February to April 2021 alone: hence the *Ashenda* festival of 2021 was a day of lamentations.

[Mahlete Gumaye](#), is named after the colourful folksong of the people of south and southeastern Tigray (especially in Rayya, Wejjerat and Enderta areas). It is an adventure, held most years, which involves a tour and gathering to celebrate folk-art in Awdewur. This is an area of jungle in the wilderness between Rayya and Wejjerat. It includes folksongs, oral poems, tales and legends and is accompanied by culture performances. *Dibarte*, is an ancient tradition involving women blessing villagers and is integral to Mahlete Gumaye. The women themselves are called after the practice: “*Dibarte*”. The etymologically of this term has not been thoroughly studied but relates to driving out a spiritual power. The origins of Mahlete Gumaye comes from a desire to preserve endangered cultural values. The psycho-social problems of individuals are released in this isolated setting or “retreat”. Awdewur was attacked by drones early in the war, apparently targeting militia. I was there on 17 November 2020, a few days after the drone attack. It was also the location of one of the bitter battles for control of Tigray which occurred in the middle of November 2020, before ENDF forces took control of Mekelle. Both the place of the cult and its intangible values were vandalized; *Mahilete Gumaye* did not take place in 2021. Instead, it was celebrated in Frankfurt (Germany) - as a means of commemorating this important element of Tigrayan culture. But Awdewur itself is now a place of depression and desolation.

St. Yared of Aksum, a famous saint known for his role in Ethiopic musical compositions and notations with well-established oral and hagiographic tradition in Tigray, is facing a similar fate. Powerful figures now claim that he was actually not from Aksum but originally from Gondar in the Amhara region. Saint Yared is said to have lived at the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century when the Nine Saints, the Byzantine Roman monks, came to Aksum. Today there is a plan to construct a new church dedicated to Saint Yared in the Amhara region.

*Al-Nejash* is the site of the first known Islamic settlement in Africa and is a significant historical site in Tigray. One may ask why a huge mosque named after *Al-Nejash* is under construction in Addis Ababa, rather than in Tigray.

An intentional and systematic minimizing of Tigrayans in the annual celebration of the battle of Adwa, disregarding their extensive contributions to the anti-colonial war, which was fought in central Tigray, is part of the same agenda. There are many other examples of attempts to erode and minimize Tigray’s role in Ethiopia’s long and important heritage; to replace it with an alternative narrative based on a central Ethiopian version of events, with Aksumite values. As political tensions increased, the region’s invaders took out their frustrations on Tigray’s cultural heritage, which they have plundered or destroyed. The region, Ethiopia, and humanity as a whole, has suffered the consequences.

### **11.5 A culture, heritage, and people under attack**

Besides the human carnage, icons of Tigray’s heritage have been intentionally targeted. The destruction of its intangible heritage and a widespread and intentional violation of values has aggravated the brutality. Social norms have been transgressed without hesitation. Older women and little girls – without regard for their age – were raped in front of their relatives. So too were nuns and the wives of priests. Soldiers interrupted church services to intimidate, abuse and kill members of

the clergy. Places of spiritual healing, like holy water springs and [supplication](#) settings, were demolished.

Churches and monasteries which were historically used as places of asylums and refuge during conflicts and were even believed to be endowed with a spiritual power to protect those seeking a haven, became hunting grounds where Tigrayans families could find no refuge. The sanctuaries themselves were destroyed.

This has led to doubt and confusion about the norms and beliefs of the society. It has even led many people to feel that they can no longer even pray. The aggressors have not only prevented Tigrayans from communicating with the international community, but they have also prevented many Tigrayans from seeking solace from their God, at this critical time.

## 12. Glossary

- AGOA: African Growth and Opportunity Act
- ALF: Afar Liberation Front
- AMISOM: African Union Mission in Somalia
- APDP: Afar People's Democratic Party
- APPG: UK All-Party Parliamentary Group
- APP: Afar People's Party
- ARDUF: Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front
- ASF: Afari Special Forces
- AU: African Union
- BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation
- B-GPDUF: Benishangul Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front
- BPLM: Benishangul Gumuz People's Liberation Movement
- COI: Commission of Inquiry
- Derg: Military government that ruled Ethiopia 1974- 1987
- EDF: Eritrean Defence Force
- EDP: Ethiopian Democratic Party
- EFFORT: Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray
- EHRC: Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

- ENAMCO: Eritrean National Mining Corporation
- ENDF: Ethiopian National Defence Forces
- ERN: Eritrean Nakfa (currency)
- EOTC: Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front
- EPDP: Eritrean People's Democratic Party
- EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
- EPRP: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party's
- ERA: Eritrean Relief Association
- ESAT: Ethiopian Satellite Television station
- EU: European Union
- EZEMA: Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice
- FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation
- FCDO: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
- FDI: Foreign Direct Investment
- GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council
- GERD: Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
- GDP: Gross Domestic Product
- G7: Group of Seven
- HDI: Human Development Index
- HRC: Human Rights Commission
- ICC: International Criminal Court
- ICU: Islamic Courts Union
- IDP: Internally Displaced Person
- IGAD: Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
- IPC: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification



- IMF: International Monetary Fund
- JIT: Joint Investigation Team
- KSA: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- LSE: London Stock Exchange
- METEC: Metals and Engineering Corporation
- MSF: Médecins Sans Frontières
- NAMA: National Movement of Amhara
- NEPAD: New Partnerships for Africa's Development
- NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations
- NRC: Norwegian Refugee Council
- OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- OHCHR: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- OFC: Oromo Federalist Congress
- OLF: Oromo Liberation Front
- ONLF: Ogaden National Liberation Front
- ONUB: UN Operation in Burundi
- OLA: Oromo Liberation Army
- PG7: Patriotic Gimbot 7
- PFDJ: Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice [successor to the EPLF]
- PP: Prosperity Party
- PSVI: Prevention Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative
- PSNP: Productive Safety Net Program
- REST: Relief Society of Tigray
- RRC: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
- RSADO: Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation

- SAM: Severe Acute Malnutrition
- SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- SNM: Somalia National Movement
- SMEG: Somalia/Eritrea Monitoring Group
- TDF: Tigray Defence Force
- TDA: Tigray Development Associated
- TPLF: Tigray People's Liberation Front
- TSF: Tigray Special Forces
- UAE: United Arab Emirates
- UAV: Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
- UCAV: Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles
- UN: United Nations
- UNAMIR: UN Mission in Rwanda
- UNAMID: UN African Union Mission in Darfur
- UNEOE: UN Emergency Office for *Ethiopia*
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
- UNFPA: UN Population Fund
- UNHAS: UN Humanitarian Air Service
- UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees
- UNISFA: UN Interim Security Force
- UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund
- UNMIL: UN Mission in Liberia
- UNMISS: United Nation Mission in South Sudan
- UNSC: United Nation Security Council
- USAID: US Agency for International Development
- US: United States of America

- WFP: World Food Programme
- WHO: World Health Organisation

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