

OPEN LETTER TO SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE CRISIS IN ETHIOPIA

To:

Secretary-General of the United Nations

President of the UN General Assembly

President of the UN Security Council

High Commissioner for Human Rights

CC:

President of the UN Human Rights Council

African Union

European Union

16 October 2023

Re: Survivor and Civil Society Open Letter on the Need to Investigate Grave Human Rights Abuses and Prevent Genocide in Ethiopia

Your excellencies,

We, the undersigned, feel compelled to write to you in relation to the situation in Ethiopia, and to express our most grave concern if provision is not made urgently for sustained independent and impartial investigation into international crimes committed and continuing in the country, for accountability for those crimes, and for the prevention of genocide in Ethiopia.

Since the armed conflict spread to in Tigray in late 2020, between the Government of Ethiopia and its allies, and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), reports of grave human rights violations and abuses in the country have been rife. As ICHREE reported just days ago, "To date, the conflict is one of the deadliest of the 21st century." The OHCHR-Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Joint Investigative Team and the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights mechanism have provided no public reporting whatsoever.

And yet on 4 October 2023, no Human Rights Council member state called for renewing the mandate of the ICHREE or even for lesser forms of engagement by the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea. At the end of this month, ICHREE will cease to exist, and credible investigation of the atrocity crimes being committed in Ethiopia, including since the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement almost one year ago, will go silent. By this act member states of the Human Rights Council sent a strong message that the people of Ethiopia do not deserve justice. This is not only the failure of the Human Rights Council and the African Union, but of the United Nations as a whole, to protect and uphold the rights of people in one of the deadliest conflicts in the world today.

As the conflict enters a new phase, and human rights violations and abuses are again increasing, it is vital that independent international scrutiny and investigations continue.

Now is a crucial time for the United Nations to act, not to abandon the suffering of people in Ethiopia in line with its fundamental principles enshrined in the UN Charter.

Your Excellencies,

The November 2022 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the government of Ethiopia and the TPLF, and the subsequent Nairobi Declaration were an attempt to bring peace to the region. Despite the government stating their commitment to the cessation of hostilities, and creating a Joint Committee on "Monitoring, Verification, and Compliance," it is now indisputable that these agreements have failed to put an end to civilian targeting and suffering.

Forewarning of this failure was evident in the shortcomings and lack of credibility of the Agreement. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement failed to include all parties to the conflict, including Eritrea, regional forces and militias which fought alongside Ethiopian National Defense Force and are alleged to have committed some of the worst violations. It also failed to address accountability in any meaningful way. In the words of the ICHREE Commissioners: "impunity leads to a pattern of systematic human rights violations in Ethiopia".

The Government of Ethiopia has ferociously opposed calls for any independent investigations of alleged atrocities during the conflict. The Government deployed considerable efforts to prevent, prematurely end, and undermine independent investigations, including the African Commission Inquiry and ICHREE's.

The Government of Ethiopia has failed to facilitate credible access to justice for victims and survivors of the conflict even through its own Transitional Justice processes. As victims and survivors of the conflict, representatives of survivors, lawyers, and human rights experts from the region and internationally, we are deeply concerned by the lack of independent legal avenues for all victims to pursue justice. The transitional justice process put in place by the government is nothing but window dressing, paying lip service to accountability measures, while on the ground the situation of human rights is deteriorating, with no accountability in sight. Indeed, there cannot be a sustainable peace in the country as long as governments are successful in their attempts to eliminate independent scrutiny and accountability.

Your Excellencies,

During the 54th session of the Human Rights Council, the ICHREE presented their most recent report documenting mass killings of civilians, looting, pillaging and destruction of civilian property, widespread and systematic rapes and sexual violence perpetrated overwhelmingly against women and children, ethnic profiling and arbitrary arrests and detention of Tigrayans, attacking refugee camps, indiscriminate shelling of civilian populations, attacks on health care facilities, arbitrary blocking of humanitarian access, and numerous other grave crimes. Many of these violations amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. And the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has issued numerous warnings – the latest only days ago – of "the continued presence of risk factors for genocide and related atrocity crimes in the country."

The UN reports 4.6 million internally displaced people and UN agencies are reporting the urgent need for humanitarian aid and to increase the support in returns and recovery.¹

The situation in Ethiopia will continue towards the brink of genocide if the international community continues to refuse to ensure an independent investigative mechanisms and engaging in accountability, a alongside the traditional diplomatic and humanitarian efforts.

Therefore, we the signatories request Your Excellencies to consider most urgently:

- Create a mechanism that will be mandated to conduct prompt, transparent, independent, impartial, thorough, credible, effective and gender-sensitive investigations of all violations and crimes committed during the conflict;
- Collect, consolidate and analyse evidence of such violations and abuses, including their gender dimension, and to systematically record and preserve all information, documentation and evidence consistent with international law standards, in view of any future legal proceedings;
- Support efforts on accountability of the perpetrators and justice for the victims and take measures to ensure the protection of victims and witnesses in such processes, centering a trauma-informed approach to their medical and psychosocial needs and to reparations.
- To pursue all efforts towards a full cessation of hostilities and achieve a sustainable and inclusive peace in Ethiopia;
- Ensure that all parties to the conflict immediately cease all attacks on civilians in violation of international human rights and international humanitarian law;
- Immediately adopt measures to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurance of our highest consideration.

Signatories:

1. 18 survivors of the conflict in Ethiopia
2. Abugida Artistic Association (CAAA)
3. Alliance of Civil Society Organizations of Tigray (ACSOT), Network of 72 CSOs in Tigray
4. Association of Tigrayan Communities in Canada
5. Association Tigray Women in Netherlands
6. Bright Future Tigray
7. Center for Rehabilitation and Development(CRDO)
8. Centre for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD)
9. Chain of Love for Human & Environmental Development
10. Dekna Foundation
11. Egbet Aid Association on Intellectual Disabilities
12. Ethiopian Canadians for Peace
13. Friends of Tigray
14. Health Professionals Network for Tigray
15. Irob Anina Civil Society (IACS)

¹ https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-humanitarian-response-plan-2023-february-2023?_gl=1*196rt60*_ga*MTQyNzAwMTIwMi4xNjkwOTkwNjU2*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY5NTY0ODE3NC42LjAuMTY5NTY0ODE3NC42MC4wLjA.

16. Kenya Human Rights Commission
17. Legacy Tigray
18. Legal Action Worldwide (LAW)
19. Miknay Development Association (MDA-Tigray)
20. Mums for mums
21. Nolawi Women and Children Recovery and Development Organization/Nolawi.
22. Organization Hiwunet Mogosa (OHM)
23. RD. Teka Abera Senior Citizens Care and Support Association
24. Safer Ethiopia
25. Samarbeidsfora for Norsk-Tigrayanere, Oslo Norway - org. nr. 929669096 -
(Cooperation Platform for Norwegians and Tigrayans)
26. Security and Justice for Tigrayans
27. Solidarity of Nations of Ethiopia
28. Tigray Action Committee (TAC)
29. Tigray Human Rights Advocacy Network/ THRAN
30. Tigray Human Rights Forum
31. Tigray Universities Scholars Association
32. Tigray Women Association (WAT)
33. Tigray Women Disability Association
34. Tigrayan Advocacy & Development Association - UK
35. United Tegar Canada
36. Vereniging Selam Edir
37. WHEAT Mentor Support Trust
38. World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)