

## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **LANDMARK CASE FILED AGAINST ETHIOPIA FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN TIGRAY**

Nairobi, 8 February 2022

Today, [Legal Action Worldwide](#) (LAW) and its counsel [Debevoise & Plimpton LLP](#), as well as the [Pan-African Lawyers Union](#) (PALU) have submitted a landmark complaint against Ethiopia before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the "African Commission") for serious and massive human rights violations against Tigrayan civilians.

This is the first time that the African Commission, which is responsible for promoting the rights contained in the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (the "African Charter"), and ensuring their protection in Africa, has been requested to examine the conduct of Ethiopian forces in Tigray.

The complaint alleges that Ethiopia is responsible for a wide range of human rights violations under the African Charter, including military targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure; mass and extra-judicial killings; gender-based sexual violence; arbitrary arrest and detention; mass displacement of civilians; destruction of property, foodstuffs, and religious and cultural heritage sites; ethnic discrimination; and enforced information blackouts.

The complaint requests that the African Commission order Ethiopia to [stop all violations](#) and abuses against civilians in Tigray, allow unfettered access of food and humanitarian aid to the region, and ensure the protection of the human rights of all Ethiopians, especially in Tigray. It also requests that the African Commission immediately order these measures on an interim basis to protect Tigrayan civilians from urgent risk of irreparable harm.

While reports suggest that violations and abuses have been committed by different parties to the conflict, against civilians from different ethnic groups, this complaint is submitted on behalf of Tigrayans victims and survivors who constitute the overwhelming majority of victims, and have been subjected to horrific violence and crimes as a result of Ethiopia's killing campaign against its own citizens. Legal Action Worldwide represents victims from Tigray, who have provided testimony for the case but could not be listed as complainants due to fear of reprisals from the government.

Antonia Mulvey, LAW's Executive Director, said: *"The African Commission has a unique opportunity to stand by victims and survivors from this conflict, to order emergency measures to stop unlawful killing of civilians trapped in Tigray, and to hold Ethiopia to account. We are keen to work alongside the Commission's Inquiry, to put an end to the impunity that has allowed these crimes to continue."*

Donald Deya, Chief Executive Officer of PALU, said: *"The Government of Ethiopia is obliged by both its Constitution and international law to protect all its citizens and residents from mass atrocities and violations of their human rights. Where it is unable or unwilling to uphold the same, as is the case here, we must seek recourse to competent international institutions. Hence, our urgent appeal to the African Commission."*

Catherine Amirfar, Co-Chair of Debevoise’s International Dispute Resolution and Public International Law Groups, said: “*We are honored to amplify the voices of Tigrayan victims and to seek accountability for those who perpetrated horrific crimes against them. We call on the African Commission to urge the government to end and remedy the abuses for which it is responsible.*”

## **Notes to Editors**

The conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia began in November 2020 between, on the one hand, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, the Eritrean Defence Forces, and the Amhara Regional Defence Forces, and, on the other, the Tigray Defence Force. Since then, civilians from all sides have suffered most of the violence, with reports of brutal massacres including of children, and widespread conflict related sexual violence including rape, mass rape and gang rape. According to the United Nations, the conflict has displaced an estimated 2.2 million people in Tigray, as well as 250,000 in the Amhara region and 112,000 in the Afar region. Half a million of those who remain in Tigray now face famine-like conditions, and 60,000 refugees crossed the border into neighbouring Sudan.

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LAW is an independent, non-profit organisation of human rights lawyers and jurists working in fragile and conflict affected areas. LAW provides legal aid to victims and communities that have suffered human rights violations and abuses in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Debevoise is a global law firm headquartered in New York with a broad public international law practice, including in representing parties before regional and international courts and tribunals. Debevoise is *pro bono* counsel to LAW in these proceedings.

The Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU) is the premier continental membership forum of and for individual African lawyers and lawyers’ associations in Africa, operating from its Secretariat in Arusha, Tanzania. PALU was founded in 2002 by African Bar leaders and eminent lawyers to reflect the aspirations and concerns of the African people and to promote and defend their shared interests. Its membership comprises the continent’s over five regional lawyers’ associations, over 54 national lawyers’ associations and individual lawyers spread across Africa and in the Diaspora, working together to advance the law and the legal profession, rule of law, good governance, human and peoples’ rights and socio-economic development of the African continent.