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ETHIOPIAN HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

Investigation into Human Rights and Humanitarian Law Violations in Areas of Amhara Region affected by the Conflict

November 2021

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

Executive Summary

Since June 28, 2021, the conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) forces and the federal government and allied forces has spread to parts of neighboring regions of Amhara and Afar. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC/the Commission) has, in previous investigative reports and statements, documented widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in areas affected by conflict.

EHRC conducted an investigation between August 28, and September 5, 2021 into violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in the context of the conflict in North Wollo Zone, South Gondar Zone, and some parts of southern Tigray. The investigation team interviewed 128 survivors, witnesses, local civilian and military authorities, health professionals and held 21 focus group discussions (FGDs) with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the conflict zones. This report is the outcome of the investigation.

Accordingly, the Commission has verified that in the areas covered by this investigation, at least 184 civilians were killed and hundreds injured as a result of the conflict until 28th August 2021. However, as the Commission's investigation team was not able to access a number of locations in the conflict zone, the number of fatalities and other injuries is likely to be higher.

In all the areas that this investigation mission was able to access, TPLF fighters have carried out shelling of civilian areas, and fatally shot and wounded many civilians. They have engaged in large scale pillaging and property destruction. Moreover, TPLF fighters dug trenches in and located and fired heavy artillery from residential areas; putting civilians at risk of military attack. Defensive and counter-attack measures taken by the ENDF against attacks launched from residential areas also resulted in civilian loss of lives, injuries and destruction of property.

At the time of the investigation, people displaced by the conflict from North Wollo, South Gondar and Southern Tigray, and sheltered in Dessie city, and Kombolcha and Hayik towns were not receiving adequate humanitarian assistance and the support of international humanitarian organizations was minimal.

The investigation has identified the following human rights and humanitarian law violations.

Deaths, physical and psychological Injury

The Commission has verified that as of August 28, 2021, a total of 184 civilians were killed in South Gondar Zone (Debre Tabor town, Farta Woreda, Guna Bege Midir Woreda, Nefas Mewtcha town and Lay Gayint Woreda) and in North Wollo Zone (Hara, Woldiya, Mersa, Habru, Urgessa and Kobo) as well as in southern Tigray in Alamata town.

TPLF fighters shot and killed several civilians in the areas they controlled for a variety of reasons including - for "being supporters of the ruling party or the government; refusing to guide or show them a particular location; sheltering or supporting wounded members of the ENDF and allied forces; refusing to handover goods"; and, for other reasons. The Commission has also confirmed that TPLF forces shot and killed mentally ill residents of towns they controlled on suspicion of being informants for the government or for being on the streets.

On the other hand, in a place called Gobye, six people who fled to Kobo town from the conflict in Tigray region, were labelled "as outsiders/infiltrators" and accused of spying for the TPLF because they carried Tigray region ID cards, and were killed by local youth.

In South Gondar and North Wollo Zones, a large number of civilians sustained physical injuries due to shelling by both TPLF and government forces. Many civilians sustained serious psychological injuries due to the extensive destruction - deaths, physical injury and property damage resulting from the conflict.

Artillery shelling of cities and residential areas

Artillery attacks by both sides in the conflict caused civilian deaths, physical injuries and damaged civilian infrastructures, homes, hospitals and places of worship.

TPLF forces dug trenches in and fired from civilian residential areas; placing civilians and civilian objects in serious danger of counter-attacks. Additionally, both warring sides engaged in indiscriminate shelling that was not directed at a specific military objective causing civilian deaths, injuries and damage to civilian property. TPLF fighters shelled towns and residential areas with artillery fire before capturing them. For instance, in South Gondar Zone, Debre Tabor, Gasay and Kimir Dingay towns were shelled by TPLF forces. Similarly, TPLF shelling on residential areas in Kobo and Woldiya towns of North Wollo Zone caused the death of several civilians, including 7 civilians in Kobo and 2 women and a three-year old child in Woldiya.

Pillage and destruction of property

In all locations covered by this investigation that had been captured by TPLF forces, large scale pillage and destruction took place. TPLF forces looted and destroyed civilian homes; commercial properties including banks and credit and savings associations; hospitals; polyclinics; schools; Kebele and Woreda administration offices; as well as electricity and telecommunication infrastructures.

While in some areas the pillaging and destruction targeted the homes of members of the Amhara Special forces, militia, Fano, and ENDF and their families; in other areas it was indiscriminate affecting civilian properties and infrastructures in general.

Limited aid to civilians displaced by the conflict

Massive displacement of civilians has occurred in all areas affected by the conflict. According to data obtained from South Wollo Zone's Disaster Prevention and Food Security Program Coordination Office (DPFSPCO), as at the time of the Commission's investigation there were 183, 404 persons in the main towns of South Wollo Zone (Hayik, Dessie and Kombolcha), who were displaced from North Wollo, southern Tigray and Afar regions.

Information obtained from the Zonal DPFSPCO also showed that as at the time of the Commission's visit, the government had provided 9,194.9 quintals of wheat and 79 quintals of corn and soy blend (CSB) nutritious food to 120,791 displaced people. Additionally, NFIs such as blankets, mattresses, mats and cooking utensils were donated. However, more than 62,000 displaced persons had yet to receive any humanitarian aid. There was acute shortage of NFIs particularly clothing and mattresses. The vulnerable, including infants, nursing mothers, the elderly and people living with HIV were not getting the special care they needed.

According to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and government officials interviewed by the Commission, apart from cleaning and feeding utensils provided by the International Red Cross, international humanitarian organizations had not yet provided any assistance. The Commission noted that residents of the towns where the displaced persons sought shelter had rallied to provide food and non-food items to the displaced.

Findings on violation of human rights and humanitarian laws

The findings listed above indicate serious violations of human rights and humanitarian laws. TPLF fighters shelled towns with heavy artillery; shot and killed and wounded several civilians; engaged in deliberate and widespread pillage and destruction of property; and put civilians at risk of military attack by locating and firing weapons,

including heavy weapons, in and from civilian homes and compounds. These acts are violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws and may constitute serious violations of human rights and war crimes.

On the other hand, the use of heavy weaponry by the ENDF to defend and counterattack against attacks launched from civilian areas by TPLF forces, caused civilian deaths and injuries and damage to property. While the Commission was not able to obtain sufficient evidence to assess the proportionality of the attacks by the ENDF and measures taken thereof to avoid or limit risks to civilians, the EHRC stresses the need for the ENDF and its allies to take additional precautionary measures to protect civilian lives, physical integrity and property.

Recommendations

To all parties to the conflict

- Respect human rights and international humanitarian laws and, protect civilian lives and civilian infrastructures from pillage and destruction.

To the Federal and Amhara regional governments

- Assess loss of lives, physical injuries and damage to property caused by the conflict and provide rehabilitation and compensation to victims.
- Ensure, in cooperation with governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations, rapid delivery of food and other essential humanitarian assistance to displaced persons. Keep shelters for displaced persons clean and secure, and provide basic health, education and other essential services.
- Launch criminal investigations based on the findings of this and other investigations conducted by the Commission into violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws and establish accountability through fair judicial process.
- In areas controlled by the government, give adequate attention to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools, health facilities and other essential public services and infrastructures damaged by the conflict in order to restore regular services rapidly.
- Make a concerted effort to ensure delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians residing in areas controlled by TPLF forces and restore access to health, water, electricity and other basic services in these areas.

To the House of People's Representatives of the FDRE and the Amhara Regional Council

- Follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations relating to human rights violations that have been identified by this investigation.

Part One

Introduction

Scope of the investigation

The conflict that began on November 3, 2020 in Tigray region between the TPLF forces and the federal government, spread, from July 2021, to neighboring areas of western Afar, and, North Gondar, South Gondar, Wag Hemra, North Wollo and parts of South Wollo Zonal administrations of the Amhara region. At the time of this investigation, several districts (*Woredas)* in the Amhara region's North Wollo and South Gondar Zones had become conflict Zones. As a result, civilians have been subjected to death, injuries and gender-based violence, and private and public properties have been pillaged and destroyed.

The Commission was prompted to undertake this investigation by information indicating violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law in the Amhara region, in relation to the conflict between the government and TPLF forces. Accordingly, the Commission deployed a team of 6 investigators and investigated violations committed in the context of the conflict. The Investigation was conducted from August 28 to September 5, 2021.

Location and timeframe of the investigation

The areas covered by the investigation in Amhara region are the towns of Debre Tabor, Gasay and Kimir Dingay in South Gondar Zone and Woldiya, Kobo and environs in North Wollo Zone. Additionally, concerning the conflict and violations in southern Tigray, the Commission interviewed IDPs from Alamata, Mehoni and Maychew towns who were sheltered in Kobolcha, Dessie and Hayik cities, and documented their accounts in the report.

The investigation covers the period from July 2021, when the conflict spread to parts of the Amhara region until the time the investigation team was deployed to conduct the investigation.

Objective of the investigation

The main objective of the investigation is to provide a faithful account of the human rights and humanitarian law violations committed in since July 2021 in connection with the conflict in the Amhara region's North Wollo and South Gondar Zones, as well as parts of southern Tigray. Thus, the investigation identifies civilian killings, and injuries; gender-based violence; looting and property damage; and the shelling of urban areas and burning of homes perpetrated by the parties to the conflict. It also assesses the adequacy of humanitarian assistance being provided to people displaced by the conflict.

Methods of work

The main methods used to gather evidence for this investigation are interviews, field visits and collection of relevant documents.

a. ***Interviews***: The Commission conducted interviews with victims and their families, eyewitnesses, IDPs as well as officials at various levels of government, religious leaders, and humanitarian organizations operating in the areas covered by the investigation. A total of 128 interviews were conducted.
b. ***Focus group discussions***: focus group discussions (FDGs) were held with IDPs to assess their situation using a checklist. 21 FDGs (with 8 – 10 displaced persons in each group) were held at 7 schools where IDPs were sheltered.
c. ***Field visits***: Based on information collected through interviews, the investigation team visited civilian residences in South Gondar Zone destroyed by shelling as well as houses, businesses, government and finance institutions, schools and health facilities that were pillaged, damaged and set ablaze. Additionally, the team visited displaced persons camps in Dessie, Kombolcha and Hayik towns where IDPs from Tigray, North Wollo and parts of South Gondar have sought shelter. The team gathered information on the humanitarian assistance being provided in these camps.
d. ***Documents***: to corroborate evidence obtained through interviews and field visits, documents were collected from ad-hoc committees set up to document civilian casualties and property damage in the towns and various Woreda where the conflict took place.

Limitations

Although it was intended for the investigation to cover more areas than those listed above, North Gondar and Wag Hemra Zones as well as towns located on the stretch between Debre Zebit and Gashena in North Wollo Zone could not be accessed by the

investigation team due to ongoing conflict. Moreover, as the team could not access North Wollo and southern Tigray due to the conflict, information relating to these areas was gathered through interviews with IDPs from Kobo, Woldiya and its surrounding areas in North Wollo Zone and Mehoni, Maychew and Alamata in southern Tigray in Dessie, Kombolcha and Hayik towns.

Part Two

Findings

2.1. Debre Tabor town

On August 19, 2021, TPLF forces fired heavy artillery five times at the town of Debre Tabor in an effort to capture it. All of the shells landed in the town's Kebele 01 neighborhood. (Medhanyalem Sefer, Lijitu Mariam, Aresma Church's new building, Blocket Sefer and Debre Tabor Hospital's compound).

Killings and Injuries

Six civilians – five members of one family (Mrs. Wude Wale, Mrs. Serkalem Deres, Esubalew Deres, Addisalem Deres, and a 5 months old baby boy named Abush Deres) and a tenant living in the same compound named Memher Geta Berhan- were killed by a shell that landed on their home. Yohannes Fanta also sustained serious injuries on his face, right hand, stomach and both legs. At the time of the investigation, he was receiving treatment at Felege Hiwot Specialized Hospital in Bahar Dar.



Image 1: A house destroyed by a rocket shell in Kebele 01, Blocket Sefer in Debre Tabor town

Damage to property

The impact and fragments of the artillery shell that landed in the compound of Debre Tabor Hospital shattered the windows of three buildings of the hospital. Shell fragments from another attack that landed in Kebele 01 Medhanyalem Sefer caused serious damage to the roofs and walls of two residential houses. In the same Kebele, in an area called Blocket Sefer, an artilery shell landed on a home, completely destroying the house and its fragments causing serious damage to the roofs, ceiling and windows of 11 neighboring houses. In Kebele 01, Arsema church's building that was under construction was also hit by shelling. Additionally, the EHRC observed that Mr. Mesganaw Atanew's house was seriously damaged by fragments of a shell that landed on a street in Kebele 01 in an area called Lejitu Mariam.



Image 2: The remains of an artillery shell that landed on a home in Kebele 01, Blocket Sefer (photographed at the Debre Tabor 1st police station)

2.2. Farta Woreda (Sahrena Kebele and Gasay town)

The fighting in five Kebeles of Farta Woreda (Andrgi, Sahra, Awzet, Soras) and Gasay Town took place from August 16 to 21, 2021.

Killings and Injuries

At least 29 civilians (23 men and 6 women) were killed in Farta Woreda during fighting between government and TPLF forces. The Commission has also confirmed that another 28 people (26 men and 2 women) sustained physical injuries. Interviews with survivors, families of victims and the relevant government officials revealed that the victims were struck by bullets or artillery shells in their homes or while fleeing from the attack.

The Commission verified through interviews with residents and administrators of Gasay town that several civilians were shot and killed by TPLF fighters. Corporal Tarek Mandefro (a retired army officer of the former communist Derg government) was shot and killed as he stepped out of his house; two young men named Fetamlak Erkyehun and Mulaw Wubet were accused of sheltering a wounded ENDF soldier and shot and killed near their house; Mr. Dessie Muche was accused of being a member of the militia, dragged out of his house, shot and killed and his body dumped on a river bank; two mentally ill men, Mr. Fentaneh Berke and Mr. Feleke Sisay, were fatally shot while walking on the streets; Mr. Abay Tsedale was also fatally shot by TPLF forces for running when ordered to stop; and Mr. Tebekaw Akal was found dead on the outskirts of the town.

As TPLF fighters used populated areas as shields to mount attacks against government forces, defensive and offensive measures taken by the ENDF resulted in the deaths of Mrs. Alemnesh Ayalew, Emaoy Asnakech Mekonnen and Mr. Adane Sewmehone, who were struck in their homes by fragments from shelling, and that of Mrs. Erteban Asmamaw who was struck outside the main door of her house.

> *"TPLF fighters constructed a long trench behind my house with stones and fired machine guns. On 19th August 2021 at 10 am, my wife was hit on both legs with artillery fire when fleeing our house. She died of her injuries. It was only after two days that her body was laid to rest. My house has been completely destroyed.*
> *The deceased's spouse*

Several civilians sustained injuries under similar circumstances. The Commission was informed by the family of Yonas Kase, their three-year-old boy was struck by artillery shell fragments fired by government forces while in his home, and as a result lost his left leg and sustained injuries on the other, and was receiving medical treatment. Two priests named Abiy Tesfa and Mekuanent Negat and, Deacon Samuel Eyasu were wounded by fragments from shelling by the ENDF. The Commission has observed from evidence collected during the investigation that TPLF forces exposed civilians to artillery attacks

by placing and firing military equipment from civilian areas and using homes and residential areas as shield while mounting attacks.



Image 3: The remains of a shell that hit the home of the three - year-old boy, Yonas Kase, in Gasay town





Image 4 **Image 5**

Image 4 and 5: Remains of a civilian house that was used by TPLF forces to mount and shield from attacks

Looting and damage to property

In Gasay town, one secondary and one primary schools; a polyclinic; the town's municipality office; a center for micro-small enterprises; and a credit and savings institution were looted, and their documents destroyed by TPLF forces. The Commission

has confirmed from witness statements and field observation that shelling by both parties to the conflict has damaged Gasay's Debre Selam Medhanyalem church, in particular, the gate, roof, ceiling, windows, outer walls and religious paintings. Additionally, homes and a mill owned by a civilian have been damaged by ENDF artillery fire.

> *On entering Gasay town, TPLF forces struck our church with DShk machine guns. Later, as TPLF forces had based near the church, the ENDF fired artillery against the TPLF forces causing further damage to the church on 18 August 2021, at 3pm; injuring three priests as they were coming out of a church service. On 19 August 2021, my mother and two children were wounded by fragments from a shell that landed close to her house. Two days later, my mother was taken to Bahir Dar for medical treatment but died on 25 August 2021 from her injuries.*
> *A clergy at Gasay Medhanyalem Church*

Kebele administrative officials informed the Commission that, in total, 107 homes in Gasay town and 20 houses in Sahran Kebele sustained varying degrees of damage from shelling. Livestock were also killed. TPLF forces broke into homes and businesses and stole cash, retail goods, electronics, daily food supplies.

2.3. Guna Begemeder Woreda (including Kimir Dingay town)

TPLF forces controlled Guna Begemeder Woreda from August 17 to 21, 2021.

Killing and bodily injury

Evidence gathered by the Commission from victims and their families, witnesses and the relevant government officials shows that during the period that TPLF forces controlled Guna Begemeder Woreda, they killed 12 civilians (10 men and 2 women) and wounded 13 people (11 men and 2 women). While some were killed and wounded by shelling from both warring parties, others were shot and killed by TPLF forces, who accused them of: being government supporters; sheltering wounded members of the ENDF; or refusing to guide them to specific places or to handover certain properties.

A young man named Kindneh Bayeh was forcibly taken out of his house by TPLF forces and made to bury bodies, dig trenches, and carry goods and bullets for them. He was then shot and is body was later found by the road side.

> *On 18th August 2021, when I called my son, Kindnew, on his phone, [a TPLF] soldier answered and told me that my son was with them. On Sunday around 10 am, I heard that my son had died and that he was buried around Zebera/Ata*

> *village. when I arrived at his grave, knew it was his body as his legs had not been covered with soil and I could see his shoes. When his body was exhumed, he was wearing the same cloths. He died of gunshot wound to the head. We took the body and buried him at St. Michael church.*
> *The deceased's father*

Two elderly men, Mr. Guade Shiferaw and Mr. Debebe Yigzaw were hit and killed by fragments from shelling by the ENDF. Mr. Nega Aynalem was also wounded by fragments from shelling. Another civilian by the name Melkam Admasu was stopped by TPLF forces in Kimir Dingay town and asked to handover a weapon he keeps at home. He was shot on the leg while trying to escape.

Witnesses also informed the Commission that, in a single day, the ENDF fired 21 artillery shells at residential areas of Kinzar village in Tado Mender Kebele which, at the time, was occupied by TPLF forces.

Looting and destruction

In the 4 days they controlled the area, TPLF forces engaged in significant pillage and destruction in Guna Begemeder Woreda especially, Kimir Dingay town. With the exception of the Woreda's Court, they broke into every other public building, looted various items including, laptops, desktop computers, power generators, cameras, amplifiers, microphones, GPS, sewing machines, motorbikes, medicines, medical equipment, veterinary medications and vehicles. They then brought vehicles and transported the looted items. They smashed and destroyed goods they could not take away such as doors, windows, tables, chairs, televisions, photocopy machines, electricity meters, telephone and electricity lines and filing cabinets. In addition, various official files including financial documents and students' academic records were strewn and intentionally left out in the open for the rain to destroy.

> *From 18th to 20th August 2021 the school was looted. Goods looted include one laptop, six computers, three microphones, blood pressure measuring instrument and a printer. Plasma TV and a photocopy machine were also taken. All doors and lockers were smashed. They littered the offices with human waste.*
> *Principal of Kimir Dingay's Secondary School*

TPLF forces used government and public buildings as military bases to cook, dine and sleep. They used civilian administration offices and homes as places of convenience. Financial institutions including the branch offices of Commercial Bank of Ethiopia,

Abbay Bank and the Amhara Credit and Savings Institution were targets of the attack. The finance sections, vaults and documents of these institutions were smashed. The amount of cash stolen from these institutions was still being assessed. According to the administrator of Kimir Dingay Woreda, one hundred and fifty-five thousand birr (ETB 155,000) was stolen from the town's municipal office.



Image 6: Abbay Bank, Kimir Dingay Branch

Medical equipment of two polyclinics, including delivery beds were all stolen or destroyed. The Commission's team observed that Kimir Dingay's Higher Secondary School, Guna Begemeder Secondary School and Guna Begemeder Technical and Vocational Training College were looted and destroyed.

The Woreda administrator informed the Commission that an ambulance and a pickup truck were stolen; 15 motorbikes were thrown off into a gorge and completely destroyed; and 11 motorbikes were stolen. The team also observed that several businesses including clothing shops, shoe shops, food warehouses, hotels, and residential houses were looted by the TPLF forces. In particular, daily food supplies such as flour, berbere (spicy chili powder), legumes and individuals' mobile phones, cloths, jewelry, private arms, household utensils and livestock (especially chickens and sheep) were looted by TPLF forces. For instance, Mr. Admasu Aweke estimates that items worth a total of birr six hundred thousand (ETB 600,000) have been destroyed and stolen from a family business

store. Similarly, a business man by the name Mr. Gebre Getnet estimates that he has been robbed of goods worth over three hundred fifty-three thousand two hundred Birr (ETB 353,200). Mr. Belay Adam stated that TPLF fighters broke into his house, looted and destroyed property worth one hundred eighty thousand Birr (ETB 180,000). There were also civilians who took part in the looting and the Commission observed community effort to retrieve goods by opportunist looters.

TPLF forces forced Mr. Gete Mekonnen, the owner of Gete's Bar and Restaurant, to serve them food and drinks and took away his private arms. When Mr. Gete attacked the TPLF forces and escaped, they burned down his bar and restaurant. Additionally, the Commission has confirmed that TPLF burnt down the home of Mrs. Hulu Ageresh Abate, a mother of four, on finding out that her husband is a member of the ENDF and an instructor at Camp Hurso. Two nearby houses were partially destroyed by the fire.

> *My husband is an instructor at the Hurso military camp. I have four children. On the Friday before TPLF forces captured our town, we were told to evacuate. I took my children to the rural parts. I returned on 21st August 2021 and found my house completely burnt down. My neighbors told me that when people tried to put out the fire, they were told, at gun point, that it was the house of Abiy's (Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed] soldier and that they had to stop.*
> *A resident whose home was burnt down*



Image 7: Gete/Seble Bar and Restaurant in Kimir Dingay

In another incident, government agencies in Ata Kebele confirmed that a local church was damaged by shelling. It is not yet known which of the warring parties or from which direction the shell was fired.

Displacement

In the 4 days that TPLF forces controlled Kimir Dingay and the neighboring areas, residents fled the town and returned only when the ENDF took back control of the town. The Commission observed that returnees are in dire situation as all their household goods and food supplies were ransacked and, they were not receiving humanitarian assistance.

Damage to Public Infrastructure

During the period of the investigation, there was no health service in Beguna Begemeder as a result of extensive looting and destruction of health facilities. Public services including electricity,water supply,telephone and banking services were disrupted. The Commission also observed that schools were in no shape to receive students due to significant damage caused by looting and destruction.

2.4. Lay Gayint Woreda and Nefas Mewcha town

TPLF forces controlled Lay Gayint Woreda and Nefas Mewcha town from 11th – 21st August, 2021. The casualties and destructions during this period include the following:

Killings and injuries

Based on evidence obtained by the Commission, in Nefas Mewcha town and Lay Gayint Woreda, 58 civilians were killed and 33 sustained serious and minor injuries. For instance, Mr. Mulat Mengesha (an employee of FH Ethiopia) as well as two relatives, Mr. Gebre Tesfa and Mr. Yebeltal Baye were stopped and fatally shot by TPLF forces around Tarya Mender 3 in Nefas Mewcha town. Mr. Getahun Dessie, Mrs. Genet Alebachew - husband and wife- and three other civilians were shot and killed while seated together and in the presence of their 5-year-old son. Furthermore, the whereabouts of Mr. Kende Tessema, a security guard of Abyssinia Bank, is still unknown after being forcibly taken away by TPLF forces.

> *My late father, Liq'e Tebebt Ambaw Wubetu was a 65-year-old farmer and handyman. On 12th August 2021, TPLF forces searched our home. They asked my father to show them the houses of members of the militia and to give them someone to carry their goods. When they asked him to go with them for*

questioning, he told them he was old and sick. They took him a short distance away from our house and shot him dead. Coincidentally, they also came across a teacher wearing a t-shirt with Prosperity Party's emblem, whom they also shot dead.
The deceased's son

Looting and destruction

Field observations by investigators and information obtained from interviews show that TPLF forces deliberately smashed the doors, windows, office furniture and stationeries of Nefas Mewcha Town's Administration offices. Documents and files were strewn outside the office building to be damaged by rain. At the time of the investigation, the town had no electricity as the lines were damaged by TPLF forces. One nursery, 4 primary schools and Nefas Mewcha Secondary School sustained damages. TPLF forces also looted Nefas Mewcha Polytechnic College.

Furthermore, TPLF forces damaged the doors and windows of buildings that house Dashen Bank, Abyssinia Bank and Commercial Bank of Ethiopia branch offices in Nefas Mewcha town. An ATM machine belonging to the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia could be seen destroyed and broken into. Various credit and saving institutions and other associations were also looted. Ras Gayint's Farmers' Association office doors and windows were smashed. Nefas Mewcha Agricultural Supplies and Services Centre sustained similar damages. Petrol stations and civilian homes were also looted. Three civilian buildings sustained major damages due to heavy weaponry fire.
The food warehouse belonging to FH Ethiopia, a non-governmental organization that distributes humanitarian aid received from USAID, was looted and its offices, office furniture, employees' quarters were significantly damaged by the TPLF forces.



Image 8: Nefas Mewcha Town Administration Secretariat





Images 9 and 10: FH Ethiopia office in Nefas Mewcha

From Nefas Mewcha Primary Care Hospital, medical equipment, medications and mattresses were looted. The hospital's windows, office furniture and patients' beds were smashed. The maternity and child care unit and antiretroviral therapy rooms sustained major damages. The laboratory's chemistry lab equipment, CBC apparatus, centrifuge apparatus and other medical instruments were completely destroyed. Computers connected to these machines and cash vaults were also smashed. Files, papers, medicines and pieces of broken items were scattered all over the hospital's floors. Investigators observed that due to these damages, normal services have been disrupted and that the hospital could only provide basic medical care.




Images 11 and 12: Nefas Mewcha Primary Care Hospital




Images 13 and 14: left to right – the walls of Lay Gayint Woreda Revenue Office and Lay Gayint Hospital

Similarly, Lay Gayint Woreda Administration offices have been looted and the buildings and furniture smashed. Several cash vaults of the Gayint Woreda Finance and Revenue Bureau have been smashed and emptied. Case files in various justice institutions have been destroyed. Significant damage has been inflicted on polyclinics. Primary and secondary schools have also been damaged. Checheo Medhanyalem church was struck by shelling damaging the roof, 5 doors and 14 windows. The Woreda's four vehicles were looted and its motorbikes destroyed.

According to people in the area of Woreda 13 in Lay Gayint, 5 houses were damaged by aerial bombing. the Commission's investigators visited the area and observed that. People who were in these houses had minor fragment wounds their cattle were killed and their harvests were damaged.

Other damages

The conflict in Lay Gayint has caused multi-faceted social and psychological problems. Although displaced people were returning to their homes, they informed the Commission that they faced food shortages due to widespread looting committed during the conflict. Residents including mothers and children could not access healthcare services as the hospital and polyclinics were looted and damaged. Due to disruption of power supply, residents had to travel 70km to the nearest grinding mill in Debre Tabor town. In general, the area people are facing major social problems.

Humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation

At the time of this investigation, government offices were being cleaned and renovated to resume services. However, the town faces major hurdles to full recovery as humanitarian aid was not being delivered to the area; health facilities had not resumed normal services; there is lack of electricity and water supply, and schools may not be able to resume in the near future due to the extensive damage sustained. At the time of the investigation, the regional DPFSPCO was gathering information to set up coordination unit for areas that need assistance.

2.5. Hara town

Hara town is a small rural town in North Wollo Zone. The town witnessed 15 days of fighting between the ENDF, militia, Amhara Special Forces and Fano on one side and TPLF forces on the other.

According to the residents the Commission interviewed, 12 civilians including people with mental illnesses were shot dead by TPLF forces. Considering the heavy fighting that took place in the area, it is believed that the number of civilian deaths could be higher. Several homes and shops were burnt or collapsed due to artillery fire from both sides to the conflict. An eyewitness told the Commission that 5 residential houses were set ablaze by shelling.

> *TPLF forces entered Hara town on 4th August 2021. After looting shops, they set ablaze the goods they did not take. Two days after entering the town, they asked a chat seller called, Nurye, to give them his phone. After checking his phone, they shot him dead around 9am. They also killed two mentally ill men whose names I do not know, a mentally ill woman called Amina, and a resident of Raya Kobo town called Wedi; Imam Tikuye; and the security guard of the town's water resources office. They also took my mobile phone and 2,700 birr while I was travelling to Mersa town.*
> *Person displaced from Hara*

Residents of Hara and its surroundings were forced to flee with no warning, abandoning their homes and properties. Several families are still separated. Mothers have been separated from their children and several disabled and elderly people from the people who look after them. IDPs told the Commission that TPLF fighters looted the homes and shops of several people. As a result, families that stayed behind find themselves in dire conditions.

2.6. Woldiya town and its environs

Woldiya is the capital of North Wollo Zone. From the time TPLF took control of the town in early August 2021, several civilians have been killed and injured and significant damage has been inflicted on civilian objects.

Witnesses who fled the town told the Commission that days before the town was captured, at 11pm artillery fired from the TPLF struck a home killing 7 civilians. On another day, around 10 am, direct artillery fire from the TPLF on the town, landed on a shop killing 2 women and a baby.

> *On 9th August 2021 at 6.30A.M., a youth known as Abdulrahim was shot in the chest in front of Lal Hotel. I heard people shouting and I quickly reached the area. I saw that he [Abdulrahim] had coughed up blood and died.*
> *Person displaced from Woldia*

TPLF forces killed 17 civilians after capturing the town. Several homes, commercial properties, hotels, public health facilities (hospitals and polyclinics), government offices and others were looted. Thousands of the town's residents have fled to Dessie, Hayik, Kombolcha and neighboring towns. TPLF's forces specifically targeted the town's administrative officials, members of the militia and Fano forces, and supporters of the government and their families. IDPs the town informed the Commission that the loss of civilian lives, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects is likely to be much higher.

2.7. Kobo town

IDPs from Kobo town who spoke with the Commission confirmed that Kobo town sustained significant damages due to shelling and at least 7 civilians were killed in the conflict. As TPLF forces entered the town, they shot and killed 5 youths as they and other residents fled the town in droves. Several civilian objects, from homes to government institutions, were significantly damaged by artillery attacks. In particular, IDPs confirmed that an artillery attack on Kobo hospital injured patients who were receiving treatment.

> *TPLF fighters went into Kobo hospital and kicked out seriously ill patients – many patients died as a result.*
> *An IDP from Kobo town*

While residents informed the Commission that one woman was raped by TPLF fighters around an area called Michael Sefer in Kobo town, the Commission could not obtain additional information on this incident. Eyewitnesses said they saw TPLF forces engaged in widespread looting of private and public properties, load up their cars and drove off with the looted goods. As a result of this, several people fled the town fearing for their lives and walked all the way to Woldiya town; and when Woldiya town was captured by TPLF forces, to Dessie city. As there were no vehicles available, residents including women, children, pregnant women and the elderly were forced to walk up to 45km, on a long and difficult journey. Information obtained from South Wollo DPFSPCO showed that as at the time of this investigation, more than 5,205 people were displaced from Kobo town.

2.8. Raya Kobo Woreda

Raya Kobo Woreda is one of the districts in North Wollo Zone. Eyewitnesses recounted several damages resulting from the conflict between government forces and TPLF forces. For instance, houses in Kebele 4 were struck by heavy artillery killing the civilians inside.

The intensity of the conflict made it impossible to bury the dead for 3 days after they were killed. In another incident, an eyewitness told the Commission that TPLF forces killed two of his uncles, who were civilians, and took from them Bajaj vehicles (three-wheelers). IDPs interviewed by the Commission, confirmed that 9 farmers were shot and killed by TPLF forces in an area called Teklehaymanot. They also stated that Dima Amanuel monastery, located in Aradima Kebele, was hit and damaged in artillery attack by TPLF forces. A public school in Kebele 035 was also damaged by artillery attack. At least 3,000 people fled following TPLF onslaught in the town.

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2.9. Habru Woreda

IDPs from Habru town who were interviewed in Dessie told the Commission that a farmer and two youths were shot and killed by TPLF forces after they were accused of being informants for the government. They were buried eight days after they were killed. IDPs also informed the Commission that an unknown number of youths were subjected to enforced disappearance by TPLF forces. Witnesses said that TPLF forces set up camp at Nini Ber area to keep goods looted from residents and institutions.

> *TPLF has a camp at Nini Ber. Since they set up the camp, they have been eating by looting from the local residents. Sometimes, they determine the price of goods they buy. However, they paid us with the old currency notes that were no longer in valid.*
> *Person displaced from Habru Woreda*

Artillery attack by the government damaged civilian homes and farms, causing a large number of people to be displaced from the Woreda. An eyewitness told the Commission that in one day alone, she saw six people killed in Girana Kebele in Habru Woreda. According to the witness as the conflict in the Woreda was spreading, more people could have been killed since then. The witness fled the town with small children and walked to Dessie, where she has sought shelter in the camp for displaced persons.

2.10. Raya, Alamata Woreda, Mehoni and Maychew towns

IDPs from Alamata town in south Tigray told the Commission that TPLF forces abducted several youths in Alamata "to get information" and killed 4 of them. On the other hand, at a place called Gobye, on July 21, 2021, 6 IDPs from Raya Alamata who entered Raya Kobo, were labelled as "outsiders/infiltrators" and killed by the local youths.

TPLF forces targeted those they accused of collaborating with the government as well as members of the militia and Fano by looting and setting their homes ablaze.

According to IDPs, after the TPLF controlled Mehoni town, they imprisoned and forcibly disappeared several youths whom they accused of collaborating with the government. They targeted people perceived to be supporters of Prosperity Party, looting and setting their homes ablaze. As the Federal government declared unilateral ceasefire and withdrew from several areas in Tigray, members of the interim government, particularly those in the lower ranks, who stayed behind because they did not have information of the withdrawal, became victims of reprisal attacks. Following reprisal attacks, several people fled to Raya Kobo, a neighboring area in the Amhara region. From among them, 3 Tigrigna speakers who carried Tigray region ID cards were killed on July 12, 2021 by the Amhara special forces on suspicion of being "terrorists".

Part Three

Situation of IDPs in Dessie and Kombolcha and Hayik towns

The Commission conducted onsite visit of IDP camps in Dessie, Woldia and Hayik towns where civilians displaced from North Wollo Zone and Southern Tigray are currently sheltered. The following outlines the mission's findings. As of the publication of this investigation report, Dessie, Kombolcha and Hayik towns have been captured by the TPLF forces. The fate of IDPs that had sheltered in these towns and of those that spoke with the Commission is not known.

3.1. Internally displaced persons at greater risk

Observations by EHRC and information obtained from the South Wollo DPFSPCO shows there are infants, children, lactating mothers, elderly people and persons with disabilities living in the IDP camps. The Commission observed that the most vulnerable persons were not receiving special assistance. However, the DPFSPCO stated that they are in the process of identifying those at greater risk. Additionally, the Commission noted that people in a camp called Kidame Gebeya, particularly those living with HIV were not receiving health care or the required medication.

3.2. Humanitarian aid delivery and distribution

According to information obtained from the South Wollo Zone DPFSPCO, until the EHRC's visit, the government has delivered 9,194.9 quintals of flour and 79 quintals of corn and soy blend nutritious food (CSB) to 120,791 IDPs out of the total of 183,404 IDPs. NFIs such as Blankets, mattresses, mats and cooking utensils were also donated. The Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara delivered 9,000 quintals of wheat and 900 quintals of split pea and 270 liters of cooking oil to 56,486 displaced persons. Concerted efforts are being made to raise more assistance from other humanitarian organizations. at the time of this investigation, with the exception of the International Red Cross, no other international humanitarian organization had delivered aid. Residents of Dessie city have organized themselves in their respective Kebeles to deliver food to the displaced. According to the head of South Wollo Zone DPFSPCO, the government has delivered aid to 120,791 out of 183, 404 displaced persons indicating that over 62,000 people did not receive government assistance.

On the other hand, in individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), IDPs have said that government aid delivery lacks coordination, and that IDPs in Addis Alem

School in Dessie for example had, as of then, not received any form of humanitarian assistance. They also indicated shortage of clothing, mattresses and nutritious food.

While healthcare in the camps was relatively adequate, IDPs indicated that they are unable to afford medication prescribed to them at secondary care health facilities. Clean water shortage is another problem highlighted by the IDPs.
Camp conditions were crowded where 25- 40 people stay in one 7meteres by 8meteres room. Moreover, as they are sheltering in schools, accommodation will become a serious problem when school resumes.

3.3. Registration and representation of displaced persons

The Commission observed that in all the camps IDPs have either been provided or are in the process of being provided with a displacement ID card; and that they are able to move freely without any restriction. However, people displaced from Alamata, Tigray region told the Commission that they were unable to access their bank accounts as all bank accounts opened in Tigray have been suspended. Moreover, although displaced persons are represented in various committees set up in the camp such as health, security, food and housing committees, a complaint mechanism where they can voice their grievances has not been put in place.

3.4. Durable solutions

Most IDPs want to return to their homes once the security situation allows it and their main request to the government is for it to re-establish the peace and security in their communities of origin and to provide them assistance to enable them to resume their normal lives.

Part Four

Findings on Violations of Human Rights and Humanitarian Laws

4.1. Killings and physical and psychological injuries

Several civilians have been killed in the conflict between TPLF forces and the government. The Commission has confirmed that in the areas covered by this investigation, at least 184 civilians have been killed. However, as indicated above, the investigation team could not access all areas of conflict due to the security issues and as such, it is expected that the actual number of civilian deaths could be much higher than what is indicated in this report.

In South Gondar and North Wollo Zones as well as southern areas of Tigray region, TPLF forces killed civilians they accused of being supporters of the ruling party or government; refusing to guide them or show them a particular place; sheltering wounded members of the defense forces; failing to handover the goods or properties they asked for; and for other unknown reasons and under unknown circumstances.

IDPs who fled the conflict in Tigray, on entering Kobo town in Amhara region, were labelled as infiltrators and informants for TPLF, and six of them were killed by Kobo town youths in an area called Gobye, and three more by the Amhara special forces. Mentally ill people were especially vulnerable in this conflict. For instance, in Woldia town 2 mentally ill people were suspected of being spies for the government and killed by TPLF forces. In another instance, in Farta Woreda, two mentally ill people named Mr. Fantaneh Birke and Mr. Feleke Sissay, were killed by TPLF forces while walking in the streets.

Many civilians were wounded by bullets fired by TPLF forces, as well as by artillery fire from both sides of the conflict that struck populated areas due to failure to take the necessary precautions to ensure that civilians did not become the object of military attacks. victims and survivors were also exposed to serious psychological harm.

Civilian injuries caused by artillery attacks have been listed below under the sub-title "Artillery bombardment of towns and residential areas".

4.2. Sexual and Gender based violence

Residents and local government officials in areas covered by this investigation informed the Commission that TPLF forces had committed sexual and gender violence against civilians. Given the large number of reports of SGBV cases, the EHRC will undertake a separate investigation on these allegations with sufficient care to ensure the protection of victims' privacy and facilitation of psycho-social support and humanitarian assistance.

4.3. Looting and destruction

All areas covered by this investigation in the Amhara region suffered widespread pillage and destruction of civilian properties by the TPLF forces. In every town they entered, TPLF forces pillaged and destroyed homes, banks, businesses including credit and savings institutions, hospitals, polyclinics, schools, local civilian administration and Kebele offices, and telephone and electricity infrastructures. For instance, in Lay Gayint Woreda of South Gondar Zone, Nefas Mewcha's hospitals and polyclinics sustained significant looting and destruction of equipment and office furniture. Hospitals in Woldiya and Kobo towns were also looted and destroyed.

In some towns, TPLF forces targeted the homes of government officials and members of the militia and Fano and their families, while in other places the looting and destruction was indiscriminate.

4.4. Artillery bombardment of towns and residential areas

Artillery fired by both parties to the conflict has damaged homes, hospitals and religious institutions. In conflicts that took place in south Gondar Zone in particular, TPLF forces exposed civilians to attacks by placing and firing weapons from residential areas in violation of international humanitarian law.

On the other hand, failure on both sides of the warring parties to take all feasible precautions to restrict artillery attacks to military targets, has caused the death of several civilians, and damaged many homes, businesses, public services, as well as religious institutions.

As TPLF forces used Kinzar village in Tado Kebele of South Gondar Zone; civilian communities in Sahrna Kebele and Kebele 03 of Lay Gayint Woreda; as well as Gasay Debre Selam Medhanyalem Church - to mount attacks and defend against the

government forces. As a result, these communities and the church were struck and damaged by artillery fire from the government forces. The roof, doors and windows of Chechewo Medhanyalem Church in Lay Gayint were also damaged by artillery. In another incident, civilian houses were damaged by aerial bombardment and civilians inside these houses sustained minor injuries due to shell fragments.

TPLF forces fired heavy artillery towards residential areas as they approached towns in South Gondar and North Wollo Zones. For instance, TPLF bombarded the towns of Debre Tabor, Gasay and Kimir Dingay. TPLF artillery attacks on the towns of Kobo and Woldia killed 7 civilians in Kobo town and, 2 women and a three-year-old child striking them in their home in Woldia town.

4.5. Inadequate humanitarian assistance to persons displaced by the conflict

There has been mass displacement of people in all the areas of the conflict. At the time of this investigation, there were 183,404 persons in Dessie, Hayik and Kombolcha towns. IDPs came from Mehoni, Raya Bala and Raya Azebo in Tigray region; Zone 4 in Afar region; and from Wag Hemra and North Wollo Zones in the Amhara region. At the time of the investigation team's site visit, more than 62,000 people had not received any humanitarian assistance either from the government or humanitarian organizations. The most vulnerable amongst the IDPs such as babies, children, lactating mothers, the elderly and people living with HIV were not receiving the special care they need.

4.6. Violations of human rights and humanitarian laws

All parties to the conflict must respect international human rights and humanitarian laws. The obligation to respect international human rights and humanitarian laws continues to apply and is even more imperative in times of armed conflict.

Ethiopia is a signatory to seven out of the nine main international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and at regional level, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention).

These international and regional instruments affirm the rights of all parties to a conflict, civilians and captured combatants to be protected from killings, torture or inhumane treatment, enforced disappearance and unlawful discrimination, and their right of access

to justice. Moreover, government's obligation to respect and ensure respect for the fundamental human rights of its citizens continues to apply in times of armed conflict.

Ethiopia has signed and ratified all Four Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols which form the core of international humanitarian law including the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II).,These are binding on all parties to the conflict – both state and non-state armed groups.

Under international humanitarian law, this conflict is categorized as non-international armed conflict and as such, common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Protocol II are applicable. Hence, all parties to the conflict have the obligation to protect civilians from violence to life and person; to refrain from pillage; and to protect civilians from military attack by refraining from locating military objects within or near areas that are in close proximity to the civilian population. Moreover, the obligation to protect combatants who have surrendered or been captured from murder, torture or inhumane treatment is also applicable.

The violations verified by the EHRC's investigation - particularly: artillery bombardment of towns; civilian loss of life and civilian injuries; conducting military operations in a manner that exposes civilian population to military attacks; pillaging and destruction of property - are all indicative of the violation of fundamental human rights, and in particular international humanitarian law. The Commission has established that TPLF forces have, in most of the areas they controlled, fatally shot and wounded large numbers of civilians; engaged in widespread pillage and destruction of property; and placed military objects including heavy artillery inside civilian homes and launched attacks from civilian homes. These acts, in addition to being violations of human rights, may constitute war crimes under international humanitarian law.

On the other hand, the use of artillery fire by the ENDF in offensive and defensive attacks against the TPLF forces, who launched attack from civilian areas, caused loss of civilian lives, injury to civilians and damage to property. While the Commission was not able to collect sufficient information to assess the proportionality of the attacks or weather all feasible precautions were taken by the government forces to avoid or minimize incidental loss of civilian lives, it stresses the need for the ENDF and allied forces to take additional precautionary measures to protect civilian lives, physical integrity and property.

The Commission reminds each party to the conflict that the obligation to respect human rights humanitarian laws does not depend on the conduct of other parties to the conflict, and that in all situations, all parties to the conflict must abide by it.