

# “WE WILL ERASE YOU FROM THIS LAND”

## CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND ETHNIC CLEANSING IN ETHIOPIA’S WESTERN TIGRAY ZONE

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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# “We Will Erase You from This Land”
## Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing

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# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASF** | Amhara Special Forces, regional paramilitary police force |
| **Awraja** | Imperial sub-provincial administrative unit |
| **Derg** | The military junta that overthrew Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie and ruled present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1974 to 1991 |
| **EHRC** | Ethiopian Human Rights Commission |
| **ENDF** | Ethiopian National Defense Forces |
| **EPRDF** | Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| **ETB** | Ethiopian birr, calculated at 1 equal's approximately $40 US dollars as of March 2021 |
| **Fano** | Irregular Amhara militia |
| **IDPs** | Internally displaced persons |
| **IOM** | International Organization for Migration |
| **Kebele** | "Neighborhood" in Amharic and references the smallest administrative subdivision at the neighborhood level |
| **Militia** | Armed community security that are not part of the regional police force, but which have played a role in Ethiopia's internal security at the local, community level |
| **MSF** | Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) |
| **NDRMC** | National Disaster Risk Management Commission |
| **OCHA** | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| **ODP** | Oromo Democratic Party |
| **OHCHR** | United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| **Prosperity Party** | A political party in Ethiopia that was established on December 1, 2019, to replace the former ruling coalition the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) |
| **Salug** | "Salug" is a term used to describe laborers, smugglers, and bandits in Sudan and in some parts of Ethiopia, including Western Tigray |

| | |
|---|---|
| **TDF** | Tigray Defense Forces |
| **Tekeze River** | Also referred to as Setit River in Sudan, crosses several points in Tigray region, marking the border with Eritrea and at points, Sudan, and delineates the West Tigray Zone from the Northwestern Zone in Tigray |
| **TPLF** | Tigrayan People's Liberation Front |
| **TSF** | Tigrayan Special Forces, a regional paramilitary police force |
| **UNHCR** | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UN refugee agency |
| **Welkait, Wolkait, or Walqayt** | An administrative district located in northwestern Ethiopia. Since 1992 "Welkait" encompasses a district located within the Tigray region. The term may also informally be used to refer to a wide swath of territory now bordering Sudan to the west, Eritrea to the north, and Amhara region to the south. During the imperial era, the districts that make up the area of Western Tigray, including Welkait, fell under the Semien sub-province |
| **Walqayte, Welkitae, Wolkatot** | Refers to a group of people historically inhabiting the highland areas of Welkait, who speak Tigrinya and Amharic |
| **Woyane** | A word in Tigrinya (language spoken in Ethiopia's Tigray region and in Eritrea) connoting "resistance." The uprising against Haile Selassie in 1941 was known as the first Woyane rebellion, and the resistance against the Derg as the second. The term has been frequently associated with the TPLF, including after the TPLF began claiming to be heirs to the first Woyane rebellion |
| **WFP** | World Food Program |
| **Woreda** | District level administrative unit |

# Map of Western Tigray




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# Summary

Goitom, a 42-year-old ethnic Tigrayan farmer, lived in Adi Goshu, a town in Western Tigray, a large and fertile district known for growing sesame, sorghum, and cotton in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. On January 17, 2021, he watched helplessly from his home as Amhara Special Forces and local militias beat up and detained Tigrayans in his town. Tigrayans had already faced months of intimidation by local authorities and Amhara security forces, and so Goitom ran to a nearby forest to escape the latest onslaught until the situation subsided. He waited a day and then called his relatives back in Adi Goshu, who informed him that the forces had rounded up dozens of Tigrayans and summarily executed them at the Tekeze bridge. He said:

> Our numbers were decreasing by the day. After the Tekeze incident happened, Tigrayans left in big numbers. There was nothing to live for. We were not part of the town; it was taken over by other people. We were not allowed to live.

Fearful for his life if he remained, Goitom, like thousands of other Tigrayans who were forced to flee – others were simply expelled from the territory – headed east across the Tekeze River to northwestern Tigray to escape Amhara authorities and regional security forces. Far from the world's attention, Goitom was among the first wave of Tigrayans fleeing abuses in the Western Tigray Zone – waves that have recurred while the conflict, and the world's attention, has moved on.

Since the outbreak of armed conflict on November 4, 2020, — pitting forces aligned with Ethiopia's federal government against those affiliated with Tigray's regional government led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) — hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans living in Western Tigray have been displaced from their homes through threats, intimidation, and a campaign of violence and forcible removal.

In communities across the region, Amhara security forces acting under newly appointed Amhara and Walqayte officials have been responsible for extrajudicial executions, rape and other acts of sexual violence. The widespread pillage of crops and livestock, and the looting and occupation of Tigrayan homes, destroyed sources of livelihood. Tigrayans have faced mass arrest and prolonged arbitrary detention in formal and informal detention sites where detainees were killed, tortured, and ill-treated. Regional authorities have also imposed discriminatory rules that deny Tigrayans basic services and access to humanitarian aid, and measures that seem designed to suppress their rights and presence from the area. Tigrayans endured ethnic-based slurs that targeted their Tigrayan identity and were banned from speaking their language, Tigrinya. People with disabilities and older people have been especially affected.

This report is based on 427 interviews and other research conducted between December 2020 and March 2022 by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as

well as previous research used for background and context. The organizations found that since November 2020 in Western Tigray, civilian authorities, and Amhara regional security forces, with the acquiescence and possible participation of Ethiopian federal forces, committed numerous grave abuses as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Tigrayan civilian population that amount to crimes against humanity as well as war crimes. These crimes include murder, enforced disappearances, torture, deportation or forcible transfer, rape, sexual slavery and other sexual violence, persecution, unlawful imprisonment, possible extermination, and other inhumane acts.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch found that Amhara regional officials and regional special forces and militias, with federal forces' complicity, are responsible for the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans from Western Tigray. Although not a formal legal term or a recognized crime under international law, "ethnic cleansing" was defined by the final report of the United Nations Commission of Experts on the former Yugoslavia as a purposeful policy by an ethnic or religious group to remove, by violent and terror-inspiring means, the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas. As this report makes clear, the campaign of ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray was conducted through resort to serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Simmering tensions in Western Tigray and rights abuses over many years, mainly by Tigray regional security forces against ethnic Amharas and Walqaytes (Tigrinya and Amharic-speaking people historically inhabiting the highland areas of Western Tigray) served as a backdrop for the eventual physical violence and expulsion of Tigrayan communities from the area. The takeover by Amhara regional officials of Western Tigray Zone — an administrative area bordering Sudan to the west, Eritrea to the north, and neighboring Amhara region to the south — represents a violent reversal of changes to Ethiopia's contested internal boundaries enacted by the TPLF-led Ethiopian federal government
in 1992.

At that time, Ethiopia's internal boundaries were redrawn following the recommendations of a government boundary commission, and the districts that make up Western Tigray, which previously fell under the administrative authority of the former Begemdir province, were incorporated into the Tigray regional state. Ever since, Amhara activists living in the Western Tigray Zone, and in the Amhara region, resisted the government decision. In response, the government suppressed, at times through violence and force, those attempting to assert their Amhara identity in the territory and raise their claims with the regional and federal government. The outbreak of conflict, in November 2020, brought these longstanding and unaddressed grievances to the fore: Amhara regional forces, along with Ethiopian federal forces, seized these territories and displaced Tigrayan civilians in a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign.

## Abuses during the military offensive's initial stages, early November 2020

When the armed conflict started on November 4, 2020, fierce fighting, initially centered on the Western Tigray administrative Zone, and pitted Tigrayan forces against Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and allied forces from the Amhara region — including Amhara regional police special forces (ASF), Amhara militias, and irregular militia known as "Fanos." Federal and allied forces shelled towns and villages, including Humera town from the Eritrean border. Tigrayan forces detained and allegedly summarily executed suspected government informants in the course of fighting but were quickly pushed out of
Western Tigray.

Within about 10 days, the Ethiopian federal forces and allied forces perpetrated numerous abuses amounting to war crimes against Tigrayan communities throughout the Zone. Forces destroyed villages and settlements, looted property, livestock, and harvests, and subjected Tigrayan civilians, suspected TPLF sympathizers, and local Tigrayan militia members, to extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, and torture and other ill-treatment. These abuses drove tens of thousands of Tigrayans to flee to neighboring Sudan to the west, and central Tigray to the east.
Mai Kadra, a town near the border with Sudan, was the site of the first publicly reported large-scale massacre. Starting from mid-afternoon on November 9, Tigrayan militia and local residents brutally beat, stabbed, and hacked with knives, machetes, and axes, scores of Amhara civilians. Later that same evening, Amhara attackers retaliated, killing and injuring Tigrayans. The violence left approximately 229 people dead. An additional 100 people, primarily Amhara residents and laborers, who had been injured were brought to nearby hospitals and health centers. A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) similarly found that more than 200 people were killed.

After federal and allied forces took control of Mai Kadra on November 10, Amhara Special Forces and militias, over the following days, targeted Tigrayans in a wave of revenge killings. The Tigrayan residents who had not fled were detained in official and makeshift detention facilities. Tigrayan property was pillaged and occupied, while security forces obstructed the provision of relief to detained Tigrayan residents before organizing their eventual expulsion from West Tigray in late December 2020.

The November 9 massacre in Mai Kadra was uniquely tied to a combination of local factors, including preexisting tensions in the town among and between residents and laborers from out of town, the proximity of the town to fast-evolving fighting between the warring parties, and widespread rumors. Differing accounts of what occurred during the massacre fueled further hatred, mutual fear, and mistrust well beyond the town. Accounts of the massacre served as a tool of mobilization to support and justify war efforts by federal and Amhara regional authorities. In other places in Western Tigray, the accounts of what had transpired in Mai Kadra precipitated revenge attacks on Tigrayans.

The persecution of Tigrayans in the town, in the days after November 9, including the targeted killings, the looting, the mass detentions, and the subsequent organized expulsion of the town's Tigrayan population, would repeat as a pattern and unfold across the territory in the year that followed.

## Abuses in Western Tigray from November 2020 to June 2021

For the many Tigrayan men, women, and children who remained behind in Western Tigray, the abuses did not stop after federal and allied forces established control of the Zone. The Amhara regional authorities took over the administration of the area, which until now remains under their authority. Interim authorities were also drawn from the local Walqayte and Amhara community in Western Tigray, as well as from the Amhara region.

The newly appointed authorities imposed a regime of ethnically targeted restrictions on movement and access to farmland, as well as on speaking Tigrinya – the local language of Tigrayans. Tigrayan residents described how newly appointed authorities and security forces in Western Tigray restricted, and at times outright blocked, their access to the critical aid that was available. Amhara and Fano militias, in some cases alongside non-Tigrayan residents and Eritrean federal forces, pillaged crops and tens of thousands of livestock — the backbone of economic survival and livelihoods of the largely farming communities in the area — leaving Tigrayans with little to survive on, and no choice but to leave. Authorities and security forces began detaining Tigrayans by the thousands.

In several towns, including Humera, Ruwassa, Adi Goshu, Adebai, and Baeker, the plans to remove Tigrayans from the area were a matter of public discussions and displays. Local administrators openly discussed such plans during public town meetings. Signs were displayed demanding that Tigrayans depart, and pamphlets distributed issuing Tigrayans a 24-hour or 72-hour ultimatum to leave or be killed. Interim authorities and security force officials repeated slogans such as "Tigrayans belong east of the Tekeze River," and "This is Amhara land," further underscoring that Tigrayans were being pushed out.

On January 17, 2021, Fano militia and local Walqayte and Amhara residents rounded up dozens of male Tigrayan residents of Adi Goshu. Amhara Special Forces (ASF) took about 60 of them to the Tekeze River bridge that same day, and summarily executed them. This is the massacre Goitom escaped from. Residents and the few survivors believed the killings were a revenge attack after ASF forces suffered heavy losses during fighting with Tigrayan forces near the river the previous night. The persecution of Tigrayans in Adi Goshu escalated in the aftermath of the massacre, prompting a mass exodus from the town. For several weeks, Tigrayans who fled across the Tekeze bridge could see the bodies, which had remained unburied, and served as a terrifying reminder of the atrocities committed.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch found that the authorities in Western Tigray deprived Tigrayan communities of resources key to their survival, and coerced people to depart for Sudan or other parts of Tigray. In some places, local authorities provided the means to forcibly remove Tigrayans from the area, organizing the trucks or buses that took Tigrayans from their homes or places of detention to the Tekeze bridge, the crossing marking the limits of the area newly under the Amhara authorities' control. Before allowing Tigrayans to cross, Amhara security forces manning the final checkpoint on the bridge confiscated their identification cards and the property documents that linked them to land in Western Tigray, warning them not to return. They also prevented Tigrayans who were fleeing the violence in other parts of Tigray from entering Western Tigray.

The forcible displacement escalated during late February and March and led to a surge in the numbers of internally displaced Tigrayans in towns east of the Tekeze River, such as Shire, Sheraro, and Axum in central and northwestern Tigray, where, for months, many lived in overcrowded displacement sites. By June 2021, a preliminary assessment carried out by the federal interim administration of Tigray estimated that 723,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Western Tigray had been registered in other parts of Tigray, while the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) had registered 51,207 refugees in Eastern Sudan by January 2022. Meanwhile, interim authorities and Amhara regional officials called for the settlement of Amhara residents into Western Tigray, with promises of available homes
and land.

## Abuses In Western Tigray from June to December 2021

As Tigrayan forces recaptured many parts of Tigray in late June, Amhara authorities and forces escalated the arbitrary arrests and killings of the remaining Tigrayan residents, particularly in the border town of Humera and nearby towns and villages. By August, as Tigrayan residents were being rounded up and killed, dozens of mutilated bodies with restraints appeared in the Tekeze River, which marks the *de facto* border between Western Tigray and Sudan. In November, the roundups and forced displacements escalated again in Humera, Adebai, and Rawyan towns, as Amhara Special Forces, Fano militia, in some cases alongside Eritrean forces, detained men and removed many women, children, and older Tigrayans from their homes, before forcibly expelling them towards the Tekeze River. Thousands of other adult and adolescent men and women remained in detention facilities, facing life-threatening torture, starvation, and denial of medical care in overcrowded sites.

The scale of the forced displacements and flight, the way the abuses were carried out, and the number of areas where they occurred within the Zone, all indicate a degree of control, coordination, and purpose among the authorities overseeing the Amhara regional forces and militias that appear aimed at terrorizing and directly removing Tigrayans from
Western Tigray.

The Ethiopian government's efforts to halt these grave abuses or punish those responsible have been grossly inadequate. Federal and regional authorities dismissed allegations of ethnic cleansing, including in response to a February 2021 statement by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken that "acts of ethnic cleansing had been committed in Western Tigray." Since then, federal authorities investigated the reports of the mass killing of Amhara residents and communities in Mai Kadra but have taken little action to investigate ongoing human rights violations against Tigrayan civilians in Western Tigray. Instead, the government's continued dismissal of accounts from refugees who fled their homes to Sudan, and its characterization of credible reports of killings and detentions in Western Tigray as "fake," has only further obfuscated the lived realities that survivors and
victims endure.

Although Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch contacted a range of Ethiopian federal government officials and agencies to seek their response to the findings set out in this report, only the Amhara Regional Government responded. Their response letter did not provide any contrary evidence or rebut our specific findings, but rather denounced allegations against "the people, governance, and security forces," as "unfounded" and "bothersome." It described our conclusions as "baseless," and the "accusations to expel Tigrayans," from what it characterized as the Amhara region, as "cynical."

The crimes outlined in this report, while not a full and comprehensive accounting of the abuses that occurred in Western Tigray, require meaningful accountability and redress. Ethiopian authorities should facilitate safe and unhindered access to humanitarian agencies, while granting independent human rights monitors – including the Commission of Inquiry established by the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights, and the United Nations-established International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia –access to conflict-affected areas in Ethiopia, including Western Tigray.

Ensuring accountability for these abuses needs a coordinated global response. The United Nations, the African Union, and Ethiopia's international and regional partners must take concrete steps to press for the immediate protection of all communities, including at-risk Tigrayan communities who remain in the area. They must also immediately support the work of the UN's independent International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and ensure its operationalization to investigate allegations of human rights abuses and alleged war crimes carried out by all parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia since November 2020. Many of the Tigrayans interviewed for this research hoped that the abuses would end, and that the world would finally know of their suffering. States should ensure that their suffering is not being ignored and press for credible justice and redress for the serious crimes that were committed.

## Summary of Key Recommendations

### To the Ethiopian federal government and regional authorities

- **Publicly** order federal and regional security forces to end all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law against the Tigrayan population in Western Tigray and elsewhere.
- **Immediately demobilize and disarm** all abusive irregular forces from Western Tigray, such as Fano and other militias.
- **Suspend civilian officials, including interim Amhara officials, and security force personnel from the Amhara Special Forces and Ethiopian federal forces** implicated in serious abuses in Western Tigray pending investigations into
their actions.
- **Discipline or prosecute as appropriate** those found to be responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Western Tigray Zone since November 2020. Investigate the three individuals named in this report.
- **As part of any consensual agreement between the warring parties, allow the deployment of an AU-led international peacekeeping force in Western Tigray** with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote human rights, and create an environment conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid.
- **Promptly release all those arbitrarily detained in Western Tigray.** Amhara interim authorities and security forces should also immediately make public information about the fate of all Tigrayans detained since the conflict began in November 2020 in Western Tigray. Ethiopian authorities should immediately allow international humanitarian agencies access to formal and informal detention sites without prior notification, and provide detainees with immediate emergency food, water, and medical care.
- **Immediately restore basic services and facilitate safe, sustained, and unhindered access to humanitarian agencies** to all affected populations across Tigray, remove bureaucratic and physical restrictions on United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations that unnecessarily hinder the delivery of assistance, and allow independent oversight and monitoring
of assistance.
- **In consultation with displaced communities** and with the involvement of relevant UN agencies**, establish an independent body that can organize and monitor returns that are safe, voluntary, well-informed, and dignified.** Ensure that returns of displaced persons and refugees take place in accordance with international standards, on a voluntary basis, and with attention to the safety and dignity of returning populations.
- Ensure that any mechanism established for addressing grievances between groups, including regarding administrative boundaries, **is in consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders and independent institutions,** and operated in full respect of individuals' human rights, including the right to return.

### To African Union and the United Nations Member States:

- **Press all parties to the conflict to immediately facilitate safe, sustained, and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected areas.** Urge the Ethiopian government to immediately restore basic services, including banking, communications, and electricity to Tigray. AU and UN member states should also press the Ethiopian federal and regional authorities to facilitate prompt access of United Nations human rights protection monitors in Western Tigray.
- **Security Council member states should place Ethiopia on the council's formal agenda** and establish a comprehensive arms embargo on all parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia, and a UN monitoring body to report on the implementation of the embargo.
- **Support, as part of any consensual agreement between the warring parties, the deployment of an AU-led international peacekeeping force in Western Tigray,** with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote human rights, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.
- **In consultation with displaced communities, and with the involvement of relevant UN agencies, assist with the establishment of an independent body that can organize and monitor returns** that are safe, voluntary, well-informed and dignified.
- Given the gravity of the crimes documented in this report, **the international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia should include events in Western Tigray** since November 2020 as part of its investigations, identify individuals responsible where possible, and **make recommendations on how perpetrators can be held accountable, including through national, regional, and international justice bodies**.
- Support, under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws, **the investigation and prosecution of those credibly implicated in serious crimes** under international law.

# Methodology

This report presents the findings of joint research by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, documenting gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, perpetrated in Western Tigray between November 2020 and December 2021. The report documents specific incidents and trends but is not a comprehensive survey of all violations that took place in the region during this period. The organizations do not take a position on the dispute between warring parties or which group, or authorities should control a territory.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch formally sought access to Tigray and the Amhara region from the Ethiopian government but received no response. Because of this lack of access, we were unable to conduct in-person interviews within Tigray or to visit the sites of alleged violations to examine physical or digital evidence.
Documentation of abuses in Western Tigray was also constrained by other factors, including ongoing efforts by Ethiopian federal and allied forces to block the routes to Sudan for fleeing Tigrayans, and the restrictions and fear of movement within Tigray, which together limited the ability of witnesses to travel outside the region. Sporadic government restrictions on electricity and communications in Ethiopia and poor communications network in Sudan often hindered the ability of researchers to document abuses in real time.

In total, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch conducted 427 interviews, including 409 interviews with survivors of abuses, their family members, and witnesses. Researchers separately carried out 18 interviews with representatives of international organizations, journalists, as well as other informed sources. Five separate research missions to Sudan in December 2020 and January, May and June 2021 allowed researchers to interview Tigrayan refugees. Finally, researchers conducted remote telephone interviews between March 2021 and March 2022, primarily with Tigrayans displaced from Western Tigray in the region and to Sudan, as well as with residents from the Amhara region.

To provide as broad a perspective as possible, researchers interviewed people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, ages, genders, and geographical areas in the Western Tigray Zone.
Researchers sought to identify safe locations to carry out interviews both remotely and in person and assessed the security concerns and risks facing interviewees before proceeding with the interviews. Interviews with victims were conducted in English, Tigrinya, and Amharic, with the help of several different and trusted interpreters where needed. Researchers informed all interviewees of the purpose of the research and the ways in which the information would be used and offered anonymity for their reporting. While all interviewees quoted or mentioned in this report agreed that their statements

could be used, many expressed extreme fear and anxiety about potential reprisals should their identity be revealed.

Names and other identifying details have been withheld to protect interviewees' security, and in the footnotes to this report, all interviewees, unless otherwise noted, have been assigned pseudonyms. None of the interviewees received financial or other incentives for speaking with us, and all spoke voluntarily, giving informed consent to be interviewed and being made aware of their right to discontinue the interview at any point. In 15 cases, researchers interviewed children between the ages of 10 and 17, where we sought to obtain the consent of a parent or relative in the case of younger children and identified service providers to assist children in cases of referrals. Where appropriate and feasible, researchers identified and referred interviewees to service providers to obtain appropriate psychosocial and medical support.

The reliability and credibility of each source was carefully assessed. Researchers probed the veracity of their statements by corroborating information from several other sources and determining consistency with overall patterns that emerged during the research, including with other types of evidence. Individual cases or incidents used in the report are based on at least one credible source of direct information, which in most cases was independently corroborated by at least one other credible source of information. Reports of major incidents are based on multiple accounts from witnesses and victims, allowing for in-depth fact-finding and detailed event reconstruction. In some cases, researchers carried out follow-up interviews with the same witness for further clarification.

Researchers also reviewed medical reports, and forensic analysis, as well as satellite imagery, videos and photographs that provided direct information concerning incidents, or which corroborated accounts of military presence, destruction, looting, and executions. Due to the communication restrictions detailed above, there were few videos and photographs to analyze. Researchers conducted targeted searches on social media platforms using keywords in Amharic, Tigrinya, and English to find relevant information, as well as received videos and photographs directly from sources. Researchers verified five videos sent directly to researchers and six videos posted to Facebook or YouTube used in this report. Researchers identified exactly where they were filmed – through matching landmarks visible in the footage with landmarks visible from satellite imagery, when they were recorded – by analyzing relevant metadata, timestamps from social media platforms, witness interviews and changes in the built environment visible in satellite imagery – and what they showed, including through an evaluation of whether it captured situations in their entirety. Other relevant material included academic articles, books, media and government reports, court documents, official government decisions, and information collected by other credible experts and independent human rights investigators that could corroborate details or patterns of abuse described in the report.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch solicited responses from the federal government, the Amhara regional government, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front,

regarding this report's findings. On February 25, 2022, we sent letters to the Ethiopian federal government, federal agencies, including the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC), and the Refugee and Returnee Services (RRS), as well as Amhara regional authorities, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front summarizing our findings and seeking a response.

At the time of publication, only the Amhara Regional Government had responded. We have included their response as an annex to this report.

# I. Background

The administrative boundaries of Western Tigray have been contested for decades.

The Western Zone of Tigray region consists of three administrative districts — Welkait, Tsegede, and Kafta Humera— forming a swathe of land bordering Sudan to the west, Eritrea to the north, and the Northern Gondar Zone of the neighboring Amhara region to the south.[1] The Tekeze River crosses several points in the Zone, marking the border with Eritrea and at points, Sudan, and delineating the Zone from the Northwestern Zone in Tigray.[2]

During the imperial era, which ended in 1974, the Kafta Humera, Welkait, and Tsegede areas were known collectively as Semien Awraja, which was alternatively administered as a separate entity or as part of Begemdir province.[3] The Semien Awraja was sparsely populated, and for decades, imperial rulers and members of the nobility maintained shifting control of the territories.[4]

By the 1950s, the Begemdir and Semien were one province.[5] The provincial administrative arrangement of these boundaries remained largely in place until the downfall of the emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. The military government that replaced him, known as the "Derg," renamed the Begemdir and Semien province as Begemdir province.[6] The Derg also established an institute for the study of Ethiopian nationalities (ISEN), to carry out research on Ethiopian nationalities and determine the basis for the constitution, state structure, and administrative setup of the country.[7]

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[1] The districts have slightly distinct names in Amharic and are referred to as: Tsegede is known as "Tegede" and Kafta Humera as "Qabtiya" or "Qabtya Humera."

[2] Also known as the "Setit River" in Sudan.

[3] David Ottoway, "From the archive,24 August 1974: Ethiopia's fallen aristocrats", *the Guardian,* August 24, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/24/ethiopia-aristocracy-revolution-civil-war-1974.

[4] Christopher Clapham, "Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia,", (1988), p 199.; Shiferaw Bekele, "Monarchical Restoration and Territorial Expansion: The Ethiopian State in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," at 159 *in* Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution, and the Legacy of Meles Zenawi (Prunier and Fiquet ed) (2015). Aynalem Adugna and Helmut Kloos, "Two Population Distribution Maps for Ethiopia Based on the 1984 Census," 9 Northeast African Studies 89, 90-92 (1987). See also Donald Crummey: Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa, (1986) Gebru Tareke, "Peasant Resistance in Ethiopia: The Case of Weyane," 25 Journal of African History 77 (1984).

[5] Imperial Decree Number 1, 1942, amended as Decree Number 6, 1946

[6] While proclaiming the importance of Ethiopia's unity, the Derg at the same time acknowledged the need to recognize "self-determination." Opportunities began opening for the country's marginalized ethnic, religious, and cultural groups. John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, (Boydell &Brewer, 2011); Getachew Assefa, "The Constitutional Right to Self-determination as a Response to the 'Question of Nationalities' in Ethiopia*," International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, Vol. 25, No. 1 1 2018.

In 1987, the Derg rolled out a plan to reorganize the administrative units to 25 administrative units and 5 autonomous regions. However, the plan was not fully implemented as the Derg was fighting multiple fronts in civil wars in Eritrea and Tigray. See http://memory.loc.gov/frd/etsave/et_04_03.html. See also Mulatu Wubneh, "Ethnic Identity Politics and the Restructuring of Administrative Units in Ethiopia", *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 & 2, Special Issue 2017, pp. 105-138, p. 117. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26586251.

[7] Mulatu Wubneh, "Ethnic Identity Politics and the Restructuring of Administrative Units in Ethiopia," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 & 2 (2017), pp.105-138 https://www.jstor.org/stable/26586251.

# Factors Contributing to Rising Tensions in Western Tigray

## Redrawing of Administrative Boundaries in the 1990s

In 1975, a number of political parties and rebel fronts began a series of armed revolts against the Derg.[8] By May 1991, a coalition, known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), overthrew the Derg, marking an end to 17 years of brutal repression, violence, and conflict.[9]

After securing control of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city, the EPRDF sought to address longstanding issues around identity, as well as the relationship of the central state to various peoples and regions in the periphery.

On July 1-5, 1991, the EPRDF convened a national conference in Addis Ababa where political parties and representatives of academic institutions attended.[10] The participants adopted a Transitional Charter, which recognized the rights of self-determination to Ethiopia's "nations, nationalities and peoples."[11] The Charter also laid the foundation for the creation of federal administrative units – regions – "on the basis of nationalities" giving each nationality the right to "administer their own affairs within their own defined territory."[12]

[8] Gebru Tareke, "The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa," *African Studies Review, Vol*52 Issue 3 (2013); Markakis, Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers, (2011).

[9] Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia- *Reckoning Under the Law, vol.*6 No. 11, November 1994, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia94d.pdf ; Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: End of an Era of Brutal Repression – A New Chance for Human Rights," June 18, 1991,https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/196000/afr250051991en.pdf.

[10] John Young, "Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia," *Taylor & Francis, Vol.*23 (1996), p. 531-542; see also Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: The Curtailment of Rights*, (New York: Human Rights Watch ,1997), https://www.hrw.org/reports/1997/ethiopia/Ethio97d-02.htm. Not all political parties, including those who had been opposed to the EPRDF, sent delegates.

[11] Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia, Negarit Gazeta, (adopted July 22, 1991) https://chilot.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/the-transitional-period-charter-of-ethiopia.pdf; see also Jane Perlez, "Talks on New Ethiopia to Affirm the Right to Secede," *New York Times, July* 4, 1991, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/04/world/talks-on-a-new-ethiopia-affirm-right-to-secede.html; Markakis, Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers p. 232. The EPRDF formed at the end of 1980. It took its definitive form from 1991- 2018 comprising of four main political parties: The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Amhara National Democratic Movements (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF). Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995. "Nationalism and Self-Determination in the Horn of Africa (I.M. Lewis edition) (1983), Christopher Clapham, "Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia," 165 (1988).

[12] The Boundary Commission defined "a nation, nationality or people" as a "group of people who have or share a large measure of common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory. The language was later included in the constitution. Article 39,46 of the Ethiopian Constitution.

In 1992, the transitional government formed a Boundary Commission that established 14 new regions, the boundaries of which drew on the ethnographic and historical data gathered by the Derg's institute on nationality studies in the 1980s.[13]

Most of Derg-era Begemdir province became part of the newly formed Amhara regional state, whereas other parts of Begemdir province, including Welkait, Tsegede, and Kafta Humera territories, were incorporated into Tigray as part of the current day Western Tigray Zone. Some Walqayte and Amhara residents in the newly established Western Tigray Zone viewed these changes as an annexation, believing that the districts that make up Western Tigray should have fallen under the Amhara region.[14]

The 1995 Ethiopian Constitution subsequently recognized nine self-governing federal states constructed largely, though not exclusively, along ethno-linguistic lines.[15]

## Tensions and Violence Around Identity, Self-Rule, State Power, and Borders

Disputes over whether state power in Ethiopia should be centralized, as well as demands for ethnic equality and self-determination, have been at the heart of mobilization and tensions in Ethiopia for decades prior to 1991. [16] The decentralization of power in the 1991 Transitional Government Charter and the subsequent federal arrangement in the Ethiopian Constitution were meant to address longstanding demands for ethnic equality and self-administration. However, segments of the Ethiopian population criticized it as introducing ethnicity into politics in Ethiopia, as controversy and competing visions over the federal arrangement of the country, as well as violence due to boundary, self-administration, and identity disputes increased after 1992.

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[13] Sarah Vaughan, "Ethnicity and Power in Ethiopia," (PH. D diss., University of Edinburgh,2003), https://era.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/id/1299/vaughanphd.pdf.

[14] "Walqayte" refers to a group of people historically inhabiting the highland areas collectively known as Kafta Humera, Welkait, Tsegede (or Tegede in Amharic) who speak Tigrinya and Amharic. Semir Yusuf, "What is Driving Ethiopia's Ethnic Conflict?" *Institute for Security Studies*, (2019), pp. 3-4; See Ethiopian Human Rights Council, 141st Special Report: "Stop the Violations of the Human Rights of Citizens Voicing Identity Demands!" (June 1, 2016), https://ahrethio.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HRCO-141st-Special-Report-English.pdf ; Ethiopian Human Rights Council, HRCO 143rd Special Report, Amharic, (October 3, 2017), p 4-6, https://ehrco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/HRCO-143rd-Special-Report-Amharic-October-3-2017.pdf ; See also interview with #88 in Gondar, December 2019 (alleging that resistance to the incorporation of the territories to Tigray began in 1992); Subsection on "Settlement Patterns and Government Land Policies in the Contested Areas."

[15] The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995, https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et007en.pdf. The interim period between the transitional government and the formal adoption of the 1995 constitution was marked by violence and insecurity in several regions, as well as a crackdown on members of the political opposition. See, for example, Human Rights Watch, World Report 1993, Ethiopia. https://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/WR93/Afw-01.htm#P47_21729.

[16] Sarah Vaughan, "Revolutionary democratic state-building: party, state and people in the EPRDF's Ethiopia," Journal of Eastern African Studies (2012),https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17531055.2011.642520?journalCode=rjea20 ;

Elio Ficquet and Gerard Prunier, *Understanding Contemporary Ethiopia: Monarchy, Revolution, and the Legacy of Meles Zenawi. (*London: Hurst&Company, 2015); Goitom Gebreleul, "Should Ethiopia Stick with Ethnic Federalism?" *Al Jazeera*, April 5, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/4/5/should-ethiopia-stick-with-ethnic-federalism.

Despite its stated commitment to the right to self-governance of every "[n]ation, [n]ationality and [p]eople" across Ethiopia, the TPLF–led EPRDF coalition, that governed Ethiopia from 1991 to 2018, suppressed the groups that advocated for such autonomy, and held onto power with an iron grip, using excessive force to quell dissent, and carried out serious abuses that may amount to crimes against humanity, including abuses in the Gambella region in 2003, and in the Somali region in 2007.[17] Between 1992 and 2017, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) issued 41 regular and special reports that focused on serious violence along ethnic lines and security force abuses in all regions of the country, including some cases where violence crossed regional borders.[18]

Since September 2018, there have been several instances of inter-communal violence, boundary and resource disputes, and armed skirmishes in many regions of the country, including in Oromia, Harar, Afar, Somali, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), Amhara, and Benishangul-Gumuz.[19] Federal and regional

[17] The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995, art 39(1),https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et007en.pdf ; Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented grave human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, mass arrests, torture and other forms of ill-treatment against critical voices. Human Rights Watch, *One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure: Violations of Freedom of Expression and Association in Ethiopia, (*New York: Human Rights Watch,2010), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia0310webwcover.pdf; *Development Without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia, (*New York: Human Rights Watch,2010), https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/10/19/development-without-freedom/how-aid-underwrites-repression-ethiopia; *They Know Everything We Do: Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia, (*New York: Human Rights Watch,2014), https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/03/25/they-know-everything-we-do/telecom-and-internet-surveillance-ethiopia; *Journalism is Not a Crime: Violations of Media Freedoms in Ethiopia, (*New York: Human Rights Watch 2015), https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/21/journalism-not-crime/violations-media-freedoms-ethiopia; Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Deeper Reforms Needed, Amnesty International Submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review, 33rd Session of the UPR Working Group," May 2019, https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AFR2598652018ENGLISH.pdf ; Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: 'Because I am Oromo': Sweeping repression in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, October 28, 2014,https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/webfm/Documents/issues/repression_in_oromia_-_amnesty_international_report_-_28_oct_14.pdf?VersionId=tlgBmcidqu8zAHTuJ1GAU0rzkFUfWk8U ; Human Rights Watch, *Such a brutal crackdown: Killings and arrests in response to the Oromo Protests (*New York: Human Rights Watch,2016), https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/15/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-oromo-protests) ; *Fuel on Fire: Security Force Response to the 2016 Irreecha Cultural Festival, (*New York: Human Rights Watch,2017), https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/20/fuel-fire/security-force-response-2016-irreecha-cultural-festival; *We Are Like the Dead: Torture and other Human Rights Abuse in Jail Ogaden, Somali Regional State Ethiopia*, (New York: Human Rights Watch,2018), https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/04/we-are-dead/torture-and-other-human-rights-abuses-jail-ogaden-somali-regional. Rights groups also documented serious human rights abuses that amount to crimes against humanity in the Gambella region in 2003 and in the Somali region in 2007. See, for example, Human Rights Watch, *Targeting Anuak: Human Rights Violations and Crimes Against Humanity in Ethiopia's Gambella Region*, (New York: Human Rights Watch,2005), https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/03/23/targeting-anuak/human-rights-violations-and-crimes-against-humanity-ethiopias; *Collective Punishment: War Crimes in Ogaden area in Ethiopia's Somali Region, (*New York: Human Rights Watch,2008), https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/06/12/collective-punishment/war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity-ogaden-area.

[18] Ethiopian Human Rights Council, *HRCO 143rd Special Report,* October 3, 2017, pp.4-6, https://ehrco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/HRCO-143rd-Special-Report-Amharic-October-3-2017.pdf. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council is a nongovernmental organization in Ethiopia established in 1991. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is the national human rights institution established by the government in 2000, reporting to Ethiopia's lower house of parliament, the House of People's Representatives.

[19] Amnesty International, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Force in Amhara and Oromia*, (May 29,2020), p 13, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/2358/2020/en/; Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Justice*

government forces often responded to the violence with excessive and lethal force.[20] The bouts of violence resulted in large-scale displacements, with over 1.4 million people internally displaced in Ethiopia due to conflict in 2019 alone.[21]

## Settlement Patterns and Government Land Policies in the Contested Areas

The Welkait, Kafta Humera, and Tsegede areas comprise a vast lowland area conducive to the cultivation of sesame, cereals, and cotton, and have for decades attracted migration and settlement, including large numbers of seasonal migrant workers from Tigray, Begemdir, and other provinces to work on large farms beginning in the 1950s.[22] Migrant workers also settled in the area.[23]

### a. Settlement Patterns in Western Tigray in the 1990s and 2000s

From the 1990s onwards, the settlement patterns and policies adopted by the TPLF-led EPRDF in the Welkait, Kafta Humera, and Tsegede districts fueled grievances and tensions, particularly among Walqayte and Amhara communities in the districts.

In the 1990s, the EPRDF government facilitated the repatriation of Ethiopian refugees who had fled to neighboring countries in the face of escalating conflict of the late 1970s and famine of the 1980s.[24] The Tigrayan refugees who fled to Sudan began to return in 1993.[25]

Between 1993 and 1996, around 30,000 Tigrayans who had been refugees in Sudan were settled in villages in the Kafta Humera district on agricultural land that had been nationalized under the Derg.[26] Public land was made available for returnees, most of

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*Needed for Deadly October Violence, (*New York: Human Rights Watch April 1, 2020), https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/01/ethiopia-justice-needed-deadly-october-violence. ; Ethiopia *Violence a Concern Despite Reform Promises, (*New York: Human Rights Watch, August 15, 2018) https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/15/ethiopia-violence-concern-despite-reform-promises. ; Ethiopian Human Rights Council, HRCO 143rd Special Report*,* October 3, 2017, https://ehrco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/HRCO-143rd-Special-Report-Amharic-October-3-2017.pdf.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Gedifew Sewenet Yigzaw and Endalsasa Belay Abitew, "Causes and Impacts of Internal Displacement in Ethiopia," *African Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2019), p. 36, https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajsw/article/view/192193.

[22] Jason W. Clay and Bonnie K. Holcomb, *Politics, and the Ethiopian Famine :1984-1985,* (Cambridge,1987); Library of Congress, http://memory.loc.gov/frd/etsave/et_04_05.html.

[23] Christopher Clapham, "Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia", *Africa Studies Review, Vol* 32 No.3 (1988), pp. 104, 185; See also, John Markakis and Naga Ayele, "Class and Revolution in Ethiopia," Journal *of Modern African Studies, (*Nottingham: Spokesman Press,1978) pp. 59.

[24] Human Rights Watch, *Evil Days:30 years of war and famine in Ethiopia*, (New York: Human Rights Watch,1999),https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/Ethiopia919.pdf ; Kassahun Berhanu, "Returnees' Experiences of Resettlement in Humera," in *Moving People in Ethiopia*, ed. Alula Pankhurst et al. (Boydell and Brewer, 2009), p. 199.

[25] Laura Hammond, "Governmentality in Motion: 25 Years of Ethiopia's Experience of Famine and Migration Policy," *Mobilities*, Vol.6 No.3 (2011): 423, Doi: 10.1080/17450101.2011.590038.; Kassahun Berhanu, *Returnees, Resettlement and Power Relations: The Making of a Political Constituency in Humera, Ethiopia*, (Vu University Press, 2001), p. 203.

[26] Ahmed Ali Egeh and Dechassa Lemessa, UNDP Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia "Ethiopia: Update on humanitarian situation of war- and drought-affected population in Tigray," April 2, 2003, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-update-humanitarian-situation-war-and-drought-affected-population-tigray (Stating that "during 1978/79, the former Settlement Authority of the Ministry of Agriculture moved about 2,000 families from various urban centres in Western Ethiopia to Setit Humera for settlement…again in 1993/94, over 30,000 returnees from the Sudan were reintegrated in Humera area (Adebay, Rawyan, Mikadra resettlement

whom were farmers.[27] They settled in places such as Humera, the area's commercial agriculture and trading center; in the village of Rawyan, a short distance south of Humera; and on old farmland in Adebai and Mai Kadra.[28]

b. Later Settlement Patterns

By 1996, the Mai Kadra area hosted 746 returnee households, while Rawyan hosted 18,107. There was no host community in Rawyan, but roughly 400 Amhara inhabitants lived in Mai Kadra at the time resettlement began, after having themselves been resettled there by the Derg around 1975.[29] Smaller settlement sites were later established for returnees near Bereket – a village located across large-scale farms west of Mai Kadra, as well as in Abderafi in the Amhara region.[30] TPLF fighters who fought against the Derg were also resettled as part of demobilization programs.[31] Around 30,000 former TPLF fighters, for instance, received agricultural plots in the western lowland areas around Dansha town, in several resettlement sites now known as "Division."[32]

The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict in 1998-2000 triggered a wave of displacement from towns in Western Tigray along the Eritrean border, with thousands of those displaced settling in towns such as Baeker and Mai Kadra.[33] In 2002, the federal government identified 15,000 additional households for resettlement along the Tekeze River in Western Tigray in 2002, following drought and insecurity, which triggered another wave of intra-regional resettlement in three regions (Amhara, Tigray, and Oromia).[34]

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villages:). See also Laura Hammond, "Humera Repatriation Report II (Part I), United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia: Returnees in Humera," May 1994, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Humera_Repat_2.html. John Bruce, Allan Hoben, and Dessalegn Rahmato, "After the Derg: An Assessment of Rural Land Tenure Issues in Ethiopia, "March 1994, https://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/61013/rpderg.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

[27] Kassahun Berhanu, *Resettlement and Power Relations: The Making of a Political Constituency in Humera*, (Ethiopia: Vu Publishers ,2001), p. 204.

[28] Laura Hammond, "Humera Repatriation Report II"*, Moving people in Ethiopia* p. 40; Kassahun Berhanu, *Resettlement and Power Relations: The Making of a Political Constituency in Humera,* ((Ethiopia: Vu Publishers,2001), pp. 23 and 204.

[29] Kassahun Berhanu, "Returnees' Experiences of Resettlement in Humera," in *Moving People in Ethiopia*, ed. Alula Pankhurst et al. (Boydell and Brewer, 2009), p. 203. See also Ahmed Ali Egeh and Dechassa Lemessa,UN-Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, "Update on Humanitarian Situation of war and drought affected population in Tigray, Assessment Mission," February 2003, https://apps.who.int/disasters/repo/9257.pdf; Laura Hammond, "Humera Repatriation Report II (Part I), United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia: Returnees in Humera," May 1994, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Humera_Repat_2.html.

[30] Laura Hammond, "Governmentality in Motion: 25 Years of Ethiopia's Experience of Famine and Migration Policy" *Mobilities*, 6 (2011); Kassahun Berhanu, Resettlement and Power Relations: The Making of a Political Constituency in Humera, Ethiopia (2001), pp. 23 and 203-04 (host population contributed labor and construction material for temporary shelters where returnees could be housed).

[31] Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe, "Transition from war to peace: the Ethiopian disarmament, demobilization and reintegration," *African Security Review*, Vol 26 No. 2(2017), p. 143,https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10246029.2017.1297580?needAccess=true

[32] World Bank, "World Bank Discussion Paper 331, Africa Technical Department Series," shorturl.at/dgkwS ; Alula Pankhurst and Francois Piguet, "Moving People in Ethiopia" 19 (2009); Dawit Anagaw, "The Socio-Economic Reintegration of The Tigray People's Liberation Front Ex-Fighters in The Post 1991 Conflict: The Case of Dansha-Division Settlement, Tigray," Addis Ababa University Thesis, 2011, http://etd.aau.edu.et/handle/123456789/10304?show=full.

[33] Joachim D. Ahrens, "Evacuees from border towns in Tigray setting up in makeshift camps: Mission 9- 18 December 1998", UNDP Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (1998),https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/tigray01.html

[34] Ahmed Ali Egeh and Dechassa Lemessa, "Update on Humanitarian Situation of war and drought affected population in Tigray, Assessment Mission," (February 2003), United Nations Emergency Unit for Ethiopia, https://apps.who.int/disasters/repo/9257.pdf.

The arrival of new residents became a source of friction. Some Walqayte and Amhara communities in Western Tigray challenged the incorporation of Kafta Humera, Tsegede, and Welkait districts into the Tigray region, citing historical claims to the territory, and viewed Tigrayan settlement into Welkait, Kafta Humera, and Tsegede areas as an attempt by the TPLF to alter the demographic makeup of the areas and thereby consolidate its claim to it.[35] At the same time, proponents of the Zone's incorporation into Tigray cited a 1985 map published by the Derg, as well as population and housing censuses of 1994 and 2007, that all depict the ethnic composition of the area as predominantly Tigrayan or Tigrinya speaking.[36]

## Protests and Rising Amhara Nationalism

In late 2011, the demands of groups that felt politically, economically, and culturally marginalized, repressed for years by the TPLF-led EPRDF government, came to the fore. At the time, Muslim Ethiopians, alleging government interference in religious affairs, began protesting. [37] In 2015, non-violent protests which raised economic, cultural, and political grievances shared by the Oromo community, swept throughout the Oromia region, and triggered a heavy-handed security response.

Amhara nationalism was also beginning to take shape as a political force by 2015: younger people expressed their distinct Amhara identity, they demanded better political representation, and the protection of Amhara minorities outside the Amhara region. They also began to challenge the internal geographic boundaries of the Ethiopian federal state.[38]

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[35] See Settlement Patterns subsection. Interview with #88, Gondar, December 2019 (alleging that resistance to the incorporation of the territories to Tigray began in 1992). See also "Exclusive Interview: After Deadly Protests in Gondar What Should the Government do Next?" *Addis Standard, July* 12, 2016, https://addisstandard.com/exclusive-interview-deadly-protests-gondar-government-next/.; US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, 115th Congress, "Democracy Under Threat in Ethiopia," March 9, 2017, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg24585/pdf/CHRG-115hhrg24585.pdf (Statement by Tewodrose Tirfe, co-founder of Amhara Association for America, alleging that "The TPLF-led government has forcefully annexed historical Amhara lands of Wolkite, Tegede, Humera, Tselemti, and Raya-Azebo to Tigray. Under the late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, the TPLF transferred thousands of Tigray settlers to the annexed Amhara land in an attempt to change the demographic make-up of the region."); Laura Hammond*, This Place Will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia*, (2004).

[36] Giovanni Ellero, "Il Uolcait," *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici,* Vol. 7 No.1(1948), p. 89, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41299451

[37] "Ethiopia's Muslim protests," *The New Humanitarian,* November 15, 2012, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2012/11/15/ethiopia-s-muslim-protests. ; See also Abadir M. Ibrahim and Awol Allo, "Redefining protest in Ethiopia: what happens to the 'terror' narrative when Muslims call for a secular state?" *Open Democracy*, October 23, 2021, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/redefining-protest-in-ethiopia-what-happens-to-terror-narrative-when-musl/.; "Ethiopia: Prominent Muslims Detained in Crackdown," Human Rights Watch news release, August 15, 2012, https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/15/ethiopia-prominent-muslims-detained-crackdown#. ; "Ethiopian repression of Muslim protests must stop," Amnesty International, news release, August 8, 2013, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/08/ethiopian-repression-of-muslim-protests-must-stop/.

[38] Mistir Sew, "Amhara nationalism at the polls in Ethiopia," *Ethiopian Insight*, June 7, 2021, https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/06/07/amhara-nationalism-at-the-polls-in-ethiopia/.

At the same time, members of Walqayte communities in Western Tigray and in the Amhara region established the "Welkait Identity Question Committee" in Gondar city, Amhara region. "Its members aimed to assert their identity and advocate for an end to discrimination against their community."[39] An unpublished document by the group in March 2015, claimed that more than 20,000 Amhara residents of the Western Tigray Zone were forcibly displaced in 1991, some finding refuge in Sudan after 1991, others in the Amhara region.[40]

The committee also claimed to have collected the signatures of about 25,000 Walqayte residents in Western Tigray who authorized the committee to represent them.[41] It brought its grievances over the administrative boundaries to the Tigray regional government and the federal government, including the House of Federation – the upper chamber in Ethiopia's parliament tasked with addressing such questions, specifically disagreements over administrative boundaries between regional states – but received no response.[42]

The group gained traction after November 2015 when widespread popular protests swept through Ethiopia.[43] Beginning in Oromia in opposition to the federal government's plans to expand Addis Ababa's municipal boundaries, the protests also spread to the Amhara region in 2016.[44] Ethiopian security forces responded to protests across both regions with excessive and lethal force.[45]

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[39] Sonja John, "The Potential of Democratization in Ethiopia: The Welkait Question as a Litmus Test," *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* Vol.56 No. 5 (2021), https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00219096211007657.

[40] Ethiopian Human Rights Council 141st Special Report, "Stop the Violations of the Human Rights of Citizens Voicing Identity Demands!" June 1, 2016, https://ahrethio.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HRCO-141st-Special-Report-English.pdf ;

See also Demands of Welkait People, unpublished, p 25.

[41] John, "The Potential of Democratization in Ethiopia: The Welkait Question as a Litmus Test," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00219096211007657.

[42] John, "The Potential of Democratization in Ethiopia: The Welkait Question as a Litmus Test," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00219096211007657 ; See also Article 48, Article 62 sub article 3 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution. ; See also Tilahun Adamu Zewudie,"The Constitutionality of the "Administrative boundaries and Identity issues commission Establishment Proclamation," Addis *Standard, January* 8, 2019, https://addisstandard.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Special-Edition-in-PDF-By-Tilahun-.pdf

[43] "Ethiopia: Lethal Force Against Protesters," Human Rights Watch news release, December 18, 2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/18/ethiopia-lethal-force-against-protesters.

[44] International Crisis Group, "Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition," February 21, 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/269-managing-ethiopias-unsettled-transition ; Solomon Father, "Government's patience is running out", "*Voice of America -Amharic service*, Feb. 13, 2016, https://amharic.voanews.com/a/welkait-ethiopia-ethnic-group/3188960.html?fbclid=IwAR26cljP9LON8d-8jEipWd6YSR5lR8yDcnyPLMt-NE8uDitYpI4iAI7r280 (Residents in Mai Kadra complain over harassment by local authorities over raising the Welkait issue).

[45] Human Rights Watch, *Such a Brutal Crackdown: Killings and Arrests in Response to Ethiopia's Oromo Protests, (*New York: Human Rights Watch, 2016), https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/15/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-oromo-protests#1963 (In December 2015 and early 2016, protester demands widened to include the release of political prisoners, economic justice, and genuine political representation, as well as administrative autonomy of the Oromia region).

In February 2016, Col. Demeke Zewdu, a leading figure of the Welkait Identity Question Committee, publicly called for the demands of the Walqayte to be recognized and denounced their condition in Tigray as "second-class citizens."[46]

Authorities sought to arrest Colonel Demeke in Gondar on July 12, 2016, for alleged terrorism offenses.[47] With his allies, including his close friend Maj. Dejene Maru (a current major in the Amhara Special Forces), Demeke resisted arrest and fought with government security forces.[48] The two days of clashes that ensued resulted in the deaths of at least 11 people, including at least six members of the security forces.[49] Demeke's supporters blocked roads leading to his residence, as businesses and vehicles belonging to Tigrayan-affiliated companies came under attack.[50]

The arrest of Demeke and other Welkait Identity Committee members marked a turning point in the Amhara region, prompting thousands of people to take to the streets in the days and weeks that followed.[51] A massive rally in Gondar on July 31 which called for Demeke's release saw protesters chanting anti-government slogans and expressing

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[46] Zecharias Zelalem, "Amhara Protests Stalwarts Released, Government Remains Mum on Welkait Issue," *OPride*, February 23, 2018, https://www.opride.com/2018/02/23/amhara-protest-stalwarts-released-government-remains-mum-welkait-issue/ ; Salem Solomon, "What is Fueling Ethiopia's Protests," *Voice of America News*, August 10, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/what-is-fueling-ethiopia-protests/3459102.html ; "Welkait Tsegede Case Sent to Tigray Region Said Colonel Demeke," *Voice of America News*, *Tigrigna News, April* 8, 2016, https://tigrigna.voanews.com/a/welkite-tsgedie-case-sent-to-tigray-region-said-colonel-demeke/3276789.html; "Colonel Demeke Zewde on Welkit and Tsegedie Question of Identity Part 2," *Voice of America News, Tigrigna News*, March 28, 2016, https://tigrigna.voanews.com/a/colonel-demeke-zewdu-on-welkite-and-tsegedie-question-of-identity-part-2/3258444.html;

[47] "Welkait people demanding to be Amhara,"video clip, You Tube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ny1P5bKFI6I&t=89s; see also "Ethiopia: Dozens killed as police use excessive force against peaceful protesters," Amnesty International press release, August 8,2016), https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/ethiopia-dozens-killed-as-police-use-excessive-force-against-peaceful-protesters/; "News: Several killed as Ethiopian police force attempt to arrest individuals, sparking city wide protest in Gondar," *Addis Standard, July* 14, 2016, https://addisstandard.com/news-several-killed-ethiopian-police-force-attempt-arrest-individuals-sparking-city-wide-protest-gondar/; "Ten killed during protests in northern Ethiopia," *Al Jazeera, July* 15, 2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/7/15/ten-killed-during-protests-in-northern-ethiopia; William Davison, "Ethnic tensions in Gondar reflect the toxic nature of Ethiopian politics," *the Guardian*, December 22, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/dec/22/gondar-ethiopia-ethnic-tensions-toxic-politics ("When security forces tried to arrest Zewdu, who is a member of a committee campaigning over the, armed Amharas protected him and several people, including security officers, were killed.").

[48] See Amhara Prosperity Party Facebook Post on July 12, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/AMHARAPPOffice/posts/3173932216177422. Dejene Maru in 2016 began fighting with government forces in between Soroka, Amhara region and Dansha, Tigray.

[49] See Amhara Prosperity Party Facebook post reflecting on the anniversary of the incident (July 12, 2021), https://www.facebook.com/AMHARAPPOffice/posts/3173932216177422 ; "Several Killed as Ethiopian Police Force Attempt to Arrest Individuals, Sparking City Wide protest in Gondar,"*Addis Standard*, July 14, 2016, https://addisstandard.com/news-several-killed-ethiopian-police-force-attempt-arrest-individuals-sparking-city-wide-protest-gondar/ ; "Another Restive Region," *Africa Confidential*, Vol. 57 No. 15(2016), http://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11725/Another_restive_region ; William Davison, "Ethnic Tensions in Gondar Reflect Toxic Nature of Ethiopian Politics," the *Guardian*, December 22, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/dec/22/gondar-ethiopia-ethnic-tensions-toxic-politics.

[50] "Another Restive Region," *Africa Confidential, Vol.*57 No. 15(2016), https://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11725/Another_restive_region; https://tesfanews.net/anti-tigrayan-revolt-spreads-across-ethiopia/

[51] Aside from Colonel Demeke Zewdu, Welkait Committee Members including Atalay Zafe, Alene Shama, Getachew Ademe, Teshager Woldemicael, and Mebratu Getahun were among those arrested in Gondar that month. Only One Ethiopia Twitter page, July 2016,https://twitter.com/OnlyOneEthiopia/status/755561545183088640?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E755561545183088640%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%%tesfanews.net%ethiopia-whats-behind-gondar-protests%.

solidarity with the Oromo protest movement.[52] Demonstrators also demanded that the pre-1991 borders in the area be restored and to return districts such Welkait and Tsegede to the Amhara regional state.[53]

By August 2016, the protests spread to other cities in the Amhara region, including Bahir Dar. The government used excessive and lethal force in response, as it had in Oromia. In just one day on August 7, government security forces killed at least 30 people in Bahir Dar.[54] Protesters also targeted foreign businesses with links to the federal government.[55] Human rights abuses intensified, with authorities detaining thousands of protesters without charge or access to family or legal representation.[56] Those released reported torture in detention.[57]

By August 2016, the claims over Western Tigray transformed into a wider Amhara demand and became a source of friction between the federal government and Amhara regional authorities.[58]

## Increased Displacement and Identity-Based Attacks in 2016-2020

As protests grew throughout the country, Tigrayan communities faced growing anti-government resentment, including violence.[59] Demonstrators in the Amhara region blocked key access roads for transporting goods from Addis Ababa to Tigray.[60] Tigrayan

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[52] Ismail Akwei, "Tens of thousands of protesters call for a regime change in Ethiopia," *Africa News*, July 31, 2016, https://www.africanews.com/2016/07/31/half-a-million-protesters-call-for-a-regime-change-in-ethiopia/ ; "The Centre Holds on," *Africa Confidential, Vol*.57 No.17(2016), https://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11754/The_centre_holds_on;

Salem Solomon, "What is Fueling Ethiopia's Protests," *Voice of America*, August 10, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/what-is-fueling-ethiopia-protests/3459102.html

[54] "Ethiopia: Dozens killed as police use excessive force against peaceful protesters," *Amnesty* International press release, August 8, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/08/ethiopia-dozens-killed-as-police-use-excessive-force-against-peaceful-protesters/ ; Zecharias Zelalem, "Amhara protest stalwarts released but government remains mum on Welkait issue," *Opride*, February 23, 2018, https://www.opride.com/2018/02/23/amhara-protest-stalwarts-released-government-remains-mum-welkait-issue/; Ismail Akwei,"Tens of thousands of protesters call for regime change in Ethiopia," *Africa News*, July 31, 2016, https://www.africanews.com/2016/07/31/half-a-million-protesters-call-for-a-regime-change-in-ethiopia/ ; Abdur Rahman Alfa Shaban, "The boundary crisis behind Ethiopia's protest," *Africa News, August* 2, 2016, https://www.africanews.com/2016/08/02/the-powerful-vs-the-populous-the-boundary-crisis-behind-ethiopia-s-protest/.

[55] Dutch-owned Esmeralda flower farm near Bahir Dar was burned in August. Aaron Maasho, "Foreign-owned flower farms attacked in Ethiopia unrest," *Reuters*, September 2, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-violence/foreign-owned-flower-farms-attacked-in-ethiopia-unrest-growers-idINKCN11824U.

[56] Letter from Human Rights Watch to the UN Human Rights Council on Ethiopia, "Joint Letter to UN Human Rights Council on Ethiopia," September 8, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/08/joint-letter-un-human-rights-council-ethiopia.

[57] Ibid.

[58] "The Centre Holds on," *Africa Confidential*, Vol.57 No.17 (2016), https://www.africa-confidential.com/article/id/11754/The_centre_holds_on.

[59] Abdi Latif Dahir, "Ethiopia's crisis is a result of decades of land disputes and ethnic power battles," *Quartz Africa,* October 30, 2016, https://qz.com/africa/822258/ethiopias-ordinary-tigray-minority-is-caught-in-the-middle-of-oromo-protests/.

[60] International Crisis Group, "Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North," June 12, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b156-bridging-divide-ethiopias-north Samuel Getachew (Interview with Debretsion Gebremichael (Ph.D.)), "Blocking roads and prohibiting grains from coming to Tigray is a grave crime," The Reporter, (June 15, 2019), https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/blocking-roads-and-prohibiting-grains-coming-tigray-grave-crime?__cf_chl_managed_tk__=pmd_hhTYi2CqB9kYOuvwh8m45sqtfEGwNTHmYcJIAvA8o-1631528610-0-gqNtZGzNAxCjcnBszRNR ; ""Tedjemerwal" : ressorts sociaux, enjeux matériels et significations locales d'une entrée en guerre," (November 17, 2020), https://polaf.hypotheses.org/7196#identifier_36_7196.

homes and businesses were attacked, while threats, fear, and rumors drove Tigrayan communities to leave the Amhara and Oromia regions.[61]

The UN estimated that approximately 16,000 Tigrayans were displaced from the Gondar area in 2016.[62] Tigrayans also experienced increased identity-based attacks and displacement in other towns in Amhara.[63]

By 2019, the threats and sporadic clashes between residents had in some places turned into calls for Tigrayans to leave, driving further displacement.[64]

In Tigray, fights over land would occasionally break out between Amharas and Tigrayans, while local and regional government security forces beat, interrogated, or arrested those "agitating" for the government to acknowledge and deal with the Welkait identity question.[65] Residents complained of beatings, harassment, and arrests for speaking in Amharic and playing Amharic songs.[66]

The arrests intensified with the Amhara protests and drove further Amhara displacement, as local and regional Tigrayan authorities cracked down on individuals and residents with actual or presumed affiliation with the Welkait identity movement.[67]

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[61] "Ethiopia's Economic Gains Tainted by Violent Repression," *Financial Times*, February 3, 2017, https://www.ft.com/content/3fc7aa-ed-11e6-967b-c88452263daf**. ;**
Jeffery Gettleman, "A Generation is Protesting in Ethiopia, long a US Ally," *New York Times*, August 13, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/13/world/africa/ethiopia-protests.html; Yohannes Woldemariam, "The Unenviable Situation of Tigreans in Ethiopia," post to "LSE" (blog), March 28, 2018, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2018/03/28/the-unenviable-situation-of-tigreans-in-ethiopia/ ("Tigrean-owned businesses have been attacked in Oromia and in the Amhara region. In some cases, there are reports that innocent Tigreans have been seriously injured or murdered. Others have abandoned their livelihoods to flee to Tigray. As the situation worsens, the daily life of innocent Tigreans living in Ethiopia is increasingly precarious").

[62] Phone interview with Samuel, Tigray, May 2021. See also UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ethiopia: IDP Situation Report, May 2019,https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/idp_situation_report_june_13_2019_final.pdf.

[63] For instance, Tigrayans in 2017 were beaten up and taken to prison in Abderafi, a town in north Gondar zone in the Amhara region that sits on the border with Tigray. Interviews with Haileselassie and #214 in Sudan, December 2020. Interview with #1, Sudan, January 2021; with Askuwal in May 2021.

[64] Interview with #1, Sudan, January 2021 lived Abderafi, in the Amhara region until November 2020 and explained how daily workers known as *salug* came and told "Tigrayan residents to leave town" around Ethiopian New Year in 2019. Interview with # 207, Sudan, December 2020 lived in Abderafi said: "You [couldn't] do your job properly as people were being abducted. They were picking up young people ... The administration said: 'We can't solve the tensions and the racism' and just told us to leave." See also phone interviews with Samuel and Tadele, Tigray, May 2021.

[65] Phone interview with Samuel and Tadele, Tigray, May 2021. Interview with Andom,Sudan, May 2021 (Andom for instance explained that in 2016 local tensions over land grew in tabia Irob, a settlement in Ruwassa and turned into fights between Walqaytes and resettled Tigrayans and Irob communities.); See also "The Case of Welkait," *Voice of America Amharic Service*, August 25, 2020 https://amharic.voanews.com/a/wolkayit-arrest-tigray-8-25-2020/5557672.html.

[66] See interviews with Zelalem, #91 Gondar, Amhara region, December 2019. Interview #91 saying "we stayed silent outside the house because we couldn't speak in Amharic."

[67] Interview with #300, Gondar, December 2019. Interviewee was a farmer in Mai-Kadra, said that he was arrested in November 2018 and held at unofficial place of detention for nearly a month where he was tortured together with other 11 Amharas. Interview with #87 in Gondar, December 2019. Interviewee, said he advocated for the Welkait Identity Committee, said he was displaced from Adi Remets to Gondar after facing multiple arrests in 2019, during which Tigrayan ENDF soldiers called him "a thief and the enemy of Tigray.".
Interview with Hiruy, Gondar, December 2019. (Hiruy also believed he was detained for his role in the committee and said that he and other nine people had been in pre-trial detention charged with instigating violence until the charges were withdrawn after the appointment of Prime Minster Abiy n April 2018).; See also Ethiopian Human Rights Council, 141st Special Report, "Stop the

In 2016, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council published a report that documented multiple grave human rights violations against the Amhara and Walqayte residents of Western Tigray Zone, including extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture, confiscation of land and arbitrary detention.[68]

Tensions continued in 2019. Houses and cars were burned in Dansha in Western Tigray, and a deadly clash between Tigrayan Special Forces and unidentified armed groups prompted increased militarization and checkpoints along the main roads of Tigray.[69] Humanitarian agencies noted the growing displacement of Amhara internally displaced persons from Dansha, and other areas in Tigray, and recorded 5,000 IDPs in a
March 2019 report.[70]

## The Transitional Period, 2018-2020

Following years of protests and interparty discord, the EPRDF, led by Hailemariam Desalegn, agreed to reform in early 2018. In April, Ethiopia's parliament selected Abiy Ahmed as prime minister. The government continued the reform process initiated by Abiy's predecessor, including the return of exiled political parties; the release of opposition politicians, activists, and journalists in detention; and the revision of repressive laws. But security force abuses continued, as did communal violence, at times manifesting along ethnic lines and often resulting from historical grievances and competition over resources and land. Violence resulted in millions displaced in 2018-2020.[71]

### a. Rise and Role of Informal Militias and Regional Special Forces

Violations of the Human Rights of Citizens Voicing Identity Demands!" June 1, 2016, https://ahrethio.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HRCO-141st-Special-Report-English.pdf ; "Government's patience is running out*," Voice of America Amharic service,* February 13, 2016, https://amharic.voanews.com/a/welkait-ethiopia-ethnic-group/3188960.html?fbclid=IwAR26cIjP9LON8d-8jEipWd6YSR5lR8yDcnyPLMt-NE8uDitYpI4iAI7r280 (Residents in Mai Kadra complain over harassment by local authorities over raising the Welkait issue).

[68] Human Rights Council, 141st Special Report, "Stop the Violation of Human Rights of Citizens Voicing Identity Related Demands!" June 1,2016, pp. 7-9.

[69] Protection Cluster Ethiopia, "Interagency Rapid Protection Assessment – Gondar, Amhara region 11-14 March 2019," March,2019, https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Interagency-Rapid-Protection-Assessment_Gondar-Amhara-Region_11-14-March-2019.pdf. (("It was also reported that Amhara IDPs are arriving in Gondar from Dansha in Tigray Region, due to the recent conflict related to the presence of trucks with Amhara plate numbers in Dansha and the surrounding areas. The conflict has caused burning of houses and cars.")

70 "Protection Cluster Ethiopia: Interagency Rapid Protection Assessment -Gondar, Amhara Region 11-14 March 2019," March 2019, https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/wp-content/uploads/Interagency-Rapid-Protection-Assessment_Gondar-Amhara-Region_11-14-March-2019.pdf.

[71] Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: "Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia," May 29,2020, pp. 13-14, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/2358/2020/en/; Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: Abiy's First Year as Prime Minister, Review of Conflict and Internally Displaced Persons," commentary, April 19, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/09/ethiopia-abiys-first-year-prime-minister-review-conflict-and-internally-displaced.

In the last 15 years, Ethiopia's regional states have established regional special police forces, known as “Liyu Police,” in Amharic. [72] Emerging first in the Somali region in 2007, special police forces have proliferated throughout Ethiopia and have become increasingly militarized.[73]

The protests and intra-party fractures within the EPRDF coalition resulted in a security vacuum that persisted following the 2018 change of government. Armed informal militia, unidentified groups, and regional special forces grew increasingly active across the country and operated with a level of impunity.[74]

In the Amhara region, “Fano,” an Amhara nationalist movement that was active during the 2016-2018 protests, emerged as an armed informal militia.[75] Since 2018, government security forces – both at the federal and the regional levels – had largely tolerated violence by Fano.[76] In 2018 and 2019, Fano, at times with the complicity of Amhara Special Forces (ASF), became responsible for widespread violence, including mass killings and the destruction of property perpetrated against communities of Qimant, an ethnic group in the Amhara region.[77]

In 2018, the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) – a partner within the EPRDF coalition – appointed Brig. Gen. Asaminew Tsige, a proponent of Amhara nationalism, to head the Amhara region’s administrative and security apparatus. This role empowered him to oversee and control the region’s security organs, including the ASF, the regular police, and the militia.[78] Asaminew built up regional security forces and reportedly “formalized

[72] European Institute for Peace, “The Special Police in Ethiopia,” October 2021, https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SpecialPoliceEthiopia-8-Oct-2021-CLEAN.pdf.

[73] European Institute for Peace, “The Special Police in Ethiopia,” October 2021, https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SpecialPoliceEthiopia-8-Oct-2021-CLEAN.pdf.

[74] Semir Yusuf, “Drivers of Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Ethiopia,” Institute *for Security Studies,* December 2019, https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/mono-202-2.pdf. ; See also Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: Growing Uncertainty Marks Abiy’s First Year in Power,” commentary, April 2, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/02/ethiopia-growing-uncertainty-marks-abiys-first-year-power.

[75] The term “Fano” historically refers to armed peasants who accompanied imperial armies, without being members. During the 2016-2018 protest movement, Fano was self-described defense groups made up of young people.

[76]. Amnesty International, “Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia,” May 29,2020, pp. 35-40, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/2358/2020/en/. (For example, during the attack on Qimant neighborhood on January 10, 2019, that lasted for 24 hours, a joint operation of Fanosand the Amhara police forces killed Qimant residents and destroyed property. At the same time, the ENDF forces stationed nearby did nothing to stop the attack despite the repeated appeals for rescue by the Qimant community members).

[77] “Fano Will Not Lay Down Arms If Demands Are Not Met: Chairman,” *Ezega News*, March 28, 2020, https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7856/Fano-Will-Not-Lay-Down-Arms-If-Demands-Are-Not-Met-Chairman; See also Amnesty International, “Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia, May 29, 2020.

[78] Nizar Manek, “Abiy Ahmed’s reforms have unleashed forces he can no longer control," Foreign *Policy,* July 4, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/04/abiy-ahmeds-reforms-have-unleashed-forces-he-can-no-longer-control-ethiopia-amhara-asaminew-adp-adfm/. Asaminew was a former rebel fighter against Derg who was serving a life imprisonment in 2009 for an alleged coup attempt. In 2018, he was given amnesty: “The politics behind the putsch,” *Africa Confidential*, Vol.60 No.13(2019),

and empowered former bandits and rebel fighters into the Fano structure; reintegrated previously dismissed members of the national defense forces and trained and armed tens of thousands of militias."[79]

At times, some Fanos came into conflict with the security forces, leading in some cases to armed clashes. On March 24, 2020, the Gondar City Security Council denounced Fanos' involvement in illegal activities including kidnapping, killing, confiscation of property, and extortion of businesspeople, among other crimes.[80] The council gave Fanos until March 29, 2020, to surrender or face law enforcement actions.[81] One Fano leader said in response that the government was trying to dismantle the Fanos organization and assimilate it to the government security structure.[82] He vowed not to disarm until the demands of the Amhara people were answered, especially the return of "Welkait, Raya, Dera and Metekel borders" to the Amhara region.[83]

## Situation Prior to the Current Conflict

Relations between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF soured after Abiy's rise to power. As chair of the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP)— one of the EPRDF political parties—and chairman of the EPRDF, Abiy set out to distance himself from the legacy of EPRDF rule upon his appointment as prime minister. He apologized for the human rights abuses of the past, described the behavior of security agencies as "terrorist acts," and removed TPLF members from the upper ranks of the security sector.[84] The TPLF in turn objected to the government's targeting of TPLF leaders for

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https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/12687/The_politics_behind_the_putsch. Asaminew was assassinated in June 22, 20219

[79] Semir Yusuf, "Drivers of Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Ethiopia," *Institute for Security Studies*, (December 2019), https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/mono-202-2.pdf.

[80] Amhara Police Commission Facebook post, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1532487200245648&id=149829718511410 (accessed March 24, 2020)

[81] Amhara Police Commission Facebook post, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1532487200245648&id=149829718511410 (accessed March 24, 2020)

[82] Ethiopia, "መንግሥት የፋኖን አደረጃጀት ሙሉ በሙሉ ለማጥፋት እንቅስቃሴ ጀምሯል ሲል ፋኖ የተባለው ቡድን ከሰሰ," Mereja , (March 27, 2020), https://mereja.com/amharic/v2/243595?fbclid=IwAR0w2aOiYClqTqdJsd1CLxoa7UJZsjyPfSxwvZ9LaehXDDEXcuVtr.HED0.

[83] Ethiopia, "መንግሥት የፋኖን አደረጃጀት ሙሉ በሙሉ ለማጥፋት እንቅስቃሴ ጀምሯል ሲል ፋኖ የተባለው ቡድን ከሰሰ," *Mereja*, March 27, 2020 https://mereja.com/amharic/v2/243595?fbclid=IwAR0w2aOiYClqTqdJsd1CLxoa7UJZsjyPfSxwvZ9LaehXDDEXcuVtr.HED0. Since the outbreak of the war in November 2020, tensions between the government and the Fanos have eased significantly and the Fano militia has been one of the main forces fighting alongside the ENDF, especially in Western Tigray. The Amhara Broadcast Corporation in August reported that the scattered Fano structures have formed a front in the fight against the Tigrayan forces. Amhara Broadcasting Corporation, "በተለያዩ አደረጃጀት ሲንቀሳቀሱ የነበሩ ፋኖዎች ግንባር ፈጠሩ (Fanos operating in different organizations formed a front)," YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RmaKHrvo, August 27, 2021.

[84] "Ethiopia PM: Security agencies committed 'terrorist acts," *Al Jazeera*, June 18, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/6/19/ethiopia-pm-security-agencies-committed-terrorist-acts. He replaced two members of the TPLF who held powerful positions in the security sector: Samora Yunis, the army chief, and brought charges against Getachew Assefa, the former intelligence chief. Getachew Assefa had been accused of enabling the rise of abusive regional security units, such as in the Somali region.

Felix Horne, "Ethiopia Torture Victims Deserve Justice," Human Rights Watch News Release, July 13, 2018,https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/13/ethiopia-torture-victims-deserve-justice ; Zecharias Zelalem, "It wasn't me! Under fire Abdi Iley pleads innocence in unhinged speeches amid dismissal rumors," *Opride*,July 12, 2018,

prosecutions for past human rights violations, and to federal probes into TPLF-linked companies, refused to hand over wanted officials to the federal government,[85] and denounced the probes as politicized
and selective.[86]

The TPLF leadership opposed other federal government measures. It saw Ethiopia's rapprochement with Eritrea in 2018 as a major threat.[87] In a speech in July in which he accepted Abiy's overture for peace, Eritrea's president, Isaias Afewerki, said it was the "end of the TPLF's shenanigans," and "game over."[88] In the aftermath of the peace agreement, Eritrea's borders remained heavily fortified and issues around trade and the demarcation of the border remained unsettled.[89]

TPLF leaders also denounced the government's dissolution of the EPRDF coalition to form the Prosperity Party in December 2019. They saw this as the federal government's attempts to build up a centralized state and rejected the federal government's accusations that it was fomenting unrest and supporting ethnic violence and armed insurgencies elsewhere in the country. [90]

Tensions between the Tigray and Amhara regions continued in 2018. Since the Amhara protests, major roads leading into Tigray remained blocked, while Amhara demands that the disputed territories in Tigray be returned to the Amhara region continue to gain salience among Amhara regional officials and opposition groups.[91]

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https://www.opride.com/2018/07/12/it-wasnt-me-under-fire-abdi-illey-pleads-innocence-in-unhinged-speeches-amid-dismissal-rumours/.

[85] "Tigray Government Refuses to Hand Over Getachew Assefa - Attorney General", *Ezega News,* January 5, 2018, https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/6883/Tigray-Government-Refuses-to-Hand-Over-Getachew-Assefa-Attorney-General

[86]"Tigray Government Refuses to Hand Over Getachew Assefa - Attorney General," *Ezega News,* January 5, 2018, https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/6883/Tigray-Government-Refuses-to-Hand-Over-Getachew-Assefa-Attorney-General; International Crisis Group, "Toward an End to Ethiopia's Federal-Tigray Feud, "August 14, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b160-toward-end-ethiopias-federal-tigray-feud.

[87] International Crisis Group, "Bridging the Divide in the Country's North," June 12, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b156-bridging-divide-ethiopias-north.

[88] "President Isaias' speech on Martyrs Day," *Eritrea Ministry of Information,* June 20,2018, https://shabait.com/2018/06/20/president-isaias-speech-on-martyrs-day/.

[89] Goitom Gebreleul, "Ethiopia and Eritrea's second rapproachement," *Al-Jazeera, September* 18, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/9/18/ethiopia-and-eritreas-second-rapprochement

[90] Kalkidan Yibetal, "Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed gets a new ruling party," *BBC News*, Nov 22, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50515636. See also International Crisis Group, "Bridging the Divide in the Country's North," June 12, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b156-bridging-divide-ethiopias-north (stating that "Several Amhara politicians, as well as other government and opposition figures, more broadly suspect the TPLF of seeking to sabotage the transition. "The TPLF sponsors every conflict in Ethiopia", said a federal minister from Amhara."). International Crisis Group, "Toward an End to Ethiopia's Federal-Tigray Feud," August 14, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b160-toward-end-ethiopias-federal-tigray-feud.

[91] In June 2020, Temesgen Tiruneh, former Amhara regional president (director general of Ethiopia's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) as of November 2020), declared his administration's plans to regain lands that were "illegally taken" by the Tigray region.

Actions by TPLF authorities also intensified tensions with the federal government. In 2018, the federal government created an Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission that was tasked with analyzing causes of administrative boundaries conflicts, self-government, and identity issues.[92] The creation of the Boundary Commission met stiff resistance from members of the parliament, but also the TPLF, which denounced the move as illegitimate, arguing that the commission's mandate overlapped with the House of Federation's.[93] Questions have also been raised regarding the commission's independence, including its accountability to the Office of the Prime Minister. [94] In June 2020, the commission signed an agreement with Addis Ababa University to undertake a study on administrative boundaries and identity issues.[95] The commission however was unable to engage universities in Tigray, first due to the lack of response by Tigray regional authorities, and then as a result of the ongoing conflict.[96]

Tensions rose dramatically when the TPLF opposed the government's decision to indefinitely postpone the August 2020 elections in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and decided to conduct its own regional election in Tigray in September 2020, in defiance of the federal government's decision. TPLF authorities further claimed that Abiy's administration would have no authority after the expiration of its term in October 2020 and that it would not adhere to federal laws and regulations. The federal parliament declared the regional election null and void, ordered a stoppage of communication between the federal and the Tigray government, and froze federal budget transfers, including donor-funded social-welfare programs to the Tigray regional government.[97]

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"Amhara president announces plan to regain illegally taken lands," *Ezega News, July* 23,2020, https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/8035/Amhara-President-Announces-Plan-to-Regain-Illegally-Taken-Lands- ; See also Samuel Getachew, "Blocking roads and prohibiting grains from coming to Tigray isa grave crime," *the Reporter, June* 15, 2019, https://bit.ly/3JVotkG

[92] Article 4 of the Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission Establishment Proclamation No.1101 /2019.

[93] Phone interview with Professor Tassew Woldehana, Addis Ababa, July 2021. According to Professor Tassew Woldehana, president of Addis Ababa University, the Tigray government filed an application at the House of the Federation against the constitutionality of the commission, which was later quashed by the House of the Federation. See also "Identities and Boundary Commission," *DW Amharic Service,* December 12, 2018, https://p.dw.com/p/3AS1q/. ; International Crisis Group, "Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails," December 16, 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/283-keeping-ethiopias-transition-rails; International Crisis Group, "Bridging the Divide in the Country's North," June 12, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b156-bridging-divide-ethiopias-north

[94] Federal Negarit Gazeta, Art.3(3), "A Proclamation to Establish Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission, Proclamation No. 1101 /2019," February 8, 2019, https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Proclamation-No.-1101-2019-Administrative-Boundary-and-Identity-Issues-Commission.pdf. See also Tilahun Adama Zewdie, "Special Edition: The Constitutionality of the "Administrative Boundaries and Identity Issues Commission Establishment Proclamation," *Addis Standard,* January 8, 2019, https://addisstandard.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Special-Edition-in-PDF-By-Tilahun-.pdf.

[95]"AAU To Conduct Study on Administrative, Border Issues", (blog), Embassy of Ethiopia,Washington D.C, June 13, 2020, https://ethiopianembassy.org/aau-to-conduct-study-on-administrative-border-issues-june-13-2020/

[96] Phone interview with Professor Tassew Woldehana, July 2021, about the work of the Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission.

[97] International Crisis Group, "Steering Ethiopia's Crisis Away from Conflict", October 30, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b162-steering-ethiopias-tigray-crisis-away-conflict

Several initiatives to mediate between the TPLF and the federal government, including by religious leaders and elders, were unsuccessful.[98] The government rejected the TPLF's preconditions for mediation, which included a comprehensive national dialogue, the formation of an inclusive transitional government led by someone other than Prime Minister Abiy to oversee national elections, and the release of political opposition leaders.[99] TPLF leaders also sought an end to federal control over regional security operations.[100] Federal authorities also did not accept the TPLF's interpretation of the constitution and sought acknowledgment by Tigrayan authorities that the Tigray regional elections held in September 2020 were illegal.[101]

Tensions reached a breaking point in late October 2020 when the TPLF leadership alleged that Ethiopia and Eritrea were planning an attack on the region.[102] On October 20, 2020, Ethiopian authorities announced the reconfiguration of military commands, with a regional military command in Bahir Dar, in the Amhara region.[103] When Abiy sought to restructure and appoint new army commanders for the ENDF's northern division based in Tigray, TPLF leaders rejected the move.[104]

Tensions continued to rise days before the outbreak of conflict in early November 2020. Amhara and Tigray regional forces mobilized along the Amhara-Tigray borders, while calls by European Union leaders to "reduce tensions, eliminate inflammatory language, and abstain from provocative military deployments," went unheeded. [105] On November

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[98] "Religious Leaders to Mediate Dispute Between Federal Government and TPLF," *Ezega News*, June 15, 2020, https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7984/Religious-Leaders-to-Mediate-Dispute-Between-Federal-Government-and-TPLF ; International Crisis Group, "Steering Ethiopia's Crisis Away from Conflict, October 30, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b162-steering-ethiopias-tigray-crisis-away-conflict ; International Crisis Group, "Toward an End to Ethiopia's Federal-Tigray Feud," August 14, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b160-toward-end-ethiopias-federal-tigray-feud.

[99] International Crisis Group, "Steering Ethiopia's Tigray Crisis Away from Conflict," October 30, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b162-steering-ethiopias-tigray-crisis-away-conflict.

[100] International Crisis Group, "Steering Ethiopia's Crisis Away from Conflict,"October 30, 2020,https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b162-steering-ethiopias-tigray-crisis-away-conflict.

[101] International Crisis Group, "Steering Ethiopia's Crisis Away from Conflict," October 30, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b162-steering-ethiopias-tigray-crisis-away-conflict.

[102] "Isaias Afwerki, Abiy Ahmed Plotting War Against Tigray Region: TPLF," *Ezega News, October* 25, 2020,https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/8200/Isaias-Afwerki-Abiy-Ahmed-Plotting-War-Against-Tigray-Region-TPLF

[103] Siyanne Mekonnen, "Analysis: Crisis Staring Tigray, Federal Governments 'In the Eye' As Army Caught in the Mix, Relations Plummet to New Low," *Addis Standard,* October 31, 2020, https://addisstandard.com/analysis-crisis-staring-tigray-federal-governments-in-the-eye-as-army-is-caught-in-the-mix-relations-plummet-to-new-low/; "Ethiopia to Establish Two Additional Regiments," *Fana news*, October 20, 2020, https://www.fanabc.com/english/nation-to-establish-two-additional-regiments/?fbclid=IwAR3qkj3ljWYT5OqpK3d7GfgfmmyATSg6G2ur8vk6x-8N-WFs_3T3enM.

[104] "Ethiopia's Tigray blocks general's appointment in blow to Abiy,"*Al Jazeera,*October 30, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/30/ethiopia-tigray-blocks-generals-appointment-in-swipe-at-abiy

[105] "Amhara region police chief reveals how region's police force guided federal steel-clad mechanized forces to join the "war" in Tigray," *Addis Standard,* January 4, 2021, https://addisstandard.com/news-analysis-amhara-region-police-chief-reveals-how-regions-police-force-guided-federal-steel-clad-mechanized-forces-to-join-war-in-tigray/. ; See also, Debretsion Gebremichael (translated by Medihane Ekubamichael,"We have prepared our military of Special Force not in need of a war, but if the worst

4, 2020, Abiy said on national TV that the Tigray security forces had attacked the ENDF's Northern Command at several military bases in the region, and that he had consequently launched a "law and order operation" against the Tigray regional paramilitary police and militia loyal to the TPLF in response.[106]

comes," *Addis Standard, November* 2, 2020, https://addisstandard.com/we-have-prepared-our-military-of-special-force-not-in-need-of-a-war-but-if-the-worst-comes-debretsion-gebremichael/. ; "Ethiopia: Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell on the latest developments", European Union External Action, November 2, 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/87959/Ethiopia%20:%20Statement%20by%20the%20High%20Representative/Vice-President%20Josep%20Borrell%20on%20the%20latest%20developments.

[106] Office of the Prime Minister – Ethiopia Twitter Page, "TPLF Attacks National Defense Force Base in Tigray,"November 4, 2020,shorturl.at/houIM .; "The last red-line': Ethiopia nears civil war as PM orders military into restive Tigray region," *France 24*, November 4, 2020, https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20201104-the-last-red-line-ethiopia-nears-civil-war-as-pm-orders-military-into-restive-tigray-region; "Internet disrupted in Ethiopia as conflict breaks out in Tigray region," *Netblocks*,November 4, 2020, https://netblocks.org/reports/internet-disrupted-in-ethiopia-as-conflict-breaks-out-in-tigray-region-eBOQYV8Z.

# II. Laws-of-War Violations During Initial Military Offensive

The Ethiopian military offensive in Western Tigray that began on November 4, 2020, against forces affiliated with the region's ruling party – the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – was carried out with the direct support and close coordination of Amhara Special Forces (ASF), Amhara militias, and Fano armed groups from the Amhara region, and in some areas, Eritrean forces.

TPLF-affiliated fighters for their part were comprised of Tigray Special Forces (TSF) and Tigrayan local militias. The initial fighting and violence to control territories in Western Tigray prompted the displacement of Tigrayan and Amhara communities, both internally and to Sudan, with an exodus of over 42,000 refugees into Sudan estimated within the first three weeks of the conflict. [107]

State Security Forces and Armed Groups in Western Tigray

- **Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF)**[108]: Ethiopia's armed forces, which consist of ground and air forces, reportedly had about 140,000 active personnel at the start of the conflict.[109] The prime minister in Ethiopia is also commander-in-chief other ENDF. On November 8, 2020, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced the appointment of Ethiopia's current chief of staff of the army, Gen. Berhanu Jula Gelalcha. In a November 30, 2020, speech before parliament, Abiy acknowledged the role of ENDF army generals, General Belay and General Meressa, in leading offensives in Western Tigray.[110]
- **Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF):** Eritrea's forces are comprised of three branches, including the air force, army, and navy. Eritrea's president is the commander-in-chief of the EDF.
- **Amhara Regional Special Forces (ASF) ("Liyu Hail" in Amharic):** A regional paramilitary police force under the command of Brig. Gen. Tefera Mamo since July 2021.[111] In February 2022, the Amhara regional government replaced Brig. Gen.

[107] UNHCR, "Ethiopia Situation: Daily New Arrivals Update," November 25, 2020, https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Sudan%20Eastern%20Border%20new%20arrivals%20update%20-%2025%20November%202020.pdf.

[108] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "A Proclamation on the Defense Forcesof the Federal democratic Republic of Ethiopia," No. 1100/2019, Addis Ababa, January 19, 2019,https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Proclamation-No.-1100-2019-Defense-Forces-Proclamation.pdf

[109] "The forces fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict," Reuters, November 13, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-military-factbox/factbox-the-forces-fighting-in-ethiopias-tigray-conflict-idUSKBN27T14J.

[110] "Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed speech before Ethiopian parliament," Video clip,YouTube, November 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7GCiixbUOY.

[111] Addis Standard Twitter page, https://twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1143195376423505921?s=20 (accessed October 25, 2020). He was reinstated as security chief of Amhara regional special police in July 2021 by Amhara regional president Agegnehu

Tefera as Commander of the ASF with Maj. Gen. Mesele Belete, who was serving as the head of the Amhara regional state peace and security bureau.[112]

- **Tigrayan Regional Special Forces (TSF):** A regional paramilitary police force, reportedly operating under the Tigray region's security bureau before November 2020. [113]
- **Fanos (loosely translated as "patriot" from Amharic):** Armed groups perceived as both an Amhara nationalist movement and as an irregular militia group, with some members affiliated with the Amhara security forces.[114]
- **Militias:** Armed security that are not part of the regional police force, but which have historically played a role in Ethiopia's internal security at the local, community level. Local militias from both the Amhara and Tigray region were active in the initial fighting. Amhara militias came to be in control of areas and towns that were captured initially by Ethiopian federal and allied forces. Local militias in Tigray, including Tigrayan militias and militias also identifying as Walqayte have also been involved in abuses in Western Tigray following the outbreak of armed conflict.
- **Salugs:** Salug is a term used to refer to laborers, bandits, and smugglers in Sudan and in some parts of Ethiopia, including Western Tigray.

As the fighting drew nearer to the towns of Rawyan, Humera, and Mai Kadra, Tigrayan Special Forces (TSF), militias, local officials, and in some cases residents, arrested ENDF soldiers as well as local non-Tigrayan residents in Western Tigray on suspicion of working as federal government informants and passing information to Ethiopian federal and allied Amhara forces using Sudanese sim cards.[115] One Humera resident said that Tigrayan militias took at least two suspected informants when they fled the shelling of the town on November 9: "when everything fell apart, militias took the informants to Axum, I saw them there when I fled there a week later."[116] In other cases, it was not

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Teshager. Amhara Prosperity Party Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/AmharaMediaCorporation/posts/1591546951020293 (accessed July 21, 2021).

[112] "#ASDailyScoop: Amhara State Replaces Special Forces Commander," Addis Standard, February 17, 2022, https://addisstandard.com/asdailyscoop-amhara-state-replaces-special-forces-commander/. ; See also Human Rights Watch,Ethiopia:Special Police Execute 10," (New York:Human Rights Watch, 2012), https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/28/ethiopia-special-police-execute-10. ; European Institute of Peace, "The Special Police in Ethiopia," (October 2021), https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SpecialPoliceEthiopia-8-Oct-2021-CLEAN.pdf. While the federal constitution empowers regional states to establish police and administer security in their respective regions, the militarization of regional police forces has grown over the last decade. Regional forces operate across regional states and have unclear standards for training, weapons, and oversight. The organizational structure and chain of command of the regional special forces differ from state to state. The ASF operate under the Amhara region's security bureau.

[113] European Institute of Peace, "The Special Police in Ethiopia," October 2021, https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SpecialPoliceEthiopia-8-Oct-2021-CLEAN.pdf (stating that prior to the outbreak of conflict in November 2020, the special police in Tigray operated under the regional state security bureau, under Tekie Mitiku).

[114] Amhara Broadcasting Corporation, "በተለያዩ አደረጃጀት ሲንቀሳቀሱ የነበሩ ፋኖዎች ግንባር ፈጠሩ (Fanos operating in different organizations formed a front)," video clip, You Tube, (accessed August 27, 202) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RmaKHrvo.

[115] Interviews with Haben, #201, #203, #204, Sudan, December 2020. Encrypted text exchanges with #300, November 2020. Interviews with #20, Kibreab, Sudan, January 2021; with Lewam, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with #223, #224, Sudan, December 2020 and with Yibrah in August 2021. Phone interview with Kibrom, Tigray, May 2021.

[116] Phone interview with #224, Sudan, December 2020.

clear what happened to those detained by the TSF and militias.[117] The bodies of at least five men, allegedly to have been summarily killed during the initial offensives, including a militia and one wealthy Amhara investor from Humera, were found in mid-November in Idriss – a town approximately 25 kilometers east of Humera.[118]

The ENDF, the ASF and Amhara and Fano militias were able to quickly assume control of most of Western Tigray in the first 10 days following the initial offensive.[119] Eritrean forces were also present in some towns and villages near the Eritrean border.

### Timeline of November Fighting in Western Tigray

- **November 3-4**: Fighting at federal military base in Dansha.[120] Ethiopian federal government forces and allies launch offensives to shell and take over towns in Western Tigray.
- **November 6 -7**: Division settlement and Ruwassa, Division and Dansha are captured and controlled by ENDF and allied forces. Sudan announces that it closed its border with Tigray.[121]
- **November 8**: ENDF and allied forces fighting against Tigrayan forces in Banat (near the border with Sudan) and Nugarad.
- **November 9**: Massacre in Mai Kadra. Indiscriminate shelling of Humera from Eritrean border.[122] ENDF in control of Adi Remets. [123]
- **November 10:** ENDF and allied forces enter Mai Kadra town and carry out retaliatory attacks. Continued shelling of Humera, indiscriminate shelling of Rawyan begins. ENDF announces control of Humera airport.[124]

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[117] Interviews with Haben, #201, #203, and #204, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interviews with #223 and #224, Sudan, December 2020.

[118] Phone interview with #301, November 2020. Phone interview with #223, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with Kibrom, Tigray, May 2021. See also Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and UNOHCHR, "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," November 3, 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ET/OHCHREHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf.

[119] Ethiopian Broadcasting Media, Press Conference by Ethiopian army chief of staff, Berhanu Jula,November 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLEQJM6KgWk.

[120] "The midnight confrontation that helped unleash Ethiopia's conflict", *France 24*, November 27, 2020, https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201127-the-midnight-confrontation-that-helped-unleash-ethiopia-s-conflict; "General Tsadekan Gebretensae Exclusive Interview with Dimtsi Weyane Tigray, Broadcast on May 29, 2021," Tghat,June 7, 2021, https://tghat.com/2021/06/07/general-tsadekan-gebretensae-exclusive-interview-with-dimtsi-weyane-tigray-broadcast-on-may-29-2021/.

[121] Bethelem Feleke and Eoin McSweeney, "Ethiopia Prime Minister says Tigray ops 'limited' as Sudan closes border," *CNN News*, November 6, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/06/africa/ethiopia-abiy-sudan-border/index.html. ;

"Defense Forces Advancing to Mekele City: Ethiopian Army Chief," *Ezega News*, November 8, 2020, https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/8233/Defense-Forces-Advancing-to-Mekele-City-Ethiopian-Army-Chief.

[122] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling in Tigray Urban Areas,* (New York:Human Rights Watch, 2021), https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/11/ethiopia-unlawful-shelling-tigray-urban-areas.

[123] Phone interviews with Tadele and Alula, Tigray, June 2021.

[124] "Ethiopian military seizes airport as fighting rages in Tigray," *Al Jazeera,* November 11, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/10/ethiopias-pm-not-rebuffing-calls-for-calm-as-clashes-continue.

- **November 11**: ENDF forces enter and control Humera and Adebai towns.[125]
- **November 12-13:** ENDF forces enter and control Adi Goshu.[126]
- **November 14 -15:** May Gaba shelled and captured.[127]

## Indiscriminate Attacks

Displaced Tigrayan civilians across Western Tigray gave strikingly similar accounts of artillery attacks by Ethiopian military and allied forces on towns and villages before their capture.[128] Though Ethiopian officials repeatedly said that Ethiopian federal forces in November 2020 had focused on military targets and not caused civilian casualties, attacks during the capture of towns in many cases appeared indiscriminate.[129] Artillery shells struck civilians and residential homes, businesses, and near schools. The shelling took place despite the withdrawal or lack of significant presence or defense by Tigrayan forces.[130]

The settlement of Division, near the Amhara regional border, and which was established to host retired and demobilized TPLF fighters and those with disabilities, many of them in their 60s-and 70s, came under a barrage of artillery.[131] On November 6, Desta, a 50-year-old farmer, witnessed heavy shelling damaging homes and killing residents. "Shelling hit houses, sorghum storages, and shops in the town center," he said. Berhane a local accountant, saw his neighbor's two sons killed, and their house, located behind the commercial bank, damaged. "They were dead, hit by the shelling [at the entrance] of their compound, killing the people and the sheep," he said. [132] Hailemariam, a doctor

[125] "Ethiopia bombs Tigray arms depots, thousands flee fighting," France 24, November 11, 2020, https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201111-ethiopia-bombs-tigray-arms-depots-thousands-flee-fighting.

[126]"Speech by Major Dejene Maru asserting that Amhara Special Forces "liberated Dansha, Mai Kadra, Adi Goshu, Baeker, and Kafta Humera," Video Clip, You Tube, (accessed November 21, 2021)

[127] Phone interviews with Atsbaha and Tesfalem, Tigray, June 2021.

[128] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling in Tigray Urban Areas, (*New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021), https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/11/ethiopia-unlawful-shelling-tigray-urban-areas.

[129] "Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed Denies Civilians Killed in Tigray Operation," *Al Jazeera*, November 30, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/30/ethiopias-abiy-ahmed-denies-civilians-killed-in-tigray-operation.; Interview with State Minister Redwan Hussein Reuters Facebook page, December 2020, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=373363980639466.

[130] Interviews with Tewolde, Tesfatsion, #219, #293, #294, #295, #296, Sudan, December 2020; Interviews with Berihu, Robel, #241, Desta, Atsbaha, May 2021.

[131] Interviews with Hailemariam and Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020; Interviews with Desta, Berhane, and #118, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interview with Tsige, Tigray, April 2021; Phone interviews with Berhan, Fikadu, Abel, Negasse, Kiros #117, #180, #197, Tigray, May 2021; Interviews with Yonas and #178 in Tigray, June 2021. Division was selected as a resettlement site for demobilized fighters that fought against the Derg regime and was comprised of mainly TPLF fighters. See Settlement Patterns subsection. See also World Bank, "World Bank Discussion Paper 331, Africa Technical Department Series,"shorturl.at/dgkwS ; Alula Pankhurst and Francois Piguet, "Moving People in Ethiopia,"*Journal of Refugee Studies*, (2009); Dawit Anagaw, "The Socio-Economic Reintegration of The Tigray People's Liberation Front Ex-Fighters in The Post 1991 Conflict: The Case of Dansha-Division Settlement," (Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2011). http://etd.aau.edu.et/handle/123456789/10304?show=full.

[132] Interview with Berhane, Sudan, May 2021.

working in nearby Meareg hospital said he had to treat “around 12 … unarmed civilians, two were children … with bullet injuries.”[133]

Ethiopian forces, accompanied by Amhara Special Forces and militia, continued to capture towns and villages surrounding Division and near the Sudanese border, before making their way north, toward the Eritrean border. On November 9 and 10, heavy artillery fire from Eritrea hit the town of Humera, in the tri-border area with Sudan and Eritrea.[134] The shelling struck homes and businesses, killed and wounded residents, and forced scores to flee to Sudan, to neighboring towns in Tigray, and to rural areas surrounding Humera.[135] Abadi**,** a 26-year-old driver, was in kebele 02 and sought shelter amid storm drains and bridges when the shelling began.[136] When he returned to his neighborhood, he saw the bodies of his neighbors, Ato Teklu and his son Goitom, who had been killed by shells that struck their home, as well as the body of a 3- or 4-year-old girl from another family, he said. “Their bodies were scattered so we wrapped them with tarpaulin and buried them in one hole.”[137]

Doctors working at Humera’s Kahsay Aberra hospital began receiving a stream of patients throughout the day on November 9. Seyoum, a doctor working at the hospital, explained:

> “[We] started to get lots of injuries, blast injuries, burns, lost limbs, in groups of five, ten. We did triage. We saw 23 dead. Around 80 injured. A mortar shell fell right outside the emergency entrance.”[138]

Some residents displaced by shelling and fighting fled towards Rawyan, a town seven kilometers south of Humera. Hoping to find safety, they only encountered more artillery fire.[139] “There was heavy bombardment on the road between Humera and Rawyan,” said Mehari, a 31-year-old farmer. “Bombs fell in front of us, around 100 meters away. Many people fell during the chaos. I got separated from my family.”[140]

After the outbreak of fighting, residents, elders, local officials, and militias in Rawyan sought to negotiate with the Ethiopian military forces stationed at the military camp in

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[133] Interview with Hailemariam, Sudan, December 2020 and interviews with Andom and Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[134] Interviews with Tewolde, Mehari, Haben, and #219, Sudan, December 2020 and #34, Sudan, January 2021. Interviews with #128 and #129, Sudan, May 2021.

[135] Interviews with Abadi, Sudan, January 2021, and with Seyoum, #128, #129, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Yonas, Tigray, June 2021.

[136] Neighborhood” in Amharic and references the smallest administrative subdivision at the neighborhood. Interview with Abadi, Sudan, January 2021

[137] Interview with Abadi, Sudan, January 2021, and Tesfakiros, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Temesgen, Sudan, August 2021.

[138] Interviews with #297, #211, Sudan, December 2020 and with Seyoum, #128, and #129, Sudan, May 2021. See also, “Tigray Crisis: How Ethiopian doctors fled militia attacks,” *BBC News*, December 17, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55236354.

[139] Interviews with Mehari and #213, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with #46, Tigray, March 2021.

[140] Interviews with Mehari and #213, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with #46, Tigray, March 2021.

town – one of several in the Western Tigray Zone.[141] But negotiations broke down as Ethiopian troops and allied Amhara forces drew nearer to Rawyan. On November 10, residents awoke to the sounds of shelling and gunfire.[142] Artillery fire from the direction of the military camp fell near the bridge and Saint Mary's church as people began to flee.[143]



Haben (not his real name), a 39-year-old farmer, said he fled towards farmland in Bereket with his three young children, ages 10, 6, and 3, on November 9, 2020, when a heavy weapon munition fell near him. A fragment from the weapon hit his thigh, calf, ankle, and finger. After arriving in Sudan, he spent 20 days in treatment. © 2020 Human Rights Watch.

Many Tigrayans faced indiscriminate shelling while fleeing. Tewolde was running under the bridge in Rawyan when an older woman fell to the ground in front of him. "She was trampled by the stampede of people fleeing," he said.[144] Haben, a 39-year-old farmer, ran with his children towards Bereket across farmland when he was hit by fragments from a mortar shell. "The fragments hit me in nine places," he said. "They are still in my body. They hit me on the thigh, calf, ankle, and finger."[145]

## Extrajudicial Executions

During the first month of fighting, Ethiopian federal forces entered towns in Tigray accompanied by Amhara security forces and militia. They deliberately killed Tigrayan

[141] Interviews with Tesfatsion, #203, #219, Sudan, December 2020. Interview with Lewam, Sudan, May 2021.

[142] Interview with #219, Sudan, December 2020.

[143] Interviews with Tewolde and Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020. Interviews with Yemane and Lewam in Sudan, May 2021.

[144] Interview with Tewolde in Sudan, December 2020. Interviews with Semira, Yemane, and Lewam in Sudan, May 2021.

[145] Interview with Haben in Sudan, December 2020.

residents in at least 11 towns across Western Tigray, including in at least three large-scale attacks in Division, Adebai, and Mai Kadra. While the vast majority of the victims of the killings appeared to be men, women and children were not spared. [146]

The killings broadly took three forms. As occurred in other towns across Tigray in the initial phases of the conflict, security forces shot at and killed and wounded civilians when they entered towns, including Tigrayans trying to escape or flee.[147] Security forces, also sometimes extrajudicially, executed individuals they suspected to be fighters, residents they believed were supporting Tigrayan fighters, and retired fighters.[148] Lastly, Ethiopian and allied forces targeted prominent community figures such as government officials, investors, and business owners, at times as a result of denunciations.[149] Coming in the wake of the indiscriminate shelling of the towns, which triggered the displacement of Tigrayan and Amhara communities in Western Tigray, the killings created an atmosphere of terror and precipitated the initial flight of Tigrayans after the capture of towns.[150]

a. Unlawful Killings on Entering Towns

In 11 towns in Western Tigray, Ethiopian soldiers, Amhara Special Forces, and militias, entering towns with little resistance, fired weapons, and shot at civilians.[151] As Ethiopian government forces and allied Amhara forces entered Adebai via the main road on November 11, 2020,[152] "People were panicked and began to run," recalled Hailay**,** a 30-year-old animal trader from the town.[153] Residents – including women and children – were frequently fired on without warning and killed. "A young woman tried to run when

[146] Interview with Tewolde, Hailay, and with Zemariam, Sudan, December 2020. Interviews with Kalayou and with #140, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, June 2021.

[147] Interviews with Tewolde, Hailay, Zemariam, Kahsay, Tsegay, #221, #212, #204, #205, Sudan, December 2020.; Interviews with Merhawi, Teame, Yemane, Mihretab, Robel, Desta, #122, #123, #117, #119, #140, #114 #245, in Sudan, May and June 2021.; Phone interviews with Hailekiros, Filimon, Abebe, Worku, #181, Atsbaha, Yirgalem, #193, #195, #196, #197, Gebreselassie, Tigray, in May and June 2021 and phone interview with Fthawi in Sudan, August 2021. See also, Human Rights Watch*, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians*," (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021), https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/ethiopia-eritrean-forces-massacre-tigray-civilians. Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: The Massacre in Axum," February 26, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/3730/2021/en/.

[148] Interviews with Araya, Hailay, Kahsay, Andom, Tsega, Lewam, Berhane, Desta, Merhawi, Kalayou, #126, #19, #221, #204, #245, #114, Sudan, December 2020, January and May 2021. Phone interviews with Tsige in Tigray, April 2021, and Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[149] Interviews with Tesfatsion, Yemane, Mihrtab, Berhane, Merhawi, #208, #212, #201, #19, #23, #245, Sudan, December 2020, January, and May 2021. Phone interview with #28 in Tigray, March 2021; and with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[150] International Committee of the Red Cross, "Ethiopia: A dispatch from West Tigray and North Amhara," *ICRC,* November 27, 2020, https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ethiopia-displaced-people-fear-for-their-lives; Catholic Relief Services, "Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Tigray IDP Assessment and Response Update," December 22, 2020, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/crs_tigray_idp_assessment_and_response_updaet_.pdf.

[151] Interviews with Tewolde, Hailay, Zemariam, Kahsay, Tsegay, Merhawi, Andom, Yemane, Mihretab, Robel, Desta, #122, #123, #117, #119, #245, #140, #114, #212, #204, Sudan, December 2020, May, and June 2021. Phone interviews with Hilekiros, Filimon, Abebe, Worku, #181, Atsbaha, Yirgalem, #193, #195, #196, #197, Gebreselassie, Tigray, in May and June 2021, and with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[152] Interviews with Hailay, Zemariam, Kahsay, Tsgay, and Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020. Interviews with Lewam, #114, Sudan, January 2021. Phone interviews with #190, #192, Tigray, June 2021.

[153] Interview with Hailay, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with #192, Tigray, May 2021.

the Ethiopian military shot at her from a distance," Zemariam said**.** "There was also a mentally ill person [person with a mental health condition]. They shot him. It seemed random. I did not hear any commands."[154] Ethiopian soldiers shot at Tsegay**,** a 42-year-old *bajaj* (motor rickshaw) driver as he fled on his vehicle with his 11-year-old son, fatally wounding the boy. Tsegay said:

> They hit [my son's] ankle and thigh. … Maybe they thought we were someone else approaching them. I begged the soldiers for medical supplies if they could call for help. One soldier was going to call, but a second soldier said, "Finish him." He said [my son] "is a TPLF puppy and when he grows up, he'll be TPLF and fight us" ... My son lost so much blood that he bled to death.[155]

In Division, five residents described how at least 17 men, ranging in age from their 20s to their 70s, were killed in the neighborhood of Dedebit on November 6, after it was captured by Ethiopian and allied Amhara forces.[156] Tesfay Teklu, a 60-year-old man, was among those killed. "His wife was sick so he couldn't leave home," explained Desta. "[Tesfay] was on the doorstep and immediately put his hands up. One Fano struck him with a machete on the side of his neck and he fell. Then they hit him with stones, and he died."[157] Teame, from Division, reported that he found the bodies of Berhe, and a man known as "Jamaica," both of whom worked as security guards at a storage house, shortly after he fled the shooting.[158] Other residents recalled seeing their bodies and burying them.[159]

Fano militias fatally shot a woman named Letay while she was fleeing May Gaba around November 15. "She fell on the ground with her six-month-old baby on her back," said Atsbaha**.** "Her body stayed out for three days.… The baby was crying [when we returned], which is when we realized [the baby] was still alive, so we took the baby and buried [the mother] after three days."[160]
Witnesses said that similar killings of residents took place in Rawyan and Adi Goshu.[161]

b. Extrajudicial Executions of TPLF Officials and Suspected Tigrayan Fighters

[154] Interview with Zemariam #114, Sudan, December 2020, and May 2021.

[155] Interview with Tsegay, Sudan, December 2020.

[156] Interviews with Fitsum, #122, #123, Merhawi in Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Negasse, Tigray, May 2021.

[157] Interview with Fitsum, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Negasse, Tigray, May 2021.

[158] Interview with Teame in Sudan, May 2021. Interviews with Fitsum, #117, #122, Merhawi, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Negasse, Tigray, May 2021.

[159] Interviews with Merhawi, Desta, Mihretab, Andom, #122, #117, #119, #140, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Negasse, Abebe, Atsbaha, and #181, Tigray, May 2021. Account #29, collected by aid workers with consent for public use.

[160] Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, June 2021.

[161] Interviews with Teame, Mihretab, Desta, and #140 in Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Negasse, Abebe, Atsbaha, and #181, Tigray, May 2021. Account #29, collected by aid workers with consent for public use.

Once they took control of at least seven towns, Ethiopian federal forces and Amhara forces worked together to interrogate, detain, and sometimes summarily execute men suspected of being TPLF fighters or sympathizers.[162] A farmer, 50, in Division, recalled that he saw two Fano fighters and an Ethiopian soldier kill Haile, a nurse at the Meareg hospital, after accusing him of taking medicines to the TPLF: "They … tied his hands at the back with a rope and led him out of the compound. … I heard gunshots. After some minutes, I went with three others and found Haile's body on the road, about 100-150 meters away from the hospital. He had been shot in the back."[163]

A 54-year-old man recalled witnessing a summary execution. Ethiopian troops took him from his home in Rawyan, beat him, and handed him over to Amhara Special Forces in Humera. "I was in so much pain," he said. "There were pools of blood in my shoe." He then said he saw the ASF fighters behead a man he knew — a chef at a local hotel.[164]

Ethiopian federal forces, Amhara forces and their local allies detained and/or extrajudicially executed Tigrayan men and boys whom they suspected of sympathizing with the TPLF, of fighting or being affiliated to the TPLF, or for wearing military-style clothing.[165] After the shelling stopped in Humera, a construction worker ventured out of his hiding place and reported seeing four armed men in civilian clothes kill his former classmate, Tekelgn, near the Humera high school:

> Tekelgn was outside the shop where he worked. There was a photo of Meles [Zenawi] [the former Ethiopian prime minister] posted outside. The [armed men] burned the photo. [Tekelgn] was unarmed; he was telling the gunmen that he is not a TPLF member. They shot him once in the chest. When we tried to pick up his body, they told us not to.[166]

Ethiopian soldiers "shot at people running, those wearing military boots, those wearing khaki," said Hailay, a farmer in Adebai." He said the federal forces, working together with Fanos, killed his neighbor Gerezighar Araye and his son Goitom:

> Gerezighar owned a liquor store.... He used to be a soldier.... He was wearing the [former] ENDF camouflage uniform when they entered his house. The Ethiopian military saw the uniform and asked him about it, and he said: "I am a retired soldier." As he was showing his ID as proof,

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[162] Interviews with Araya, Hailay, Kahsay, Andom, Tsega, Lewam, Berhane, Desta, Merhawi, Kalayou, #19, #126, #145, #221, #204, #245, Sudan, December 2020 and January and May 2021. Phone interviews with Tsige in Tigray, April 2021, and Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[163] Interview with Desta, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Tsige in April 2021.

[164] Interview with #221, Sudan, December 2020.

[165] Interview with Hailay, Merhawi, #126, #245, Sudan, December 2020, and May 2021.Similar tactics used in Axum, see Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: The Massacre in Axum," February 26, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/3730/2021/en/.

[166] Interview with #201, Sudan, December 2020.

> they said: “No, come with us!” They made him come out of the house… and strip to his underwear. They shot him three times in the chest. Goitom screamed as they shot his father, and they shot him in the chest, too.[167]

Those who fled towns said security forces stopped them at checkpoints and checked their bodies for injuries or marks suggesting they had carried a rifle on their shoulders or weight on their hips.[168] “I saw one man being checked [by Ethiopian soldiers], a carpenter,” whose work involved carrying heavy tools, said a 21-year-old driver from Rawyan. “They maybe found a scar, because they shot him.”[169]

Kalayou said a mixed group of security forces, including Ethiopian soldiers, Amhara militias, and Fanos stopped him and his friends, at a petrol station near Rawyan on November 11, checked their bodies for marks or scars, beat them, and accused them of being TPLF members. [170]

In some cases, Ethiopian security forces mutilated the dead bodies of TPLF officials, Tigrayan fighters or suspected supporters[171]. Kahsay said that after fleeing with her children and arriving in Humera town in early November, “We saw a man in a Tigray special force uniform. They had his legs chained to a car. They dragged his body through the streets while we heard the sounds of gunshots.”[172]

c. Deliberate Targeting of Prominent Figures and Business Owners

Ethiopian and allied forces extrajudicially executed prominent community leaders and local business owners.[173] At times, non-Tigrayan local residents helped identify prominent individuals in the community.[174] For example, on November 10, a wealthy farmer named Isaias was driving his tractor on the bridge on the main road out of Rawyan towards Baeker and Mai Kadra when Ethiopian troops and Fano militia stopped him. According to three witnesses, one town resident identified Isaias. [175] Tesfatsion

[167] Interview with Hailay, Sudan, December 2020. Interviws with #114 and Lewam, Sudan, May 2021.

[168] Interview with Araya, #223, in Sudan December 2020. Interview with #126 with Merhawi, in Sudan May 2021.; Cara Anna, “Leave no Tigrayan: In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased,” *Associated Press,* April 7, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-tigray-minority-ethnic-cleansing-sudan-world-news-842741eebf9bf0984946619cc15023 (Noting that “Kidu Gebregirgis, a farmer, said he was questioned almost daily about his ethnicity, his shirt yanked aside to check for marks from the strap of a gun. He said the Amhara harvested around 5,000 kilograms (5.5 short tons) of sorghum from his fields and hauled it away, a task that took two weeks.”).

[169] Interviews with Merhawi, #245, Sudan, May 2021.

[170] Interview with Kalayou, Sudan, May 2021.

[171] Interview with Kahsay, #14, Sudan, December 2020, and January 2021.

[172] Interview with Kahsay, Sudan, December 2020.

[173] Interviews with Tesfatsion, #208, #212, #205, Sudan, December 2020, with #23, Sudan, January 2021, and with #245, Yemane, Mihretab, Berhane, Merhawi in Sudan, May 2021. Phone inerviews with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[174] Interviews with Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020 and with #23, Yemane, Mihetab, #137, Sudan, January, and May 2021.

[175] Interviews with #208, Tesfatsion, Merhawi, #245, Sudan, December 2020, and May 2021

recalled that the resident reported Isaias as "exploitative" and "hating the Amharas."[176] "A Fano hit [Isaias] on the head with a machete and he fell to the ground. Other Fanos hit him too," said Merhawi**,** who watched the killing from his home. "There were about 15 Fanos around him but not all hit him. Then they left, and he stayed lying on the ground."[177]

Religious figures in Rawyan who in early November 2020 had participated in the negotiations with the Ethiopian military were also among those killed.[178] "Someone [in the town] pointed them out. This happened once the soldiers took over the town ... We heard gunfire and wanted to go out and get the bodies, but the Ethiopian soldiers stopped us," said Tesfatsion, who said that he later saw a sheikh's body.[179]

Fano and other militias killed Tesfaye, a shoe seller in Dansha known for his charity work, outside his workplace, near Saint Mikael church, said Berhane**,** who witnessed the attack. "First, they struck his head with a machete. His brain was coming out," he said. "There were a lot of them, and they surrounded him. They dragged him by his legs, holding onto his feet. After they dragged him some distance, they left him there. His brain was completely out of his head."[180]

## Burning and Destruction of Neighborhoods

Federal and allied forces systematically destroyed entire neighborhoods in Division.[181] Residents described how Ethiopian federal forces, Amhara forces and Walqayte militias deliberately set fire to houses, destroying mender (neighborhoods) 1 and 2 around November 6 and 7, 2020. This shocked many Division residents, as the settlement was run by the Ethiopian military, and many residents received veteran pensions.

Hadgu, from Division, said that on November 6, "most of mender 1 houses were burned."[182] Witnesses said that the destruction involved the federal forces, Fanos, and Walqayte militias.[183] A 25-year-old driver from the settlement said that they selectively targeted Tigrayan houses: "We did not expect this. They went to private houses. They were looking for Tigrayan houses ... [T]he Amhara [residents] showed which houses belonged to Tigrayans."[184] A shop owner, 22, said federal forces burned down his house

[176] Interview with Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020.

[177] Interview with Merhawi, Sudan, May 2021.

[178] Interviews with Tesfatsion, Yemane, Sudan, December 2020, and May 2021.

[179] Interview Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020.

[180] Interview with Berhane, Sudan, May 2021.

[181] Interviews with Hadgu, Berihu, Teame, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Natanael, Kiros in Tigray, March, and May 2021.

[182] Interview with Hadgu in Sudan, May 2021.

[183] Interviews with Hadgu, Berihu, in Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Fikadu, Negasse, Kiros, #180, Tigray, April and May 2021.

[184] Phone interview with #180, Tigray, May 2021.

as they entered Division, forcing him to flee the village. He and other residents collected a list of 88 houses that the ENDF burned that day.[185]

Berihu saw around 80 to 100 Fano fighters, all armed — some in civilian clothes, others in the old ENDF uniforms: “First they came and took over and started looting. They looted these neighborhoods [mender 1 and 2] and then burned them — I was there when mender 1 and 2 were burned. … They used [fuel] to burn.”[186] Kiros, a 63-year-old farmer, said he could only watch as non-Tigrayan residents from neighboring villages destroyed his house:




Satellite imagery from November 11, 2020 shows the eastern side of Division. Many structures along the main road are completely destroyed. According to low resolution imagery (not shown), the structures were damaged between November 5 and 10, 2020. Fires were detected in the area on November 7.

> [They] said: “This is not your land! We own this place! Your land is on the other side of Tekeze. Go there! Live there! You can claim what you want there, but you have nothing to claim here.” Me and my friends managed to save materials from the roof, and then we went to the Amhara Special Forces and told them the Walqayte [were] stealing everything from the house. Instead of protecting us, the Amhara Special Forces took what we

[185] Phone interview with Natanael, Tigray, March 2021.

[186] Interview with Berihu, Sudan, May 2021.

had salvaged from
the house.[187]

Three residents returned to Division to find that their houses had been destroyed.[188] Teame, a 74-year-old farmer and retired TPLF fighter, fled to Sheglil during the shelling but returned two weeks later. “I found [mender 1] was burned [down], including my house,” he said. “Sometimes I feel they burned it to terrify people, because our mender is the first mender you find when you come from the direction of Dansha.... They know that this place is for [veterans] with disabilities and that our house was built by the ENDF.”[189]

## The Mai Kadra Massacre and its Aftermath

Mai Kadra, one of the larger farming towns in Western Tigray Zone, was the site of the first publicly reported large-scale massacre in early November 2020. In subsequent days and months, strikingly different accounts of what had unfolded in Mai Kadra emerged. Federal and regional authorities seized on the narrative of an atrocity committed by Tigrayan forces to provide further arguments for its offensive, while Tigrayan communities insisted that they too were harmed. But the massacre that took place resulted from a unique combination of local circumstances, including preexisting tensions in the town and news of the advance and abuses by Ethiopian and allied Amhara forces as fighting spread in Western Tigray.[190]

Tensions between neighbors and residents in Mai Kadra, which had steadily grown for several years, surged in the initial days of the war. News of the imminent advance of Ethiopian federal forces and allied forces, and of attacks by Amhara and Fano militia on neighboring towns south of Mai Kadra, created an atmosphere of intense fear among Tigrayans. On the morning of November 9, tensions rose sharply following news that the Ethiopian military and allied forces were several kilometers from the town after having routed Tigrayan forces. Tigrayan youth began carrying out neighborhood searches, monitoring newcomers in the town. By the afternoon, Amhara daily workers opportunistically looted Tigrayan businesses. The rising tensions caused many Tigrayans and Amhara to hide in their homes or flee to the countryside. Beginning at 3 p.m. and continuing into the evening, Tigrayan men and youth with knives, machetes,

[187] Phone interview with Kiros, Tigray, May 2021.

[188] Interview with Berihu and Hadgu, May 2021. Phone interview with Negasse, Tigray, May 2021.

[189] Interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021. See also Dawit Anagaw, “The Socio-Economic Reintegration of The Tigray People's Liberation Front Ex-Fighters in The Post 1991 Conflict: The Case of Dansha-Division Settlement, Tigray,” (Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2011, http://etd.aau.edu.et/handle/123456789/10304?show=full.

[190] Robbie Corey-Boulet and Abdelmoniem Abu Idris Ali, “Questions Linger Among the Corpses of an Ethiopian massacre,” *Agence France Presse,* November 25, 2020, https://uk.news.yahoo.com/questions-linger-among-corpses-ethiopian-150033223.html. Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, and Silvia Aloisi, “How Ethnic Killings Exploded in an Ethiopian Town,” *Reuters*, June 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/.

and axes, beat, stabbed, and hacked Amhara residents, killing scores and injuring about 100. By evening, armed Amharas also attacked Tigrayan residents in town.

Differing estimates have emerged of the number of those killed. The number of Amharas killed ranged from around 200 to over 1,000.[191] A team of federal police investigators and prosecutors deployed to Mai Kadra in December 2020 concluded that 229 civilians were killed. [192] The joint investigation by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) concluded that more than 200 civilians were killed.[193] Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch researchers spoke with an expert involved in the investigation who described the exhumation of 229 bodies found in three mass grave sites behind the Abune Aregawi church.[194] The expert evaluated 40 bodies, the majority of which showed blunt force head injuries, and found three identification cards of those killed from the Amhara region.[195]

After Ethiopian military forces and allied Amhara security forces and militias captured the town by 10 a.m. on November 10, these forces targeted the remaining Tigrayan residents in a brutal wave of revenge killings, arbitrary detentions, pillage, and eventual mass expulsion – a pattern that would repeat against Tigrayan communities across the Western Tigray Zone in the year that followed.

a. Background

Located near the border with Sudan, some 30 kilometers south of Humera town, Mai Kadra served as a resettlement site under both the Derg and EPRDF regimes.[196] Until the outbreak of the war in November 2020, it had an estimated population of around

[191] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021. See also, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, "EHRCO Preliminary Investigation Report on Major Human Rights Violations in and around Maikadra," December 25, 2020, https://ehrco.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/EHRCO-Preliminary-Investigation-Report-on-Major-Human-Rights-Violations-in-and-around-Maikadra-1.pdf.

[192] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of the Prime Minister, "Transcript: Prime Minister's Office Press Briefing 3 June 2021," June 3, 2021, https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/prime-ministers-office-press-briefing-transcript-june-3-2021//

[193] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the UN OHCHR, "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," November 3, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/report-ethiopian-human-rights-commission-ehrcoffice-united-nations-high-commissioner.

[194] Phone interview with expert, Ethiopia, March 2021. Also see Interview with #169, Ethiopia, November 2020. A team of federal police investigators and prosecutors deployed to Mai Kadra in December 2020 concluded that 229 individuals were killed. See, for example, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of the Prime Minister, "Transcript: Prime Minister's Office Press Briefing 3 June 2021," June 3, 2021, https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/prime-ministers-office-press-briefing-transcript-june-3-2021.

[195] Phone interview with expert, Ethiopia, March 2021.

[196] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021, and with Hanna, Ethiopia, November 2020. See also Jonathan Zbedea,"Mai Kadra," *VOA Amharic*, February 8, 2021, https://amharic.voanews.com/a/5770001.html; Joachim D. Ahrens, "Evacuees from border towns in Tigray setting up in makeshift camps: Mission 9-18 December 1998, UNDP Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, (1998)," https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/tigray01.html.

40,000 people, consisting of Tigrayan, Amhara, and Walqayte residents.[197] Although communities lived alongside one another, neighborhoods were largely formed along ethnic lines and intercommunal tensions had built up over the years.[198]

As in other towns in this fertile agricultural district, most of Mai Kadra's residents worked as farmers, growing sesame, sorghum, and other cereals on the farms surrounding the town. Mai Kadra's population would swell for several weeks or months of the year when farm laborers from around Ethiopia, including from other areas in Tigray and the Amhara region, came in pursuit of seasonal work, typically tilling land owned by wealthier farmers or investors.[199]

b. Rising Tensions

There were tensions along ethnic lines well before the November 9 and 10 massacres over issues such as the administration and unequal distribution of farmland, the corrupt practices of local officials, and the abusive behavior of security forces in response to the demands raised by the Welkait Identity Committee**.**[200]

The strains became more visible following the 2016-2018 Amhara protests.[201] Amhara and Walqayte residents said that local authorities suppressed the Amharic language and targeted establishments that played Amharic songs, while the local police harassed and arrested individuals with perceived or actual affiliation with the Welkait Identity Committee in the town.[202]

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[197] Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, Silvia Aloisi, "How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," *Reuters, June* 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/.

[198] Interviews with Zelalem, Hiruy, Fentahun, and #90, Ethiopia, December 2019. Interviews with #222, Araya, Senait, Mehari Haben, #220, Tesfatsion, Amanuel, #243, Sudan, December 2020 and January and May 2021. Phone interviews with Abrehet and Anonymous, in, Sudan, September 2021, and with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

[199] Interview with Haileselassie, Sudan, December 2020. See also Ethiopia National Disaster Risk Management Commission, "Livelihoood Profile Tigray Region, Ethiopia February 2007, http://www.ndrmc.gov.et/Livelihoods/Tigray/Downloadable/Tigray%20Livelihood%20Zone%20Reports/EPL.pdf; *See also* African Development Bank, "Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Report for the Proposed Baeker IAIP and Mai Kadra RTC" (March 2018),https://esa.afdb.org/sites/default/files/Ethiopia%20-%20Intergrated%20Agro%20Industrial%20Park%20Development%20Project_Tigray_ESIA_26%20March%202018.pdf; See also Rebecca Marie Coulborn, Tesfay Gebregzabher Gebrehiwot et al., "Barriers to access to visceral leishmaniasis diagnosis and care among seasonal mobile workers in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia: A qualitative study," *PLOS Water journal*, (2018), https://journals.plos.org/plosntds/article?id=10.1371/journal.pntd.0006778 (Between February and May workers would clear and prepare the farmland, some staying to weeding season. Others remained for longer periods to participate in the harvest season, which would begin in early November for sesame, or in December for sorghum.); Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, "Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violations in Maikadra, Preliminary Findings",November 24,2020, https://ehrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Maikadra-Preliminary-Findings-English-1.pdf.

[200] Interviews with Zelalem, Hiruy, Fentahun, and #90, Ethiopia, December 2019. Interviews with #222, Araya, Senait, Mehari Haben, #220, Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020. Interview with #243, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Abrehet and Anonymous, Sudan, September 2021, and with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021. See also Ethiopian Human Rights Council, 141st Special Report, "Stop the Violations of the Human Rights of Citizens Voicing Identity Demands!" June 1, 2016, https://ahrethio.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HRCO-141st-Special-Report-English.pdf ;Haftom Tesfay, "Rural Land Dispute Settlement Mechanism: The Case of Humera, (LLM thesis,Addis Ababa University,2011), pp. 84-87, https://land.igad.int/index.php/documents-1/countries/ethiopia/conflict-1/85-rural-land-dispute-settlement-mechanisms-in-tigray-the-case-of-humera/file (Describing how the Rural Land and Proclamation directive granted power to rural land use administrative officers at the tabia (administrative division at the village or neighborhood level) which were exposed to "forger, fraud, and manipulation." Several criminal cases were instituted against individuals at the Mai Kadra rural land administrative unit as well as against the mayor of Mai Kadra.

[201] As described in the Background section.

[202] Interviews with Zelalem, Fentahun, #91, #298, Ethiopia, December 2019.

Tigrayan, Walqayte, and Amhara residents complained that administrators did little to curb acts of violence and grievances over the unequal distribution of land and took measures that contributed to local tensions.[203] Abrehet, a 70-year-old Tigrayan woman explained that the unequal treatment began as early as the 1990s: "The [federal government] gave Tigrayan families and households two or three hectares of farmland. But Walqayte and Amhara farmers had much more, like 20-30 hectares, sometimes over 50 hectares."[204] Tensions began to grow, however, in 2015. A 43-year-old Walqayte farmer said he joined the Welkait Identity Committee after his land was taken away by administrators. "They took 20 hectares from me and 20 hectares from Eyerus. We were farming the land until (2016)."[205] Haben, a Tigrayan farmer, criticized corrupt land practices after 2018, but blamed administrators he said were linked to the federal government for granting Walqayte people more land: "A Tigrayan would get two hectares, while a Walqayte person would get five hectares of land," he said.[206]

By 2018, these tensions led to mobilization along ethnic lines in certain neighborhoods in Mai Kadra. "There were different signs that people were forming in groups, a Tigrayan group, Walqayte group, Amhara groups. Small groups of people, but divided by ethnicity," recalled Abrehet.[207]

[203] Interview with #89, Fentahun, Ethiopia, December 2019. Interviews with #222, Haben, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interviews with Abrehet, Yehansu, #167, Sudan, September, and October 2021.

[204] Phone interview with Abrehet, Sudan, September 2021. See also Laura Hammond, "Governmantality in Motion: 25 Years of Ethiopia's Experience of Famine and Migration Policy," *Mobilities*, Vol.6 (2011) p. 424. (Stating that "the government's attitude towards returnees was that they should not be given much special treatmentReturnees should not be given the same access to land as local people, as this would create jealousy between locals and returnees... Instead, returnees were expected to produce sesame and sorghum on smaller plots to meet most of their cash and food needs.)

[205] Interview with #89, Gondar, December 2019.

[206] Interview with Haben, Sudan, December 2020. See also, Haftom Tesfay, "Rural Land Dispute Settlement Mechanism: The Case of Humera," (LLM thesis, Addis Ababa University), pp. 84-87, https://land.igad.int/index.php/documents-1/countries/ethiopia/conflict-1/85-rural-land-dispute-settlement-mechanisms-in-tigray-the-case-of-humera.

[207] Phone interview with Abrehet, Sudan, September 2021.




Satellite imagery shows an overview of Mai Kadra on November 11, 2020. Areas with significant damage are highlighted in red, and locations of areas of significant events in November and December 2020 – including the reported detention of Tigrayans in Abadi warehouse – are marked with orange squares.

Complaints over land fueled tensions across neighborhoods; in particular, they pitted Tigrayan residents of the Samre neighborhood against the Walqayte residents of Bole sefer neighborhood, explained Amanuel.[208] "There were [agricultural] investors in town with [commercial] interests," said Tesfay, a Tigrayan student. "They were agitating. … They started fanning differences in 2018-2019. … They started mobilizing youth in Bole

[208] Interview with Amanuel, Sudan, January 2021.

and in other areas."[209] In May 2018, attempts by town administrators to give land in the Tigrayan neighborhood of Samre to Walqayte youth from Adi Remets, another town in the district, further inflamed the situation.[210]

Fights broke out between the groups on a few occasions in 2018 and 2019.[211] In 2018, a group of young Tigrayan men staged a demonstration, making their way through different neighborhoods and demanding the administration distribute land for houses. Abrehet said**:**

> While they were walking, a Walqayte with a gun insulted the Tigrayans demonstrating. … "This is Welkait! You do not deserve any land!" he said.... A few Tigrayans began to throw some stones at [him].... When the [demonstrators] got to the administrator's office they were agitated. They were angry and asked "Why don't you distribute land for Tigrayans? Why are you so corrupt? Why are you administering unequally?" [212]

In June 2019, Hiruy**,** a Walqayte resident, said that clashes between Tigrayan and Walqayte residents mainly involved the use of "stones and sticks," but at times also weapons, and that property was occasionally destroyed.[213] On June 19, 2019, Tigrayan youth and residents looted homes in the Bole neighborhood, where Walqayte predominately lived. "It was the youth that did this, but they were accompanied and protected by the militia, special force, and police," added Zelalem.[214]

Farmers and seasonal workers also took part in the violence.[215] Biniyam, a 30-year-old Amhara resident, explained how laborers collecting harvests confronted each other after workers from the predominantly Tigrayan neighborhood of Samre grazed their cows on his brother's sorghum's field in 2018:

> My brother [went] to the government offices to raise the issue with the administrators … When he came back, the [Tigrayans] were not happy. … They wanted to attack my brother, but the Amharas were made aware too. … When they [began] to follow my brother, we shouted. The local Amhara militias and civilians armed with weapons gathered to save my brother. In between this, the Tigray police interfered and spoke to the two sides not to engage in conflict, and we dispersed.[216]

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[209] Phone interview with Tesfay, Sudan, October 2021.

[210] Interview with #89, Ethiopia, December 2019. Phone interview with #167, Sudan, September 2021.

[211] Interviews with Zelalem, Hiruy, in Ethiopia, December 2019; with Abrehet, Asmelesh, and #167, Sudan, September and November 2021; and with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

[212] Phone interview with Abrehet, Sudan, September 2021.

[213] Interview with Hiruy, Ethiopia, December 2019.

[214] Interview with Zelalem, Ethiopia, December 2019.

[215] Phone interview with #220, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

[216] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

A 21-year-old Tigrayan resident, explained that such disputes were a "normal" occurrence at the time. He recalled how "Amhara and Tigrayan *salugs* [laborers] did not like
each other.[217]

c. Mai Kadra at the Onset of the War

The communications blackout in Tigray after November 4, 2020, deprived Mai Kadra residents of reliable information about the conflict unfolding in the Zone. Mai Kadra's proximity to the Sudanese border, however, enabled some residents who owned Sudanese SIM cards to access the Sudanese network.[218] But, as in other towns in Western Tigray located near the Sudanese border, Tigrayan militias in Mai Kadra issued orders that "no one should use Sudanese SIM cards," taking their continued use as a way to identify alleged government informants and artillery spotters. Two witnesses recounted how militia and local residents in the town searched for informants who used phones after
November 4.[219]

Between November 6 and 8, Ethiopian federal forces and allied Amhara forces advancing in Western Tigray encountered stiff resistance from Tigrayan militias and Special Forces around Banat and Lugdi – both farmland areas in the unsettled border Zone between Ethiopia and Sudan, around 10 to 15 kilometers west of Mai Kadra.[220] Residents said that Mai Kadra administrators and volunteers provided food, water, and other logistical assistance to the Tigrayan Special Forces and militias fighting nearby, while wounded Tigrayan fighters came to Mai Kadra's health facilities for treatment.[221]

Despite the blackout, information about events in the nearby areas trickled in as people fleeing fighting arrived in Mai Kadra. Farmers and seasonal workers, including a large number of Amharas, fled the fighting around Banat and Lugdi, and found refuge in Mai

[217] Phone interview with #220, Sudan, December 2020; and with Abrehet, September 2021. Salug is a term used to refer to laborers in Sudan and in some parts of Ethiopia, including western Tigray. Salug's may also refer to former laborers who engage in banditry or in human smuggling. See also Altai Consulting for the European Union, "European Union Trust Fund Monitoring and Learning System Horn of Africa: Quarterly Report – Q3 2018," February 2019, p. 51 https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/eutf_hoa_mls_q3_2018_report_final.pdf. ; European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa "Cross-Border Analysis and Mapping Final Report," September 22, 2016, https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/files/2020/02/CROSS-BORDER-ANALYSIS-AND-MAPPING.pdf ("These movements are often controlled by the so-called 'Salug', former labourers turned brokers who make a living facilitating employment of farm workers in Sudan and Ethiopia. Salug are said to have links to criminal gangs").

[218] Keep it On,"Shattered Dreams and Lost Opportunities: A Year in the Fight to #Keepiton," March 2021, https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/03/KeepItOn-report-on-the-2020-data_Mar-2021_3.pdf.

[219] Interview with Haben, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with Tesfay, Sudan, October 2021.

[220] Phone interview with Habtamu, Ethiopia, November 2020. Interviews with #218, #299, Haben, #220, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with Yibrah and Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021. Describing border crossing at Lugdi. See United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund Allocation, "Republic of the Sudan: Displacement, December 30, 2020, https://cerf.un.org/what-we-do/allocation/2021/summary/20-RR-SDN-46213.

[221] Interview with Amanuel, Sudan, January 2021. Phone interviews with Tesfay, #167, Sudan, September 2021; with in October 2021, and with Asmelesh in Sudan, November 2021.

Kadra.[222] Tigrayans fleeing violence further south and southeast of the town also passed through Mai Kadra and gave word of fighting and killings elsewhere in Tigray and along the boundaries with the Amhara region, particularly in Dansha, Tigray (71 kilometers away), and in Abderafi, Amhara (42 kilometers away). After hearing unconfirmed reports of Tigrayans killed by Amharas in Dansha, Abrehet, a 70-year-old housewife,
decided to flee.[223]

Tensions and fear mounted.[224] "The situation in Mai Kadra was not good," said a 32-year-old teacher. "Many people came in and out [of the town]. The situation was very stressful and out of the normal."[225] A Tigrayan doctor in the town explained the atmosphere:

> Before the war there were already a large number of laborers, probably as many as the original residents of Mai Kadra in the town. Some of them went back [after the war started] but others stayed in Mai Kadra. They were staying in the street, and in people's houses. … People grew very afraid of the people that were staying in the street. … They did not trust them. Especially after what happened in Dansha, we used to hear that after the federal army entered Dansha, the Fano group came in, following them, and killed a lot of Tigrayans. So, we were afraid not of the military but of what the Fanos could do and how these people could even assist them, so we did not trust them, and we feared them.[226]

In the absence of a regular security presence, youth groups began organizing by neighborhood, residents said.[227] "There were youth volunteers who decided to protect the town since there was a gap in security, so they were searching for new faces, and monitoring new people," recalled a 25-year-old Tigrayan student.[228]

Their actions left Amhara residents in the town also fearing for their safety. "The [Tigrayans] were coming around our area holding axes and machetes," said a 30-year-old Amhara woman who lived near Gimb Sefer.[229] "Residents of our neighborhood were worried and asking our Tigrayan neighbors why this was happening. They responded that groups are coming to rob and that the [youth groups] would stop them."[230] Biniyam,

[222] Interview with #299, #216, #217, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with Yehansu, Sudan, October 2021.

[223] Phone interview with Abrehet, Sudan, September 2021.

[224] Interview with Haileselassie, Sudan, December 2020.

[225] Phone interview with Yehansu, Sudan, October 2021.

[226] Phone interview with Asmelesh, Sudan, November 2021.

[227] Phone interviews with Tesfay, Yehansu, and with #166, Sudan, October 2021.

[228] Phone interviews with Tesfay, Yehansu, and with #166, Sudan, October 2021.

[229] Phone interview with Hanna, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[230] Phone interview with Hanna, Ethiopia, November 2020.

an Amhara resident also living in Gimb Sefer neighborhood, said local youth from the Samre neighborhood also "began to search and inspect individual houses." He added that the local youth registered "Amharas from other areas residing in Amhara homes.... They registered who was armed and who was not. They also actually put restrictions not to move from area to area … from going to the farmland."[231]

On November 8, residents began learning of an impending ENDF attack on the town. "We started hearing that they were really getting close," said Asmelesh, a doctor in Mai Kadra. "Some people were scared, others were saying: 'This is just rumors.'"[232]

d. November 9

On the morning of November 9, residents began their daily routine – heading to work in the fields or in town. Yehansu, a teacher, awoke at 7 a.m. and was eating breakfast at a restaurant in the neighborhood of Gijet when he saw "injured Tigrayan and ENDF soldiers loaded on tractors … also tired Tigrayan fighters coming to Mai Kadra" from the front.[233] A 15-year-old grade 8 student**,** who was excited to be back in class that week after several months of school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, said: "Around fourth period, I could hear *boom*, *boom* [at a distance]. Our teacher told us to just go back home."[234] Araya, who worked as a daily laborer, was heading to the nearby farmland that morning when he saw other laborers return with their tractors towards the town. "I was afraid because I could hear gunshots in every direction," he said.[235]

Between 10 a.m. and noon, according to two Tigrayan residents, word spread that the Ethiopian federal forces advance on the town was imminent.[236] The news, combined with the return of laborers from the farmland to "Hawelty" – a square in the center of town – contributed to a sharp rise in tensions. Yehansu, a Tigrayan, said he passed through Gimb Sefer neighborhood in the center of town and recalled the uneasy atmosphere:

> People were grouping by ethnicity. … things were not good to see. People that we never ever saw in town were standing around in the streets, grouping by ethnicity, some with sticks and it just made you feel very uncomfortable – as if they came to beat us up. And they had a very threatening presence. Some said that the TPLF is losing, and that their people are coming. Some started playing Amharic music and were saying

[231] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

[232] Phone interview with Asmelesh, Sudan, November 2021.

[233] Phone interview with Yehansu, Sudan, October 2021.

[234] Interview with #215, Sudan, December 2020 and with #132, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Yibrah, Sudan, September 2021.

[235] Interview with Araya, Sudan, December 2020.

[236] Phone interviews with Yehansu, Sudan, October 2021 and with Asmelesh, Sudan, November 2021.

> TPLF days are over. It just made all of us very uncomfortable. Some Tigrayans were scared and started to flee. [237]

A 32-year-old Tigrayan resident said that the Amhara daily workers seemed to be "celebrating" that they would prevail against the Tigray administration. [238]

While Tigrayan militia and special police were at the battlefront, an unclear number of Tigrayan militia present in the town announced to residents that "thieves were coming" that day and ordered them "to protect themselves and their houses," according to two residents. [239] Tigrayan youth groups, Tesfay said, began "monitoring the new people" that morning, and took some to the police station in Bole neighborhood, because they had "four or five Sudanese sim cards each." [240]

The reaction of Tigrayan residents to the news of the Ethiopian military's advance stoked fears among Amhara residents. Mahlet said that at 10 a.m., she noticed that other Amhara residents, in her neighborhood of Gimb Sefer, were disturbed by the announcement from Tigrayan militias. She and other neighborhood residents appealed to their local kebele officials, an Amhara man named Dessalegn and another named Tamir, who reassured them. "The kebele officials said nothing will happen," she said. "They said to stay
at home." [241]

Around noon, a 58-year-old Tigrayan priest who lived near Abune Aregawi, a church that lies north of Hawelty square and close to Gimb Sefer, encountered a Tigrayan laborer fleeing from Abderafi. The priest recounted that the laborer warned him it was time to "escape for [their] lives," after he witnessed Fano and Walqyate militia kill his friend in farmland near Mai Kadra and said that "others coming after them would steal and loot." [242] By then residents, particularly those living on the edges of Mai Kadra, noticed people fleeing from the center of town, warning others to do the same. [243]

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[237] Phone interview with Yehansu, Sudan, October 2021.

[238] Phone interview with #167, Sudan, September 2021.

[239] Phone interview with Biniyam, with Mahlet, Tigray, September, and October 2021.

[240] Phone interviews with Tesfay, Sudan, October 2021, and with Asmelesh, Sudan, November 2021. According to an Amhara witness interviewed by Reuters, and in a preliminary report by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Tigrayan youth carrying knives and machetes began checking people's identification documents that morning and to look for people who owned Sudanese SIM cards.; Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, and Silvia Aloisi, "How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," *Reuters*, June 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-repor t/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/. See also Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, "Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra, Preliminary Findings," November 24, 2020, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vS-0N8xCDZDRAM5lzBAELTVjqfKLrzJha8xpKdqh1OE/mobilebasic.

[241] Interview with Haileselassie, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with Mahlet, Ethiopia in October 2021.

[242] Interview with Berhe, Sudan, December 2020.

[243] Interview with Haileselassie, Araya, #217, Sudan, December 2020, and with #132, Sudan, May 2021.

The teacher, Yehansu, said: “Everyone was worried and asking [for information] from those who were coming [into town] because the telecommunications were down. Everyone was worried and afraid… because we are Tigrayans, the ENDF soldiers will beat us or kill us.”[244]

By then, the climate of intense distrust between communities and perceptions of imminent threat had turned Mai Kadra into a tinderbox.

About 2 p.m., three Tigrayan residents noticed the Amhara daily workers gathering together in Bole, a predominantly Walqayte neighborhood, and in Gimb Sefer and Sarmender where Amharas live.[245] “they said the Tigray militia and forces are about to flee. Our brothers are coming so let us be ready. A lot of people were afraid,” explained a 32-year-old Tigrayan resident.[246]

Also, around 2 p.m., six Amhara men eating at a small restaurant in Hawelty square left without paying. The Tigrayan owner started screaming, drawing the attention of several residents and youth. “I asked what’s going on,” said Kibreab**,** a 50-year-old Tigrayan farmer who saw a large crowd giving chase to six men in the square. “I can’t estimate the number of people running after them, because it was many people, especially young men.”[247]

Biniyam, an Amhara resident**,** was also near the square and witnessed a large crowd give chase. He said:

> They were chasing the Amharas saying “Thieves! Thieves!” They [the Tigrayans] were carrying different implements like *gejera* [machetes]. When they were chasing, the Amharas were trying to protect themselves using stones. They [Tigrayans] were beating and attacking. The situation was not good. The Amhara residents then understood they were attacking each and every Amhara. Rather than be killed, the Amharas gathered together. In each house, they said let us come together and defend ourselves. Tigrayans came from different areas and were insulting us, calling us “Amhara donkeys.” The Amhara daily laborers were captured at the roundabout. We do not know where they took them.... Then the [Tigrayan militias] fired bullets ... and ordered us to enter our homes. The Amharas that had gathered dispersed. [248]

[244] Phone interview with Yehansu, Sudan, October 2021.

[245] Interviews with Haben and #217, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with #167, Sudan, September 2021.

[246] Phone interview with #167, September 2021.

[247] Interview with Kibreab, Sudan, January 2021.

[248] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

Tigrayan residents brought the six captured men to the police station in Bole neighborhood, finding it empty except for two officers.[249] Deciding against holding them there, a group of older men accompanied the six to Sarmender, a predominantly Amhara neighborhood. Kibreab**,** one of the men there, noticed that a group of angry Tigrayan youth had been following them and gathering along the road. He explained: "We, the older residents, walked with them, [the six], so people would not fight with them. We took them to Sarmender and let them go free, to avoid conflict."[250]

Shortly after, around 3 p.m., Amhara seasonal workers began looting in Bole and Samre neighborhoods. According to four residents, word of the Ethiopian military forces' advance into Mazoria, a rural area around 10 to 15 kilometers away from Mai Kadra, had reached the town.[251] Yibrah, who saw around 20 to 30 Amhara youth loot shops along Ketena 05 in the Bole neighborhood, believed the news of the advance prompted opportunistic daily laborers to begin looting.[252] At a house in Ketena 05, the local militia found a group of around 30 laborers in one house. The militia members "checked their ID cards and detained them in the Eyasu Berhe school," said a 34-year-old driver who helped in
the arrest.[253]

e. The First Killings

Tigrayan and Amhara residents said that the initial bout of mass killings began in Gimb Sefer, in the center of town, near the health center, shortly after 3 p.m. and lasted until around 5 p.m.[254]

Several witnesses and survivors interviewed, as well as media reports, described how Tigrayan seasonal workers, local militias, and armed youth killed Amhara and Walqayte residents and laborers on the street and during house-to-house searches in Gimb Sefer.

According to local and international media accounts and the report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, local Tigrayans approached the home of a former Amhara militia, named Abiy Tsegaye, calling him out before striking him in the head with a machete, then shooting him in the chest, and setting fire to his home.[255] A 30-year-old

[249] Interviews with Amanuel and Kibreab, Sudan, January 2021.

[250] Interview with Kibreab, Sudan, January 2021.

[251] Interview with #217, Sudan, December 2020, and with #152, Sudan, June 2021. Phone interviews with Yibrah and Tesfay in Sudan, September, and October 2021.

[252] Phone interview with Yibrah, Sudan, September 2021. Interview with #239, Sudan, January 2021.

[253] Interview with #20, Sudan, January 2021. Phone interview with Yibrah, Sudan, September 2021. On file, videos directly received of injured survivors receiving treatment in November 2020.

[254] Interviews with #222, Senait, Haben, Amanuel, #19, #20, Sudan, December 2020 and Januar y2021. Phone interviews with Zerihun, Hanna, Tewodros, #83, and #84, Ethiopia, November 2020; with Asmeret, Tigray, May 2021; and with Tesfay, Biniyam, Mahlet Tigray, September and October 2021. Phone interview with Asmelesh, Sudan, November 2021.

[255] Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, and Silvia Aloisi," How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," *Reuters*, June 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/.; See also Ethiopian Human Rights

Amhara woman living in Gimb Sefer said that Abiy was among the first killed: “After the [Tigrayan attackers] killed him, they burned his body. Then they burned seven houses after [killing] him.”[256]

Satellite imagery of Mai Kadra recorded between November 9 and 10 (11:17 a.m. to 11:11 a.m.) and analyzed by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, shows visible damage and burning to a cluster of homes in the Gimb Sefer neighborhood, about 200 meters southeast of the main intersection at Hawelty square. Satellite imagery recorded on November 11 shows additional damaged houses in the Gimb Sefer neighborhood.




Satellite imagery from 20 November 2020 shows a closer look at one area of major damage in Mai Kadra. The buildings – circled in red – were damaged between 9-10 November 2020 according to low resolution imagery (not shown). Debris is also visible along the road.

Biniyam, an ethnic Amhara, was hiding alongside his brother and around 35 other laborers in the corrugated iron sheets of their roof. His brother’s wife and three children, including an infant, were in the home. Biniyam said that a group of what he estimated to be 40 people repeatedly came looking for his brother, eventually killing him as he watched:

> We saw the [attackers] moving around, killing along the street. In our area, human beings were chopped like trees with traditional implements

Commission, “Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra, Preliminary Findings,” November 24, 2020, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vS-0N8xCDZDRAM5lzBAELTVjqfKLrzJha8xpKdqh1OE/mobilebasic.

[256] Phone interview with Hanna, Ethiopia, November 2020.

> like *gejera* [machetes]…. They approached our house. The children inside were crying…. My sister-in-law begged them not to kill her or her children, and they left. [257]

Mahlet, Biniyam's sister-in-law**,** added that the attackers "seemed prepared" as "they had hammers to open the doors." She said the group insulted her, called her slurs such as "donkey," frightening her and her children.[258]
When the group of attackers returned, her husband was unable to tolerate the shouts and cries of the children and came down from the roof. Biniyam recalled:

> They knew him. They were saying this is [name withheld] house! Here is … we got him! I was watching when they hit him with an axe, and he fell to the ground. He tried to protect himself, covering his hand with clothes, but he was struck on his head and chest. I wanted to go down to him, but others held me back and prevented me from shouting.[259]

A 33-year-old Amhara laborer said he was at home when a group of Tigrayans came to his house, asked for an ID and told him they'd take him to the police station. He recounted that they subsequently beat him, struck him on the head with an axe, and broke his hands. [260] Other survivors similarly described attackers hitting them in the head with sticks and axes, while militia members shot at those trying to escape.[261]

A 29-year-old Amhara seasonal worker was sitting outside at a café in Gimb Sefer, around 4:30 p.m., when he witnessed Tigrayan laborers and residents gather and attack a young man. He said:

> We were sitting outside at a tea shop ... when I saw them hitting the young man with an axe. I begged them to shoot him rather than kill him with the axe. When they came for us, we closed the door, but they broke it. We jumped to another house, but they kept following us. We could hear people screaming for help.
>
> We ran through five houses … and [eventually] entered one old man's house, owned by a Tigrayan man. His wife was Amhara. She tried to calm us and locked us inside. When [the family] told [the attackers] that

[257] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

[258] Phone interview with Mahlet, Tigray, October 2021. Donkey, or in Tigrinya "*adgi*," is a derogatory term that had been used by Eritrean soldiers during the Derg to refer to ethnic Amharas and other soldiers in the Derg army. The term has been used pejoratively by Tigrinya speakers to refer to ethnic Amharas. See Munyaradizi Mawere and Ngoidzashe Marongwe, *Violence, Politics and Conflict Management in Africa: Envisioning Transformation, Peace, and Unity in the Twenty-First Century,* (Langaa RPCIG,2016).

[259] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

[260] Phone interview with Zerihun, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[261] Three videos received via encrypted channels of injured survivors in Gondar hospital in November 2020.

> this is a house owned by a Tigrayan, they called the militias ... the owner spoke with them and … they left.[262]

The day laborer added: “Militias were assisting them. They weren’t protecting us.”

Tewodros similarly fled the attacks by escaping to different houses before finally hiding in the home of an old Tigrayan man when the attackers went searching door-to-door. “The baby inside the house we hid in started to cry. We were trying to make him stop crying. The [attackers] then came to the house and checked inside. Noticing no one, they left.”[263]

Hanna was at home with her husband, Zerihun, when attackers she described as youth and militias came to their house around 4 p.m. and asked for their IDs and mobile phones.[264] “They took my husband and his brother outside.… There were also other Amharas … They beat my husband four times with a machete on his head. He was like a corpse when brought to Gondar,” she explained.[265] Her husband Zerihun, survived. Zerihun recalled the attack:

> They said, “We will take you to the police station first.” But later they started to beat us. Some of us tried to defend ourselves with what we had, mainly sticks. But when we tried to defend [ourselves], the militia were shooting at us. Then we dropped our sticks and surrendered. They beat me … on my head and broke my hands. The rest of my body was also not spared. I saw them killing my friends who were with me. They killed them with sticks, knives, and axes. They thought I was dead and left me on
> the ground. [266]

These killings prompted an immediate mass exodus from the town. Yehansu, said between 3 and 4 p.m., he saw: “that everyone was leaving Mai Kadra… I saw that people were running out of the town and all the cars were just moving out and taking anyone that was running.… Everyone was panicking.... People were trying to get away from whatever
was coming.”[267]

Violence appeared to subside around Hawelty square and the center of town and residents returning to town around 5 p.m. recalled seeing a large number of bodies in

[262] Phone interview with #84, Ethopia, November 2020.

[263] Phone interview with Tewodros, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[264] Phone interview Hanna, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[265] Phone interview Hanna, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[266] Phone interview with Zerihun, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[267] Phone interview with Yehansu, Sudan, October 2021

the area. Amanuel entered Mai Kadra and saw several bodies near the square, in Bole, Gimb Sefer, and near the beer shops in Ketena 4.[268] A 30-year-old health worker returning to Mai Kadra that afternoon saw "the road to the health center from the *Kela* [checkpoint] was strewn with dead bodies."[269]

Attacks, however, continued elsewhere in the town in an atmosphere of intense confusion. By then Amhara daily workers and attackers began targeting Tigrayans, according to
six residents.[270]

Terhas, a 28-year-old Tigrayan farmer, said she ran from house-to-house with her 4-year-old son and a friend. She reported seeing dead bodies around Ketena 5 neighborhood in the southwest of the town. "There were no other forces around, only Fanos and Salugs," she said.[271] While running, she recognized the body of a Tigrayan guard from the town's Commercial Bank. She recounted the killing of a Tigrayan man who sold water: "They first struck his back and then his neck and threw him in a drain." As she approached Ketena 1, she said Amhara farmworkers she previously worked for took her to a Walqayte woman's home. "She washed my face and that of my kid. I tried to move to another house, when I saw [more] people being killed.… I covered one body with my scarf."[272]

Tewolde, a 65-year-old farmer from Rawyan, remembered entering Mai Kadra at sunset, and was unaware of the massacre occurring in the town:

> We arrived at night and saw dead bodies. People were fleeing the town in our direction, telling us to hide. They were Tigrayan. They told us that "People are dying here, why are you entering Mai Kadra?!" [When we entered] people were killing each other with knives and machetes … While we were going to the house, near the Abune Aregawi church, we saw dead bodies on the ground … people were slaughtered, necks cut, stomachs stabbed. We knocked on our family house, but they didn't answer at first … They had locked the house because they were terrified … They finally let us in when they recognized our voices.[273]

[268] Interview with Amanuel, Sudan, January 2021.

[269] Interview with #24, Sudan, January 2021 and with #216, Sudan, December 2020.

[270] Interviews with Mehari, Haben, Sudan, December 2020; with #15, #239, Sudan, January 2021 and with #135, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021.

[271] Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021

[272] Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021

[273] Interview with Tewolde, Sudan, December 2020.

Many residents said they heard extensive shooting around sunset, but it is unclear who was doing the shooting.[274]

Mehari was hiding in his bathroom when attackers, whom he described as armed Fano wearing civilian clothes, entered his home around 1 a.m. “They took 10 quintals [1000 kilograms] of sesame and 30 of my sheep. My family was at home, they [the attackers] didn’t say anything to them. They also took my donkey cart.[275]

A 33-year-old Tigrayan resident, was hiding in his home in Kebele 02 when he reported witnessing a large mixed group of what he described as Fano kill 15 workers, including 4 Tigrayans he knew personally, near the gate of his home.[276] “There were about 25 of them,” he said. “Some had rifles and some machetes. [The] group of 15 young men came, maybe they were fleeing, like so many others. I saw some [of the forces] hitting the young men with machetes mostly and some shot.”

f. November 10

The sounds of gunfire subsided by morning. The surviving residents who had not fled soon emerged from hiding to find the bodies of their family members, friends and neighbors scattered through the streets. One 44-year-old Tigrayan farmer, who lived in Gimb Sefer but recalled spending the night in Ketena 4 after being tipped off by residents not to go home, expressed fright and shock as he went home. He recalled: “That morning I saw a lot of dead bodies and I was very shocked, so I was jumping as I passed through them … I was very shocked … thinking how I can run and save my life. I can’t even estimate how many dead bodies there were. I also saw different property broken on the street.”[277]

Kibreab, a 50-year-old Tigrayan farmer who had stayed in Mai Kadra to protect his property, recounted opening his door on the morning of November 10 and found three of his neighbors — Halefom, Berhe, and Lilay — stabbed to death.[278]

Around 10 a.m., Ethiopian federal forces approached Mai Kadra, accompanied by Amhara regional police forces and Fano militia, in a manner similar to their capture of other towns — firing their guns. Four men who had volunteered to accompany the forces described seeing bodies lining the streets.[279] **“**We saw a lot of bloody, dead bodies on the streets and in the cheap [rentals] frequented by seasonal workers,” said Habtamu**.** “I’m still struggling to cope with the experience. I didn’t count the bodies, but I guess it to be between 100 and 150.... Most of the dead bodies I saw were found on the main road

[274] Interviews with Tedros, Sheshay, Amanuel, #15, #16, #22, #24.; with Haileselassie, Senait, #220, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interviews with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021 and with Asmelesh, Sudan, November 2021.
[275] Interview with Mehari, Sudan, December 2020.
[276] Interview with #135, Sudan, May 2021.
[277] Interview with #243, Sudan, May 2021.
[278] Interview with Kibreab, Sudan, January 2021.
[279] Phone interviews with Habtamu, #169, #171, #170, Ethiopia, November 2020.

in the town's center.... There were a lot of corpses near the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia branch, in the town center." [280]

A video posted to Facebook on November 10, 2020, shows a similar scene described by witnesses. The video, according to the shadows visible, was filmed between noon and 1 p.m. near the town's centre. It shows five vehicles being driven in a northly direction with approximately 130 men, most of whom are wearing uniforms and can be seen carrying Kalashnikov-style military assault rifles.[281] There are several men visible riding on the trucks wearing civilian clothing. Four large white trucks, carrying at least 30 men in uniforms, and one smaller truck carrying at least 10 uniformed men drive by. One of the trucks slows down and people wearing civilian clothes can be seen passing them water. The military forces are heard and seen firing their weapons throughout the video.

Three self-described volunteers arrived with or shortly after the federal and regional forces and militia said they helped identify those wounded and still alive and arranged for trucks and an ambulance to take them to the closest health centers.[282]

Medical teams treating the injured in at least two health centers and a hospital in the Amhara region began receiving patients from Mai Kadra. The health center in Abrahajira, Amhara region, received over 100 injured patients.[283] Those with more severe injuries were referred to other hospitals, including Gondar hospital in Amhara region.[284] A doctor treating the wounded revealed that the majority of the injured were Amhara, with many of the patients having suffered from different injuries, the majority with injuries in the head and neck area. [285] He added that very few patients arrived with bullet injuries as most were wounded by sharp objects, likely knives and machetes, "around four patients had penetrating abdominal injuries." [286]

As volunteers made arrangements to treat the injured, the bodies of those killed remained on the streets. Biniyam described hiding on the roof of his home when the federal forces and Amhara forces arrived. "When they arrived, we were told not to pick up the bodies, not only that of my brother, but different bodies were seen around," he said. "They told us not to pick them up until the journalists came and filmed the situation and took videos." [287]

g. Immediate Aftermath

[280] Phone interview with Habtamu, #171, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[281] Facebook post in Mai Kadra town, November 10, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/amare.setie.3/videos/3338799306226275.

[282] Phone interviews with Habtamu, #170, #171, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[283] Phone interview with #169, #170, #171, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[284] Phone interview with #171, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[285] Phone interview with #171, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[286] Phone interview with #171, Ethiopia, November 2020.

[287] Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

Bodies lay outside for several days.[288] Tadesse**,** a Tigrayan farmer, 60, corroborated Tilahun's account that the arriving federal and Amhara forces told them not to bury the dead. A burial committee was established, he said, but Tigrayans killed in his neighborhood were dumped elsewhere: "After three days the forces loaded the bodies on a tractor and took them outside of town. I saw them in a pile west of the town. These were [Tigrayan] neighbors I saw being killed." [289]

Several witnesses provided similar accounts of bodies being carried away on tractors. Senait, a Tigrayan woman in Kebele 02 said: "When I went out, I saw around 20 to 40 dead bodies. They had been hit with axes and knives. I saw Agew residents [an ethnic group inhabiting Ethiopia and Eritrea] gathering the bodies and putting them in a tractor," [290] She added, "This was around the big shop. The dead bodies were mainly of young men, ages 17 to 20. I couldn't recognize them. Their faces were covered with blood." [291]

Residents seeking shelter at the church or initially with Ethiopian military forces also witnessed a collection process whereby bodies were taken away using tractors. [292]

Terhas found shelter in Abune Aregawi church for a few days. She said the funerals of those killed on November 9 took place days later, between November 13 and 16, when bodies were buried in mass graves in the church graveyard or covered with soil in a dry riverbed near a petrol station on the way to Humera. By then the stench of decomposing bodies lingered in the air of the town. She said:

> I saw when ENDF soldiers and Amhara Special Forces came to the compound and the church, and [when] Salug helped carry the bodies into the grave. They buried three bodies in the same grave, and two dead bodies in other graves, but not very well.... Some of the faces and legs were not covered. The most disgusting thing happened when I was in church, one dog brought half of a leg, from the knee [down]. The shoe was still on the foot…. [In another case,] there was a man killed, he was fat. They brought him [and] immediately threw him in the grave … and laughed. They were speaking in Amharic: "How did he get so fat? Was he a rich man? How did he get so fat?" [293]

[288] Interviews with Haileselassie, Senait, Tadesse, #18, Sudan, December 2020 and May and January 2021. Phone interview with Biniyam, Tigray, September 2021.

[289] Interview with Tadesse, Sudan, May 2021.

[290] "Agew" peoples inhabited north-central Ethiopia, in north Gondar province, Tigray, and in Eritrea. Interview with Senait in Sudan, December 2020.

[291] Interview with Senait, Sudan, December 2020.

[292] Interview with Haileselassie, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021.

[293] Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021.

A November 12 video, posted on Facebook, shows the sun rising at around 6:30 a.m. on either November 10 or 11 and covered bodies being carried on wooden stretchers down the main road of Mai Kadra. At least another 30 bodies are filmed on stretchers in a courtyard off the main road.[294]

News of the mass killings of Amhara and Walqayte civilians in Mai Kadra spread rapidly online. The Amhara regional president described the attacks as "a brutal genocide against the Amhara people."[295] Prime Minister Abiy called the killings "the epitome of moral degeneration," and said without providing evidence that the perpetrators of the attacks may have fled to Sudan and were hiding among the refugees – a charge that numerous government officials and pro-government commentators later repeated.[296] TPLF officials denied that that regular Tigrayan forces had targeted Amhara civilians but told reporters that "local Tigrayan militias may have committed abuses."[297] Tigrayan residents recounted attacks by federal forces and Amhara militias in Mai Kadra.[298] Conflicting accounts of what unfolded in early November have since crystallized as federal and regional authorities have capitalized on accounts of the killings of Amhara civilians in Mai Kadra to mobilize support for the military operations in Tigray.

[294] Facebook post in Mai Kadra town on November 12, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/iyeruse/videos/3349829495086926

[295] Facebook post by Agegnehu Teshager on November 10, 2020. Teshager is the former Amhara regional state president and current speaker for the House of Federation, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=180459477024816&id=112237320513699

[296] interview with State Minister Redwan Hussein, Reuters Facebook page December 2020, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=373363980639466. See Aggrey Mutambo, "In address to Parliament,Abiy explains the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict,"*Nation Africa*, November 30, 2020, https://nation.africa/kenya/news/africa/in-address-to-parliament-abiy-explains-the-ethiopia-tigray-conflict-3214182?view=htmlamp; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ethiopia Blog, "The Mai Kadra Genocide: Perpetrators Acting as Victims," February 25, 2021, https://mfaethiopiablog.wordpress.com/2021/02/25/the-mai-kadra-genocide-perpetrators-acting-as-victims-february-25-2021/; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Blog, "Statement regarding the latest 'report by Amnesty International on the alleged rape and other sexual violence in the Tigray Regional State of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (August 12, 2021)," August 12, 2021, https://ethiopianembassy.org/statement-regarding-the-latest-report-by-amnesty-international-on-the-alleged-rape-and-other-sexual-violence-in-the-tigray-regional-state-of-the-federal-democratic-republic-of-ethiopia-augus/.

[297] Stephen Grey, "Special Report: In Ethiopia war, new abuses charge spotlight on Tigrayan former rulers," *Reuters,* December 28, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-conflict-tplf-idAFL8N2TD18W.

298 Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, Silvia Aloisi and Baz Ratner, "Special Report: How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," *Reuters*, June 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/; Fay Abulgasim, Nariman El-Mofty and Cara Anna, "Shadowy Ethiopian massacre could be tip of iceberg," *Associated Press*, December 20, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/sudan-ethiopia-massacres-d16a088dcb0511172b5662b92478.

h. Revenge Attacks and Extrajudicial Executions

The Ethiopian federal forces, Amhara Special Forces, and militias responded to the violence carried out against Amhara and the Walqayte residents and laborers in Mai Kadra by targeting the broader Tigrayan population in a wave of killings, arbitrary detentions,
and looting.

As in other towns in Western Tigray, local residents assisted in the killings, helping security forces by identifying Tigrayan residents. “There were informants pointing people out: people who ran banks, people who had large farms,” said Tesfatsion**,** a 45-year-old woman farmer.[299]

Terhas, while seeking shelter at the Abune Aregawi church, noticed Ethiopian solders working with non-Tigrayan residents and daily laborers to identify three Tigrayan residents they knew. She said she saw the soldiers lead the three men away and subsequently heard gunfire and screams. She explains how she later witnessed killings by a mix of Amhara Special Forces and Ethiopian federal forces:

> I was sitting in the church compound when a mix of ASF and Ethiopian troops brought two Tigrayans. I saw them shoot one person in the chest. He fell on the ground, on his back. I turned my face away immediately and uttered: “In the name of the Father.” I didn’t want to see any more.[300]

Federal forces took positions on the main roads and around the church while Fano militiamen and Amhara Special Forces swept through Tigrayan neighborhoods, going house-to-house to apprehend people. A driver describes witnessing federal soldiers shoot and kill a 15 or 16-year-old boy near Andinet hotel in Ketena 5.[301] Five residents witnessed members of the Ethiopian military or Amhara security forces, including Fano militias, kill Tigrayan residents in Kebele 02, in the Tigrayan neighborhoods of Samre and Gijet located in the eastern part of the main road that leads to Humera.[302]

Tadesse, a 60-year-old Tigrayan farmer living in Kebele 02 witnessed what he described as Fano militia and forces wearing beige uniforms – apparent Amhara Special Forces – bring two groups of people to an open area, meters away from his home, and shoot them.
He said:

> They shot them with continuous automatic fire. I didn’t know them. They weren’t from Mai Kadra [town]. They were 20 agricultural laborers.... They

[299] Interview with Tesfatsion, Sudan, December 2020.

[300] Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan September 2021.

[301] Interview with #20, Sudan, January 2021.

[302] Interview with Berhe, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interviews with Shehsay, #30, #25, Tigray, March 2021.

> ordered residents not to bury them and not to go to the bodies. They were eventually buried near the house in two common graves.
>
> Then they collected 37 men in front of my house, by my gate – some young and some old (I have a list of names). They shot them – automatic fire. There were about 20 fighters around them. I don't know exactly which or how many of them fired. They came and tried to take me. I was begging them not to kill them and [I] said I am Walqayte, so they left me.[303]

As a religious figure, Berhe thought he would be safe when government forces took over the town. Hearing gunshots in his neighborhood, he recalls seeing Fano militiamen kill people at a distance:

> They were walking in a group. Whoever they saw in the street, they would kill. They called over one guy standing near a building and shot him in the neck.... I took my motorcycle and started riding towards Hamdayet [20 kilometers away]. They were shooting at me as I fled, with a weapon called a "Bren" [light machine gun]. I put my head down and bullets were flying over my head."

Sheshay**,** a 56-year-old farmer in Ketena 2, said "ENDF [were] shooting in the town while Salug went home to home killing ethnic Tigrayans."[304] He describes watching as an 86-year-old man named "Aba Fano," was killed in Ketena 2 near the Samre school, while Salug dragged Sheshay's grandson, a militiaman, out of the house and killed him.[305] He also recounts seeing two other dead bodies. Of witnessing one of the attacks, he said:

> Gerie Wedi Adwa was beheaded after Fano found him in the Ethiopia hotel around 1:30 p.m. Abadi Milashu was killed in front of his house. I didn't see them kill [Abadi], but we found his dead body.... I saw Aba Wedajo being beaten with a stick and machete by militia and Salug on the street."[306]

One 27-year-old man said Fanos approached him and asked him if he was Tigrayan or Amhara. "I told them I am Tigrayan, and they hit me with a machete," the man said. "We were three, two of us survived and the other one died. I went to the church.... [A]n Amhara priest asked me what happened and hid me in a church hall under construction."[307]

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[303] Interview with Tadesse, Sudan, May 2021.

[304] Interview with Sheshay, Sudan, January 2021.

[305] Interview with Sheshay, Sudan, January 2021.

[306] Interview with Sheshay, Sudan, January 2021.

[307] Interview with #110, Tigray, April 2021.

Security forces stopped Tigrayans who were fleeing. After seeing people killed on the street, a 23-year-old trader tried to escape. He described a patrol of Amhara Special Forces stopping him near Rawyan, attacking him with a knife, and bringing him back to town.
He said:

> They hit me on several parts of my body. "You can't escape! ... You are a member of the junta! This is your end! We will erase you from this land. This land is ours. This is the last time a Tigrayan will live in the area." They left me for dead, adding me to the corpses on the street. I saw many, maybe around 50 bodies in the square, before I lost consciousness. They were collecting bodies from other parts of the city in a tractor to the square.[308]

i. Ensuing Abuses

Killings of Tigrayans continued in the days that followed, accompanied with looting and detentions. A 53-year-old widower explained that Fano militiamen entered his home where he was with his two daughters on November 11. They pulled him out of his house and led him to the center of town, where they hit him and other Tigrayan neighbors with sticks, axes, and machetes, he said.[309] Some of the Tigrayans were shot. The widower, who survived the attacks, recalled:

> They beat me severely and I was injured on the head, back and other parts of my body. I fell and my head was bleeding profusely, and they left me for dead. I lay there unconscious the rest of the day and all night. I woke up the following morning and there were [about 40] bodies around me.[310]

The widower recognized two Tigrayans who had been killed.[311]

On the same day, around 9 a.m., a 48-year-old housewife described returning to town after having fled the initial violence when she was stopped by a group of around eight people, armed with machetes, who shouted at her. Hoping to protect herself, she claimed she was from the Amhara region. The attackers believed her and let her go.[312] When she entered her home, she saw that her property and livestock had been taken.

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[308] Phone interview #196, Tigray, May 2021.

[309] Interviews with #134 and #244, Sudan, May 2021. Interview with #220, Sudan, December 2020.

[310] Interview with #134, Sudan, May 2021.

[311] Interviews with #134, Sudan, May 2021.

[312] Interview with #22, Sudan, January 2021. See also, Cara Anna, "'Look after my babies': In Ethiopia, a Tigray family's quest," *Associated Press*,April 23, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/health-ethiopia-lifestyle-africa-middle-east-abdb94e97a25e17befcc6574201af3 (Describing the account of a Tigrayan man who addressed Amhara militias in Amharic and showed an altered ID card suggesting he was Walqayte).

She recalled finding the bodies of two brothers she knew from another family, and the dismembered body of her husband, a former militiaman and member of the local administration, lying near the gate of their home in Ketena 02. “I had left town on November 9.… [B]y then my husband was out of Mai Kadra at the farm.... I think he was killed when he came back to check on us. His body had marks of cuts by sharp objects. He was dismembered at his hip and neck … I was not allowed to pick or bury his dead body. And there were many other dead bodies like him. The Salug were watching the dead bodies.”[313]

Four Tigrayans, who had fled to nearby farmland or towns, said they had returned to Mai Kadra after receiving assurances from non-Tigrayan residents whom they knew.[314] A 51-year-old farmer had fled to Adebai when he was told by three elders from Mai Kadra to return since the “town was stable.”[315] Others, like Tedros**,** returned after the owner of the farm he was hiding in said that there was “an order to return to Mai Kadra by the government forces.”[316]

Some local residents tried to protect their Tigrayan neighbors.[317] When Tedros returned home, he said it had been broken into and many items had been looted. Amhara neighbors took his daughters to stay with them. He recounted how seven Fano militiamen came into his home and demanded that he hand over his gun. Fifteen Salug workers then arrived and began attacking him. He said:

> They forced me to kneel and pointed their guns to my head and chest and asked me to choose where I wanted to be shot ... [They] started to beat me with an axe and stick. They hit my head, ear, and back. I was bleeding everywhere. They then dragged me and put me among other dead bodies. I asked them to kill me instantly, but they were laughing. My children were watching but the neighbors kept them for fear they might be killed if they tried to help. The Salug stood watch for anyone who would come to pick up the dead bodies. I stayed there the whole day and night. I lost consciousness many times since I lost much blood.... Around 4 a.m., my children and neighbors came and nursed my wounds. [318]

j. Roundups and Detentions

Beginning on November 10, Tigrayan witnesses and former detainees described how a mixture of forces, including ENDF, ASF, and Fano militias, began rounding up Tigrayan residents, holding them first in makeshift locations, including hotels, bars, and

[313] Interview with #22, Sudan, January 2021.

[314] Interviews with Araya, #220, Sudan, December 2020, and with Tedros, #15, Sudan, January 2021.

[315] Interview with #15, Sudan, January 2021.

[316] Interview with Tedros, Sudan, January 2021.

[317] Interviews with Tedros, #18, #19, Sudan, January 2021 and with #244, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview #40, Tigray, March 2021.

[318] Interview Tedros, Sudan, January 2021.

restaurants, before later transporting them to a grain warehouse known as “Abadi Foq,” located in the southern part of town.[319] Tigrayans, estimated to be in the thousands, were detained at the site for nearly two months.[320] Three witnesses said some detainees were taken out and killed.[321]

Fano militia entered the home of Haileselassie and threatened to shoot him, before handing him over to the ENDF. He said he was kept in “a camp” for a day. “I was with 40 or 50 other people. The ENDF treated us well, gave us food and drink. Then they started to move us to another area, a few meters away from where we were. While we were being moved, I saw the Fano shoot and kill a man.… He was a barber in the town.”[322]

A Tigrayan farmer, recalled being arrested by three armed men in civilian clothes, two of whom were farmworkers he knew, who accused him of taking part in the killing of Amharas. He said:

> The person whom I don’t know said: “You are the one who killed our people!” and pointed his gun at me to kill me.... But they arrested me and took me to a big compound owned by a businessman named Abadi, in Ketena 5. The compound has many rooms. I was arrested with 60 other people in a room that is approximately 5 by 5 meters. All the detained in the room were ethnic Tigrayans, including militia members, wives of militias, and farm workers.[323]

Alongside other people, Kindihafti said she was held for a day in a bar used as a makeshift detention site at first; Ethiopian forces subsequently took her to the Abadi building where she was detained for over a month.[324] Similarly, Mekonnen recounted staying with a Walqayte neighbor who refused to hand him over to Amhara militiamen and instead took him to a hotel in the center of town that was under Ethiopian military control, thinking he would be protected. The Ethiopian military forces, however, in turn marched him and 40 others to the Abadi storage, where he was detained for nearly a month. He described the conditions there:

> Day to day, they were bringing in more people... One of the people I had been arrested with, one was beaten with sticks.... After day two, there was no food provided. We lived off 10 biscuits a day. Families were allowed to bring in food, but we had to share. The ENDF left, and it was Fano controlling us ... Women and men were detained in the same

[319] Interviews with Haileselassie, Mehari, Mekonnen, Kindihafti, Gidey #15, #19, #215, Sudan, December 2020, January 2021, and May 2021. Phone interviews with Asmeret in Tigray, May 2021 and with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021.

[320] Interview with Mekonnen, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interviews with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021 and with phone interview with #53, Tigray, April 2021.

[321] Interviews with Haileselassie, Mekonnen, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interview with #110 Tigray, April 2021.

[322] interview with Haileselssie, Sudan, December 2020.

[323] Interview with #14, Sudan, January 2021.

[324] Interview with Kindihafti, Sudan, January 2021.

> location. There were many women. Some women told me they had been threatened – [they] had run to the ENDF to get assistance and were then arrested."[325]

Ethiopian military forces also captured Tigrayans seeking to flee from other towns and detained them in Abadi storage. Gidey, a 36-year-old laborer, said he fled Bereket, west of Mai Kadra, when he was caught by the ENDF and taken, first, to an empty house, and then to the Abadi warehouse. He described being held there for over a month and interrogated about abuses against Amharas in Mai Kadra. He recalled receiving no food for the first five days of his detention. [326]

One 27-year-old Tigrayan man said he was held at Abadi warehouse for nearly two months and described accusations by town residents and beatings by guards. "Women would come covering their faces and identify us saying 'this one killed 20, the other one killed 10," he recalled, adding: "Then we would be beaten. Fanos and militias were the ones beating people."[327]

Terhas, a 28-year-old farmer, went to the Abadi storage after hearing that Tigrayans could gather there for refuge.[328] When she arrived there, she noticed "so many Tigrayans in the compound," and soon realized it was a prison guarded by Amhara Special Forces and Fano militiamen. She said she was held there for two months. She explained what she witnessed during her detention:

> The number of people arrested increased from day to day. There was one Tigrayan they forced to register all the people. And I asked him how many we were, and he said 9,000 people. So, we were almost 9,000 people.
>
> They treated us badly. If you were man, the [forces] would beat you with a gun, the butt of the Kalashnikov, even the front. A lot of men were injured ... They would intimidate the men especially. There wasn't enough medicine and equipment for women to get treated. There was no water, there was no food ... For those that were detained, they would get food delivered from those who were half Walqayte or those who were married to Walqayte or Amhara men or women.[329]

After approximately one month, humanitarian workers arrived at the site, but guards, armed Fano and Amhara Special Forces, refused to allow them in at first. Eventually, they were able to enter, provide "plumpy nuts" (a peanut-based therapeutic food), water

[325] Interview with Mekonnen, Sudan, December 2020.

[326] Interview with Gidey**,** Sudan, May 2021**.** See also Interview with #110 Tigray, April 2021.

[327] Interview with #110, Tigray, April 2021.

[328] Phone interviews with Terhas Sudan, September 2021, and with #535, Tigray, April 2021.

[329] Phone interview with Terhas, September 2021.

trucks, and medications, and screen individuals for consultations, according to witnesses.[330]

At one point, Terhas continued, the guards began to separate detainees who were mixed or had Amhara spouses:

> After two months, they began separating the pure Tigrayans from the ones that are mixed. My husband is Walqayte and so I have a kid with him.... [My husband] came from Adi Remets and he visited me once, and they let him in once and they said: "You shouldn't be close with the junta" and "Keep your distance," so we didn't shake hands and we had little conversation, and [we] were 5 or 6 meters away.… He tried many times to free me.... [One day] they called my name and said my husband … left a letter with the administration … and that is how I was a released from the warehouse.[331]

The detainees of the Abadi warehouse were eventually deported to central Tigray (**see Forced Displacement, Transfers and "Ethnic Cleansing" section**).

**Response of the Amhara Regional Government**

The letters that Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch sent to a range of federal, regional authorities and to TPLF officials included our findings regarding the events in Mai Kadra and requested information regarding the status of any investigations into the killings in the town. None of the federal agencies and the TPLF officials whom we contacted responded, but we did receive a response from the Amhara Regional Government, which described the events of Mai Kadra as "dreadful crimes committed by the … TPLF."196 The Amhara authorities claimed that "members of Samri (youth groups assigned for the massacre), with the help of the Tigrayan police and militia … slaughtered more than 1,600 innocents" at Mai Kadra. Their figure, however, does not tally with victim counts found in the Joint EHRC - OHCHR Investigation Report and in the reporting of the Ethiopian Federal Police Commission. The Amhara Regional Government also declined to respond to our specific questions concerning the events of Mai Kadra and was silent regarding reprisal attacks targeting Tigrayan residents of Mai Kadra.

[330] Phone interview with Terhas, September 2021. Interview with Gidey, Sudan, May 2021.

[331] Phone interview with Terhas, September 2021.




Imagery from 11 November 2020, shows people and vehicles along the road outside of Abadi warehouse. On 7 December 2020, imagery shows many people and some vehicles present within the Abadi warehouse area.

# III. Ethnic Cleansing in Western Tigray

Within a few weeks of the capture of towns in Western Tigray, Amhara security forces and newly appointed authorities began to take various measures to drive Tigrayans from their homes.

## Establishment of New Authorities

As towns and villages in Western Tigray changed hands, Amhara regional officials and security forces facilitated the appointment of new administrators, including local residents, representatives from the Amhara region, and members of the Prosperity Party, to fill local and zonal government roles.[332] For instance, Col. Demeke Zewde, the leader of the Welkait Identity Committee (See **Background section**), became the new head of security for the Western Tigray Zone, and issued orders to the militias. These officials oversaw an administration that subjected Tigrayan residents to discriminatory restrictions, threats, and intimidation that appeared designed to compel them to leave their homes and
the region.

Tigrayans interviewed said that new administrators established their authority in local, town hall-style meetings that took place in November and December 2020, within days or weeks of the towns and villages changing hands. Amhara regional officials attended some of these events, appointing the new administrators, and making residents "elect" them by a show of hands.[333] In some meetings, Tigrayans said they were not allowed to vote.[334] In Humera, Adi Goshu, and May Gaba, the meetings' organizers and their supporters explicitly discussed removing Tigrayans from the towns.[335]

After the Ethiopian military passed through tabia (administrative neighborhood) Irob, a village near Ruwassa, leaving Fano militias in control, a Bahir Dar official arrived and declared to residents that the village belonged to Amhara, and was placed under the administration of the Amhara regional government, according to Andom, a 36-year-old teacher in town:

> One official from the Bahir Dar administration … asked [one] guy: "Do you know … what government administ[ers] this area?" and the guy answered: "the Ethiopian administration." The [Bahir Dar official continued]. "Yes, of course it is, but which government specifically?" and

[332] Phone interview with #289, [location withheld] July 2021.

[333] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Berhan and Abel, May 2021, Tigray.

[334] Phone interview with #181, Tigray, June 2021, Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021.

[335] Interviews with Askuwal, Aklile, and Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with #29, #38, Gebrekristos, Tigray, March 2021 and with with Atsbaha, Tesfalem, in Tigray, June 2021.

> the guy said: “As I know, it was under the administration of Tigray until today, but maybe we’ll see ... the next administrator.” And then the [Bahir Dar official] said, as a kind of warning: “Don’t ever say that this is under the administration of Tigray, because this is the administration of Amhara.”[336]

Andom said that on November 19, the Bahir Dar official appointed a local Amhara man and a local Walqayte man as the new administrators.[337]

In Adi Goshu, Amhara regional representatives and Fanos oversaw the appointment of local residents to administrative posts during a public meeting on December 10 at the Semeon Migebet restaurant, according to two residents.[338] Mihretab, a 28-year-old construction worker, in attendance, explained that the voting process excluded Tigrayans:

> Fano leaders asked the people to vote for their new administrators.... We voted, but not Tigrayans. Only Walqayte were allowed to vote … by raising hands ... The Walqyate said … “Tigrayans should leave, they cannot vote or be elected either.” Because there were two Tigrayan people who were elected during this meeting, but later the Walqayte said “No.” And they elected [the new Walqayte and Amhara administrators].[339]

Security in Adi Goshu came under the authority of Maj. “Shaleqa” Dejene Maru, an Amhara Special Forces officer and longstanding ally of Colonel Demeke (**See Background section**).[340] Filimon, a 41-year-old farmer, who attended a meeting that Dejene called on November 14, said: “Most people had fled the town, so there were few people [in the meeting]. He said: ‘From now on, there is nothing called Tigray here. This is the land of Gondar, of Amhara. Don’t expect the previous administration. This is Amhara from
now on.’”[341]

In Adebai, after the Ethiopian federal forces passed through the village in November, “the Fanos were left in the town,” said Kahsay, a 50-year-old woman, “They called a meeting at the church. Many residents participated.... We were afraid. The force said we had to accept the new administration in the town.”[342] An Amhara resident who was said

[336] Interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021.

[337] Interviews with Andom and Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[338] Phone interview with Kidane, Tigray, May 2021; Interview with Mihretab in Sudan, May 2021.

[339] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Kidane, Tigray, May 2021.

[340] Phone interviews with Filimon and Neguse, Tigray, June 2021, and with #289 in July 2021. “Shaleqa” historically referring to a military title and meaning a “commander of a thousand.” In the modern military it came to refer to a commander of a battalion or a major.

[341] Phone interview with Filimon, Tigray, June 2021.

[342] Interview with Kahsay, Sudan, December 2020.

to have fought as a soldier for the Derg administration became mayor during that meeting, according to
three residents.[343]

Elsewhere, villages and towns of Western Tigray, including Rawyan, May Gaba, Baeker, and Division, also came under the authority of Walqayte and Amhara individuals, predominantly local residents, many of whom were newly armed.[344] For the ENDF and forces from the Amhara region, relying on local Amhara and Walqayte residents facilitated control. In May Gaba, Hailemichael said the new Walqayte administrators "were the ones who knew the Tigrayans in the town…. The armed forces didn't know who was in the town, they needed the information from the Walqayte."[345]

The new authorities collected weapons from local militiamen and, in some places, redistributed them to local allies.[346] Andom said that in tabia Irob, the "Bahir Dar official" at a meeting gave an ultimatum to local Tigrayan militias to lay down their arms. The administration then "started giving the guns to most of the Walqayte people."[347] In Adebai, the organizers "said any militia found to have weapons should turn them in," during the first town-hall meeting after the town changed hands, recalled Zeray.[348] Amhara Special Forces in Sheglil also collected weapons from around 20 militias at a meeting. "When the Fano first came into the city, they didn't have firearms," said Aregawi, a 60-year-old farmer. After one week, he said, ASF "handed the weapons to the Fano who started going door-to-door looting."[349]

Initial public meetings played a crucial role in cementing the power of the new authorities, creating an atmosphere of intimidation for Tigrayan residents. In Adebai, Adi Goshu, Rawyan, May Gaba, and Humera, the authorities indicated an intent to ethnically cleanse the area of Tigrayans.[350] In May Gaba town, for instance, a local Walqayte resident assumed authority on November 20, according to two residents, and called a meeting that Tigrayans were required to attend.[351] One of the residents recalled one of the new administrators saying: "'You need to leave the town. We are not protecting you; we won't even try … If a single Amhara dies, we will kill 10 Tigrayans.'"[352] A 55-year-old

[343] Phone interviews with #188, Leul, #190, Tigray, May 2021.

[344] Interviews with Semira, Hadgu, Gebremariam, Yemane, Tesfa, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with #38, Tigray, March 2021 and with Hailemichael and Berhan, Tigray, May 2021.

[345] Phone interview with Hailemichael, Tigray, May 2021.

[346] Interview with Aregawi, Sudan, December 2020, and interviews with Gezae, Andom, Zeray, Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[347] Interview with Andom, Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[348] Interview with Zeray, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[349] Interviews with Aregawi, Sudan, December 2020. Phone interviews with Takele, #26, #185, Tigray, March and May 2021.

[350] Interview with Aklile, Yemane, Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Atsbaha, Tesfalem, #29, Sindayo, Tigray, March and June 2021.

[351] Phone interviews with Atsbaha, Tesfalem, Tigray June 2021.

[352] Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, June 2021.

farmer in attendance, recalled that the administrator said that Tigrayans needed "to leave town the next day, and [added]: 'If you are found the next day, we won't protect you from whatever is coming to you."[353] In Adi Goshu, Walqayte residents during the December 10 meeting spoke up to say that "First the Tigrayans should leave.… [T]hey should go out of the area," said Mihretab. He added:

> The Walqayte people who had a gun [new militias] started intimidating Tigrayans and looting their properties and separating people according to whether they were pure Tigray or of mixed background.... If they found a pure Tigray family, they forced them to leave. If the [militias] found a family [who was] half Walqayte and half Tigray, they only forced Tigrayans to leave.[354]

The ethnic cleansing campaign was announced in meetings in Humera.[355] According to five residents, new kebele administrators held a string of public meetings in December 2020.[356] Aklile, a 30-year-old Tigrayan farmer who lived there, described one such meeting: "I was trying to attend one of two times but it's uncomfortable, because they don't like us to participate with them in the meeting – especially the Amhara residents."[357] He said that on December 14, he went to a general meeting held in the kebele 1 administrative building: "They invited the residents – not specifically Amharas or Tigrayan. But the agenda was very dangerous because it was about Tigray and how we can move Tigray people out of the Zone beyond the Tekeze bridge."[358]

The new kebele 1 administrator, he said, made a speech announcing the administration's decision to deport Tigrayans:

> They said: "We won against the EPRDF and the TPLF so Tigrayan people must not live with us, and they shouldn't live here. If they want, they can go by themselves, if not we can also deport them. Also, nobody can go to Sudan, so we will close the

"The agenda [of the meeting] was very dangerous because it was about Tigray and how we can move Tigray people out of the zone beyond the Tekeze bridge."

[353] Phone interviews with Atsbaha, Tesfalem, Tigray, June 2021.

[354] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021.

[355] Interviews with Aklile, Askuwal, and Tesfakiros, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with Mihret, and #48, Tigray, March 2021; with #174, May 2021; Phone interview with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[356] Interviews with Askuwal, Aklile, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with Gebrekristos, #174, Fthawi, Tigray, March, May, and August 2021.

[357] Interview with Aklile, Sudan, May 2021.

[358] Ibid.

> way. So Tigrayans are not allowed to stay and live with us, they must leave and live across the Tekeze bridge."[359]

Aklile's mother, Askuwal, a 65-year-old woman, was present. She said: "The topic was about Tigray, Tigrayan people, and it was kind of disparaging for Tigrayans because they said they don't like for Tigrayans to stay in the city. [360]

## Discriminatory Restrictions

A new regime of discriminatory restrictions dramatically impacted living conditions for Tigrayans in West Tigray. "The [security forces] would say 'This is not your land. You don't have any rights here. Don't expect to be treated [well],'" said Filimon, a 41-year-old farmer from Adi Goshu. "We were not allowed to live like we used to."[361]

### Language Restrictions

Andom said that the new administrator of tabia Irob told a meeting of residents mid-November: "'From now, you are not allowed to speak Tigrinya or Saho [the language of the Irob people], and we only speak Amharic.'"[362]

This is not your land. You don't have any rights here. Don't expect to be treated [well]." "From now, you are not allowed to speak Tigrinya."

This ban on Tigrinya came into force across Western Tigray in November 2020, according to people from Adebai, Division, Adi Goshu, Rawyan, Baeker, and Humera.[363] In Division, said Hadgu, "They just wrote it on placards, like the one at the police station, that we're not allowed to speak Tigrinya."[364] Akbret, a 38-year-old woman from Humera, said:

> We couldn't speak in Tigrinya, because when they heard us, they would say "Isn't it enough that you spoke it 27 years in this town? So don't think about it, don't speak in Tigrinya." ... The Fano and Walqayte people [that claimed Amhara identity] … would say these things to us. They would also say things like: "This is our land, not yours." The Fano ... would follow us on our way to church and say: "How could you speak in

[359] Interview with Aklile, Sudan, May 2021.

[360] Interview with Askuwal, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interview with Gebrekristos,Tigray, March 2021.

[361] Phone interview with Filimon, June 2021.

[362] Interview with Andom in Sudan, May 2021.

[363] Interviews with Hadgu, Tesfa, Andom, Lewam, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with Akbret, #174, and Goitom in Tigray, May 2021.

[364] Interview with Hadgu, Sudan, May 2021.

> Tigrinya?" My little daughter is 4 years old, and they would also say these kinds of things to her.... I lived in Humera with huge fear. [365]

Interactions with the administration were required to be in Amharic.[366] Goitom, a 42-year-old farmer from Adi Goshu, recalls that on November 23, the authorities "declared that everyone had to speak in Amharic to get service. You wouldn't get service if you didn't speak in Amharic … Not everyone knew the language – we were facing challenges. I would try to speak, but with difficulty."[367] Yemane**,** an 18-year-old male student, said that by late December in Rawyan, "Everything [was] completely changed and replaced by the Amharic language. Even if you have any complaint, or application, or letter, you should write
in Amharic."[368]

The ban, said Akbret, extended to "listening to Tigrinya music."[369]

Those who dared to speak Tigrinya faced reprisals.[370] In Humera, said Tsegu, a 27-year-old male banker, Tigrayans "were not able to move within the city since the Amhara Special Forces and Fanos were beating people who speak Tigrinya."[371] Tesfa, a resident of Baeker, said that in his village the new Walqayte militias were the primary enforcers: "They were pushing people not to speak Tigrinya, even … in church."[372]

Gebremariam, a 14-year-old boy, described how he was stopped at a checkpoint on a road exiting Rawyan. He said:

> When the soldiers ask us anything, if they want to speak with us, they speak in Amharic and if we respond in Tigrinya, and they tell us they don't want to hear Tigrinya, that makes them angry.... I asked him at the checkpoint that I wanted to cross, and he said: "Don't talk to me in Tigrinya. Can you ask me in Amharic," and he just kicked me with his shoe.[373]

## Identification Cards

[365] Phone interview with Akbret, Tigray, May 2021.

[366] Phone interview with Akbret, and #190, Tigray, May 2021; phone interviews with Abebe, Goitom, Tigray, June 2021. Interview with Yemane, Sudan, May 2021.

[367] Phone interview with Goitom, Tigray, June 2021.

[368] Interview with Yemane, Sudan, May 2021.

[369] Phone interview with Akbret, Tigray, May 2021.

[370] Interview with Tsegu, Gebremariam, Tesfa, Meaza, and Mihretab, Sudan, January and May 2021

[371] Interview with Tsegu, Sudan, January 2021.

[372] Interviews with Tesfa, Meaza, Sudan, May 2021.

[373] Interview with Gebremariam, Sudan, May 2021.

In some locations, the new authorities selectively distributed new identification cards issued by the Amhara region, and then limited the rights of Tigrayans who were denied these cards.[374] Atsbaha, a 55-year-old farmer from May Gaba, said:

> The Tigrayans were not given new IDs. They began issuing IDs in December and I went to ask for one, because I wanted to travel and see my family. They said I was Tigrayan, and "You don't deserve to get one." It was only allowed for Walqayte and Amhara.[375]

Two other Tigrayan residents confirmed that the new interim administration was not giving out IDs to Tigrayans.[376] Dawit, a 50-year-old farmer, lost his ID in May Humer village before the outbreak of the conflict and was denied a new one by the new administrator in the village. He said that [the new administrator] told him he was ordered "from above," not to distribute the new cards to Tigrayans.[377]

The new identification cards were necessary to move through town, access essential services, or raise complaints. "We kept asking," said Dawit. "But they kept refusing. I couldn't get health treatment, so I had to come to Shire."[378] A 70-year-old farmer similarly was forced to leave Dansha for Shire to seek medical care: "[My friend's daughter] was sick, and I tried to take her to the center in Dansha since the one in Division was destroyed. When they saw her father's name was Tigrayan, they refused service to us, and told us to go to Shire and get treatment there."[379]

Dawit said, "The old ID said: 'Tigray region,' but the new ones said the town was [in the] Amhara region.…The new ID brought problems for Tigrayans":

> We feared that we might be caught somewhere. We didn't want to risk leaving ... our villages. The village didn't have a health facility, and didn't have much access, so those of us with serious illness couldn't get the proper treatment they deserved. If they wanted it, they needed to leave the village, but if we left, we had to have an ID.[380]

Aklile, a 30-year-old farmer from Humera, echoed these claims. The new ID cards, he said, had "the name of the administration of Semen [North] Gondar," adding: "It's very difficult then, because you can't move without any ID card, so the only way you have is

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[374] Cara Anna, "Leave no Tigrayan: In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased," Associated Press, (Apr. 7, 2021), https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-tigray-minority-ethnic-cleansing-sudan-world-news-842741eebf9bf0984946619cc15023.

[375] Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, June 2021.

[376] Phone interview with Dawit, Tigray, June 2021. Interview with Aklile, Sudan, May 2021.

[377] Phone interview with Dawit, Tigray, June 2021.

[378] Ibid.

[379] Phone interview with Fikadu, Tigray, May 2021.

[380] Phone interview with Dawit, Tigray, June 2021.

fleeing [to Sudan] … Personally, I didn't get the new one because I'm Tigrayan – it's difficult."[381]

The denial of new forms of identification for Tigrayans facilitated subsequent targeting. "It was a very good technique for them to easily recognize who is Tigray and who is Amhara," said Yemane, from Rawyan. "They kept asking people for ID cards … and could easily arrest and hold the Tigrayans who didn't have an ID."[382]

## Confiscation of Personal Documents

At the same time, Amhara forces and Walqayte militias confiscated or destroyed the personal documents of many Tigrayans — an act that would make it difficult for Tigrayans to claim rights and services and ultimately continue to live their lives in the area.[383] Yonas, a 65-year-old man with disabilities from Division, said that the Amhara Special Forces in Adi Goshu destroyed his documents when they arrested him at his house. They "saw the papers describing me and how I ended up in Adi Goshu … the papers showed I had injuries from the [previous] war … and they burned them," he said. "They burned any paper
I had."[384]

Amhara forces would sometimes confiscate identification cards on release from custody and at checkpoints. Leul, a 19-year-old from Adebai, said Amhara Special Forces took his ID, "and didn't give it back" when they released him at a checkpoint in the Kafta Sheraro Park.[385] Fikadu, a 70-year-old farmer from Division, also reported that Amhara Special Forces guarding the checkpoint on the western side of the Tekeze bridge, near Adi Goshu town, also took the ID as he tried to cross the bridge. He said that former soldiers with disabilities who fought against the Derg like himself "have papers to show that they had injuries from the war." The document entitles its holder to receive assistance from a veterans' association. He added: "And if anyone wanted to help former freedom fighters with disabilities, [they] could recognize us through these papers." Now that his documents were gone, he said, he could not claim benefits.[386]

One woman said that Amhara forces and Walqayte militias destroyed property deeds that would entitle her to lodge a complaint about looted goods, or to reclaim her houses in the future. "The Amhara militia, Special Forces, and Walqayte" not only looted Tigrayan property, but also "took IDs … [and] burned our papers," explained Berhan, a 58-year-old farmer from Division. "[The papers] were not useful for them, but … would

[381] Interview with Aklile, Sudan, May 2021.

[382] Interview with Yemane, Sudan, May 2021.

[383] Interviews with Teame, Andom, Meaza, Mihretab, Berhane, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interview with Mihret, Tigray, March 2021.

[384] Phone interview with Yonas, Tigray, June 2021; Interview with Aklile, Sudan, May 2021.

[385] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[386] Phone interview with Fikadu, Tigray, May 2021.

be useful for us.… The ownership papers of our house, property, land; the ones the TPLF gave us to prove that we were former fighters of the party." Without IDs, she said, "we couldn't go to the Dansha to ask about [our stolen] property or animals.… We only had a paper … [issued] by the interim authority ... to cross to Tekeze and Shire."[387]

## Other Restrictions

The new authorities reflected the emergence of a new ethnic hierarchy that imposed restrictions on Tigrayans without a legal basis, underscoring the impunity with which Tigrayans could be mistreated. In Rawyan, the appointment of new authorities came with a series of discriminatory rules that prevented Tigrayans from collecting crops and harvesting the land. Yemane said that the new rules began in November, "the season for harvesting." He continued: "The administration proclaimed ... that the sorghum fields belong to Amharas, so it was legal for them to harvest any of the land that they got." The authorities, however, said they wouldn't "give permission to any Tigrayan farmer that has land there."[388]

Banks that had been closed since before the conflict reopened in Dansha in January, but a 70-year-old pensioner said he was denied service. "I went to receive my pension. The bank was open, and it was serving other customers. But they didn't give me my pension because I am Tigrayan," he said.[389]

## Blocking Freedom of Movement

Beginning in late November 2020, the Ethiopian federal forces, Amhara Special Forces and militias including Fanos frequently stopped civilians from crossing the border to Sudan by detaining, robbing, beating, and killing them. Ethiopian soldiers often told people to return home, in an apparent attempt to present a veneer of normalcy. Witnesses said that Amhara forces and militias told Tigrayans to go beyond the Tekeze River towards
eastern Tigray.

On November 25, 2020, journalists reporting from the border crossing point of Hamdayet in Sudan, along the Tekeze River, noted that Ethiopian forces were visible in Dima, the last Ethiopian village refugees reached before crossing.[390] The flow of refugees into Sudan had shrunk from 1,300 to 6,800 per day, between November 10 and 20, to a few

[387] Phone interview with Berhan, Tigray, May 2021.

[388] Interview with Yemane, Sudan, May 2021.

[389] Phone interview with #52, Tigray, April 2021.

[390] Anne Soy, "Tigray Crisis: Ethiopian Soldiers Accused of Blocking Border with Sudan, "*BBC News,* November 28, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55106353; Anne Soy, "Tigray Crisis: Thousands Seek Refugee on Sudan-Ethiopia Border," video report, *BBC News,* November 27, 2020, https://youtu.be/O46DFR8AoeIhttps://youtu.be/O46DFR8AoeI.

hundred per day throughout most of December, down to a few dozen per day after that.[391]

Many of those fleeing to Sudan said they were blocked by an extensive network of checkpoints controlled by Ethiopian and Amhara forces. Samuel, a 45-year-old farmer from Humera town, said that in November 2020 “there was no way to leave” because “the Fano and Amhara Special Forces were controlling all the ways out” of the city.[392] A 56-year-old farmer who was in Adi Goshu until January also tried to go to Sudan: “We were stopped at the checkpoint by the Amhara Special Forces just on the outskirts of Adi Goshu. They asked for our ID, they saw [on] our ID that we were from Division and said we could not go to Sudan or stay in Amhara land.”[393]

Many traveling northwards from the areas of Division and Dansha were stopped and turned back at the village of Rawyan, which lies roughly nine kilometers from the border.[394] Meaza, a 45-year-old woman from Baeker, tried three times to enter Sudan. She recalled encountering Ethiopian soldiers at a checkpoint south of Rawyan in the month of Hidar (November-December 2020): “we told them ... ‘They are killing us, cleansing us! Please!’ They said: ‘We don’t care, it’s not our business. They can kill you, it’s up to them.
Just go back!’”[395]

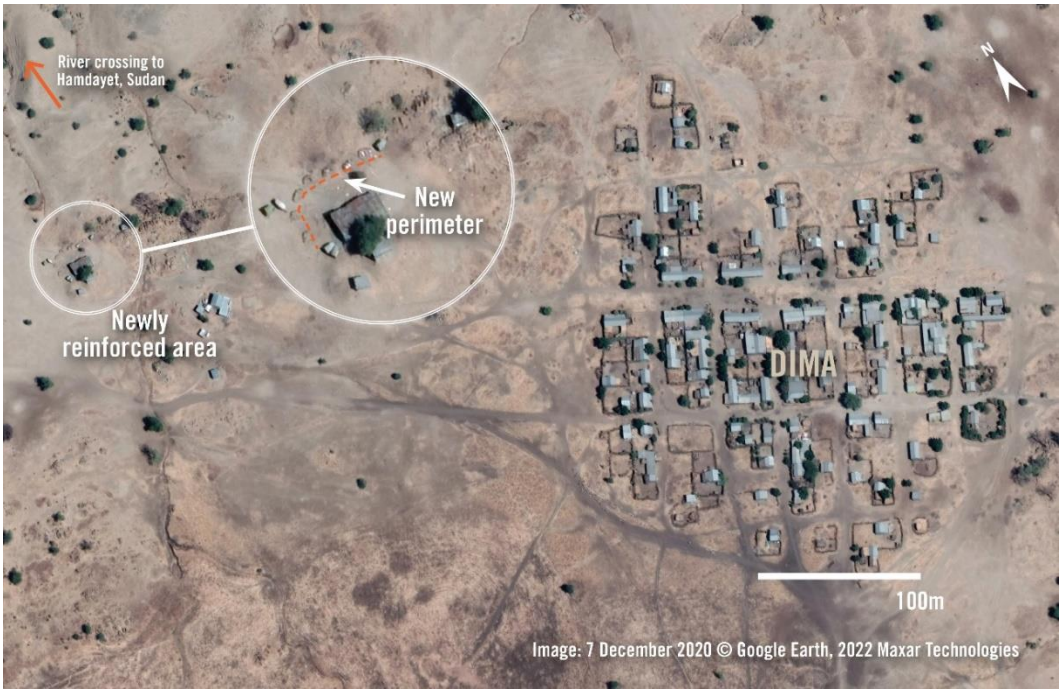
[391] UNHCR, “Ethiopia Situation: Daily New Arrivals Update, Sudan: Eastern Border,” (January 7, 2021), https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Eastern%20Sudan%20Border%20-%20Ethiopian%20New%20Arrivals%20Update%207%20January%202021.pdfhttps://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Eastern%20Sudan%20Border%20-%20Ethiopian%20New%20Arrivals%20Update%207%20January%202021.pdf.

[392] Phone Interview with Samuel, Tigray, May 2021.

[393] Phone interview with #179, Tigray, May 2021.

[394] Interviews with Berihu, #240, Sudan, May 2021.

[395] Interview with Meaza, Sudan, May 2021.




Satellite imagery from 7 December 2020, shows the Dima area where many people passed through to cross to Hamdayet, Sudan. There is a new perimeter surrounding some structures west of the village, on the path to the river.




Imagery from 18 August 2021, shows a new structure with perimeter at a key crossing point during the rainy season, between Humera and Dima. Two vehicles appear to be moving toward the checkpoint from the west. Low resolution imagery (not shown)indicates that the perimeter and structure became visible between August 5 and 18, 2021.

By January 2021, Ethiopian federal soldiers were no longer visible in Dima, the last stretch of the journey for Tigrayans fleeing to Sudan. But refugees in Sudan describe groups of Amhara Special Forces and Fanos waiting in ambush to intercept people on the move. Some of the people fleeing were detained on the way or turned back repeatedly by forces in the Dima area.

A group of civilians fleeing Division on April 19, 2021, similarly, encountered Amhara Special Forces in Humera. The Amhara Special Forces, according to one farmer, said: "'This is not your place – you need to go to the middle of Tigray.'"[396]

A 24-year-old from Shire said two of his friends were killed when his group came under attack by Amhara forces near Saint Michael church, on the outskirts of Humera and roughly five kilometers east of Dima:

> They stopped us. We started running. They made … Dawit and Samera … kneel down in front of them… at gunpoint. They were shooting at us as we ran away. These were Amhara Special Forces.... On November 26, we arrived in Hamdayet. We asked people [who arrived after] if they had seen our friends. They told us they had been killed.[397]

Lewam, a 27-year-old woman from Rawyan, who tried to cross into Sudan on January 20 as part of a group, recounted that around 12 Fano militiamen stopped them by the river. The Fanos, she said, robbed everyone of their belongings, including bags of sesame, and beat the young men.[398]

A 19-year-old fleeing Adebai town was caught by Fano militia in Dima. He said they detained him there for 24 hours, and then jailed him for seven days in Kafta Humera.[399] Tesfakiros from Humera town similarly said he was arrested, beaten, robbed and threatened by Fano militia while travelling alone at night on the road near Dima.[400] He explained how after beating him with the stocks of their Kalashnikov-type assault rifles and debating whether to kill him, Fano militia took the 15,000 birr (ETB) he had before sending him back to Humera.[401]

The patrols posed a threat to any Tigrayan in the area, even those who were not seeking to cross the border. Hagos, 20, was one of a small group of cattle keepers, living with their animals out in the fields of Banat, an agricultural area near the border. On January

[396] Interview with Hadgu, Sudan, May 2021.

[397] Interview with #202, Sudan, December 2020.

[398] Interview with Lewam, Sudan, May 2021.

[399] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[400] Interview with Tesfakiros, Sudan, May 2021.

[401] Interview with Lewam, Sudan, May 2021.

16, 2021, he and other cattle keepers came across a patrol of Amhara and Walqayte men in a sand-colored camouflage uniform:

> We were about to cross the river.... They shot and our cattle got scared and started running. And then they shot again and then we were scared.... The soldiers came, arrested us. Some of them said: “Those are juntas, supporters of TPLF!” ... And some of them said: “Kill them!” We were with our cattle and then my friend fled, went down to the river... We were together in the river; the water was up to our waist. First, they shot him, he fell in the water... and the water took him... I ran immediately out of the water and lay on the ground ... I thought they were gone, but when I got up, he shot at me, hit my arm.... I kept running across the river to the Sudanese border. He shot at me twice but couldn’t hit me.

Hagos said that his friend, Angesom, died after being shot in the neck. Hagos received medical treatment for his bullet wound in Sudan, but he remains unable to use his hand.[402]

## Harassment, Threats, and Intimidation

[402] Interview with Hagos, Sudan, May 2021.

Many Tigrayans said they faced harassment in their daily lives from forces loyal to the Amhara region, which they believed was aimed at terrorizing Tigrayans to leave the areas. They described how Amhara Special Forces and Fano and Walqayte militias harassed them through a variety of what interviewees called “techniques”: throwing stones at houses, shooting rifles in the air, and taunting Tigrayans with loudspeakers. These forces also used the opportunity of daily encounters with Tigrayans to beat and threaten them.

The new local authorities in some cases refused to assist Tigrayans who sought help in



On January 17, 2021, Hagos (not his real name), a 20-year-old cattle keeper said he was shot in the arm by Amhara and local militia as he and his friends tried to cross the Tekeze River to Sudan. (c) 2021 Amnesty International.

these cases.[403] In seven villages and towns, the harassment escalated into ultimatums giving Tigrayans 24- or 72-hours' notice to leave the area under threat of death.[404]

a. Daily Harassment

Mihret said that a climate of relentless intimidation took over Humera. The forces in town “would come to your neighborhood with speakers and taunt people to come out of their home and feel fear,” she said. “I felt pained hearing this profiling.”[405] In tabia Irob, the Fanos and Walqayte who controlled the area “kept terrifying Tigrayans [in] different ways,” said Andom, a 36-year-old male teacher from the village: “They come up to your house and throw stones and do what they want.”[406]

[403] Phone interviews with Abel, Atsbaha, Ayele, Tigray, March, May, and June 2021.

[404]; Interviews with Andom, Meaza, Hadgu, Berihu, Yemane, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with Mihret, Semhal, Tigray, March and June 2021.

[405] Phone interview with Mihret, Tigray, March 2021.

[406] Interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021.

Meaza, a 45-year-old woman from Baeker, said: “They keep saying that they want to kill us, it’s very difficult to go praying.”[407] At night, Tigrayans, remaining at home, listened in fear as militias terrorized their neighborhoods. “We prayed that the day wouldn’t become night, because [at] night it’s scary,” said Hadgu, a 24-year-old farmer from Division. “We heard weapons shot, because Fanos came every night and tried to loot the cattle, so they shoot at people or shoot in the air to terrorize people.”[408]

In Humera, Genet, a 30-year-old woman from the town, remembered that on November 29, 2020 – well after the town fell under the control of federal and allied forces, “The only thing you could hear is weapons' fire non-stop. They kept shooting and shooting.”[409] The harassment and threats continued for months afterwards. Selamawit, who stayed in Humera until May 2021, said, “Humera is also still in darkness, there is no electricity ... It was stressful when the sun would go down … We would hear weapon shots. Gunshots continuously every night.”[410]

Tesfa, the 60-year-old farmer from Baeker, said the gunshots at night were just one of many “techniques to make you feel uncomfortable living there.” He mentioned other such tactics:

> Every night… stones were thrown on houses. Most of the walls are made of steel, so when they throw stones against the wall, it’s loud and scary. That means they are around. Every night. Every single night. And that’s terrifying, it makes you feel uncomfortable and hate living there, so you deport yourself.

Tigrayans trying to go about their daily lives faced threats and the risk of a violent encounter.

“It makes you feel uncomfortable and hate to live there, so you deport yourself.”

Yemane, an 18-year-old student from Rawyan, was one of five youths – including his brother and their friends – abused by Fano militiamen on January 16. He reported that they encountered a Fano group, before the curfew went into effect, who stopped, robbed, and severely beat them, telling them: “Why don’t you go to Shire [a town in Central Tigray]?” When one of the young men started running, the Fanos shot at him, but missed.[411]

In Division, Tigrayan residents felt as though they had no recourse for abuses. Tsige, a 20-year-old female student, said that, since “the administration [of Division was]

[407] Interview with Meaza, Sudan, May 2021.

[408] Interviews with Hadgu and Berihu, Sudan, May 2021.

[409] Interview with Genet, Sudan, May 2021.

[410] Phone interview with Selamawit, Tigray, June 2021.

[411] Interview with Yemane, Sudan, May 2021.

controlled by Fano, […] we couldn't complain to anyone" about what was happening in the village.[412] Teame, a 74-year-old farmer from the village, said: "It's normal for any Walqayte or Amhara to come to your house and beat you and loot your house. There was no accountability."[413] In Division, Tigrayan residents had hoped that appointing local Amharas as administrators would improve their relations with non-Tigrayan residents and forces deployed in the village, said Abel, a 72-year-old farmer:

> But that is not what we got out of it.... There was no legal action taken in the town.... They took whatever they wanted and took it to Dansha to sell.... The killing started and didn't stop.... [Non-Tigrayan] residents started to ... accuse us [of] having guns, even though we didn't have guns. They would arrest people, and they would go to the ENDF and say we were involved in the war, even though [we] were not involved in the war. This was a technique to demoralize people and take the property. And things were getting hard.[414]

The impunity militias enjoyed from local authorities created an environment in which even ordinary residents felt empowered to threaten their Tigrayan neighbors.[415] A 37-year-old *sewa* (beer) seller in May Humer village near May Gaba received threats from Walqyate residents while at work. She explained: "Walqayte would come to my house and would say, 'Why are you in our land? We expect you to leave."[416]

Tsega, a 24-year-old woman from tabia Irob, recalled: "People were beaten every day, every time." She recalled being assaulted by the operator of the mill where she went to mill her sorghum:

> I was at the mill machine.... It was my turn and I tried to feed the machine my sorghum. And the operator [a Walqayte man], slapped me.… First, he [dropped and] threw my sorghum to the floor. And he beat me. Anybody can beat you. They don't feel like Tigrayans are human beings. They don't treat Tigrayans in good ways. Just like animals.[417]

Akbret, a 38-year-old woman from Humera, said that her landlord's son threatened her with death. "I didn't have any issues" with her landlord, she said:

> Until his son came to the house one day and started calling me "junta" repeatedly – a word that the prime minister started calling Tigrayans. He

[412] Phone interview with Tsige, Tigray, April 2021.

[413] Interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021.

[414] Phone interview with Abel, Tigray, May 2021.

[415] Phone interview with Akbret and #198, Tigray, May 2021.

[416] Phone interview with Semhal, Tigray, June 2021.

[417] Interview with Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

> told me I am Tigrayan, that I am "junta" and that he would report me to the administration, and they would have me killed if I didn't leave. He even said: "I will even stab you with my own hands."[418]

"They were calling my little girl, who is 4, a junta," recalled a 33-year-old from Baeker, adding:

> Not only them, but their kids, little boys, were threatening my little girl, and they would say they would behead my daughter. I assumed that these were words they heard and learned from their parents. So, what if they would [actually] do it someday? What if they took a knife and beheaded my daughter? I had to leave; it wasn't safe for me.[419]

b. Ultimatums

Between November and March, in at least 11 towns and villages, Tigrayan households received written ultimatums with deadlines to leave from Amhara security forces and militias, often alongside death threats.

Amhara Special Forces and Fano militias distributed pamphlets when they first entered Ruwassa on November 6-7, 2020. Solomon, a 46-year-old farmer, said he saw "papers that said Tigrayans need to leave the town immediately. … They were thrown everywhere, so when we woke up in the morning, you would see it on your door, or on the way to church, everywhere."[420] Andom, from tabia Irob (Ruwassa), said that during the Ethiopian calendar month of Hidar (November – December 2020) typed leaflets were handed out, which read: "Every Tigrayan who lives here should leave the area; if not we will massacre the same [way] as Mai Kadra." The pamphlet said it came from "Fano Committee" and "Asmelash (Welkait Identity) committee."[421]

Kidane, a 23-year-old university graduate, saw Walqaytes repeatedly distribute such typed pamphlets in Adi Goshu. The papers read: "Tigrayans need to leave tomorrow," "Tigrayans need to leave, or they will be killed." "They would have a deadline," he said.[422]

"They handed out pamphlets… which said: ... "Every Tigrayan who lives here should leave the area; if not, we will massacre the same [way] as Mai Kadra."

In Baeker, the pamphlets were handwritten, according to a 33-year-old woman who said they were left: "in churches and outside Tigrayan homes. The messages read: 'If you

[418] Phone interview with Akbret, Tigray, May 2021.

[419] Phone interview with #198, Tigray May 2021.

[420] Phone interview with Solomon, Tigray, May 2021.

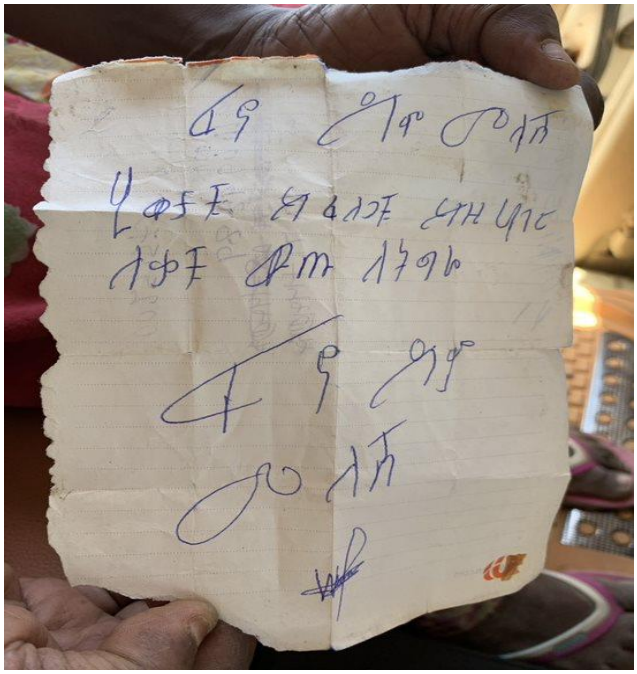
[421] Interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021.

[422] Phone interview with Kidane, Tigray, May 2021

don't leave in 15 days, there will be another Mai Kadra in Baeker. We didn't know who posted these papers or put them.'"[423] Meaza, a 45-year-old woman, recalled: "Every night they keep saying 'Tigrayans, go out we will kill you. Go out. Go out of the area,' and sending this … paper." She added: "Every single Tigrayan and Tigrayan house received this paper.

We burned three papers before. This was the fourth one. And we finally realized that they would have no mercy on us. … And finally, we decided [to leave]."[424]

In Humera, the ultimatums warning Tigrayans to leave the area were issued on placards signed by "the Administration of Welkait Tegede," said Abrahaley, a 28-year-old cashier from the town.[425] Notices calling for Tigrayans to leave were also posted on the Abune Aregawi church in Mai Kadra, and orally repeated to her by Fano militias, according to a 56-year-old woman.[426] A student, 21, said between February and March in Division, Fanos and Amhara Special Forces distributed pamphlets calling for Tigrayans to leave and also urged them to head towards Central Tigray.[427]



Threatening pamphlet reported to have been distributed in Baeker town around November – December 2020. Pamphlet loosely translates to: "Tigrayans leave this territory if you want [to save] your life," and is allegedly signed by Fano militias. © 2021 Amnesty International.

> "They kept saying every night 'We will kill you. Go out. Go out of the area.'"

## Depriving Tigrayans of Means of Survival

> It seemed they were trying to kill us slowly. What did we have to wait for? There was nothing to live for and survive. So why would we stay?
> —Mehari, a 70-year-old farmer from Division, June 2021

[423] Phone interview with #198, Tigray, May 2021.

[424] Interview with Meaza, Sudan, May 2021.

[425] Interview with Abrahaley, Sudan, January 2021

[426] Interview with #18, Sudan, January 2021.

[427] Phone interview with #32, Tigray, March 2021

Deliberate actions by security forces and local authorities deprived Tigrayan communities of their means of survival. Federal and allied forces looted Tigrayan homes, businesses, livestock, and crops as they took over towns and villages. Amhara Special Forces, Fano militias, and Eritrean military forces — when they were present — carried out the bulk of the looting, but groups in civilian clothes, some armed, others not, later joined them.[428] The pillage began after the capture of towns and villages and continued long afterwards, as security forces, particularly Fano and other militias targeted harvests and livestock. [429] Newly appointed authorities and the security forces who did not partake in the looting did little to intervene. Local authorities also denied Tigrayans the ability to plough farmland and impeded their access to food assistance and other services.[430] The consequences of their efforts to deprive Tigrayans of critical sources for survival and their livelihood were far-reaching, and ultimately effective. As Tigrayan communities faced extreme deprivation and continued threats, many began to flee Western Tigray to Central Tigray in greater numbers beginning in January 2021, with some managing to seek refuge in Sudan.[431]

## Looting of Property

Tigrayans who returned home after the shelling of their towns and villages found that their valuables, furniture, and other property were gone. Tesfa, a 60-old-farmer who returned to Baeker in mid-November 2020, said that he found his house empty: “Carts, beds, everything was looted.... I couldn’t find any mattress or bed.... We just slept on the floor.” [432]

Two interviewees said they saw security force members loot homes and businesses, selectively targeting Tigrayan property.[433] Berihu returned to his small shop and house in Division when Walqayte militia beat him and his friends before looting the premises.[434]
He recalled:

[428] Interview interview with Tesfa, Sudan, May 2021.

[429] Giulia Paravinci and Katharine Houreld, “UN official accuses Eritean forces of deliberately starving Tigray,” *Reuters*, June 11, 2021; “In the fertile lands of western Tigray, farmers abandoned fields full of sorghum, teff and sesame to escape the violence, Reuters reporting shows. Some residents accused Amhara forces of stealing their crops and livestock or chasing them off their farms.” https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/.

[430] OCHA, “Ethiopia: Access Snapshot Tigray Region”,March 31, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/access_snapshot_-tigray_region_-_31_march_2021.pdf [“While no active fighting is reportedly taking place in the Western zone, reports of forced displacement of Tigraypopulation and denials of assistance to people of Tigray origin in areas close to Dansha by local authorities and armed groups continue to emerge. Reportedly, armed groups in the area deny partners' access to the population stranded in areas close to the Tekezi river bordering North-Western Tigray in Korarit woreda.”].

[431] UNHCR, “UNHCR relocates first Ethiopian refugees to a new site in Sudan,” January 5, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/briefing/2021/1/f4316c4/unhcr-relocates-first-ethiopian-refugees-new-site-sudan.html

[432] Interview with Tesfa, Sudan, May 2021.

[433] Phone interview with #198, Tigray, May 2021. Interview with Jemila, Sudan, June 2021.

[434] Interviews with Berihu, Hadgu, Sudan, May 2021

> We had a TV hall – we had a 42-inch TV for people to come and watch soccer. Three refrigerators. They took that. They also looted the shop. All the chairs. My father also left 80,000 Ethiopian birr in the shop — they also looted [that].[435]

Looters carried the goods away in different ways. In tabia Irob (Ruwassa), Fano militia used ambulances to move the goods stolen from Tigrayan homes, according to Andom, a 36-year-old teacher.[436] Atsbaha, a bank guard, 55, from May Gaba, saw Amhara Special Forces and Fano militia loot the bank in mid-November and said the effort seemed well organized. Amhara Special Forces first stole "items they could carry in their hands," he said. "The Fano [then] came and took items they needed to transport with their cars." [437]

Security forces also pillaged public and communal institutions, such as schools, courts, churches, and health centers.[438] In Division, the pillage of equipment and takeover of the hospital "left nothing for the residents," according to Fikadu.[439] Fano militia in Humera, said Tesfakiros, looted computers, laboratories, and chairs from the secondary school and preparatory school, and pillaged a warehouse belonging to Guna trading company. He continued: "There were so many sesame bags there that were looted by different trucks.... The Fanos and soldiers were assisting them. I heard them when they spoke to each other about it.... Everything moved to both Amhara and Eritrea."[440]

Security forces looted four of Division's churches, including Abune Aregawi, St. Gabriel, St. Mary, and St. Michael's church, according to Berihu, who said:

> They looted church property, artifacts.... Some of them were priests…[who] were there assisting the Fanos and looting.… When we came back, we found … the Abune Aregawi church ... empty and we were shocked because we never expected that they would loot a church.... We only found [the] postcards of saints.[441]

The pattern of pillage and looting of Tigrayan property continued after towns and villages came firmly under the control of new authorities and security forces. In Adebai, "the Fanos started looting" after the Ethiopian federal forces left, said Hailay, a 30-year-old animal trader from Adebai. "They were looking for gold, they

[435] Interview with Berihu, Sudan, May 2021.

[436] interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021.

[437] Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, June 2021.

[438] Interviews with Senait, Berihu, Tesfakiros, #209, #205, Sudan, December 2020, and May 2021; Phone interviews with Takele, Tigray, March 2021 and with Fikadu, Tsige, Tigray, May 2021; Phone interview with #289 [location withheld], July 2021.

[439] Phone interview with Fikadu, Tsige, Tigray, May 2021.

[440] Interview with Tesfakiros, Sudan, May 2021.

[441] Interview with Berihu, Sudan, May 2021.

were even picking out the clothes they liked and didn't like."[442] In Humera, ASF and Fanos plundered homes and businesses.[443] "They were even taking curtains from houses," said a 33-year-old civil servant in the town.[444] Residents from Adi Goshu, Ruwassa, May Deli, Bereket, and Korarit described comparable mass looting in
these locations.[445]

Earlier destruction and looting left Tigrayans in some towns without shelter. "They even took the corrugated iron roofs," said a 73-year-old farmer from May Deli, adding: "they took ... my property and burned down my daughter's house."[446] In Division and Mai Kadra, security forces and non-Tigrayan residents also took the iron roofs and sheets that remained of Tigrayan homes, according to three residents who later fled.[447] Terefe said he resorted to living in an "open field … under the trees because of the lack of shelter," after fleeing May Lemin village.[448]

On December 16, 2020, one witness recorded the damage of property as he drove south between Dansha and May Deli towns. At one point in the video, a man can be seen bent over picking up debris left from the foundations of a house with a cart nearby. Shortly after, a man has parked his donkey cart while he is walking through the destroyed remnants of houses. The entire video films approximately 1.7 kilometers of the road and approximately 16 destroyed houses are seen on one side of the road. High resolution satellite imagery from November 18, 2020, shows the roofs visible at the start of the video still intact. By December 14, high resolution satellite imagery shows the roofs are no longer there.

[442] Interview with Hailay, Sudan, December 2020.

[443] Interview with Tesfakiros, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with #50, #174, Tigray, April and May 2021.

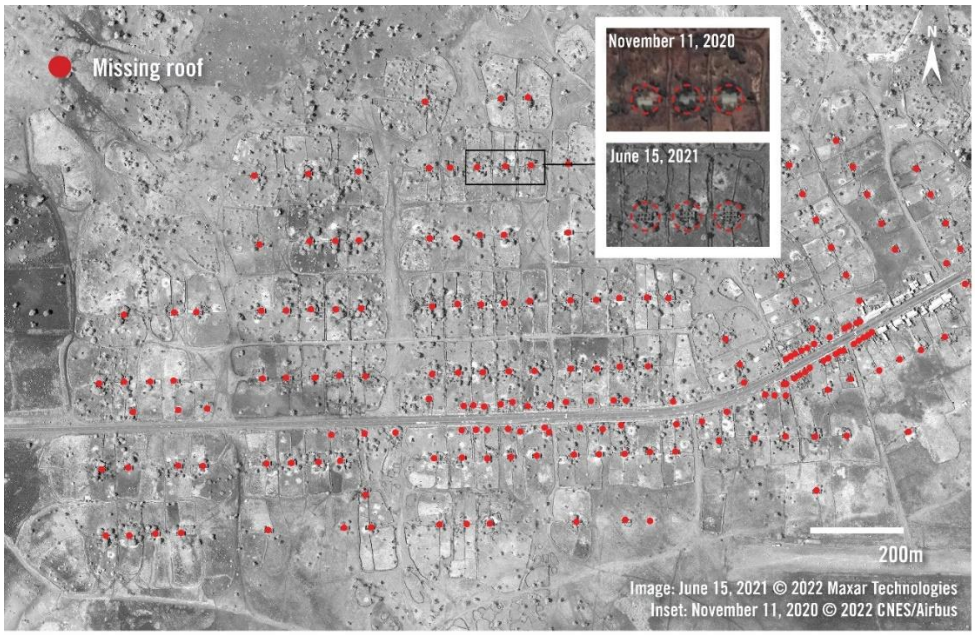
[444] Phone interview with #50, Tigray, April 2021.

[445] Phone interviews with Goitom, Yirgalem, #186, #189, #197, Tigray, May and June 2021; Interview with #240, Sudan, May 2021.

[446] Phone interview with #197, Tigray, May 2021.

[447] Phone interviews with #26, Tigray, March 2021, with #289, April 2021, with #197 in Tigray, May 2o21. Interview with #17 in Sudan, January 2021.

[448] Phone interview with Terefe in Tigray, March 2021.




Satellite imagery from June 15, 2021 shows the eastern side of Division. Over 200 structures appear to be missing roofs. According to low resolution imagery (not shown), the roofs disappeared between March 25 and 2 April, 2021.

## Looting of Crops, Livestock, and Restrictions on Access to Farmland

Numerous Tigrayans with whom we spoke, including farmers across the Western Zone, said that the new interim authorities-imposed restrictions on harvests. In addition, Fano militias and other security forces, and in some cases non-Tigrayan farmers, systematically looted their crops and livestock.[449]

The pillage of harvests and livestock often marked the first of a series of actions by security forces in Western Tigray that left Tigrayan communities without access to and the means to secure food, medicine, or other sources of livelihood. The timing of the attacks – during harvest season (November–December) – and its duration – continuing long after the takeover of towns – exacerbated food insecurity for Tigrayan residents.

In November 2020, Tigrayan farmers returning home found that the harvest they had been forced to leave behind had been looted.[450] In mid-November, Aregawi, a relatively well-off farmer and beekeeper in Sheglil, spent 10 days in detention, where he was tortured. After his release, he discovered that all his harvest, livestock, and personal property had been looted. “They didn’t even leave a cup to drink water from,” he said.

[449] Interviews with Aregawi, Tewolde, Mehari, #205, Hadgu, Gebremariam, Tesfakiros, Gezae, Yemane, #246, Fitsum, Hayelom, Sudan, December 2020, and May 2021; Phone interviews with Sindayo and #46, Tigray, March 2021, with Asmeret in Tigray, April 2021, with Samuel, in Tigray, May 2021, and with Filimon, #183, in Tigray June 2021. “Tigray conflict: ‘We have no food, we face death,’” *BBC News*, June 8, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57397901.

[450] Interview with Aregawi, Sudan, December 2020; Phone interview with Ayele, Tigray, March 2021; Cara Anna, “Leave no Tigrayan: An Ethnicity Erased,” *Associated Press*, April 7, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-tigray-minority-ethnic-cleansing-sudan-world-news-842741eebf9bf0984946619cc15023

"They stole 50 quintals (5000 kilograms) of my honey, 70 quintals (7000 kilograms) of millet, 20 quintals (2000 kilograms) of sesame, 150,000 ETB (about US$3,000), and 150 oxen."[451] With nothing left, Aregawi felt he had no choice but to flee to Sudan.

In Adi Goshu, one farmer said that the looting of sorghum and the harvest caused "extreme hunger."[452] By June 2021, the situation felt desperate for communities in May Woini, a small village near Adi Goshu. Neguse explained: "Most of the time we spend at home, because we can't move ... We don't have food and other freedom. We want to move to any other place that is safe and accessible for food. There's no food. This has made us stressed. Things are critical. I have no words to explain it."[453]
Berihu, a 17-year-old boy in Division, said: "There was not enough food to be honest and no good food, either. Because mostly we just ate the sorghum and all the mills were looted, so most of the time women would grind the sorghum with the stone and it's very difficult."[454] In Baeker, Semira said that for food, her family ate "only water with salt and scrambled injera [flat bread]."[455] One 28-year-old ended up crossing the Tekeze barefoot and hungry. "We didn't have shoes because we sold them to get money and to get food," he explained.[456]

Four Tigrayans in other villages separately provided similar accounts of militias and security forces waiting for farmers to collect or harvest the sorghum before stealing their crops.[457] "They completely looted the land," explained Hadgu, a farmer from Division. "We cut the sorghum together with other residents. Then, after we cut the sorghum, Fano [militiamen] came up to us and forced us to leave and took the cut sorghum and processed it themselves."[458] In farmland surrounding Mai Kadra, Rawyan, and Adi Goshu, militias were free to harvest the land themselves.[459] In early December, as Asmeret, 70, hid with her family, she could see Amhara militia and laborers come to a farmland near Mai Kadra and loot the harvest:

> The Amhara militia ... brought daily laborers ... who started looting what Tigrayans harvested from last summer.... There was no chance for us to stay in the fields.... We saw them putting the harvest on trucks and taking it in the direction of their region.[460]

[451] interview with Aregawi, Sudan, December 2020.

[452] Phone interview with #183, Tigray, June 2021.

[453] Phone interview with Neguse, Tigray, June 2021.

[454] Interview with Berihu, Sudan, May 2021.

[455] Interview with Semira, Sudan, May 2021.

[456] Phone interview with #193, Tigray, May 2021.

[457] Interviews with Hadgu, Gezae, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interview with Sindayo, #46, Tigray, March 2021.

[458] Interview with Hadgu, Sudan, May 2021.

[459] Interview with Gebremariam, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Asmeret, Tigray, May 2021, and with #183, Tigray, June 2021.

[460] Phone interview with Asmeret, Tigray, May 2021.

Witnesses in Division, Humera, Adebai, and Adi Goshu similarly saw Amhara security forces taking pillaged goods in the direction of the Amhara region.[461]

Security forces also systematically stole vast numbers of cattle and other livestock, another crucial source of food and cash income for small and large-scale farmers in Western Tigray.[462] Tigrayan farmers from nine different villages described widespread theft of harvest and livestock, which formed part of a campaign to deprive Tigrayan communities of their livelihoods and drive them from their homes. [463]

Amhara forces also prevented Tigrayans from harvesting their land or grazing their livestock using threats and, in some cases, violence, according to numerous Tigrayan residents from eight different villages and towns.[464] "I was in my farmland with a young herder when the Fano and ASF came. They pointed a gun at me, and they beat me, too," said Abel, from Dansha. "They gave me an option: 'Do you want your life or your animals?' I chose my life, and they took my animals.... I was left with one camel and donkey and cart."[465] Fano militia also looted all 20 cattle belonging to the family of a 38-year-old farmer from Sheglil in the first week after the capture of the village. "They were taken in front of my eyes. The cattle lived with us, in our compound.... The armed Fano threatened us.… We don't have any other possessions, as we are poor ... they just took our cattle ... They accused us of being Woyane thieves."[466]

Halefom said he was with 40 of his cows on the edge of Bereket village on November 25, 2020, when Fano, Amhara Liyu, and Saluq ordered him to lead his cows away. "I refused, and they started to beat me with sticks and axe. They hit me with an axe across my right eye and hit me on the head."[467] Halefom lost his eye due to the attack. In May Woini village, near Adi Goshu, attempts by Amhara militiamen to steal large numbers of cattle and livestock similarly turned violent on January 29, according to two witnesses, when militia opened fire at farmers, killing around 30 people and wounding others. One 40-year-old farmer said:

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[461] Phone interviews with #174, Hailekiros, Worku, Asmeret, Tigray, May and June 2021. Phone interview with #289 in July 2021. Interview with Genet, Sudan, May 2021.

[462] For a description of sources of livelihood for communities in Western Tigray - Hagos Abraham et al., "Begait Goat Production Systems and Breeding Practices in Western Tigray, North Ethiopia" *Open Journal of Animal Sciences*, vol.7 (2017), p. 198, https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=75753; ACAPS, "Ethiopia: The Pre-Crisis Situation in Tigray," February 22, 2021, https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20210223_acaps_secondary_data_review_ethiopia_pre-crisis_situation_in_tigray.pdf.

[463] Interviews with #219, #206, Sudan, December 2020 and with Berihu, #117, Halefom, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Abel, Negasse, Kiros, Solomon, Neguse, Gebreselassie, #25, #117, #189, #183, #192, Tigray March, May, and June 2021.

[464] Interviews with #206, #219, Sudan, December 2020, and with Berihu, Gezae, Yemane, #138, #117, Halefom, Fitsum, Hayelom, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Samuel, #183, Neguse, Yirgalem, #192, Tigray, June 2021, and with #25, Sheshay, #17, Berhan, Fikadu, Abel, Negasse, Kiros, Solomon, #189, Asmeret, and Gebreselassie, Tigray, #100, March and May 2021.

[465] Phone interview with Abel, Tigray, May 2021.

[466] Interview with #206, Sudan, December 2020. "Woyane" is a Tigrinya term meaning "Revolution," or "Resistance." The first "Woyane" revolution by Tigrayan farmers occurred in 1943 against the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie but has been commonly associated to refer to the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF).

[467] Interview with Halefom, Sudan, May 2021.

> They collected thousands of animals, almost 4,000 cattle and 90 camels, 8,000 sheep and goats looted on that day from the community, mostly from Tigrayan farmers.... As a farmer I wanted to help ... we gathered sticks and tried to defend our animals, but they had guns and shot at us.[468]

In late December 2020, over a dozen Amhara militia, and in this instance Eritrean soldiers, threatened a group of 13 Tigrayans harvesting their crop in fields near Adebai, before shooting them and killing 12, said two witnesses. Hayelom**,** a 54-year-old farmer, described what happened:

> We sent a man from our group to bring water from the river when the forces [approached]. [They] asked what we were doing. [We] said: "Harvesting sorghum." [One] said: "This is Amhara land, and you have no right to be here and to harvest the sorghum."
>
> Then they made us stand in a line. Ordered us to sit, and then to stand, and to sit again, several times. Then, as we were standing, [they] ordered us to turn our back to them, and they shot at us. As the shooting started, I turned to face them. I was scared – I don't know why I wanted to see. I got a bullet in the front of my head, above my left eye, top of the head. I fell and lost consciousness so I don't know anything that happened after.... I woke up the following day, next to the 12 dead.[469]



Hayelom (not his real name), a 54-year-old farmer, said he was shot by a group of Eritrean and Amhara militias around December 29, 2020. Doctors in Sudan treating his injuries found bullet fragments that superficially penetrated his scalp. © 2021 Amnesty International

Fitsum, who had left the group to collect the water from the river, witnessed the aftermath of the attack. He recalled: "I saw they were walking towards the farm and after about 15 minutes I heard shooting. I stayed hidden until the soldiers went away.... I went back to the farm and saw the 13 killed, near each other in a line, some facing up, some facing down. I thought they were all dead."[470]

As threats and widespread theft of crops and livestock recurred, some Tigrayan farmers resorted to selling the animals they still had to gather the cash they needed to

[468] Phone interview with #183, Neguse, Tigray, June 2021.

[469] Interview with Hayelom, Sudan, May 2021.

[470] Interview with Fistum, Sudan, May 2021.

survive or leave.[471] "People were coming from Armachiho and Tegede [in Amhara region] when they heard the news that Tigrayans were selling property and animals for cheap," said a 70-year-old farmer in Division. He continued:

> I had 23 cows in Division, I had 20 taken, I sold three of them to use money to pay for transport for Shire.... We had an animal market in Division and sold them there. The cows usually sold for 20,000 Ethiopian Birr. I sold them for 5,000 Ethiopian Birr for each .... We didn't have a choice. If we kept the animals, they would come one night and take them for free.[472]

## New Authorities' Response to Looting and Pillage

The new authorities were complicit in the theft of Tigrayan property from Western Tigray.[473] Two Tigrayan farmers said they had attempted to reclaim stolen livestock and harvest but saw no credible avenues to do so because they considered that the new security forces and administrations in the Zone were involved in the theft.[474] Ayele, a 55-year-old farmer from Ruwassa, said she saw a pamphlet in town signed by Fano militia that claimed Tigrayan cattle as their own and called for Tigrayans to leave: "We took that paper to the Ethiopian military commander. He said, 'This is the least that can happen to you.' After this, the Fanos took all the cattle and camel I had."[475]

In other cases, new authorities at administrative offices issued permission papers for pillaged property, livestock, and harvests to be transported out of the western Zone.[476] A 38-year-old resident of Humera, observed such a process in early February 2021: "Amhara Special Forces were looting cereals stored in a warehouse, such as Teklai's store. The Ethiopian military restricted the people from taking the items out of the town when they were there. [After they left], interim officials were giving permits for people to take out the looted items, mainly sesame from Tigrayan farmers."[477]

According to Neguse, an Adi Goshu administrator issued permission papers for the transport of pillaged goods out of the town**:**

> When the Amhara Special Forces and Walqayte militia took the crops, he was the one giving permission, with his stamp and signature for the crops to be transported to Gondar [Amhara region] through Adi Remets and

[471] Phone interviews with #178 and #179, Tigray, May 2021; and with Terefe, Tigray, March 2021. Interview with Hadgu, Sudan, May 2021.

[472] Phone interview with #178, Tigray, June 2021.

[473] Phone interviews with #44, Tigray, March 21, and with Hailekiros, Neguse, Tigray, June 2021. Phone interview with #289, April 2021, and with #154, Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[474] Phone interview with Ayele, #44, Tigray, March 2021.

[475] Phone interviews with #44, Tigray, March 21, with Neguse, Tigray, June 2021, and with #289 April 2021.

[476] Phone interview with #44, Tigray, March 2021. Phone interview with Neguse, Tigray, June 2021.

[477] Phone interview with #44, Tigray, March 2021.

> Dansha.... They were using every means of transport.... Since the people transporting [the crops] were not armed and didn't have uniforms, they would be stopped by other Amhara Special Forces at checkpoints up to Gondar. So, a passage paper was given by [an official] to go to Gondar.[478]

One man saw the operations of such a checkpoint in Sanja, north of Gondar, in the Amhara region: "They will stop looted trucks, to check if there are no drugs, but they know all is looted from [Western Tigray] .... Some of the drivers are prevented by the ENDF if they don't have right papers."[479]

## Denial of Services and Discriminatory Distribution of Aid

### a. Lack of International Humanitarian Presence, Oversight in Western Tigray

Aid workers and donor government officials described the initial humanitarian response in Tigray, particularly from the UN, as slow and disorganized.[480] They attributed this partly to the prevailing lack of security, but also to the overall orientation of international aid organizations in the region toward economic development instead of humanitarian assistance – a stance that affected their relationship to the government, their staffing, and their programming.[481] In particular, aid organizations operating in the region tended to follow the government's lead in framing their humanitarian response.[482] Such an approach was much less appropriate during an armed conflict, when an arms-length relationship with the government was needed. One humanitarian worker explained the shift that was needed for aid agencies to operate effectively in Tigray:

> We needed to reset to have the right dialogue with government, scale up, and have the right people. Yes, we had a great relationship with the government on development, on drought [response]. But now, we needed to have a different conversation and dialogue because you are dealing with a government that is an active party to the conflict.[483]

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[478] Phone interview with Neguse, Tigray, June 2021.

[479] Phone interview with #289 April 2021.

[480] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia — I Always Remember That Day:' Access to Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, November 2021, https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/11/09/i-always-remember-day/access-services-survivors-gender-based-violence-ethiopias.

[481] Phone interviews with humanitarian workers, February and March 2022; Sue Lautze, Angela Raven-Roberts, and Teshome Erkineh, "Humanitarian Governance in Ethiopia," *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, issue no. 46, (2009), (accessed March 29, 2022), http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=3005.

[482] Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, "December 8 briefing by Amb. Redwan Hussein and NDRMC Commissioner, Mitiku Kassa," December 8, 2020, (accessed March 29, 2022), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zn5YLwYthvs; Ambassador Redwan can be seen stating: "the agreement [with the UN] we entered was in belief that the UN would collaborate, and we the government would call the shots … there is no such thing as unfettered access in Ethiopia. It is led by the government." Phone interview with humanitarian worker, February 2022.

[483] Phone interview with humanitarian worker, February 2022.

As aid agencies struggled to scale up their response in Tigray to meet urgent needs in the first months of the conflict, the three main actors in charge of food distribution in Ethiopia – the federal government's National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Joint Emergency Operation Program (JEOP), and the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) – divided up operational coverage.[484] This arrangement left NDRMC in charge of food distribution in Western Tigray, where on occasion it had previously provided assistance.[485]

The international humanitarian coverage and operational presence in Western Tigray has remained small throughout the conflict, limiting independent monitoring of the humanitarian and human rights situation and neglecting the protection role that a strong humanitarian presence can provide.[486] In May 2021, the Emergency Directors Group (EDG), tasked by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee with advising on humanitarian coordination, and including representatives of operational UN agencies and some NGOs, discussed the possibility of establishing a base in Western Tigray. However, this did not materialize, leaving only a limited presence of non-food-focused international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in the Zone.[487]

As in other parts of Tigray, aid organizations operating in Western Tigray, or those attempting to carry out assessments, faced bureaucratic restrictions, harassment, and obstruction by armed forces and groups. [488]

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[484] Northern Ethiopia Response Plan, May 2021, (accessed March 29, 2022), p. 9, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/northern_ethiopia_response_plan_-_may_2021.pdf.

[485] See "Ethiopia 3W Operational Presence," Humanitarian Data Exchange, September 2019, https://data.humdata.org/dataset/ethiopia-3w-operational-presence-september-2019 (accessed March 29, 2022). See also National Disaster Risk Management Commission Establishment Council of Ministers Regulation No. 363-2015. NDRMC would lead the humanitarian response in the country through data and information it received from regional and local administrative levels. Through this framework, local administrations gather data informed by assessing the needs and vulnerabilities of the community and share that information with the federal government. See, for example, The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "National Policy on Disaster Risk Management," July 2013, https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a2689ea4.pdf (accessed March 29, 2022): "Disaster risk management shall be informed by disaster risk profile information. To that effect, disaster risk profiles that contain information on each hazard, vulnerability and capacity to cope as well as other related baseline information shall be developed at the woreda level and organized in a database, periodically updated and put into practice."

[486] See for example, UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region: 3w Operational Presence," January 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20220125_tigray_region_partners_presence_v5.pdf (accessed March 29, 2022); UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region: 3W Operational Presence," (September 2021), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20-%203W%20Operational%20Presence%2rom%209%20August%20to%206%20September%202021.pdf (accessed March 29, 2022).

[487] Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "The Emergency Directors Group": Northern Ethiopia Scale-Up Summary Note, May 2021.

[488] See for example, June 2021 Tigray access analysis. See also Ben Parker, "Ethiopia: A partial view of the humanitarian fallout emerges in Tigray," *The New Humanitarian*, January 12, 2021, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/01/12/tigray-ethiopia-humanitarian-needs-assessment-incomplete (accessed March 29, 2022); See for instance, UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Situation Report 6 January 2021," January 6, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-6-january-2021 (accessed March 29, 2022); UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Access Snapshot Tigray Region," February 28, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-access-snapshot-tigray-region-28-february-2021 (accessed March 29, 2022); UNOCHA, "Ethiopia- Access Snapshot Tigray Region,"

In January 2021, as aid agencies sought to negotiate and request clearances at local levels to enter the Tigray region, Amhara security forces operating in Western Tigray denied permission to aid agencies to access the Zone, even though clearances had been issued by the federal government.[489] Aid agencies also had to seek authorization from multiple different actors in place in Western Tigray to get access, which further impeded the humanitarian response. As one aid worker said:

> The access is not through the civilian authority… [I]t is through the command post [the mixed civilian-military body in charge of areas under military authority], and it is a mixed command chain. You have the remaining Ethiopian Defense Force chain, the Eritrean chain, the Fano militia chain.[490]

### b. Government Assistance in Western Tigray

Government control over food distributions in Western Tigray took place at time when Tigrayan communities, which had seen their crops and livestock pillaged, faced restrictions on movement and farming and were as a result becoming reliant on food aid for their survival. As a 67-year-old farmer from Division explained: "Every crop we had was taken from the farm… not only the crops, but the animals too... This was the main reason we had nothing to eat. Everything we had was taken."[491]

Humanitarian assessments as early as December 2020 depicted a deteriorating humanitarian situation in Western Tigray. For instance, a joint government-humanitarian partner assessment mission to Dansha and Humera towns between December 20 and 30 determined that "[n]early half the population visited are living in vulnerable conditions, with important gaps of food and nutrition as harvests did not take place."[492]

Though there was also limited public information available on food distributions and on who had access to food assistance in Western Tigray between January and March 2021—at the height of Tigrayans' forcible displacement from the area (see Forced Displacements, Transfers, and "Ethnic Cleansing" Section). The little information that was available, however, highlighted a dire humanitarian and human rights situation.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch obtained unreported humanitarian assessments of Western Tigray carried out in January 2021 that described violence,

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March 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/access_snapshot_-tigray_region_-_31_march_2021.pdf (accessed March 29, 2022).

[489] Ben Parker, "Ethiopia: A partial view of the humanitarian fallout emerges in Tigray," *The New Humanitarian*; UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Situation Report 6 January 2021," January 6, 2021; Multi-agency initial rapid assessment to Wolkayt Tsgede Kafta Humera, Mission Report 2-8 March 2021, on file.

[490] Phone interview with humanitarian specialist, February 2022.

[491] Phone interview with Gebreselassie, Tigray, May 2021.

[492] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Situation Report 6 January 2021," January 6, 2021.

looting, and forced displacement of Tigrayan communities from the area, and an "absence of food, healthcare, clean water, and money."[493]

A UN inter-agency assessment was carried out in Western Tigray for the first time in early March 2021.[494] Amhara regional authorities prevented the team from travelling to Division, citing security concerns. The March assessment nonetheless described an alarming food situation in the areas that were assessed, including Dansha, Adi Remets, Ketema Negus, Baeker, and Adi Goshu. It further noted the absence of "reliable data on… the assistance received to date, such as information on beneficiaries covered, not covered and the estimated number of those still in need."[495]

The lack of independent monitoring meant aid agencies and donors had no real understanding of how much aid was in fact distributed. As one donor country official put it:

> When you look at data from NDRMC it looks like people were served on regular basis, but how much of it is true, and verifiable, we have no clue… I would not be in any position to tell you how much has been delivered by NDRMC since March 2021.[496]

Many people reportedly received no food. In June 2021, unidentified authorities reported to an inter-agency assessment mission that no food aid had in fact been distributed to Western Tigray since February 2021.[497] An August 2021 OCHA report cited a round of food distributions by NDRMC to populations in Mai Kadra, Humera, and Dansha woredas, saying that the "government's round 2 distribution in Western Zone [was] on hold due to the fluid security situation."[498]

**Timeline of Publicly Reported Food Distributions in Tigray in 2020 and 2021**

- **December 2020:** NDRMC distributed 5,600 metric tons of food relief benefiting 332,000 conflict-

[493] January 2021 humanitarian assessment on file; UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray: Humanitarian Access Snapshot," April 30, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_ethiopia_210510_access_snapshot_tigray_as_of_30_april_2021_final_draft_ya02_copy.pdf (accessed March 29, 2022) (describing the situation in Western Tigray in terms of people's access to aid as dire despite no reported active fighting).

[494] June 2021 access analysis on file.

[495] Multi-agency initial rapid assessment to Wolkayit Tsgede Kafta Humera, Mission Report 2-8 March 2021, on file.

[496] Phone interview with humanitarian specialist, February 2022.

[497] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," June 17, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2017%20Jun%202021.pdf (accessed March 29, 2022).

[498] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," August 13, 202, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2013%20Aug%202021.pdf (accessed March 29, 2022).

affected people in Tigray (Western, Northwestern, Southern, Southeastern Zones) and Amhara (North Gondar Zone) Regions.[499]

- **January 2021:** In mid-January NDRMC reportedly delivered food to beneficiaries in Western Tigray**.** [500]
- **April:** One round of food was distributed by the Amhara Regional Government.[501]
- **June:** Local authorities report to UN assessment mission that no food aid had been distributed since February 2021.[502]
- **July:** Amhara regional authorities organize a round of food distribution in the town of Baeker, southeast of Humera**.**
- **August**: NDRMC reported distribution of 927 metric tons of food to 61,771 people in Mai Kadra, Humera, and Dansha woredas.[503]

### c. Denial of Services and Humanitarian Aid

Tigrayan residents described how newly appointed authorities and security forces in Western Tigray restricted, and at times outright blocked, their access to the critical aid that was available.[504] For instance, a driver in Rawyan said people in the town were given aid only once in the beginning of the conflict:

> Ten kilos per family. That was it… I don't know who [provided] it. It was the Walqayte and Amhara who registered and gave us aid one time. When there is aid, it is up to the administration to call people, and they didn't call us [Tigrayans]… After that, there was no aid coming. Tigrayans were starving. When we asked for food, we were told we were "junta." The Fanos and Amhara Special Forces would say, "Tigrayans ate for 27 years and that's enough."[505]

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[499] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," December 28, 2020, (accessed March 29, 2022), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2028%20Dec%202020.pdf

[500] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Northern Ethiopian Humanitarian Update," January 26, 2021, (accessed March 29, 2022), https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia/card/4IQkMJOPa8/.

[501] Local beneficiaries described the distribution as inadequate; UNOCHA, "Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," April 19, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2019%20Apr%202021.pdf.

[502] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," June 17, 2021.

[503] Ibid.

[504] Phone interviews with #162 and Andom, Sudan, December and May 2021; Phone interviews with Tsige, Leul, #183, and #191, Tigray, April and June 2021; UNOCHA, "Ethiopia- Access Snapshot Tigray Region," March 2021; UNOCHA, "Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," April 19, 2021; "The UN's warning of famine conditions did not contain an assessment on Western Tigray, now under the control of Amhara regional forces who claim the area as their own. The UN said it didn't have sufficient data from there," quote by Giulia Paravicini and Katharine Houreld, "UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray," *Reuters*, June 11, 2021, (accessed March 29, 2022), https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/exclusive-un-official-accuses-eritrean-forces-deliberately-starving-tigray-2021-06-11/; "Tigray conflict: 'We have no food, we face death,'" *BBC News*, June 8, 2021, (accessed March 29, 2022), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57397901; Cara Anna, "'Leave no Tigrayan': In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased," *AP News*, April 7, 2021, (accessed March 29, 2022), https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-tigray-minority-ethnic-cleansing-sudan-world-news-842741eebf9bf0984946619cc15023.

[505] Phone interview with #162, Sudan, December 2021.

Tsige mentioned a one-time distribution in Dansha town between January and February 2021, but the aid was refused to Tigrayan residents in nearby settlements of Division, including in Ambagala village where she was from:

> The Dansha mayor kept telling us that we [Tigrayans] needed to move – that we don't belong there… Some humanitarian actors came to Dansha and distributed aid. [But] they didn't distribute to Division, because most of the people in the Division area were Tigrayans… the mayor in Dansha kept saying [to them] Division had enough money and food... [T]hey were using hunger as a weapon. They blocked access and aid. So, people were tired and hungry. And so, they were pushing people to go away from the place, so... we fled.[506]

A March 31 UNOCHA report corroborated reports of denials of assistance to "people of Tigrayan origin in areas close to Dansha by local authorities and armed groups… and that groups in the area den[ied] partners' access to populations stranded in areas close to the Tekeze river bordering North-western Tigray in Korarit woreda."[507] Distributions reportedly arrived in Adebai on at least two occasions when Tigrayans did not receive it, first around the end of March, according to Leul who "saw the aid coming into town."[508] The new authorities, including Adebai town's new mayor, were responsible for controlling the distribution and registering beneficiaries.[509] Leul and other Tigrayans who were displaced in Adebai did not receive any assistance despite being registered. He said:

> The Kunama [an ethnic minority in Tigray] were given 15 kilograms for each person, but Tigrayans didn't get anything.[510] The farmers in Adebai, the Tigrayans, went to the authorities and said: "Everything we had was taken, so why are we not getting any aid?" And the authorities said: "Don't come back asking these same questions." The people in power said Tigrayans had a good summer, so they didn't need any aid, but the Kunamas got some. I was one of the people registered to get aid, but I didn't get anything... There was an announcement that every resident from Adebai should register for aid, people from Division asked too, those who were living [displaced] there... but they still got nothing.[511]

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[506] Phone interview with Tsige in Tigray, April 2021; UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Northern Ethiopian Humanitarian Update," January 26, 2021.

[507] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Access Snapshot," March 31, 2021.

[508] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, June 2021.

[509] Phone interviews with Leul, #191, Tigray, June 2021.

[510] Kunama are an ethnic minority in Tigray with settlements in Western and Northwestern administrative zones in Tigray, including in Adebai town.

[511] Phone interviews with Leul, #191, Tigray, June 2021; interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021.

The denial of assistance also applied to Tigrayan residents of Adebai town. A 17-year-old resident of Adebai said that in May "aid came one time to Adebai, they gave it to old people, but not all old people. After that the aid came ... it had the Ethiopian flag on it, so I think it was from the government aid... It was distributed to the administrators… and was always given to Amharas and not Tigrayans in the town."[512]

A farmer in Adi Goshu recalled that a distribution occurred in late May but was denied to Tigrayan residents. "It was a government distribution; they didn't stay long." He added:

> They gave all the food to the [local] administration and they left. The administrators then told us: "This doesn't belong to Tigrayans. It belongs to us." So, they didn't distribute anything to us; they kept it for themselves.[513]

For Tigrayans in Western Tigray, the lack of food, along with limited access to health care was especially acute for people at particular risk – the displaced, women with sexual and reproductive health needs, survivors of sexual violence, children, and older people. The lack of access to local medical facilities and the threats from Fano militias made it difficult, for example, for Mihretab**,** who was in Adi Goshu, to help his 8-month-old child who fell ill. "There was a lack of hospital treatment because the hospital... was moved to Humera," he said. "They moved all the [services] there... It's very difficult to go to Humera for the hospital because most Tigrayans don't have money."[514] He said a pharmacist finally helped him get treatment: "We were hiding from the Fanos. But after they found out that the pharmacist secretly [gave] medicine to Tigrayan people, I saw him with gauze on his face and heard they beat him [for giving help to Tigrayans]."

In Division, Ethiopian military and Amhara Special Forces and militia also took part in the occupation and looting of the Meareg hospital, affecting the ability of residents to receive care. "Officials from the new zonal administration locked the medicine store of the hospital," said Takele**,** a staff member who fled from the hospital. **"**So, patients weren't able to get medicine."[515]

Mobile health clinics, where they were available, served as the only way for many Tigrayan residents to receive care. Said Neguse from May Woini village: "I never heard or saw humanitarian aid coming here. We only know when MSF comes, we get treatment. For Tigrayans it is difficult and dangerous... to [travel] to a hospital. If I want to get treatment, forces may arrest me and ask for money. I just generally cannot enter the village [where the health center is]."[516]

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[512] Phone interview with #191, Tigray, June 2021, and Leul, Tigray, June 2021.

[513] Phone interview with #183, Tigray, June 2021.

[514] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021.

[515] Phone interview with Takele, Tigray, March 2021.

[516] Phone interview with Neguse, Tigray, June 2021.

## Impact

Cut off from their sources of livelihood, essential services, health care, and food, many Tigrayans felt they had no option but to flee Western Tigray.

For Andom**,** from Division, the lack of food assistance for Tigrayans in January drove Tigrayans like himself to leave. He said:

> After one week, all Division residents decided to leave because they couldn't get anything and they found out that the distribution had already taken place, but heard it was only for Amhara residents. And in a week, most if not all residents of Division fled to Shire and different parts of Tigray. I also decided to leave.[517]

Robel**,** a 40-year-old construction worker, hid in Rawyan, in fear of being targeted for abuse. He arrived in Sudan in late December. "I was extremely hungry, starving, almost dying," he said. "There was one guy with me who kept supporting me. And after we crossed the river [into Sudan], I came to the hospital, and they gave me glucose."[518] Gebreselassie, a 67-year-old pensioner in Division, also relied on support from neighbors at first, but that amount was insufficient – as mostly everyone was in a similar state. The lack of food and support forced him to leave. "We were really starving," he said. "We had no stable life, we were [previously] supported by government programs, but after the war broke out, no government [was] supporting us, no international organization. It was hard for us."[519]

Displaced from their homes, left without shelter, and with little to eat, Tigrayans sought refuge in places of worship. In Adebai, dozens of displaced people stayed at the Abune Aregawi church. A 45-year-old farmer displaced from Mai Kadra said the displaced people survived by drinking water from the church's well and eating food that residents donated, and some harvested food on nearby land.[520] "Life in Adebai was extremely difficult," said Teame**,** a 74-year-old man displaced in the town. "We begged for food to survive."[521]

There was little work Tigrayans could do to earn a living. Semira, a 21-year-old woman who remained in Rawyan for around five months, said everything had changed: "There are no… facilities for taking classes, getting jobs to make money and help your family, follow your daily life in different ways – financially, economically."[522] "There was no banking, no telephones, our cattle were looted. There was no work," said Andom in the village tabia Irob, providing a list of the limited options Tigrayans had to survive. "The

[517] Interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021.

[518] Interview with Robel, Sudan, May 2021.

[519] Phone interview with Gebreselassie, Tigray, June 2021.

[520] Interview with #243, Sudan, May 2021.

[521] Interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021.

[522] Interview with Semira, Sudan, May 2021.

biggest thing was the lack of food; we didn't have any food to eat."[523] Tesfa from Baeker said: "If they looted everything you have, you can't survive. If your cattle, your property, your bed, your food [were stolen], it's difficult to live, and they know what they're doing."[524]

The compound effect of these hardships on lives and families was devastating. "We felt broken. We saw human indignity, suffering. We experienced displacement from our own land and own homes, own family, and from our own people," said Asmeret**. "**We can't do anything but pray. We had the warmest family; now we have no proper hygiene, home, electricity, no children."[525]

## Arbitrary Arrests, Mass Detentions, and Torture, November – June 2021

Federal military and Amhara forces, following the capture and control of towns in Western Tigray Zone, carried out both targeted and mass arrests. Those apprehended included current and former government officials, wealthy individuals, and suspected Tigrayan fighters, militiamen, and supporters. Those held must be treated in accordance with international human rights law and appropriately charged or released. From November 2020 until at least December 2021, the authorities increasingly carried out mass, arbitrary arrests, and detentions of a broad spectrum of the Tigrayan population, often on an apparently discriminatory basis, who were not implicated in criminal offenses.[526]

In Mai Kadra, federal police transferred over a dozen detainees detained in Abadi, a makeshift detention site hosting thousands of Tigrayan to Adi Arkay in the Amhara region, without access to a court before their eventual transfer to Addis Ababa.[527] Twenty-two are currently facing charges under the country's terrorism law and criminal code.[528] Thousands, however, were kept in the detention Abadi warehouse for nearly two months, until some were expelled from the town at the end of December 2020.

In other towns across Western Tigray Zone, a mix of security forces, in particular Amhara Special Police, militia, and Fano, and in some cases Ethiopian federal forces, arrested and detained arbitrarily without charge thousands of Tigrayans in police stations, prisons, military camps, and other unofficial sites, including food storage

[523] Phone interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021.

[524] Phone interview with Tesfa, Sudan, May 2021.

[525] Phone interview with Asmeret, Tigray, May 2021.

[526] Giulia Paravicini, Dawit Endeshaw, Katharine Houreld, "Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands," *Reuters*, May 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-tigrayans/.

[527] Phone interview with #302, September 2021.

[528] Katharine Houreld, "Could Ethiopia's capital fall to Tigrayan and allied forces?" *Reuters,* November 5, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/could-ethiopias-capital-fall-tigrayan-allied-forces-2021-11-05.

facilities and schools.[529] Men were the primary targets for arrest, although those in custody included women.[530] Former detainees described people as old as 80 in detention, and six interviewees described children detained with adults, including a child as young as one. [531]

**Detention Facilities in Western Tigray**

Facilities in which people were detained were controlled by different security forces, including:

**Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF):**

- Military Camps
  - Quaja, Rawyan
  - Baeker
  - May Deli

**Amhara Special Forces and Militias, including Fano militias:**

- Prisons
  - Humera "Bet Hintset" prison
  - Humera Old prison
  - Korarit
- Police Stations
  - Setit police station, Humera
  - Kafta Humera/Geter police station, Humera
  - Adi Remets
  - Adi Goshu
  - May Gaba

**Fano and Amhara Militias:**

- Makeshift Sites
  - Warehouses, and Food Storage
    - Abadi warehouse, Mai Kadra
    - Enda Yitbarek warehouse, Humera
    - Guna warehouse, Humera
    - Flour mill, Rawyan
    - Farmers Association Building, Adebai
  - Schools
    - Humera
    - Sheglil
  - Kebele offices

[529] Interviews with Aregawi, Sudan, December 2020, and Gebremariam, #245, Aklile, Tesfakiros, Teame, Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with Yemane, Gebrekristos, Measho, #32, #35, #42, #45, #46, #47, #49, #57, #58, #59, #60, Tigray, March and April 2021; Phone interviews with Samuel, Akbret, Kibrom, Fikadu, Yonas, Tadele, Alula, Abebe, Goitom, Frehiwot, Worku, Mesfin, Kidane, Atsbaha, Yirgalem, Leul, Haftu, #175, #176, #182, #185, #187, #191, #193, and #194, Tigray, May and June 2021. Phone interviews with Terhas and #155, Sudan, September 2021.

[530] Interview with Aklile and #19, Sudan, January and May 2021. Phone interviews with Yemane, #28, #45, #58, Tigray, March 2021. Phone interview with Kibrom, Alula, and #187, Tigray, May and June 2021. Account #29, collected by aid workers with consent for public use.

[531] Interview with Andom, #117, Sudan, May 2021; Phone interviews with #28, #187, Tigray, March, and May 2021. Phone interview with Fthawi, #250, Sudan, August 2021.

- Humera Kebele 02
- Rawyan, Kebele 02

## Arbitrary Arrests

Tigrayans described raids and searches in neighborhoods and towns and villages across Western Tigray in which Amhara special police, militiamen, and Fanos rounded up Tigrayan men and boys after identification checks.[532] Few said they were given reasons for their arrest. “They came to my house, it was the Ethiopian defense forces, Amhara Special Forces, and Fanos. They simply told us we were ‘needed,’” said one construction worker from Humera. “They were taking all the male members of the family; I was the only male in the house. My neighbor was taken. Other males in the neighborhood were also led to the penitentiary in the town. We were there for three months.”[533]

In Bereket town, Fano militiamen rounded up Tigrayan men around November 24, according to Yirgalem, a 46-year-old farmer arrested in the town: “There was no jail in Bereket, [so] they gathered all the prisoners from Western Tigray.” Together with others, he was taken to Humera, where he was held for months.[534]

At times security forces relied on accusations by local residents and even newly arrived residents as the basis for carrying out arrests.[535] “They asked for my ID, they checked it, and they asked if I was from Adwa. There was a woman with them, and she accused me of being a member of parliament in the town and accused me of being TPLF,” said one shopkeeper. “I’ve lived in Humera for 49 years. I hadn’t seen her before. I didn’t know who she was.”[536] In one town, at least five Tigrayans who fled during the initial offensive were detained during house-to-house searches when they returned home.[537] A farmer from Korarit returned home on January 21, and days later Fano militias arrested him. They took him to the prison in Adi Remets town and beat him with a stick. “Many people

[532] Interview with #17, Sudan, January 2021, and with Gebremariam, Aklile, Tzegeab, Fitsum, #115, #130, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Kibrom, #175, #176, Tigray, May 2021; with Yonas, Alula, #173, Tigray, June 2021. Phone interview with Godafa, #45, #57, #60, Tigray, March 2021.

[533] Phone interview with Kibrom, Tigray, May 2021.

[534] Phone interview with Yirgalem, Tigray, May 2021.

[535] Phone interviews with #173, #175, Yonas, Abel, Tigray, May 2021.

[536] Phone interview with #175, Tigray, May 2021.

[537] Phone interviews with #175, Yonas, Yirgalem, #187, Haftu, Tigray May and June 2021.

were arrested with me for similar reasons," he said. "There were old men [detained] too, and they told them: You are Tigrayans; you should cross the Tekeze River."[538]

The security forces apprehended others while they were out pursuing regular activities or while attempting to leave town in search of safety.[539] One farmer said Fano militiamen stopped him from attempting to plough his land in Humera, threatened "to deport him from the land," and called Amhara special police who arrested and detained him in the Humera prison for three months.[540] On November 22, 2020, Ethiopian federal soldiers at a checkpoint near a petrol station south of Rawyan stopped Berihu, a 17-year-old student trying to seek protection in Sudan with 17 other people and detained them overnight in a storage space. He recalled:

[538] Phone interview with #60, Tigray, March 2021.

[539] Interview with #117, Andom, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Gebrekristos, Yonas, Tadele, Alula, Yirgalem, #187, #193 #39, #57, 42, Tigray, March, May, and June 2021.

[540] Phone interview with Samuel, Tigray, May 2021.

We were very scared before they put us in the room because they kept beating [one] guy.... [T]hen they told us to hold our shoes and belts and made us line up.... We thought they were about to kill us, but they brought us to the storage space.... There were maybe 20 to 25 [other] people held there.[541]

> "Then they told us to hold our shoes and belts and made us line up.... We thought they were about to kill us, but they brought us to the storage space ..."




Imagery from 13 and 14 November 2020, shows the petrol station on the southern end of Rawyan. Over the two days, many vehicles – circled in orange – are visible in the area. In the time between the capture of each image, debris surrounding the structure west of the petrol station, visibly increases. Imagery from 12 February 2021, shows this intersection becomes a strategic location with multiple military vehicles and a probable checkpoint as described by interviewees. Many buses and trucks are also stopped on the road coinciding with the time frame of reported deportations forcible displacement from the area.

Some Tigrayans thought they would not face threats, restrictions, and violence from Ethiopian federal forces.[542] Instead, these forces also arrested and abused Tigrayans in their custody. "While taking me to jail in an ENDF vehicle, they asked me why I came

[541] Interview with Berihu, Sudan, May 2021.

[542] Interview with #113, Sudan, June 2021. Phone interviews with #28, #53, #193, Tigray, March and May 2021; Catholic Relief Services Tigray IDP Assessment and Response Update, December 2020. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/crs_tigray_idp_assessment_and_response_updaet_.pdf.

back to Humera," said Tsegazeb, a civil servant who recounted his arrest by a group of Ethiopian federal forces and Amhara and Fano militiamen from his home in Humera in early January 2021: "I thought civil servants wouldn't be targeted and that the situation in Humera had improved. [But] they said: 'This is Amhara land; you have no right to be here.'" [543] At least two Tigrayans, who had sought protection at Ethiopian military camps, were transferred over to the new administrators or to Amhara security forces and militia, and later detained in official and unofficial detention sites. [544] One woman said she sought protection at an ENDF camp in mid-November with her baby and father and 98 other Tigrayans. But on November 28, she recalled, "interim administration officials came and said they want to arrest all of us." Alongside the rest of the group and her baby child, she was taken to a police station in Humera: "The ENDF did not protect us ... They just handed us over,"
she said. [545]

## Torture, Ill-Treatment, and Deaths in Custody

Tigrayans, held in custody across Western Tigray, suffered physical abuse from Ethiopian security forces. Many former detainees described regular beatings, physical and psychological torture, as well as ill-treatment. [546] Three former detainees, including one held by federal forces at a military camp in Baeker, reported being forced into a painful stress position— where arms and feet are tied together behind the back— for prolonged periods, a torture method that has previously been documented in detention centers
in Ethiopia. [547]

According to Aregawi, a 60-year-old beekeeper from Sheglil, on November 17, a week after federal and allied forces took control of the village of Sheglil, around six Amhara Special Forces militiamen entered his home, shouting that the land belonged to Amhara. They took his money and looted his property, he said, before detaining him with his family and a 48-year-old man at a school in the village. The ASF held him there for over a week, repeatedly torturing him.

[543] Interview with Tzegazeab, Sudan, May 2021.

[544] Phone interviews with#28, #53, Tigray, March 2021...

[545] Phone interview with #28, March 2021

[546] Interviews with Andom, Tsegazeab, #117, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with #57, Tigray, March 2021, and #197; Haftu; #187; #175; #193, Tigray, May 2021. Account #29, collected by aid workers with consent for public use. For the distinction between "physical and non-physical" torture see: UN Commission on Human Rights, Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Peter Koojimans, E/CN.4/1986/15, February 19, 1986, (accessed October 9, 2021), https://undocs.org/en/E/CN.4/1986/15, paras. 118-119.

[547] Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia - We are Like the Dead:Torture and other Human Rights Abuses in Jail Ogaden, Somali Regional State, Ethiopia*, July 4, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/04/we-are-dead/torture-and-other-human-rights-abuses-jail-ogaden-somali-regional#_ftn113; Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia - They Want a Confession: Torture and Ill-Treatment in Ethiopia's Maekelawi Police Station*," October 18, 2013, https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/10/17/they-want-confession/torture-and-ill-treatment-ethiopias-maekelawi-police-station; Amnesty International, "*Ethiopia: 'Because I am Oromo': Sweeping repression in the Oromia region of Ethiopia*," October 28, 2014, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/4000/afr250062014en.pdf.



On November 17, 2020, Amhara Special Forces arrested Aregawi (not his real name) a 60-year-old farmer and beekeeper from Sheglil village. The security forces detained Aregawi in a school for over a week and beat him every night. Amhara Special Forces pierced through his finger with a nail and cut him on his right arm and back with a farming tool. On November 26, 2020, they hung him by one of his feet, upside down by a tree in the school compound and beat him in the back with a stick. © 2020 Human Rights Watch.

Aregawi said:

> At night, they took us out and beat us. I was beaten every night. The Amhara Special Forces tried to pierce through my finger with a nail. They cut me on my right arm and [on my] back with a scythe – the one you use to cut grass and millet. They said they will destroy Tigray and its men.
>
> On November 26, they hung me by my one leg, upside down by a tree. They hung me for one day and night. The blood rushed to my head and made me faint. They beat me in the back with a stick, whatever they could get. My feet don't function well now. They tied them, so the blood doesn't circulate well anymore. The Special Forces finally untied me and released me from the tree when my foot started to bleed. They let me go home but commanded me to bring the rest of the money I had in my house. But I didn't have [anything] anymore, they had taken everything.[548]

Security forces frequently punched, kicked, or slapped detainees, or beat them with implements such as sticks, rifle butts, and heavy metal objects, often resulting in serious

[548] Interview with Aregawi, Sudan, December 2020.

injuries.[549] "They took anyone they wanted from the cell," said Kibrom, a contractor held in Humera prison for three months: "They would take you to the field and you would be beaten. I was beaten three times while I was there."[550] Kibrom witnessed an older man – a retired militiaman whom he said was not involved in the war, being "beaten every day. His left hand is now paralyzed."

A 74-year-old man who was interrogated for a week by Ethiopian federal forces in the Baeker military camp recalled similar abuse:

> They were beating us very seriously — punching, kicking, slapping. One of my friends lost his eye, another lost his hearing. I got hurt on my kidney and was peeing blood many times, even when I was asleep, lying on a bed. I still get pain in my back. [551]

A 37-year-old shopkeeper described a brutal, almost daily schedule of beatings during his three-month detention at the police station in Humera:

> When it is around 6 p.m.... they will come for you.... And they will beat you until 8 or 9 p.m. They will leave us in a different room so that we are separated from the rest. You get up in the morning as if nothing happen[ed] to you ... everyone will remain silent and act like we didn't see anything, because if it's my turn today, tomorrow, it's the other one. [552]

"You get up in the morning as if nothing happen[ed] to you ... everyone will remain silent and act like we didn't see anything, because if it's my turn today, tomorrow, it's the other one."

Three former detainees held in different detention sites in Humera, including one survivor of rape, provided accounts of sexual violence in detention.[553] A 32-year-old woman in Humera was arrested by an ASF officer in November, and detained, first at a police station before being taken to two different prisons in the town. While detained, she said guards raped her and other female detainees. She said she was raped by the same three police guards every night until her release over two months later:

[549] Interviews with #176; Alula; #175; Kibrom, #187; Alula, Atsbaha; Haftu, Tigray, May 2021. Interviews with Teame, Tsegazeab, #115, #117, Sudan, May 2021.

[550] Interview with Kibrom, Tigray, May 2021.

[551] Interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021.

[552] Phone interview with #57, Tigray, March 2021.

[553] Phone interviews with #95, Tigray, 2021; and Haftu, and #187; Tigray, May 2021; Amnesty International, "I don't know if they realized I was a person": Rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia," August 11, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR2545692021ENGLISH.PDF

> Even if I shout, no one can help. The three could not stop raping me. Though I told them to stop, they call me "junta," and they beat me with a huge stick called "the thieves stick" – it is a plastic tool the police use.
>
> They made us take off our clothes and stay naked in the sun for two hours. They wanted to do it in our mouth and other things, while we were in the police station. I was badly sick. They saw me and said that I better die outside and not there where they detained me. So, they threw me out in the dark. I was very sick … but there was no medical treatment.[554]

Two former detainees held in Geter police heard a woman crying in the next cell. Said one of the men: "[She] was crying the whole night. When the sun came up, we asked her what happened. [She told us] it was a Walqayte officer, and the Fano and Amhara Special Force guards. They raped her."[555]

Detainees were subject to psychological torture, ill-treatment, humiliation, and verbal abuse.[556] Teame recalled that while in Humera jail**,** guards would "cock their weapons and say: 'Bring us people to kill, we want to kill them.'" Their actions, Teame explained, made you "not know when you'll die or be killed."[557] A 28-year-old driver said that a mixed group of Amhara security forces detained him in a room of a house in Adi Goshu town and beat him for four days. "They took me to a hole that looks like a grave and asked me if I had any last words," he said. "They would say, 'We will shoot you and bury you in this grave.'"[558]

Witnesses and former detainees described enforced disappearances and apparent extrajudicial executions of detainees, particularly former local officials and militia members, and hearing the sounds of gunshots at night.[559]A man identifying as Walqayte, but who was a Tigrayan militia member at the onset of the conflict, said Ethiopian soldiers arrested him in Humera on November 12, 2020, alongside 17 Tigrayan militia members from the broader Humera area. They were detained at the Humera police station, which was controlled by the ASF, for months. He said that on January 7, 2021, the other detainees were taken out of their cells and killed: "One of the people who was guarding the prison told me: 'It's because you're Amhara that you are

[554] Phone interview with #95, Tigray, 2021.

[555] Phone interviews with #187, Haftu, Tigray, May 2021.

[556] Interviews with Kindihafti, Sudan, January 2021; Andom and #115, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Samuel, #175, Kibrom, #176, Tadele, #187, #193, Atsbaha; Tesfalem, Alula, Yonas, Tigray, May and June 2021. Phone interview with #155, Sudan, September 2021. Account #15 shared with consent for public use by aid agency.

[557] Interview with Teame in Sudan, May 2021.

[558] Phone interview wth #155 in Sudan, September 2021.

[559] Interviews with Meaza in Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with #257 in Sudan, September 2021; and with Measho in Tigray, March 2021.

spared. You would have been killed with them.'"[560]

"They kept shooting guns to terrorize us," said Kindihafti, a female detainee held in a makeshift detention site in Mai Kadra for over a month. "I think bullets are cheap for them."[561] Two former detainees said they saw individuals taken away by guards and not returning. "They took people one by one or a few at a time and we never heard what became of them," said Measho, who was held in Humera prison.[562] Haftu, who was captured by federal soldiers along with friends and held in a military camp near Rawyan in early March 2021, said: "They took one of my friends, Berihu Wereda. They accused him of being a militia. He wasn't different from the rest of us. They wanted to scare us. I have no idea where he is until now."[563]

Mass detentions, killings, and enforced disappearances of detainees in Humera, Adebai, and Rawyan towns increased in July 2021, coinciding with the appearance of dozens of bodies floating downstream into Sudan on the Tekeze River, and escalating again in November 2021. (**See Renewed Roundups and Extrajudicial Executions July - December 2021 section.)**

Two detainees described guards showing them dead bodies as a method of intimidation.[564] "The [guards] would take you out of jail at night and take you to the [bodies]," said a man held in May Gaba for a month, who saw the bodies of three youths killed near a school in town. "I saw the bodies out [when] I was arrested and still saw the remains [after my release] when I left town."[565]

Three detainees held in different detention sites described security forces also subjecting detainees to discriminatory measures and restrictions, including forbidding speaking in Tigrinya, exacerbating the detainees' sense of powerlessness and humiliation. [**See Discriminatory Restrictions section.]** "If any of us tried to speak in Tigrinya, [the guards] would say you can't … 'This is the language of birds. This is not for humans,'" said one man held in the Geter police station, referring to an insult common during the Derg period and imperial era. "Those of us who could speak in Amharic would

"If any of us tried to speak in Tigrinya, they would say you can't … This is the language of the birds. This is not for humans."

[560] Phone interview with #257 September 2021.

[561] Interview with Kindihafti in Sudan, January 2021.

[562] Phone interviews with Measho in Tigray, March 2021.

[563] Phone interview with Haftu in Tigray, May 2021.

[564] Phone interview with Atsbaha in Tigray, May 2021; Interview with Teame in Sudan, May 2021.

[565] Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, May 2021.

try to communicate with the guards, but some of us couldn't, so we would keep silent," he continued. "It's hard to explain what I felt."[566]

A 45-year-old farmer who said he was detained first in a jail, and then a prison in Humera town over a three-month period, recalled that guards forced detainees and their visiting family members to converse in Amharic, a language that older Tigrayans, and those from rural areas, did not speak or understand well, if at all:

> Our families would come to see us, but no visitor was allowed to speak in Tigrinya. Even if you don't speak in Amharic, you were forced to try to speak in Amharic....
>
> One day one of my relatives came to see me, but they didn't speak in Amharic, and the police ordered my visitor to speak in Amharic, and I told the guard that he didn't speak in Amharic. I asked my relative to bring me some water, and my relative said "I don't have anything to bring you," and while we were discussing [this] in Tigrinya, [the guard] took me and beat me in front of my family.[567]

Former detainees who had been held in sites in five towns across Western Tigray frequently spoke of the poor conditions of detention and being subjected to forms of ill-treatment that endangered their health and safety. A shopkeeper in Adi Remets reported that he was locked for three days in a toilet.[568] Rooms where detainees were held in formal and informal sites in Adebai, Mai Kadra, and Humera were small.[569] One man, held in Humera jail for three months, described sleeping in a roughly 4-by-5-meter cell with around 60 people.[570] Another man held in the same site said the lack of sufficient space forced detainees to "sleep on one another."[571] A former detainee held in Adebai said he was kept with around 30 other people in a small shed made of iron sheets.[572] Other sites were also significantly overcrowded.[573] "At one point the number arrested reached 60 people. It was [a] really hot and small room. Everyone suffered. There was suffocation," said one detainee from May Gaba.[574] Two people held in Mai Kadra and Adi Goshu said they were kept in the open. "There was no ceiling, we were kept in a

[566] Phone interview with #193, Tigray, May 2021.

[567] Phone interview with Samuel, Tigray, May 2021.

[568] Phone interview with Tadele, Tigray, May 2021.

[569] Interview with #14, Teame, Berihu, and #130, Sudan, January and May 2021. Phone interviews with Atsbaha, #176, Tigray, May and June 2021. Account #15 shared with consent for public use by aid agency.

[570] Phone interview with #176, Tigray, May 2021.

[571] Phone interview with Yemane, Tigray, March 2021.

[572] Account #15 shared with consent for public use by aid agency.

[573] Phone interviews with Yemane, Atsbaha, #176, Tigray, March and May 2021. Interviews with #14, Teame, #130, #117, Sudan, January and May 2021.

[574] Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, May 2021.

compound. So, when it rained,[575] and it continued for three weeks, the rain fell on us," said a farmer held in Adi Goshu. [576]

Authorities in both formal and makeshift detention sites limited or deprived detainees of food and water.[577] "We were not given any water during the first few days of jail," said a 30-year-old farmer held in Geter police station. "It was so hot – you can imagine how hot it was – and how much we needed water."[578] "They didn't give us [enough] water," recalled 73-year-old farmer held at the same jail, who said each prisoner received two liters every three days.[579]

Food was also denied at the Geter police station. The 73-old-continued: "We were not given any food.... [P]eople from the outside would try to help and bring food, but the Amhara Special Forces and Fano would threaten them not to bring food again."[580] Former detainees held in Mai Kadra, Adi Goshu, Bereket, and Adi Remets recalled similar deprivations and denials by guards.[581]

Detainees survived off the food that those held close to home would receive from family members or friends on the rare occasion they could visit.[582] Other relatives and friends would pass food to Walqayte and Amhara neighbors and friends to deliver to their loved ones. [583]

Because security forces had stolen the property, livestock, and harvests of Tigrayans and denied them services, families had little to share with their detained relatives. **[See Depriving Tigrayans of Means of Survival section.]** In light of the actions and statements of the authorities, the denial of food, water, and medical treatment to detainees appeared to be a form of punishing the Tigrayan population in Western Tigray. "The [Fano and ASF guards] kept telling us that Tigrayans deserve to be starved and starved to death," said a 73-year-old

> "They kept telling us that Tigrayans deserve to be starved and starved to death."

[575] Phone interview with #176, Tigray, May 2021.

[576] Phone interview with Yonas, Tigray, June 2021.

[577] Interviews with Aklile, Teame, Tzegazeab, #130, #117, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Samuel, Leul, Haftu, Yonas, Yirgalem, #34, #187, #193, Tigray, March, May, and June 2021.

[578] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[579] Phone interview with #187, Tigray, May 2021. See also Phone interviews with Yonas, Tadele, Yirgalem, and Leulin, Tigray, May and June 2021. Interviews with #117 and Teame, Sudan, May 2021.

[580] Phone interview with #187, Tigray, May 2021.

[581] Interview with #140, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Samuel, Yonas, Tadele, Tigray, May 2021. Phone interviews with Terhas, Sudan, August 2021.

[582] Phone interview with Yirgalem, Tigray, June 2021. It is common in Ethiopia that families bring food to detention centers and prisons for their relatives, to supplement meager prison rations.

[583] Phone interview with Tadele, Tigray, May 2021. See, Phone interviews with Terhas, Zemede, #115, 250, #252, #280, #281, #278 in Sudan, August, September, November, and December 2021.

farmer
from Central.[584]

Two prisoners, held in Humera, resorted to selling what little items they had with them, including clothing, to stay alive.[585] "It was one bread for four people, one liter for three days. It was a hard time to spend a week. I sold the jeans I had. I bought them for 700 ETB ($17), but I sold them for 30 ETB ($0.71) for food. We sold everything we could to survive," said a 19-year-old from Adebai.[586]

Three former Tigrayan detainees held in Geter police station said that non-Tigrayans, including Amhara and Walqayte residents appeared to receive better treatment.[587] "They [Walqayte and Amhara detainees] would ask for food and get it, but we had no food for 3 to 4 days. When we were closer to death, [the guards] would give us food so we wouldn't die. They would say: You don't deserve any food. Death is nothing for you, we want you to suffer before you die," said a 28-year-old held in Humera jail.[588]

"[Guards] would say: You don't deserve any food. Death is nothing for you, we want you to suffer before you die."

In at least three towns, the forces in control of the detention sites denied or limited prisoners' access to medical treatment.[589] "'You expect us to give you medicine when we want you to die?'" heard a 55-year-old former detainee in May Gaba who fell ill and asked the guards for medication.[590] Terhas, who was held in a food warehouse in Mai Kadra for two months until December 2020, said there were insufficient medications to treat injuries, medical conditions, or for the clinical management of rape. "There was one woman who told me she was raped by six people before she was detained in Baeker," she said. "She was sick: when she ate any food or water, she would throw up. She was bleeding from her vagina. There wasn't enough medicine: only for [few] diseases, malaria, diarrhea. And there was a shortage of medications, ... equipment for the woman

[584] Phone interview with #187, Tigray, May 2021.

[585] Phone interviews with Leul and #187, Tigray, May 2021.

[586] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[587] Phone interviews with Haftu, #193, #175.

[588] Phone interview with #193 Tigray, May 2021.

[589] Interview with Gidey, Sudan, May 2021.Phone interviews with Atsbaha, Yirgalem, #45, Tigray, March, May, and June 2021, and with Terhas, Sudan, August 2021.

[590] Phone interview with Atsbaha, Tigray, June 2021. Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia - I Always Remember that Day: Access to Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*," November 9, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/11/09/i-always-remember-day/access-services-survivors-gender-based-violence-ethiopias. Amnesty International, "I Don't Know if They Realized I was a Person: Rape and Sexual Violence in the Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia," (August 11, 2021), https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/4569/2021/en/.

to
get treatment."[591]

Former detainees believed some people died in custody as a result of the deprivation of food and the denial of medical treatment. "Six people died from hunger," said one man held in Geter police station.[592] Two former detainees said that deaths increased in Humera prison at the end of February 2021, pushing security forces to free some detainees.[593] One man said he was released from Humera prison at the end of Yekatit (February 2021) "when they saw that people were dying for not receiving medical treatment." He said:

> There was a guy called Tedros, I knew him [from] before. He was sick, and he didn't receive medical treatment. Not only him, but others died, too. We reported it to the Amhara Liyu, who allowed [us] to bury [them] in the penitentiary compound.[594]

The releases were sporadic and, in several cases, made conditional on extortionate payments to security forces. [595] Yirgalem said his group of detainees was freed after [they paid a total of paid] 15,000 ETB ($375): "There was a guy from the diaspora who was in jail with us. He paid half of the price and we paid the rest by selling clothes and cellphones."[596] Detainees from poor backgrounds or who were out of touch with their families risked longer detention.[597] "Sometimes the police would negotiate, saying, 'If you have this money, we can release you,'" recalled a 45-year-old farmer held in Humera prison.[598] "But we had no money," he said. "I know some people who paid 20,000 ETB ($500) to be released, others 105,000 ETB ($2625)."

Finally, some detainees were held for longer periods, at times spanning several months before their arranged expulsion from detention sites in Western Tigray to the Tekeze bridge [**see Organized Forced Expulsions section].** For the Tigrayan communities who remained, the pattern of arbitrary detentions and expulsion solidified an atmosphere of oppression that prompted many to leave out of fear of being ethnically targeted for arrest and forcibly transferred. [**see Coerced Departures section.]**

## Extrajudicial Executions and Mass Killings

[591] Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021.

[592] Phone interview with #187, Tigray, May 2021.

[593] Phone interview with Yirgalem, #187, Tigray, May and June 2021.

[594] Phone interview with Yirgalem, Tigray, June 2021.

[595] Interviews with Teame, Tzegazeab, #19, #117, Sudan January and May 2021. Phone interviews with Haftu, Yirgalem, #39, #185, #187, #193, Tigray, March, May, and June 2021.

[596] Phone interview with Haftu, Tigray, May 2021.

[597] Interviews Amanuel, Andom, Tzegazeab, #19, #117 in Sudan, January and May 2021. Phone interviews with Samuel, #60, # 185, #193, Tigray, March and May 2021.

[598] Phone interview with Samuel, Tigray, May 2021.

Amhara forces and allied militias killed Tigrayans, at times in revenge attacks or when Tigrayans tried to protect their belongings from looting.[599] At other times, the killings seemed to have little apparent motive beyond spreading terror. This violence played a key role in motivating many Tigrayans to flee.

Meaza, a 45-year-old woman farmer from Baeker, said that on February 24, 2021, Amharic-speaking gunmen in uniform detained her brother-in-law Beyene while the family was taking refuge in Adebai, and subsequently killed him. She believed that Beyene, a retired soldier and the father of two Tigrayan fighters, was killed as a result of a denunciation:

> First, they came to my home, to the place where we stayed, and they wanted to search the house. And we were really scared … They asked him: "Where are your children?" and he said: "I don't know where they are," and that we got separated.… They took him somewhere. It was at night and then he returned back.… In the next … morning, they came and took him away for the second time… He disappeared so we were worried he wouldn't come back … [Then] we just heard that they had been killed and [was] on the street. And … we found his dead body… and buried him.[600]

Elsewhere, Amhara forces appeared to have deliberately shot Tigrayans at random. Berihu, a 17-year-old boy from Division, said that on December 28, 2020, he saw Amhara Special Forces kill a man on the street:

> There were two siblings, brother and sister… holding one another by the shoulder. And then one soldier from the Amhara Special Forces asked them to stop and he asked them who is this girl for him. And the brother said: "That's my sister" and… he shot him immediately… in the chest, near his armpit.... So, people became terrorized and ran away.[601]

Berihu said that the brother was taken to the Maereg Hospital, but it is not known whether he survived.

Hadera, a daily laborer, said he saw seven men he knew, between the ages of 30 and 70, being taken away near a church in Bereket on December 8, 2020.[602]. He said four Fanos in green uniform tied the men's hands behind their backs and loaded the men onto the back of a pickup truck. "They took them to the western edge of Bereket and

[599] See section Depriving Tigrayans of Means of Survival section.

[600] Interview with Meaza, Sudan, May 2021.

[601] Interview with Berihu, Sudan, May 2021.

[602] Bereket is a town in the al-Fashaga triangle, an undemarcated fertile border area disputed by Sudan and Ethiopia; Mohamind Amin, "Sudan and Ethiopia's dispute in fertile border area threatens regional stability," *Middle East Eye*, July 2, 2021, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-ethiopia-fashaga-dispute-threatens-regional-stability.

shot them," he said. "People saw the bodies and brought information to the town, and the following morning I and other villagers went to bury them and saw that these were the same ... people [I saw] being picked up the previous day."[603] Some had been shot and one had been beheaded, he recounted.

Three people, who were in Adebai in January 2021, said that Amhara forces killed eight people in a sorghum field during the harvest that month.[604] "I left Adebai because they started to kill civilians," said a 55-year-old farmer from May Lemin (Ruwassa). "My wife was very worried that they might kill me. Addisu Werede, Degu Mebrat, Gebre Giorgis were among the eight killed. Some of them are from Adebai and [others] from May Lemin."[605] In a separate incident, Leul, 19, said that Amhara Special Forces on February 11, 2021, killed "two women … accused of being wives of militia members." He said their bodies were left out for two days until Eritrean soldiers, who were present in Adebai town, "ordered the women to be buried."[606]

Nigisti, an 18-year-old student, returned to her hometown of Dansha in the first days of December, after fleeing the massacre by Eritrean forces in Axum in late November, only to find the remains of those killed.[607] She said:

> In Dansha, I saw the heads of people who had been beheaded around the gates of my home. The people say that Tigrayans' dead bodies shouldn't go to the grave.... The smell of dead bodies … I saw bodies where limbs were separating itself from each other because they had been left out for too long.[608]

Amhara Security Forces and militias in Humera prevented Tigrayans from burying their dead. "They were killing Tigrayans every day. They would kill one or two or three people day," recalled a 67-year-old woman from the town:

> They would kill around the neighborhood of the church … The Amhara Special Forces and the Fano were telling us not to bury our dead families.… They would threaten those of us who tried to bury. They would only allow us after so many days.... When they gave us permission, we would bury the dead in Saint Mikael, Saint Gabriel, [or] Saint Mary church. They were so mean.[609]

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[603] Interview with Hadera, Sudan, May 2021.

[604] Phone interview with Sindayo, # 26, #42, Tigray, March 2021.

[605] Phone interview with #34, Tigray, March 2021.

[606] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[607] Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians," (March 5, 2021) https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/ethiopia-eritrean-forces-massacre-tigray-civilians. Amnesty International, "The Massacre in Axum," (February 26, 2021), https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/3730/2021/en/.

[608] Interview with Nigisti, Sudan, January 2021.

[609] Phone interview with #172, Tigray, May 2021.

Bodies were found on the side of the road at a place called Mazoria, a rural area 10 to 15 kilometers away from Mai Kadra around December 2020, according to Nigisti. She found them as she was walking from Baeker towards Dansha: “I saw dead people around there, maybe 20 to 25.” Horrified by the scene, she added: “There were a lot of bodies.... All of them were burned.”

## Tekeze River Bridge Massacre, January 17, 2021

On January 17, 2021, Fano militia and local Walqayte and Amhara residents rounded up several dozen Tigrayan men who were residents of Adi Goshu and detained them. Amhara Special Forces then took about 60 of them to the Tekeze River crossing towards Northwestern Tigray that same day and extrajudicially executed them, leaving at least four survivors.[610] At the time, Maj. Dejene Maru was the commanding Amhara Special Force officer in Adi Goshu. The massacre precipitated a mass exodus of Tigrayans from Adi-Goshu and proved to be a turning point in the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans from the area (**See Forced Displacements, Transfers, and “Ethnic Cleansing” section**).

Witnesses and survivors said that the massacre appeared to be a revenge attack after Amhara Special Forces suffered heavy losses during fighting with Tigrayan forces near the river the previous night.[611]

Researchers interviewed 17 witnesses of the mass arrest in Adi Goshu and three survivors of the killings at the Tekeze River, as well as several people who saw the bodies of the victims left unburied for months near the bridge.[612]

On January 16, local authorities held a mass rally in Adi Goshu to celebrate the takeover of Western Tigray.[613] According to a 22-year-old from Adi Goshu, the demonstrators were chanting: “We returned our land, [the border] is up to Tekeze.”[614] The crowd held a procession to celebrate.[615]

The situation dramatically changed the following morning. Amhara Special Forces suffered heavy losses in the area after clashing with Tigrayan fighters near the Tekeze River. News of the Amhara battle losses soon reached Adi Goshu.[616] Amhara Special

[610] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Mesfin, Kidane, #81, #35, #176, Tigray, March, May, and June 2021.

[611] Phone interviews with Goitom, Frehiwot, Worku, Leul, #73, #81, #181, #182, Tigray, May and June 2021.

[612] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Kinfe, Filimon, Abebe, Goitom, Frehiwot, Worku, Mesfin, #181, #73, #74, #75, #76, #77, #78, #79, #80, #81, May and June 2021. Account #15 shared with consent for public use by aid agency.

[613] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews, with Filimon, #77, Tigray June 2021.

[614] Phone interviews #77, Filimon, Tigray, June 2021.

[615] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview with Filimon in Tigray, June 2021.

[616] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021.

Forces, Walqayte and Amhara residents, as well as werkegnas (artisanal gold miners), then went around town, attacking Tigrayans, beating them on the streets and in their houses as they rounded them up, robbed them, and brought them to various detention sites. A 32-year-old farmer, a member of the Kunama ethnic minority in Tigray, said the forces and goldminers specifically targeted Tigrayans in town. “After the battle they came back saying ‘Let the Tigrayans leave,’ as they beat and arrested people,” he said. “I was hiding at home, they didn’t target Kunamas.” [617] One 19-year-old who ran to Saint Michael church for protection said that he witnessed Amhara Special Forces kill five people near the church.[618]

The assailants also attacked Tigrayan residents with sharp objects. “It was horrific,” explained a 41-year-old farmer who was detained. “They would grab Tigrayans and beat them as they were taken.... They were even using sharp objects, like an axe. I was one of the people beaten that day. How can I say [complain that] I was beaten, when I saw people hit with an axe?” [619]

The Fano militiamen, ASF, and gold miners collected Tigrayans at “Habesha” police station.[620] “The civilians were taking other civilians to the police station, chanting ‘Arrest the Tigrayans! Arrest Tigrayans by your house! Bring them to police station!’” said Mesfin, a 57-year-old-man from Adi Goshu, who reported that he was taken from his home by a militiaman, beaten, and taken to the police station mid-afternoon, where he was held with around 40 other people.[621] Leul, a 56-year-old-man from Adi Goshu, said that he was also among those arrested that day by civilians, including gold miners, who carried weapons, as well as by members of the Amhara Special Forces. “The gold miners … were the ones identifying Tigrayans and giving them up to the Amhara [Special Forces],” he said. “I wasn’t held in the police station … because the jail was full.” [622] He recounted his detention in a compound near the police station alongside 60 other people. Some Tigrayans, he said, were robbed of their valuables, such as mobile phones, money, or food, either during arrest or while in detention.

The Amhara militiamen and the ASF together loaded one group of around 60 men into trucks, while the other group of detainees spent the night in custody and were released the next day.[623] Witnesses and survivors said the Amhara Special Forces drove the men in the trucks to the Tekeze River, around 35 kilometers away, led them to a field, and then
shot them.

[617] Phone interview with #79, Tigray, May 2021.

[618] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[619] Phone interview with Filimon, Tigray, May 2021.

[620] Phone interviews with Frehiwot, Worku, Mesfin, Leul, #73, #79, Tigray, May and June 2021.

[621] Phone interview with Mesfin, Tigray, June 2021.

[622] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[623] Phone interviews with Filimon, Goitom, Frehiwot, Worku, #73, Tigray, May and June 2021.

Mesfin, alongside his son and son-in-law, was among the detainees.[624] Mihretab, who had been detained by Walqayte residents and taken to the police station, was also put in one of the trucks. He said:

> They started to separate, picking 61 people, including me, from the people who were detained … They picked 61 people and carried us on [Isuzu] FSR trucks, and they made us sit down. If it's not comfortable and [if] we stand up, they beat us with a stick. I saw when my friends got really scared and peed because of the shock. They moved us until the Tekeze.[625]

One of the survivors said the Amhara Special Forces told them to disembark:

> They lined us in four rows and ordered us to hold each other's hand. That way they made us cross the Tekeze bridge towards Sheraro. After the bridge, there was a ditch and bushes. There is also a kind of stone fence near it. We resisted going further towards the ditch, but they cocked their guns and pointed them at us. Then we didn't have an option but to go down.[626]

Other survivors said the Amhara forces shot them on the eastern side of the river. Mihretab said: "There were over 40 soldiers, armed men, they wore the same uniform. They took us … somewhere around the bridge, a kind of field, but we were on the ground.... We were facing a hill."[627] Mesfin said:

> They told us get out of the [trucks]. They made us get off the main road. They told us to stand meters away [from each other]. Some soldiers surrounded us, so we couldn't run. They had [already] made us hand over our shoes and belts.[628]

Someone in command issued instructions, recalled a 23-year-old survivor: "They told us to hold hands with each other.... The commander came and counted to 10: 'Make groups of 10' ... and told the soldiers to count.… They made layers, made [people] line up, 10 per row."[629] Mihretab said that the forces beat them "until they got [them] to the

[624] Phone interview with Mesfin, Tigray, June 2021.

[625] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021.

[626] Account #15 shared with consent for public use by aid agency. Phone interview with Kinfe, Tigray, May 2021.

[627] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021.

[628] Phone interview with Mesfin, Tigray, June 2021.

[629] Account #15 shared with consent for public use by aid agency.

area," and made them line up "in two columns, face to back."[630] Mesfin remembered that at this moment, he "had given up. We all knew we were going to be killed."[631]

The soldiers began to shoot. "First, there are two soldiers behind, and in front of the line, there are another two, to check out who has died," said Kinfe. "They sprayed us with bullets, and we all fell into the ditch below."[632] Mesfin recalled: "They shot all of us, me included.… The ones from behind started firing … I was shot in my right shoulder and right hand. Bodies were falling one after the other. I don't remember what else happened after that."[633]

Mihretab said that he survived by falling over as the bullets started flying: "I fell immediately because I was in the front." He added:

> There were people behind me, and the shooters were behind them…. When they shot at us, I fell first and then I saw also when the others in front of me were shot and fell. And the people behind me fell on me and covered me. They were dead.... All the dead bodies' blood poured [from other bodies] onto me, it's a lot of blood. And then from minute to minute, their weight became so heavy I couldn't resist it.[634]

Mihretab said he began praying. He believed that the killers left him alone because they thought he was dead. Kinfe**,** the 74-year-old man, said he faced another round of shooting:

> After that, they said the "Tigrayans don't die easily, shoot again" and they were shooting on us. I was wearing a red shirt. One of them said: "The one with red shirt is not dead yet, shoot him again!" They shot at me, but the bullet just hit my side. My one leg was also hit with a bullet, and I am still having difficulty moving.[635]

The forces left rapidly, said the victims who survived the massacre. The survivors found

> "Tigrayans don't die easily, shoot again."

help among sympathetic local residents. Mesfin recalled:

[630] Interview with Mihrettab, Sudan, May 2021.
[631] Phone interview with Mesfin, Tigray, June 2021.
[632] Phone interview with Kinfe, Tigray, May 2021.
[633] Phone interview with Mesfin, Tigray, June 2021.
[634] Interview with Mihretab, Sudan, May 2021.
[635] Interview with Kinfe in Sudan, May 2021.

> I woke up at around 4 a.m.... I saw so many dead bodies around me.... I went to the forest in Tekeze. A lot of people were hiding. Some cow herders found me when I entered the forest. They took me to the people hiding in the forest. They treated me there, until I recovered.... I lost my son and son-in law that day.[636]

A 16-year-old, resident of Adi Goshu, said he lost his two cousins in the massacre: "We heard the news of the deaths from one of the survivors from the killing."[637] Worku, who reported that he was detained but not loaded onto the trucks, said: "I was lucky enough not to be in the vehicle to taken to the Tekeze.… But my son was in the group of people taken to Tekeze. He survived it, though."[638]

According to multiple witnesses, the bodies of the victims were visible for months, lying on the side of the highway east of the bridge.[639] A 20-year-old from Adi Goshu passed by the bridge a week after the killing. He mentioned the victims he was able to identify:

> Atalay Fekade was my uncle's name. Zemichael, Hailekiros, Girmay were my friends who used to play football with me. But there were other old men. I identified some of them. Gebre Rufael, he was an old man. Negasi Amare, he was 20 years old. They told me that he was wearing a sports suit, and I saw a body with a suit. It was all piled up, so I can't identify him [conclusively]. … There was one man who was killed with his two children. Aba Gebrehiwot was also among the killed.[640]

Two months later, the remains could still be seen at the location. A 57-year-old man from Mai Lemin who crossed the Tekeze bridge on March 11, 2021, said:

> The Amhara Special force were at Tekeze. When we went to the Special Police [Special Forces], we saw a lot of dead bodies near the bridge. There were about 60 to 70 bodies. They were partially covered with metal roof sheets.[641]

Researchers were not able to confirm if subsequent killings took place at the same site, or if dead bodies from the January 17 massacre were buried or had been moved at the time
of writing.

Just as in mid-November, when they had prevented residents from burying their dead (**see Initial Military Offensives Section)**, the Amhara Special Forces and the local

[636] Phone interview with Mesfin, Tigray, June 2021.

[637] Phone interview with #78, Tigray, May 2021.

[638] Phone interview with Worku, Tigray, June 2021.

[639] Phone interviews with Sindayo, Samuel, Kibrom, #31, #32, #33, #35, #42, #81, #172, #176, #188, Tigray, March and May 2021.

[640] Phone interview with #81, Tigray, May 2021,

[641] Phone interview with #35, Tigray, March 2021.

militias prohibited the families from mourning the victims of the massacre, several people said.[642] A 30-year-old woman whose father was among those killed only mourned her loss when she arrived in Shire. She said:

> For two months ... the Amhara Special Forces banned us from mourning … One young lady lost her husband on the bridge … she screamed when she heard … The [police] came to her house and … threatened her not to cry and ... said, “Don’t you dare mourn your husband! If you do, the next time we won’t just warn you!” After this, other families started fearing if we screamed and cried … So, people with information about the dead wouldn’t dare tell them, and for those of us who lost our families would cry silently.[643]

Frehiwot, whose father was killed in the massacre said: “They took the right to bury, they took their lives ... they took away their right to rest.”[644]

A 26-year-old man who lost his father in the massacre said:

> We couldn’t cry for our dead families. We were there just for each other. No one would cry like [we normally do in] the culture, where people would cry for three or seven days. But no one did that. It was so hard for us victim families to even mourn our own families.[645]

As a family member of one of those killed, he felt increased threats, eventually prompting him to leave the town. “The Walqayte would say: ‘His father is dead. Why is he here? They will want revenge, and he may kill us. Let us get rid of them.’”[646]

## Gang Rape and Other Sexual Violence

> I was with other women; four men raped me. … They insulted me and they urinated on my head. They said you and your race are a foul, toilet-smelling race and should not be on our land. Then was left on my own and stranded for four days.
> – Samhal, 30-year-old survivor, May 2021

[642] Phone interviews with Abebe, Frehiwot, #181, #182, Tigray, May and June 2021.

[643] Phone interview with Frehiwot, Tigray, June 2021.

[644] Phone interview with Frehiwot, Tigray, June 2021.

[645] Phone interview with #182, Tigray, May 2021.

[646] Phone interview with#182, Tigray, May 2021.

Widespread sexual violence has been one of the defining features of the Tigray conflict, including in Western Tigray.[647] Gang rape involving physical and verbal abuse, abduction and sexual slavery has been a key element of the ethnic cleansing campaign.

Nineteen Tigrayan survivors of rape described being assaulted by federal and allied forces in Western Tigray, including members of the Amhara Special Forces, Fano militias, the Ethiopian federal forces. Survivors said they were gang raped in their homes or while in security force custody or during prolonged captivity (**see cases of rape in detention in Detentions Section above**).[648] Some survivors said they were raped after being detained while fleeing their home areas. Interviewees described being repeatedly verbally abused and denigrated for their ethnicity during the rapes and some were specifically told to leave their home areas during the attacks.

Blen, a 48-year-old woman from Dansha town, said that on February 7, 2021, Fano gunmen wearing old Ethiopian army uniforms robbed her of her money and took her from her house to rape her:

> First, they came to my house … There were three.... I was alone and sleeping. They asked for money first. I had 37,000 birr [about US$900] at home. It was our savings. I gave them the money; they took me somewhere and raped me. I don't exactly recall the place, as it was at 8 p.m. There was some cattle barn ... They took off my clothes and raped me. They left me there and some people found me.... After they raped me, it took me a lot of time until I regained my consciousness."[649]

Jamila, a 27-year-old owner in Dansha, said that in early November, a half-dozen Fano militiamen carrying out neighborhood searches targeting Tigrayans entered her shop while she was working, and raped her in front of her children. She said:

> Two of them raped me and then I lost consciousness and don't know how many more raped me, if all six [did], or not. They said: "You Tigrayans should disappear from the land west of Tekeze! You are evil and we are purifying your blood." It was early morning, before 7 a.m., ... about four days after the ENDF came to town. My children were with me, and they saw what they did to me. They are 7 and 2 years old.[650]

"You Tigrayans should disappear from the land west of Tekeze; you are evil and we are purifying your blood."

[647] Amnesty International, Ethiopia: "I don't know if they realized I was a person": Rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia, August 11, 2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/4569/2021/en/.

[648] Out of the 19 survivors of rape in Western Tigray with whom researchers interviewed, 15 said that they were gang raped.

[649] Phone interview with Blen in Tigray June 2021.

[650] Interview with Jemila inSudan, May 2021.

Samhal, 30, tried to flee Baeker toward central Tigray in early November, when Amhara militias apprehended her:

> I was with other women. Four men raped me. Some took me and some took some of the women who were walking with me.... The [armed men] wore uniforms all [bearing] the same flag: the Ethiopia flag. They insulted me and they urinated on my head. They said: "You and your race are a foul, toilet-smelling race and should not be in our land." [651]

In some cases, soldiers targeted women and girls for rape and abduction to pressure them to reveal the whereabouts of their male relatives. Leul said that in May in Adebai, seven women, including the wives and daughters of Tigrayan militiamen were "raped by Amhara Special Forces and Eritrean troops." [652]

## Sexual slavery

Some survivors interviewed were raped while they were held in captivity, in one case for more than a month.

Fasika, a 28-year-old mother of two from Humera, recalls that she was attempting to cross the border to Sudan in mid-December with her two daughters, ages 3 and 5, when ten Amhara militia members apprehended her and forcibly took her to a house nearby. She said:

> Some kept my daughters in a room and others took me to another room. [I am] not sure how many were in the room with me. They were going in and out. They abused me. Most of them raped me. I lost count of how many raped me. It was around midday. They raped me all day and throughout the night and kept me for three days and continued to rape me all the time. They said: "If you were male we would kill you, but girls can make
> Amhara babies." [653]

A farmer in Adi Goshu tried to assist at least three women who had been taken by Amhara militias while trying to cross the Tekeze River to central Tigray. The militiamen raped the women and held them

"If you were male we would kill you, but girls can make Amhara babies."

[651] interview with Samhal, Sudan, May 2021.

[652] Phone interview with Leul, Tigray, May 2021.

[653] Interview with Fasika, Sudan, May 2021.

in captivity.
The farmer said:

> Took them somewhere else, [held] them for a week or 10 days, and raped them, for a week or 10 days, and it is so painful and difficult. They let them free after that time. I know [three of the] women personally. We helped them to [the town of] Sheraro. Some returned to Adi Goshu. The women in Sheraro got medical services. The women that returned in Adi Goshu, they haven't been treated. We haven't been able to get care in hospitals and medical centers.[654]

Etsegenet, a 16-year-old from Dansha, said that Fano militia members gang raped her for three days in Adebai town, where she and her family had fled, seeking safety. "My mother sent me to buy injera on the street," she recalled, when three men armed with sticks, machetes, and rifles approached. Two wore uniforms, while one was in civilian clothes. She said:

> They spoke Amharic. They took me to the compound where my mum and brothers were and ordered me to give the injera to my mum and took me with them in a pickup truck … to a compound not far in the city ... inside the house ... There was a man in uniform, an [ENDF] officer, because he had shoulder pads with symbols. He was about 50. He asked if my father was a fighter and I said he was dead. He said: "You liar!" and slapped me in the face. He raped me while the other three waited outside. He took my virginity and then left, and then the other three men also raped me. They kept me for three days in that house and continued to rape me many times... after three days … they let me go.[655]

Rape and the threat of rape were an important driver in forcing Tigrayan women, girls, and their families to flee Western Tigray. Selamawit left Humera after learning of security forces raping a woman and her two daughters whom she knew. She explained: "The main reason I left was after this one incident.… Six people raped them, the mother, with her two daughters. I thought this could happen to me next. A lot of women were raped in the area. So, I didn't grab anything, I just left."[656]

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have both reported on the limited avenues for survivors of rape and other sexual violence to protection, health, livelihood,

[654] Phone interview with #183, Tigray, June 2021.

[655] Interview with Etsegenet, Sudan, May 2021.

[656] Phone interview with Selamawit, Tigray, June 2021.

and psychosocial support and care in Tigray.[657] This is a result of conflict-related destruction and looting of healthcare services, the flight of medical providers, and in most of Tigray the government's effective siege on the region that has hobbled humanitarian efforts to provide survivors with management of post-rape care and the rehabilitation of the
health sector.[658]

## Forced Displacement, Transfers and "Ethnic Cleansing"

The outbreak of conflict in the Tigray region on November 4, 2020, triggered widespread displacement from Tigray, with more than 65,000 people fleeing to neighboring Sudan and more than two million displaced within Tigray.[659] The number of Tigrayans who sought refuge in Sudan slowed by December. However, by late February and the first two weeks of March 2021, tens of thousands and perhaps hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans began arriving in Central Tigray's larger towns.[660] Local authorities and relief organizations reported large population influxes from Tigray's Western Zone, with about 1,500 reaching Shire every day. By late February, 45,000 new arrivals had been registered in Shire. [661]

The precise number of Tigrayans displaced from Western Tigray remains unclear.[662] In April 2021, federally appointed interim officials said that 700,000 people had left Western Tigray to other parts of the region.[663] A preliminary assessment carried out by the federally appointed interim regional administration of Tigray found that 723,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Western Tigray had been registered in other parts of Tigray by June 2021.[664] Humanitarian groups supporting displaced communities in

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[657] Amnesty International, "I Don't Know if They Realized I Was a Person: Rape and Sexual Violence in the Conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia; Human Rights Watch, "I Always Remember That Day: Access to Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region.

[658] Ibid

[659] OCHA, "Ethiopia- Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report," July 26, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-tigray-region-humanitarian-update-situation-report-26-july-2021.

[660] Cara Anna, "'People are starving'" New exodus in Ethiopia's Tigray region," *AP News*, March 11, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/world-news-ethiopia-a25a50a774da284122c74a0bc1428052.

[661] OCHA, ": "In Western Tigray, partners report that tens of thousands of people have been displaced from the area allegedly on ethnic grounds.... Since February, thousands of residents in Western Tigray have fled the Zone amid reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and disappearances of people, particularly young men. As of 8 March, more than 45,000 people have been registered in Shire, with an influx of about 1,500 people every day... Humanitarian access and response in Western Zone is currently only possible through Amhara Region: USAID, "Ethiopia- Tigray Conflict," March 31, 2021qwaZ, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/03.31.2021_-_USG_Tigray_Fact_Sheet_5.pdf, and the Norwegian Refugee Council said between 140,000-185,000 came from West Tigray over a two-week period in March 2021.

[662] Metasebia Teshome, "Tigray region IDPs exceed a million," *Capital Ethiopia,* March 22, 2021 https://www.capitalethiopia.com/capital/tigray-region-idps-exceed-a-million/; UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Update," December 2, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Northern%20Ethiopia%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%202%20Dec%202021.pdf.

[663] Andres Schipani and David Pilling, "Ethiopia: war in Tigray threatens to end Abiy's dream of unity," *Financial Times*, April 8, 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/18a8bf-0999-43e6-9636-3581a8a2c249

[664] Phone interview with #302(location withheld), November 2021.

larger towns in Central Tigray, such as Shire, estimated that many of the 460,000 IDPs were driven out from Western Tigray.[665] A July household level survey carried out by the International Organization for Migration in seven Tigray urban areas, including Shire found that 53% of surveyed IDPs originated from Western Tigray. [666] As of January 2022, 51,207 Ethiopian refugees had been registered by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in eastern Sudan, with many reportedly displaced from Western Tigray.[667]

On March 10, 2021, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the Biden administration had seen credible reports of "acts of ethnic cleansing" in Western Tigray.[668] Tigray's interim regional authorities, appointed by the Abiy government, acknowledged the forcible displacement of civilians from Western Tigray and called for them to end.[669] However, both Amhara regional authorities and the federal government denied that ethnic cleansing had taken place (**See Government Response Section**).

The systematic nature and scale of the expulsions belies government claims. Humanitarian groups in Sheraro and Shire observed the timing and pattern of arrivals and found that those forcibly displaced arrived from similar areas around the same three-week time period.[670] Witness accounts of the escalating expulsions beginning in January 2021 show that the federal and regional authorities were on many occasions involved in, and often facilitated, the expulsion of communities from Western Tigray. These forcible expulsions continued in early November 2021, when Amhara regional

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[665] Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), "Ethiopia: Tigray cities fill with people fleeing violence," March 26, 2021, https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/story/ethiopia-tigrays-cities-fill-people-fleeing-violence; Fritz Schaap, "An Ethiopian Doctor Records the Destruction of His Homeland," *Spiegel*, March 15, 2021, https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/chronicler-of-horrors-an-ethiopian-doctor-records-the-destruction-of-his-homeland-a-ba9139d0-d443-4dde-9458-cd18dc38cae1 - quoting humanitarian figures of between 100,000 – 150,000 Tigrayans driven from the Western zone at the time of publication in March); Northern Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan,"May 2021, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/northern_ethiopia_response_plan_-_may_2021.pdf - stating that "The interim Government estimates that there are around 2 million IDPs across the region, most of whom came from the Western Zone." OHCHR-EHRC report (November 3, 2021), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf - estimating that more than 600,000 Tigrayans fled their habitual residences in some woredas, including ncluding, Awrora, Dansha, Mai Gaba, Maikadra, Tsegede, Welkait and Humera)

[666] International Organization for Migration, "Ethiopia- Household Level Intention Survey: Tigray Region, July 2021, https://displacement.iom.int/reports/ethiopia-%E2%80%94-household-level-intention-survey-tigray-region-july-2021.

[667] UNHCR, Ethiopian Emergency Situation Update - New Arrivals - East Sudan and Blue Nile - As of 31 January 2022,https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90807.

[668] "Top US diplomat decries 'ethnic cleansing' in Ethiopia's Tigray," *Al Jazeera,* March 10, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/10/us-top-diplomat-decries-ethnic-cleansing-in-ethiopias-tigray.

[669] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," (April 19, 2021), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2019%20Apr%202021.pdf; Interview with Abebe Gebrehiwot, Deputy Chief Executive of Tigray Regional State," Tigrai TV, May 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAwEfskXhNY.

[670] UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," April 19, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2019%20Apr%202021.pdf (accessed April 1, 2022).
UNOCHA, "Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update," April 19, 2021.
"'You don't belong': land dispute drives new exodus in Ethiopia's Tigray," *Reuters*, March 29, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-conflict-displaced-insight-idUKKBN2BL1B9 (accessed April 1, 2022).

forces and militias rounded up Tigrayans in Adebai, Humera, and Rawyan towns, and expelled older people, women, and children towards Central Tigray.[671]

The continued abuses by security forces against Tigrayan civilians, the transportation provided to Tigrayans including those in custody by interim administrators and Amhara regional authorities out of the region, and the repeated public threats against the Tigrayan population by regional officials and federal and regional security forces,[672] indicate a planned and systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing of the Western Tigray region by the new Amhara authorities.

## Organized Forced Expulsions

The authorities used various administrative methods to forcibly expel Tigrayans from Western Tigray.

In Ketema Negus town, one witness said that local kebeles issued permission or release papers to facilitate the flight to the Tekeze River of Tigrayans across towns and villages. He saw a wereda administrator issue oral instructions to an employee, explaining: "We cannot write that they shall pass checkpoints up to Shire! We can write up to the Tekeze! For Tigrayans who want to go back to Tigray, we write 'up to the Tekeze' … and that's all ... After that, we don't have authority, it's none of our business."[673]

As restrictions in movement were in place in many parts of the Western Zone, local authorities at times issued papers allowing Tigrayans to cross the Tekeze River to Central Tigray. The authorities would at times say that papers were not in order and demand the payment of additional fees. For example, two people from Adi Goshu and Kafta Humera said Amhara Special Forces commanders and soldiers charged them for the signatures and the stamps that would allow them to cross. "We paid ETB 8,000 ETB ($200) [first] to leave, and when we arrived in Tekeze, the paper for passage was not signed by the commander of the special force in the Zone," explained one 28-year-old man. "We had to take the paper to the commander in Adi Goshu, and he signed it, but we paid ETB 2,000 ($50) before he signed the paper, and then we crossed the Tekeze."[674]

At times the new interim authorities also provided the means of departure, arranging transport for Tigrayan residents to leave town, several witnesses said.[675] The new

[671] Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: New Wave of Atrocities in Western Tigray," December 16, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/16/ethiopia-new-wave-atrocities-western-tigray.

[672] In many towns and villages, officials, security forces, and non-Tigrayan residents would proclaim that Tigrayans should go to "towards Tigray," that they did not belong in the territory, and that "Tigrayans belonged east of the Tekeze River."

[673] Phone interview with #289, April 2021.

[674] Phone interview with #193, Tigray, May 2021.

[675] Interview with #116, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Mihret, Yonas, Sindayo, Alula, Tigray, March, May, and June 2021.

mayor of Adi Remets organized the transportation of Tigrayan residents to the Tekeze, recalled a 60-year-old resident: “He … made the decision. They called everyone, all Tigrayans who wanted to leave town, to the police station. An Isuzu FSR truck came, and we were sent [across the] Tekeze River to the Dedebit side.” [676] Sindayo in Adebai said interim authorities similarly arranged transport and made Tigrayans finance their own expulsion: “On the day I came, about seven big buses of Tigrayans left to the Tekeze. We took the buses, paying 1,000 ETB ($25) per person.” [677] Mihret in Humera had a similar experience: “There were 10 minibuses.... The forces kept telling us to leave the Zone to go to the middle of Tigray. There was transport available, owned by Amhara drivers and arranged by the region.” [678]

Amhara security forces and militias also accompanied and guarded the buses of expelled Tigrayans across checkpoints to the Tekeze bridge and demanded payment for the “service.” [679] A 66-year-old farmer who left on March 20 explained the expulsion process in Aurora town: “We came with an FSR truck with 50 people. That didn’t include the children, who didn’t pay. We paid 18,000 ETB ($450) to the Tekeze. We had one night [to spend] before crossing the Tekeze bridge. We paid 2,400 ETB ($60) to the Amhara Special Police for guarding us there.... There were about 8 FSR [trucks] from Aurora.” [680]

Amhara security forces began a new wave of forced expulsions in November and December 2021. Amhara militias rounded up Tigrayans in Adebai, Humera, and Rawyan towns, loaded them onto trucks and expelled older people, young children, and women east, towards the Tekeze River, according to 15 witnesses and family members of those expelled. [681] One teenaged boy who witnessed the roundups in Rawyan town and managed to escape in early December said that Fano militia started rounding up Tigrayans in the town. “They identified the young and teenagers, they registered us, and let us go,” he said. “The older people … they beat them … even my parents were beaten … they took their money, mobiles, anything they had…and they transported them in trucks.” [682]

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https://tigrigna.voanews.com/a/residents-in-western-tigray-are-accusing-the-amhara-special-forces-of-abusing-thier-human-rights/5691905.html - Tigrayan residents interviewed by VOA Tigrigna service indicated that administrators arrived in town with 11 trucks to a school where displaced residents took shelter and ferried them to the Tekeze River.

[676] Phone interview with Alula, Tigray, June 2021.

[677] Phone interview with Sindayo, Tigray, March 2021.

[678] Phone interview with Mihret, Tigray, March 2021.

[679] Phone interviews with Terefe, Abel, Haftu, Asmeret, #36, #38, #57, #172, #198, Tigray, March, April and May 2021.

[680] Phone interview with #37, Tigray, March 2021.

[681] Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, “Ethiopia: New Wave of Atrocities in Western Tigray,” December 16, 2021; Phone interview with #305, Tigray, February 2022.

[682] Phone interview with #160, Sudan, December 2021.

A 55-year-old farmer from Adebai described how he tried to hide when the roundups began. He said his daughters, niece, and other Tigrayans were taken by Fano militia on November 23:

> They called me from the vehicles as they were being taken. I saw the big construction vehicles, with their trailers from where I was hiding. There were about 14 vehicles, and they were taking them towards [Central Tigray].… Everyone is gone … every Tigrayan is gone.[683]

A UN assessment on December 15, 2021, estimated that 29,000 residents from Western Tigray were internally displaced to the Northwestern Zone in that wave of forced expulsions.[684]

### a. Expulsions from places of detention

Amhara interim authorities began expulsions from places of detention in Western Tigray in December 2020, efforts that would escalate in February 2021. The coordination and timing of bus movements, as well as the striking similarity of the witness accounts across several locations, all indicate a centrally planned operation that contributed to the ethnic cleansing campaign in Western Tigray. Security forces first gathered Tigrayan detainees and placed them on FSR Isuzu trucks or convoys of buses, which were then often escorted by Amhara Special Forces or militias, and at times Ethiopian federal forces or police, during the trip to the Tekeze bridge.

By the end of December 2020 in Mai Kadra, security forces and newly appointed authorities forcibly transferred hundreds, perhaps thousands, of those detained in the Abadi warehouse east to the Tekeze River in what may have been one of the first efforts to drive Tigrayans out of the area.[685] One 70-year-old man detained for nearly two months said: “they told us we will be released.... I thought they were releasing us to go home, but ... they loaded us on five big buses ... that the [Ethiopian military] escorted to the Tekeze.”[686]

Terhas, 28, whose Walqayte husband helped to get her released from the warehouse, described witnessing at least two rounds of organized forced transfers while she was still detained: “The administration transferred some people before I was released, around December 25, 2020. Six big trucks came up to the warehouse; they put them on trucks and took them to the Tekeze. I was released on December 30, 2020, and I heard [from

[683] Phone interview with #276, Sudan, December 2021.

[684] UNHCR, “Regional Update #26: Ethiopia Emergency Situation,” December 15, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/unhcr-regional-update-26-ethiopia-emergency-situation-15-december-2021.

[685] Phone interviews with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021. Interview with #53 and Kindihafti, Sudan, January 2021.

[686] Interview with #53 and Kindihafti, Sudan, January 2021.

people transferred] that they transported another seven trucks to Tekeze on January 1, 2021.[687]

Yonas, who was detained in Adi Goshu, described a similar process whereby security forces and militias escorted him and other detainees towards the Tekeze after 21 days of detention: "We were transported by a minibus owned by a civilian, and we had to pay him 200 ETB each, but still, the Amhara Special Forces and Walqayte and Fano militia were with us until we crossed [the river], and told us: 'Don't think of coming back to Amhara land!' and 'If you come back you are deciding on your life.'"[688]

"'Don't think of coming back to Amhara land!' and 'If you come back you are deciding on your life.'"

In Adi Remets town, two former detainees said Amhara officials oversaw the transportation of Tigrayans to the Tekeze.[689] Tadele**,** a shopkeeper recalled that non-Tigrayan residents approached the vehicle that he was on, and argued with administrators, including some from the Amhara regional administration in Bahir Dar, about their decision to transfer the Tigrayans, suggesting that they be killed instead. He said:

> They forced 130 Tigrayans to get on a big Isuzu FSR [truck]. We got in the vehicle at 8 a.m. and stayed on the vehicle until 4 p.m. People were gathering [during that time]. They were there to decide our fate. The people from Adi Remets were divided into two groups. One group said: "These people were peaceful and worked hard, they built our town. Why should they be killed? Let us send them to Tigray." The other group said: "They are Tigrayans. There is no question that they will join the TDF and will come back and hunt and kill us. They know everything we did to them, and they will kill us. Why don't we get rid of them when we get the chance?" This was the argument they had while we were sitting in the vehicle for eight hours. The [authorities] allowed six patrol [cars] … three [cars] leading and three behind the Isuzu truck carrying us. We crossed at Dedebit, the lower [southernmost] Tekeze crossing. The Amharas made us cross [the bridge], and then [they] went back.[690]

[687] Phone interview with Terhas, Sudan, September 2021.

[688] Phone interview with Yonas, Tigray, June 2021.

[689] Phone nterview with Tadele and Alula, Tigray, May 2021.

[690] Phone interview with Tadele, May 2021.

"Why don't we get rid of them when we get the chance?"

In May Gaba, a former traffic police officer had become an administrator in the town, according to two former residents.[691] Tesfalem**,** 43, who was held in custody, said the administrator arranged for the Welkait sugar factory car to transport detainees, including himself, to the Tekeze, escorted by security forces. He said:

> After three months, they ... sent me and about six people by car, saying: "You are Tigrayan, and if we had to release you, you can't stay here, you have to leave May Gaba." They drove us to Tekeze, dropped us off ... The car was the sugar factory car ... and the driver [was] a Walqayte man who used to work as a driver for the sugar factory, [and] now drives for [the administrator] ... [The administrator] came to the jail, and he said: "This is our land. This is Welkait. You don't belong here; don't you dare come back! The consequences won't be the same." [He] told us these words. They told us to get on the car first, and there were two Amhara Special Forces [members] in the car. They were armed. When we saw them armed, we were afraid we would be killed.[692]

### b. Forcible Transfers from Humera in February 2021

Two residents and 11 detainees held in Humera described their transfer from detention sites starting in February 2021.[693] A 38-year-old man received a warning from a friend, who was a local militia member, of what appeared to be planned, escalating arrests in mid-February: "He informed me not to move around from February 17-22, so that I [wouldn't] be arrested. They were arresting Tigrayans during those days."[694]

"I was arrested on February 16," said Gebrekristos, who was swept up in the roundup:

> First, they took me to the police station near the bus station. After two days, they took me to prison. There were about 300 people who were arrested with me, in the prison. I spent eight days in prison. We came [to central Tigray] loaded on two FSR [trucks], and we were around 180

[691] Phone interview with Atsbaha and Tesfalem, Tigray, June 2021.

[692] Phone interview with Tesfalem, June 2021.

[693] Phone interviews with Akbret, Kibrom, Yonas, Tadele, Alula, Yirgalem, Godofa, Gebrekristos, Measho, #175, #45, #57, #58, Tigray, March, April, May, and June 2021.

[694] Phone interview with #44, Tigray, March 2021.

people
in total.[695]

Two other detainees gave similar accounts in which the authorities used the Humera penitentiary as a collection point to gather detainees and facilitate their forced transfer to central Tigray. Those expelled ranged from detainees held in custody for a few days, to others who had already been held for several months. Samuel, a 45-year-old farmer, was expelled after three months in detention.[696] "In the last seven days of imprisonment, we were taken to the penitentiary, the main one in Humera," he said. "We stayed there for one week before we were released. There were 250 of us, but after beating and torturing us, they released 180 [including me]." He continued:

> They said we were farmers and weren't involved in the war. We were sent by Isuzu FSR [trucks] to Tekeze. When we arrived in Tekeze, the Amhara Special Forces at the bridge asked who we were, and the [guards taking us] said we were arrested for three to four months. [They] said they found nothing and had to release us. But the Amhara Special Forces at the bridge said: "No, they are Tigrayans. Why are you releasing them? They would join the junta, they need to be killed right here, right now!" But the people guarding the prison said*:* "They were found innocent of crime. We are not going to kill them. They need to cross the bridge. They don't belong here, but they are not criminals." The policemen were from Agew and were guarding [us] the last month and half of prison stay. They were kind to us. They would give [us] cellphones to call [our] families. They saved us from being killed by the Amhara Special Forces. The [forces] had a bad argument, [but] the policemen won, and they made us cross the bridge.[697]

Two other detainees described the same encounter. "First, they told us that we're going to leave... There was one FSR [truck] and they put 180 of us on it. The rest remained in the prison. We were not chained or handcuffed. But they were armed," said Godofa, a bajaj driver who was detained. "They took us to the Tekeze bridge. When we reach there, they started to argue whether they are going to kill us or not. Some were saying we were not ordered to kill them." [698]

The Amhara Special Forces guarding the bridge crossing threatened some Tigrayan who had been forcibly transferred not to return. Yonas, who was released in May from the Adi Goshu jail also received such a warning by the forces that escorted him and his family to the Tekeze: "They told us that 'From now [on] and from here, go and do

[695] Phone interview with Gebrekristos, Tigray, April 2021.

[696] Phone interview with Samuel, Tigray, May 2021.

[697] Phone interview with Samuel, Tigray, May 2021.

[698] Phone interview with Yemane, Tigray, April 2021.

whatever you want, but don't come back to Adi Goshu. Don't think of crossing the Tekeze and coming to
our land.'"[699]

Once dropped off, the forcibly removed Tigrayans would walk across the Tekeze bridge where they encountered Eritrean forces on the other side.[700] The soldiers allowed the Tigrayans to continue their travel on foot or in minibuses to towns in central Tigray where they hoped to find assistance.

## Coerced Departures

Those whom the militias or police did not forcibly remove, but instead fled Western Tigray in the months that followed the capture of towns in November 2020, gave varying accounts of the reasons that ultimately led them to leave. But all referred to the dramatic deterioration of their living conditions as a result of the persecution Tigrayans faced, citing frequent killings, beatings, rapes, looting, destruction of their homes and property, forced transfers, and arbitrary arrests and detention. They also pointed to profiling, threats, harassment, and restrictions on the Tigrinya language. These abuses and the lack of support from the administration made Tigrayans experience overwhelming fear for
their lives.

Efforts by security forces and interim authorities to remove Tigrayans generally increased throughout Western Tigray in the first months of 2021. Tsige**,** a 20-year-old student from Division, said that in January, "the Amharas and Walqayte started to push us to leave the city, they pushed us to go away. … They said this area belongs to Amhara and Walqyate and we had to leave."[701] In tabia Irob, a pamphlet had circulated during Tehassas (December – January 2021) threatening Tigrayans with death if they didn't leave the area within two weeks.[702] Tsega, a 24-year-old woman from the village, said that after that, a meeting took place in the tabia administrative building "about how we can leave from this area safely.... Walqayte and Amharas were also there. … Also, Ethiopian soldiers participated."[703] She described the exchanges:

> [It] was all about what would be the solution to that pamphlet. Some of them... said "Let's ask the ENDF if they can take us" ... Others: "The ENDF did this to us! Why should we ask them for help?" Others wanted to stay: "Please be patient! Maybe things will get better." And other people said: "No let's leave … our way." … The administrator… said: "Don't be

[699] Phone interview with Yonas, Tigray, June 2021.

[700] Phone interviews with Akbret, Kibrom, Berhan, Abel, #42, #75, #175, Tigray, March and May 2021.

[701] Phone interview with Tsige, Tigray, April 2021.

[702] Interviews with Andom and Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[703] Interview with Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

> worried about the paper, it's just kids and young men who did that." But we were terrified and we [couldn't] trust him.[704]

The episode, Tsega said, accelerated the exodus of Tigrayans: "Most of the people had fled. But they didn't kill [Tigrayans] after two weeks. It was a terrifying technique."[705]

Specific incidents that convinced Tigrayans that things would not improve or that a threat to them was imminent triggered departures. A 46-year-old farmer in Ruwassa said he left after Fano militia twice attempted to kill him:

> One night I heard a sound [outside]. One Fano wanted to take the last camel I had left. He fired at me four times but missed, I hid behind a tree in my home. The second night, one militiaman came to my house, he tried to kill me, but his gun failed to fire. After this, I made up my mind to leave.[706]

A 37-year-old beer seller from May Humer, near May Gaba, said she and other people in the village left mid-May after witnessing a militiaman beat up a relative of hers, a priest: "After seeing this and other incidents, I thought: What are we expecting? Are we waiting [for them] to kill all of us? Why don't we cross the Tekeze while we [can] still have our life?"[707]

In places such as Adi Goshu or Mai Kadra, where massacres took place, the mass killings caused Tigrayans to flee in large numbers. In Adi Remets, accounts of the mass killings of Amharas in Mai Kadra escalated the threats on Tigrayans in the town. Alula, a 60-year-old resident, heard an announcement on November 12, 2020, that "Tigrayans would be killed." He recalled:

> A priest and another person had a small speaker going around Adi Remets calling for Walqayte to kill Tigrayans: "They have already killed us! You are in Adi Remets, but our brothers in Mai Kadra were killed by the TPLF, so we need to avenge them! Kill the Tigrayans you see!" I was at home. … One of my good friends, who was Walqayte, came to my house and said: "Walqayte are so furious! And they want to kill every Tigrayan in Adi Remets, because they [said they] lost 700 people in Mai Kadra... they want to avenge their lives." So, he said that if we stay in the town we would be killed, so one [friend] helped me leave. I left on foot.[708]

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[704] Ibid.

[705] Interview with Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[706] Phone interview with Solomon, Tigray, May 2021.

[707] Phone interview wiht Semhal, Tigray, June 2021. Interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021

[708] Phone interview with Alula, Tigray, June 2021.

**Impact of Tekeze River Bridge Massacre**

In Adi Goshu, the massacre by the Tekeze River on January 17, 2021, marked a clear turning point for Tigrayan survivors and residents, who faced increased harassment and, like Tigrayans elsewhere across Western Tigray, ultimatums to leave.[709]

On the morning of January 18, the day after the massacre, the local authorities publicly announced that Tigrayans should leave. Frehiwot, a 30-year-old woman who said she lost her father the previous day, recalled an announcement: "[It was] declared … in churches … that every Tigrayan needed to leave within 72 hours or they [the authorities] would be taking action."[710]

As a result of the ultimatum, said Frehiwot, "Every Tigrayan was terrified, selling what was in our hands, for cheap prices. Even if the item cost 1000 ETB ($25), we sold [it] for 200 ETB ($5) to save ourselves."[711] As the news of the massacre spread, "We were worried about our safety," said Frehiwot**.** Worku, a 56-year-old farmer from the town, recalls: "We had to sell every property in our house so that we can cross the Tekeze. We sold it for a very cheap price. We sold all the items we had."[712]

The authorities in Adi Goshu, however, soon changed their tone. Maj. Dejene Maru, the commander of Amhara Special Forces in Adi Goshu, called and led a meeting in the kebele 02 administrative office, also referred to as "Kunama hall."[713]

Kidane, a 23-year-old student whose father was also among those killed, was present at the meeting. He explained how non-Tigrayans in attendance argued: "'Most Tigrayans need to leave! We need to deport them. This is not their land. They need to leave immediately.'"[714]

Interim administrators however, said it was a "mistake to tell [us] to leave in three days," recalled a 56-year-old Tigrayan farmer.[715] "Every Tigrayan was told to be in the meeting. We all attended," Frehiwot recalled, "[but] they changed their mind after the deadline passed."[716] Worku, who was in attendance, said they nevertheless followed up with a warning:

[709] Phone interviews with, Frehiwot, Worku, Kidane, and #179, Tigray, May and June 2021.

[710] Phone interview with Frehiwot, Tigray, June 2021.

[711] Phone interview with Frehiwot, Tigray, June 2021.

[712] Phone interview with Worku, Tigray, June 2021.

[713] Phone interview with Worku, Kidane, #73, #80, Tigray, May and June 2021.

[714] Phone interview with Kidane, Tigray, May 2021.

[715] Phone interview with #179, Tigray, May 2021.

[716] Phone interview with Frehiwot, Tigray, June 2021.

> Me and other 50 prisoners were taken to the meeting in Kebele 02 and held in a place called “Kunama hall.” The hall was previously used by the Kunama [ethnic minority] as an administrative office.… The Amhara special force attending the meeting [said]: “If any TDF attacked Amhara Special Forces, The Tigrayans would pay the price.” They made it very clear.[717]

Kahsay said that Major Dejene told Tigrayan residents during the meeting: “If any Tigrayan wishes to stay here, you can. If you want to leave, we will escort you.”[718] Alongside other surviving detainees from the roundup, Worku was released then.

After the meeting, “they started to go around using a bajaj [motor rickshaw] ... telling us not to leave,” said Natanael, a 48-year-old farmer, but “we were all ready to leave and [had] already sold our property so that we can use the money [for] transport.”[719] The threat of collective punishment and the fresh awareness of the massacre meant that people found little solace in knowing the ultimatum had been revoked. “So many Tigrayans crossed to Shire” at that time, said Worku.[720] Frehiwot recalls: “So many of us had sold our items, the bridge and way to Shire was open. We didn’t want to stay in Adi Goshu, [in case the] TDF would attack the ENDF or Amhara Special Forces.”[721]

However, the harassment and threats continued relentlessly against those who remained. A 56-year-old farmer said that even though Tigrayans were told they could stay, the assurances did not last long. “The people from the interim administration — they were Amharas.… They said their hands were tied. The [ASF and Fano] started doing the evil things as before. They were beating old people, taking away property, killing people.”[722]

One farmer stayed for just a few days but added that fear of further killings drove their flight on February 10.[723] More ultimatums emerged. Kidane, who had stayed, said that in the month after the massacre:

> I saw papers distributed around the town or thrown ... around. The papers would say: “Tigrayans need to leave tomorrow,” “Tigrayans need to leave, or they will be killed.” They would have deadlines ... The same words were written on another day. If Tigrayan didn’t leave, they would throw the

[717] Phone interview with Worku, Tigray, June 2021.

[718] Phone interviews with Kahsay, Tigray, May 2021, and with Worku in Tigray, June 2021.

[719] Interview with Natanel, Sudan, January 2021.

[720] Phone interview with Worku, Tigray, June 2021.

[721] Phone interview with Frehiwot, Tigray, June 2021.

[722] Phone interview with #179, Tigray, May 2021.

[723] Ibid.

paper, with the same content. It was the Walqayte [residents] throwing the paper.[724]

The campaign succeeded in pressuring many Tigrayans to leave. “Our numbers [in Adi Goshu] were decreasing by the day,” said Goitom, a 42-year-old farmer.[725] After “the Tekeze incident happened, the Tigrayans left in big numbers,” he said. “There was nothing to live for. We were not part of the town; it was taken over by other people. We were not allowed to live. And so, I came to Shire.”[726]

**Other Departures**

Elsewhere in Western Tigray, people left under pressure after they had exhausted all coping mechanisms. The military and regional forces that controlled Western Tigray had committed mass killings and other grave abuses against Tigrayans with impunity, creating a situation in which the mere rumor of a government crackdown was enough to trigger flight.

“Every single minute you feel fear — are they gonna kill me? Am I going to die today? Am I going to go to jail?”

Tesfakiros, a 30-year-old shopkeeper from Humera, recalled: “Every single minute you feel fear — are they gonna kill me? Am I going to die today? Am I going to go to jail?”[727] When asked how her life changed after her village, tabia Irob, changed hands, Tsega, 24, said: “If you want to buy groceries, you’re scared a lot, and you can’t [sense] whether you will be going be back home or be killed. Your brain is running about these things. It makes you feel [like you’re] losing control.”[728] Living in Adebai, where “there is killing, hunger, detentions, releases,” said Gezae, a 45-year-old male farmer who was displaced to the village, “makes you feel hopeless.”[729] Being banned from speaking Tigrinya, Hadgu, a 24-year-old farmer from Division, said he “felt deep anger inside, because that’s my language and identity, I can’t change it.”[730]

Many community members said they experienced deep emotional pain, sadness and thoughts of death. “Sometimes I prefer to die,” said Robel, a 40-year-old construction worker from Rawyan. “Especially when you see the dead bodies, you hate living and you want to die, that’s how it feels when you see the dead bodies.”[731] Semira, a 21-year-old

[724] Phone interview with Kidane, Tigray, May 2021.

[725] Phone interview with Goitom, Tigray, June 2021.

[726] Phone interview with Goitom, Tigray, June 2021.

[727] Interview with Tesfakiros, Sudan, May 2021.

[728] Interview with Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[729] Interview with Gezae, Sudan, May 2021.

[730] Interview with Hadgu, Sudan, May 2021.

[731] Interview with Robel, Sudan, May 2021.

woman from Rawyan recalled: “This makes your brain dark. You have no future life. Everything became closed. It’s very difficult.”[732]

Tesfakiros, the 30-year-old shopkeeper from Humera, said:

> That situation makes us feel ashamed to be Tigrayan, feeling uncomfortable to be Tigrayan, because we were killed by those people, and it’s very painful when someone tells you about what happened to them — “My sister was raped,” “My dad was killed,” “I lost my family,” “I lost my property” — so everybody was in very deep sadness.[733]

“That situation makes us feel ashamed to be Tigrayan, feeling uncomfortable to be Tigrayan.”

Recounting an experience common among the people interviewed, a 70-year-old farmer from Division said: “We had hoped that things would get better, but ... It seemed they were trying to kill us slowly. What did we have to wait for? There was nothing to live for and survive. So why did we stay? We decided to live and that was what made us leave.”[734] In Ruwassa, said Andom**,** “They were pushing us to leave that area.” “They really worked on it,” explained his wife, Tsega.[735] Speaking of the diverse intimidation methods deployed against Tigrayans, Tesfa**,** a 60-year-old farmer from Baeker, said: “They were pushing us to leave that area.… You got deported in different ways.”[736]

“They were pushing us to leave that area…You got deported in different ways.”

Some Tigrayans planned their departures in secret; others left in haste, selling off whatever belongings had not been looted for a fraction of what they were worth. Families banded together, pooling funds to charter coaches at inflated prices. Tigrayans, said Andom from tabia Irob, paid “a lot of money to get a contract bus — you gather money and pay all at once and that bus will take you.” These buses, he said, “were organized by the residents, but the drivers were Walqayte.”[737]

[732] Interview with Semira, Sudan, May 2021.

[733] Interview with Tesfakiros, Sudan, May 2021.

[734] Phone interview with #178, Tigray, June 2021.

[735] Interviews with Andom, Tsega, Sudan, May 2021.

[736] Interview with Tesfa, Sudan, May 2021.

[737] Interview with Andom, Sudan, May 2021.

Many boarded buses and minibuses heading for the Tekeze bridge, paying many times the normal price of transport as they would during peacetime. They said that drivers throughout Western Tigray – all Walqayte or Amhara – gouged them on prices. Akbret**,** a 38-year-old civil servant, fled eastwards, from Humera to Shire. After receiving financial support from a Walqayte friend, she paid 400 ETB ($10) to reach Tekeze on a bus run by an Amhara driver. Upon reaching the Tekeze bridge, she said, "the Amhara took the money and took me to Tekeze, and we crossed on foot. The Eritreans received us on the other side of the river. I paid another 500 ETB ($12.50) to Eritreans, and I arrived in Shire."[738] The price of transport increased each month. Mihret said he paid 1000 ETB ($25) for a minibus from Humera to Tekeze. "Before the war, the transportation was 100-150 ETB," ($2.50 - $3.75) he said.[739] Kibrom found a car to take him from Adebai to the Tekeze in April 2021. He and another friend were forced to pay 3000 ETB ($75) each to cross. "Nobody would dare cross if they didn't have the money, and then they would allow you to cross," he explained. [740]

Amhara Special Forces controlling the checkpoint on the western side of the bridge stole from desperate convoys of fleeing Tigrayans on the bridge.[741] "[The Special Forces] would take anything they saw that was valuable in the car," said a 26-year-old man from Turkan. "They were taking items from travelers: refrigerators, TVs … from Tigrayans who were in Western Tigray."[742]

## Renewed Roundups and Extrajudicial Executions, July - December 2021

In June 2021, Tigrayan forces gained control of much of Tigray, causing Ethiopian and Eritrean government forces to withdraw from most of the Northwestern, Central, Eastern and Southern Zones of Tigray.[743] The Western Tigray administrative Zone, however, remained under the control of Amhara regional forces and militias.

This dramatic change in the conflict by late June led in July to an increase in the persecution of Tigrayans in Humera town and in the neighboring towns of Adebai and Rawyan. Amhara forces began rounding up and detaining Tigrayan civilians, including women and children, in overcrowded prisons, police stations, and makeshift detention sites.[744]

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[738] Phone interview with Akbret, Tigray, **May 2021**.

[739] Phone interview with Mihret, Tigray, April 2021.

[740] Phone interviews with #172 and Kibrom, Tigray, May 2021.

[741] Phone interview, #172, #174, #182, Tigray, May 2021.

[742] Phone interviews with #172, #182, Tigray, May 2021.

[743] Declan Walsh and Simon Marks, "Ethiopian Forces Retreat in Tigray, and Rebels Enter the Capital," *New York Times*, June 28, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/28/world/asia/tigray-mekelle-ethiopia-retreat.html.

[744] Phone interviews with Zemede, Ftawhi, #250, #115, #256, #261, #281, #278, #280, #282, #283, #284, #303, August, November, and December 2021, and January 2022.

In November 2021, the federal government declared a nationwide state of emergency as reports of fierce fighting between Tigrayan forces and Ethiopian and allied forces in Amhara and Afar regions intensified.[745] At the same time, the Tigrayans who remained in Adebai, Humera, and Rawyan towns faced a new wave of roundups, detentions, expulsions,
and killings.[746]

Those who escaped the detention sites in and around Humera since June 2021 described ever-worsening conditions of detention. Former detainees described deaths of other detainees in custody due to torture, a lack of food, and the denial of medical care.[747] Three former detainees described witnessing the summary execution of detainees and residents by Amhara security forces in Humera town.[748] Several others residing in Humera confirmed finding the bodies in open areas around the town of victims they described as Tigrayans.[749]

## Mass Detentions of Tigrayans

After several months of threats and violence, local authorities in Humera in June 2021 again issued a threatening ultimatum that Tigrayans leave the town.[750]

Amhara police, militias, and Fano went house-to-house to deliver the ultimatums, asking: "Where are the Tigrayans?" said Fthawi, a 38-year-old teacher from the city.[751] Zemede, a 48-year-old tailor, explained:

> I was one of the people who received the warning. And when they told me to leave, I asked them: "Where am I supposed to go?" and they said: "We don't care! Just leave our town. If you don't leave within 24 hours, we will do the Mai Kadra story in Humera." And then I asked: "But there is no

[745] "Parliament approves state of emergency proclamation," *Addis Standard*, November 4, 2021, https://addisstandard.com/update-details-of-ethiopias-state-of-emergency-proclamation/. Prior to the declaration of a nationwide state of emergency, the Amhara regional government declared its own regional state of emergency in October 2021; "Amhara state council declares emergency, including region wide curfew," *Addis Standard,* Ocober 31, 2021*,* https://addisstandard.com/update-amhara-state-council-declares-emergency-including-region-wide-curfew-suspension-of-activities-by-state-institutions/; Katharine Houreld, "Could Ethiopia's capital fall to Tigrayan and allied forces?" *Reuters*, November 5, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/could-ethiopias-capital-fall-tigrayan-allied-forces-2021-11-05.

[746] Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: New Wave of Atrocities in Western Tigray."

[747] Phone interviews with #278, #281, #280, and #303, Sudan, November and December 2021 and January 2022.

[748] Phone interviews with #277, #279, and #280, Sudan, December 2021.

[749] Phone interviews with Temesgen, Fthawi, #257, #274, #258, #277, #279, #280, #169, Sudan and Tigray, August, November, and December 2021.

[750] Phone interviews with Zemede, Temegen, Fthawi, August 2021.

[751] Phone interview with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

> way out! Every road is blocked!" and they simply said they didn't care and left.[752]

The ultimatum "was difficult to accept," said Fthawi, "so we sent priests and other elders ... [to say] that this is short notice, and [there are no] means of transport to go elsewhere. They told us to go through Eritrea, any other direction, but to leave." Following their complaints, an administrator called a meeting for Tigrayans in Humera.[753] Fthawi recalled:

> I attended the meeting … in the open football stadium near Hawzen school. There were around 3000 people gathered.... And in the meeting [an administrator] proposed that if Tigrayans want to live in Humera, they should go out on the street, demonstrate, and condemn the TPLF as terrorist group, as anti-development, and not representing the Tigrayan [people].[754]

In the ensuing days, Fano and local militias went house-to-house again, threatening Tigrayans to coerce them to attend the demonstration. Zemede said that on July 11, the militias came to his home: "The militias [were] giving this message to every Tigrayan.… They told us to report to the kebele and they would be the ones leading everything. And whoever was not present in the demonstration [must] consider [they are] agreeing to getting killed."[755]

The demonstration took place around a week after the stadium rally. "I participated," said Fthawi, "Everyone participated. We were afraid for our lives."[756] He added: "A warning had been given, if anyone remained in their homes and didn't participate in the demonstration, they would be killed."[757] The protest, in which local residents chanted slogans against the TPLF, was covered on an Amhara state media broadcast on July 14.[758]

Two days later, on July 16, the authorities launched a wave of sweeping arrests. Fthawi said: "The rounding up of Tigrayans intensified. They took the [ones] forgotten or hidden like myself.… Everyone was being rounded up."[759]

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[752] Phone interview with Zemede, Sudan, August 2021.

[753] Phone interview with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021. Amhara Media Corporation Facebook post by Amhara Media Corporation, June 13, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/AmharaMediaCorporation/posts/1563797483795240.

[754] Phone interview with Fthawi, Sudan August 2021.

[755] Phone interview with Zemede, Sudan August 2021.

[756] Phone interview with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[757] Phone interview with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[758] "የትግራይ ተወላጆች ተቃውሞ በሑመራ," Amhara Media Corporation, video clip, YouTube, July 14, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaole_fAJD0.

[759] Phone interviews with Fthawi, Zemede, Sudan, August 2021.

Zemede recalled his arrest on July 17 by a mixed group of Amhara forces, including ASF, Fano, and local militias, even though he had attended the demonstration:

> I left my house … to eat breakfast in the morning and they pulled me from the street, told me that they wanted me, and they took me to the kebele [administrative office] … A lot of Tigrayans were there. They were using the kebele as a prison.... They kept us there for three days and on July 19 they took us all to the Enda Yetbarek storage. They're using that as a prison and bringing Tigrayans from Rawyan and other areas and just jailing them.[760]

A 32-year-old tractor driver in Rawyan confirmed that the sweeps extended to his town on July 12. He recalled: “The Fano and Amhara militia were the ones going home-to-home to collect Tigrayans. They took them to the kebele [office], to the school, the flour machine, and also to Humera. There was no difference at to whom
they collected, it was all Tigrayan, regardless of sex.”[761]

Zemede said he was among those swept up in Humera. He recalled:

> When I entered the kebele it was filled with Tigrayans … so people were scared, wondering what they're going to do to us. Everyone was trying to comfort each other, it was horrible.... [O]nly from our kebele, we were about 200 people and they kept adding more after us. … There were men, women – pregnant, breastfeeding women, women with 4 to 5-year-olds.[762]

The Yetbarek warehouse, a large sorghum processing mill and storage house on the western edges of the town, had been converted to a makeshift prison by December 2020, and was guarded by Amhara special police.[763] Other detention sites included the Bet Hintset prison, the old prison, the Setit Humera police station, the Geter police station, and the Enda Quaja camp, which is located south of the city. [**See Detentions section**].

[760] Phone interview with Zemede, Sudan, August 2021.

[761] Phone interview with #165, Sudan, December 2021.

[762] Phone interview with Zemede, August 2021.

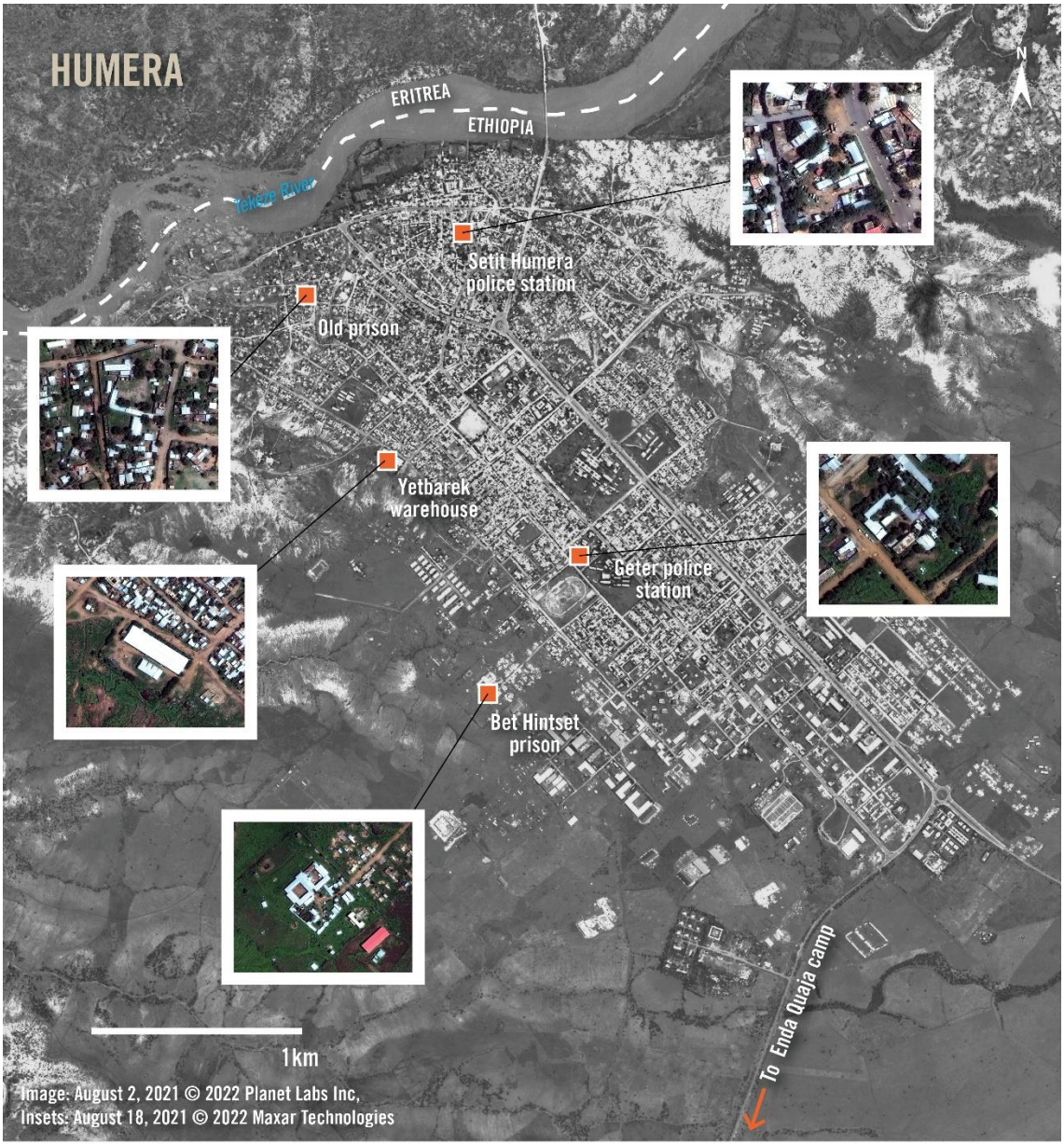
[763] Phone interview with Yirgalem, Tigray, June 2021.




Satellite imagery from 18 August shows a couple of lorries and a possible armoured vehicle at the Setit police station in the centre of Humera. Activity with vehicles moving and objects shifting is seen at the police station throughout imagery collected in late 2020 and 2021.




Satellite imagery from November 20, 2020 and August 18, 2021 shows the Bet Hintset prison in Humera. New debris is visible on both dates – circled in orange. On August 18, there are many vehicles visible outside of the prison gates.




An overview of Humera from 2 August 2021 shows the areas where people reported being detained in the town.

Former detainees held in the Yetbarek warehouse estimated that thousands were held there by July 2021.[764] Zemede recalled:

> They added people from more and more [neighborhoods] and they kept adding people from other areas too. … The people were from four different kebeles and there were maybe 1500 women, with their kids maybe a total of 2000, and the men were almost the same. I estimate that there may have been 4000 to 4500 people in that storage…people from four kebeles in Humera. There were also people they brought in from Rawyan… [and] people from Bereket, as the storage [house] in Bereket was full.[765]

A 35-year-old laborer, described being held in the same warehouse, estimates there were between 3000 and 4000 people detained there.[766] One 48-year-old said that during the last week of July, about 3000 to 4000 people were arrested, including his brother. [767] By early September 2021, "[t]here were maybe 1500 Tigrayans" in the Bet Hintset prison, said one detainee who managed to escape. "[M]aybe 850 or 900 were male, and the rest were female. Maybe 150 of the were [children]. There were also babies with the women."[768] One man who recalled his detention in Bet Hintset prison in July and who escaped in mid-November, estimated he was kept in a cell with at times up to 200 people, and that there were at least eight other rooms on the same floor that were equally as crowded.[769]

One official, Belay, appeared to be screening detainees in the Yetbarek warehouse, recalled Zemede: "Belay, the intelligence guy, came with his guards and told us that whoever had Amhara blood in them, 50 percent Amhara blood or Walqayte, was set to be free."[770] In the warehouse, "at first, all of us who were in jail were Tigrayan," recounted one former detainee, "and after some time they did their own research and released half-Amhara, half-Tigrayan people. And after some time, they released the half-Walqayte, [half-Tigrayans] … [then]they released the half-Eritreans. And finally, it was only the full Tigrayans who were left in the prison." [771] At that time, he said, the children younger than 10 were also released.[772]

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[764] Phone interviews with Zemede, #256, #280, Sudan, August and December 2021.

[765] Phone interview with Zemede, August 2021.

[766] Phone interview with #256, Sudan, August 2021.

[767] Phone interview with #261, Sudan, August 2021.

[768] Phone interview with #155, Sudan, August 2021.

[769] Phone interview with #278, Sudan, December 2021.

[770] Phone interview with Zemede, August 2021.

[771] Phone interview with #256, Sudan, August 2021.

[772] Phone interview with #256, Sudan, August 2021.

Detainees described appalling conditions. Zemede said that in the kebele compound where he was held, Fano and local militias took turns guarding Tigrayans, adding: “They didn't allow us to talk to people and whenever one of the sons or daughters of the people being held with us came to visit, if someone came closer to the gate, they started chasing us and whipping everybody.”[773]

In the Yetbarek warehouse, continued Zemede, “it was very nasty, very dirty.”[774] There were no latrines, and the warehouse was so crowded that detainees could not lie down to sleep.[775] Zemede added that the guards denied medical care to detainees and would beat people when they deemed too many at once wanted to use the bathroom. The guards, said a 29-year-old detainee, “insulted us every day, they said: ‘Junta,’ ‘You are junta!’, ‘If we let you go, you will join the TPLF and fight against us, so we will never let you go! You will
die here.’”[776]

As in other detention sites previously, the guards did not provide detainees with water or food and the only food detainees receives was what was brought by Amhara or Walqayte friends and relatives.[777] [**see Arbitrary Arrests, Mass Detentions, and Torture November 2020- June 2021 section**]

A 29-year-old daily laborer who was held in the warehouse, said: “There is no food, not enough water. If you asked for any food, they [would] say ‘Your food is a bullet. We will kill you!’”[778] Those who could, would pay the guards to get food, he said.

A 28-year-old driver held was held in Geter police station in Humera and explained that “it was common for people to faint from hunger. Some people could stay three or four days without food and then faint.”[779] He was subsequently brought to the Bet Hintset prison, where the conditions were the same: “The most difficult was getting food. We were starving.” [780] A 30-year-old was arrested on July 19, and also held in Bet Hintset prison. He said: “Forget showers, we couldn't access the toilets, they didn't give us any food or water, even when our families would bring us food and water, they wouldn't give it to us.”[781]

### a. Torture and Ill-Treatment in Detention

[773] Phone interview with Zemede, August 2021,

[774] Phone interview with Zemede, Sudan August 2021.

[775] Phone interview with #280, Sudan, December 2021.

[776] Phone interview with #250, Sudan, August 2021.

[777] Phone interviews with Zemede, #155 #250, #252, #280, #281, #278, Sudan, August, September, November, and December 2021.

[778] Phone interview with #250, Sudan, August 2021.

[779] Phone interview with #155, Sudan, August 2021.

[780] Phone interview with #155, Sudan, August 2021.

[781] Phone interview with #278, Sudan, December 2021.

Former detainees held in Bet Hintset prison said that torture was routine. One man recalled being hit with "electric wires" on the soles of his feet and on his chest.[782] One former detainee held in Bet Hinstset for a month and a half described the torture he endured on four occasions:

> They would just take you out of your room and beat you up however they wanted in the open in the compound, but sometimes they would take you in an underground place downstairs, it's dark, and they torture you….
>
> They used to do it simultaneously. They would take 10 or 15 people out at the same time. They would tie us down and we would lie on the floor with our face down. And they would start beating us....
>
> They used rope and tied our hands to our back … they hit you in your very sensitive areas, such as your testicles, your head, your chest. They would beat us with a stick, or mostly they used the rifle, they would beat you with the back of it or with the muzzle."[783]

In Bet Hintset, said one detainee, "many people were … tortured to the point where they were emotionally unstable.… I think they also hit them on their head, so they were always nervous, they would be talking to themselves, they would pee or defecate on themselves."[784] The conditions in Enda Yetbarek were so appalling, recalled another detainee, adding that "there are so many people that are now [emotionally traumatized] because they saw so many things and so many things happened to them."[785]

Four former detainees described how guards insulted them using dehumanizing terms and would threaten them with death. A 58-year-old farmer, was held in Adebai, where guards speaking in Amharic would say, "You [Tigrayans] don't deserve air, you shouldn't even be alive, you're not humans."[786] A farmer who said he managed to flee Humera town after being extorted by a member of the Amhara Special Force recalled what the officer told him, "'Being a Tigrayan is a crime of its own. You have two options, either death or pay money.' After I paid, when it was dark, he took me out of the jail and he told me that if I wanted to stay alive, I had to leave Humera because they have plans, they're going to

"You [Tigrayans] don't deserve air, you shouldn't even be alive, you're not humans."

[782] Phone interview with #281, Sudan, November 2021.

[783] Phone interview with #278, Sudan, December 2021.

[784] Phone interview with #279, Sudan, December 2021.

[785] Phone interview with #280, Sudan, December 2021.

[786] Phone interview with J#303, Sudan, January 2022.

kill all Tigrayans. 'All Tigrayans will be killed', he said. He said, 'Today I took money from you, but tomorrow someone else could do worse to you.'"[787]

### b. Bodies in the Tekeze River, Eastern Sudan

In July 2021, as the mass arrests unfolded in Humera and Rawyan, dozens of bodies began washing up in Sudan along the banks of the Tekeze River, which flows north of Humera town, where it marks the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and west, along the border with Sudan, and through Western and Northwestern Tigray Zone.[788] As of November 2021, approximately 136 bodies had been found in the river between Hamdayet and Wad al-Hiliyu; more were found in other places along the river but may not have been counted.[789]

Researchers received photographs and videos of the bodies taken by a person coordinating the collection of the bodies in August and September 2021 and sent the imagery to two forensic pathologists for analysis. Researchers also interviewed five individuals involved in, or who witnessed, the retrieval of the bodies, former residents, and aid workers.[790] The bodies appeared in various states of decomposition; they showed skin loss and discoloration as well as physical injuries. The large majority, of the bodies found in Sudan were men.[791] From descriptions provided by a man who assisted in the retrieval of the corpses, some bodies "had their arms tied up in the backs with electric wires," and that 23 of the victims were men and 5 were women. A review of the photographs and videos shared similarly confirm that two bodies were bound, with their elbows tied behind the back. Most bodies were without clothes.[792] Another person involved in the retrieval of the bodies described how, out of 28 bodies found in Wad al-Hiliyu by August 3, 10 had injuries that he believed were from bullets.[793] The wounds were "around their ears and neck,"
added Merhawi.

A forensic pathologist reviewed nine photographs, a form of analysis that is limited in comparison to what a physical analysis could reveal and observed that three of the bodies appeared to have been restrained with ligatures. One body had "linear injuries" likely due to chopping as a result of a blunt or sharp weapon in an "unusual location,"

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[787] Phone interview with #275, Sudan, December 2021.

[788] The refugee registration center of Hamdayet, which currently hosts around 6,000 Tigrayan refugees, also lies by the riverbanks, on the Sudanese side of the border between Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and downstream from Humera. Further downstream, an irrigation dam near the Sudanese town of Wad al-Hiliyu turns the Setit River into a lake, forming eddies that encourage the beaching of floating objects.

[789] Phone interviews with three individuals involved in the retrievals of the bodies, Sudan, August – September 2021; with a journalist present during retrievals, August 2021.

[790] Phone interviews with Merhawi, #248, #247, #258, #285, August – November 2021.

[791] Phone interviews with three individuals involved in the retrievals of the bodies, Sudan, August – September 2021

[792] Phone interview with Merhawi, an individual involved in the retrieval of bodies, Sudan, August 2021.

[793] Phone interview with #247, an individual involved in the retrieval of bodies, Sudan, August 2021.

which could suggest that the arms were raised away from the torso at the time." At least one body displayed a gunshot wound.[794]

A medical professional involved in the retrieval in July and August said the bodies showed injuries from sharp objects.[795]

It was not possible to conclusively identify the victims found in Sudan. The recovery and handling of human remains require special attention and care, including respect for the dignity of the deceased and compliance with forensic best practices to ensure that such evidence is preserved for future identification by trained experts and for accountability.

## Deaths in Detention from Torture and Inadequate Medical Care

Beatings and grossly inadequate detention conditions killed prisoners in some cases, said former detainees who witnessed the deaths.[796]

A 19-year-old detainee said that seven people – all men above 70 – died of hunger and illness in his cell while he was held in Bet Hintset.[797] Another detainee, also held in Bet Hintset prison, said one 23-year-old man died because he did not receive treatment after falling sick. He said: "When we first got in, he was healthy, but as time went by, he started becoming thinner and weaker and [he] finally died.[798]

Four witnesses told of 18 men dying in Bet Hintset, Enda Yetbarek, and the Adebai farmers' association warehouse (an informal detention site) after guards beat them.[799] One man recalled:

> All of us have went through [torture] but the most vulnerable ones were older people.… One old man, they had hit him on his testicles and his testicles were swollen, he couldn't pee. He was in so much agony. He [eventually] died.[800]

A 38-year-old held at Bet Hintset, said that on October 11, two of his fellow detainees eventually died after Bet Hintset guards kicked them in the testicles.[801]

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[794] Forensic pathologist analysis of images commissioned by Amnesty International, August 2021.

[795] Phone interview with #248, a medical professional involved in the retrieval of the bodies, Sudan, August 2021.

[796] Phone interview with #250, #281, #280, #279, Sudan, August, November, and December 2021.

[797] Phone interview with #278, Sudan, December 2021.

[798] Phone interview with #281, Sudan, November 2021.

[799] Phone interviews with #281, #303, #278, #280, Sudan, November, December 2021, and January 2022.

[800] Phone interview with #278, Sudan, December 2021.

[801] Phone interview with #281, Sudan, November 2021.




Four small white objects are visible at the entrance and back area of the Yetbarek Warehouse in imagery from July 29, 2021. The objects are also visible on July 30 and August 2 (not shown) suggesting they could be checkpoints for movement into and around the warehouse area. The objects are not visible in imagery from August 18, 2021.

A detainee at Enda Yetbarek, said that one detainee died from complications after the guards beat him in retaliation after he attempted to escape: "They beat him, and he wasn't able to eat or drink anything for two weeks and [he] died."[802] He added that guards at Enda Yetbarek would wait for days to remove dead bodies from detention cells or at times force other detainees to do it:

> The guards would wait three, four, five days and then take them and throw them into the valley behind. So, they would wait for the bodies to smell and swell up.... [They] would even make the prisoners do it. They would tell the prisoners to carry the bodies and make them throw them into the valley, or they would come into vehicles and tell the prisoners to put the bodies on the vehicles. [803]

Another former detainee recounting his arrest on July 19, and detention in Bet Hintset prison, described guards forcing him and other detainees load onto tractors the corpses of fellow detainees who had died in the prison around mid-November. He recalled:

[802] Phone interview with #280, #278, Sudan, December 2021.

[803] Phone interview with #280, Sudan, December 2021.

> Whenever they took the bodies, they used to tell us that they were taking them to their families, but since we're in jail we couldn't really know if they were taking them to their families or throwing the bodies away. On the last day that I was there, about four people died and they picked about 12 of us to help get the bodies out of there and put it on a tractor that was waiting outside.[804]

## Extrajudicial Executions, Enforced Disappearances

### a. Killings

As local authorities increased their roundups and arbitrary detention of Tigrayans in July and November 2021, Amhara security forces summarily executed Tigrayans in Humera town.[805]

Feven, a middle-aged woman who owned a snack shop in Humera, was arrested in July, days after a demonstration. Her body with her eyes gouged out was found in town on the banks of the Tekeze River. A friend of hers, Temesgen, said he was among those who found her body: “She was tied up, her hands to her back and she was also on the side of the river and her eyes were completely removed.”[806]

The killings in Humera continued for several months. “We always see bodies” on the streets of Humera, recalled one resident. “[B]y the Mariam bridge, Michael bridge, by the Tekeze before you get to the water.… At a school called Enda Abate, every day new bodies are found there... even yesterday when I went out, I saw bodies.... They were around the road to Adebai.”[807]

In many cases the bodies were found on the outskirts of the town. In September, one man recalled finding the body of an acquaintance, a teacher from Humera named Asmelash, in a valley on the western edge of town close to the Enda Michael church and Enda Yetbarek warehouse.[808] “We found him with [gash wounds] on his face and neck,” he said. [809] He later helped bury Asmelash.

In November, one farmer said he saw six bodies covered in what he described as engine oil near an industrial warehouse known as “The Shed.”[810]

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[804] Phone interview with #278, Sudan, December 2021.

[805] Phone interviews with Temesgen, Zemede, Merhawi, with #257, #258, #250, #279, #277, #280, #281, #248, #247, #285 and #275, Sudan, in August, September, November and December 2021. Fthawi, #155, #159.

[806] Phone interviews with Temesgen, #281, and #275, November and December 2021.

[807] Phone interview with #257, September 2021.

[808] Phone interview with #257, September 2021.

[809] Phone interview with #274, Sudan, December 2021.

[810] Phone interview with #159, Sudan, November 2021.

The killings and sight of bodies instilled terror among Tigrayans said, a 36-year-old farmer from Humera, adding: “I would hear gunshots every day and we hear about the people they killed. And there were bodies on the street every day…. I lived in fear thinking they would come and get me.”[811]

Eight former detainees mentioned the killings and enforced disappearances of Tigrayans in custody since July 2021.[812] A 20-year-old student described being arrested in mid-October and held in the kebele 2 office when Fano militia called for a detainee held in the same room and summarily shot him outside: “I don’t know who told on him, but they came in and said he was a former soldier. They took him out and I heard gunshots, and I heard him drop. Afterwards, I could see from the door in our room that his body was lying at
the gate.”[813]

At the Yetbarek warehouse, a former detainee, who was held there for two months until June or July, said he saw guards shoot two youths who tried to escape, killing a 16-year-old.

In early November, Amhara militia and local security forces shot at or otherwise attacked residents trying to flee a new wave of roundups and arrests.[814] As Adebai residents headed to the Abune Aregawi church to pray in the early morning hours of November 3, 2021, Amhara militias, Fano militias, and Eritrean military forces gathered around the church, ordering the men to stay for a meeting while telling the women to leave, according to five residents.[815] One 58-year-old farmer at the church said that Fano militias, zonal officials, including Colonel Demeke and Belay, were in attendance and gave instructions to the people present:

> They waited for people to gather in the church. …They started telling us that our time there was up. That they can no longer carry us with them. That we are “juntas.” That we were responsible for the deaths of many people and that we are no longer welcome there. The Eritrean intelligence person, said ‘Tigrayans go on this side, [while] Amharas, Walqayte, Eritreans, Kunamas, go on the other.’ After they separated us… they started putting the younger people in vehicles, and us older people, above 60, they made us walk.[816]

[811] Phone interview with #258, Sudan, September 2021.

[812] Phone interview with Zemede, #154, #250, #275, #279, #277, #281, Sudan August, September, November, and December2021.

[813] Phone interview with #277, Sudan, December 2021.

[814] Accounts of the killings in Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: New Wave of Atrocities in Western Tigray,” December 16, 2021.

[815] Phone interviews with #303, #274, #276, #157, and #272 in Sudan December 2021 and January 2022.

[816] Phone interview with #303, Sudan, January 2022.

A 20-year-old man, who had been warned by three Tigrayan women returning from church, confirmed that he saw younger men loaded onto trucks and older people, guarded by Fano militiamen, forced to walk towards the eastern edges of the town.[817] "I saw them marching them to the main road," he said, adding. "They were pushing them in the back and beating them. They made the trip two or three times, loading them repeatedly, [in] maybe one vehicle, two or three times."

Several Tigrayan men interviewed said that as word of the roundup spread, many people panicked and tried to flee. Some went home or to neighboring fields to evade arrest. Four people witnessed Amhara militia members shoot or attack, with machetes, axes, knives, or sticks, Tigrayans seeking to flee. A 26-year-old man said he saw armed men on motorbikes shooting at people including his 70-year-old uncle. He later saw his uncle's body, and those of two other men, including an older man he knew. "They were shooting at anyone who was behind," he said. "[My uncle] wasn't even running.… they still shot him. I saw the guy shooting at him and him falling."[818]
In Adebai, Amhara forces that rounded up residents in early November 2021 took those apprehended to detention sites: some to the town's police station, others to an Adebai farmers' association compound located on the town's eastern outskirts, near the Enda Roto petrol station compound whose warehouse was used as a makeshift detention site.

Four witnesses described Fano militia going house-to-house searching for Tigrayans. Before fleeing, a student recounted hiding at home where he witnessed as a group of 30 to 40 armed men attacking his neighbor, a mechanic in his mid-twenties: "they told him to come.… He had his hands up and they hit him on his shoulder with an axe. As he screamed, they dragged him and took him with them."[819]

In the ensuing days, Tigrayans who had escaped survived by hiding on farmland, but the attacks continued. One man described hearing gunshots on November 7 and later saw bodies near a reservoir three kilometers northeast of Adebai:

> The Fanos and Walqayte militia just came … and started killing whomever they found in the bushes.… We were further [away] ... but we were hearing a lot of gunshots. So, when it got quiet and it was dark, we went to the [reservoir] and saw a lot of bodies. We didn't count because we were afraid and shocked.... I would say [I saw] about 20 [bodies].[820]

### b. Enforced Disappearances

[817] Phone interview with #157, Sudan, December 2021.

[818] Phone interview with #274, Sudan, December 2021.

[819] Phone interview with #274, Sudan, December 2021.

[820] Phone interview with #270, Sudan, November 2021.

Five former detainees in Humera described how Tigrayan detainees would be removed from detention and not be seen again.[821] One former detainee recalled how Fano militiamen once forced him and others to tie up other prisoners:

> The [Fanos] came, pointed their guns at us, and told us to tie up five people. They gave us ropes and told us to tie them up or we would be shot. So, we tied them up, and they told us to put them on vehicles. They then drove them away.[822]

Zemede was held in an administrative office in the kebele 2 neighborhood that had been turned into a makeshift detention site. He said that Belay, an official "came to the kebele [office] every few hours, [and] counted the prisoners with his eyes.… And he took two people from us who we never saw again."[823] One former detainee said that at the Geter police station, "A lot of people would be taken away and never returned to the jail … I remember that two people fainted and the soldiers took them away and they never returned, so whether they killed them or released them, we don't have any information about them."[824] In the Yetbarek warehouse, said Zemede, "from time to time they would come and call out names and take people away. They used to say it was for investigation, but we never saw these people again. No one knew of their whereabouts, so we don't know if they transferred them to other prisons or killed them."[825] Another man, recalling his detention in the warehouse said: "We still don't know what happened to the people taken away every night. We never saw them. We were hoping they were released but after we got out and asked around, no one had seen them."[826]

[821] Phone interviews with Zemede, #256, #250, #155, Sudan, August, and September 2021.

[822] Phone interview with #280, Sudan, December 2021.

[823] Phone interview with Zemede, Sudan, August 2021.

[824] Phone interview with #155, Sudan, September 2021.

[825] Phone interview with Zemede, Sudan, August 2021.

[826] Phone interview with #256, Sudan, August 2021.

# IV. Efforts to Prevent Returns

## Barring Tigrayans from Entry into Western Tigray

Together with the Amhara authorities' expulsion of the Tigrayan community from Western Tigray, there was a concerted effort to bar Tigrayans from other parts of Tigray from entering the region.[827] By December 2020, forces loyal to the Amhara region guarded the eastern boundaries of Western Tigray, preventing the entry of internally displaced people fleeing other parts of the region. Until the withdrawal of Ethiopian and Eritrean military forces from most of Tigray in June 2021, the northern bridge over the Tekeze River, on the road linking Sheraro to Adi Goshu, formed the crossing between areas predominantly under the control of the Eritrean military and those under the control of forces loyal to the Amhara region. While Eritrean soldiers guarded a checkpoint on the eastern side of the bridge, Amhara Special Forces and Fano militias positioned on the western side, where they screened travelers on an ethnic basis. They welcomed Amharas residents, but harassed, threatened, beat, detained, and robbed Tigrayans traveling westward, before sending them back to the eastern side.[828]

A 22-year-old student who fled Axum town in central Tigray in search of refuge in Sudan, tried to cross the northern Tekeze bridge crossing with a group in late December 2020. He said Fano militias robbed him of his money and beat them with sticks and rifle stocks.[829] They subsequently detained the group for two days, then released the men but kept two young women in their custody, he recounted.[830] Fano militias also questioned a 23-year-old student as he crossed the bridge. "They asked if we're Tigrayan or Amhara," he said. "We said we're Tigrayan and they said we're not allowed to pass the bridge… [they] ordered us to go back."[831]

Non-Tigrayans, as well as Tigrayans who at the checkpoint managed to pass as Amharas or Walqayte, received starkly different treatment. "After we arrived on the Tekeze bridge, they asked us our names and ethnicity," recalled a 23-year-old metalworker from Axum, describing his January 5 encounter with Amhara forces.[832] "My friend said he's half Amhara and they let him go free. I told them I'm pure Tigrayan and they really beat me."[833]

[827] Interviews with #225, #226, #227, #232, #234, #235, Sudan, January 2021. Phone interview with #304, Sudan, February 2021.

[828] Interviews with #225, #226, #227, #231, Sudan, January 2021.

[829] Interviews with #225, Sudan, January 2021.

[830] Interviews with #225, Sudan, January 2021.

[831] Interviews with #226, Sudan, January 2021.

[832] Interviews with #227, Sudan, January 2021.

[833] Interviews with #227, #231, Sudan, January 2021.

A 17-year-old from Axum hid his Tigrayan identity by pretending to be Amhara. The Amhara forces on the bridge welcomed him with open arms:

> The Amhara Special Forces asked me about my ethnicity. I told them that I'm pure Amhara but that my mom lives in Humera and my dad in Addis… I opened [a bank] account in an Addis branch, so... I showed them this [bank account card] and they allowed me to pass. They thought I was Amhara… They let me pass the bridge. … They invited me for tea, bananas. They also helped me take the bus. I heard the soldiers talk about me to the driver: "Hey! Drive him. He's one of us."[834]

After being turned away, some Tigrayans nevertheless managed to swim across the Tekeze River bordering Sudan during the dry season when the current was slower and eventually found their ways to Sudan.[835]

## Occupation of Homes

Amharas and Walqayte people, whether from the area or from further afield – including the Amhara region – began occupying the homes of Tigrayans throughout the Zone almost immediately after the capture and control of towns and villages in late 2020. After fleeing initial violence, a 33-year-old restaurant owner said she returned to Baeker only to find few Tigrayans left, her property taken, and her home occupied. "A Walqayte woman took my house," she said. "She didn't have any right to claim my home. My restaurant was also taken by [an Amhara] Special Forces member – they were using it as if it was their own."[836]

Abandoned homes in Mai Kadra and Humera were marked with the words: "Amhara house" or "This is ours," as a way of laying claim to property formerly occupied by Tigrayans, and of threatening those who would dare to return.[837] A 15-year-old girl from Mai Kadra noticed the writing on her gate:

> They took over my house and wrote "Amhara house" on the gate. They were writing this on the abandoned houses. When we entered the neighbor's house, the neighbor also had "Amhara house" outside. While we were inside, six daily laborers came in holding stones saying: "This is our house! Why are you in here?" Then a woman, an Amhara resident

[834] Interviews #234, Sudan, January 2021.

[835] Interviews with #233, #237, Kibreab, and #231, Sudan, January 2021.

[836] Phone interview with #198, Tigray, May 2021.

[837] Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, Silvia Aloisi, "How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," *Reuters*, June 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/. "In Pictures: Inside Humera, a town scarred by Ethiopia's war,"*Al Jazeera*, November 23, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2020/11/23/in-pictures-inside-a-tigray-town-scarred-by-ethiopian-conflict.

> from Mai Kadra, said to them: "These are our girls, leave them alone." I decided to leave after this. I was too scared and nervous to stay.[838]

A 38-year-old woman said she noticed Fano militia making similar markings in Humera:

> The Fano would write on the houses that belonged to Tigrayans. I went to a friend's house, and they wrote on the gate of his house, "This is Amhara house," "Walqayte house." They claimed every empty house in the town.[839]

A teacher in Humera recalled seeing the writings on homes around the hospital and elementary school and observed that the militias "competed to take houses" by writing on the doors and walls of houses, including that of his brother. He said: "They would write: 'This is occupied,' or 'This is taken.'"[840]

Between the time his house burned down during the shelling of Division and the moment he left in April 2021; Hadgu described seeing the arrival of new Amhara residents while he was forced to live under a tree with other displaced residents. "Most of the town became empty," he said.

> Some [Tigrayans] fled to the middle of Tigray, others to Sudan, so a lot of houses became empty. So many people – most are farmers – came. If they find an empty house, they start living in there ... especially around Mazoria, the circle road around the city. Around there, parts of the neighborhoods where Tigrayans built houses before the war – new Amhara residents came to live.[841]

Security forces and militias took part in the occupation of homes, according to a 53-year-old businessman who remained in Humera. He saw militias and their families occupy homes, and explained that Tigrayans did not have any option but to leave:

> They took over the houses they wanted ...You have no one to complain to. We owned the houses, but the Fano and Amhara Special Forces would take over the houses. Amhara Special Forces [would] break into houses with their guns, bring their families, and stay for two to three months. [Then], they take everything back to Gondar. I had to leave the town because I knew they would take my property and house, and so I

[838] Interview with #215, Sudan, December 2020.

[839] Phone interview with Akbret, Tigray, May 2021.

[840] Phone interview with Fthawi, August 2021.

[841] Interview with Hadgu, Sudan, May 2021.

> gave it to my neighbors, my friends who are Amharas. I wanted to give it to a friend instead of it being taken over. They are still living there.[842]

Aklile previously lived in Abderafi, a border town in the Amhara region, and said he began to recognize some of the new residents arriving from there to live in Humera. Though the process to live and occupy homes appeared random at first, with time, he explained, it became more formalized with the appointment of new authorities.[843]

## Repopulation

The brutal forced displacement of Tigrayan communities in Western Tigray and denial of entry to the Zone to other Tigrayans coincided with the settlement of towns by hundreds of Amharas from the Amhara region and from Sudan into towns such as Adebai, Humera, and Division, as interim authorities promised available land and homes.[844]

[842] Phone interview with #174, Tigray, May 2021.

[843] Interview with Aklile, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interview #173, Tigray, June 2021.

[844] Interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021. Phone interviews with Leul, #190, #191, #289 in Ethiopia, June 2021 and with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.




A time series of satellite imagery from 19 January 2021 to 4 March 2021, shows the movement of trucks in a lot across from the hospital in Humera coinciding with arrival of new residents in the town and the reported forcible displacement of Tigrayans from Humera. The lot is approximately 600 metres east of the bus station in town where vehicles gathered before November 2020. On 19 January, no vehicles are visible in the lot. On ebruary, many trucks are visible and the beds appear covered. On 12 February, six trucks with covered beds are present along with three trucks without covered beds. On 4 March, imagery shows trucks, many without covers on their beds.

An official in Gondar, Amhara region, told reporters in March 2021 that "20 buses were leaving daily" for Western Tigray, "each carrying 50 people."[845] Between February and

[845] Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, Silvia Aloisi, "How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," *Reuters,* June 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions.

March 2021, a Humera resident said he witnessed the arrival of over 10 trucks "full of people" – including many women and children – arrive in Humera town. He said the town's mayor and Colonel Demeke welcomed the arrivals as they disembarked in an open area across from the Kahsay Aberra hospital. He added that: "they took over homes formerly belonging to Tigrayans. Some returned home when they couldn't find homes empty
of property."[846]

Residents described authorities issuing instructions that those coming with "furniture would be first for a house."[847]

In Adebai, two residents saw fleets of buses with new arrivals in May 2021. An 18-year-old in the town explained: "New Amharas came to the town. Two full buses in Adebai. When they arrived, they were given houses in the town for free. Even if the houses had people in them, they would take them too."[848] A 74-year-old Tigrayan farmer displaced in Adebai, gave a similar account:

> They wore civilian clothes and had no guns ... They were men … all under 30. I saw them around the entrance of Adebai, in the direction of Shire. There were three buses. The passengers who dropped off the first bus all had a stick. I saw them when people tried to assist them to feed them. They came on May 16, in the daytime, and we were scared. We thought that they might come for [a dangerous] purpose. So, we fled that night.[849]

In June and July, local and international media reported that Amhara's who had been living in Sudan began returning to Ethiopia; 3,000 individuals were reported to be registered to return with 15,000 awaiting return to the Welkait and Tselemt districts.[850] While some had reportedly been previously displaced from Western Tigray, other individuals began arriving from elsewhere in Ethiopia. According to the accounts, Amhara regional officials promised to facilitate the transportation of returning communities to their chosen destination, with further pledges to provide "required support," including government-chartered buses to transport some Amhara communities who had been living in exile in Sudan.[851]

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[846] Phone interview with Fthawi, Sudan, August 2021.

[847] Phone interview with #289, Ethiopia, April 2021.

[848] Phone interview with #190, Tigray, June 2021.

[849] Interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021.

[850] "Ethiopian Returnees to Humera," *Voice of America – Amharic Service*, July 3, 2021, https://amharic.voanews.com/a/Ethiopian--returnees-humera-7-3-2021/5952294.html?fbclid=IwAR0RRr12mFlVQUxksUZYXwLCYyUN70PS8G5wHFEyEnyGcb5pOKbvdAKOcR4; Robbie Corey Boulet, "Survival Struggle: Ethnic standoff drives new phase of Tigray War," *AFP*, July 13, 2021, https://news.yahoo.com/survival-struggle-ethnic-standoff-drives-022623982.html.

[851] Phone interviews with Leul, #190, #191, Tigray, June 2021. Interview with Teame, Sudan, May 2021; Robbie Corey Boulet, "Survival Struggle: Ethnic standoff drives new phase of Tigray War," AFP, July 13, 2021.

In June 2021, a humanitarian assessment team confirmed seeing populations from the Amhara region moving into the Zone "and occupy[ing] empty houses and land in several locations."[852]

As the forced displacement of Tigrayan communities from their homes and land and the settlement of new residents in Western Tigray continued, Amhara regional authorities also took steps to further solidify their claim to the territory, notably by petitioning the federal parliament to redraw the regional boundary to incorporate Western Tigray into the Amhara region in March 2021.[853]

Interim administrators in Western Tigray and Amhara regional authorities also began the process of redistributing land. In May 2021, Amhara regional authorities released a public notice calling for investors to lease farms in Western Tigray on 288 farms, many of which belonged to Tigrayans.[854] These efforts to repopulate Western Tigray placed the hopes for a prompt return of displaced Tigrayans to their homes very much in doubt.

[852] OCHA, "Tigray Region Situation Update: June 20, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Situation%20Report%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20Tigray%20Region%20Humanitarian%20Update%20-%2017%20Jun%202021.pdf.

[853] Samuel Gebre, "Ethiopia's Amhara Seize Disputed Territory Amid Tigray Conflict," *Bloomberg News*, March 16, 2021, https://www.bloomberg. com/news/articles/2021-03-16/ethiopia-s-amhara-seize-disputed-territory-amid-tigray-conflict.

[854] Land in Ethiopia, according to the Constitution, is state-owned, with regions afforded autonomy in the administration of land, including developing systems for the compensation, investment, and settlement of disputes. Rights to till it are traditionally given based on a blood and soil connection—in other words, proven descent from the community grants access to land.The proclamation was first posted on https://twitter.com/GlobalGsts/status/1394299590883659778.

# IV. International Legal Standards

The conflict in Tigray that began on November 4, 2020, between the Ethiopian military and its allied forces from the neighboring Amhara region and Eritrea on one side, and fighters affiliated with the Tigray People's Liberation Front on the other, is considered a non-international armed conflict under the Geneva Conventions. The conflict is governed by international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, which provides protection to civilians and other noncombatants from the hazards of armed conflict by all sides to a conflict. International human rights law, such as set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, remains in effect.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch found that since November 2020, Amhara regional government forces and militias and local authorities, with the participation of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, committed numerous serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law as part of a campaign of ethnic cleansing targeting the Tigrayan population of Western Tigray. These violations include war crimes and crimes against humanity. Amhara Special Forces and Fano and other militias have committed unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, enforced disappearances, torture, rape and other sexual violence, persecution, forcible displacement, and other inhumane acts, including starvation, as part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the Tigrayan civilian population of Western Tigray. Ethiopian federal forces in Western Tigray have committed murder, arbitrary arrest and detention, and torture against the Tigrayan population, which are war crimes and may also amount to crimes against humanity.

## Ethnic Cleansing

Since November 2020, Amhara regional forces and militias operating under the interim authorities affiliated with the Amhara regional government carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing that forced hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans to flee Western Tigray. The organized, forcible displacement of Tigrayans, including many first put in custody, removed much of the Tigrayan population from land that for decades and generations was their home. Though term "ethnic cleansing" has no formal definition under international law, a UN Commission of Experts defined it as a "purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas" where "the purpose appears to be the occupation of territory to the exclusion of the purged group
or groups."[855]

The definition rests on three crucial components. "Purposeful policy" designates coordinated actions by individuals and groups (whether formal or informal), acting in the

[855] United Nations Security Council, Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), May 27, 1994.

pursuit of a common goal; qualifying acts as "purposeful policy" may rely on demonstrating the implication of government bodies, but does not require it. The second component, the "remov[al] … by one ethnic or religious group … the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from a geographic area," indicates that the policy aims at widespread displacement of a given group by another. Finally, ethnic cleansing relies on "violent and terror-inspiring means."

The UN Commission of Experts further defined the means of ethnic cleansing to include crimes such as "murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extra-judicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, and wanton destructions or property."[856] As this report demonstrates, the forces Amhara regional government forces and their local allies have, with the complicity of the Ethiopian federal forces, pursued various means to carry out their ethnic cleansing campaign.

Officials from the Amhara regional government, newly appointed interim officials, Amhara Special Forces, Fano, and ethnic Amhara and Walqayte militias, took concerted action to remove Tigrayans from Western Tigray. Those who directed or took direct part in abuses, made clear orally and in written statements their intention to remove Tigrayans "from this land" and beyond the Tekeze River. In addition to their role in coordinating the forcible removal and transfer of Tigrayans, Amhara regional authorities organized the repopulation of Western Tigray, providing legal cover for the pillage and looting of Tigrayan property and the distribution of land that Tigrayans had farmed. Taken together, these acts indicate a concerted policy carried out by the Amhara regional administration, with the acquiescence and possible participation of the federal government.

## War Crimes

Serious violations of international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, committed with criminal intent—that is, deliberately or recklessly—are war crimes. War crimes, listed in the "grave breaches" provisions of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and as customary law as reflected in the International Criminal Court statute and other sources, include a wide array of offenses for which individuals may be held criminally liable —deliberate, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks harming civilians; murder; torture; rape and other sexual violence; arbitrary detention; enforced disappearance; pillage and looting; using starvation as a method of war; and collective punishment, among others. Individuals also may be held criminally liable for attempting to commit a war crime, as well as assisting in, facilitating, aiding, or abetting a war crime.

[856] United Nations Security Council, Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992) (S/25274), May 27,1994.

Responsibility also may fall on people planning or instigating a war crime. Commanders and civilian leaders may be prosecuted for war crimes as a matter of command or superior responsibility when they knew or should have known about the commission of war crimes and took insufficient measures to prevent them or punish those responsible.

Ensuring justice for serious violations is, in the first instance, the responsibility of the country whose nationals are implicated in the violations. Governments have an obligation to investigate serious violations that implicate their nationals or other people under their jurisdiction. The government must ensure that military or domestic courts or other institutions impartially investigate whether serious violations occurred, identifying and prosecuting the individuals responsible for those violations in accordance with international fair-trial standards, and imposing punishments on individuals found guilty that are commensurate with their deeds. While non-state armed groups do not have the same legal obligation to prosecute violators of the laws of war within their ranks, they are nonetheless responsible for ensuring compliance with the laws of war and have a responsibility when they do conduct trials to do so in accordance with international fair trial standards.

## Crimes Against Humanity

Crimes against humanity are part of customary international law and were first codified in the charter of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal of 1945. The purpose was to prohibit crimes "which either by their magnitude and savagery, by their large number, or by the fact that a similar pattern was applied …endangered the international community or shocked the conscience of mankind."[857] Since then, the concept has been incorporated into a number of international treaties and the statutes of international criminal tribunals, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The definition of crimes against humanity varies slightly by treaty, but the definition found in the Rome Statute, which largely reflects customary international law and is therefore binding on all states includes a range of serious human rights abuses committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.[858]

Crimes against humanity include only abuses carried out as part of an attack directed against a civilian population. So long as the targeted population is of a predominantly civilian nature, the presence of some combatants does not alter its classification as a "civilian population" as a matter of law.[859] Rather, it is necessary only that the civilian

[857] *History of the United Nations War Crimes Commission and the Development of the Laws of War* (1943), p. 179, quoted in Rodney Dixon, "Crimes against humanity," in *Commentary on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (O. Triffterer, ed.) (1999), p. 123.

[858] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute), July 1998, entered into force July 1, 2002, art. 7. https://www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/documents/rs-eng.pdf

[859] *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Trial Chamber), September 2, 1998, para. 582.

population be the primary object of the attack by state or non-state forces. Thus, the presence of some Tigrayan fighters among the civilian population that Amhara regional forces and militias and Ethiopian federal forces targeted for attack and abuses does not discount them from being possible crimes against humanity. In Western Tigray, all these forces committed serious violations as part of the same widespread and systematic attack against the Tigrayan population.

The attack against a civilian population underlying the commission of crimes against humanity must be widespread or systematic, it need not be both. [860] "Widespread" refers to the scale of the acts or number of victims. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch consider the numerous serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by Amhara and Ethiopian security forces against Tigrayan civilians in Western Tigray since November 2020 to be "widespread" and part of broader operation that amount to crimes against humanity. In addition, a single occurrence of large-scale killings, such as the massacres in Humera, Mai Kadra and on the Tekeze River that claimed the lives of dozens of people, can by themselves be considered a widespread attack.

A "systematic" attack indicates "a pattern or methodical plan." International courts have considered to what extent a systemic attack requires a policy or plan. For instance, such a plan need not be adopted formally as a policy of the state. The nature of the abuses, their broad-based character, and their frequency (rather than the actions of individual security forces and personnel) constitute the relevant factors to assess whether the acts are reflective of a policy. [861]

The commission of crimes against humanity can serve as the basis for individual criminal liability not only in the domestic courts of the country where the crimes took place, but also in international courts and tribunals, as well as in other country's courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Individual criminal liability extends beyond those who carry out the acts to those who order, assist, facilitate, aid, and abet the offense. Under the principle of command or superior responsibility, military, and civilian officials up to the top of the chain of command can be held criminally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates when they knew or should have known that such crimes were being committed but failed to take reasonable measures to prevent the crimes or punish
those responsible.

The following alleged crimes against humanity should be independently and impartially investigated and appropriately prosecuted:

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[860] *Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Appeals Chamber), Case ICTR-96-4-A, ICTR Trial Chamber, September 2, 1998, para. 579; *Kordić & Čerkez*, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Case IT-95-14/2, ICTY Trial Chamber, February 26,2001, para. 179; *The Prosecutor v. Clément Kayishema and Obed Ruzindana,* International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Case ICTR-95-1-A, ICTR Trial Chamber, May 21, 1999, para. 123.

[861] *Prosecutor v. Kunarac*, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Case ICTY-96-23/1 A, Appeals Chamber, June 12, 2022, para. 98.

## Imprisonment and Other Severe Deprivation of Physical Liberty

Amhara civilian authorities in conjunction with the security forces and federal authorities carried out thousands of arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention of Tigrayans in various formal and informal detention sites.

## Torture

Tigrayans in custody have been subjected to torture, defined by the Rome Statute as "the intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering" that can be either physical or mental. The Rome Statute definition of torture as a crime against humanity does not require that it be inflicted with a specific prohibited purpose, such as to obtain a confession, meaning that certain acts of severe physical or mental pain or suffering would fall within the crimes against humanity definition of torture regardless of the purpose for which it is committed.

Many of the acts committed against Tigrayans amount to torture under the Rome Statute as well as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Acts of torture include beatings, verbal insults, deprivation of food, water, and medical care against Tigrayans held in custody in formal and informal detention centers.

## Murder, Enforced Disappearance, and Crime of Extermination

Murder is prohibited as a violation of the right to life under international human rights law and as a violation of Common Article III to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The Rome Statute defines an enforced disappearance as arrests or detentions of someone by a state or political organization "followed by a refusal to acknowledge the arrest, detention, or abduction, or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons," "with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time."[862] Enforced disappearances not only violate various human rights law provisions, but they put the individual disappeared at heightened risk of torture and other ill-treatment and take a terrible psychological toll on their families, who may wait long periods before finding out what happened to them. The Rome Statute defines "extermination" as the "intentional infliction of conditions of life, inter alia the deprivation of access to medicine, calculated to bring about the destruction of part of a population."[863]

Amhara and federal forces were implicated in the massacres of Tigrayans in their custody as well as the killings and forced disappearances of Tigrayans in their homes and at other locations throughout West Tigray. An unknown number of Tigrayans died as a result of the conditions of detention, particularly at sites in Humera town, where security forces subjected them to beatings, torture, and summary executions. The deliberate deprivation of food and medical treatment to hundreds, and perhaps

[862] International Criminal Court Elements of Crimes (ICC), art. 7(1)(i); Rome Statute, art. 7(2)(i).

[863] Rome Statute, art. 7(2)(b).

thousands, of Tigrayans in custody could amount to the crime against humanity of extermination.

## Rape, Sexual Slavery, and Other Forms of Sexual Violence

Rape and other acts of sexual violence committed as part of an attack on civilian population may be prosecuted as crimes against humanity. Survivors of rape described being assaulated by Ethiopian military forces, as well as Amhara Special Forces, and Fano militias. Survivors described being subjected to gang rape in their homes, in some cases in custody or held in captivity for prolonged periods. Tigrayan rape survivors repeatedly described being verbally abused and denigrated for their ethnicity during the attacks and were specifically told to leave Western Tigray.

## Forced Displacement

The deportation or forcible transfer "without grounds permitted under international law … to another location, by expulsion or other coercive acts" can amount to a crime against humanity.[864] The ICC Elements of Crimes provide that both physical and psychological force, such as "fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power against such person or persons or another person" can characterize an act of displacement as forcible transfer.[865]

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement prohibit the "arbitrary" displacement of persons, which is defined as including displacement in situations of armed conflict, "unless the security of civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand."[866] The prohibition of displacing civilians in non-international armed conflicts is set forth in Additional Protocol II[867] and customary humanitarian law.[868] Under the Statute of the International Criminal Court, "ordering the displacement of the civilian population for reasons related to the conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand," constitutes a war crime.[869]

Since November 2020, Amhara and Ethiopian security force have forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans from their homes, villages, and towns in Western Tigray, and acted to prevent their return. These actions appear aimed at permanently removing the Tigrayan population and thus change the demographic nature of Western Tigray Zone altogether.

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[864] Rome Statute, art. 7(1)(d).

[865] Rome Statute, art. 7(1)(d), n.12.

[866] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, September 2004),https://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.pdf.

[867] Protocol Additional of 1977 to the 1949 Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of the victims of non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II), art. 17. adopted June 8,1977, entered into force December 1978.

[868] International Committee of the Red Cross, Customary International Humanitarian Law, rule 124.

[869] Rome Statute, art. 9(2)(b), n.8.

A similar pattern of forced displacement across towns and villages in Western Tigray over several months indicates a governmental policy. Amhara interim authorities and other officials, and Amhara regional forces, at times with the support of federal forces and police, forcibly transferred Tigrayan communities, arranging the buses and trucks that removed Tigrayans from Western Tigray.

The term “forced” is not limited to physical force or violence, but may also include fear of violence, psychological oppression, or abuse of power against the person. Restrictions on movement, violence inflicted, denial of services and food, and a prevailing environment of harassment, threats, and intimidation by officials who called for Tigrayans to leave and security forces, made Tigrayans feel that had no choice but to flee. Such “involuntary departures” would still constitute forcible transfer.

### Persecution and Other Inhumane Acts

Persecution is “the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity,”[870] based on “political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender … or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law.”[871] Persecution operates as an umbrella term that encompasses other constitutive acts so long as they are committed with discriminatory intent.

Security force actions in Western Tigray deprived Tigrayan communities of medical care and humanitarian services, pillaged Tigrayans’ food and other livestock necessary for their survival and denied food and medical treatment to detainees in detention sites. Together these acts, perpetrated on ground of ethnicity, may amount to the crime against humanity of persecution.

## Right to Return

Since the adoption of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951 (the Refugee Convention), three “durable solutions” have emerged under international law and refugee policy to enable refugees to put an end to their refugee status and re-establish an effective link in a country. These are voluntary repatriation to the refugee’s country of origin, local integration in the country of asylum, and resettlement in a third country.

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) promotes voluntary repatriation -- the voluntary return of refugees to their home countries -- as the optimal solution to refugee crises. UNHCR has statutory responsibility to seek, promote, and facilitate the voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin.[872]

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[870] Rome Statute, art. 7(2)(g).

[871] ICC Elements of Crimes, art. 7(1)(h).

[872] Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the Refugee Convention), 189 U.N.T.S. 150, 1951, entered into force April 22, 1954. international protection for refugees only ceases once a refugee has “re-availed himself of the protection of the country of his

The right to return to one's own country is a fundamental human right, which is recognized in several international human rights instruments.[873] The right to return is most clearly enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) under the right to freedom of movement, which includes the right to enter one's own country.[874] The basis for the right to return under international refugee law can be found in the Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, various regional refugee instruments, UN Resolutions, and Conclusions of UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom).[875]

International law entitles people who are victims of the crime against humanity of deportation and forcible transfer the remedy of return to their home areas and property. The UN Security Council and other UN bodies have also repeatedly asserted the right of internally displaced persons to return to their former homes. The Security Council, in its Resolution 820 (1993) dealing with Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated that, "all displaced persons have the right to return in peace to their former homes and should be assisted to do so." The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which are drawn from accepted principles of international law, set out provisions relating to return, resettlement and reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons. Principle 28 states:

> Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavor to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.[876]

## Right to Redress

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nationality"; "acquired a new nationality, and enjoys the protection of the country of his new nationality"; "voluntarily re-established himself in the country which he left or outside which he remained"; or for a "person who has no nationality he is, because of the circumstances in connexion with which he has been recognized as a refugee have ceased to exist, able to return to the country of his former habitual residence." The Refugee Convention, art. 1(c).

[873] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted December 10, 1948, art. 13(2). States that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

[874] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted December 16,1966, art. 12(4). The Human Rights Committee, the international body that monitors compliance with the ICCPR, in its General Comment on the freedom of movement, "considers that there are few, if any, circumstances in which deprivation of the right to enter one's own country could be reasonable. A State party must not, by stripping a person of nationality or by expelling an individual to a third country, arbitrarily prevent this person from returning to his or her own country." UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 27, Freedom of Movement (Art. 12), CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.9, November 2, 1999, para. 20.

[875] The authoritative 1985 ExCom Conclusion on Voluntary Repatriation confirms "the basic rights of persons to return voluntarily to the country of origin," while the 1994 General Conclusion on International Protection "calls upon countries of origin, countries of asylum, UNHCR and the international community as a whole to do everything possible to enable refugees to exercise freely their right to return home in safety and dignity."

[876] OCHA, "UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement," (September 2004), https://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.pdf.

Under international law, victims of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are entitled to redress, including reparation. According to the UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy, victims of gross violations in particular have the right to receive "adequate, effective and prompt reparation for harm suffered."[877] This right draws on the broader principle of a right to concrete and effective remedy in the face of violations.[878] The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights General Comment No. 4 also provides guidance on the right to redress for victims of torture and other forms of ill-treatment.[879]

Victims of gross violations are "persons who individually or collectively suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights," and include "the immediate family or dependants of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimization."[880]

Reparation includes, among other aspects, restitution and compensation. Compensation is due when restitution cannot be obtained.[881]

People who have been unlawfully displaced, such as the victims of ethnic cleansing, are entitled to return to their homes and, if their homes have been destroyed, to be compensated for the loss.[882] The Ethiopian government, as the competent authority, has a duty to victims to recover their possessions and, if not possible, to provide them, or assist them in obtaining, compensation.[883]

Victims are also entitled to reparation for other rights violations committed as part of crimes against humanity and war crimes, for instance if they were detained arbitrarily,

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[877] United Nations, Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, March 21,2006, https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/BASICP~1.PDF.

[878] International Commission of Jurists, "The Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Gross Human Rights Violations, A Practitioner's Guide," Revised Edition, 2018, pp. 52-84.https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Universal-Right-to-a-Remedy-Publications-Reports-Practitioners-Guides-2018-ENG.pdf ; Theo van Boven, "Victims' Right to a Remedy and Reparation: The New United Nations Principles and Guidelines," p. 22. https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r26214.pdf.

[879] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, General Comment 4, African Charter on Human and People's Rights:The Right to Redress for Victims of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment, (23 February – 4 March 2017), https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/achpr_general_comment_no._4_english.pdf.

[880]UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy, principle 8.

[881] International Commission of Jurists, "The Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Gross Human Rights Violations, A Practitioner's Guide," Revised Edition, 2018, pp. 156.

[882] UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy, principles 19, 20.

UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), General Recommendation XXII.

[883] UN Sub-commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (the Pinheiro Principles), UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, June 28, 2005 https://www.unhcr.org/protection/idps/594d849/principles-housing-property-restitution-refugees-displaced-persons-pinheiro.html.

tortured, raped, their family member killed, or if their property or crops were looted. The Ethiopian government again bears primary responsibility to provide victims with, or assist them in obtaining, compensation.

The process of reparation and the right to return should not result in further human rights violations. The UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, under the UN Commission on Human Rights, said that authorities have a responsibility to "develop effective and expeditious legal and administrative procedures to ensure the free and fair exercise of this right, including fair and effective mechanisms to resolve outstanding housing and property problems."[884] This means that the Ethiopian government has a duty to ensure that dwellers who do not have lawful rights to occupy homes that were made vacant during the ethnic cleansing campaign do not become homeless or subject to human rights violations.

[884]UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Resolution 1998/26, August 26, 1998.

# VI. Prospects for Accountability

Under the TPLF-led EPRDF coalition government that was in power from 1991 to 2018, Ethiopian institutions with the mandate to investigate human rights violations, including the judiciary, the national Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and the ombudsperson were not sufficiently independent to meet that responsibility. In their responses to allegations of abuse, officials typically denied any wrongdoing and suggested that the claims were "politically motivated." The government also strongly opposed international investigations, asserting that it could carry out such investigations on its own.

On coming to power in 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed inherited a federal government that was rife with serious human rights abuses, including a broken judicial system. He embarked on several legal reforms to expand civil and political rights by amending repressive laws that had been used by the previous government to clamp down on fundamental freedoms.[885] The Attorney General's office established a Legal Justice and Affairs and Advisory Council tasked with examining and proposing revisions to abusive laws and regulations.[886] The government also said that "new legislation on police use of force and accountability" was being drafted and was expected to "create [a] clear, independent and effective complaint mechanism that would allow the submission of complaints concerning ill-treatment by security and law enforcement authorities."[887]

National authorities also took steps towards justice for past abuses by bringing charges against high-ranking government officials, including several members of the TPLF party, for human rights abuses. Ethiopia's Attorney General Office at the time accused intelligence officers[888] of the former government of torturing political detainees.[889] TPLF

[885] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation, Proclamation No. 1113/2019, Federal Negarit Gazeta, March 7, 2019, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ethiopia/document/ethiopia-civil-societies-proclamation-proc-no-1113-2019. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism Crimes, Proclamation No. 1176/2020, Federal Negarit Gazeta, March 25, 2020, https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-PROCLAMATION-TO-PROVIDE-FOR-THE-PREVENTION-AND-SUPPRESSION-OF-TERRORISM-CRIMES.pdf. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Media Proclamation, Proclamation No. 1238/2021, Federal Negarit Gazeta, April 5, 2021, https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Media-Proclamation-No.-1238-2021.pdf.

[886] The Council, Legal Justice Affairs Advisory Council (Aug.15, 2019),

http://ljaac.gov.et/About/CouncilStructure. Behailu Ayele, "Council Arise to Reform Anti-terrorism, Media Law," *Addis Fortune*, June 30,2018 https://addisfortune.net/articles/council-arise-to-reform-anti-terrorism-media-law/.

[887] UN Human Rights Council, Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Thirty-Third Session, "National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21," UN Doc. A/HRC/WG.6/33/ETH/1, para. 40, February 25, 2019, https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/053/56/PDF/G1905356.pdf?OpenElement.

[888] Note, Abiy Ahmed was also one of the founders and head of Information and National Security Agency (INSA).

[889] Mahlet Fasil and Yared Tsegaye, "Analysis: Ethiopia crackdown on corruption, human right abuses. Everything you need to know," *Addis Standard*, November 16, 2018, https://addisstandard.com/analysis-ethiopia-crackdown-corruption-human-right-abuses-everything-need-know/.

leaders criticized these investigations as selective and politicized.[890] The investigations were limited in scope, as some officials who were implicated in serious violations – including in the Somali, Oromia, and Gambella regions – never faced investigations, let alone trial.[891]

Between 2018 and 2020, high-profile political assassinations, security force abuses, and large-scale massacres along ethnic lines increased, while survivors and affected communities were rarely informed of the outcome of government investigations or provided with redress.[892] Police and investigative authorities sought to stretch or evade legal requirements: they repeatedly appealed or ignored judicial orders and transferred suspects between jurisdictions to hold them for prolonged periods.[893] Government officials were quick to cast blame for conflicts and assassinations on Ethiopia's "internal and external enemies," on anti-reformists, and on political opposition or armed movements, without conducting credible investigations with a view to ensure accountability for
the abuses.[894]

## Domestic Investigations into the Tigray Conflict

As reports of abuses carried out by Ethiopian federal and regional forces and Eritrean forces in Tigray mounted, Ethiopian authorities denied or downplayed them, including the presence and involvement of the Eritrean military.[895] Ethiopia also repeatedly rejected early calls for independent international investigations, saying it could carry out

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[890] George Obulutsa, "Powerful Ethiopian party accuses government of ethnic crackdown," *Reuters*, November 20, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics/powerful-ethiopian-party-accuses-government-of-ethnic-crackdown-idUSKCN1NP1JN.

[891] "To Heal, Ethiopia Needs to Confront its Violent Past", Human Rights Watch News Release, May 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/heal-ethiopia-needs-confront-its-violent-past, "Ethiopia: Abiy's First Year as Prime Minister, A Review of Accountability and Justice," Human Rights Watch,News Release, April 8, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/08/ethiopia-abiys-first-year-prime-minister-review-accountability-and-justice. Amnesty International, "Justice, Not Repression will Break Ethiopia's Wave of Violence, November 9, 2020, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/11/oped-justice-not-repression-will-break-ethiopias-waves-of-violence/.

[892] "Ethiopia: Justice Needed for Deadly October Violence," Human Rights Watch News Release, April 1, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/01/ethiopia-justice-needed-deadly-october-violence#:~:text=Protests%20erupted%20in%20Ethiopia's%20capital,a%20claim%20the%20police%20denied.

[893] "Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared," Human Rights Watch News Release, August 18, 2021, https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/18/ethiopia-ethnic-tigrayans-forcibly-disappeared; "Ethiopia: Opposition Figures Held Without Charge," Human Rights Watch News Release, August 15, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/15/ethiopia-opposition-figures-held-without-charge; "Ethiopia: Free Speech at Risk Amid Covid-19", Human Rights Watch News Release, May 6, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/06/ethiopia-free-speech-risk-amid-covid-19.

[894] Tom Gardner and Lule Estifanos, "Political Violence Could Derail Ethiopia's Democratic Transition," *Foreign Policy*, Sept. 20, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/20/political-violence-could-derail-ethiopia-democratic-transition-assassination/.

[895] Rodney Muhumuz, "Ethiopia denies 'ethnic cleansing,' is open to outside probe," *Associated Press,* March 13, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/world-news-race-and-ethnicity-antony-blinken-ethiopia-uganda-1e1b536ccc1cd686db75ae2040bbdfc0; "Evidence mounts those Eritrean forces are in Ethiopia," *The Economist*, January 2, 2021, https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2021/01/02/evidence-mounts-that-eritrean-forces-are-in-ethiopia.

such investigations itself.[896] One federal government official maintained that the country did not "need a babysitter," and would invite assistance "only if it failed to investigate."[897] While states have a primary duty to investigate alleged war crimes committed on their territory and violations of international human rights law, investigations must meet the standards of effectiveness, independence, impartiality, and transparency to be considered adequate.[898]

For the first few months of the conflict, preliminary investigations were carried out by the national Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a federal body charged with investigating human rights abuses in the country. Ethiopian authorities argued that investigations by the Attorney General's Office and the EHRC were sufficient and that an international inquiry was not needed.

Government narratives of violence and abuses have focused almost exclusively on those allegedly committed by TPLF-affiliated forces. Earlier investigations into the conflict by Ethiopia's Attorney General's Office focused on alleged harm by Tigrayans – notably in Mai Kadra and during the Tigray Special Forces' attack on federal military bases of the northern command at the onset of the war. Trials against 23 suspects allegedly responsible for the massacre of Walqayte and Amhara civilians in Mai Kadra are currently underway.[899]

In May 2021, the Attorney General's Office presented the measures that had been taken to ensure the protection of civilians as well as the status of investigations and accountability efforts undertaken so far by military prosecutors, as well by as federal and regional police and investigative authorities.[900] It mentioned investigations by military police and prosecutors into the extrajudicial executions of civilians and allegations of sexual and gender-based violence. Prosecutors reportedly pressed charges against 53 soldiers: 28 suspected in the killing of civilians and 25 suspected for committing acts of rape and gender-based violence. While trials were reportedly underway, only four

[896] Ethiopian Authorities Reject Outside, Independent Investigation on Massacres, *Addis Fortune*, Dec. 8, 2020, https://addisfortune.news/news-alert/ethiopian-authorities-reject-outside-independent-investigation-on-massacres/.

[897] Cara Anna, "UN: Ethiopia's conflict has 'appalling' impact on civilians," Associated *Press,* December.9, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/international-news-coronavirus-pandemic-ethiopia-massacres-united-nations-e32b036d6a27b6a3be59a9d334.

[898] Turkel Commission, Second Report of the Public Commission to Examine the Maritime Incident of 3 May 200: Israel's Mechanisms for Examining and Investigating Complaints and Claims of Violations of the Laws of Armed Conflict According to International Law, Israel, February 203 (Second Turkel Report), pp. 114–117 and 129, para. 82; UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law", UN Doc. A/RES/60/47, (December 6, 2005) (Basic Principles on the Right to Remedy), para. II(3)(b).

[899] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Attorney General, "A Summary of Efforts to Ensure Accountability Regarding Violations of International Humanitarian Law and Other Legal Norms in the Regional State of Tigray," (May 21, 2021), https://ethiopianembassy.org/a-summary-of-efforts-to-ensure-accountability-regarding-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-and-other-legal-norms-in-the-regional-state-of-tigray-may-21-2021/.

[900] Ibid.

soldiers had so far been convicted. [901] Transparency around these trials and investigations remain elusive.[902] It remains unclear, for instance, whether any of the cases concern abuses against civilians in Western Tigray and whether they also include violations by Amhara regional forces
and militias.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, which has been undergoing reforms in recent years, has carried out several fact-finding investigations since the start of the conflict, including in Western Tigray. But the EHRC has voiced muted criticism of abuses by Ethiopian federal and regional forces. In its Mai Kadra investigation, the EHRC concluded that local Tigrayan police, militias, and an informal Tigrayan youth group were responsible for the massacre of at least 600 Amharas, but did not publish any findings about the retaliatory killings, mass arrests and detentions of Tigrayan residents, and extensive looting that was taking place at the time of their reporting.[903] Its brief monitoring report from Dansha and Humera acknowledged that some members of Amhara Special Forces, Amhara and Fano militias, Eritrean troops, and few members of the Ethiopian federal forces carried out looting of businesses. The Commission had also received multiple accounts of insults and harassment of Tigrayans.[904] It further stated that it received information that measures, "though inadequate" were being taken by some of these same forces, specifically ASF and militia to "restor[e] peace and security in the area."[905] In Dansha, it noted that the security situation had "improved" although acknowledged that Tigrayans still expressed fear of harassment and attack.[906]

Following the joint investigation report by the EHRC and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in November 2021 (**see International Investigations section below**), the Ministry of Justice announced the establishment of an inter-ministerial taskforce to "oversee redress and accountability measures in response to human rights violations committed in the context of the conflict in northern

[901] Dr. Gedion Timothewos, Attorney General, and Billene Seyoum, Press Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, "Recent developments in Tigray and the upcoming elections, Press Briefing, Addis Ababa, June 3, 2021, transcript, https://www.ethioembassy.org.uk/prime-ministers-office-press-briefing-transcript-june-3-2021/.

[902]Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the UN OHCHR, "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," at para 376 (November 3, 2021), https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ET/OHCHREHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf. ("Stating the investigative team's concerns "that investigations conducted by Ethiopian national institutions do not match the scope and breadth of the violations it has identified through its investigations nor that those investigations which are being undertaken sufficiently comply with international standards, including with respect to transparency.").

[903] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, "Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Mai Kadra: Preliminary Findings," November 24, 2020, https://ehrc.org/ethiopian-human-rights-commission-rapid-investigation-into-grave-human-rights-violation-maikadra-preliminary-findings/.

[904] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, "Brief Monitoring Report on the Situation of Civilians in Humera, Dansha, and Bissober," (January 17, 2021) https://ehrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Brief-Monitoring-Report-Humera-Dansha-and-Bissober-2-1.pdf.

[905] Ibid.

[906] Ibid.

Ethiopia," and set up four committees on investigation and prosecution, refugees and IDP affairs, sexual and gender-based violence, and resource mobilization. It is unclear whether the committees will investigate the situation in Western Tigray.

## International Investigations

In March 2021, the federal government accepted that the EHRC carry out a joint investigation with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In May 2021, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) established a Commission of Inquiry with a mandate to investigate allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the Tigray region.[907] Ethiopia's Foreign Ministry criticized the ACHPR for setting up a commission of inquiry on abuses committed in the Tigray conflict and instead requested a joint investigation.[908]

The OHCHR-EHRC completed its investigation and released its report on November 3, 2021. The report covered abuses during the first nine months of the conflict and found reasonable grounds to believe that widespread violations of international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law had been committed by all parties to the conflict.[909] The report concluded that some of these violations may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.[910]

The report acknowledged that it was not a comprehensive investigation into the crisis. Its coverage of events in Western Tigray does not make any assessment of the relative scale and severity of violations of or the culpability of any of the warring parties. The report speaks about the "modus operandi" of Tigray Special Forces in carrying out arrests and beatings of non-Tigrayan residents in Humera during the first week of the conflict but does not describe how Amhara forces used the town as a site to arrest, detain, torture, execute, and forcibly disappear scores of Tigrayan residents in the town and in surrounding areas throughout the reporting period.[911] Similarly, the widespread pillage, denial of humanitarian aid, mass arrest, and rape of Tigrayan residents by

[907] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, "Press Statement on the official launch of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,"June 16, 2021, https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/40424-pr-press_release_coi_eng.pdf.

[908] Ethiopia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press statement on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights measures to investigate alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian law in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, June 17, 2021, https://ethiopianembassy.org/press-statement-on-the-african-commission-on-human-and-peoples-rights-measures-to-investigate-alleged-violations-of-human-rights-and-humanitarian-law-in-the-tigray-region-of-ethiopia-june-1/.

[909] Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the UN OHCHR, "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," November 3, 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/ET/OHCHREHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf (accessed November 3, 2021).

[910] Ibid.

[911] Ibid, para 145.

Amhara forces is
not described.

The report identifies waves of displacement, which includes both Amhara and Tigrayan populations. It speaks to fear as a driver of displacement, but also of violence. While describing the detention and transport of Tigrayans from Mai Kadra to the Tekeze, the report does not reflect the organized and coerced nature of these expulsions, nor does it establish a timeline of displacement affecting Tigrayan residents across the Western Tigray Zone or spell out who may be responsible.

# VI. Government Response to Allegations

The Ethiopian federal authorities' statements concerning the alleged abuses committed against Tigrayan civilians in Western Tigray described in the report – some of which were previously reported in the media or by other organizations – have repeatedly denied or sought to downplay the role of federal and allied forces.

The Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Ministry said that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's characterization of events in Western Tigray as ethnic cleansing in March 2021 were "completely unfounded and spurious." In addition, the ministry said that "[n]othing during or after the end of the main law enforcement operation in Tigray can be identified or defined by any standards as a targeted, intentional ethnic cleansing against anyone in the region.… The Ethiopian government vehemently opposes such accusations."[912] The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused the US of "overblowing things out of proportions."[913]

In their media statements, Amhara regional authorities also rejected the charges of ethnic cleansing and denied allegations of abuses by Amhara forces in Western Tigray. The region's spokesman, Gizachew Muluneh, said reports of ethnic cleansing and mass displacement were "propaganda," claiming that "a few Tigrayans may be displaced, a few in number."[914] In response to Blinken's call for Amhara forces to leave Tigray, Gizachew said:

> There are not any Amhara forces in Tigray region. These areas are not Tigrayan areas, in history.... If the Secretary [Blinken] is talking about these areas, these areas are not Tigrayan. Our forces are not in the Tigrayan areas, rather our forces are in Amhara region. That is our response.[915]

Gizachew acknowledged the Amhara region was administering the territory. He said that "Tigrayans [are] welcome to stay" and ignored journalists' questions regarding abuses by Amhara forces.[916]

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[912] "Press Statement on allegations of 'ethnic cleansing," Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Twitter Page, March 13, 2021, https://twitter.com/mfaethiopia/status/1370632020917903367/.

[913] Ibid.

[914] "Ethiopia's Amhara rejects charge of 'ethnic cleansing' in Tigray," *Al Jazeera*, March 12, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/11/ethiopias-amhara-rejects-charges-of-ethnic-cleansing-in-tigray.

[915] Robbie Corey-Boulet, "Ethiopia's Amhara region rejects charge of 'ethnic cleansing' in Tigray." *Agence-France Press,* March 11, 2021, https://news.yahoo.com/ethiopias-amhara-region-rejects-charge-111509243.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAADF6xPZr4BF_5TF0l5cgmIzwdBEQTUYqGutrP-vcFjulS70hB0wTCc0QEugYiWoyBHDvfxlF_57NKLvmuhHcugvdKIyORUM4j-uF-n6HkJAjFS-S6hKZatTHFX9SE8NF_118N3NgRWwVspJaFDvzd9-Nz20m-KfwG7bcoNqPBbOU

[916] "'You Don't Belong': Land Dispute Drives New Exodus in Ethiopia's Tigray,"*Reuters*, March 29, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/ethiopia-conflict-displaced-insight-int-idUSKBN2BL1C3.

The authorities have denied or downplayed the violations committed by the Ethiopian federal forces. In a statement issued on May 21, 2021, Attorney General Gedion Timethewos said that "the ENDF's effort to avoid armed confrontation in cities" during the initial offensive "has largely been successful in sparing… Humera," among other towns in Tigray, "from the destruction that would have ensued had the ENDF engaged with TPLF forces in these cities."[917] The Attorney General said his office has brought charges against soldiers suspected of killing civilians or for sexual violence, and that some have been convicted. The publicly reported investigations of the Attorney General – renamed as the Ministry of Justice in October 2021) concerning Western Tigray have otherwise centered on the TPLF's attack on the northern command of the ENDF on November 3, 2020, as well as on Mai Kadra.[918]

Since November 2020, federal authorities have discredited accounts of Tigrayan refugees, overwhelmingly from Western Tigray, who fled to Sudan in the first two months of the conflict.[919] Federal authorities have also depicted mass killings in Mai Kadra as a one-sided massacre carried out by "TPLF's troops and loyalists," discounting killings of Tigrayans.[920]

Finally, the federal government denied that Tigrayan civilians had been killed in Humera in mid-2021. On July 22, 2021 – days before bodies began to appear in Sudan in the Tekeze River – the "Ethiopia Current Issues Fact Check," a Twitter account run by the federal government, issued a statement claiming that "the TPLF [was] preparing to bury…300 bodies… in a mass grave to support their made-up propaganda of a massacre having taken place. The TPLF's digital propagandists have in the past two days already began fake claims of a massacre taking place in Humera."[921]

[917] FDRE Attorney General, "A Summary of Efforts to Ensure Accountability Regarding Violations of International Humanitarian Law and Other Legal Norms in the Regional State of Tigray," May 21, 2021, https://ethiopianembassy.org/a-summary-of-efforts-to-ensure-accountability-regarding-violations-of-international-humanitarian-law-and-other-legal-norms-in-the-regional-state-of-tigray-may-21-2021/.

[918] Ibid; https://twitter.com/MOJEthiopia/status/1445945924098920460?lang=en.

[919] Twitter, Office of the Prime Minister (November 30, 2020), https://twitter.com/pmethiopia/status/1333352269920817153.

[920] Twitter, Office of the Prime Minister, "Federal Government Condemns the atrocities committed by TPLF in Maikadra,"(November 24, 2020), https://twitter.com/PMEthiopia/status/1331281998514696195; Twitter, State of Emergency Fact Check, (November 19, 2020), https://twitter.com/ETFactCheck/status/1329296196184190976.

[921] Ethiopia Current Issues Fact Check, "Fake massacre in the making by TPLF," Ethiopia Current Issues Fact Sheet, July 22, 2021, https://twitter.com/ETFactCheck/status/1418085432898826241.

# VII. Recommendations

## To All Parties to The Armed Conflict:

- Issue clear, public orders to all security forces, including the military, military intelligence, police, and allied militias to prevent and end all abuses, including unlawful killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearances, crimes of sexual and gender-based violence, forcible displacement, and theft and looting of property.
- Investigate and appropriately hold accountable those responsible for serious abuses, including commanders for abuses committed by forces under their control.
- Facilitate safe, sustained, and unhindered access by humanitarian organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to all populations in need and ensure all humanitarian staff, facilities, and supplies are protected from attack.
- As part of any consensual agreement between the warring parties, allow the deployment of an AU-led international peacekeeping force in Western Tigray with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote respect for human rights, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid.
- Exclude from any peace agreement the provision of amnesty or immunity for serious violations of international law.
- Ensure that returns of displaced persons and refugees take place in accordance with international standards, on a voluntary basis with attention to the safety and dignity of the returning population.

## To the Ethiopian Federal Government

### Protection

- Publicly order federal and regional civilian officials and security forces to end all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law against the Tigrayan population in Western Tigray and elsewhere.
- Immediately demobilize and disarm all abusive irregular forces present in Western Tigray since November 2020 such as Fano and other militias.
- Suspend civilian officials, including interim Amhara officials and security force personnel from the Amhara Special Forces and Ethiopian federal forces, implicated in serious abuses in Western Tigray pending investigations into their actions. Discipline or prosecute as appropriate those found to be responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Western Tigray Zone since November 2020. Investigate the three individuals named in this report.
- Immediately restore basic services, including banking and electricity, the disruption of which is causing disproportionate harm to Tigray's civilian population. Urgently facilitate the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian assistance to populations at risk throughout Tigray. Specifically, remove bureaucratic and physical restrictions on United Nations agencies and

humanitarian organizations that unnecessarily hinder the delivery of food, fuel, and medical assistance to all populations in need throughout Tigray, including Western Tigray. Support independent evaluation and monitoring of the humanitarian response, including the distribution of food and medical assistance.

- Promptly release everyone arbitrarily detained in Western Tigray. Press Amhara authorities and security forces in Western Tigray to immediately make public information about the fate of all Tigrayans detained since the conflict began in November 2020 in Western Tigray.
- Immediately provide all detainees adequate food, water, and medical care. Urgently allow independent international humanitarian agencies access to formal and informal detention sites without prior notification.
- Investigate and prosecute serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law as appropriate, including the three individuals named in this report who should be investigated for crimes against humanity and war crimes. Investigators and prosecutors should focus on the impact of the conflict on survivors of sexual violence, on children, older people, and on persons with disabilities. Civilian and military officials implicated, including as a matter of superior or command responsibility, should be prosecuted regardless of position or rank.

## Internally Displaced Persons

- Treat all internally displaced persons (IDPs) in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.
- Ensure that internally displaced persons and refugees wishing to return to their homes or places of habitual residence have the right to do so, that returns take place in accordance with international standards, and that returns are safe, voluntary, well-informed, and dignified.
- Provide clear, accurate, and accessible information to refugee and IDP populations about the situation in their areas of habitual residence to ensure that decisions to move are fully informed.
- In consultation with displaced communities and with the involvement of relevant UN agencies, establish an independent body to organize and monitor the safe and voluntary return of communities, and report on conditions faced by returnees, including the specific conditions for people with disabilities, older people, and other at-risk groups. Publicly report on any inability to monitor conditions faced
  by returnees.
- Set up a fair, accessible, and independent mechanism to provide compensation or redress for losses or damage to housing, property, and land because of government violations.

## Prevention

- Cease all coercive policies associated with the forced expulsion or transfer of ethnic minorities, including restrictions on movement, and the seizure of property, businesses, and land.
- Ensure that any mechanism established for addressing grievances between groups is in consultation with a diverse range of stakeholders, and conducted with full respect for their human rights, including the right to return.
- Set up a forum in consultation with nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, and government institutions with relevant expertise, to develop alongside victims and affected communities a comprehensive, impartial, transparent, accessible, and efficient mechanism that would provide restitution and reparation for victims of serious abuses and their families. The mechanism should also promptly provide for resolution of claims over land, property, and livestock losses in accordance with international standards.

## Accountability and Security Sector Reform

- The Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Accountability and Redress of Violations should ensure its investigations into abuses in conflict-affected areas including Tigray. The Task Force should provide timely and transparent updates to the public and international community on the progress of its investigations and ongoing trials and make its findings public. Any military, police, and other investigations already underway should be promptly completed and the findings made public.
- Serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law should be investigated and prosecuted as appropriate in accordance with international fair trial standards. Civilian officials and military commanders implicated in abuses, including as a matter of superior or command responsibility, should be prosecuted regardless of position or rank.
- Cooperate with and facilitate access to conflict-affected areas in northern Ethiopia for the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, established by the UN Human Rights Council, including in relation to events in Western Tigray since November 3, 2020.
- Establish a vetting mechanism in consultation with victims and stakeholders to remove members of the Ethiopian federal forces and regional police who are responsible for serious abuses human rights abuses, notwithstanding any criminal charges that may be brought against them. The vetting mechanism should take into accounts reports from the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in Tigray, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia established by the UN Human Rights Council, national and international human rights organizations, and testimony of victims.
- Establish an independent and accessible oversight mechanism to ensure individuals and affected communities can make complaints about human rights violations, including discrimination and other misconduct by members of the security forces. Such disciplinary measures should complement rather than replace criminal investigations by the relevant civilian bodies.

## To the Amhara Regional Authorities

- Direct the Amhara Special Forces and regional militias to immediately cease all abuses against civilians and captured combatants, including specifically against the Tigrayan population.
- Immediately disarm and demobilize all abusive militia forces, including Fano, present in Western Tigray since November 2020.
- Suspend civilian officials, including interim Amhara officials, and security force personnel from the Amhara Special Forces implicated in serious abuses pending criminal investigations into their actions in Western Tigray.
- Facilitate criminal investigation of members of Amhara Special Forces and Fano and other militias who have been deployed in Western Tigray.
- Cooperate with investigations by the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Commission of Inquiry into abuses carried out in Western Tigray Zone.

## To the Tigray Regional Authorities

- Direct Tigrayan forces to immediately cease all abuses against civilians and captured combatants and adopt measures to deter and appropriately punish commanders and fighters who have committed serious human rights abuses.
- Cooperate with investigations by the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Commission of Inquiry into abuses committed by all sides in Tigray and neighboring regions.
- Cooperate with independent efforts to investigate abuses committed in Mai Kadra on November 9, 2020, and the causes of ethnic violence.

## To the United Nations Security Council

- Formally add the situation in Ethiopia to the Security Council's agenda and request monthly briefings from relevant UN agencies and other bodies on the situation in Tigray and other affected regions.
- Press the Ethiopian government to permit independent international humanitarian agencies access to all detention facilities, official and unofficial, without prior notification.
- Impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Ethiopia and Eritrea that covers the direct and indirect supply, sale, and transfer, including transit and trans-shipment, of all weapons, munitions, and other military and security equipment, as well as the provision of training and other military and security assistance.
- As part any consensual agreement between warring parties, press for and support the deployment of an AU-led international peacekeeping force in Western Tigray, with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians,

promote human rights, and create an environment conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid.

  - Any future peacekeeping force deployed to Western Tigray should have sufficient resources – financial, personnel, and technical – to prevent and remedy human rights abuses by its members.
  - Officers and soldiers belonging to any future peacekeeping force should receive appropriate training in international human rights, children's rights, and humanitarian law, and a unit of advisors with particular expertise in international humanitarian law should be included within it.
  - An independent human rights' monitoring and accountability mechanism should be incorporated within any future peacekeeping force, with special emphasis on prevention and protection of sexual violence in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2436 (2018).
  - Peacekeepers who commit war crimes or other abuses or misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children, should be investigated, disciplined, or appropriately prosecuted.
- Call for the UN special advisor on the prevention of genocide to conduct a fact-finding mission in Western Tigray and provide a formal briefing to the UN Security Council.

## To the United Nations Department of Peace Operations

- Place a moratorium on the use and deployment of Ethiopian forces, including federal forces, federal and regional police officers, in peacekeeping operations until an effective vetting mechanism can ensure that no one reasonably suspected of human rights violations committed anywhere in Ethiopia is being deployed.
- Ensure that any peacekeepers provided by the Ethiopian government for UN peacekeeping operations are fully vetted to ensure that they have not been involved in human rights violations. This should cover all Ethiopian federal forces, federal and regional police officers and forces from Ethiopia, not just officers and senior officials.

## To the African Union and AU Member States

- Urgently call for an African Union extraordinary session on the conflict in northern Ethiopia.

- The AU Peace and Security Council should press Ethiopia, as one of its 15 member states, to ensure safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance in Tigray and other conflict-affected areas.
- Ensure that the AU Peace and Security Council holds regular private and public discussions on the situation in Tigray.

- The AU Peace and Security Council should request the three African member states of the UN Security Council, the so-called A3, in collaboration with other Security Council members, to add Ethiopia to the Security Council's regular agenda and consider calling for a global arms embargo against Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- As part of any consensual agreement between the warring parties, consider the deployment of an AU-led international peacekeeping force in Western Tigray with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote human rights, and create an environment conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid.
    - Any future peacekeeping force deployed to Western Tigray should have sufficient resources – financial, personnel, and technical – to prevent and remedy human rights abuses by its members.
    - Officers and soldiers belonging to any future peacekeeping force should receive appropriate training in international human rights, children's rights, and humanitarian law, and a unit of advisors with particular expertise in international humanitarian law should be included within it.
    - An independent human rights monitoring and accountability mechanism should be incorporated within any future peacekeeping force, with special emphasis on prevention and protection of sexual violence in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2436 (2018).
    - Peacekeepers who commit war crimes or other abuses or misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children, should be investigated, disciplined, or appropriately prosecuted.
- The AU Peace and Security Council should provide technical and political support to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Commission of Inquiry and the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia to promote timely and comprehensive investigations.
- Call for the UN special advisor on the prevention of genocide to conduct a fact-finding mission in Western Tigray and provide a formal briefing to the AU Peace and
  Security Council.

## To UN Member States

- Support the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and its mandate, as set out in Human Rights Council Resolution S-33/1 (2021), including its continued investigations and annual reporting to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

## To Ethiopia's Partners including the United States, United Kingdom, European Union and its Member States, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and China

- Press the UN Security Council member states should step-up efforts to put the human rights situation in Ethiopia on the Security Council's formal agenda.
- Press all warring parties to immediately facilitate safe, sustained, and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected areas. Urge the Ethiopian government to immediately restore basic services, including banking, communications, and electricity to Tigray. Also press Ethiopian federal and regional authorities to facilitate prompt access to UN human rights protection monitors in Western Tigray. Ensure access of independent humanitarian organizations to detention facilities in Western Tigray.
- As part of any consensual agreement between the warring parties, press them to support the deployment of an AU-led international peacekeeping force with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote human rights, and create an environment conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid.
    - Donor countries should provide financial and other assistance to any AU-led international peacekeeping force.
    - Officers and soldiers belonging to any future peacekeeping force should receive appropriate training in international human rights, children's rights, and humanitarian law, and a unit of advisors with particular expertise in international humanitarian law should be included within it.
    - An independent human rights monitoring and accountability mechanism should be incorporated within any future peacekeeping force, with special emphasis on prevention and protection of sexual violence in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2436 (2018).
    - Peacekeepers who commit war crimes other abuses or misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children, should be investigated, disciplined, or appropriately prosecuted.
- Immediately suspend the direct and indirect supply, sale, and transfer, including transit and trans-shipment, of all weapons, munitions, and other military and security dual-use equipment, as well as the provision of training and other military and security assistance pending thorough investigations into allegations of human rights violations.
- Closely monitor justice and accountability initiatives in Ethiopia, including when providing technical support and resources to initiatives and institutions by demanding greater public transparency and updates on the progress of their investigations and steps taken towards accountability to ensure their credibility and effectiveness.
- Given the gravity of the crimes documented in this report, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, should include events in Western Tigray Zone since November 2020 into their investigations, identify individuals responsible, and make recommendations on holding perpetrators of violations identified accountable, including through national, regional, and international justice bodies.
- Support under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws, the investigation and prosecution of those credibly implicated in serious crimes under international law.

- Continue to provide political support and resources to the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia.
- Donor countries and international financial institutions should press for the establishment of robust independent monitoring processes and systems in agreements with the government to monitor assistance to ensure that it is not being diverted or withheld.
- Support the creation of vetting mechanisms to ensure that members of the Ethiopian federal forces and regional forces responsible for serious human rights and humanitarian law abuses are not reintegrated into the national army or given other official positions within the government. Call on the government to disarm and demobilize abusive militia forces.
- Assist and support the establishment of an independent mechanism that can organize and monitor returns, with the involvement of relevant UN agencies, so that displaced persons and refugees can return in accordance with international standards, on a voluntary basis with attention to the safety and dignity of the returning population, as well as the particular circumstances for people with disabilities, older people, and other at-risk groups.

## To the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia

- In accordance with its mandate set out in Human Rights Council Resolution S-33/1 (2021), investigate and report on allegations of violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law and international refugee law by all parties in Western Tigray since November 3, 2020.
- Make recommendations on holding perpetrators of violations identified accountable, including through national, regional, and international justice bodies.

# Annexes

## Key Individuals Meriting Criminal Investigation

Individuals who are responsible for crimes under international law should be investigated and appropriately brought to justice.[922] This includes those who commit or order a crime, as well as attempting to commit, assist, facilitate, and aid or abet a crime. Under international humanitarian and criminal law, military commanders, and other superiors, including civilian officials, can be held criminally accountable for the acts of their subordinates under the principle of superior or command responsibility. A commander or superior is criminally responsible if they knew or should have known of the crimes and willfully failed to prevent or punish them.[923] A superior does not necessarily need to know the identity of subordinates who carried out crimes. It is sufficient that the commander or superior have "effective control" over the forces responsible for the crimes.[924] Effective control means the material ability, at the time relevant to the charges, of superiors to prevent or punish the crimes of their subordinates.

Applying these rules to the situation in Western Tigray leads to the following conclusions. First, administrators as well as military, security, and militia leaders who gave orders or directly participated in the commission of the crimes in Western Tigray documented in this report should be investigated on the basis of their individual responsibility. In addition, commanders of military units, as well as of other security forces (such as police commanders and militia leaders), may bear responsibility for violations committed by forces under their command in accordance with the doctrine of command responsibility.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call for the investigation of civilian leaders as well as those within the military chain of command, security, and militia leaders in Ethiopia who either were directly responsible for crimes in Western Tigray or who knew or should have known of the crimes and took no steps to prevent or punish them.

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[922] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Customary International Humanitarian Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Rule 102, 151, 158.

[923] See *Prosecutor v. Elizaphan Nkaritumana and Gérard Nkaritumana*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Case No. ICTR-96 10 and ICTR-96-17-T, Judgement and Sentence (Trial Chamber), February 21, 2003, para. 819; *Prosecutor v. Alfred Musema,* International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Case No. ICTR- 96-13-T, Judgement and Sentence (Trial Chamber), January 27, 2000, para. 148; Zejnil Delalić ("Čelebići"), Case No. IT-96-21-A, Appeal Judgement, February 20, 2001, para. 195; *Prosecutor v. Zejnil Delalić*, *Zdravo Mucić*, *Hazim Delić, Esad Landžo* (*Čelebići case*), International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Case No. IT-96-21-T (Trial Chamber), November 16, 1998, para. 378. See also article 28 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

[924] *Prosecutor v. Hadžihasanović*, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Case No IT-01-47-T, Judgement (Trial Chamber) March 15, 2006, para. 90; *Prosecutor v. Ignace Bagilishema,* International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Case No. ICTR-95-1A-T, Judgement (Trial Chamber), June 7, 2001, para. 45.

In particular, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch believe, based on their research, that the following individuals should face judicial proceedings for the crimes detailed in this report, including war crimes and crimes against humanity:

**Col. Demeke Zewdu**, deputy administrator of the Western Tigray Zone and Head of Security in the Zone. Col. Demeke is a leading member of the Welkait Identity Committee and was a former member of the Ethiopian army.[925] Demeke has been serving as one of the most senior officials in Western Tigray and is reported to exercise oversight and control over the Amhara Special Forces, Fano militias, and Amhara militias in the zone.[926] As documented in our forthcoming report, these forces, at times acting in coordination with one another, carried out numerous abuses against Tigrayans throughout Western Tigray to violently expel Tigrayans from the area.

Witnesses said that Demeke engaged in rallies, meetings, and decisions in Humera town, as well as in Adi Remets and Adebai towns.[927] Witnesses in Humera identified Colonel Demeke as coordinating activities with other interim authorities, militias, and Eritrean officers in a hotel and in the zonal office in Humera town and as encouraging the occupation of Tigrayan homes and businesses in Humera town.[928] A witness identified him at a detention site observing Tigrayan detainees in Adi Remets town.[929]

In early November 2021, civilian authorities and security forces in Western Tigray initiated a new wave of abuses and accelerated the forcible displacement of Tigrayans from the area, particularly in the towns of Adebai, Humera, and Rawyan. A witness identified Colonel Demeke in Adebai town during the roundup of Tigrayan residents, where older people, women, and young children were expelled on trucks heading east to the Tekeze River, while Tigrayan men were forcibly rounded up in the town and taken to a makeshift detention site.[930] An unknown number of those trying to flee were killed.

Demeke failed to prevent, stop, or punish crimes against Tigrayans committed by security forces operating under his apparent command in Western Tigray. He outright rejected allegations made in a Reuters investigative report on Western Tigray that Fano militias were responsible for abuses, telling reporters that accounts of "attacks on Tigrayans by Fano are 'completely and absolutely false.'"[931]

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[925] See for example, Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, and Silvia Aloisi, "Special Report: How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town," Reuters, June 7, 2021, https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-expulsions/ (accessed March 29, 2022); Zecharias Zelalem, "Amhara protest stalwarts released but government remains mum on Welkait issue," (February 23, 2018), *Opride*, https://www.opride.com/2018/02/23/amhara-protest-stalwarts-released-government-remains-mum-welkait-issue (accessed March 29, 2022).

[926] Phone interviews, April, June, July, and November 2021.

[927] Phone interviews, March, April, May, and November 2021; and in January 2022.

[928] Phone interview, April 2021.

[929] Phone interview, May 2021.

[930] Phone interview, January 2022.

[931] Katharine Houreld, Michael Georgy, and Silvia Aloisi, "Special Report: How ethnic killings exploded from an Ethiopian town."

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch believe that Colonel Demeke should be investigated and appropriately prosecuted for command responsibility for crimes against humanity of murder, torture, deportation, forcible transfer, sexual violence, persecution, and other inhumane acts including possible extermination; and for command responsibility for the war crimes of murder, cruel treatment, torture, pillage, committing sexual violence, the displacement of civilian population not required for their security or imperative military necessity, and seizing property not required by military necessity, as detailed in this report. He should also be investigated for direct responsibility for these crimes.

**Commander "Shaleqa" Dejene Maru**, commander of the 2nd battalion, Gafat Brigade, Amhara Special Force.[932] A public associate of Col. Demeke Zewde since the Amhara protests in 2016,[933] Commander Dejene was also the commanding Amhara Special Force officer in Adi Goshu town during the early offensives in November 2020 and the roundups, beatings, and extrajudicial killings of Tigrayans at the Tekeze bridge by Amhara Special Forces in January 2021.[934] As documented in this report, Amhara Special Forces, at times acting in coordination with one another, carried out numerous abuses against Tigrayans throughout Western Tigray zone to violently expel Tigrayans from the area.

Witnesses identified Commander Dejene Maru in Adi Goshu town as being in Western Tigray as early as mid-November 2020, after the Ethiopian military and allied forces from the neighboring Amhara region captured the town and indiscriminately shot at fleeing residents. Bodies lay unburied until residents approached Commander Dejene for permission to bury those killed.[935]

On November 14, 2020, Commander Dejene reportedly called a meeting of town residents and said that "from now on there is nothing called Tigray here. This is a land of Gondar, of Amhara… from now on."[936]

In a video posted on Facebook on November 20, 2020, Commander Dejene can be seen on the Tekeze bridge, approximately 25 kilometers from Adi Goshu town, addressing a group of Amhara Special Forces and militias.[937]

[932] See Facebook post, https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=415328752932448&_rdr (accessed March 29, 2022).

[933] Phone interviews, May, June, July 2021.

[934] Phone interviews, June 2021.

[935] Phone interviews, June 2021.

[936] Phone interview, June 2021.

[937] Emmanuel Man's Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=237568794367275&id=100043424670385 (accessed March 29, 2022).

In an interview in Adi Goshu town and posted on Facebook on December 1, 2020, Dejene states that the "priority [of his forces] was to ensure stability in the town [Adi Goshu]." He added: "We established a temporary town/city committee. And we also established a committee to facilitate the surrender or neutralization [of TPLF militiamen in the bushes]. Many of them finally surrendered their guns when they ran out of options."[938]

Several witnesses said that in the weeks and months that followed the capture of Adi Goshu town, Amhara Special Forces under Commander Dejene's command carried out threats, intimidation, arrests of Tigrayans, and the looting of Tigrayan property, including homes and businesses.[939]

On January 17, 2021, Amhara Special Forces, militias, and local residents rounded up over 60 Tigrayan men. Witnesses and a few survivors said that Amhara Special Forces then transported the men to the northwestern bridge on the Tekeze River and shot them.

After an ultimatum was issued to Tigrayans to leave Adi Goshu, witnesses saw Dejene lead a meeting in the town. Residents asked where the Tigrayans detained had been taken, to which Dejene apparently replied: "we escorted them to the Tekeze."[940] Administrators in the meeting he presided were also heard saying that "if Tigrayan fighters attacked Amhara Special Forces, Tigrayans would pay the price."[941]

As the most senior ASF officer in Adi Goshu, Dejene had authority and command over the forces in Adi Goshu town that carried out the massacre on the Tekeze River on January 17, 2021. He failed to prevent or stop the crimes by Amhara Special Forces in Adi Goshu town or to punish subordinates responsible.

Commander Dejene should be investigated and appropriately prosecuted for command responsibility for the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, deportation, forcible transfer, sexual violence, persecution, and other inhumane acts; and for command responsibility for the war crimes of murder, cruel treatment, torture, pillage, committing sexual violence, ordering the displacement of civilian population not required for their security or imperative military necessity, and seizing property not required by military necessity. He should also be investigated for direct responsibility for these crimes.

**Belay, full name believed to be Belay Ayalew**, intelligence officer based in Humera. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have not been able to determine his formal position.

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[938] See Facebook post, https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=415328752932448&_rdr (accessed March 29, 2022).

[939] Phone interviews, June 2021.

[940] Phone interview, May 2021.

[941] Phone interview, June 2021.

Witnesses identified Belay as coordinating Fano militias in Humera and Adebai towns and carrying out intelligence, investigative, and interrogation work in detention sites, aimed at identifying Tigrayans in Humera town.[942]

Former detainees held in Humera detention sites also describe Belay as being directly involved in the beating of Tigrayans.[943]

In early November 2021, civilian authorities and security forces in Western Tigray initiated a new wave of abuses and accelerated the forcible displacement of Tigrayans from the area, particularly in the towns of Adebai, Humera, and Rawyan. Witnesses said that Belay was in Adebai town on November 3, 2021, during a roundup of Tigrayan residents, when older people, women, and young children were expelled on trucks heading east to the Tekeze River, while Tigrayan men were forcibly rounded up and taken to a makeshift detention site. An unknown number of those trying to flee were killed. Witnesses said Belay issued instructions to Fano militiamen and attempted to take Tigrayan detainees away that day, only to be prevented from doing so by the Eritrean military. [944]

Belay should be investigated and appropriately prosecuted for criminal responsibility for the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, deportation, forcible transfer, sexual violence, persecution, and other inhumane acts including possible extermination; and for the war crimes of murder, cruel treatment, torture, and committing sexual violence.

[942] Phone interview, May, August, and December 2021.

[943] Phone interviews April, June, and December 2021.

[944] Phone interviews, December 2021, January 2022.

# Amhara Regional Government Response Letter

Received on March 26, 2022

**A Response to the false allegations against the Amhara Regional Government**

This is a broad reflection to the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch query referenced as TG AFR 25/2022.2718.

The Tigrayan People Liberation Front, TPLF, has labeled the Amharas as 'enemies' some four decades before and targeted our people in all walks of life. That hatred has been enlarged during its tenure in the name of political and ideological reforms; and finally an official sidelining from the state apparatus was due. Further, after the overthrow of the group from the Ethiopian political power four years back, TPLF entered to a direct attack against our people. The false narrations across generations then, upgraded and helped them to invade us, the premises of our people; committed calamitous massacres against civilian ensued from the anti-Amhara sentiment spread across generations, looted properties in the most invaded areas and created appalling crisis that bounce from rights violations to war crimes.

**The Dreadful Scenes that all humans shall bear in mind**

To help you well understand the whole story and construct a refined frame, few incidents are presented below.

The November 9-10, 2020, Maikadra Massacre on ethnic Amharas is one of the greatest brutality against humanity. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) had deployed an investigation team to Maikadra, Abrhajira, Sanja, Dansha and Humera and between November 14 and 19th 2020. According to the Commission's findings, dreadful crimes were committed by the TPLF expertise on murders. Evidence gathered and analyzed by the EHRC revealed that the Maikadra attack is not a simple criminal act but is rather "a premeditated and carefully coordinated grave violation of human rights."

Members of Samri (youth groups assigned for the massacre), with the help of the Tigrayan police and militia crossed Tekeze River unveiled the cruel and atrocious rampage on people they pre-identified/profiled as Amharas. They slaughtered more than 1,600 innocents, beating them with batons/sticks, stabbing them with knives, machetes and hatchets and strangling them with ropes. They also looted and destroyed properties. It has been made apparent that the attack was ethnicity based and specifically targeted men the attackers profiled through, amongst other things, identification cards, as Amharas.

Indeed, our people have suffered the economic damages and well planned pillages have equivalently exceeded hundreds of billions of Ethiopian Birr. This has really caused significant impact on the Ethiopian economy.

After such torments, the TPLF forces invaded the Amhara Region while we were on peace efforts. The North Wollo, Waghimra, Soth Wollo, North and South Gondar, North Shewa and Oromo nationality Special Zones of Amhara Region were raged by the invasion. Incidents are investigated as the most horrible and inhumane acts.

The Mehoni, Agamsa, Chena, Boza, Kobo, Hayk, Worebabo, Kombolcha, Gashena and Antsokiya massacre are not just stories of antique, but fresh and shocking scenes.

However, rebuffing all the trajectories our people have come through, the unfounded allegations against our people, governance and security forces is bothersome. Equally, the frequent mention of the 'Western Tigray' that is not existing even in the vocabulary of our administrative entities but often associated with the Amhara Region is the romance of the TPLF dictators. We do not have such constituency that we run for, thus there is no canton called or known with this name. The false accusations of the 'expel of Tigrayans' from the Amhara Region is also cynical. Rather, we have compiled tens of thousands of TPLF invading forces infantry personnel list found (and meticulously audited) in North Shewa in August. The lists along with five other classified documents have disclosed that a remarkable number of the TPLF military staff deployed for invasion were residents in our Region, but diagnosed the biodata as they joined TPLF, invaded us and fought against our people. This is the fact that anyone can audit for further report.

**Final Remark: Unleashing the Power of Peace**

TPLF did everything to annihilate youths, women, people with disabilities, and farmers. The mass it agitated invaded most of our farming communities, looted ranches, moved door to door to murder boys and rape girls, including nuns. The invasion and its consequences are still resonating in the minds of our innocent people and of course remained the most disconcerting factors. The international community, media, rights groups and the humanitarian agencies shall provide basic needs to the victims and uncover the very atrocities of the TPLF.

Despite all these stories, human rights protection is the priority of the Amhara Regional State. The Region respects rights and fights against any violations. Therefore, contrary to the TPLF's terror entrepreneurship, the Amhara Regional government and its people justly remain committed to the rights and security of civilians regardless of their political, ethnic and gender differences. We aspire peace and development for our people and the nation at all. We are working for that. We are walking the untrodden ways for mutual peace. Hence, we tolerate no rights violations in the territory we govern and beyond, so that we firmly denounce the baseless stories that hash behind.

**Amhara Regional State**

**Bahir Dar, Ethiopia**

# “WE WILL ERASE YOU FROM THIS LAND”

## CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND ETHNIC CLEANSING IN ETHIOPIA’S WESTERN REGION

Since the outbreak of armed conflict in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray region on November 4, 2020, hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans living in the Western Tigray Zone have been forcibly displaced from their homes through a campaign of violence, expulsion, threats, and intimidation.

*“We Will Erase You From This Land,”* based on more than 400 interviews with victims of abuses, family members, witnesses, and others conducted between November 2020 and March 2022, documents how security forces and officials from the neighboring Amhara region subjected Tigrayans to a coordinated campaign of ethnically targeted persecution and violence. With the acquiescence and possible participation of Ethiopian federal forces, they carried out extrajudicial executions, rape and other acts of sexual violence, enforced disappearance, and pillage, and imposed a regime of restrictions on movement and denial of basic services and humanitarian aid. Amhara security forces also subjected Tigrayans to prolonged arbitrary detention in life-threatening conditions that included torture and other ill-treatment.

Many of the grave abuses documented in this joint report by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Tigrayan population in Western Tigray. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International call on the Ethiopian government and its regional and international partners to urgently end these abuses, including by demobilizing abusive militias, and impartially investigating and appropriately prosecuting security force members and civilian authorities implicated in serious abuses in Western Tigray pending investigations into their role, as steps to counter prevailing impunity. Ethiopia and its international partners should also support, as part of any consensual agreement between the warring parties, the deployment of an African Union-led international peacekeeping force, and ensure independent and sustained humanitarian assistance and protection monitoring in Tigray.

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HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL