



## Active Genocide Alert

### Ethiopia - Tigray Region

*Released on 12 October 2023*

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is issuing an Active Genocide Alert (AGA) for Ethiopia's Tigray region due to the recent gross human rights violations committed by Eritrean and Amhara forces, and the current humanitarian crisis affecting the Tigray region in particular, and Ethiopia in general. We call on the international community to engage in more forceful dialogue with Ethiopian authorities to ensure the security and wellbeing of all Ethiopians, especially those currently being targeted by genocidal violence and genocidal policies. Governments that target their own citizens with atrocity crimes must be challenged by their allies. We specifically call on Turkey, Iran, and the UAE, which have been [sending military aid](#) and investing heavily in Ethiopia under the regime of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, to demand an end to the atrocity crimes perpetrated, aided and abetted by the Abiy government and to work towards sustainable prosperity for all communities in Ethiopia.

The Lemkin Institute noted in its statement from February 3, 2023, in "[Support of an International Investigation of Abiy Ahmed's Crimes in Ethiopia](#)," that "since the outbreak of the war in the region of Tigray in November 2020, Ethiopia's government, under the orders of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, has committed egregious crimes against its own citizens including widespread human rights abuses, looting, ethnic-based atrocities, rape, and other forms of gender-based violence. *The fact pattern strongly suggests that, among other crimes, the Ethiopian government forces may have committed genocide against the people of Tigray. As a result of two years of vicious warfare between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and federal Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, millions of Ethiopians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.*" (Emphasis added).

Furthermore, the Lemkin Institute pointed out that multiple reports had revealed human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed with the complicity of the

Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). In fact, according to a joint report issued by the United Nations (UN) and the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), the ENDF, alongside allied Eritrean forces, had indeed committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Tigray region.

On November 2, 2022, the warring parties signed the “Cessation of Hostilities Agreement” (CoHA), which was reported to have led to a significant diminution in large-scale violence in Tigray. However, in [its September 14, 2023 report](#), the ICHREE found that “[...] the Federal Government has failed to carry out CoHA commitments on human rights, transitional justice and territorial integrity.”

The international community had hoped that the signing of the CoHA would signal the end of international law violations and human rights abuses that had plagued the two-year conflict in northern Ethiopia. However, it instead witnessed continued violations during the negotiations and after the signing of the agreement, largely by Eritrean armed personnel still present in the territory of Ethiopia, but also by Amhara forces in certain zones of Tigray as well as the disputed Western/Wolkait territory.

On October 25, 2022, the African Union [officially announced](#) the commencement of peace negotiations between the TPLF and the government of Ethiopia. On the same day, soldiers of the ENDF and Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) engaged Tigrayan forces in Mariam Shewito district, located in the Central Zone of the Tigray region. Amnesty International, in its September 4, 2023 report [“Today or Tomorrow, They Should Be Brought Before Justice,”](#) and the ICHREE reported that, between October 25 and November 1, 2022, EDF members went into residential areas and committed extrajudicial executions of civilians. According to testimonies gathered by the human rights organization, at least 20 civilians, primarily men, were executed by members of the EDF, allegedly in search of members of the TPLF and their supporters. It also reported that it had received a list of over 100 names of individuals who were extrajudicially executed during this period, although not all cases could be independently corroborated.

On November 1, 2022, as peace negotiations between the federal government and the TPLF were on the verge of conclusion, fighting erupted between Tigrayan forces and soldiers of the ENDF and EDF in parts of Tigray’s Eastern Zone, including in Kokob Tsibah district. Active hostilities ended on the evening of November 3, 2022, and the district remained under EDF control until January 19, 2023. [According to testimonies](#) gathered by Amnesty International, as well as a list provided by local authorities, 24 civilians were extrajudicially executed by EDF soldiers between November 2022 and January 2023. In a manner similar to the events in Mariam Shewito district, the victims were reported to have been primarily men and to have been executed in searches for members of the TPLF and their supporters.

From early November 2022 to late January 2023, EDF forces in Kokob Tsibah district held at least 15 women captive at their military camp, according to Amnesty International. For three months, these women were subjected to rape by EDF personnel. They also suffered physical

and psychological abuse, in addition to being deprived of food, water, and medical assistance. EDF soldiers were also accused of committing rape and gang rape against women who were held captive in their own homes or in houses where their captors were staying. According to testimonies gathered by Amnesty International, the EDF targeted women based on suspicions that their husbands, sons, or male relatives were affiliated with the Tigrayan forces. Rape, including common forms of genocidal rape, such as gang rape, rape of young girls, and rape accompanied by ethnic slurs, has been a [weapon of war and genocide](#) against Tigrayan women and girls since 2020.

According to Amnesty International, this was not the first time that Kokob Tsibah district fell under EDF control. [A social worker interviewed](#) by the human rights organization mentioned that it had been held by Eritrean forces from November 21, 2020, to June 28, 2021. They also explained to Amnesty International that, during this earlier period, approximately 120 women reported to their organization that they had been subjected to sexual violence by EDF forces.

In the same report, Amnesty International further reported that the ENDF was present in the district when some of these violations took place. However, residents mentioned that ENDF forces left after capturing the city, later returning to the district following the EDF's withdrawal on January 19, 2023.

Most of the survivors, witnesses, and family members of the victims interviewed by Amnesty International in both Mariam Shewito and Kokob Tsibah districts reported that EDF members pillaged their property and livestock, negatively impacting their livelihood. As a result, many now depend on aid or on family members for shelter and food, while some said that they are now sustaining themselves through begging.

The Lemkin Institute shares the ICHREE's concerns about the continued presence of Eritrean forces in frontier zones of Ethiopia populated by minority Irob and Kunama communities, in relation to which the ICHREE has received credible reports of grave human rights violations against civilians.

The non-international armed conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region has been characterized as an intricate conflagration that saw the intervention of various armed actors. Accordingly, among its provisions, the CoHA required the disarmament of the Tigrayan forces concurrent with the withdrawal of foreign forces from Ethiopian territory, as well as the withdrawal of non-ENDF forces from the Tigray region. However, Eritrean armed personnel not only remain present in Ethiopia but also Amhara forces in the disputed Western/Wolkait region and the Southern Zone of Tigray.

In its supporting document titled: "[The Acute Risk of Further Atrocity Crimes in Ethiopia: an Analysis](#)", issued on October 3, 2023, the ICHREE stated that it "[...] documented violations after the CoHA by Amhara forces and Fano militia, including rape and other forms of sexual violence and forced expulsion of Tigrayan women, men and children from Western Tigray [Wolkait]."

In addition to the ongoing violations throughout the Tigray region, the humanitarian situation on the ground has further deteriorated as a consequence of the suspension of humanitarian aid since early May 2023. Following the discovery of aid diversion, on May 3, 2023, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) [announced the suspension of food assistance to the war-torn region](#). The following day, the World Food Programme (WFP) [announced the suspension of food assistance to Tigray](#). In June, the suspensions were extended to the whole country after indications of a widespread and coordinated campaign to divert food assistance, according to both [USAID](#) and [WFP](#).

In its September 14 report, the ICHREE mentioned that, according to the head of the Tigray office of the Disaster Risk Management Commission, some 1,400 hunger-related deaths were recorded in the region between April and August 2023. Moreover, the ICHREE reported that, since the aid suspension announcement in May, multiple interviewees in the region described facing a desperate situation from the acute impact of not receiving aid. It also highlighted that this situation is particularly challenging for displaced civilians unable to return to their homes due to the presence of armed actors, including civilians who have been forcibly displaced by Amhara forces from the Western/Wolkait region.

The ICHREE also expressed its concern over the fact that, as of September 14, more than 20 million Ethiopians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, many of whom are suffering from famine-like conditions, including communities in the drought-affected areas of Afar and Oromia. In early August, the WFP [announced that they were slowly resuming food assistance](#) to Ethiopia through small-scale distribution. However, USAID [announced that the United States would continue with the suspension](#) until it had assurances that the aid would reach its intended beneficiaries.

Although humanitarian assistance was suspended nationwide last June, the situation in Tigray remains particularly alarming. The consequences of the conflagration, largely unaddressed by the national government, are compounded by the ongoing human rights violations perpetrated by both Eritrean and Amhara forces. Among others, these violations include torture, rape, and extrajudicial execution of civilians – the latter characterized by overt undertones of androicide, especially against “battle-age” ethnic Tigrayans – as well as the pillage and destruction of private property, including means of subsistence. The Ethiopian government willingly abandoned civilians in the Tigray region, leaving them at the mercy of Eritrean and Amhara forces. This situation, combined with the ongoing humanitarian crisis, amounts to the commission of genocide by attrition against the people of Tigray.

The Lemkin Institute notes that, although the Ethiopian government has agreed to participate in a joint investigation with the United States into the diversion of humanitarian assistance, it also faces accusations that some Ethiopian government officials were involved in the scheme. The government, however, [has dismissed the suggestion](#) that it bears primary responsibility.

The investigation of past human rights violations in Ethiopia has been marked by a pervasive culture of impunity rather than a commitment to accountability. Regrettably, the government has consistently fallen short of its duty to conduct thorough investigations and, where there is actionable evidence, prosecute those responsible for the commission of serious human rights violations in Tigray and elsewhere. Furthermore, many of these atrocities within Tigray have been committed in concert or with the acquiescence of the ENDF. This raises a valid concern that, if the government has demonstrated thus far an unwillingness to investigate and address some of the most serious crimes under international law in its territory, there is little reason to believe that it will adopt a different stance regarding the current humanitarian crisis.

According to the ICHREE, the federal government has been keen to highlight its cooperation with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the East Africa Regional Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-EARO), often citing the EHRC/OHCHR-EARO Joint Investigation Team report as an example of its cooperation with human rights bodies. However, the ICHREE noted that the report was not exhaustive and that the Joint Investigation Team faced significant challenges to undertake its duties, including the harassment and intimidation of its staff, government-imposed restrictions on communication equipment, and difficulties in obtaining security clearances for travel.

The unwillingness of the Ethiopian government to investigate international law violations and human rights abuses within its borders is further reinforced by its lack of cooperation with the ICHREE, and the Commission of Inquiry established by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, [whose mandate was quietly terminated in May 2023](#) without issuing any report on its findings. Moreover, the ICHREE reported that the presence of Eritrean forces in Ethiopian territory frustrated the activities of the African Union Monitoring, Verification and Compliance Mission, and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in May 2023.

The Lemkin Institute's mistrust of the willingness of the Ethiopian government to properly address the current humanitarian crisis is further supported by the well-documented use of starvation as a method of warfare by the national government and its allied forces during the conflict in Tigray, despite Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's arguments to the contrary. Thus, there is no convincing reason to believe that the government will not exploit the current humanitarian situation to further its genocidal agenda against the Tigrayans.

In this regard, the Lemkin Institute believes that processes of genocide often have an economic logic, whereby the perpetrators will often try to achieve the maximum amount of destruction with the least amount of effort or resources. Although the current humanitarian situation in the region is not the result of a blockade, as it was during the conflict, the government's unwillingness to address the suffering of its starving population, as well as its lack of action in order to prevent non-ENDF forces from remaining in the region, has established a series of conditions which amount to the slow but certain destruction of the ethnic group.

The Lemkin Institute regrets that [the mandate of the ICHREE is set to expire](#) in October, due to the lack of proposals seeking an extension during the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council. Given the paucity of reliable information coming out of Ethiopia at the moment, an independent investigatory body such as the ICHREE is just as essential now as it has been in the past. Without efforts to document conditions according to international standards, the violence between groups is more likely to escalate and responsible parties are less likely to be held accountable. We call on the UN Human Rights Council to clearly and publicly explain the reasons for its decision to allow the mandate to expire and to offer alternative approaches. If the UN, in particular the UN Human Rights Council, believes that the ICHREE is not the appropriate mechanism to address the current crisis, its response should not be to abandon Ethiopia to its fate. Ethiopia cannot simply be forgotten.

The Lemkin Institute reiterates its words from its February 3 statement that call “[...] on the international community to refer [Abiy Ahmed’s] crimes to the ICC for investigation.” It further calls on the international community to exert pressure on the government of Ethiopia to remove any foreign or regional forces whose continued presence in the Tigray region constitutes a violation of CoHA commitments; to allow an independent, international fact-finding mission into the country to assess the situation on the ground; to commit resources to support a restorative and transformational justice process in the disputed Western/Wolkait region, which is the ongoing cause of brutal intercommunal violence between Amhara and Tigrayan communities; and to take appropriate steps to resume the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Tigray region.