

Re: Threats to Terminate the Mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia

To: Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Excellencies,

We, the undersigned civil society and human rights organizations, are alarmed by the 15 February announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia to the Executive Council of the African Union that the Ethiopian government is planning to present a resolution at the upcoming session of the UN Human Rights Council to terminate the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE).

We write to urge your delegations to reject any resolution to prematurely terminate the mandate of ICHREE, and to express your support for the mandate and work of the Commission. The independent mandate and work of ICHREE is crucial to preserve the opportunity for victims of grave international crimes to have access to justice, particularly because of the eroding environment for independent media and human rights monitoring of conflict-affected areas of Ethiopia. We are deeply concerned about the government's ongoing [harassment of human rights defenders](#), including at the judicial level.

Ethiopia's attempts to terminate ICHREE's mandate during its term are unprecedented. Not only does it suggest that states can politically maneuver to overturn the decisions of the Human Rights Council to avoid independent scrutiny and accountability, but it could also set a dangerous precedent regarding international scrutiny and impunity for rights abuses elsewhere.

In November 2022, the Ethiopian federal government and Tigrayan authorities signed [a cessation of hostilities agreement](#). While the agreement restored some long overdue aspects of civilian life, including easing some restrictions on basic services and humanitarian assistance, independent, effective investigations with a view to prosecution of grave international crimes will be key. The work and mandate of ICHREE would complement the cessation of hostilities agreement which recognizes the need for accountability and justice.

Victims of violations and their families in northern Ethiopia, as well as in other parts of the country, have expressed [a lack of trust in state institutions](#) and continue to seek greater international attention to their suffering and for action to end impunity. Ethiopia's efforts to terminate ICHREE's work would silence the hope and trust that victims have placed in it, including those who have already engaged with the ICHREE in the hope that their stories would be told.

With ongoing human rights abuses, and credible investigations and accountability at the domestic level still elusive, the Human Rights Council and its members should support those seeking justice and enable ICHREE to continue to fulfill the mandate it was given in 2021: to collect and preserve evidence of serious crimes committed, and to identify those responsible, with a view—where possible—to make such information accessible and usable in support of ongoing and future accountability efforts.

We reiterate our call to members and observers of the UN Human Rights Council to block Ethiopia's efforts to terminate the mandate of the ICHREE, and to confirm your support for the ICHREE and the protection of the integrity of the Human Rights Council and its mandated bodies.

1. Africa Legal Aid (AFLA)
2. African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) - Sudan
3. Amnesty International
4. Association pour la Défense des Droits de la Personne et des Libertés Publiques (ADL) - Rwanda

5. Association Mauritanienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH) – Mauritania
6. Association nigérienne pour la défense des droits de l'Homme (ANDDH) – Niger
7. Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion et Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ATPDH) – Chad
8. Association of Victims, Relatives and Friends of September 28, 2009 (AVIPA)
9. Atrocities Watch Africa (AWA)
10. Australia Tigray Alliance (ATA)
11. The Botswana Centre for Human Rights (DITSHWANELO) - Botswana
12. Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD)
13. Center for Democracy and Development (CDD)- Mozambique
14. The Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law - Sierra Leone
15. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
16. The Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia
17. Coalition for Justice and Accountability
18. Cooperation platform for Tigrayan-Norwegians
19. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
20. Dekna Foundation
21. Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) – Ethiopia
22. Ethiopian Canadians for Peace
23. FKA-Senegal
24. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
25. The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)
26. Groupe LOTUS - Democratic Republic of Congo
27. Health Professionals Network for Tigray
28. Human Rights Concern Eritrea
29. Human Rights Watch
30. International Commission of Jurists (Global)
31. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
32. The International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)
33. Irob Anina Civil Society (IACS)
34. Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRI) - Kenya
35. Kenya Section of the International Commission of Jurists (Kenya)
36. Legal Action Worldwide (LAW)
37. Legacy Tigray
38. Les Mêmes Droits pour Tous (MDT) - Guinea
39. Ligue Burundaise des droits de l'Homme (Iteka) – Burundi
40. Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l'Homme (LCDH) - Central African Republic
41. Ligue Djiboutienne des Droits Humains (LDDH) – Djibouti
42. Ligue Ivoirienne des Droits de l'Homme (LIDHO) - Cote d'Ivoire
43. Ligue Sénégalaise des Droits humains (LSDH) - Sénégal
44. Observatoire congolais des droits de l'Homme (OCDH) – Congo
45. Observatoire des droits de l'Homme au Rwanda (ODHR) - Rwanda
46. Omna Tigray
47. Organisation Guinéenne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen (OGDH) - Guinea
48. Organisation Nationale des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH) - Sénégal
49. Oromo Legacy Leadership & Advocacy Association (OLLAA)
50. Pan African Lawyers Association (PALU)
51. Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
52. Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO)
53. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
54. Security & Justice for Tigrayans
55. Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)
56. Sudanese Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) - Sudan
57. Tigray Action Committee
58. Tigray Advocacy and Development Association UK
59. Tigray Youth Network

60. Union of Tigrayans in Europe

61. United Tegar Canada

62. Women's Association for Victims' Empowerment (WAVE)-Gambia

63. Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) – Zimbabwe

Background

The United Nations Human Rights Council established the ICHREE on 17 December 2021 through [resolution S-33/1](#) and tasked it with investigating and documenting violations of international law committed by *all* parties to the armed conflict since November 2020, with a view to making such information available to support future accountability efforts. In September 2022, the council renewed ICHREE's mandate for one year. ICHREE is scheduled to provide an oral update to the Council at its 52nd session on [21 March 2023](#) and present its comprehensive report in September 2023.

During the two-year armed conflict in northern Ethiopia, all parties to the conflict committed gross human rights violations that amount to crimes under international law such as war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions. As one of the parties to the armed conflict, the Ethiopia military and its allied forces, including the Eritrean military, have been implicated in serious international law violations, [including war crimes and crimes against humanity](#). These abuses include targeted attacks on civilians and civilian objects, indiscriminate attacks, mass extrajudicial executions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, denial of humanitarian assistance, arbitrary detention, and pillage.

Governments are obligated to provide victims of abuses and their families with a meaningful remedy. Such a right includes access to justice, the right to truth, and reparations for the harm suffered. The absence of genuinely independent, impartial, and competent domestic investigations and prosecution, necessitates the ICHREE to continue to fulfill the mandate it was given in 2021.

The Ethiopian government rejected early calls for independent regional and international investigations, claiming that it was capable of carrying out such investigations itself. Meanwhile, government investigations and accountability steps taken so far to hold its forces and that of its allies accountable, including Eritrean forces, have fallen far short from being credible and effective. Where warring states parties fail to pursue credible and meaningful investigations that can hold those responsible for grave violations to account, the international community should intervene to ensure justice and accountability for international crimes.

At the regional level, Ethiopian authorities [urged](#) the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Commission of Inquiry on Tigray to "cease" its operations in June 2021, and refused to cooperate with the commission after the ACHPR refused to conduct their inquiry jointly with the national Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, a federal body.

Similarly, Ethiopia has rejected ICHREE's mandate since its inception, refused to cooperate with it, denied ICHREE access to conflict-affected areas inside Ethiopia, and repeatedly taken measures to undermine its work. It introduced resolutions [twice](#) at the UN General Assembly for its [funding to be denied](#), most recently in December 2022. Since January, Ethiopia has called on the European Union, which are the penholders on the resolution, as well as ambassadors from the [United Kingdom](#), the [United States](#), and [EU member states](#) to terminate the mandate. In his speech during the Executive Council meeting of the African Union on 15 February 2023, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia announced that Ethiopia would submit a resolution to terminate the mandate of ICHREE during the 52nd session of the Council.