

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# ETHIOPIA: VICTIMS BETRAYED AFTER STATES FAILED TO CONTINUE UN ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM

By failing to extend the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) despite its warnings of an “acute risk of further atrocities”,<sup>1</sup> member states of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) have extinguished the only credible avenue for independent international investigations and oversight on Ethiopia – a key source of hope for victims and survivors seeking justice and accountability.

Member states of the HRC looked away from Ethiopia’s ongoing<sup>2</sup> human rights crisis as the deadline for formal tabling of resolutions at the ongoing 54th session of the HRC elapsed on 4 October 2023. Without a resolution to extend its mandate ICHREE will have to end its work.

On 3 October 2023, ICHREE issued a detailed analysis laying down evidence and trends indicating an “acute risk of further atrocity crimes in Ethiopia.”<sup>3</sup> The commission also presented its report to the HRC on 18 September 2023, detailing how conflict-related abuses are no longer limited to the Tigray region and that they have escalated to a “national scale.”<sup>4</sup>

ICHREE’s report also emphasized that the Government of Ethiopia has failed to effectively investigate violations and that it had initiated a flawed transitional justice consultation process.

The grave human rights crisis in Ethiopia has already affected millions<sup>5</sup> and poses further serious threats to people throughout the country. ICHREE asserted that the risk might extend “to the State as well as regional stability and the enjoyment of human rights in East Africa”<sup>6</sup>. The decision to not continue UN investigations into ongoing rights abuses, amid a sweeping national state of emergency and warnings by the ICHREE is a gross betrayal of victims and survivors.

UN member states ignored pleas by victims, survivors and civil society to extend ICHREE, in the absence of credible alternatives at the national or regional levels,<sup>7</sup>. On 13 June 2023 the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights prematurely terminated the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry into the situation in the Tigray Region of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia (Col).<sup>8</sup> The Col never issued a report or a statement about its investigations in Ethiopia. At the domestic level Ethiopia does not have adequate legal frameworks or credible accountability processes to address severe human rights violations and crimes under international law.

In December 2021, the European Union (EU) led the initiative to establish ICHREE at the HRC and continued to lead subsequent initiatives on ICHREE. The ICHREE has a key role to play in international oversight, early warning and prevention within the UN system. The EU’s decision to ignore the UN’s warnings and abandon the only independent, credible international investigative mechanism on Ethiopia, is shameful.

<sup>1</sup> Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, 3 October 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/54/CRP.2. UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Resolution S-33/1, adopted 17 December 2021, UN Doc. A/HRC/RES/S-33/1.

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, “Ethiopia: Authorities must grant independent investigators, media unfettered access to Amhara region to probe violations under state of emergency”, 18 August 2023, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/08/ethiopia-authorities-must-grant-independent-investigators-media-unfettered-access-to-amhara-region-to-probe-violations-under-state-of-emergency/#:~:text=The%20government%20blocked%20internet%20access%20in%20the%20Amhara,charge%20or%20trial%2C%20and%20unlawful%20restrictions%20on%20communication](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/08/ethiopia-authorities-must-grant-independent-investigators-media-unfettered-access-to-amhara-region-to-probe-violations-under-state-of-emergency/#:~:text=The%20government%20blocked%20internet%20access%20in%20the%20Amhara,charge%20or%20trial%2C%20and%20unlawful%20restrictions%20on%20communication).

<sup>3</sup> OHCHR, International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (previously cited).

<sup>4</sup> OHCHR, Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, 14 September 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/54/55.

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, “Over 2 million people displaced by conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region - local official”, 6 January 2021, [reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-conflict-idUSKBN29B1N7](https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-conflict-idUSKBN29B1N7)

<sup>6</sup> OHCHR, Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (previously cited), para. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: 54th session of the UN Human Rights Council: Ethiopia – Renew the mandate of the ICHREE*, (Index: AFR 25/7174/2023), 7 September 2023, [amnesty.org/en/documents/af/25/7174/2023/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/af/25/7174/2023/en/)

<sup>8</sup> Africa Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Resolution on the termination of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 13 June 2023, ACHPR/Res.556 (LXXV) 2023.

It is deplorable that certain states, including China and some members of the African Group, supported Ethiopia's campaign against the renewal of ICHREE's mandate. The reticence of other UN member states, including key economic partners of Ethiopia, such as the United States, and members of the African Union, to fill the vacuum left by EU inaction is also shocking. This collective failure to take meaningful action to preserve the UN's preventive capacity undermines human rights, peace and stability in today's world.

When the world stepped up its scrutiny on the human rights situation in Ukraine, Amnesty International had hoped that this high standard would be applied to other serious crises across the world. Failure to do so will weaken human rights protections in all parts of the world and lend credence to criticisms of double standards. The approach taken on Ethiopia indicates an urgent need for deep introspection within all member states of the Human Rights Council and within the EU - both on the EU's stated commitment to justice and accountability in Ethiopia<sup>9</sup> and the wider credibility of EU foreign policy on human rights.

Member states of the HRC and the EU now have a particular responsibility to make amends by re-instating the international accountability processes that they have unwisely chosen to abandon, especially given fears that the current situation in Ethiopia will continue or deteriorate further as the country remains under a national state of emergency with restricted access to conflict areas for independent observers.

## **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S RECENT FINDINGS**

In a report released on 5 September 2023, Amnesty International documented war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity committed by the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) in the Tigray region, both before and after the signing of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) between Ethiopia's federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in November 2022.

Amnesty International gathered testimonies of 49 witnesses, survivors, and family members of victims and conducted further interviews with medical experts, staff of local civil society organizations and others for the report. Among these, 11 were survivors of rape and sexual slavery in Kokob Tsibah district. More than 40 women in this district reported to a local civil society organization that they were subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence between 1 November 2022 and 11 January 2023. These violations occurred in various settings, including inside an EDF military camp, within their own homes, or in homes commandeered by the EDF.

Amnesty International interviewed four survivors who were held in an EDF camp in Kokob Tsibah district for nearly three months, enduring repeated acts of rape and sexual slavery. The impact of these violations on the affected communities, particularly in Kokob Tsibah and Mariam Shewito, has changed their lives irreversibly.

Survivors of rape and sexual slavery face physical and psychological trauma and lifelong medical conditions. Families of those who lost their lives are left grieving and unable to give their loved ones a proper burial, compounding their suffering. Additionally, the looting of belongings and livestock, vital to their livelihoods, has left many survivors grappling with significant socio-economic losses.

In this report, most survivors of rape and sexual slavery expressed a strong desire to see those responsible held accountable before a court of law when asked about what justice looks like to them. Some expressed their willingness to testify against the perpetrators if given the opportunity. Most survivors emphasized the importance of guarantees of non-repetition. They envisioned this in various forms, with one survivor highlighting the crucial role of the international community. She said, "If those at the very top, across the world, say that those who did this to us are punished, and this will never happen again, then that is justice for me."

## **INTERNATIONAL CRIMES DOCUMENTED SINCE NOVEMBER 2020**

- On 12 November 2020, Amnesty International published a research report showing that scores of civilians had been killed in Mai-Kadra town in Western Tigray.<sup>10</sup>
- On 26 February 2021, Amnesty International published its report on violations documented between 19 and 29 November 2020 by EDF troops operating in Axum, Tigray. The report found out that the EDF conducted mass

<sup>9</sup> Council of the EU, "Council Conclusions on Ethiopia", 24 April 2023, [data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8610-2023-INIT/en/pdf](https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8610-2023-INIT/en/pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Investigation Reveals Evidence that Scores of Civilians were Killed in Massacre in Tigray State", 12 November 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/ethiopia-investigation-reveals-evidence-that-scores-of-civilians-were-killed-in-massacre-in-tigray-state/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/ethiopia-investigation-reveals-evidence-that-scores-of-civilians-were-killed-in-massacre-in-tigray-state/)

executions of civilians, looted properties, and indiscriminately targeted civilians and concluded that such acts may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>11</sup>

- On 16 February 2022, Amnesty International published its findings of summary killings, looting and rape by Tigrayan forces in Amhara region.<sup>12</sup>
- On 6 April 2022, Amnesty International, jointly with Human Rights Watch, documented that, officials from neighboring Amhara region had committed crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing against Tigrayans in the Western Tigray region.<sup>13</sup>
- Amnesty International also documented systemic and widespread sexual violence against women and girls in the Tigray region, including sexual slavery by the EDF, ENDF, ASF and militias fighting alongside the federal government.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, *Summary killings, rape and looting by Tigrayan forces in Amhara* (Index: AFR 25/5218/2022), 16 February 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/5218/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/5218/2022/en/)

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, *Ethiopia: "We will erase you from this land": Crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone* (Index: AFR 25/5444/2022), 6 April 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/5444/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/5444/2022/en/)

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: "I don't know if they realized I was a person": Rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray* (Index: AFR 25/4569/2021), 11 August 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/4569/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/4569/2021/en/)