



To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, Geneva, Switzerland

14 September 2022

UN Human Rights Council should extend and bolster support to the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia

Your Excellencies,

On the 51st session of the Human Rights Council (12 September 2022 to 07 October 2022), we, the undersigned civil society organizations from **the Horn and East Africa Region**, write to highlight the need for the Council to extend the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia that was established in December 2021 and calls on member states to lend support to achieve the Council's goals of fostering peace, justice, and national reconciliation. The Commission continues to document mass human rights violations under international human rights and humanitarian law since its first reporting in June 2022. We, as civil society, continue to consistently document human rights violations in the country, some of which we believe reach the gravity of mass atrocity crimes under international law.

The Ethiopian Government and allied forces, Tigrayan forces, and Amhara security forces have all been implicated in the violence that broke out in November 2020 and continues to take place. In the country's northern region, Tigray, Ethiopian, and allied forces have carried out deliberate attacks on civilian objects and infrastructure such as schools and hospitals and perpetrated mass sexual violence, with 1,300 rapes documented between January 2021 and February 2022. We are concerned that the actual number of rapes is much higher but has gone unreported due to stigma, trauma, and inability to reach victims.

In 2021, a world record in mass displacement was reached, with 5.1 million displaced in Ethiopia, the highest figure recorded for any country in a given year. Displacement in 2021 was three times the amount of displacement recorded in the region in 2020 according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

Efforts to stem information about the conflict and associated rights violations have been met with repression and restrictions on civil and political rights, including censorship, with the Government charging 111 unregistered media outlets with "working to make Ethiopia a center of violence." The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia documented the use of hate speech and marked it as a concern for incitement to ethnic violence and mass atrocity crimes.

The Amhara security forces have carried out ethnic cleansing campaigns against the Tigrayan population in the western Tigray zone of the countries. Ethiopian authorities have effectively besieged the population since June 2021, blocking humanitarian aid and medical supplies from entering the region, implementing a shutdown of essential services, and exacerbating hunger and malnutrition in the region. This situation has been compounded by persistent drought. This has also impeded access to medical services for rape victims. A shutdown of communications networks has left Tigray's capital, Mekelle, without access to phones, banking, electricity, and internet for over a year and impeded the capacity to report violations and abuses. Fuel restrictions imposed by the Government of Ethiopia have also culminated in an inability to deliver what little food and medical aid is available to the civilian population. The restoration of services has been a core demand of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) before peace talks, but the Government of Ethiopia has insisted talks must begin without the restoration of services.

Human Rights Watch also reported that the Ethiopian Government did little to prevent the killings of civilians in Western Oromia in June 2022, despite having the primary responsibility to protect. On 18 June 2022, about 400 civilians, including children, were killed by an armed group despite the presence of government forces in the area.

Tigrayan forces have also committed unlawful killings and rapes of Eritrean refugees in Tigray. The violations have extended outside the Tigray region. Ethiopian authorities have forcibly disappeared dozens of ethnic Tigrayans. In July 2021, the conflict spread into the Amhara and Afar regions, where Tigrayan forces carried out summary executions, sexual violence, and looting against Amhara civilians. Other regions of the country, such as Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz, have experienced insecurity, with government operations culminating in serious rights violations and a sharp uptake in attacks against minority groups.

The collapse of a ceasefire agreed to in March by the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF in August 2022 has resulted in new intense fighting, and the Government of Ethiopia has announced the establishment of a new military front on the border of Sudan in western Tigray. For its part, the national Ethiopian Human Rights Commission expressed concern and called for a ceasefire. In the June 2022 presentation of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, the Commission noted that they had been slow to receive information from the National Commission.

On 30 August, explosions took place late in the evening in the capital of Tigray, with one explosion hitting a neighborhood near Mekelle General Hospital. A medical worker reported that the hospital had received some casualties, though, at the time of writing, the extent of the damage remains unclear. The explosion follows an airstrike on 26 August on a children's playground, killing seven people, including children.

In the wake of the renewed violence since the collapse of the ceasefire, UN officials reported that no humanitarian aid deliveries had been allowed to enter the region for at least nine days.

In East Ethiopia, multiple sources have confirmed reports about renewed hostilities and an armed conflict between Somali and Afar ethnics in Ethiopia this year. These attacks led to hundreds of civilian casualties and the displacement of over 100,000 population in the Somali zone of Ethiopia. The displaced populations have no access to humanitarian or medical treatment. Such attacks are politically and ethnically motivated to relocate the Somali ethnic group from that area forcefully.

The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia is tasked with conducting its work amidst these dire human rights and humanitarian situations. Yet the Commission has faced technical challenges, including lack of staff, time to complete reporting, and receiving information from national human rights bodies and other UN mechanisms to complete its work and make recommendations on transitional justice, accountability, healing, and national reconciliation.

In this context, the Human Rights Council is responsible for placing Ethiopia high on its list of priorities, contributing to meaningful progress in the country, and ending these grave violations. We call for the extension of the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and for the Human Rights Council to provide it with robust technical support. We call on member states to lend political support to any future peace process mediated by the African Union or another international body. We also call on the Government of Ethiopia to continue cooperating with the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia and allow full and unimpeded access to all parts of the country.

We thank you for your attention to these pressing issues and stand ready to provide your delegation with further information as required.

Sincerely¹:

1. Al Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment (KACE)- Sudan
2. Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders (CSHRDs) - Somalia

3. De l'association Djibouto- Djibouti
4. Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Right (EMDHR)- Eritrea
5. Horn Afrik News Agency for Human Rights (HANAHR) - Somalia
6. Kasanja Development Initiative (KDI), Uganda
7. Ligue djiboutienne des droits humains (LDDH)- Djibouti
8. Resource Rights Africa (RRA)-Uganda
9. South West Human Rights Defenders Network (SWHRDN)- Somalia
10. The Centre for Development and Research (CDR)- South Sudan
11. The Kenya National Civil Society Centre (KNCSC)- Kenya
12. Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy (VECOD)- Ethiopia