Afar and Amhara Regions: Report on Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in Afar and Amhara Regions of Ethiopia Published

March 11, 2022 | Press Release, Report

Strong commitment of all actors indispensable to obtain justice for victims and rehabilitation of areas affected by the conflict

Twitter
Facebook
Telegram
Email
Whatsapp
Download
Download
Print

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Press Release

March 11, 2022

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has, on March 11, 2022, published its 110 pages Report on Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law in Afar and Amhara Regions of Ethiopia conducted between September and December 2021. The report, which provides a detailed account of widespread human rights violations against civilians committed by parties to the conflict including its gender dimensions, calls on all actors and institutions to support justice and redress initiatives for victims and the rehabilitation of conflict affected areas.

The report, focusing on Afar and Amhara Regions for the period from July 2021, following the Tigray Forces military offensive and control of several areas in the two regions, builds on the EHRC and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation Report on alleged violations of human rights in the Context of the Conflict in the Tigray Region **(JIT) published on November 3, 2021**.

EHRC's 29-member team of investigators conducted investigations in many parts of Afar and Amhara regions affected by the conflict, covering over 50 locations in both regions. In Afar region, the investigation covered several areas in Fenti Resu, Kilbety Resu and Awesi Resu Zones. Similarly, in Amhara region, the geographic scope of the investigation extended to North Gondar, North Wollo, South Wollo, North Shoa and Oromo Administrative Zones. While the main regional focus of this report was Afar and Amhara regions, the team also conducted limited monitoring and investigation into civilian casualties of air raids/shelling that took place in some parts of Tigray region.

The investigation team conducted 427 confidential interviews and held 136 meetings with various government offices and authorities; it also conducted 12 focus group discussions with religious leaders, community elders and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Interviews conducted include those with victims and survivors, their family members, residents, witnesses, health professionals, aid organizations and civic societies. The investigation mission also collected documentary information and evidence from relevant government and non-government sources.

The investigation was carried out within the framework of relevant international legal norms, including international human rights law, humanitarian law and criminal law, as well as Ethiopian domestic law and other applicable international principles. Consistent with the international practice in similar human rights investigations, EHRC adopted a "reasonable grounds to believe" standard of proof for factual determinations on information and evidence it collected.

The main objectives of the investigation are to provide a faithful account of the human rights violations against civilians committed by all parties to the conflict, including its gender dimensions; to contribute to the process of holding perpetrators to account; to advocate for justice and redress for victims and survivors; as well as to prevent recurrence of similar violations.

The parties to the conflict include Tigray Forces and allied militia (in some locations including the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)- aka "OLF-Shane") on the one hand, and the security forces of the government of Ethiopia (Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and allied security forces, Afar and Amhara security forces and allied militia) on the other.

Although this report is not an exhaustive record of all incidents that occurred in all the locations and during the whole of the period covered, it fairly illustrates the main types of violations and abuses and overall situation and patterns of human rights and humanitarian law violations and abuses.

Because the war was conducted largely in towns and rural areas with dense civilian populations, a significant number of civilians have died, suffered physical and psychological injuries as well as sexual and gender-based violence as a direct result of acts of violence committed by parties to the conflict.

The findings show parties to the conflict carried out indiscriminate attacks on civilians who are vulnerable in particular women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons. These attacks on civilians and civilian objects were committed in violation of the principles of distinction, necessity, precaution, and proportionality. By using civilians as human shields, conducting military operations from civilian homes and in urban areas, the parties have caused civilian deaths, physical injuries, and property destruction. Without including the extrajudicial killings, at least 403 civilians have died and 309 have suffered minor to serious physical injuries as a result of acts of violence in the context of the conflict.

In parts of Afar and Amhara Regions covered by this investigation, at least 346 civilians have been subjected to unlawful and extra-judicial killing by parties to the conflict – mainly by Tigray Forces. In areas which were under their control, OLF-Shane also committed targeted killings of government officials and their family members, and civilians they accused of supporting the government

ENDF, Amhara Special Forces, Fano and other militia also committed unlawful and extrajudicial killing of and caused physical injuries to civilians they suspected of supporting Tigray Forces or OLF-Shane.

Tigray Forces committed widespread, cruel, and systematic sexual and gender-based violence including gang rape against women of different ages-girls and elderly women in parts of Afar and Amhara regions under their control. Tigray Forces committed these acts of sexual and gender-based violence to demoralize, dehumanize and punish communities; often indiscriminately and sometimes in a targeted manner. The attacks were often perpetrated in a premeditated and cruel manner including through gang rape, rape in front of family members of victims/survivors, and insertion of foreign objects into the vagina. Often times, these acts were committed with the knowledge of military commanders and officials of the Tigray Forces who, despite pleas from communities under their control, failed to take the necessary and reasonable measures to stop violations and hold perpetrators to account. The EHRC believes the information and evidence it gathered strongly indicate a calculated and systematic use of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) (mostly indiscriminately but also selectively) for warfare by Tigray Forces.

Parties to the conflict engaged in arbitrary detentions, abductions, and enforced disappearances in violation of human rights and humanitarian laws. Tigray Forces engaged in abductions and enforced disappearances in a manner that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Federal, Afar and Amhara security forces engaged in widespread arbitrary detentions in violation of the principles of necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination applicable even during a state of emergency.

Tigray Forces committed acts of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment against civilians they accused of refusing to hand over cash or to disclose information, of refusing to handover private weapons, or other similar accusations.

Many civilians were displaced and suffered physical, mental, social, economic and other injuries following the expansion of the conflict into Afar and Amhara Regions. Insecurities resulting from the war and human rights violations including large-scale looting and destruction perpetrated by Tigray Forces were the main drivers of displacement from Afar and Amhara regions.

Separation from family members, inadequate humanitarian assistance including food, health services, clothing, and bedding; as well as shortages of sanitary pads and other specific supplies for women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities has aggravated the precarious situation of the most vulnerable IDPs.

In many areas covered by this investigation, and which were under their control, Tigray Forces carried out widespread and organized pillaging, looting and destruction of government administration facilities, public service facilities (in particular education and health facilities), private property, and commercial properties. The breakdown of law and order in the local areas also resulted in some civilians taking part in the looting.

In many of the areas covered by the investigation, Tigray Forces, with deliberate intent and in a carefully organized manner, pillaged medical equipment, machinery and other technological tools and transported them in vehicles apparently to the Tigray region. From hospitals and other health facilities in particular, medicine, equipment and other laboratory equipment, ambulances and other medical equipment were pillaged and transported.

In Afar and Amhara regions, a total of 2,409 health facilities including hospitals and health posts have ceased operation as a result of the destruction, damage and pillage they sustained. In addition, a total of 1,090 schools were fully destroyed while 3,220 sustained partial damage in both regions.

Financial institutions, in particular 18 commercial banks, sustained billions of birr worth loss due to looting and destruction on 346 branches.

In many of the areas covered by the investigation, Tigray Forces have looted day to day consumables such as food items and clothing, as well as other commercial goods in privately owned shops and/or residences, perishable food items, grains and cereals, electronic goods and others. They have shot and killed domestic and farm animals.

In parts of Amhara Region retaken from Tigray Forces, property owned by people of Tigray ethnic origin who fled the areas fearing for their safety and those owned by people suspected of collaborating with Tigray Forces, were looted by some residents and some members of government forces.

The war has caused a grave humanitarian crisis in Afar, Amhara and Tigray Regions, significantly increasing the level of humanitarian need. While it is apparent that the ongoing conflict in Afar Region has impeded humanitarian relief services into Tigray Region, administrative and bureaucratic criteria and processes by federal and regional governments have slowed and limited the humanitarian relief.

Children were killed, subjected to SGBV, physical and psychological injuries, as a direct result of acts of violence taken by parties to the conflict. Children were exposed to traumatic experiences such as witnessing the killing, physical injury to or rape of close family members. The destruction of health and education facilities has resulted in a violation of children's right to health and education. Beyond the social, economic, and psychological injuries, large-scale civilian displacement has denied children the protection they receive from their family members.

Persons with disability and older persons died, suffered physical and mental injury, as a result of violations committed by parties to the conflict. Older women were subjected to sexual violence by Tigray Forces. Older persons whose houses and property were destroyed suffered additional injury, trauma, and exposure to other socio-economic challenges, because they lost sources of financial support due to family members being killed or physically injured.

Persons with psychosocial disability were subjects of specific targeting by Tigray Forces. They were killed for reasons such as "being outside/watching when Tigray Forces marched into locations they came in control of, for moving around outside instituted curfew hours, for not being able to execute orders properly or for not being able to respond to questions correctly." Several persons with psychosocial disability were also killed on suspicion of "being government spies".

In the detailed conclusions and recommendations that the report forwards, EHRC has stated that the human rights and humanitarian law violations that have been committed in Afar, Amhara and parts of Tigray Region may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. It therefore called for an impartial and credible criminal investigation consistent with applicable international human rights standards to ensure accountability. EHRC has reiterated that ensuring accountability for all violations committed by all parties to the conflict lies primarily with the Government.

The widespread nature of the human rights violations detailed in the report and the large number of civilian populations affected also demonstrates that the task should not be left solely to the criminal justice apparatus. Accordingly, relevant national and international institutions should coordinate support to the Government in rehabilitation and resumption of health, education and other public facilities and services as well as relief services to IDPs and conflict affected populations.

Stating that national institutions and the international community do have a role to play to implement recommendations from both the JIT report and this latest report, EHRC Chief Commissioner Daniel Bekele said, "It is imperative for all parties to the conflict to take responsibility for the grave human rights violations committed by their members and leaders, and to deliver on their duty to ensure accountability. For victims and their families, this is the first unavoidable step." Daniel Bekele added that "parties to the conflict should without precondition commit to end hostilities to prevent further injury from this over fifteen months long war and find a political resolution to the conflict". He also called on all relevant authorities to immediately start the process of implementing the recommendations from the report.

Full Report (**Amharic only**) and Executive Summary (**Amharic**, **English**) linked here.

Report includes an **interactive map of the investigation's geographic coverage**.

Read the Amharic Press Release

Location Afar

Related posts

November 9, 2021 Video
ሺኦኤ አማርኛ – ከኮምሽነር ዳንኤል በቀለ ጋራ የተደረገ ቃለ ምልልስ

July 31, 2021 EHRC Quote
Afar & Somali regions: Loss of life & displacement

September 11, 2021 EHRC Quote
Tigray Region: Ensure uninterrupted and improved provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians

February 22, 2021 EHRC on the News
Restoring Humanitarian Access in Ethiopia

Signup for the Latest Update from EHRC

Submit your email to singup

Email Address

Submit

We are using cookies to give you the best experience on our website.
You can find out more about which cookies we are using or switch them off in settings.
Accept