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Yemane Zeray Mesfin Commissioner(CITG), Associate Professor

#### A Message from the Commissioner

The Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide (CITG) was officially established in May 2022, mandated by proclamation to investigate the comprehensive destruction caused by the genocidal war on Tigray. In line with this responsibility and its objectives, the commission has systematically documented and analyzed detailed data on human losses as well as infrastructural and material damages.

To highlight its tasks, the commission published a magazine called Tsinta (a Tigrigna word meaning genocide) in both Tigrigna and English in January 2024. In addition to showcasing the commission's work, the magazine played a key role in reaching the international community and raising awareness of the genocide committed in Tigray. Although the evidence featured in the magazine represents only the tip of the iceberg, its impact was evident when numerous media organizations and research institutes cited it.

Over the past year and a half, our commission has focused on three main activities, all of which are reflected in the magazine. The first and most important has been to gather organized data and prepare a report that meets international standards. This report, the Tigray War Damage, Loss, and Need Assessment Report (the T-DaNa Report), is primarily created for Tigray's rehabilitation and reconstruction purposes.

This project was inherently complex, influenced by significant political, technical, and financial factors. It required close collaboration with diverse partners, including the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Ethiopia's Ministry of Finance, and all public sectors

within Tigray. While this multi-stakeholder approach made the work time-consuming, the tireless efforts of the commission's experts, leadership, and partners ensured the final report was successfully delivered to relevant international organizations. Building on this foundational work, the Tigray Plan Commission has also completed a comprehensive five-year recovery and reconstruction plan for the region.

Second, the commission has been working to contribute to ensuring justice and accountability. We have collected hundreds of thousands of data points and prepared detailed case files to demonstrate the nature and depth of the atrocities committed. This information has been shared with international organizations and the media, which has not only ensured the crisis in Tigray remains in the public consciousness but has also helped it receive the attention it demands. A key part of this work was advocating for the inclusion of the Tigray Interim Administration and other Tigrayan bodies in the transitional justice process, which was initially being handled solely by the Ethiopian government.

The third function is to document and preserve the material history of the war for future generations. The mass graves where horrific massacres occurred, along with destroyed infrastructure, heritage sites, and institutions, must be preserved through documentation and in museums or memorials. To advance this goal, our commission has prepared a preservation guideline and conducted extensive discussions with governmental and non-governmental bodies on the matter. To further this work, the Commission organized Tigray Genocide Commemoration Forums in all regions in November and December 2024. This effort was strengthened by a series

of discussions with all Zonal and Woreda administrations, civil society representatives, and the public at large on the campaign we had in June.

In the coming months, we will complete the remaining tasks of data collection. The commission's primary focus will then shift to the publication of a comprehensive report that encapsulates the full extent of the genocide based on the data at our hand. Critically, we will work to establish a permanent government institution tasked with coordinating a region-wide effort to build memorials and museums in every Wereda. These sites will play a vital role in preserving the history of the genocide and ensuring the pursuit of justice.

A message to the people of Tigray at home and abroad, as we all know, the genocidal atrocities inflicted upon us were intended to exterminate us as a people. While this war caused devastating damage, the sacrifices of your children prevented that ultimate evil from succeeding. However, critical issues of displacement, justice, recovery, and peace remain unresolved. We believe these problems can be overcome if we confront the political obstacles that challenge our solidarity, set aside group interests, and strengthen our unity to focus on the primary cause. On behalf of the entire staff of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide, I affirm our unwavering commitment to playing our part in this vital work.

Never Again, Never Forget, The Tigray Genocide! Yemane Zeray Mesfin, Commissioner, Associate Professor





Five Summers. That's how long thousands of Tigrayan families have lived under plastic sheets, in exile, their lives torn apart by war. In refugee camps and displacement shelters, Tigrayans face not just the loss of home, but of dignity, health, and hope.

The genocidal war in Tigray has done more than destroy towns and claim lives; it has driven a people to the edge of erasure. The perpetrators of this genocide seek not just military victory, but the elimination of Tigrayans from their ancestral land. Their goal is uprooting, scattering, and silencing. What remains is a population trapped in exile, stripped of home and security, for five winters now, displaced Tigrayans have endured searing heat by day and freezing cold by night, confined to makeshift tents with no end in sight. Their suffering is relentless, an open wound the world has chosen to ignore.

In this article, we offered a glimpse into the agony of Tigrayan refugees and displaced persons. For their protection, the names of those who shared their stories have been changed.



#### Um Rakuba Refugee Camp, Sudan

Abrehat Hadgu, 57 fled her home in Setit Humora and now lives alone in Sudan's Um Rakuba refugee camp. Separated from her three children, she survives without support, trapped in fear and uncertainty.

"I never imagined I'd suffer like this at my age," she says. "Back in my village, I worked hard, sold goods, and made a decent living. Now I sleep on the ground. My back aches constantly. I thought I'd get care when I returned home, but that day hasn't come." Life in the camp, she says, is a daily fight for survival, scorching heat and wind in summer, storms and freezing rain in winter. Her pain is not hers alone. It mirrors the suffering of thousands of displaced Tigrayans, still waiting for safety, still longing for home.

Similarly, 78-year-old Hagos Zenebe now lives in a refugee camp after spending a lifetime in Adebay, Kafta Humera. When the genocidal war broke out, he was in Humera. In November 2020, he fled to Sudan through Hamdayet, leaving everything behind. "My wife and children were forcibly expelled to central Tigray. They didn't even have time to take their clothes." He recalls.



Now stranded in Um Rakuba camp with only one of his sons, Hagos describes the profound distress of family separation. "We live with constant anxiety and hardship," he says. He had hoped the Pretoria Agreement would open the path home, but that hope remains unmet. He narrates, "They didn't even have time to grab clothes," he recalls. "My wife and children were expelled to central Tigray. We were ripped apart."

We had a farm, livestock, and a home. We still hope to return someday, but exile has taken its toll. I developed chronic diabetes. Illness spreads here, medicine is scarce, and the suffering is deep. Without caretakers, survival becomes a struggle. We're fighting sickness and despair every day. Yet despite everything, we remain grateful to the Sudanese people and their government for giving us refuge.

Um Rakuba Refugee Camp shelters thousands of Tigrayan refugees who have fled to Sudan. Yet, even in exile, safety remains out of reach, endangered not only by the hardships of displacement but also by recurring natural and man-made disasters. Devastating fires have claimed the lives of children and reduced countless shelters to ashes, leaving survivors in an even more precarious situation.



Tigrayans crossing the Tekezze River to migrate to Sudan (Photo, Nariman El-Mofty, AP)



Tigrayan Refugees in Um Rakuba Refugee Camp, Sudan (Photo, Ebrahim Hamid)

#### Adulis IDP Shelter, Aksum

Senait Solomon, 30, was displaced from Sebeta in 2020 amid targeted attacks against Tigrayans across Ethiopia. She and her husband fled to Tigray and eventually settled in a refugee camp in Adwa.

In 2022, while pregnant, Senait travelled to visit her family in the nearby village of Mariam Shewito. During her stay, Eritrean soldiers stormed her husband's family home. They forcibly took her husband and his father.



Adolice IDPs Center, Axum (Photo: Batseba Seifu)

"I begged them to tell me where they were taking them," she recalls. All they said was, 'We will not kill them,' and threatened her into silence.

The night of the 20th was a night of horror for Senait. "They bound them barefoot, leaving their feet exposed" she recalls, her voice trembling. "We went to where they were tied and begged to know why this was happening. But that same night, they killed them."

Senait, now a widowed mother of four, was forced to split her family apart. Two of her children live with her parents; she remains in Adwa with the other two. Her second daughter suffers from deep trauma, panicking at the sight of armed men.

"The Eritrean army massacred so many in Mariam Shewito," Senait says. "I saw nineteen bodies with my own eyes, all killed by Eritrean troops."

The memories still torment her.

"It tortures me to remember. I ask my self, Would it have been better if I hadn't seen the bodies?

The psychological wounds are deep and unrelenting. Senait now carries the double burden of grief and separation, mourning her husband's murder while trying to keep her fractured family alive inside a refugee camp.

#### Nigiste Saba IDPs, Adwa

Berhan Yemane, a Tigrayan woman from Maygaba in Wolkait Woreda, once earned her living raising cattle and running tea houses. But on November 11, 2020, everything changed. Pregnant and under threat, she was forced to flee, eventually finding refuge in Aksum.

"Life as a displaced person is barely survivable," she says. Berhan describes camp life as a constant battle for survival.

"When it rains, our suffering gets worse. The latrines overflow. Our sun-bleached tents leak through wide tears. At night, we sleep in fear. As the saying goes, 'sleep and death are brothers.' You never know who might slash through your tent before dawn."

With no fences around the compound, she says, everyone is exposed. Medical care is almost non-existent. As a result, hypertension, diabetes, and tuberculosis are widespread among displaced families.

The architects of the Tigray genocide have executed a calculated strategy: exterminate those who remain, and displace those who survive. It is a campaign not just of war, but of erasure.

Today, the survivors live in camps stripped of safety, dignity, and stability. They face crushing poverty, illness, and psychological scars that do not fade. Many watched loved ones being slaughtered. Many fled mass atrocities only to end up in shelters unfit for human life. Others disappeared into exile, torn from their homes, their families, and their identity.

This is prolonged suffering, imposed in silence.



1DPs center in Adwa Town (photo: Ximina Borrazas)

Tigrayans living as refugees and internally displaced persons are not just survivors of genocide, they are victims of a continuing crisis. Instead of healing from unthinkable trauma, they face new layers of suffering: hunger, illness, instability, and the psychological toll of prolonged exile.

The Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide has documented these crimes across more than 120 displacement sites, systematically recording the atrocities committed against Tigrayans, both before and after their displacement.

This cannot continue: We urgently call for concerted international action to,

Ensure the safe and dignified return of all displaced and refugee Tigrayans to their homes. Guarantee their protection.

Address, without delay, the long-ignored question of the welfare and rights of the Tigrayan people.

Silence is complicity. Time to act is now.

## **Abandoned lives in Hitsats IDP camp**

Hitsats IDP camp is located at the entry to Hitsats area in Asgede Wereda, Northwestern Tigray. The sun here is so unbearable that residents spend their days napping under the shade of large trees, using plastic bedding or their own clothes for cover. The camp is now home to over 4,625 displaced households.

The IDPs are grouped into seven sections based on their wereda of origin. While most are from Western Tigray, others have come from Northwestern Tigray, various regional states of Ethiopia, and Sudan. Currently, households that have not yet received any assistance are in dire need. Shelters are constructed from little more than torn plastic covers.

Slightly removed from the main camp, a group of over 76 particularly vulnerable individuals, including the elderly, women, and unaccompanied or separated children, has been identified.

According to Mrs. Letebrhan Tensay, a volunteer caretaker and coordinator for IDPs from Maikadra, this group has been deemed ineligible for aid. They were informed that because they cannot make the nearly 20-minute walk to the main camp for registration, they cannot receive assistance.

The consequences are severe. To date, 325 people in the Hitsats camp have died, primarily from food and medical shortages. The precarious shelters have also led to tragedy, one girl was killed and two others were injured in two separate collapses. In desperation, countless youth have migrated from the camp to Arab countries.

"The number of IDPs is still rising in this highly concentrated camp, as the flow of IDPs has not stopped yet," said Keshi Kahsay Abreha, the IDP coordinator, in an interview in April 2025. Camp coordinators report that 121 IDPs recently arrived from Sudan, underscoring the ongoing influx.

Displaced persons in Hitsats endure an insecure life in a crowded, vulnerable camp, seeking shelter from the unbearable sun inside flimsy, partially collapsed structures. The population includes numerous vulnerable groups: unaccompanied minors, pregnant or lactating women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, those with medical emergencies, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), newly arrived families, and those separated from their loved ones.





Remains of Tigrayans, washed away by floodwaters from mass graves in Abala, Afar region.

Abala (formerly Shiket) town, located in Kilbet Rasu (Administrative Zone 2) of the Afar Region, lies approximately 50 km from the city of Mekelle. Originally known as Shiket, the town earned its name due to its strong historical ties with the Tigrayan community, which was once made up about 70 percent of its population. It was previously administered under the Tigray

regional state and served as a home to over 70,000 Tigrayans before the outbreak of the genocidal war in November 2020.

For centuries, Tigrayans lived in harmony and mutual respect with the Afar people in Abala. They built homes, established thriving businesses, opened schools, and constructed churches; laying deep roots in the town's social and economic fabric. However, following the outbreak of the genocidal war against Tigray, this long-standing coexistence was violently disrupted. Everything the Tigrayan community had built was destroyed, leaving behind a town stripped of its shared history and once vibrant spirit.

The brutal atrocities inflicted upon Tigrayans across other regions of Ethiopia were equally carried out in Abala town. All properties belonging to Tigrayans were systematically destroyed, and any visible signs of their settlements were erased. Afar militants marked Tigrayan homes with the words "Christian house" in large, bold letters, then went from house to house, mercilessly massacring Tigrayans found in the streets and business establishments. In addition to the violence against people, they ruthlessly looted and demolished all property and wealth belonging to the Tigrayan community.

#### Where?! And What happened?!

After making preparations on December 17 and 18, Afar militants and their allies officially launched the massacre on December 19, 2021; They carried out massive and coordinated massacres against Tigrayans for five consecutive days. They continued their relentless attacks by killing, raping women, burning and destroying their property.

On April 22, 2022, an investigation team comprising human rights violations researchers and audio-visual experts from the Commission of inquiry on Tigray Genocide traveled to Abala town. The purpose of the campaign was to collect and document data from eyewitness accounts and testimonies, to take photographs of mass graves, remains, and destructions. Although it is not possible to list all the mind-boggling atrocities committed against Tigrayans



The inscription "A Christian Home" on this door identifies the residents as Tigrayan Christians, who are targeted by armed groups.

resides in Abala Town, let us present it in a few excerpts of the investigation that the team recorded in Abala (Shiket).

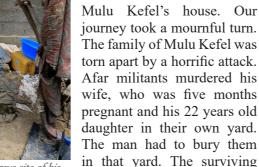
On our first investigation trip, we saw the mass graves of four people who had been killed on the side of the road in a place called Mergua (Angole). Next, we found a grave of an elderly man in his house. The old man was brutally murdered in the yard of his house. This is located in a place called Hidmo. There was a Hidmo Primary School where only Tigrayan students attended, now this school is completely burnt down and destroyed.

During our travel, we saw a one-man grave in the street of city center. Then, we found a mass grave containing five bodies. Further along our route, we discovered another mass grave holding 10 bodies in a place called Adi Haremeni. We heard that there is a school called Haremeni in this area. Our journey then took us to Haremeni School. There, on the school compound, we found a mass grave containing 16 bodies. Driven by a pressing need to document the evidences of further sites of massacres, we worked swiftly, we were in a relentless hurry to finish our documentation quickly as the flames of the sun beat down on us.

In Abala, there is a disposal site for the city's accumulated waste called Iqa. The Iqa disposal site, intended for waste, became a site of tragedy. Eye witnesses recounted that over 145 Tigrayans were buried there, their bodies mixed with the city's discarded garbage. Our search led us to multiple sites. In a place called under China Camp, we found a mass grave containing eight bodies. Near Berhanu Adhanom house, we saw a grave holding three, we observed two graves containing four bodies together with a man named Abrha Berhe.

The toll of the violence was evident across many locations in Abala. Three men were massacred and buried in a place called Dinemel. Two others were interred in a place called Siga Bord. Twentyone others lay in a mass grave in a farm area called Sherifoy. Eye witnesses recounted many more burials near, but those graves were swept away by floodwaters. Scattered human remains were also visible across various sites. The investigation team had captured in images and videos for documentation.

We went to places and sites we thought 'should not be left' and continued our investigation and documentation. We arrived at





Ato Mulu's residence, now the grave site of his wife and daughter.



Grave site of four victims killed on the roadside.



The destroyed Debre Michael church in Abala, formerly serving the local Tigrayan community.

daughters endured more suffering as their second daughter aged eight, initially survived the killing was admitted to Ayder Comprehensive specialized Hospital in Mekelle city but she later died. His third daughter was also shot five times in the hand, now lives with a paralyzed hand. The father, Mulu Kefel, is in bitter grief, and is currently living in Quiha sub city IDPs centers.

Our investigation uncovered further evidence of the deliberate targeting of families. Atsbeha Woldu, a resident of Asal Kebele were victims of this calculated cruelty, Atsbeha along with his five children were brutally murdered.

Witnesses accounted a series of targeted violence and horrific acts. Approximately 47 Tigrayan health workers, serving the entire



Renains of Tigrayan Victims in Abeala

residents of Abala town, were killed by drones in Erbtu woreda while being transported by Afar forces and their allies. In addition, there was also cases where a teacher was hunted down by his student, and a businessman was murdered by his employee.

The entire Tigrayan community of Abala town has suffered catastrophic loss. Homes and businesses have been systematically destroyed and looted, leaving a landscape of ruin. The streets in Abala were covered with the debris. Broken objects, electronics, metals and torn clothing were scattered everywhere in the streets.

The churches were not spared the ravages of the horrific attack. Religious institutions belonging to Tigrayan were also targeted. Heading to St. Michael's Church, the church was completely destroyed and its sacred objects stolen. St. Mary's Church suffered severe damage from heavy weapons, the windshield was shattered and the interior was completely burned. In the same way, The Trinity Church was similarly burned and destroyed.

While The Commission of Inquiry team gathering the data, eyewitnesses who miraculously survived the massacre helped us to get a lot of information and evidence.

On December 2021, during a five-days period, the town of Abala and surrounding areas witnessed widespread violence. Places including Gra G/Medhin Niguse, Mashgula, Sga Board, Dinemeli, May Awala, Ksad Deba, Sherifoy, Asalel, Hidmo, Mergu, Adi Taliyan, Under China Camp, Iqa, Haremeni, and other unnamed locations were subjected to the attacks. Eyewitnesses estimated over 600 civilians Tigrayans were brutally massacred often with weapons locally known as 'gilen' (Afar's locally used knife), reinforcement bars and bullets. The names and data of about 450 victims are documented in the commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide.

Even as the massacre targeted Tigrayan ethnic, acts of compassion emerged. Thousands of Afar natives who recognize the enduring bonds of friendship between the Tigrayan and Afar communities risked their own safety to shelter and help thousands of Tigrayans escape the killings, they hide and guided them to flee to Quiha sub city nearest to Abala town. The number of victims could be much higher than the current estimation.

We headed back to Mekelle echoing the horrors we had documented and reflecting on what we had seen and experienced. It was disheartening to see that the once bustling town of Abala now resembled a deserted and frightening ghost town. Everywhere we looked, devastation surrounded us, We were haunted by the images we had documented.

The extent of suffering endured by Tigrayans targeted in Abala for their identity is beyond the scope of this account. Members of our investigation team also faced health challenges as a result of their data collection work in Abala town. Some of them required medical care. Such massacres will never be forgotten and should not be repeated again in the future.



#### The Deliberate Destruction of Kisad Gaba's Water Supply

During the war on Tigray, Ethiopian, Amhara, and Eritrean forces systematically targeted critical civilian infrastructure, including schools, health centers, and water supply systems. These attacks were not accidental but part of a deliberate strategy to inflict maximum suffering on the Tigrayan population. One documented case among others is the complete destruction of the water supply system in Kisad Gaba, a village located about 20 k.m northwest of Shire in the Northwestern Zone of Tigray. Constructed at a cost of 21 million ETB, the Kisad Gaba water

project was completed and operational by August 2020, providing clean water to over 7,500 people. However, just three months later, Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) occupied the area and deliberately destroyed the entire system. They looted and burned electromechanical equipment; including pumps, motors, and generators; and converted the water treatment plant into a military fort. The total damage is estimated at over 65 million ETB, with an additional 5.5 million ETB in losses from looted construction equipment belonging to the contractor.

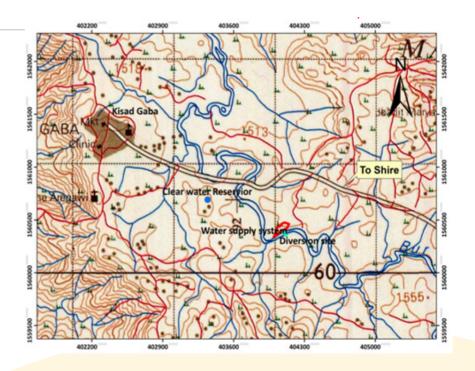
According to informants, the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) deliberately destroyed Kisad Gaba's water infrastructure during January and February 2021, a period when no active war occurred in the area, which was fully under Eritrean military control.

One key eyewitness, a hotel owner whose property was occupied by EDF troops for nearly a month after the town's capture, confirmed that three Eritrean commanders stationed in the area directly ordered the complete destruction of the water treatment and supply system.

The EDF's actions were accompanied by explicit threats and genocidal rhetoric. Soldiers declared, "You and the land now belong to Eritrea," and vowed to destroy not only the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) but also Tigrayan civilians and infrastructure. They even taunted residents by singing in Tigrinya, "ከሳድ ጋባ ዋሪምቲያ ከንመወከ.

አ.ና ንዓመታ ጥቅምቲየ" translated as "Kisad Gaba, our beautiful place, we will come back next November," signalling their intent to maintain control.

The consequences have been tragic. Without access to clean water, Kisad Gaba's residents are forced to drink untreated surface and groundwater, leading to outbreaks of deadly waterborne diseases. The destruction of this vital infrastructure reflects a broader pattern of atrocities designed to collectively punish Tigrayans.



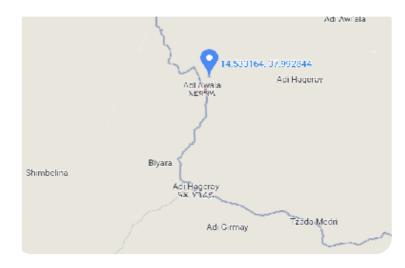
The targeting of Kisad Gaba's water supply was not an isolated incident but part of a coordinated campaign to deprive Tigrayans of basic survival resources.

# Massacre of children and women in Adi-Awala , Central Adyabo

On September 30, 2022, during one of the most intense phases of the Tigray War, members of the Eritrean army came to a small village called Habela in the central Adiyabo sub-district of Adi-Awala. On the day, 33 women, including two men, fled their homes with their children after being shocked by gunfire in the distance. Fearing that staying at home would put their lives in danger, the mothers and daughters hid in the house of a farmer, whose name we will keep confidential. One of the men with the women was an 85-year-old man, and the other was a 65-year-old blind man.

The distant sounds of war left the women anxious and unsettled. To calm themselves, they decided to brew a pot of coffee. But just as one of them was about to serve it, she heard the voices of soldiers outside. It was about 7:00 AM. The members of the Eritrean army were searching house to house. The soldiers soon reached the very house where the women had taken refuge, just as they had feared. Similar to other villagers who managed to flee, the homeowner had taken shelter in the forest.

When the Eritrean soldiers found the women, they ordered them out of the house and searched. For several minutes, the soldiers inspected them, attempting to determine whether they and the two elderly men with them were civilians. Despite their pleas and visible vulnerability, the soldiers issued threats and instructed them to return inside. Believing the danger had passed, the women



reassured each other, saying, "They saw we are just women with children, they've left us." With cautious relief, they went back into the house, thinking the soldiers had moved on. Everything fell silent. The soldiers appeared to have left. But, they were lying in wait. Moments later, Selam Tadesse, a 22-year-old mother, opened the door wide, holding her baby in her arms, ready to escape. The others followed quickly behind her. But as they reached the doorway, they were met with a horrifying sight: Eritrean soldiers had surrounded the house, their guns pointed at them.

Without giving them time to retreat, the soldiers opened fire. The 8-month-old baby was the first to be killed, still cradled in her mother's arms. Her mother was shot immediately after. Gunfire tore through the house from every direction. When the soldiers believed they had killed all the women in the house, they stopped firing, but the damage had already been devastating.

Inside the house, thick with smoke and the heavy scent of death, the surviving women lay still, hiding beneath the fallen bodies. Everything was quiet. Once the soldiers were convinced that everyone inside was dead, they departed from the farmer's yard.

Ten of the 33 women in the house died at once, while one injured woman died a day later due to lack of medical treatment.

The women who miraculously survived the massacre lacked the strength to carry all eleven bodies, though they longed to give them a proper burial in the nearby cemetery. They only managed to drag the bodies to the farmer's yard, burying six bodies there while five remained unburied inside the house for nine days. Victims were denied a proper funeral for three months. However, eight of those massacred were laid to rest at St. Mariam Church and three at St. Gabriel Church. None of the survivors escaped unharmed. Eight encountered serious injuries. With no medical care available at the time, the survivors were forced to treat their wounds using only salt and water.

One of the survivors said "They saw that we were civilians. They searched the house thoroughly. Some of the soldiers shouted, 'Stop! Leave the women and children alone!' But others argued,

'No, beat them! Finish them off. Lock them inside and kill them! They must have been feeding the Tigray forces. Who else would be fighting us if not them?'

The witnesses told us that when they went out and saw the village, they saw widespread destruction and many farmers' houses had been burned down and destroyed. In particular, the houses of three farmers were destroyed, and burnt to the ground. Livestock had been targeted. From the village alone, 145 goats of the farmers were slaughtered by the Eritrean army that day alone.

December 2023. Despite the Pretoria Agreement being signed a year ago, witnesses report that the abduction of innocent Tigrayans continues. With persistent threats facing civilians, this interview had to be conducted in secret in the town of Adi Hageray. A farmer who witnessed the massacre in his house shared the following testimony,

"Our environment is not safe... it's been three, almost four years now without security. This community is constantly at risk. There's hunger, there are so many problems. How can people survive when they haven't farmed in all this time? The situation is critical. The Eritrean army is still active in our area. It's not a place where anyone can feel safe. There is still no protection for Tigrayans in Adi-Awala. The same Eritrean forces that committed

the massacres continue to operate here."

the Silent Genocide facing Tigrayan IDPs.

Suffering, Hunger, Disease, and Death-





# Aster's Story

#### A Story of Hatred, Violence, and Survival

Aster is a young Tigrayan woman living outside Tigray in Ethiopia. In the regional area where she resides, she is married to a local government worker from the same region. A successful businesswoman, Aster leads a comfortable life despite experiencing sexual harassment from a persistent admirer at her workplace. He keeps pressing her for marriage even after she told him she was already married.

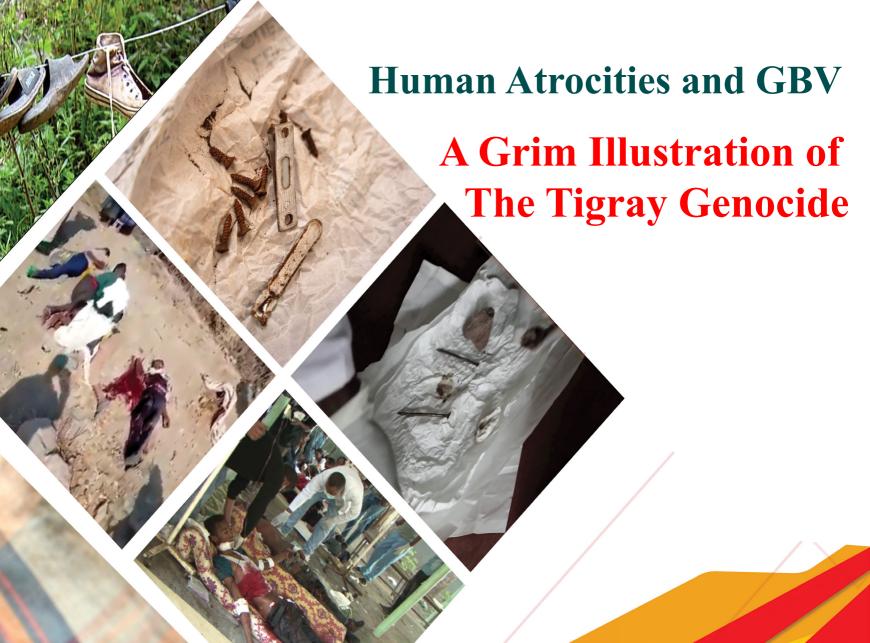
The year 2018 brought hardship for Tigrayans across Ethiopia, including Aster's region. They faced torture, imprisonment, and even death solely because of their Tigrayan identity. Aster also became a victim. Her business warehouse was raided just for being Tigrayan. Exploiting government-backed human rights abuses against Tigrayans, the man who had been pursuing her then assaulted her. She fell ill but recovered with proper medical care. Aster was deeply shaken by the racially motivated injustice inflicted on Tigrayans in the region and on her.

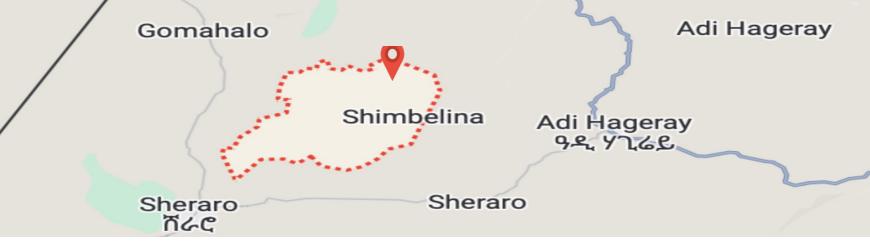
After relocating to Tigray, Esther settled in a small town. Soon, war erupted, and the town fell to enemy forces. On December 14, 2020, three Eritrean soldiers entered her home, demanding bread and water. One of them carried a dead snake coiled around his hand. Startled, Aster bent to fill a jerrycan with water when one of

the soldiers kicked her to the ground. Realizing their intent to rape her, she protested, claiming she was HIV positive. Disregarding her plea, the soldier raped her. She then lost consciousness when the second soldier raped her and has no memory of what transpired afterward. A young neighbor, discovered her door open and found her lying on the floor. He tried to help her up, prompting her to regain consciousness and cry out. Attempting to rise, she reached into her vagina and, to her horror, found the dead snake from the soldier's hand lodged inside. She recoiled in shock, pulling it out. This act, she says, triggered significant mental distress.

She has since suffered profound physical and psychological trauma from the abuse. Aster endures severe pain and uterine contractions and is undergoing continuous medical treatment. She reports that her menstrual cycle ceased after the rape. The incident constantly replays in her mind, causing dizziness and sickness. She experiences moments of imbalance and falls. Though she removed the dead snake from her womb, Aster continues to experience phantom sensations of movement inside her. As a result, she is prescribed medication to manage the resulting psychological trauma. Fearful of social isolation and stigma, Aster confides that she has only discussed this ordeal with healthcare professionals.







### Shembelina: A Land Stained with Tigrayan Blood

The genocidal war on Tigray has devastated communities across the region, leaving behind a trail of mass killings, displacement, and destruction. Shembelina, a peaceful kebele in the Northwest zone, remains a solemn reminder of the atrocities carried out during this dark chapter in history. Once home to harmonious Tigrayan and Kunama communities, Shembelina became the site of brutal massacres and systematic violence by the Eritrean Defense Force. This article draws on firsthand accounts and findings by the Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide's to document the tragic events and honor the memory of those who were lost. For the safety of eyewitnesses, we will not disclose their names or used pseudonames.

September 7, 2022, was a significant and tragic day in Shembelina Kebele, located in Thtay Adiyabo Woreda. On that morning, the Eritrean Defense Force entered the village. According to eyewitnesses, on the 9th, the army started going from house rounding up residents who were native to the Kunama ethnic group

and Tigrinya speakers. Those detained were gathered and taken to a location in the center of the village where they were executed inhumanly. On that day alone, 16 civilians lost their lives.

An eyewitness who witnessed the massacre while hiding in a Crop field reported that the victims were massacred using firearms and that all of them died instantly. According to the witness, the individuals who were massacred were peaceful farmers with no involvement in the conflict. Describing the events, the eyewitness stated, "We started fleeing when the EDF came to our area and started gathering people from their houses. Those killed were civilians who were not involved in the war. The EDF took them to a place called Enda Chguno and killed them."

The eyewitness said the soldiers in the area did not allow the bodies of the victims to be buried. Two months later, their bones were collected and they were given a formal burial. Residents who fled their homes at the time were also prevented from returning to their homes by the Eritrean army that invaded the

area and so they returned two months later when the troops left the area.

Another resident of Shembelina, Hagos, who lost his father on September 7, 2022, said the Eritrean army went to the residence of his father, priest Gebreselam, and brutally killed him. "We were all running away from the area to save our lives" said Hagos. "My father was a priest and a farmer. After hearing that the Eritrean army had left the village. We returned. I found my father beheaded and burned. His body was eaten by hynas and dogs. I found his bones scattered. I could only tell he was my father by the clothes he was wearing and the cross he was holding." After the tragedy, Hagos and two friends buried his father's remaining burnt bones in the yard of their house. In December 2022, they were dug out of their home yard and laid to rest at the local St. Michael's Church.

The witnesses said the perpetrators of the massacre were members of the EDF who had been stationed in the area for a long time. And wore EDF uniforms. He said victims like priest Gebreselam were innocent Tigrayans who had nothing to do with the war.

At the same time, two brothers who were neighbors of priest Gebreselam were taken away by the EDF for investigation and brutally murdered. Despite their mother's desperate plea for the lives of both of her sons, they were executed. Shembelina has been the site of severe human rights violations, including mass killings, acts of torture, destruction of property, and forced closures. Shembelina is the site of the most difficult to describe mass murders, torture, destruction of property and closures.

This was not the only innocent bloodshed in Shembelina. On September 15, 2022, another massacre took place. The EDF brutally massacred 13 innocent ethnic Kunama and Tigrayan residents of Shembelina in Adi Selam and denied a proper burial. Their bodies were left to decompose and be consumed by animals

for months. Two months later, their remains were recovered by community members, who identified them through their clothing and personal belongings, such as bowls, before finally laying them to rest.

Eyewitnesses say Eritreans who were born and raised in the area and who later joined the EDF were the main actors in the September 15 massacre. The members of the Eritrean army said, "We cannot live in peace unless we cleanse the Tigrayans" eyewitnesses told the Commission of Inquiry on Tigray Genocide's investigators.

The witnesses we asked about the terms used by the Eritrean troops. They were using insults such as "Kondaf Agame", a derogatory language used to shame Tigrayans. They said they were also carrying out orders to kill Tigrayans from general Simon Eqube, nicknamed "R'esi Mirakh".

Beyond the horrific massacres of civilians, the EDF also inflicted widespread destruction on both private and public property, deliberately obstructing humanitarian aid and exposing residents to death, disease, and prolonged suffering. Shembelina stands as a tragic symbol of the relentless violence unleashed by the Eritrean Defense Forces, where residents were hunted and slaughtered over the course of days.

The genocide in Tigray has been marked by indiscriminate atrocities, targeting all ethnic groups in the region. Among the most vulnerable are the minority Kunama and Irob communities, who continue to face severe and systematic violations of their basic human rights. It is our collective responsibility to stand against these atrocities and work tirelessly to end the killings, kidnappings, torture, and ongoing injustices committed in the shadows of silence.

### Ximena Borrazá: A Voice for the Unheard, A witness" to the Forgotten



In a world where the suffering of the marginalized is too often ignored, one woman chose not to look away. Ximena Borrazás, an award-winning journalist and photo documentarian born in Montevideo, Uruguay, now based in Barcelona, Spain, has spent her career chronicling humanity's darkest hours armed conflicts, mass displacement, and human rights abuses. Her camera is more than a tool; it is a weapon against silence, a voice for those the world has forgotten.

Ximena's work has appeared in some of the world's most respected media outlets such as National Geographic, The Guardian, BBC, CNN, DW, Le Monde, and Al Jazeera. Her exhibitions, displayed by institutions like UNESCO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), serve not only as art but as testimony. She is a journalist who doesn't simply report; she amplifies the cries of the unheard.

#### When the World Looked Away, She Came to Tigray

When the genocidal war against Tigray erupted, Ximena followed closely from afar. She watched in horror as reports of massacres, rape, displacement, and starvation emerged crimes committed under the guise of a so-called "law enforcement operation" by the Ethiopian



federal government, backed by Eritrean forces and allied militias. Tens of thousands of civilians were slaughtered. Women were systematically raped. Families were driven from their homes into overcrowded camps, where starvation and disease awaited them.

Yet, the world's media remained largely silent. For Ximena, the silence was intolerable.

Despite rejection from multiple media outlets unwilling to fund the trip, Ximena and her colleague, photographer Edgar Gutiérrez, made a bold decision. "No one wanted to assign us to cover Tigray," "But we are stubborn. We went anyway. And it was the best decision we could have made." she tweeted.

In August 2023, she arrived in Tigrayr isking not only her safety but also her careerto document what the world refused to see.

Bearing Witness to the Unthinkable

Ximena's reporting from Tigray was relentless and courageous. She visited some of the most devastated cities Mekelle, Adwa, Aksum, Abyi-Adi, and Samre entering hospitals, IDP camps, and mass grave sites.

She interviewed dozens of survivors women subjected to unimaginable sexual violence, children scarred by war, and elders whose entire families had been wiped out. She listened as women described being raped with objects nails, metal rods, and rifle barrels leaving them permanently injured. She heard the

stories of mothers whose husbands and children were slaughtered before their eyes.

Her photo essay, published by The Guardian under the headline "A ceasefire in Tigray, but in the displaced peoples' camps, the suffering goes on" (August 7, 2023), pulled back the curtain on a genocide the world wanted to forget. Her images were raw, intimate, and impossible to ignore.

More than a Journalist-An Advocate for Justice

Ximena's commitment went beyond documentation. She collaborated closely with the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide, gathering critical data and visiting massacre sites, hospitals, and IDP camps under their guidance.

Her investigations culminated in powerful reports featured on Deutsche Welle (DW) and other global platforms. Through infographics, video documentaries, and relentless social media advocacy, Ximena painted a vivid picture of the humanitarian catastrophe in Tigray the starvation, the medical collapse, the ongoing sexual violence, and the psychological scars that may never heal.

Her voice reached beyond Europe. Major Latin American outlets like TN International (Argentina) invited her to share firsthand

testimonies of the genocide. In every interview, every article, and every post, she centered the voices of survivors, refusing to let the suffering of Tigray fade into silence.

Ximena didn't stop at raising awareness. She mobilized tangible support. Using her social media platforms, she organized fundraising campaigns to assist the most vulnerable. With funds raised, she donated 33,600 ETB to the One-Stop Center at Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Hospital in Mekelle, which provides treatment and rehabilitation for survivors of sexual violence.

In recognition of her solidarity and humanitarian contribution, Mekelle University, College of Health Sciences, awarded her a Certificate of Appreciation on May 24, 2024 a rare honor for a foreign journalist. Together with her photographer colleague, Edgar Gutiérrez, and the Basque NGO EGOAIZIA, along with their local partner 4YBIN, they launched a project called HAFTEY when she was there in Tigray this year (2025). As part of the project Ximena together with her colleagues be able raised €20,000 to support 12



Ximena in an interview with TN International TV (Argentina)

women survivors of sexual violence for 12 months. And, this project is believed to be a pilot project, which means that there is a hope that with the results we obtain, it can continue and raise more money to help more women the severely victimized women.

Her courage did not go unnoticed. Ximena received the prestigious "Tom Stoddart Award for Excellence" and the 2024 Gentex Corporation Personal Safety Award, recognizing her fearless work documenting the Tigray genocide.

Yet, with her growing visibility came an ugly backlash. Ethiopian and Eritrean extremists who deny the genocide launched a coordinated harassment campaign against her threats, online abuse, and misogynistic attacks aimed at silencing her. Human rights organizations like the Coalition for Women in Journalism



Ximena during the "Tom Stoddart Award for Excellence" and the 2024 Gentex Corporation Personal Safety Award ceremony presenting Tigray Cases.

(CFWIJ) quickly condemned the harassment, standing firmly by her side.

But Ximena did not flinch. In her own words, "Many thanks to all the @ianparrygrant judges and Gentex Corp for these awards. I feel honored to receive them and privileged to have the opportunity and support to continue my documentary work in Tigray."

Despite the Pretoria Agreement, Ximena continues to report that the genocide persists only now it hides behind the veil of ceasefire and political theater. She documents ongoing deaths from famine, lack of medicine, and systemic neglect, exposing how Eritrean forces and others continue to plunder, terrorize, and kill in occupied regions.

Her photographs are not just pictures. They are evidence. Her reports are not just stories. They are indictments. Her voice is not just journalism. It is a rallying cry for justice.

In a time when truth is often the first casualty of war, Ximena Borrazás chose truth. She chose the side of the voiceless. She chose Tigray.

"Thank you, Ximena, for refusing to look away. Thank you for being the voice for those whose screams were drowned in silence." አብ ትግራይ፣ ዘይተነገረ'ምበር ዘይተፈፀመ ነገር የለን።



# When Faith Becomes a Tool of Destruction: The Role of Religion in Fuelling the Tigray Genocide

It is widely recognized that theological principles differ across faiths. Yet, a common thread unites most religions: the consistent preaching of love and peace as foundational values. In countries like Ethiopia, where religion holds significant societal influence, believers often uphold religious directives with unwavering commitment even at great personal cost.

Historically, there has been an understanding among religious communities in Ethiopia that followers of different faiths should coexist with mutual respect, love, and support. However, this long-standing interfaith harmony has been increasingly challenged. Despite these tensions, all faiths, to varying degrees, supported the war and became instruments of the government's campaign.

In recent years, the principle of secularism clearly articulated in Ethiopia's constitution as a separation between religion and state has been systematically eroded. The government has begun to interfere in religious affairs, while religious leaders have become entangled in political matters. Each is stepping beyond its designated domain. This mutual encroachment has enabled the state to exploit religious institutions as instruments of political control and violence. Shockingly, this includes inciting and legitimizing atrocities through the support and complicity of religious leaders.



Monks joined the Ethiopian Defence Force (ENDF) in a war front.

The Ethiopian government's involvement in the genocidal war in Tigray is well-documented, with both public and private institutions playing a role. Institutions of higher learningtraditionally spaces for independent research and critical thoughthave been tragically complicit. From providing financial support and allowing campuses to serve as military training grounds, to coercing students into military service and threatening dissenters with academic sanctions, these institutions have strayed far from their educational mission.

This article, however, focuses specifically on the troubling role of religious institutions and leaders in this context. Rather than standing against the atrocities in Tigray, many religious figures abandoned their spiritual principles and actively contributed to the devastation. Through hate-filled sermons and war-mongering rhetoric, they have fuelled ethnic animosity and dehumanization. Their influence helped justify and perpetuate atrocities such as mass killings, the widespread rape of women in ways that defy both cultural and religious norms, the damage of churches, the imprisonment and expulsion of innocents, the destruction of infrastructure, and the deliberate withholding of food, medical supplies, and total blockage access to banking and communications in the region for years.

In this genocidal war, religion institutions were not merely passive bystanders they were actively weaponized. Religious narratives were twisted to cast the war as a "battle for survival." Religious institutions provided logistical support to military forces, voiced solidarity with perpetrators, denied documented crimes, and suppressed those who opposed this atrocity.

Religious leaders publicly endorsed the war with disturbing zeal. Pastor Bekele weldekidan, preaching in a crowded hall, declared the war is "just" and described it as "God's judgment." Another pastor claimed that "God will support the Prime Minister even if anyone from any side opposed him." Several pastors provoke their believers to support the prime minister and Prosperity party during the genocidal war. Abba Hitsan is one of the proponent fathers who profoundly support the Ethiopian government while committing genocide against Tigraians. He proclaimed that he left his clerical

duties to join the battlefield out of admiration for the Prime Minister's determination. In media interviews, he stated that he used his personal vehicle to transport soldiers and provided support through prayer, logistics, and more. "We arrived at the frontlines voluntarily, without anyone asking us to do so... From now on, all bishops should march." Said Aba Hitsan. The government has capitalized on these actions for propaganda purposes, using religious leaders to advance its destructive objectives.

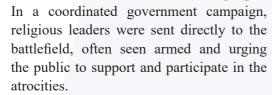
Perhaps most disturbingly, Abba Gebremariam Aderaw told the BBC, "I fight with both of them the prayer and the bullet" a chilling encapsulation of the fusion between faith and violence that has come to characterize this dark chapter in Ethiopian history.

The genocidal war in Tigray severely tested Ethiopia's religious institutions, casting doubt on their commitment to treating all followers equally, irrespective of ethnicity or identity. Religious organizations, including their teachings, were weaponized by the government to support the political agenda and actions of the ruling regime.

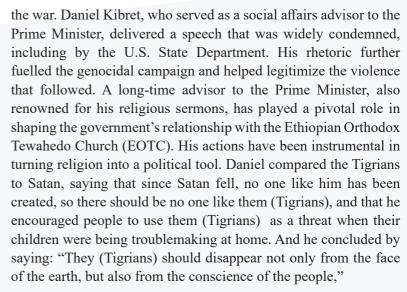
Many Ethiopian religious leaders played a significant role in transforming the Tigray genocide into a "spiritual war." Apostle Zelalem Getachew, known for labelling Tigryans as 'Tsegure liwit - 67-2 AD-T' literally meaning 'unknown dangerous aliens' was exponent figure in encouraging Tegaru's persecution. In addition to explaining the meaning of "Tsegure liwit" (67-2 AD-T) to the Prime Minister, Apostle Zelalem Getachew also emphasized that "everyone should report these "Tesgure liwit' to the police." He suggested that those he referred to as "them for Tegaru" should

be targeted due to their identity. Such toxic namings provokes Tigrians to be hunted, arrested, and killed for their identity, while some religious leaders often played a pivotal role in justifying these actions.

As a result, religious leaders were forced to compromise their spiritual responsibilities and align themselves with the political aims of the regime. One such figure, Abba Hitsan, publicly stated, "It is his (the Prime Minister's) determination that made us all leave our jobs and come here (to the battlefield)." This declaration was aired on mainstream media outlets, highlighting the direct involvement of religious figures in the conflict. The genocide, which was conceived through hateful rhetoric and baseless accusations, claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people.



Religious and spiritual teachings were distorted and taken out of context to create an environment in which atrocities could be justified. One of the most infamous examples of hate speech came from Deacon Daniel Kibret, a prominent religious figure and the founder of the religious organization 'Mahebre Kidusan' meaning Holy Communion, which played its role in



Similarly, Megabe Hadis Eshetu, a prominent figure among Ethiopian Orthodox followers, is known for his religious and public speeches on various occasions. In one event he made a controversial statement that strayed from spiritual teachings, saying, "Had Eritrea and Tigray (both home to Tigrinya-speaking populations, but the Eritrean government was an ally of the Ethiopian government in the genocidal war against Tigray and its people) united to inflict upon us the same suffering we currently endure, the Oromo and Amhara peoples would have been utterly destroyed. But God, in His wisdom, turned them against each other." Another religious leader echoed dangerous sentiment concerning withholding humanitarian aids entering Tigray. "And what do we need for this?



A pastor in a military uniform



This bishop, preaching hate against Tigrayans, stated: "We would be better off with Satan ruling us than the Tigrayans do."

To end the war, we need to shut down human support."

Another clergy member resonated his desiring the continuation of the genocidal war on Tigrians by condemning to the ceasefire talks:

"All their scholars and ordinary people have gone mad. So, if someone is crazy, there is a saying: "If a hyena needs to devour you, consume it first and be purified.' The government has called to negotiate peace, but their response is clear: if they (Tigrians) refused to accept this call, we the priests need to baptize them with fire."

Moreover, when government officials, military leaders, and other prominent figures invoke religious rhetoric to justify their atrocities, many religious leaders have failed to speak out against such behaviour. For instance, the mayor of Dire Dawa city used a distorted interpretation of the Quran to dehumanize the Tigray

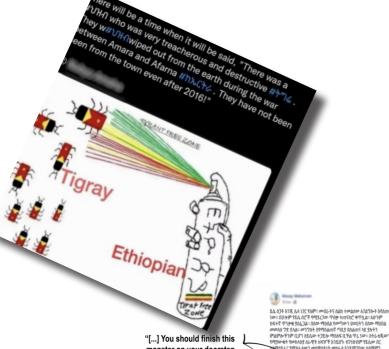
people, claiming that "They were not created as humans; they are even worse than Satan." Such inflammatory remarks have been used to justify the attacks against the Tigrayans, drawing on misrepresented religious teachings to legitimize violence.

Religious leaders expressed hatred, claiming that "Without a homeland, there can be no faith." and framing support for the government's survival campaign as a moral obligation. When religious institutions in Tigray were destroyed, their properties looted (currently these looted sacred relics are being sold on the black market) these leaders remained silent.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarch, Abune Mathias, who has condemned the war in Tigray, has faced severe backlash. He boldly accused the government and its allies for the "genocide" they are committing against Tigray and its people. Following his speech, he becomes a primary target of other religious leaders within the church and the government. This campaign to discredit the patriarch is a clear example of the government's broader efforts to undermine religious institutions critical of the war.

The Ethiopian government has engaged in widespread oppression of religious leaders who preach peace and call for an end to the war. While religious institutions in other countries have denounced the atrocities in Tigray, Ethiopian religious organizations have largely remained silent or, worse, supported the violence. "This active complicity, or even silence, marks a dark chapter in history, as religious institutions in Ethiopia have, at times, aligned themselves with the political forces perpetrating these atrocities."

# Weaponizing the Media as an Instrument of Genocide



"[...] You should finish this monster on your doorstep.

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ከዚህነት (27 ዓ.ች) ተቋቋሞው ነዋጣ በመጀመሩ ማቀም በመጀምት
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Mass media plays a pivotal role in shaping informed societies and fostering positive social transformation. Its fundamental responsibilities include providing information, education, and entertainment while upholding legal and professional ethics. When used constructively, the media can disseminate factual content, set critical agendas, stimulate socio-political discourse, support economic development, introduce new technologies, promote peace and stability, and raise awareness across diverse societal groups.

However, when media outlets deviate from these principles and become tools of propaganda abandoning their ethical and legal obligations they can serve as powerful instruments of destruction. In such cases, media not only manipulate and mislead the public but can also incite violence and orchestrate mass atrocities, including genocide. In societies lacking strong democratic institutions, media platforms can be hijacked to erode core societal values. When wielded irresponsibly by

leaders, governments, or ideologically driven groups, media can trigger social collapse, economic disintegration, political polarization, and widespread trauma. Indeed, under such circumstances, media become instruments of genocide.

As documented by scholars such as Lazarsfeld and Merton (1971), Cole (1998), Hallin (1984), Taylor (1992), Kent (2006), and Brooten (2015), and cited by S.E. Gebremikail & Daniel Tesfa (2024), historical records from fascist regimes, the Vietnam and Bosnian conflicts, the persecution of the Rohingya, and the Rwandan genocide demonstrate the devastating role media can play. In these instances, media not only enabled and encouraged violence but also instructed perpetrators in the commission of mass atrocities and war crimes.

In the Rwandan genocide, for example, over 51,000 perpetrators were directly incited by Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), which broadcast inflammatory propaganda encouraging the extermination of Tutsi communities (Yanagizawa, 2014). Similar media-driven incitement contributed to mass killings in Sierra Leone and Bosnia.

### The Ethiopian Media History

In Ethiopia, the media has historically described as between serving public interest and reinforcing authoritarian control. According to Negusse (2014), Ethiopian media traditionally functioned as a voice for ruling regimes, prioritizing state agendas over journalistic integrity and public service. For decades, media institutions operated more as state apparatuses than independent watchdogs, often perpetuating oppression

rather than enlightenment.

This pattern reflects a deeply embedded tradition where media was submissive to authority. As Negusse notes, impartiality and professional ethics were routinely compromised, undermining the media's role as an autonomous institution with a responsibility to the public.

The rise of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) brought constitutional guarantees for press freedom and freedom of expression. Terje Skjerdal (2018) highlights this period as a theoretical turning point, marking the formal recognition of media as vital democratic institutions. However, in practice, repression persisted. Journalists continued to face intimidation, and institutional pressures constrained media independence. Despite constitutional provisions, the government-maintained dominance over state media, and democratic ideals remained largely unrealized.

A New Chapter? Media Under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

The arrival of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in April 2, 2018 brought a brief and deceptive breath of hope. Journalists were released from prison, exiled media were welcomed back, and there were grand promises of media reform and freedom of speech. The release of imprisoned journalists, the return of exiled media, and promises of reform generated optimism both domestically and internationally (Henock, 2022). Abiy's public stance that "journalists are not criminals" signaled a break from past practices. But beneath this polished exterior, Ethiopia's media landscape quickly reverted now weaponized with new purpose under the guise of reform. Instead of dismantling the

propaganda machine, Abiy's government repurposed it. The narrative shifted toward an ethnonationalist, exclusionary project that portrayed Tigrayans not as citizens but as existential threats.

As Skjerdal and Mulat (2020) argue, these reforms were superficial. The government's subsequent embrace of ethnocentric narratives exacerbated media polarization. State-aligned media became tools for exclusion, systematically silencing dissent and marginalizing entire communities particularly Tigrayans. Tigrayan journalists were dismissed, harassed, or censored, reflecting a media environment that stifled reconciliation and reinforced ethnic division.

So, as the war on Tigray erupted in November 2020, the role of the media shifted fully from negligence to direct complicity. From the first days of the war, Ethiopian state media, regional broadcasters like Amhara Media Corporation, and affiliated private media channels began broadcasting coordinated messages of hate, dehumanization, and incitement. The media's mission was no longer to inform it was to mobilize the public toward the destruction of the Tigrayan people.

### Media Strategy During the Tigray Genocidal War

Evidence confirms that Ethiopian media played a central role in justifying and inciting violence during the Tigray war. State and affiliated media disseminated hate speech and



disinformation, portraying Tigrayans as enemies and legitimizing mass atrocities. From the onset of the war until the Pretoria Agreement, media narratives dehumanized Tigrayans and mirrored genocidal rhetoric seen in historical atrocities.

According to a documentary by peertub.institute.org, titled "Effective Moderation of Social Media to Curb

**Genocidal Content",** the Ethiopian government, along with its allies, deployed a three-pronged media strategy, especially through the digital platforms, to sustain and justify the genocide against Tigray.

First, through systematic dehumanization, Tigrayans were stripped of their humanity on national airwaves. They were called "weeds," "cancers," "hyenas," and "devils." This wasn't random hate speech it was part of a deliberate narrative architecture designed to prepare the broader population for participation in, or at least silent consent to, mass atrocities. Documentaries, interviews, songs, sermons, and panel discussions revolved around a singular message: that the existence of Tigrayans was a threat to the Ethiopian state. Just

as Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) functioned in Rwanda to prepare the Hutu population for genocide, Ethiopian state media alongside private outlets like ESAT and Amhara Media Corporation played a central role in priming Ethiopian society for violence against Tigrayans.

Second, the regime deployed coordinated disinformation campaigns. Government ministries, intelligence agencies like INSA, universities, and research centers worked together to flood the information space with false narratives. This included manufactured videos alleging fake atrocities committed by Tigrayans, fabricated claims that Tigrayans were attacking neighboring regions, and stories that painted Tigrayan civilians as armed insurgents. While credible media outlets like CNN, BBC, France 24, and AP struggled to report the truth, their coverage was publicly dismissed as "foreign propaganda." In an Orwellian twist, the Ethiopian government launched its own "Fact-Checking" initiative not to promote truth, but to suppress it. Any verified reports of rape, mass killings, or starvation tactics in Tigray were labeled misinformation by the state's propaganda apparatus.

Third, there was a systematic effort of information control and suppression. Independent Ethiopian journalists who reported truthfully were hunted. Some, like Dawit Kebede and Bereket Berhe, were killed in Mekelle. Others, like investigative reporter Lucy Kassa, were assaulted in their own homes. Foreign journalists faced threats, harassment, detention, and expulsion. Tom Gardner of The Economist was detained, beaten with a rifle butt, and later deported. Even the most well-established international outlets were vilified on national television and accused of being mouthpieces for "terrorists."

This campaign of media violence was not just about lying it was about denying the Tigrayan people the right to be heard, seen, or remembered. It was an effort to silence the victims before their bodies were even cold.

Similarly, a 2024 report by the New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy details how Ethiopian authorities suppressed press freedom during the conflict. Journalists contradicting the government narrative were harassed, beaten, or expelled. Ethiopia's global press freedom ranking dropped sharply from 99th in 2021 to 114th in 2022 (Reporters Without Borders Index).

### Crime of Direct and Public Incitement to Genocide

Under the 1948 Genocide Convention, even if genocide is not ultimately committed, direct and public incitement to genocide constitutes a punishable crime. As clarified by international courts such as the ICTR, incitement includes "encouraging or persuading" others to commit genocide, whether via speeches, broadcasts, or online platforms.

The ICTR notably found that RTLM's post-April 6, 1994, broadcasts constituted direct and public incitement to genocide for explicitly calling for the extermination of Tutsis.

Thus, incitement means "encouraging or persuading another" to commit a crime, whether "through speeches, shouting or threats, or any other means of audiovisual communication." It is essential to prove that relevant speech acts are both "direct" and "public" in inciting acts of genocide.

### **Direct Incitement in the Tigray Genocidal War**

Article 3(c) of the Genocide Convention prohibits direct and public incitement to genocide, and this standard was breached during the Tigray war. The UN Human Rights Council and the ICHREE (June 2022) acknowledged widespread hate speech and ethnicand gender-based incitement. Despite these warnings, state media continued to disseminate genocidal content.

In the Tigray genocidal war, therefore, the media contents and words were not careless. They were deliberate, calculated, and designed to incite. Statements from prominent figures drove this genocidal fervor as sho cases as:

- · Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed himself described Tigrayans as weeds: "In our country, weeding is done with a hammer."
- PM Abiy's advisor, Deacon Daniel Kibret, openly advocated: "Weyane is a cancer... like Tasmania... the goal is total erasure until not even the idea remains."
- Dire Dawa Mayor Kedir Juhar declared on national TV: "Tigrayans are worse than the devil himself."
- Artist Debebe Eshetu incited violence with: "Let's eat the hyenas [Tigrayans] and rejoice... I have no sympathy for those burned; they deserve it."
- ESAT and Amhara Media Corporation aired continuous calls to "finish the monster on our doorstep" and "ignite the massacre until no Tigrayan survives."

Thus, the incitement was direct. The intention was clear. The crime, direct and public incitement to genocide, is clearly defined in Article III of the 1948 Genocide Convention. Whether or not physical genocide has occurred (and it has), the incitement itself constitutes an international crime.

Cognizant of this, the New Lines Institute (2024) report, in its legal finding, concluded that "there is a reasonable basis to believe that certain individuals have directly and publicly incited genocide." This incitement contributed to mass killings, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, torture, and systemic destruction. Also, the United Nations Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) echoed this, stating in their June 2022 oral update that the violence against civilians was "fueled by hate speech and incitement to ethnic and gender-based violence."

This wasn't spontaneous. It wasn't incidental. It was deliberate. A strategy designed in offices, broadcast through microphones, and transformed into machetes, bullets, bombs, and starvation. As such, preserving media content from this period is vital for holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring justice.

### From Words to Wounds: The Lasting Impact

The consequences are staggering. Tens of thousands of civilians massacred. Entire villages wiped off the map. Women subjected to rape so brutal that the physical and psychological damage is permanent. Families separated by displacement, starvation, and forced exile. The media didn't merely report on the war it created the conditions for genocide.

Therefore, the Ethiopian media's role in the Tigray conflict underscores how mass communication can be weaponized in service of genocide. What should serve as a public good has instead been used to incite hatred, justify war crimes, and suppress truth. Documenting and confronting this reality is essential not only for accountability in Ethiopia but also as a global lesson on the dangerous power of unregulated, state-controlled media during times of conflict.

Today, the scars remain. The genocide against Tigray wasn't just carried out with guns and bombs. It was carried out with cameras, microphones, headlines, and commentaries. Words that were sharpened into tools of extermination. This must be remembered. This must be recorded. It must be prosecuted.

If there is one lesson for the world, it is this: genocide does not begin with weapons. It begins with words. With normalization of hate. With denial of humanity. And with silence from those who could have spoken out.

Never again is meaningless unless the world listens, acts, and holds perpetrators accountable. Silence is complicity. And words, left unchecked, can kill.

# Some of hate speech and genocidal rhetoric broadcast on State Media and Online Media:

- "We work to get the weeds up. But when we pull out the weeds, we take all possible care not to damage the wheat. In our country, weeding is done with a hammer. The children of Ethiopia are also doing it." PM Abiy Ahmed
- "Cancer is treated with radiation & chemicals. Cuz if even one cell survives, it will replicate & destroy [the host]. Weyane is a cancer. We need to have a program to systematically eradicate them, making sure no one remains" By Professor Tilahun Yilma broadcast on ETV news (Sate media)"
- 'Weyane [Tigray] is not something we can understand. We can only erase it. For instance, Australia.' ... there is an island called Tasmania which is found in southern Australia. They have destroyed Tasmanian tribes until only one person remained. There was only one person left for [continuity of] the race. Only one person! They have completely wiped them out. It is only by wiping out. As I had said before, it is only by wiping out [of existence] the disease called Weyaneness. ... Firstly, so that ismay not exist physically. ... Secondly, the [very] idea. The idea of Weyaneness must never exist. Even in the form of an idea. ... When people say "Weyane" one ought to say "in the name of the father"! [A common Ethiopian Orthodox reaction uttered against wickedness while crossing oneself] Everyone [should say that]!" Danail Kibret Advisor to the Prime Minister

- "They should be erased and disappeared from historical records. A person who wants to study them should find nothing about them. Maybe he can find out about them by digging in the ground." Danail Kibret Advisor to the Prime Minister
- "As you know, after the fall of Satan, there was nothing like Satan that was created...... Satan was the last of his kind. And, they (The TPLF) must also remain the last of their kind" Danail Kibret Advisor to the Prime Minister
- There should be no land in this country which can sustain this kind of weed." Danail Kibret Advisor to the Prime Minister
- "Tigrayans are worse than the devil himself." Kedir Juhar, Mayor, Dire Dawa City, (On national television)
- "Banditry is their culture. I want to separate Ethiopia from Tigray. What, does it hurt? It doesn't hurt. [...] What I am saying clearly is that it was Wolkayit, and we are left with our land. [...] After this, the aim and goal of the Ethiopian movement should be to separate Ethiopia from Tigray. What is the deal? What do we owe? A lifetime of country denial, brats. As if they had sold a country for a lifetime. I have no obligation to live with someone who promotes a culture of banditry and disloyalty. We have to speak up; we have to separate Ethiopia from Tigray. We should think about it because Ethiopia should not be bleeding for the rest of its life due to the betrayal of Tigray. What do we owe?" Seyoun Teshome, a journalist and political analyst from Amhara (who is said to be a close friend of Abiy Ahmed, reportedly said in an interview with reference to Tigray)
- "The military and security officers [should order] those that hold

- sticks and arms in villages [in Tigray] to put them down. If they refuse, they should shoot them. That's it! It is a state of emergency. There is nothing [more important] beyond Ethiopia. The main snake got hit around its middle: it then fled and got under a rock in Mekelle. I will not give out the details here, but the government! ... A good plan has to be prepared and they have to be hit [destroyed]." Kassaye Chemeda, retired Brigadier General of the Derg regime (was reported to have said on the government-aligned Walta TV station)
- "Why do we tolerate the renegade Tigrayans among us while we are dying? Raise your machete, axe, or gun and ignite the campaign against renegade Tigrayans in the respective areas. Ignite the massacre to a point no Tigrayan survives." ESAT What's New" program (also allegedly posted the statement on Facebook)
- "a struggle between a minority tribe who want to exterminate us and get the upper hand to rule over us and we, the people, who suffering [sic] has never come to an end... This plan of havoc is prepared by a million people against 95 million people... Do we wait until they exterminate us one by one? There is only one choice ... taking measures by force ... one way of removing dead fish from the sea water is by drying the sea." ESAT (broadcast, which followed after violence in Gonder in mid-2016, included a 'call for solidarity from the people of Gonder', portraying the violence)
- "The difficulty that we (Ethiopians) are facing now is not between the oppressor government/regime and the oppressed people, as other countries are facing. What we Ethiopians are now facing is between a small minority ethnic group, representing five percent of the Ethiopian population, who wants to rule Ethiopia subjugating

others and the subjugated peoples. And the solution for what we are facing at this time is 'drying the water so as to catch (kill) the fish.'" Mesay Mekonnen, ESAT journalist

- "These people [Tigrayans] are enemies of all Ethiopians and must be eliminated." the then Regional Governor of Amhara, now current speaker of the Ethiopian House of Federation (broadcast in the Amhara Media Corporation)
- "Let's Eat the hyenas (Tigrayans) and rejoice." Artist Debebe Eshetu
- "I have no sympathy for those (civilian Tigrayans) who were burned; they deserve it." Artist Debebe Eshetu
- "The government's strategy should be to build a buffer zone around Tigray to give the people 'time for reflection' for three to five years." By Gizaw Legesse, a journalist regularly featured on ESAT TV and broadcast on State-owned Amhara Media Corporation
- You should finish this monster on your doorstep.......'strict message to the government: It is not late. Ethiopia should put Tigrayans to detention centers, even those with no connection to TPLF. As American did during World War 2 to the Japanese living in America (......). By Mesay Mokonen, ESAT Journalist (on his personal FB account).
- "The war is with those you grew up with, your neighbors. If you can rid your forest of these thorns.....victory will be yours!" This Facebook post was shared over 900 times and attracted over 2,000 reactions.



A magazine published by the Public Relations and International Relations Directorate of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide.

## A War on Livelihoods: How Beekeeping in Tigray Was Deliberately Destroyed

In the rugged, beautiful highlands of Tigray, farming has always been more than a way of life, it is a heritage of resilience, ingenuity, and harmony with nature. Among the many traditions that have sustained Tigrayan farmers for generations, beekeeping stands out as both an art and a critical lifeline.

Renowned for producing some of the highest quality honey in Ethiopia, Tigray was a thriving center of apiculture. Honey wasn't just a commodity, it was a source of pride, sustenance, and survival. It fueled local economies, provided vital income for farmers, especially for women, youth, and landless households, and played an irreplaceable role in food security through pollination of crops and the preservation of biodiversity.

For many Tigrayan families, beekeeping was more than a livelihood. It was their bridge out of poverty. It offered dignity, stability,



and independence. Protecting bees meant protecting food, ecosystems, and futures.

But the genocidal war on Tigray did not spare even the bees.

In the Southeastern Zone of Tigray, in Enderta Woreda, Tabya Aynmbrkekn, stood a beacon of progress, a privately owned beekeeping farm that symbolized the future of sustainable agriculture in Tigray.

This was no ordinary farm. It was a vision. Built with both traditional and modern hives, it boasted thriving colonies, advanced equipment, balanced feed, and stored honey ready for the market. The owner had fenced it with iron and local materials, determined to transform centuries-old practices into modern enterprise. It created jobs for local youth, contributed to regional food security, and supported the economy.

When the Ethiopian Defense Forces (ENDF) and Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF) swept through the area, the farm did not survive.

They looted the equipment. They smashed the beehives, using them as firewood. They destroyed the shelters, torched the feed, shattered the concrete water reservoirs. Entire colonies burned alive or vanished from the toxic plumes of smoke and the deafening noise of military machines.

This was not an accident. This was deliberate. This was not an act of war between armies, it was a war on civilians, a war on livelihoods, and a war on nature itself.

Modern beehives burned to ashes

300 modern beehives destroyed, 250 bee colonies vanished or burned alive, 1,000 kilograms of harvested honey lost, all equipment looted or destroyed, including queen excluders, feeders, solar panels, honey extractors, wax melting containers, water barrels, protective gear, and more, A concrete water reservoir blown apart, a land cruiser vehicle stolen, entire infrastructure, corrugated iron, wooden poles, fencing, reduced to rubble.

The damage has caused major loss. It is measured in the shattered dreams of the farmer, in the jobs erased, in the ecological damage, and in the loss of a vital food source for a community already facing mass starvation.

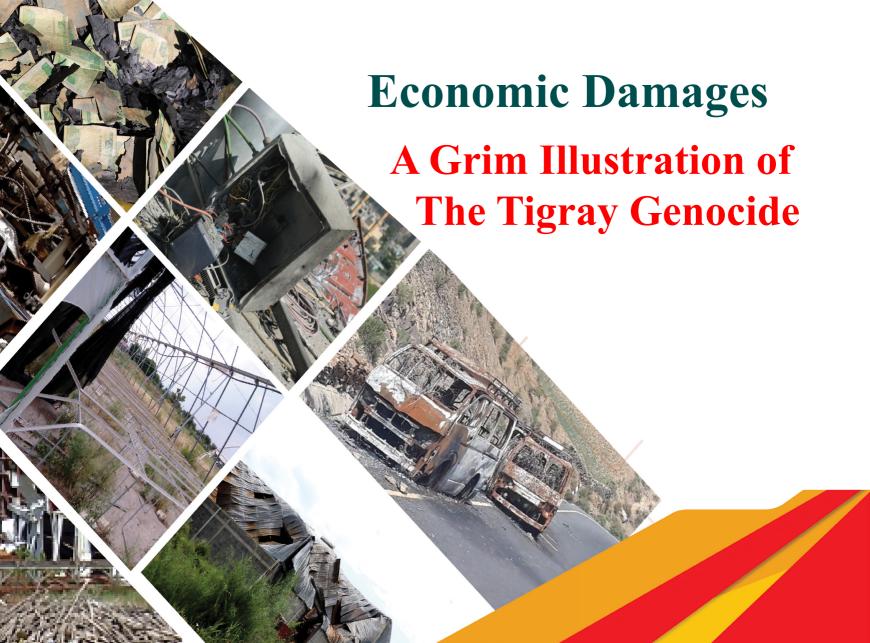
And the cruelty was intentional.

There was no fighting in the beekeeping compound. No military target. No threat. It was simply an attack designed to dismantle the self-reliance of Tigrayans, to starve, impoverish, and break the ability to survive long after the bullets stopped.

The destruction of this farm is not just an economic tragedy. It is an environmental crime. Bees are not just honey makers, they are the silent workforce behind agriculture. Their disappearance means failing crops, failing ecosystems, and deepening food insecurity.

This wasn't just a war on people, it was a war on their ability to exist.





# Reasons for the establishemnt of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide

Reports of atrocities, human rights violations, and acts of genocide during the war in Tigray have been released by the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), the New Lines Institute, UN Human Rights Organizations, and others, including survivor accounts from writers and media outlets. However, none of these can fully convey the scale of the genocide against the people of Tigray. The complete story of the countless atrocities, the destruction of livelihoods, and the ongoing, horrific suffering of the Tigrayan people remains unwritten. Every Tigrayan has a personal story of sorrow and trauma; each is a victim of the war's atrocities. Only the extent and specific nature of their suffering may differ.

For the people of Tigray, the suffering caused by the war was a shared, daily reality. It was the loss of lives and property, the sudden drop from wealth to desperate reliance on food aid, the gnawing hunger, and the lack of basic clothing. It was the constant anxiety, deaths from air strikes and heavy weapons, the agony of losing loved ones to brutal massacres and dismemberment, and the terror of narrowly escaping bombings.

So much remains unwritten about the tears the people of Tigray have shed for their loved ones. Stories of the displaced and refugees still dying from a lack of medicine and malnutrition. Stories of people still going hungry and children denied an education. Stories of Tigrayans still in the hands of invading forces, leading slave-like lives. Stories of mothers dying in childbirth after health facilities were destroyed and ambulances looted. Stories of rape survivors living in trauma with little to no access to rehabilitation. These are the accounts that have yet to be written.

The war turned everything upside down. Children once sent to school were taken from their families. Yards once full of life used for weddings, graduations, and celebrations were turned into graveyards. The image of a mother on camera, pointing to the graves in her own yard, tells the whole story: "They killed one of my sons here, the other here again, and they killed and left the remains of my husband here."

In short, Tigray has been robbed of its current and future doctors, teachers, engineers, and politicians; the dreams of its sons and



TOT on how to use geospatial and GPS

daughters have been cut short. As Tigrayans, our tomorrow is shattered, our dreams are stolen, our hope is darkened, and our very survival is in question. Yet, little has been documented, and little is being done to avert the crisis and rehabilitate the region.

However, this does not mean everything is dark, nor that nothing has been done. There have been encouraging actions. One of them is the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Genocide and the data it has collected. This work, started during the war, is unparalleled in its deployed manpower and geographic scope.

The commission was established with a clear mission: to investigate and document the damage caused, provide scientific evidence to help ensure justice, contribute to recovery and reconstruction, and create a historical archive to enable future generations to learn from these events and prevent their recurrence.

When the data collection began, there was no budget, no transportation, and no funding for accommodation. What the Commission had, however, was harmony, enthusiasm, and determination. Thousands of volunteers were willing to work without payment. Traveling on foot to collect data from remote areas, volunteer data collectors faced floods, cold, fatigue, hunger, and security threats. Despite these hardships, many young people remained committed to the work. This dedication was met with grassroots support: some hotels offered lodging to team leaders, and officers at army checkpoints provided meals for the trainers.

The hardships that data collectors endured to cover nearly all of Tigray are impossible to fully list. The challenges began with the most basic tools: a mobile phone or a tablet. A battery would die mid-interview in a village with no electricity. Finding a generator might mean a journey of dozens of miles on foot.

To make matters worse, the work took place during the rainy season. A collector might be stopped by a swollen river, forced to wait for the floodwaters to recede. By then, the sun would have set, and they would have to find a farmer's house and ask for shelter for the night. The next day, the journey would continue on an empty stomach. Upon finally reaching a generator, they might find it turned off and have to wait hours, or even days, for the owner to switch it on. A seemingly simple task like charging a phone became a monumental effort. In these conditions, what is normally close feels impossibly far away.

But driven by a sense of purpose, they endured it all. Therefore, the data now in the hands of the Commission is not just information; it is a precious resource, forged through immense sacrifice.

The scope of the data collection was extensive, focusing on economic and social harm, human rights abuses, including sexual violence, and damage to infrastructure, natural resources, and the environment. The process began with the preparation of written interview guides, followed by comprehensive training for professionals and volunteers from higher education institutions.

A team of 32,000 data collectors and 5,000 coordinators was then deployed. The primary research method was a general survey that reached over 693,000 households and selected IDP shelters, gathering statistical data from approximately 2.5 million individuals. As a crucial protocol, data related to sexual assault were collected exclusively by female interviewers. In addition to this large-scale survey, thousands of in-depth interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data on humanitarian damage, sexual violence, destruction of heritage sites, and environmental devastation.

For the private sector, data were gathered from 71,000 firms over three rounds of survey research. To ensure accuracy, name and address lists of these businesses were posted in nearly every city under the provisional administration of Tigray for public verification. A dedicated team was assigned to handle and implement corrections submitted by business owners. Furthermore, affected members of the business community were issued a letter of support, which served as an official acknowledgment until their damages could be fully consolidated and monetized in a formal certificate.



Data collectors gathering data on the damage to the private sector in Shire

In addition to its research, the commission conducted extensive outreach and advocacy. It held more than ten consultation forums on various topics with a wide range of stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental bodies, civil society groups, faith-based institutions, political parties, and the media.

The commission's Human Injury Research Center was particularly active in the following ways:

- It referred numerous cases to relevant international organizations and human rights bodies.
- It established connections with professional coalitions formed by the Tigrayan diaspora.
- It campaigned to raise awareness among officials, diplomats, international organizations, and the media about the crisis in Tigray.

Through its Directorate of Public Relations and International Affairs, the commission published a bilingual magazine, Tsinta (in Tigrinya and English), to document its findings. The magazine and

other materials were distributed to allies and advocates working to secure justice for the victims of the genocide in Tigray.

To honor the victims, the 4th anniversary of the Tigray Genocide was commemorated with candlelighting ceremonies and memorials for the martyrs across all regions of Tigray. Similar events were also held in the zonal towns of Tigray, except Humera (the capital of the Western zone of Tigray, which is still in the hands of Amhara forces), on preserving massacre sites. Furthermore, the commission prepared and submitted a comprehensive report detailing the war's damage and the estimated budget required for reconstruction. A final summary report is now nearing completion.

Despite its progress, the commission's work has been significantly hindered by several factors. The Center for Human Injury Studies identified the following primary obstacles:

- Budget Constraints: A project of this magnitude would ideally require billions of dollars in funding. The commission was unable to secure such resources, which prevented the collection of additional survey data and follow-up investigations, limiting the scope of work despite the vast amount of data already gathered.
- Lack of Essential Equipment: Directly related to budget shortfalls, the research center faced problems of critical tools, including advanced electronic equipment, remote sensing technology, satellite imagery for damage assessment, forensic materials for investigations, and an adequate database management system.

- Limited Access to Key Regions: Data collection was impossible in the Western Zone and other districts that remained under the control of invading forces. As a workaround, teams collected data from Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in various shelters. However, this is an incomplete substitute for direct, on-the-ground investigation in those areas.
- Emotional Toll and Vicarious Trauma: Documenting torture, sexual assault, and other atrocities took a heavy emotional toll. During in-depth interviews, it was common for survivors to become overwhelmed while recounting their suffering. This understandable distress would often pause or halt the data collection process, creating significant delays.
- Pervasive Political Instability: The ongoing political instability affected all institutions in Tigray, not just the commission. This climate of uncertainty created a major obstacle, making it difficult for staff to focus and operate effectively.
- Infrastructure Failures: Frequent and prolonged power and internet outages, while widespread, had a direct impact on the commission's operations. These disruptions delayed data processing and the issuance of damage certificates, leading to repeated inquiries from affected members of the business community.

Nevertheless, the staff of this commission has persevered through all these difficulties, carrying out their duties with remarkable enthusiasm and dedication.



# Compassion in the Crossfire: The Story of Dr. María, Yohannes, and Tedros Humanitarians Who Paid the Ultimate Price

In a world torn apart by violence, three brave humanitarians stood firm, driven by compassion and an unshakable commitment to humanity. Dr. María Hernández Matas, Yohannes Halefom Reda, and Tedros Gebremariam were not soldiers. They carried no weapons. Their only mission was to save lives and they were just humanitarian. But on a tragic day in June 2021, their lives were brutally cut short in what is now known as the Walwa Massacre in Tigray.

María was a person with a warm heart, a permanent smile and a cheerful character. She was dedicatedly working as an MSF Emergency coordinator in Tigray. Maria with her two colleagues were the compassionate humanitarian workers who were deliberately killed during the Tigray war particularly during the Walwa Massacre in Tigray.

### María: A Life of Service Across Continents

At just 35 years old, María Hernández Matas had already dedicated her life to serving the most vulnerable. Born in Madrid, Spain, and raised in the small village of Sanchotello, María had spent years on the frontlines of humanitarian crises from Central African Republic to South Sudan, Yemen, Mexico, Nigeria, and finally Ethiopia.

She was known not only for her medical expertise but for her infectious smile, boundless empathy, and fearless commitment. Her colleagues and the communities she served often described her as someone whose heart was as big as her courage.

### Yohannes and Tedros: Heroes from Their Own Homeland

Yohannes Halefom Reda, born in Mekelle, Tigray, was a rising leader in public health. The former medical director of Samre Hospital, he joined Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in 2021 as an assistant coordinator for the Abi Adi project, determined to serve his people during their darkest hour.

Tedros Gebremariam, from Abi Adi, was a beloved figure in his town. Known for his humility and kindness, Tedros worked as an MSF driver a role often overlooked but essential. In conflict zones like Tigray, drivers are not just staff; they are lifelines, navigating danger to deliver hope.

### Why They Were Killed: When Compassion Becomes a Target

The tragic chain of events began when a group of desperate parents in Abi Adi sought help to locate their missing children. These children most of them internally displaced and underage had been abducted by Fano militants, who falsely claimed they were needed as porters to carry weapons and supplies. The parents were panicky, knowing the fate of their children was likely tied to the brutal pattern of violence unfolding across the region.

As active members of the MSF humanitarian mission, María, Yohannes, and Tedros were well known in the community for providing medical care to displaced families and survivors of repeated massacres. Witnesses had seen María just days earlier, on June 22, 2021, after a horrific massacre where 20 young men were executed by Eritrean (EDF) and Ethiopian (ENDF) soldiers where she was also seen moving between bodies, checking for signs of life, her clothing soaked in blood as she tended to the wounded, despite the lack of safety equipment. She was the embodiment of what it means to be a humanitarian present in the worst of humanity's failures, refusing to look away.

An eye- witness told us, "A 'Ferengi' woman, Dr.Maria, was with us and tended to all the wounds, even without proper protective kits. She examined each victim and she was soaked with the fresh blood of the victims."

When the parents approached the MSF team, Maria and her colleagues did not hesitate. They agreed to help, knowing full well the risks but refusing to turn away from those pleading for assistance. Their search led them toward Shewate Hugum, an area reported to be the last known location of the missing youth. María instructed the families to stay behind in safer areas while she and her colleagues continued forward to investigate. It was a decision rooted in courage but also one that would cost them their lives. "María was a true humanitarian. She never cared about ethnicity, about sides. She cared about helping everyone. And for that, they killed her" said a resident of Abi Adi.

This was not an accident. This was not crossfire. This was the intentional killing of humanitarian workers, alongside innocent civilians, under the banner of a campaign that sought to destroy not just lives but the very principles of human dignity and compassion.

María, Yohannes, and Tedros stood for something greater than themselves. They stood for what the world is supposed to protect; the idea that even in the worst of conflicts, there are no enemies in a hospital bed, there are no enemies when someone is wounded, starving, or pleading for help.





The Walwa massacre, which occurred on June 24, 2021, in Shewate Hugum, Abergele Wereda, claimed the lives of twelve civilians; including underage students, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and three Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff. Just two days earlier, twenty civilians were executed by Eritrean and Ethiopian forces in Abyi-Adi.

The events leading to the Walwa massacre began on June 22, when nine underage children were reportedly abducted by Fano militants near Lesanu Primary School under the pretense of interrogation. The children were compelled to transport ammunition barefoot to Shewate Hugum. When they did not return, concerned family and community members initiated a search the following day. What they found was horrifying:: all nine children had been killed alongside three MSF workers, their bodies left abandoned in the dirt. The community recovered the remains and transported them back to Abi Adi. Two of the children were returned to their families in rural areas, while the others were buried together in a mass grave at Abune-Aregawi Church, a somber marker of yet another chapter in the unfolding genocide.

A resident of Abi Adi later said with trembling voice, "Most of the victims were just children. They were innocent. They were displaced because of earlier atrocities in West Tigray. The way they were shot, the way the MSF team was killed it's unspeakable."





### Ma'abino Meskele Christos Monastery

Cuddle up in the peaceful highlands of northern Tigray, Ma'abino Meskele Christos Monastery is located in Eastern zone of Tigray, Irob Woreda, Endamosa Tabia, Asgarwa Village, stood as a recent but revered spiritual sanctuary. Though relatively recent in its physical establishment, founded with the guidance of Aba Zewengel, one of the region's most prominent monks, it had quickly become a cornerstone of faith, cultural identity, and intergenerational learning for the Irob community. More than just

a place of worship, the monastery served as a vital center for preserving history, tradition, and communal solidarity.

Yet, during the genocidal war on Tigray, this sacred sanctuary became a target of unspeakable violence. In an act that epitomizes the wider devastation inflicted upon religious and cultural heritage, the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) launched a devastating assault on the monastery, leaving behind not only physical ruins but also a deep spiritual wound.

The monastery suffered severe structural damage from heavy artillery and gunfire. Its once-serene compound, a symbol of peace and divine connection, now bears the scars of war: cracked walls, shattered gates, and broken doors stand as grim testaments to the indiscriminate destruction. The central prayer hall, a sacred space meant for reflection and communion, was desecrated. Witnesses report that EDF troops deliberately targeted key areas, suggesting an intentional effort to erase its spiritual significance.

The theft was carried out with the same cruelity. Priceless religious artifacts, many donated by the local community or painstakingly preserved over generations, were stolen. Sacred manuscripts, ceremonial crosses, vestments, and chalices vanished from the altar, their whereabouts still unknown. Even the most basic necessities; food, clothing, and the personal belongings of resident monks were seized or destroyed.

The violation extended beyond theft and structural ruin. EDF soldiers reportedly committed acts deliberately designed to profane the monastery's sanctity. Its generator, a crucial source of electricity for lighting and essential services, was set ablaze, an act of symbolic as well as practical demolition. Eyewitnesses recount how religious items were trampled, altars defiled, and prayer books torn or burned. These were not random acts of war but deliberate transgressions against the spiritual and cultural values of the Irob people.

The destruction of Ma'abino Meskele Christos Monastery is more than the loss of a building, it is a wound inflicted on the cultural and spiritual identity of the Irob people. In Tigray, monasteries are not merely places of worship; they are living repositories of history, centers of education, and protectors of oral and written

traditions. Their loss severs a sacred link between past and future, disrupting the transmission of faith, language, and heritage.

For the clergy and faithful who found solace and guidance within its walls, this attack has inflicted profound spiritual trauma, a cruel addition to the already unbearable suffering of genocidal war.







### Genocide in Tigray:

Serious Breaches of International Law in the Tigray Conflict, Ethiopia, and Paths to Accountability

SUMMARY

June 2024

## **Legal findings on Tigray Genocide:**

There is a reasonable basis to believe that a genocide has been carried out against Tigrayans' based on the below legal finding and indicators:

- There is a reasonable basis to believe that members of the Ethiopian National Defence Force, and relevant officials, had the necessary special intent to destroy Tigrayans as an ethnic group, in whole or in part, as such.
- "They should be erased and disappeared from historical records. A person who wants to study them should find nothing about them. Maybe he can find out about them by digging in the ground."
- Prime Minister Abiy's social affairs adviser, Daniel Kibret "...wipe out the Tigrayans for 100 years..."
- There is a reasonable basis to believe that some individuals of the Amhara region—including members of Amhara militia, Fano, and the Amhara Special Forces—had the necessary special intent to destroy Tigrayans as an ethnic group, in whole or in part, as such.

"Tigrayans should disappear from the land" and that they were "evil" and "we are purifying your blood." Fano militia (affiliated with the ASF)

Another woman who was raped was told "I'm going to destroy your uterus so you can never give birth to a Tigrayan. Tigrayan children grow like a cancer inside."

A doctor reported that rape victims were told that they were raped in order "to either Amharize them or at least leave their Tigrinya status [...] to cleanse the blood line."

- There is a reasonable basis to believe that the soldiers of the Eritrean Defence Forces had the necessary special intent to destroy Tigrayans as an ethnic group, in whole or in part, as such.
- 'What 'What you already did in the '90s we haven't forgotten about it even now. From now on, no Tigrayan woman will give birth from a Tigrayan man.' A note on a piece of paper, written by EDF soldiers, removed by a doctor from the genital organs of a raped woman
- There is a reasonable basis to believe that, with the intent described above, ENDF, ASF, and EDF members carried out at least four acts constituting the crime of genocide: killing Tigrayans, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life upon Tigrayans calculated to bring about their destruction, and imposing measures intended to prevent births among Tigrayans.

- Killings
- There is a reasonable basis to believe that ENDF members participated in killings in or around Mai Kadra, Adebai, Mirab Abaya, Zalambessa, Adwa, Mahbere Dego, Togogwa Market, and various locations in Western Tigray.
- There is a reasonable basis to believe that ASF members participated in killings in or around Mai Kadra, Adebai, Humera, Rawzan, and various locations in Western Tigray.
- There is a reasonable basis to believe that EDF members participated in killings in or around Axum, Zalambessa, Hitsats, Adigrat, Adwa, Nebelet, and in or around the villages of Mariam Shewito, Geria, Adi Bechi, Adi Chiwa, Mindibdib, Kidfimet, Rahiya, Endabagerima, and Kumro.
- Serious bodily and mental harm, including sexual violence and measures intended to prevent births
- "A Tigrayan womb should never give birth."
- Measures deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of Tigrayans
- "We are here to watch them dying, nothing else"

A doctor, pained at only being able to alleviate the suffering of starving infant children through medicine and oxygen, rather than food

- There is a reasonable basis to believe that certain individuals have directly and publicly incited genocide.
- "Why do we tolerate the renegade Tigrayans among us while we are dying? Raise your machete, axe, or gun and ignite the campaign against renegade Tigrayans in the respective areas. Ignite the massacre to a point no Tigrayan survives." ESAT What's New" account
- There is a reasonable basis to believe that Ethiopia failed to prevent the genocide against the Tigrayan people. There is a reasonable basis to believe that Ethiopia failed, and continues to fail, to punish those responsible for the genocide against the Tigrayan people.

### "We are civilians!"

The ENDF soldier replied: 'Yes, we are looking for the civilians!' Dead bodies were lying around everywhere."

- Persecution
- "Let her cry isn't she Tigrayan?" A soldier, denying a Tigrayan mother the chance to comfort her baby daughter, while raping the mother
- Rape, conflict-related sexual violence, and other sexualized crimes

(Forcible Displacement, Unlawful Imprisonment and Enforced Disappearances, and Murders)

"We had to clean out our insides." Brigadier-General Tesfaye Ayalew, Head of Deployment Department of the Ethiopian National Defence Force, justifying the exclusion of ethnic Tigrayans from the military



