



**“I DON’T KNOW IF THEY  
REALIZED I WAS A PERSON”**

RAPE AND OTHER SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE CONFLICT IN TIGRAY,  
ETHIOPIA

AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL



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# CONTENTS

|                                                                              |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>                                                  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>2. METHODOLOGY</b>                                                        | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>3. BACKGROUND</b>                                                         | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>4. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN TIGRAY</b>                  | <b>12</b> |
| GANG RAPE, INCLUDING OF PREGNANT WOMEN                                       | 12        |
| SEXUAL SLAVERY                                                               | 14        |
| SADISTIC BRUTALITY ACCOMPANYING RAPE                                         | 16        |
| BEATINGS, INSULTS, THREATS, HUMILIATION                                      | 17        |
| WOMEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED WHILE TRYING TO FLEE THE COUNTRY                    | 18        |
| <b>5. IMPACT OF THE VIOLATIONS ON SURVIVORS</b>                              | <b>21</b> |
| <b>6. SURVIVORS' ACCESS TO MEDICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICES</b>             | <b>23</b> |
| <b>7. THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE</b>      | <b>28</b> |
| <b>8. VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LAW</b>                       | <b>30</b> |
| RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE UNDER INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LAW | 31        |
| THE WAR CRIME AND CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY OF RAPE                             | 31        |
| OTHER CRIMES UNDER INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW                                | 32        |
| <b>9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>                                     | <b>34</b> |
| RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT                                  | 34        |
| RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ERITREAN GOVERNMENT                                   | 36        |
| RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF)               | 36        |
| RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN UNION                                         | 36        |
| RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS       | 36        |
| RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UNITED NATIONS                                        | 37        |

# GLOSSARY

| WORD   | DESCRIPTION                                                                |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ACHPR  | African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights                            |
| ASF    | Amhara Regional Police Special Forces                                      |
| CAT    | Convention against Torture                                                 |
| CEDAW  | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| EDF    | Eritrean Defense Forces                                                    |
| EHRC   | Ethiopian Human Rights Commission                                          |
| ENDF   | Ethiopian National Defense Forces                                          |
| EPLF   | Eritrean People's Liberation Front                                         |
| EPRDF  | Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front                          |
| HeRAMS | Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System               |
| ICCPR  | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights                       |
| ICESCR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights             |
| ICRC   | International Committee of the Red Cross                                   |
| IHL    | International Humanitarian Law                                             |
| MSF    | Médecins sans frontières                                                   |
| OCHA   | Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs                        |
| OLA    | Oromo Liberation Army                                                      |
| TPLF   | Tigray People's Liberation Front                                           |
| WHO    | World Health Organization                                                  |
| UNFPA  | United Nations Population Fund                                             |

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“They raped me one after the other... I don’t know if they realized I was pregnant. I don’t know if they realized I was a person.”**

A Tigrayan woman who was raped by multiple perpetrators in Baaker, western Tigray, in November 2020.

During the conflict that began on 4 November 2020 in Tigray — Ethiopia’s northernmost region — troops fighting in support of the federal government have committed widespread rape against ethnic Tigrayan women and girls. The perpetrators include members of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Amhara Regional Police Special Forces (ASF), and Fano, an informal Amhara militia group. Given the context, scale, and gravity of the sexual violence committed against women and girls in Tigray, the violations amount to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity.

In this report, Amnesty International sets out the overwhelming evidence it has collected showing that Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers and members of allied militia are responsible for a pattern of rape and other forms of sexual violence in Tigray. The organization is calling on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to urgently send his Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to the Tigray region — as provided for in UN Security Council resolution 1888.

The sexual violence that Amnesty International has documented has been accompanied by shocking levels of brutality, including beatings, death threats, and ethnic slurs. Some of the victims were held in captivity by the perpetrators for days and weeks, in circumstances constituting sexual slavery; others were raped in front of their children and other family members.

The prevalence of rape is hard to estimate, given that sexual violence is generally under-reported due to fear and stigma, and that the Ethiopian government has not granted international non-governmental human rights organizations access to the Tigray region to investigate these crimes. While many, possibly most, survivors of sexual violence have not been able to access medical care during the conflict, health facilities in Tigray registered 1,288 cases of sexual violence from February to April 2021, with doctors indicating that this is higher than in previous years and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, conflict related. Just one of these facilities recorded 376 cases of rape committed from the beginning of the conflict to 9 June 2021. Yet many of the survivors Amnesty International interviewed had not visited any health facilities at all, suggesting that these figures are likely to represent a small fraction of the total number of rapes committed.

The consequences of rape are severe. Survivors and family members frequently suffer health complications — including mental health problems — because of the violence inflicted upon them. Many survivors complained of physical trauma such as continued bleeding, pain, incontinence, immobility and fistulas. According to health workers at Shire Hospital, three survivors tested HIV positive due to rape (as did at least one woman in the camps in Sudan). Depression, insomnia, anxiety, and other forms of emotional distress are also common among survivors, as well as family members who witnessed the abuses.

There are limited, if any, protection, rehabilitation, and livelihood services available to survivors of sexual violence in Tigray, because health facilities have been damaged and looted in the conflict and medical personnel have fled. Post-rape care, in particular, has been limited or non-existent. Recovery for survivors of sexual violence is thus elusive as many are dislocated from core support systems — family and friends — because of the active conflict in Tigray and fear of stigmatization and reprisals. The conflict has also dismantled other support and response systems that were previously available, such as health facilities, protection, and local police.

The conflict has displaced survivors of sexual violence together with other Tigrayan residents from their homes and localities. Most of the victims Amnesty International interviewed were living in a refugee camps in Sudan or in displaced persons camps in Shire, east of the Tekeze River — where humanitarian conditions are dire, and the security situation is poor.

Interviewees at the camps in Shire told Amnesty International that they received limited or no livelihood assistance, medical care, or psycho-social support. Rape survivors and their families said they are short of food, shelter, and clothing, due to the limited humanitarian aid available. Local initiatives by residents of Shire are providing sanitary kits to some victims in displaced persons' camps and hospitals but are not sufficient to cope with the demand. Medical facilities providing services such as surgery, abortion, HIV testing and prophylaxis medicine are few and only exist in larger towns, making them not easily accessible to survivors in rural areas. Sexual violence survivors in the refugee camps in Sudan, where living conditions are very poor, have likewise told Amnesty International that they have only limited access to livelihood assistance and health care.

Amnesty International wrote to the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments on 26 July 2021 to share the key findings of this research and to seek their response. The letters were emailed to the Office of the Prime Minister, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Minister of Women, Children and Youth of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, with copies to the Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Nairobi and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Amnesty International also wrote to the Eritrean government's Information Minister and a senior advisor to President Isaias Afwerki. The Embassy of Eritrea in Kenya refused to receive a letter several times. The organization had not received any responses at the time of writing.

Amnesty International's most urgent recommendations to the concerned parties include:

To the Ethiopian government:

- Ensure that allegations of sexual violence perpetrated since the outbreak of the conflict in the Tigray region are promptly, effectively, independently and impartially investigated, and bring those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in open, accessible civilian courts in full compliance with international standards for fair trial without recourse to the death penalty. Where appropriate, those suspected of committing rape or sexual slavery should be investigated for the war crimes and crimes against humanity of rape, sexual slavery, torture and persecution.
- Issue clear orders to Ethiopian armed and security forces prohibiting sexual violence and any other violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

To the Eritrean government:

- Issue clear orders to Eritrean armed and security forces prohibiting sexual violence and any other violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and ensure that Eritrean armed forces and any other relevant institution cooperate fully with investigations into sexual violence in Tigray.

To the African Union:

- Use its good offices to encourage Ethiopia to grant the Commission of Inquiry into the Situation on the Tigray Region of Ethiopia established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights prompt and unfettered access to the Tigray region of Ethiopia to carry out its on-the-ground investigation into allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including sexual violence.
- Step up its public and private engagement on the Tigray conflict, including through tabling it at the AU Peace and Security Council.

To the UN Secretary-General:

- Send his Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to the Tigray region of Ethiopia as provided for by Security Council resolution 1888, which calls upon the Secretary-General to “take the appropriate measures to deploy rapidly a team of experts to situations of particular concern with respect to sexual violence in armed conflict”; and deploy his Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to carry out a visit to Tigray and/or camps in Sudan, to speak to survivors and report back, including on survivors' priorities for assistance and justice.
- As part of a wider policy to ensure that all members of national armed forces are vetted before being deployed to Department of Peace Operations or African Union peacekeeping missions, in order to ensure that they have not committed serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, ensure that no members of the Ethiopian or Eritrean armed forces are deployed to any such multilateral mission before being fully vetted.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This report focuses on conflict-related sexual violence, that is, incidents or patterns of sexual violence in a conflict or post-conflict setting that have direct or indirect links with the conflict itself.<sup>1</sup>

Between March and June 2021 Amnesty International researchers interviewed 63 women and girl survivors of sexual violence in the context of the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Fifteen of the interviews were conducted in person at various locations in eastern Sudan, including the Hamdayet refugee reception centre and the Um Rakuba and Tunaidbah refugee camps. Forty-eight of the interviews were conducted remotely using secure lines in Shire, Axum and Mekelle, with the assistance of community workers who supported in identifying survivors and seeking their consent. The community workers who accompanied the survivors during the interviews also helped link them with health care providers in cases where they needed medical treatment.

Amnesty International researchers also interviewed doctors, nurses, midwives and humanitarian workers who treated or assisted survivors of sexual violence in Shire and Adigrat, as well as in refugee camps in eastern Sudan. Additional data from humanitarian organizations operating in Tigray relating to sexual violence and health services has also informed these findings.

The names of the people interviewed and information that could lead to their identification have been withheld to protect their privacy and safety. Pseudonyms are used in all cases.

Interviews were conducted in private or semi-private settings, ensuring that interviewees were comfortable with the interview setting and understood the purpose of the interview, the topics that it would cover, and how the information would be used. Most interviews with survivors were conducted with the help of interpreters. Researchers asked survivors to describe incidents of sexual violence and any other abuses they were subjected to or had witnessed — to the extent and in the manner which they felt able and comfortable — and the identity of the perpetrators. As sexual violence often occurred alongside other abuses, some survivors also described killings, looting, and destruction of civilian property that they had suffered or witnessed. Researchers also asked survivors about the physical and psychological impact of the sexual violence they endured, and whether they had sought and received medical or other support. Researchers referred survivors to medical, psychological, and livelihood support services, as appropriate and where those services were available.

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual violence that occurs in Tigray and elsewhere in Ethiopia in the context of domestic and intimate partner violence, including among displaced and refugee populations, was not included in the scope of this report.

# 3. BACKGROUND

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was the dominant party in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition that ruled Ethiopia from 1991 to 2018. It held onto power with an iron grip, denying civic freedoms and repressing dissent. During this 27-year period, Amnesty International documented grave human rights violations in Ethiopia, including extrajudicial executions, mass arrests, and torture and other forms of ill-treatment.<sup>2</sup>

Tensions between the TPLF and the Eritrean government date back to this era. The ruling political party in Eritrea — the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) — was allied with the TPLF in the armed struggle against the military government — known as the Derg — that governed Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991. However, fissures between the TPLF and the EPLF started to surface in the wake of the Derg's fall, after Eritrea gained its independence. The bloody Ethio-Eritrea border war, which took place between 1998 and 2000, was followed by an armed standoff and hostile EPLF-TPLF relations.

The disaffection of many ethnic Amhara also has roots in this era. In 1991, with the TPLF-led restructure of regional administrations based on ethnicity and language, many Amhara claimed that areas of western Tigray that were historically part of the Amhara region had been annexed by the Tigray region. They also alleged that serious human rights violations against Amhara were being carried out in the contested areas.

In 2018, following sustained protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions that began in 2015, the TPLF conceded power. That April, Ethiopia's House of People's Representatives elected Abiy Ahmed as prime minister.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government, based in the EPRDF coalition, embarked on a political liberalization process, releasing political prisoners and reforming repressive laws. It also took steps to normalize relations with Eritrea by unconditionally accepting the decision of the 2001 Ethio-Eritrea Border Commission.

Prime Minister Abiy significantly improved gender representation at the highest levels of government, with 50% of cabinet posts held by women. Ethiopia also adopted the Maputo Protocol in 2018. However, the Abiy administration inherited a society marked by structural gender inequality with weak accountability for sexual and gender-based violence, gaps in reproductive healthcare and significant gender disparities in secondary education. Ethiopian feminists underscored the need to engender the political reform process.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, this reform process took place amidst weak institutions and a culture of impunity among security forces, including the EDF, Federal Police, and regional special police forces. The transition faced numerous other structural challenges, including governing within an ethno-federal state and the politicization of ethnicity, land and minority groups. Historical grievances stemming from decades of human rights violations and disputes around internal administrative borders and ethnic identity and self-administration persisted. In short, many of the conditions that had contributed to the context in which systemic violence had occurred in the past remained.<sup>4</sup>

From 2018 onwards, ethno-nationalist and pan-Ethiopian rhetoric intensified, alongside debates around the relationship between the federal state and its constituent parts. The Sidama in 2018 were the first ethnic

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, Ethiopia: Deeper Reforms Needed, Amnesty International Submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review, 33<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UPR Working Group, May 2019 (Index: AFR 25/9865/2018).

<sup>3</sup> Sehin Teferra, "Ethiopia at the Juncture of Political Reform – A Gendered Analysis," in Melaku Gebeye Desta, Dereje Feyissa Dori and Mamo Esmelealem Mihretu (eds.), *Ethiopia in the Wake of Political Reforms*, 2020, pp. 123-39.

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia, May 2020 (Index: AFR 25/2358/2020), pp. 13-14.

group to request the federal government to hold a referendum to secede from a regional state.<sup>5</sup> Tensions in Oromia focused on whether the interests of ethnic Oromo were sufficiently represented in the new political dispensation and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) continued carrying out armed attacks. In the Amhara region, there were continued demands for self-determination from the Qimant ethnic group and associated inter-communal violence, disputes around territories that many ethnic Amhara claim Tigray annexed in the early 1990s, and human rights violations against Amhara in these areas.<sup>6</sup> Tensions also simmered between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF.<sup>7</sup>

This political tensions between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF's regional administration had many fault lines. The TPLF opposed the dissolution of the EPRDF coalition, the formation of the Prosperity Party, and prosecutions of TPLF leaders for past human rights violations. Federal government officials also accused the TPLF of fomenting unrest and supporting ethnic violence and armed insurgencies elsewhere in the country.

Having rejected the indefinite postponement of the August 2020 elections due to COVID-19, the TPLF regional administration unilaterally conducted a regional election in Tigray in September 2020, in which it was declared winner of all regional parliament seats except one. The federal parliament subsequently declared the regional election null and void, ordered a stoppage of communication between the federal and the Tigray government, and froze funds transfers to the Tigray regional government. Initiatives to mediate between the TPLF and the federal government were unsuccessful. TPLF officials wanted the formation of a transitional government, a comprehensive national dialogue, and release of political opposition leaders, which the federal government was not amenable to.<sup>8</sup>

In October 2020, the situation reached a breaking point when Tigray officials rejected the restructure and appointment of new army commanders for the ENDF's northern division based in Tigray.<sup>9</sup> On 4 November 2020, Prime Minister Abiy announced on national TV that Tigray security forces had attacked the ENDF's Northern Command and that he had consequently launched a "law and order operation" against the Tigray regional paramilitary police and militia loyal to the TPLF.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after, reports emerged that Eritrean troops were participating in the conflict in support of the ENDF. On 15 November 2020, the TPLF said they had launched rocket attacks against Eritrea's capital, Asmara, claiming that this was in retaliation for the EDF's involvement in the fighting.<sup>11</sup>

According to Amnesty International's interviews with survivors and witnesses, and analysis by other human rights organizations and journalists, Eritrean forces have committed grave and widespread violations of international humanitarian law, some of which amount to war crimes and possible crimes against humanity. In this briefing, 28 out of the 63 survivors of sexual violence interviewed by Amnesty International identified the EDF as the sole perpetrators of rapes they survived and witnessed. Previous Amnesty International investigations also found that the EDF soldiers committed extrajudicial killings in Axum and Adwa.<sup>12</sup>

Yet despite mounting evidence of the Eritrean presence in the region, the Ethiopian authorities consistently denied that Eritrean soldiers were participating in the Tigray conflict until Prime Minister Abiy's admission in an address to parliament on 23 March 2021 that Eritrean forces were present.<sup>13</sup> Even then, the prime minister did not acknowledge the full extent of the Eritrean forces' presence and role in the Tigray region. He stated that "Eritrea had said its soldiers were acting to secure the border, taking over trenches there

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia, *World Report 2020*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/ethiopia>

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *Beyond Law Enforcement, Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security Forces in Amhara and Oromia*, May 2020 (Index: AFR 25/2358/2020).

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of these dynamics in Oromia, Amhara and between the Ethiopian federal government and the TPLF, see International Crisis Group, *Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails*, Report No. 283 / Africa, 16 December 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/283-keeping-ethiopia-transition-rails>

<sup>8</sup> For more background on this, see International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, Briefing No. 167 / Africa, 11 February 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/167-finding-path-peace-ethiopia-tigray-region>

<sup>9</sup> Aljazeera, "Ethiopia's Tigray blocks general's appointment in blow to Abiy," 30 October 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/30/ethiopia-tigray-blocks-generals-appointment-in-swipe-at-abiy>

<sup>10</sup> Office of the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, "The Ongoing Law Enforcement Operations in Tigray: Causes and Objectives", 14 November 2020.

<sup>11</sup> VOA News, "Rockets Hit Eritrea's Capital, Asmara", 15 November 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/rockets-hit-eritreas-capital-asmara>

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: The massacre in Axum*, 26 February 2021 <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR2537302021ENGLISH.PDF>. Also see, for example, Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians", 5 March 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/ethiopia-eritrean-forces-massacre-tigray-civilians>; Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Three killed, 19 injured in Tigray as Eritrean troops open fire on civilians", 14 April 2021 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/ethiopia-three-killed-19-injured-in-tigray-as-eritrean-troops-open-fire-on-civilians-2/>

<sup>13</sup> BBC, "Ethiopia PM Ahmed Abiy admits Eritrea forces in Tigray," 23 March 2021. Previously, on 30 November, Prime Minister Abiy had informed parliament that Ethiopian soldiers who survived the TPLF's attack on the night of November 3 had been ordered to withdraw into Eritrea, where they were provided shelter and the space and provisions to recuperate. BBC, "Tigray crisis: Eritrea's role in Ethiopian conflict," 28 December 2020.

abandoned by Ethiopian soldiers who had gone off to fight.”<sup>14</sup> This description of the Eritrean forces’ limited presence and role stood in stark contrast with a growing body of evidence that Eritrean forces were operating in towns and villages throughout the Tigray region.

The Eritrean government, for its part, announced in a letter to the UN Security Council on 16 April 2021 that its forces were beginning to withdraw from Tigray, in what was its first admission that its forces were operating there.<sup>15</sup>

Eritrea’s involvement followed Prime Minister Abiy’s normalization of relations with Eritrea in 2018 and acceptance of the 2001 Ethio-Eritrea Border Commission’s ruling. This rapprochement between Ethiopia’s federal government and Eritrea contrasts with Eritrea’s historical animosity with the TPLF, who had led Ethiopia during the 1998–2000 Ethio-Eritrea war.<sup>16</sup>

When the conflict started in November 2020, much of the Tigray conflict was centred around parts of Western Tigray that are historically contested between Tigray and Amhara regions. In the weeks that follow, ASF and Fano militia took over areas that many Amhara claim Tigray had annexed in the early 1990s. Amnesty International has collected multiple testimonies showing that ASF and Fano militia have been operating in various parts of Tigray alongside the ENDF, often operating in the same spaces, and moving from place to place at the same time, demonstrating cooperation between the ENDF and these groups.

In May 2021, Ethiopia’s cabinet designated the TPLF as a terrorist group.<sup>17</sup> Following national elections in much of Ethiopia in June, and after withdrawing ENDF troops from Tigray, the Ethiopian government announced a unilateral ceasefire on 28 June 2021.<sup>18</sup> In response, the TPLF set out their pre-conditions for a negotiated ceasefire, including resumption of essential services, restoration of telecommunications, release of political prisoners, and an end to detentions of Tigrayans in other parts of the country.<sup>19</sup> TPLF forces continued to advance into Afar, east of Tigray, North Wollo Zone of the Amhara region, and parts of Western Tigray. The Ethiopian federal government announced that they were mobilizing forces from other regions indicating that the conflict was likely to continue.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> BBC, “Ethiopia PM Ahmed Abiy admits Eritrea forces in Tigray,” 23 March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Reuters, “Eritrea admits presence in Ethiopia’s Tigray, tells U.N. withdrawing,” 16 April 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/eritrea-admits-presence-ethiopia-tigray-tells-un-withdrawing-2021-04-16/>.

<sup>16</sup> International Crisis Group, *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region*, Briefing No. 167 / Africa, 11 February 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/167-finding-path-peace-ethiopia-tigray-region>

<sup>17</sup> Bloomberg, “Ethiopia Declares Tigray, Oromia Groups Terrorist Organizations”, 6 May 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-06/ethiopia-declares-tigray-oromia-groups-terrorist-organizations>

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Decision by the Federal Government of Ethiopia in Response to the Proposal of the Tigray Provisional Administration to Resolve the Challenges Facing the Tigray Region”, 29 June 2021.

<sup>19</sup> The Government of Tigray, “Current position on the Government of Tigray regarding a Negotiated Ceasefire”, 27 July 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Al Jazeera, “Ethiopia Regions Sent Troops to Back Fight with Tigray Rebels”, 15 July 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/15/ethiopia-regions-send-troops-to-back-fight-with-tigray-rebels>

# 4. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN TIGRAY

Sexual violence, along with other grave human rights violations, has been a defining element of the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region since its outbreak in November 2020. Multiple forms of sexual violence — including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation and torture — have been perpetrated against Tigrayan women and girls by Ethiopian government forces — the ENDF and ASF, and their allied Fano militias — as well as by the Eritrean forces that have been fighting alongside the Ethiopian military.<sup>21</sup>

The sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in different areas of Tigray throughout the nine-month conflict is shocking in its scale and level of brutality. It is often accompanied by threats and by additional acts of physical and psychological torture aimed at causing lasting fear, and physical and psychological damage. In the majority of cases investigated for this report, women and girls were gang raped. The victims included children and pregnant women, with several of them subjected to additional acts of torture, including being raped with objects, being beaten, threatened with the intention of humiliating them, and being denied assistance for the injuries sustained. Several were held captive in sexual slavery for up to several weeks.

The patterns of sexual violence emerging from survivors' accounts indicate that the violations have been part of a strategy to terrorize, degrade, and humiliate both the victims and their ethnic group. The fact that such practices have been widespread and continuous indicates that this strategy has been tolerated at the highest level of government in both Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The accounts of survivors interviewed for this report show that sexual violence has been rampant from the very first days of the conflict in the Tigray region, and has occurred in various settings where women and girls have come into close proximity with the EDF, ENDF, ASF and Fano militia. Such settings include when government forces have searched houses and neighbourhoods or villages looking for fighters or weapons, and when they and/or Fano militias have raided homes in order to loot. They also include when women and girls were fleeing from one area of Tigray to another; when they were hiding in rural areas; when they were trying to cross the border to Sudan and following their abduction or detention.

## GANG RAPE, INCLUDING OF PREGNANT WOMEN

**"I have not enough words. They see us [Tigrayan women] as a leftover kollo [a local cereal snack]."**

A 32-year-old woman raped by multiple perpetrators while in detention for two months at a police station in Humera, Western Tigray.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The Fano militia is an Amhara armed group which has been participating in the Tigray conflict with the consent and cooperation of the Ethiopian government forces, at times alongside them and at times independently.

<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 4 June 2021.

A majority of rape survivors — 38 out of 63 — interviewed by Amnesty International said that they were raped by multiple perpetrators. Some were pregnant when they were raped, and others were assaulted in front of their children.

Lelay, a 20-year-old woman from Baaker, told Amnesty International that she was assaulted in her home in November 2020 by armed, Amharic-speaking men, wearing a mix of uniforms and civilian clothing. She recalled:

On 19 November they came to our home, where I lived with my parents and my siblings, and said we need to search the house for weapons. I was pregnant and was sleeping. My father said, “OK, but my daughter is sleeping in this room”. They said, “we only want to search for weapons and won’t disturb her”, and got my parents and siblings out.

Three men came into the room where I was. It was evening and already dark. I woke up due to the noise they were making. I did not scream; they gestured to me not to make any noise or [they] would kill me. They raped me one after the other. They were not young; [they were] at least 40. They had rifles.

I was four months pregnant; I don’t know if they realized I was pregnant. I don’t know if they realized I was a person.

I did not tell my family. I don’t know if they knew or suspected what happened to me.<sup>23</sup>

Lelay said that some days prior to the incident three men who she described as being Amhara Fano militia members had come to her home and told her family to leave, saying that they “didn’t want any Tigrayans” there. The family left their home immediately after the rape and fled across the border to Sudan.

Nigist, a 35-year-old mother of two from Humera, told Amnesty International that she and four other women were raped by Eritrean soldiers in Sheraro on 21 November 2020. She explained:

We were leaving Humera loaded at the back of a tractor and it broke in Sheraro. We stopped while they were fixing it in Sheraro. There were many Shabiyas [Eritrean soldiers]. They commit lots of horrific things. Three of them raped me in front of my child.

There was an eight months pregnant lady with us, they raped her too. I have no words to tell you. They gathered like a hyena that saw something to eat. When the fourth one was coming to rape me, one of them said “leave her alone”.

This happened in Sheraro. We left Humera carrying our children as heavy artillery was striking our house. They caught us around the bus station in Sheraro. They raped the women and slaughtered the men. They also beat the men using sticks. It was on 21 November 2020. It was the annual St Michael celebration day. It was on the 12th day since we left Humera. We were begging them “What did we do?”. They committed this on the road, even on the old women who were 50 or 60 years old. It was around 6 PM. We were crying for help and they dragged us to the ground.

The pregnant woman gave birth after they raped her, and the baby was stillborn. She was raped by five men.

Lots of women were raped, but they don’t speak. When they raped us, we were five; we know each other as we left together from Humera. They raped me while my two-year-old son was watching. When he was crying, they said “shut up you a son of a Tigre”.<sup>24</sup>

Nigist said that after the assault she was in so much pain that she could not walk for two weeks. When she was able to reach a health facility and get tested, she learned that she had contracted a sexually transmitted disease.

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 21 May 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 10 June 2021.

Azmera, who had worked at an ENDF cafe until the conflict started, told Amnesty International that:

Then the TPLF fighters attacked and took the ENDF soldiers. The TPLF fighters let the women go, we went to the desert. Then Eritrean soldiers caught us in the rural area. That was on 1 Hidar [10 November]. They committed lots of attacks. They raped me, consecutively for days, in turns. We were with them for one month and two weeks in the field. They were raping us the whole time.<sup>25</sup>

Yemisrach, a 24-year-old woman from Badme town near the border with Eritrea, told Amnesty International that four EDF soldiers raped her and her friend for 28 days even though she told them that she was HIV positive. Yemisrach recalled that:

It was on 16 Tir [24 January]. I was going to my mother. Four Eritreans captured me and raped me, all of them. I told them I am HIV positive, they said we don't care. They said, "you think you can fool us". They asked me if I came all this way thinking that the Tigray Militia or Special Force would protect me. I told them I am just looking at my missing mom. They said, "You must have believed someone would protect you". It is a place called Nafra, on the way from Sheraro to Biyara. That's where they raped me. There is a ditch there; that's where they raped us.

They were watching a sex film on their phone. They were telling me to use my mouth to please them. They were telling us that we will be killed if we don't bring the militia or a special force. I was with my friend and we stayed for 28 days with them. They were moving us from place to place.<sup>26</sup>

## SEXUAL SLAVERY

**"He raped me while the other three waited outside. He took my virginity and then left, and then the other three men also raped me. They kept me for three days in that house and continued to rape me many times."**

A 16-year-old girl who was held captive in the town of Adebai.<sup>27</sup>

Twelve of the survivors of sexual violence interviewed by Amnesty International were held for days and weeks during which they were repeatedly raped, most of them by several men. Three of them were children. Some were held with other women, who were subjected to the same abuse. Some were held in military camps, others in houses or in open grounds in rural areas.

In some cases, soldiers targeted women and girls for rape and abduction to pressure them to reveal the whereabouts of their male relatives or to pressure the latter to give themselves up.

Etegenet, a 16-year-old girl from Division, was abducted and held captive in Adebai by Ethiopian soldiers while fleeing with her mother and siblings. She recounted her ordeal to Amnesty International:

We took a minibus from Division to Adebai with my mother and brothers. In Adebai we stayed in the compound (yard) of an empty house. Then my mother sent me to buy injera and on the street three men came with sticks and machete and rifles; two were in uniform and one in plain clothes. They spoke Amharic. They asked me where I am from and I said from Division. I said I had gone to buy injera for my family. They took me to the compound where my mum and brothers were and ordered me to give the injera to my mum and took me with them in a car, a pick-up vehicle. They took me to a compound not far; in the city. They took me inside the house.

At the house there was a man in uniform, an officer (ENDF) because he had shoulder pads with symbols. He was about 50. He asked if my father was a fighter and I said he was dead. He said, "you liar" and slapped me in the face. He raped me while the other three waited outside. He took my virginity and then left, and then the other three men also raped me.

<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 10 June 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 16 June 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 27 May 2021.

They kept me for three days in that house and continued to rape me many times. Then, after three days, at night they let me go.<sup>28</sup>

Tsedey, a 17-year-old 8<sup>th</sup>-grade student, told Amnesty International that she was abducted by Eritrean soldiers in Zebangedena and held captive for two weeks. She recalled:

We fled to Zebangedena from Adi Hagerai as there was a problem there. Then someone told them that I was there. They came and abducted me. They held me captive for two weeks. They were eight Eritrean soldiers. It was on 5 January 2021. They took me to a rural area, in a field.

There were many soldiers; I was raped by eight of them.

It was in Zebangedena. Usually, they went out to guard the area in two shifts. When four of them went out, the rest stayed and raped me. They beat me. They insulted me. They used to tell me that they would kill me if I didn't bring my father. I didn't see other women there. I was alone.<sup>29</sup>

Blen, a 21-year-old waitress from Badme, told Amnesty International that she was abducted by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers on 5 November 2020 and held for 40 days with some 30 other women:

They took us in the evening; we walked, and then they brought cars to transport us. We stayed in the forest; we stayed there for one month and 10 days. They told us that we are transferred to the desert from our village. It was both Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers. They raped us and starved us.

They were too many who raped us in rounds. Maybe they were five or six. They raped us after taking us to the Eritrean in the Gashbarka area.

We were around 30 women they took from Badme. All of us were raped. They kept us for one month and 10 days. Then they brought us back to Badme and they let us go.<sup>30</sup>

Tsedale, a 32-year-old woman from Humera, told Amnesty International that she was arrested on 17 November 2020 at her home in Humera and arbitrarily detained for two and a half months. As the conflict broke out the local authorities and police were ousted and replaced by the incoming forces — army units and militias — resulting in large numbers of arbitrary, unregulated detentions. Tsedale was among those detained in those circumstances. She told Amnesty International:

A man who is from the Amhara Special Force came and took me from my home; he said that I was one of the wanted Junta (TPLF/TDF). In detention they beat me three times a day. Every morning, in the afternoon and at night. Then they came every night to rape me.

Three men raped me. They told me "You Junta! We will not get anything if you die. We would rather torture you", and they beat me, and raped me...

I was [held] for two months and two weeks. Each night they used to come to rape me. The three men took turns to do so. Even if I shouted, no one can help... Though I told them to stop, they call me Junta, and they beat me with a huge stick called "the thieves stick": it is a plastic tool the police use.<sup>31</sup>

Lulit, a 35-year-old widow and mother of three girls, told Amnesty International that she was raped by seven Amhara militia members near Mai Kadra on 16 November 2020. The men also abducted her 16-year-old daughter. She described:

I was caught by Amhara (special) forces/Fano militias with many other people as we were going back to Mai Kadra after hiding in the bush for four days. I was raped by seven soldiers/militiamen. When I was raped, I was with eight other women and girls, including my 16-year-old daughter. Each of us was given to some soldiers/militiamen who could do anything with us.

<sup>28</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 27 May 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 12 June 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 10 June 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 4 June 2021.

I got separated from my daughter in this incident; I had no news of her for four months and then discovered she was in held in Gonder. Now she is in Mekelle and I have spoken to her on the phone, and she told me that while in Gonder she was being held by a military man for almost five months and during this time he was using her for sex. She managed to escape by breaking the door and in the street was seeking help and found help to get to Mekelle. She got pregnant by the rape and when she reached Mekelle hospital the pregnancy was already too advanced to terminate.<sup>32</sup>

## SADISTIC BRUTALITY ACCOMPANYING RAPE

**“They used an iron rod, which is used to clean the gun, to burn me... They left pieces of metal in my womb; that was what hurt me.”**

A 39-year-old mother of two who was raped in front of her children.<sup>33</sup>

Survivors recounted additional acts of brutality accompanying the rapes, with perpetrators — mostly Eritrean soldiers — inflicting such torture solely to cause maximum pain and damage, not to extract information. Two survivors reported having hot metal rods, large nails and multiple types of metal and plastic shrapnel inserted deep into their vaginas, causing indescribable pain and lasting and at times irreparable damage.<sup>34</sup> Doctors and other medical professionals who have treated survivors of sexual violence have recounted cases where they had to remove nails and shrapnel from survivors’ vaginas.<sup>35</sup>

Eyerusalem, a 39-year-old mother of two, said that she was seized by Eritrean soldiers, together with two other women, as she was traveling east with her children:

We were fleeing from [my hometown of] May Kadra. It happened after we crossed the Tekeze river at a place called Tselim. We were three [women]... It was on 29 December 2020. It was the Shabiya [Eritrean] soldiers. They spoke Tigrigna and had a tattoo [tribal scarring] on their faces... They kept me for 24 hours. They asked for my husband. First, they used a hot iron rod and inserted pieces of metal in my womb. They filled it with metal pieces.

They kept me at their temporary base; it was fenced in with piled up stones. Five of them raped me in front of my children. I have three children. One was three months old, and the other two are nine and six years old. They used an iron rod, which is used to clean the gun, to burn me. They used the fire they put on to roast the goat [to heat the rod]. They inserted pieces of metal in my womb; that was what hurt me. Then they left me on the street. I waited for help on the road until passersby helped me. My feet were burning, and I couldn’t stand, I didn’t know what was inside me. Then people found me lying on the ground and brought me to the main road.<sup>36</sup>

The medical director of the hospital where Eyerusalem was treated told Amnesty International that:

In February, we also saw one case of a victim with a foreign body inserted into the uterus. We removed four nails from the body that stayed there for more than two months. One of the nails was curved. It was very difficult for her to sleep and walk before we removed the nails. Three weeks after the operation, she was able to move. She stayed in hospital for months. She is a mother of two. She also had a burn on her upper thigh when she was raped.<sup>37</sup>

A doctor working at a medical facility treating survivors of sexual violence in Adigrat told Amnesty International about another such case. He explained:

The girl from Edaga Hamus was taken from the public minibuses on 6 February 2021. They let her go on 15 February and she arrived during the night and came to us the next day. We took out two nails... tissue paper, gravel, and a piece of plastic packaging measuring 9 cm by 8 cm from her vagina. The plastic

<sup>32</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Reuters, “Special Report: Health official alleges ‘sexual slavery’ in Tigray; women blame soldiers,” 15 April 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-rape-specialreport-idAFKBN2C20P0>.

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 16 June 2021.

looks like the kind you use to pack coffee beans and we found it on the top while the other items were beneath the plastic.<sup>38</sup>

Quoting the medical account provided by the survivor, the doctor told Amnesty International that:

[The perpetrators] caught her in Edaga Hamus, which is 25 km from Adigrat. They took her off the minibus and took her to the eastern part of Edaga Hamus. There is a military camp there, which was previously used by the Ethiopian government. It is around five kilometers from the main road. They held her captive for nine days.<sup>39</sup>

A doctor and two midwives told Amnesty International that they treated women who had been raped anally as well as vaginally and that survivors found it even more difficult to disclose having been subjected to such abuse, as the practice is seen as shameful.<sup>40</sup> Mariam, a midwife, told Amnesty International:

Some women display symptoms and problems which are the result of anal rape, but they do not mention it and even we cannot ask them directly if they have suffered that abuse because it would inflict such shame on them. It would be like another abuse for them. So we try to help them but don't ask them and don't discuss this with them.<sup>41</sup>

Meaza, a 37-year-old woman who was abducted and held captive for 15 days by Eritrean soldiers, described how she was raped anally by multiple perpetrators. She told Amnesty International:

It was on 11 November at 1pm. There is a rural area near Shiraro, called Adi Nebri. The Shabiya [Eritrean] soldiers captured me there. They were 13 people. They raped me, and it was not normal rape. They were raping me through my anus. They told me: "You are useless."

There were 13 of them, and I understand one of them was an official. They spoke in Arabic. He insulted me in Arabic. While they were abusing me they insulted me. I didn't say anything to him, I was scared.

They kept me captive for 15 days in the forest. At the end they put condoms and gravel inside me (my vagina). They thought I was dead and they left me. People found me and took me to Shire and I came to Adwa after a month, because they had blocked the road (when they captured Selelekah). People found me and took me to the hospital. I was getting medical care. But then conflict broke out in Adwa and had to leave again. At the hospital in Adwa they took out what was inside me. I didn't know what was inside me until they took it out.<sup>42</sup>

## BEATINGS, INSULTS, THREATS, HUMILIATION

**"They said: 'you are Agame [an insulting word used by Eritrean to refer to Tigrayans], disgusting, backward. This is what you deserve.'"**

A young mother who described being gang-raped by five Eritrean soldiers.<sup>43</sup>

The soldiers and militiamen who raped and otherwise tortured Tigrayan women and girls often perpetrated particularly brutal additional acts of torture and practices clearly aimed at terrorizing and humiliating their victims. Their gruesome deeds were often accompanied by beatings, insults, threats, demeaning comments

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<sup>38</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Adigrat, 9 June 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Adigrat, 9 June 2021.

<sup>40</sup> "They [survivors] don't say they were raped in this way, anal rape. Sometimes we understand from the type of injury," Sara, a midwife said. Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 22 May 2021. Similarly, a doctor told Amnesty International, "When she went to the clinic she did not tell them what they had done to her [about anal rape]." Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021. See also Associated Press, "'Our Season': Eritrean Troops Kill, Rape, Loot in Tigray", 28 May 2021, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/our-season-eritrean-troops-kill-rape-loot-tigray>

<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 4 June 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

and ethnic slurs. Several survivors interviewed by Amnesty International said that their rapists had specifically tried to humiliate and degrade them — saying insults like, “you are disgusting.”<sup>44</sup>

Bersabeh, a 25-year-old from Shiraro, fled from her home to Shire when the fighting broke out in the town. According to Bersabeh, a soldier with cultural marks specific to ethnic groups unique to Eritrea stabbed and raped her when she was on the run. She told Amnesty International:

When the fighting began in Sheraro, we were running from one dessert to another. When they approached the place, we were hiding, and we ran away. It took me seven days to reach Shire from Sheraro. When we reached Guna, he found me. He speaks Tigrigna but he has scratch marks on both sides of his cheeks; the scars are like the number 11. He found me when we were entering the city.

He was walking with us and talking to me like a normal person. But he stayed behind and strangled me. He took his bayonet [combat knife] out and he stabbed me in the neck. When I pulled the knife out of my neck, he stabbed me in my stomach two times.<sup>45</sup>

Mahder, a 25-year-old mother of two, told Amnesty International:

On 20 Hedar [29 November] we decided to leave. At night we left and walked west to go to Hamdayet. Near the river we found Eritrean soldiers, a group of them. They took both me and my husband. They raped me; five of them raped me. They insulted me; they said, “you are Agame, disgusting, backward. This is what you deserve.”

They said [they] would kill my husband. They took him away. I have had no information about him since. I can't sleep; I think about what happened all the time.<sup>46</sup>

Tiruye, a 43-year-old mother of four, told Amnesty International that she was pregnant at the time she was assaulted by Eritrean soldiers in November 2020. The perpetrators not only raped her, she said, they also beat her and her son, and she lost her baby after the assault. She recalled:

I got to a little town called Tselim Tseder. There were Eritrean soldiers and they seized me. I was four months' pregnant.

One of them beat me very hard and I fell. I knew that they were Eritreans by the way they were talking. One of them was wearing black clothes. The other two were wearing military uniform. They did not know that I was pregnant. They kicked me. I was shocked and I was bleeding.

Though I was telling them that I am pregnant, they did not listen and raped me.

Two of my children, a 13-year-old girl and a 10th grade son (age 25), were with me. They beat my son when he told them “leave my mother alone.” They told him: “This is not your business.” They beat him so hard. My son is now mentally ill. He doesn't speak, and he is now tied with chains.

There was no one around when they did this to me. Everyone was running to save their lives. No one was there to save me. No one could help me. My son was also wounded. After they beat my son, all the three soldiers raped me turn by turn, and left.<sup>47</sup>

## WOMEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED WHILE TRYING TO FLEE THE COUNTRY

**“They said if you were male we would kill you, but girls can make Amhara babies.”**

A 28-year-old mother of two who was raped by Amhara forces near the border with Sudan.<sup>48</sup>

Several women told Amnesty International that they were raped by soldiers and militiamen near the border with Sudan, as they were trying to reach the border to seek shelter in refugee camps in eastern Sudan. Such

<sup>44</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 16 June 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International phone interviews, Shire, 28 May and 12 June 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 29 May 2021

reports emerged as Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers increased their efforts to prevent Tigrayans from crossing the border into Sudan.<sup>49</sup> Since that time, the number of Tigrayans crossing into Sudan has significantly reduced.<sup>50</sup>

Seble, an 18-year-old 10<sup>th</sup> year student from Division, recounted the ordeal she endured as she was fleeing to Sudan in January 2021:

I came to Sudan at the end of Terri (January), but I left Division when the war started and went to Sheglil for a month and then when things calmed down I went back home but found that our home was burned down and so went to stay with friends. My mother is Wolkait so she stayed but she told me, "I cannot protect you; better you go away."<sup>51</sup> I came with two friends, two girls my age. On the way here we went via Enda Gaber area, Azruf area. We went the wrong way, did not know the way. One of the other two girls split and went to Humera and the other one found a guy she knows who can swim well and so she went ahead with him to cross the river quickly and so I was alone when I reached near the border and the soldiers caught me. They wore plain clothes and had rifles and spoke Amharic.

One of them raped me and the other two held me.<sup>52</sup>

Sosina, an 18-year-old student from Rawayan, told Amnesty International of a similar experience when she was fleeing to Sudan in November 2020:

I was raped on the way to the border. It is only a couple hours' walk to the border from my hometown. Near Dima there is a camp which I think in the past was used by Tigrayan forces but now is used by the national army. I was making the journey with three young men, in their mid- to late 20s.

When we saw soldiers coming towards us, the three guys ran away and I was left alone to face the soldiers. Two soldiers came to me; they wore civilian clothes but had rifles. They spoke Amharic. They said now we are in charge here; the TPLF is dead and gone.

They raped me, both of them and then they left. After they left, I stayed there waiting for some people to come to help me to cross the river because I can't swim. Then some guys came and they helped me.<sup>53</sup>

Fasika, a 28-year-old mother of two from Humera, fled her home with her two young daughters in early November 2020. She went first to central Tigray but returned to Humera when she heard that the army had told displaced people that they would be safe in Humera. When she arrived back in Humera, however, she found that her home had burned down, which led her to decide to cross the border to Sudan. She recalled:

On 13 December 2020 the ENDF was collecting people on trucks taking people back to Humera, saying Humera is safe. I got home that day. My home in Kebele 2 was completely looted and most of my neighbours were not there; only the Amhara were there, not the Tigrayans. I could not call my husband in Addis because there was no phone network. So on 16 December I decided to cross into Sudan as I had nothing in Humera. I was carrying my little girl and the other daughter was walking with me.

Near St. Michael Church I was caught by Amhara forces, about 10 of them. They asked me where I was going. I said to Holy Water (a place nearby) and they said, "you must come with us" and took me by force

<sup>49</sup> Several Tigrayan refugees in Sudan told Amnesty International about the difficulties they had faced when trying to cross the border, including how soldiers and/or militia members on the Ethiopian side of the border had shot at them while they were crossing the river which separates the two countries. See also BBC, "Tigray crisis: Ethiopian soldiers accused of blocking border with Sudan," 28 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55106353>; AP, "Ethiopian forces said to block refugees from entering Sudan", 3 December 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/sudan-ethiopia-bab9935d0f82ff394c435b3d9d9553fe>

<sup>50</sup> In the first four weeks of the conflict more than 45,000 Tigrayan refugees crossed into Sudan. UNHCR, Ethiopia Tigray emergency, 30 November 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/ethiopia-tigray-emergency.html>. Some 11,000 more refugees crossed in the following five weeks. UNHCR, UNHCR relocates first Ethiopian refugees to a new site in Sudan, 5 January 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2021/1/5ff4316c4/unhcr-relocates-first-ethiopian-refugees-new-site-sudan.html>. That figure was revised down to 46,000 by mid-June 2021. UNHCR, Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region), Regional Update #17, 17 May – 14 June, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Ethiopia%20%28Tigray%29%20Situation%20External%20Regional%20update%20%2317%2017%20May-14%20June.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> Wolkait, a district in Western Tigray Zone, is an area that is disputed between the Tigray and Amhara regions. It has been within the administrative boundaries of the Tigray region since 1991, but previously it was part of Gondar Province, which was largely an ethnic Amhara province. Part of the population of Western Tigray has been campaigning for the territory to be part of the Amhara region. See, for example, The Guardian, Ethnic tensions in Gondar reflect the toxic nature of Ethiopian politics, 22 December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/dec/22/gondar-ethiopia-ethnic-tensions-toxic-politics>

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 23 May 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 22 May 2021.

with my daughters to a house nearby. Some kept my daughters in a room and others took me to another room; not sure how many were in the room with me; they were going in and out. They abused me.

Most of them raped me. I lost count how many raped me. It was around midday. They raped me all day and throughout the night and kept me for three days and continued to rape me all the time.

They said if you were male we would kill you, but girls can make Amhara babies.

I never saw my daughters in the house during that time. Then several Eritrean soldiers came in and took me away and one of them started to rape me in the bush but he saw that I was bleeding, so he said let's leave her, she is bleeding. And they took me back to my kids and left. There were some soldiers' biscuits, and we ate those.

We stayed there for two days as I could not move. They left me alone and then there was some firing in the distance and the soldiers left and I left with my girls towards holy water. I stayed by holy water for three or four days and then crossed the river to Sudan. There I found a doctor who took me to a clinic, but I did not tell them what happened to me, so they thought I had a urinary tract infection and gave me pills for that, but those pills did not help. I am still in pain now.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 29 May 2021.

# 5. IMPACT OF THE VIOLATIONS ON SURVIVORS

Survivors described serious health problems stemming from rape, including mental health problems. Many survivors complained of continuing physical trauma such as bleeding, pain, incontinence, immobility and fistulas. Others said that they tested positive for HIV due to rape, a consequence confirmed by doctors. Depression, insomnia, anxiety, and other forms of emotional distress are also common among survivors, as well as family members who witnessed the abuses.

Lulit, a 35-year-old widow and mother of three girls, said that she was raped by seven Amhara militia members in November 2020. She fled to Sudan afterward, where she checked into a clinic, was tested, and was found to be HIV-positive. She said that she was given drugs for HIV but was still suffering a lot. “I am in a lot of pain,” she said.<sup>55</sup> Lulit’s doctor told Amnesty International that, in addition to the physical pain and injuries, Lulit is suffering from deep anxiety because she was separated from her 16-year-old daughter, who had been abducted with her.<sup>56</sup>

Meaza, a 37-year-old woman who was raped anally by multiple perpetrators during the 15 days that she was held captive by Eritrean soldiers, spoke to Amnesty International about the resulting physical damage. She said:

I had a lot of pain in my womb and then I suffered a rectal prolapse. I was in a lot of pain for 13 days. At the hospital they wanted to do surgery, but they didn’t have the medicine. The wound took time to heal. I had to be strong, I was the only one there for my kids, as their father was dead.<sup>57</sup>

The father of a 10-year-old girl who was raped said his daughter continued to suffer the physical and mental consequences of the assault:

Now she has a serious cramp in the stomach. I suspected that she would test positive for HIV, but she tested negative ...

Initially, she had pain in the stomach, she had a problem peeing, and she had a horrifying nightmare that haunts her at night. These days she is getting better as we try to talk to her and it helps.<sup>58</sup>

Eyerusalem, a woman who was gang-raped by Eritrean soldiers who inserted an iron rod and nails in her vagina, said she suffered severe physical consequences. “I was not able to control my urine,” she recalled, until a humanitarian organization took her to a hospital. “Now I can control my urine,” she said, “but I can’t

<sup>55</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

<sup>56</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 4 June 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

sleep on my back. I can't sit down. I only can sleep on my chest.<sup>59</sup> She also said: "I have a problem sleeping. When my children see anyone with a military uniform they cry."

As Eyerusalem's situation suggests, family members who witnessed the rape of a loved one also endure trauma and may also suffer continuing mental health issues. Tiruye, a 43-year-old mother of four who described being gang raped by Eritrean soldiers, said that her daughter has not recovered. "My 13-year-old daughter cries all night, she can't sleep well at night after that day," Tiruye told Amnesty International. "She saw when everything happened to me."<sup>60</sup>

In addition to a host of negative consequences linked to rape, virtually all survivors of sexual violence have also been harmed in other ways by the conflict. Some have had close relatives killed, injured or disappeared; others have lost contact with close relatives, including spouses, children, parents and siblings. Some have had their homes and businesses looted, damaged or destroyed; many have been forcibly displaced and have lost their livelihoods.

Crucial support mechanisms that existed prior to the conflict — savings, food reserves and ability to borrow — have been largely exhausted and the recovery phase has not yet begun. Instead, the humanitarian situation is expected to deteriorate further, the movement of people and goods remains restricted, and the reconstruction of public infrastructure and private property may be far off. The hardship which survivors and their families face compounds their suffering and hinders their recovery from the trauma of sexual violence.

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<sup>59</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 28 May and 12 June 2021.

# 6. SURVIVORS' ACCESS TO MEDICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICES

While the survivors of sexual violence in Tigray suffer from multiple medical complications, there are limited protection, health, livelihood, and psycho-social services available in the region because the conflict has decimated them. Medical facilities have been looted, damaged or outright destroyed, and staff have fled.

In March 2021 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) warned that a majority of primary health centres in Tigray, which normally attend to 70% of all patients, were not functioning at all, while the main hospitals were struggling to treat the war-wounded and maintain essential medical services.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that:

Ongoing assessments by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that 141 of the 198 assessed hospitals and health centres were either partially or fully damaged. All hospitals and centres urgently need more medical supplies, drugs and equipment, according to WHO, and partners report continued looting of health facilities, with 12 further incidents of looting by armed actors reported in the past two weeks.<sup>62</sup>

According to Médecins sans frontières (MSF), the violence in Tigray engulfed health facilities, leaving “barely one out of 10 functioning”.<sup>63</sup> Of 106 health facilities visited by MSF in Tigray in March 2021, 30% had been damaged, 73% had been looted, and 87% were not functioning or only partially functioning.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, one in every five health facilities had been occupied by troops.<sup>65</sup>

Such destruction has had a devastating impact on medical care in general and dramatically reduced the availability of post-rape care — notably emergency contraception, post exposure prophylaxis and safe abortion. The MSF report based on these visits concluded that “victims of sexual violence are often unable to get medical and psychological care”.<sup>66</sup>

A midwife who worked in medical facility in Adwa told Amnesty International that health services in the town were abruptly interrupted when Eritrean soldiers entered and looted the hospital on 20 November 2020, prompting staff and patients to leave. She recalled:

In the following day and weeks, I tried to visit the homes of pregnant women I knew to assist them and I volunteered with two charities. It was very limited what we could do and it was dangerous because the soldiers think that medics treat combatants.

<sup>61</sup> ICRC, “Operational update on Ethiopia: ICRC concerned about humanitarian situation in rural areas of Tigray”, 12 March 2021, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/operational-update-ethiopia-icrc-concerned-about-humanitarian-situation-rural-areas-tigray#>

<sup>62</sup> OCHA, “Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Situation Report”, 30 March 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia/>

<sup>63</sup> MSF, “People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,” 15 March 2021, <https://www.msf.org/health-facilities-targeted-tigray-region-ethiopia>

<sup>64</sup> MSF, “People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,” 15 March 2021.

<sup>65</sup> MSF, “People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,” 15 March 2021.

<sup>66</sup> MSF, “People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed,” 15 March 2021.

Even if we work on women's health, the soldiers don't care. They see us as enemies.

Women who were raped by the soldiers could not get medical treatment because they were too afraid to approach medical centres if the soldiers were there, and for those in rural area there were no facilities at all as the mobile clinics did not function.<sup>67</sup>

A midwife who used to work at Humera hospital told Amnesty International of her frustration at not being able to help seven women and girl survivors of rape whom she met in the second half of January 2021:

I met them near the health centre in the centre of town in the Meskit area. They were there but did not go in because they were scared. The youngest was only 15 years old. They told me that they were raped by ENDF soldiers in Mai Gava several weeks earlier and then they came to Humera. They were scared and needed help but I was not able to help them because I had nothing. Shortly after that I left.<sup>68</sup>

While the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) predicted that 26,000 people of reproductive age (15-49) might seek clinical management of rape services,<sup>69</sup> only 29% of the health facilities in Tigray were partially providing clinical management for sexual violence survivors according to the United Nations World Health Organization (WHO) Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS).<sup>70</sup> The rest were not providing any service for survivors, mainly due to lack of trained staff and medical supplies,<sup>71</sup> with emergency contraception unavailable in 86% of health facilities assessed across the region in May 2021.<sup>72</sup> Thirty-seven (51%) out of 72 health facilities were able to provide post-exposure prophylaxis, while the service was partially available in 23 (32%) of them. According to UNFPA, by mid-July 2021, only 40 rape cases had been clinically managed in Tigray within the recommended 72-hour window.<sup>73</sup>

Survivors interviewed by Amnesty International gave accounts that were consistent with these findings. They consistently described how they were unable to obtain timely medical treatment and support. Meaza, who faces multiple health complications from being repeatedly gang raped when held for 15 days by Eritrean soldiers near Shiraro town, said that she had to travel to the town of Adwa, nearly 200 kms from Shiraro, to get medical treatment. She recalled:

In Adwa, they took out what was inside me. I didn't know what was inside me until they took it out. They gave me medicine and I had a difficult pain in my womb. Later when I was in the toilet my rectum prolapsed. I was in a lot of pain for 13 days. They wanted to do surgery, but they didn't have the medicine.<sup>74</sup>

Hagos, the father of a 10-year-old child who was raped vaginally and anally in early November 2020 told Amnesty International that he was not able to get his daughter — who suffered terrible physical and psychological damage — to the hospital for four and a half months:

I wanted to take her to the hospital in Division, but it was they [the armed forces which committed abuses against Tigrayans] who were administering it. So I came to Shire on 21 March and she got medical help.<sup>75</sup>

Eyerusalem, a woman who was raped by Eritrean soldiers using an iron rod and nails, also spoke of the extreme difficulty she faced trying to access the needed medical care. She recounted:

[A humanitarian organisation] tried to send me in a car to Mekelle so that I could get further medical help. But the car was returned as the soldiers at a checkpoint threaten to burn it. They brought the medicine here and I am taking it. But you know sometimes the Shabiyas [Eritrean

<sup>67</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Gedaref, Sudan, 22 May 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Gedaref, Sudan, 3 June 2021.

<sup>69</sup> UNFPA, UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis, Situation Report, 15-31 May 2021, pp. 4-5, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/extsitrep\\_15-31\\_may\\_tigrayresposne.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/extsitrep_15-31_may_tigrayresposne.pdf)

<sup>70</sup> HeRAMS, Ethiopia (Tigray), Service availability, Sexual Violence, Emergency Contraception/ Post Exposure Prophylaxis, [https://herams.org/project/46?page\\_id=562&parent\\_id=553](https://herams.org/project/46?page_id=562&parent_id=553) (visited in July 2021).

<sup>71</sup> HeRAMS, Ethiopia (Tigray), Service availability, Sexual Violence, Emergency Contraception/ Post Exposure Prophylaxis, [https://herams.org/project/46?page\\_id=562&parent\\_id=553](https://herams.org/project/46?page_id=562&parent_id=553) (visited in July 2021).

<sup>72</sup> UNFPA, "Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis, Situation Report, 15-31 May 2021", p. 5, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/extsitrep\\_15-31\\_may\\_tigrayresposne.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/extsitrep_15-31_may_tigrayresposne.pdf). See also AOR, "Response Update: Crisis in Tigray Gender Based Violence," June 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GBV%20Area%20of%20Responsibility%20-%20Crisis%20in%20Tigray%20-%20Ethiopia%20-%20June%202021.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> UNFPA, UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis, Situation Report, 1-15 July 2021, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 4 June 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

forces] came here to the hospital and I hide when they came. The mental health doctors come and give me treatment.<sup>76</sup>

A doctor at the hospital in Shire where Eyerusalem was eventually able to get medical treatment told Amnesty International that it took her two months to access medical care. He said, “We removed four nails in the body that stayed there for more than two months. One of the nails was curved. It was very difficult for her to sleep and walk before we removed the nails. Three weeks after the operation, she was able to move. She stayed in the hospital for months.”<sup>77</sup>

The doctor lamented that most survivors of sexual violence did not manage to get medical care they needed for weeks and months:

Most of the rape victims we treat come for treatment after months have lapsed. Some of them come after they are three and four months’ pregnant due to rape. The challenge for the victims was the suspension of public transport and insecurity to travel due to the fighting. It is only few of them who come for treatment immediately.<sup>78</sup>

Even in big cities, medical care for survivors of sexual violence was simply not available in the first weeks and months of the conflict. In Shire, for example, the one-stop centre for sexual violence survivors was only established in February — and has since been struggling to cope due to a shortage of drugs and equipment, among other challenges, including a lack of sexually transmitted infection (STI) tests.

Tsedale, a 32-year-old woman from Humera, told Amnesty International that she was arrested on 17 November 2020 at her home in Humera and arbitrarily detained for two and a half months. She recalled: “After they released me I was very sick but there was no medical treatment.”<sup>79</sup>

Amarech, age 19, told Amnesty International that she was seven months pregnant due to rape by Eritrean soldiers near Enda Abaguna. Amarech said she was not able to travel to Shire to seek medical treatment in a timely way because public transport was not available due to the conflict.<sup>80</sup> “We had nothing to eat or money to pay for transportation,” she explained. “We went to the farmers and we stayed with them until we got a car. They [EDF] used to burn cars.”<sup>81</sup>

Some women told Amnesty International that when they were able to access health facilities, they were offered a pregnancy test and follow-up healthcare services. However, three women told researchers about unwanted pregnancies conceived as a result of the rape, and said they were not able to get a safe abortion.<sup>82</sup>

Melat, age 19, was raped by an Eritrean soldier in Zana, Central Tigray, on 1 February 2021. She told Amnesty International that she had to take traditional medicine to abort the unwanted pregnancy since the medical facility in the area was not operating. However, the traditional medicine she took to abort the pregnancy caused life-threatening complications. As she described:

I used traditional medicine. Later I came to the Red Cross. Traditional medicine caused lots of problems. I was about to die. I didn’t get medical help after the incident happened since the health station in the area was not operating. So I used traditional medicine when I knew that I am pregnant. I took it as I was very disappointed.<sup>83</sup>

The two other women described being unable or too afraid to access health services for a number of months after the attack, at which point they said it was too late to obtain an abortion.<sup>84</sup>

Many survivors told Amnesty International that they did not seek medical treatment due to risks of stigma and fears for their privacy. Five of them specifically said that they did not seek medical help since they were scared of potential stigmatization should their community find out.<sup>85</sup> Many survivors interviewed by Amnesty International in Shire said that they had to support their children, and to choose between their livelihood and their health.

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<sup>76</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 16 June 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 16 June 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 4 June 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 11 June 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Amnesty International phone interviews, Shire, 11, 12 and 16 June 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 17 June 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Amnesty International does not have information about why these two survivors felt they were unable to have an abortion at a later stage of pregnancy.

<sup>85</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 10 June 2021.

Tiruye, a survivor of rape from Aditeter, told Amnesty International that she needed to prioritize work to feed herself and her children over seeking medical treatment. She explained:

I am not in a condition to get medical treatment. Because I have an economic problem and that was why I could not take medical treatment. I have nothing to eat or drink even if I got the medicine. Sometimes I wash people's clothes. On some days I beg to get food. Now there is, of course, free medical treatment service, but the food is the priority.<sup>86</sup>

During a follow-up interview after two weeks, Tiruye told Amnesty International that she received a medical treatment with the support of the community worker. After the treatment, the bleeding from her uterus had stopped, said Tiruye.<sup>87</sup> Tiruye also told Amnesty International that she is still undergoing medical treatment for the remaining health complications caused by the rape.

Similarly, Bersabeh told Amnesty International that she had to make a difficult choice between her health and livelihood. She rejected the medical advice to be admitted for treatment because she had to work to sustain herself. She explained:

They asked me to be admitted to the health centre, but I couldn't. I have problems eating and I have other problems too. No one can help me. They told me to be admitted as the wound on my stomach developed a complication.<sup>88</sup>

The absence of psycho-social support for survivors is, if anything, even more glaring than the absence of medical services. Most of the survivors interviewed by Amnesty International said they did not get psycho-social counselling even though they have been suffering from depression and insomnia since they were sexually assaulted. A doctor at Suhul Shire Hospital told Amnesty International that the psychologist appointed to the hospital by the Interim Regional Government and UNFPA was yet to start working.<sup>89</sup>

According to the WHO health services monitoring platform, as of July 2021 there were only five health facilities providing mental health services in all of Tigray.<sup>90</sup> There were no psychological first aid services in Shire town, where Amnesty International interviewed 46 survivors of sexual violence.<sup>91</sup>

In refugee camps in Sudan, survivors of sexual violence have been reluctant to take up offers of psycho-social support from humanitarian organizations. Those interviewed by Amnesty International explained their reluctance as being mostly due to fear of knowledge of their situation spreading in the community — especially given the proximity in which refugees live in the camps — and also due to their many competing needs.

In the words of one survivor:

I lost my husband, my home and my livelihood and I was violated, and nothing can wipe that away or make me feel better. The conditions here for me and my children are miserable, and I try to put all my energy into looking after my children and providing for them because they don't have anyone else.

Even if I talk to psychologists about what happened to me they cannot solve my problems. I hope we can go back home soon and find my husband and rebuild our lives. That is what we need.<sup>92</sup>

Other survivors expressed similar sentiments.

States must apply a survivor-centred approach to preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict and post conflict contexts.<sup>93</sup> This means, among other things, that prevention and response efforts must be “non-discriminatory and specific,” and must “respect the rights and prioritize needs of survivors.”<sup>94</sup> Survivors must also be able to participate in all state decision-making that affects them.<sup>95</sup>

Amnesty International is concerned that survivors have not been able to access the goods and services they need and are entitled to, which is a central aspect of a survivor-centred response. Human rights law requires

<sup>86</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 28 May 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, Tigray, 12 June 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, Tigray, 16 June 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Amnesty International phone interview, Shire, 16 June 2021. A recent UNFPA update confirms the recruitment of a GBV consultant to be based in Shire. UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis, Situation Report, 15-31 May 2021, [https://ethiopia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/extsitrep\\_15-31\\_may\\_tigrayresposne.pdf](https://ethiopia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/extsitrep_15-31_may_tigrayresposne.pdf), p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> HeRAMS, Ethiopia (Tigray), Service availability, [https://herams.org/project/46?page\\_id=562&parent\\_id=553](https://herams.org/project/46?page_id=562&parent_id=553) (visited in July 2021).

<sup>91</sup> HeRAMS, Ethiopia (Tigray), Service availability, [https://herams.org/project/46?page\\_id=553&parent\\_id=563](https://herams.org/project/46?page_id=553&parent_id=563) (visited in July 2021).

<sup>92</sup> Amnesty International interview, Sudan, 28 May 2021.

<sup>93</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019).

<sup>94</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019).

<sup>95</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019).

states to ensure that survivors can access a comprehensive response, including medical treatment, mental healthcare and psychosocial support.<sup>96</sup> This must include access to sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency contraception and abortion services.<sup>97</sup> More broadly, all possible measures must be taken to ensure that displaced civilians receive adequate shelter, enjoy satisfactory hygiene, health, safety and nutrition, and that families are not separated.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019).

<sup>97</sup> For more on this, read the explanatory note accompanying Amnesty International's abortion policy. Amnesty International, Policy on abortion: Explanatory note, Annex I: Abortion in armed conflict situations, 28 September 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL3028472020ENGLISH.PDF>

<sup>98</sup> The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, and sets out the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to which access to health care is an essential component. Articles 11 and 12, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Minimum standards must still be met in a conflict and post-conflict context.

# 7. THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual abuse was mostly hidden from the outside world during the first two months of the conflict, largely due to the communications blackout in Tigray and access restrictions imposed by the Ethiopian government. Specifically, phone and internet networks in Tigray have been disrupted or cut off most of the time, and access to the region for journalists and humanitarian workers has been severely limited. Amnesty International and other international human rights organizations have still not been allowed into Tigray at all. Likewise, at the time of writing, the Ethiopian government had not yet responded to the access request by the Commission of Inquiry into the Situation on the Tigray Region of Ethiopia established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and had objected to the establishment of such a Commission of Inquiry.<sup>99</sup>

In January 2021, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten warned about sexual violence in the Tigray conflict,<sup>100</sup> and as international media visited Tigrayan refugee camps in eastern Sudan and gained access to parts of Tigray, graphic reports emerged of widespread sexual assaults against Tigrayan women and girls.<sup>101</sup> As reports spread worldwide of the scale and brutality of the sexual violence being perpetrated by government forces and their allies, Ethiopian officials acknowledged the existence of the problem, but failed to take concrete measures to prevent the atrocities.

On 11 February 2021, Filsan Ahmed, Ethiopia's Minister of Gender, Children and Youth tweeted: "our Taskforce team on the ground in the Tigray region have unfortunately established rape has taken place conclusively and without a doubt".<sup>102</sup> On 19 February Ethiopia's President Sahle-Work Zewde issued a statement mentioning her visit to Mekelle, where she met survivors of sexual violence and medical personnel who care for them.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), an official body appointed by parliament, stated that 108 cases of rape had been reported to health facilities in Tigray during the first two months of the conflict. The EHRC concluded: "The war and the dismantling of the regional

<sup>99</sup> See ACHPR's statement on 17 June 2021, <https://www.achpr.org/pressrelease/detail?id=583>. See also the statement by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 17 June 2021, <https://wailta.info.com/ethiopia-condemns-the-achpr-unilateral-commission-of-inquiry-measures/>.

<sup>100</sup> United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, urges all parties to prohibit the use of sexual violence and cease hostilities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 21 January 2021, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/united-nations-special-representative-of-the-secretary-general-on-sexual-violence-in-conflict-ms-pramila-patten-urges-all-parties-to-prohibit-the-use-of-sexual-violence-and-cease-hostilities-in-the/>

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Reuters, "'Choose - I kill you or rape you': abuse accusations surge in Ethiopia's war," 22 January 2021; BBC, "Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: 'I lost my hand when a soldier tried to rape me,'" 15 February 2021.

<sup>102</sup> [https://twitter.com/1\\_filsan/status/1359945231765032973](https://twitter.com/1_filsan/status/1359945231765032973), 11 February 2021.

<sup>103</sup> <https://twitter.com/POEthiopia/status/1362836907164581889>, 19 February 2021

administration have led to a rise in gender-based violence in the region.”<sup>104</sup> However, neither institution mentioned that the alleged perpetrators were Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers — and, at the time, the Ethiopian government still denied that Eritrean forces were present in Tigray and actively involved in the conflict there.<sup>105</sup>

The official statements do not reflect the scale and gravity of the abuses, and others go further in dismissing reports of widespread sexual assaults.<sup>106</sup> Although Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed eventually acknowledged the allegations and promised that the perpetrators would be punished,<sup>107</sup> the government failed to take concrete measures to stop and prevent such crimes — which continued unabated. According to medical workers who have been assisting rape survivors in central and east Tigray, conflict-related sexual violence did not diminish, but rather increased in the second half of the conflict.<sup>108</sup>

Nine months on from the onset of the conflict, the Ethiopian authorities have not so far provided any details of the measures they claim to have taken to investigate incidents of conflict-related sexual violence and to bring those responsible to justice. At the timing of writing, the only information made public about concrete steps taken is the announcement by the Attorney General's office on 21 May 2021 that three Ethiopian soldiers were convicted of rape and 25 others indicted and are being tried for rape and other acts of sexual violence.<sup>109</sup> In a statement for the UN Human Rights Council Session, the Attorney General said that “charges have been pressed against more than sixty soldiers... suspected of killing civilians and engaging in acts of sexual violence.”<sup>110</sup> However, no information has been made available about these trials and other legal proceedings.

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<sup>104</sup> EHRC, *Current Situation of Residents in Tigray Region: Brief Monitoring Report*, 11 February 2021, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oqIUj-artYwDyAv4Z0I30x7C0ipk3RyG/view>

<sup>105</sup> In March 2021, after months of denial, Prime Minister Abiy acknowledged that Eritrean forces were participating in the conflict in the Tigray region. See, for example, BBC, “Ethiopia PM Ahmed Abiy admits Eritrea forces in Tigray,” 23 March 2021.

<sup>106</sup> Asked about the reports that Eritrean troops have committed rapes in Tigray and are keeping women in sexual slavery, the country's information minister, Yemane Gebremeskel, accused TPLF activists of “coaching ‘sympathizers’ to create false testimonies.” Reuters, “Health official alleges ‘sexual slavery’ in Tigray,” 15 April 2021.

<sup>107</sup> In a speech to parliament on 23 March 2021, the prime minister said: “Any member of the national defence who committed rape and looting against our Tigrayan sisters will be held accountable.” Reuters, “Ethiopian PM confirms Eritrean troops entered Tigray during conflict,” 23 March 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Amnesty International interviews, Shire and Adigrat, 9 and 16 June 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Reuters, “Four Ethiopian soldiers convicted of crimes against civilians in Tigray,” 21 May 2021.

<sup>110</sup> <https://twitter.com/fagethiopia/status/1407628318430711810?s=21>

# 8. VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LAW

Ethiopia has ratified — and is bound by — all the major international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>111</sup> The country is also bound by regional human rights instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.<sup>112</sup> Eritrea has likewise ratified the ICCPR, CAT, ICESCR, CEDAW and ACHPR.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, both states are required to comply with their own country's constitution and relevant domestic laws, to the extent that these are consistent with international human rights law.

The situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia constitutes a non-international armed conflict, and therefore International Humanitarian Law (IHL) rules that regulate non-international armed conflicts also apply. These include Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, which Ethiopia has ratified.<sup>114</sup> Both Ethiopia and Eritrea are bound by customary international humanitarian and customary international criminal law. UN Security Council resolutions under the Women, Peace and Security agenda should also be implemented in full.

The Amhara Fano militias have been deployed and are fighting alongside the Ethiopian armed and security forces, and/or were carrying out government functions as they committed the internationally wrongful acts set out in this report.<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, the Ethiopian authorities bear responsibility for these violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law.<sup>116</sup>

Likewise, while Eritrea is responsible for the violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by its forces as documented in this report, the Ethiopian authorities also bear responsibility.

<sup>111</sup> See Ratification of 18 International Human Rights Treaties, <https://indicators.ohchr.org>.

<sup>112</sup> See List of countries which have signed, ratified/acceded to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 15 June 2017, [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-sl-african\\_charter\\_on\\_human\\_and\\_peoples\\_rights\\_2.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-sl-african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_2.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> See Ratification of 18 International Human Rights Treaties, <https://indicators.ohchr.org>.

<sup>114</sup> See Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocolii.aspx>

<sup>115</sup> See this interview of a Fano leader on Amhara Media Agency, [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1601615460013442&id=118697174971952](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1601615460013442&id=118697174971952); see also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksy4Q2qWTQI&t=257s>

<sup>116</sup> International Law Commission, Responsibility of States for internationally wrongful acts, (hereinafter ILC, Articles on State Responsibility), annexed to UN General Assembly Resolution 56/83, Yearbook of the International Law Commission 2001, Vol. II (Part 2), Articles 8 and 9. Even if this were not the case, the Ethiopian authorities would be in breach of their international human rights law obligations to exercise due diligence to protect the rights of individuals against deprivations caused by persons or entities, whose conduct is not attributable to the State.

In the first place, Ethiopia would be responsible for violations committed by Eritrean troops, if these troops were “placed at Ethiopia’s disposal” in order to exercise the functions of the Ethiopian armed forces (or other “elements of governmental authority” of Ethiopia).<sup>117</sup> Ethiopia also has obligations under international human rights law to protect the people of Tigray from violations including the right to life and gender-based violence by Eritrean forces and ensure redress.<sup>118</sup>

Acts that constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity also incur individual criminal responsibility under international law. Serious violations of international humanitarian law associated with an armed conflict, where the perpetrator had knowledge of the armed conflict, are war crimes.<sup>119</sup> Where rape and other forms of sexual violence are committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population as part of a government or organizational policy, and where the perpetrator had knowledge of the attack, they also constitute a crime against humanity.<sup>120</sup>

## **RAPE AND OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE UNDER INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LAW**

Rape is a violation of a number of human rights, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination, to physical integrity, and to the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment.<sup>121</sup> States are required to act to end sexual violence in conflict, protect those at risk, bring perpetrators to justice, and provide comprehensive services and reparation for survivors.<sup>122</sup> Rape is defined under international law as sexual penetration or “invasion,” however slight, when committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or against a person incapable of giving genuine consent.<sup>123</sup>

Ethiopia’s Criminal Code also prohibits and punishes rape. While the scope of the definition of rape under the code falls short of international standards, it includes contexts where a woman has been compelled to submit to sexual intercourse by the use of violence or grave intimidation, or after the perpetrator rendered the victim unconscious or incapable of resistance.<sup>124</sup> It sets out a higher sentence for perpetrators committing rape against girls, and for rape by multiple perpetrators.

In all the cases documented by Amnesty International, members of the armed forces and associated militias sexually penetrated women using physical force or in circumstances that were highly coercive. These acts constitute rape under international law. In most cases, elements of the Ethiopian revised criminal code definition of rape were also satisfied. Many of these attacks constituted multiple perpetrator rape.

## **THE WAR CRIME AND CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY OF RAPE**

Rape is a serious violation of international humanitarian law that amounts to a war crime.<sup>125</sup> The acts of rape set out in this report amount to war crimes, as they occurred in the context of an armed conflict which the perpetrators would have been aware of.

Evidence collected and reported by Amnesty International also suggests that these acts may have been committed as part of an attack against the civilian population of Tigray. These acts were committed by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, the Amhara Regional Police Special Force and Fano militia in a manner that was widespread and/or systematic, and any single act of rape carried out in this context, where the perpetrator was aware of the wider context, would amount to a crime against humanity.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>117</sup> ILC, Articles on State Responsibility, Article 6.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, ICCPR general comment 36, paras. 7 and 22, and CEDAW general recommendation 35, section 3.

<sup>119</sup> See International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 156.

<sup>120</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Elements of Crimes, Article 7 (1) (g)-1.

<sup>121</sup> CEDAW general recommendations 19 and 35 prohibit gender-based violence including rape as a human rights violation and set out the steps states are required to take in order to comprehensively respond. General Recommendation 30 specifically focuses on the obligations of duty bearers in conflict, conflict prevention and post-conflict contexts, and reaffirms State obligations to take action to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in conflict including rape.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, CEDAW General Recommendation 30.

<sup>123</sup> See ICC, Elements of Crimes, Element 1, Article 7 (1) (g)-1 and Article 8(2)(e)(vi)-1(2). Coercive circumstances that negate consent include circumstances created by the perpetrator, such as fear of violence, duress, detention contexts, and the abuse of power. Consent is also negated when the perpetrator takes advantage of coercive circumstances that already exist, even if they are not of their own making, such as those already inherent to an armed conflict. For more on this, see Amnesty International, *Rape and sexual violence: Human rights law and standards in the International Criminal Court*, 2011, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/ior530012011en.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> Proclamation No.414/2004, The Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2004, Article 620.

<sup>125</sup> Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8 (2) (e) (vi)-1; ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 156.

<sup>126</sup> ICC, Elements of Crimes, Article 7 (1) (g)-1. Rape is also a crime against humanity under customary international humanitarian law. See, for example, <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F72%2F10&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop>

Information collected by Amnesty International also suggests that rape itself was carried out in a manner that was widespread, and possibly systematic, in line with a policy to attack the civilian population. In particular, the following factors are relevant:

- Large numbers of women have reported to Amnesty International and to others they had been raped by Ethiopian or Eritrean forces or associated militias. As noted in the methodology of the report above, Amnesty International researchers spoke to 63 women and girls who reported being raped. Many of these women had also directly witnessed or otherwise knew of multiple other cases of rape against women or girls. Researchers also spoke to doctors and medical staff who had treated numerous patients who had been raped, including one doctor who stated that their hospital had recorded 376 cases of rape committed since the start of the conflict.
- In the cases documented by Amnesty International, as described by survivors, perpetrators did not appear to hide their actions from others, highlighting lack of fear of response. Indeed, in the majority of cases documented by Amnesty International, rape was committed by multiple perpetrators, and often in front of multiple victims, other civilians and sometimes in front of other members of armed forces or militias.
- The troops committed the rape in various settings, in homes, on the road, in the bushes, and in the field. In some cases, perpetrators made it clear they were targeting women who they presumed to be associated with TPLF members, demanding to know where their male family members were, and raping them apparently to punish them and their families, or to pressure them for information about their male family members, as described in chapter four of this report. From early in the conflict, senior civilian and military leaders in Ethiopia and Eritrea would have been aware of reports of large-scale rape and other sexual violence being committed in Tigray.
- As noted above, this was tolerated at the highest level of government in Ethiopia and Eritrea. As set out in chapter 5 of this report, despite the relatively prolonged period in which these attacks were being carried out, there appear to have been limited efforts at best to address and stop the widescale rape being carried out.

Perpetrators would have been aware that their crimes were committed in the context of an armed conflict.

As such, individuals who committed acts of rape in the conflict should be investigated for the crime against humanity of rape.

## OTHER CRIMES UNDER INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL LAW

According to the findings of this report, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces may also have committed the war crime and crime against humanity of sexual slavery, the war crime and crime against humanity of torture, and the crime against humanity of persecution.

Sexual slavery is defined as a situation in which:

1. The perpetrator exercised any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over one or more persons, such as by purchasing, selling, lending or bartering such a person or persons, or by imposing on them a similar deprivation of liberty.
2. The perpetrator caused such person or persons to engage in one or more acts of a sexual nature.<sup>127</sup>

Sexual slavery is a war crime and crime against humanity where the contextual elements are met.<sup>128</sup>

In at least 12 cases documented by Amnesty International, Ethiopian or Eritrean troops or members of associated militia exercised powers attaching to the right of ownership over women in Tigray, in most cases by imposing on them a deprivation of liberty, and then subjecting these women to acts of a sexual nature — mostly rape. In many of these cases, the deprivation of liberty extended to days or weeks, and involved multiple acts of rape. In some instances, multiple perpetrators committed the crime.

Those responsible committed the war crime of sexual slavery, as they were committed in the context of an armed conflict, which the perpetrators would have been aware of.

<sup>127</sup> ICC, Elements of Crimes, Article 8 (2) e.

<sup>128</sup> Rome Statute of the ICC, Articles 8 (2) e and 7 (1) (g) 1; ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 156, and Report of the ILC, UN Doc A/72/10 <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F72%2F10&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop>

The acts of sexual slavery documented in this report were also part of the wider attack on the civilian population, as set out above, which the perpetrators would have been aware of. In addition, they also appear to have been widespread, as Amnesty International documented numerous cases, and also heard reports from healthcare providers and others about similar cases. Reported cases are also likely to be only a fraction of the total number of cases, due to the difficulties survivors face in reporting.

Perpetrators of rape have also committed the war crime and possible crime against humanity of torture.<sup>129</sup> Human rights law and international criminal law recognize that the pain and suffering caused by an act of rape is of a severity to constitute torture, both physically and psychologically,<sup>130</sup> as is also evident from the testimonies of survivors as documented in this report. The purpose includes punishment, as well as discrimination on the grounds of gender. The victims, as documented in this report, were civilians, and as described above, the contextual elements are likely met.

In addition, perpetrators of both rape and sexual slavery may have committed the crime against humanity of persecution.<sup>131</sup> According to Amnesty International's research, armed forces targeted women in particular for sexual violence such as rape and sexual slavery. Rape and sexual slavery are both severe deprivation of rights, and gender is among the protected grounds.<sup>132</sup> In each of these cases, the perpetrators would have known the gravity of their conduct. As stated above, the contextual elements have likely also been met — that these attacks formed or were part of a widespread or systematic attack on the civilian population of Tigray, and perpetrators would have been aware of all the relevant facts.

In addition to those who directly perpetrated the acts, military commanders knew or should have known about the conduct of their forces, notably patterns of widespread rape and other sexual violence, given that by January 2021 reports of such abuses were widely circulating in the media. As documented in chapter 4 of this report, military commanders not only failed to take reasonable steps to prevent and repress the conduct but tolerated it. These military commanders may therefore be criminally responsible for the crimes against humanity of rape, sexual slavery, torture and persecution.

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<sup>129</sup> ICC, Elements of Crimes, Articles 7 (1)(f) and 8 (2) (c) (i)-4. Torture is defined as when the perpetrator 1. inflicted severe physical or mental pain or suffering upon one or more persons, 2. for such purposes as: obtaining information or a confession, punishment, intimidation or coercion or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind; 3. and that such person or persons were either *hors de combat*, or were civilians, medical personnel or religious personnel taking no active part in the hostilities and where 4. the perpetrator was aware of the factual circumstances that established this status. See also rule 156 of the ICRC Customary IHL Study.

<sup>130</sup> For more on this, see Amnesty International, Rape and sexual violence: Human rights law and standards in the International Criminal Court, 2011, p. 42.

<sup>131</sup> ICC, Elements of Crimes, Article 7 (1) (h). This requires the severe deprivation of one or more person's fundamental rights, contrary to international law, when the perpetrator targeted such persons because of the protected ground, and when the perpetrator was aware of the gravity of their conduct, in addition to the contextual elements referred to above.

<sup>132</sup> ICC, Elements of Crimes, Article 7 (1) (h).

# 9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urgent steps must be taken to prevent further sexual violence, both in the context of ongoing hostilities and in the context of displacement and post-conflict situations. Accountability for violations is crucial both to ensure justice for survivors and as a deterrent against further abuses. Prompt, independent, and impartial investigations must be carried out into allegations of sexual violence with a view to bringing suspects to trial in compliance with international standards for fair trial. Judicial and trial proceedings must be transparent, as it is crucial that justice be done and be seen to be done to send a clear message that sexual violence will not be tolerated.

States must also take a number of proactive steps to prevent gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situation, including through laws, policies, protocols, and trainings, and through adopting a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors.<sup>133</sup>

Survivors of sexual violence in the conflict also have a right to reparation as a step towards restoring their well-being through concrete forms of assistance as well as symbolic measures.<sup>134</sup> This should include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. In the case of sexual and gender-based crimes, transformative reparation measures “should aspire, to the extent possible, to subvert, instead of reinforce, pre-existing structural inequality that may be at the root causes of the violence”, including violence that women in particular experience before, during and after the conflict.<sup>135</sup> UN Security Council resolutions under the Women, Peace and Security agenda also acknowledge that structural gender inequality and discrimination are the root causes of sexual violence, and affirms the importance of the participation and empowerment of women as the only viable route to sustainable peace and security.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT

In light of the above, Amnesty International calls on the Ethiopian government to take the following measures:

### INVESTIGATIONS, TRUTH, ACCOUNTABILITY, REPARATIONS, COMPENSATION

- Ensure that allegations of sexual violence perpetrated since the outbreak of the conflict in the Tigray region are promptly, effectively, independently and impartially investigated, and bring those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in open, accessible civilian courts in full compliance with international standards for fair trial without recourse to the death penalty. Where appropriate,

<sup>133</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, 18 October 2013, para. 38, <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/gcomments/cedaw.c.c.g.30.pdf>.

<sup>134</sup> See, for example, Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (hereafter Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy), A/RES/60/147, 21 March 2006. See also, “Nairobi Declaration Women’s and Girls Right to a Remedy and Reparation, 2007, available at [www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/NAIROBI\\_DECLARATIONeng.pdf](http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/NAIROBI_DECLARATIONeng.pdf), Resolution on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Women and Girls Victims of Sexual Violence, November 2007, [www.achpr.org/sessions/42nd/resolutions/111/](http://www.achpr.org/sessions/42nd/resolutions/111/).

<sup>135</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: Reparations to women who have been subjected to violence (2010), para. 31, [www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/14/22](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/HRC/14/22).

those suspected of committing rape or sexual slavery should be investigated for the war crimes and crimes against humanity of rape, sexual slavery, torture and persecution.

- Allow international human rights organizations unhindered access to the Tigray region, so that they are able to investigate and document sexual violence and other violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- Establish a vetting mechanism to remove from the ranks of the armed and security force anyone suspected of ordering, committing acts of sexual violence or acquiescing in violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, until allegations concerning them can be independently and impartially investigated.
- Ensure an effective victim and witness protection programme enables survivors of sexual violence to have their complaints registered and investigated without fears and in full respect of their privacy.
- Establish a reparations program for victims of the conflict, in consultation with civil society and affected communities. Give special consideration to the violations faced by women including sexual violence. Seek and implement expert advice to ensure reparations are gender transformative and that reparations are designed and distributed in such a manner as to be accessible to all women affected.
- Ensure that survivors of sexual violence in the conflict are able to participate in decision-making that affect them, including future transitional justice processes.
- Request and accept offers of technical assistance from multilateral organizations or other states that are specialised in addressing conflict-related sexual violence, including UN missions (for example, the UN Team of Experts) to support efforts to address patterns of sexual violence of women and girls in Tigray and in displacement settings. Assistance may be particularly useful in the areas of monitoring and documenting patterns of sexual violence and supporting the response capacity of the justice and security sector.
- Extend an invitation to visit Tigray to special procedures mandate holders of the UN Human Rights Council and African Commission, including, specifically, the council's Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, and the African Commission's Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa.
- Grant prompt and unfettered access to Tigray to the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

## PREVENTION

- Issue clear orders to Ethiopian armed and security forces prohibiting sexual violence and any other violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- Immediately restore phone and internet communication networks in the Tigray region to end the communication blackout that has been imposed since November 2020 and has hindered the flow of information about the vast scale of sexual violence – and has ultimately facilitated the commission of such crimes.
- Define all forms of sexual violence in accordance with the highest international standards. Ensure each of these acts are characterized, as appropriate, as torture, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide so they can be prosecuted at the national level as crimes under international law.
- Ensure that armed and security forces, prosecutors and the judiciary are trained in best practices for investigation, prosecution and adjudication of crimes under international law and in identifying and addressing gender inequality in relation to access to justice and provide general gender sensitization training for conducting all their interactions with complainants and other members of the public in a gender-responsive manner.

## SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS

- Ensure that members of the armed and security forces immediately cease attacks and threats against humanitarian workers and assets and other obstructions to humanitarian assistance and ensure immediate and unhindered access for UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations to all areas of northern Ethiopia for the purposes of providing assistance to civilians, including survivors of sexual violence, affected by the conflict.

- Ensure that survivors of sexual violence are able to access adequate food, water and shelter, including by ensuring that humanitarian assistance and services provided to people displaced as a result of the conflict is adequate, and special measures are taken to ensure the inclusion of female headed households.
- Ensure that survivors of sexual violence are able to access healthcare, including comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare. Ensure women are able to access abortion, if they wish, and that if any restrictions are imposed on abortion access, these are in line with international human rights law.
- Ensure that survivors of sexual violence, and family members, are able to access psycho-social care.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ERITREAN GOVERNMENT**

Amnesty International calls on the Eritrean government to take the following measures:

- Issue clear orders to Eritrean armed and security forces prohibiting sexual violence and any other violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- Urgently provide forces with appropriate training in the prohibition of sexual violence and in human rights and humanitarian law and establish concrete mechanisms to adequately monitor the conduct of forces to ensure compliance and swift corrective measure in cases of non-compliance.
- Condemn all acts of sexual violence committed by its forces.
- Undertake that Eritrean armed forces and any other relevant institution will cooperate fully with investigations into sexual violence in Tigray.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF)**

Amnesty International calls on the TPLF to take the following measures:

- Respect international humanitarian and human rights law and ensure the safety and security of civilians, including IDPs and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, in areas under their effective control.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN UNION**

Amnesty International calls on the African Union to take the following measures:

- Use its good offices to encourage the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to grant the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights prompt and unfettered access to the Tigray region of Ethiopia to investigate on-the-ground allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including sexual violence.
- Step up its public and private engagement on the Tigray conflict, including, through tabling it at the AU Peace and Security Council.
- Cooperate with the UN Office of Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict on sexual violence in the Tigray conflict in accordance with the Framework of Cooperation signed in January 2014.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

Amnesty International calls on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to take the following measures:

- Extend all necessary support to the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia that it established in May 2021, including any extensions to its mandate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Amnesty International calls on the United Nations to take the following measures:

### TO THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL:

- Urgently send the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to the Tigray region, as provided for by Security Council resolution 1888, which calls upon the Secretary-General “take the appropriate measures to deploy rapidly a team of experts to situations of particular concern with respect to sexual violence in armed conflict”.
- Urgently send the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to carry out a visit to Tigray and/or refugee camps in Sudan, to speak to survivors and report back including on survivors' priorities for assistance and justice.
- Ensure that an effective monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangement (MARA) is established in Tigray, in line with UN Security Council resolution 1960, to respond to cases of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict circumstances.
- As part of a wider policy to ensure that all members of national armed forces are vetted before being deployed to Department of Peace Operations or African Union peacekeeping missions, in order to ensure that they have not committed serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, ensure that no members of the Ethiopian or Eritrean armed forces are deployed to any such multilateral missions before being fully vetted.

### TO THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL:

- Invite the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to brief them and to present their recommendations for the international community to prevent and respond to sexual violence and protect and support survivors.

### TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL:

- Invite the Commission of Inquiry on the Tigray Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia established by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to brief them and to present their recommendations for the international community to prevent and respond to sexual violence and protect and support survivors.
- Adopt a resolution to ensure robust documentation and reporting with a view to preventing conflict-related sexual violence and holding perpetrators to account, in collaboration with the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences.

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# **“I DON’T KNOW IF THEY REALIZED I WAS A PERSON”**

## **RAPE AND OTHER SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE CONFLICT IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA**

Soldiers fighting in support of the Ethiopian government have committed widespread rape against ethnic Tigrayan women and girls during the conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region. The perpetrators — Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers, as well as members of allied militias — have carried out widespread sexual violence, including gang rape; held some victims in captivity for days and weeks in circumstances constituting sexual slavery, and raped others in front of their children and other family members. These assaults have been accompanied by shocking levels of brutality, including beatings, death threats, and ethnic slurs. Given the context, scale, and gravity of the sexual violence committed against women and girls in Tigray, the violations amount to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity.

Based on extensive interviews with rape survivors, this report gives the most comprehensive account to date of the sexual violence that has taken place during the conflict. Amnesty International is calling on the Ethiopian government to take immediate action to prevent further abuses, including by ensuring sexual violence allegations are investigated and those responsible are brought to justice. It is also urging the African Union to step up its engagement in the crisis, and the United Nations to send experts to the region to speak to survivors.