



## Thematic Country of Origin Information Report on Tigray 2021

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## Introduction

This thematic country of origin information report is based on the questions and points of focus in the Terms of Reference (ToR) drawn up by the Ministry of Justice and Security. The ToR was confirmed on 28 May 2021. A anonymised version of it, together with the thematic report, is available on the website of the Dutch Government.

This thematic report supplements and updates the general country of origin information on Ethiopia of February 2021, specifically examining the armed conflict that has been in progress in the regional state of Tigray since November 2020. The report describes the situation in this northern state of Ethiopia insofar as it is relevant to the assessment of asylum applications and to decisions on the repatriation of rejected asylum seekers. It concerns people from Tigray, people of ethnic Tigrayan descent or people who are affected in any other way by the conflict in northern Ethiopia. The report primarily covers the period from November 2020 to August 2021, but will examine earlier events where necessary for context.

This report is based on carefully selected, analysed and verified information from both public and confidential sources. Information from non-governmental organisations, professional literature, media coverage and (where applicable) relevant government agencies was used to compile it. Unless stated otherwise or when the facts are generally undisputed, the content in this report is based on multiple sources. The public sources that were consulted are listed in the appendices. Both public and confidential sources are referred to in the text. This official country report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under investigation and does not include any conclusions or recommendations.

This report uses information from interviews conducted with relevant and expert sources. In addition, confidential information from the diplomatic representation in Ethiopia and other diplomatic missions of the Netherlands abroad was used. The confidential sources are marked as a 'confidential source' in the footnotes and are accompanied by a date. The information obtained on a confidential basis has chiefly been used to support and supplement the content based on publicly available information.

Chapter One deals with the political and security situation in Tigray. Chapter Two examines the position of the victims of the conflict. The position of Tigrayans outside Tigray is discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four deals with the situation of refugees and displaced persons in connection with the conflict in northern Ethiopia.

## 1 Political and security situation in Tigray

### 1.1 Political developments that form the background to the conflict

#### *Seizure of power by TPLF*

In 1974, a communist military junta known as the Derg (Committee) deposed Emperor Haile Selassie, bringing to an end the Ethiopian monarchy, the House of Solomon. The Derg pursued a policy of nationalisation and collectivism. Between 1976 and 1978, the Derg killed thousands of political opponents (the Red Terror campaign). Fighters from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a multi-ethnic alliance,<sup>1</sup> ousted Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam's Derg in 1991. The Tigrayans are a small minority in Ethiopia's mosaic of nearly 90 different ethnic groups,<sup>2</sup> but with the overthrow of the Derg, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which represented Tigray within the EPRDF, took power in Ethiopia. The TPLF, which according to confidential sources consisted exclusively of Tigrayans, was the dominant force within the EPRDF. It managed the party's agenda and determined its policies. Furthermore, the TPLF had a disproportionate influence in Ethiopia's military and security services.<sup>3</sup> Under Tigrayan leadership, Ethiopia experienced economic growth and was a stable factor in the Horn of Africa for some time. However, the years when the EPRDF/TPLF was in power were also characterised by nepotism and the arbitrary detention, exile and torture of political opponents. Hundreds of political prisoners were held in the infamous Maekelawi Prison, described by human rights organisations as a 'torture chamber'.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Abiy restricts the power of the TPLF*

As mentioned in the General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia of February 2021, the TPLF lost power at national level in Ethiopia in 2018. Other ethnic groups including the Oromo, who constitute the largest population group in Ethiopia, felt disadvantaged by the Tigrayans and had been holding mass demonstrations on the streets since 2014. In the spring of 2018, the Oromo Abiy Ahmed was appointed prime minister, which took the heat out of the demonstrations in the country. *De Volkskrant* wrote that it was now the turn of other regions in the vast, ethnically diverse Ethiopia to make their mark, and that it was clear that Tigray would lose influence.<sup>5</sup> Since the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, an ethnic Tigrayan, in 2012, the influence of the Tigrayans on Ethiopia's politics and polity had already gradually been waning. Abiy Ahmed immediately set about limiting the presence of Tigrayans, especially TPLF loyalists,<sup>6</sup> in the

<sup>1</sup> This coalition consisted of four parties: the *Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization* (OPDO), the *Amhara National Democratic Movement* (ANDM), the *Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement* (SEPDM), and the *Tigrayan People's Liberation Front* (TPLF).

<sup>2</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 111, February 2021. In 2016, according to the CIA, the population of Ethiopia (approximately 104 million) was divided into the following ethnic groups: Oromo 34.9%, Amhara 27.9%, Tigray 7.3%, Sidama 4.1%, Wolayta 3%, Guraghe 2.8%, Somali 2.7%, Hadiya, 2.2%, Afar 6%, other ethnic groups 12.6%.

<sup>3</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, pages 7 and 9, February 2021; Reuters, *Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021; confidential source, 28 June 2021; confidential source, 25 August 2021.

<sup>4</sup> The New York Times, *'I Didn't Expect to Make It Back Alive': An Interview With Tigray's Leader*, 3 July 2021; AfricaNews, *Ethiopia closes Maekelawi prison, restores internet across the country*, 7 April 2018.

<sup>5</sup> *De Volkskrant*, *De gebroken trots van Tigray: Uitgemoord omdat we Tigreeërs zijn*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>6</sup> People of Tigrayan descent were apparently not the only group affected. Ezega News reported in September 2020 that government officials in the Benighangul-Gumuz region were dismissed primarily for their alleged involvement in ethnic killings, but that their dismissal may also have been related to their alleged support for the TPLF: EZEGA News, *At Least 40 Officials Sacked for Alleged Involvement in Killings in Western Ethiopia*, 28 September 2020.

government and the security apparatus. Many Tigrayan military officers<sup>7</sup> and senior officials were dismissed and replaced by Abiy loyalists. The loss of their privileged position in Ethiopia was resented by many Tigrayans. The rapprochement with Eritrea, for which Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019, also met with resistance from the TPLF. From 1998 to 2000, when the TPLF-dominated EPRDF was in power in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Ethiopia fought a bloody border war. The Tigray region bordering neighbouring Eritrea was badly affected by the war.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Disagreement over elections*

In December 2019, Prime Minister Abiy dissolved the EPRDF and founded the Prosperity Party (PP). His aim in doing so was to break with ethnic politics and achieve greater national unity. The TPLF, which had previously held sway within the coalition party, regarded the PP's takeover as illegal and unconstitutional, and refused to join the new party. National elections were due to be held in the summer of 2020, but the government postponed them due to the coronavirus epidemic. The TPLF regarded the postponement of the elections scheduled for August 2020 as an illegal ploy by Abiy to remain in power for as long as possible.<sup>9</sup>

On 21 June 2021, Abiy's Prosperity Party won a landslide election victory after the postponed elections went ahead. The party won 410 of the 436 seats that were contested on 21 June. Several opposition parties, such as the OFC (Oromo Federal Congress) and the OLF (Oromo Liberal Front), whose leaders were under house arrest or in prison, boycotted the elections. In two of the ten regional states (henceforth 'regions'), including Tigray, as well as in parts of other regions, it was not possible to vote on 21 June, partly because of the security situation.<sup>10</sup> The head of the African Union's monitoring mission, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, declared in a press conference that the elections had been conducted in an orderly, peaceful and credible manner.<sup>11</sup> A confidential source said the elections were an example of 'how not to do things' due to the withdrawal of opposition parties, the limited choice of candidates to vote for and problems with the registration of voters and candidates.<sup>12</sup>

To the displeasure of the federal government, the Tigray region had itself called regional elections for 9 September 2020, in which the TPLF secured 189 of the 190 seats. The Ethiopian House of Federation (the upper house of the Ethiopian parliament) declared these elections unconstitutional a few days before 9 September. Tigrayan opposition parties stated after the election that the TPLF had committed electoral fraud.<sup>13</sup> In an interview with a government news medium in early September 2020, Prime Minister Abiy took a negative stance on the regional elections in Tigray. He said the elections would have consequences, without explaining what these would be.<sup>14</sup> Analyst William Davison claimed in an interview

<sup>7</sup> Ninety percent of senior military officers were of Tigrayan descent.

<sup>8</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, pages 29 and 66, February 2021; De Volkskrant, *De gebroken trots van Tigray: Uitgemoord omdat we Tigreeërs zijn*, 27 May 2021; Madote, *Over 160 generals fired from Ethiopian army*, 9 November 2018; Reuters, *'Nobody will kneel': Tigrayans defiant as Ethiopian leader cracks down*, 16 December 2018; confidential source, 25 August 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, pages 11, 12 and 14, February 2021.

<sup>10</sup> De Volkskrant, *Abiy Ahmed wint verkiezingen Ethiopië, temidden van aanhoudend conflict Tigray*, 12 July 2021.

<sup>11</sup> AfricaNews, *Ethiopian election 'peaceful and credible': African Union observers*, 23 June 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Confidential source, 22 June 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 14, February 2021; Reuters, *Ethiopia's upper house rules Tigray regional vote unconstitutional*, 5 September 2020.

<sup>14</sup> France24, *Ethiopia's Tigray region defies PM Abiy with 'illegal' election*, 9 September 2020.

on YouTube that Abiy had said that women and children would ultimately be the victims of the illegal regional elections.<sup>15</sup>

#### *TPLF break with federal government*

In early October 2020, the House of Federation decided to end federal support to the Tigray region due to the unconstitutional elections in Tigray, with the result that on 6 October 2020, the TPLF called on its delegation to the federal parliament to withdraw. Until the TPLF delegates withdrew from the Ethiopian parliament, their party was essentially the only opposition in the Ethiopian parliament. In 2015, when the TPLF was still part of the EPRDF, the latter had won all seats in parliament in the national elections.<sup>16</sup> When the TPLF decided at the end of 2019 not to be part of the successor to the EPRDF, the Prosperity Party, it went from being the ruling party to a (federal) opposition party. However, it had increasingly withdrawn to its own state.<sup>17</sup> The federal government believes that it did everything in its power not to alienate the Tigrayan leaders and get them to join the Prosperity Party. According to the federal government several attempts on its part to reach an agreement with the TPLF were rejected or thwarted by the TPLF.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Surprise attack or inevitable conflict*

On the night of 3 to 4 November 2020, violent conflict broke out between the TPLF and the federal government when forces loyal to the TPLF attacked several bases of the Northern Command, the forces of the ENDF (Ethiopian National Defence Forces) in Tigray.<sup>19</sup> Several sources believe that the events of early November 2020 did not come out of nowhere, but that there was a build-up to them. For example, the federal government had previously tried to replace Tigrayan commanders in the Northern Command with officers from other regions. In late October 2020, the TPLF stated that the Tigray region would no longer accept new federal government appointments of military commanders for the Northern Command. The party argued that the Abiy government no longer had the legitimacy to make such changes, as the federal parliament's constitutional term had expired on 5 October 2020. The TPLF matched words with actions, sending the newly appointed deputy commander of the Northern Command, Brigadier General Jemal Mohammed, back to Addis Ababa.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Support for the conflict with the federal government*

The previous country of origin information report stated that the TPLF did not form a homogeneous bloc before the outbreak of the armed conflict. While most members of the TPLF advocated a federal Ethiopia, there was a group, albeit in the minority, that wanted complete independence from Ethiopia.<sup>21</sup> In January 2021, a confidential source expressed the feelings of many in Tigray when he stated that he could not imagine that Tigray would ever again be part of the Ethiopian federation as a normal region, and that if the TPLF won, Tigray would continue as an independent state.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Mereba Esset Conversations, *Understanding the war in Tigray: Teklay Haileselassie & William Davison*, at 12 minutes 45 seconds, 27 May 2021 (YouTube).

<sup>16</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 14, February 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 82, February 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Confidential source, 26 March 2021; ENA, *Summary of Efforts Reconciliation with TPLF*, undated; confidential source, 23 July 2021.

<sup>19</sup> De Volkskrant, *De gebroken trots van Tigray: Uitgemoord omdat we Tigreeërs zijn*, 27 May 2021; Reuters, *Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Borkena, *Ethiopian Defense Force responds to TPLF statement*, 1 November 2020;

<sup>21</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, page 19, February 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Confidential source, 22 January 2021.

Several sources believe that the current sentiment is a direct result of the war and the accompanying human rights violations, and not historically rooted.<sup>23</sup>

According to various sources, the federal government had somewhat underestimated the enormous support among the Tigrayan people for the struggle. The Tigrayan diaspora sided increasingly openly with the TPLF and the young people also began joining the TPLF in growing numbers.<sup>24</sup> When asked, a confidential source stated that the conflict can no longer be seen only as a struggle between the federal government and its allies on the one hand and the TPLF on the other. Many Tigrayans who were not members of the TPLF or who were even critical of the party have joined the conflict. A frequently heard reason for speaking in support of the struggle against the federal government and its allies and wanting to join in the fight is the human rights violations by the federal government and its allies (see 1.2.2).<sup>25</sup> In late May 2021, *De Volkskrant* quoted a lecturer in public administration at the University of Mekelle who, although he was one of the few Tigrayans to speak out openly against the TPLF, nevertheless supported the fight against the central state.<sup>26</sup> A Tigrayan in his twenties who believed in a unified Ethiopia when Abiy came to power and described himself as not at all happy with the TPLF said that he wanted to take up arms and defend himself against the central government.<sup>27</sup>

#### TPLF/TDF

The TPLF, which was designated a terrorist organisation by the federal government on 1 May 2021, has renamed itself the Tigray Defence Force (TDF) in the course of the conflict.<sup>28</sup> This military organisation, which originated after the outbreak of the conflict, is leading the fight against the federal government and its allies. Although the organisation's leadership includes many TPLF loyalists, the commanders and fighters come from all parts of Tigrayan society. A confidential source heard from local sources that there is an unwritten rule that every family in the countryside gives up at least one son to the conflict. The federal authorities have stated from the outset that the TPLF was forcing minors to join the armed struggle. The federal government does not recognise the TDF and uses the term TPLF (for more information about TPLF/TDF, see 1.2.1).<sup>29</sup>

#### *Consequences of the ongoing struggle*

On 28 November 2020, the Ethiopian authorities announced that the Tigrayan capital of Mekelle had fallen into federal hands. The Ethiopian authorities then established an interim government in Tigray. This government mainly consisted of Tigrayan officials who did not support the TPLF, such as members of Arena, the Assimba Democratic Party (ADP)<sup>30</sup> and the Tigray Democratic Party (TDP). These

<sup>23</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021; Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Confidential source, 19 May 2021; Confidential source, 4 June 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>26</sup> *De Volkskrant, De gebroken trots van Tigray: Uitgemoord omdat we Tigreeërs zijn*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>27</sup> NOS, *Jeugd wil wraak na getuigenissen van gruwelijke verkrachtingen in Tigray*, 31 May 2021.

<sup>28</sup> There is no consistency in the use of the terms TPLF and TDF in public sources. The Ethiopian federal government also strongly opposes the use of the term TDF and has urged international media not to use it (see 1.2.1), although many international news outlets and analysts use the term TDF for the party engaged in the military conflict. TPLF/TDF will therefore be used where possible in this report, with the exception of cases where the TPLF had not yet taken the name TDF.

<sup>29</sup> ICG, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021; Confidential source, 3 June 2021; Confidential source, 4 June 2021; ENA, *Youth TPLF Fighter Expose Group of Forcing Teens to Fight with National Defense Force*, 11 November 2020.

<sup>30</sup> The leader of the ADP, Dori Asgedom, was arrested by the federal authorities in early 2021 for his opposition to the war in Tigray (see 3.2.1).

parties were originally Tigrayan parties that opposed the TPLF.<sup>31</sup> Prime Minister Abiy expressly proclaimed victory after the capture of Mekelle. This turned out to be premature: the conflict was not yet over, and was still ongoing at the time of writing of this report. Many TPLF leaders, such as the former president of Tigray, Debretsion Gebremichael, had gone into hiding from the Ethiopian government and were continuing the fight from the more inaccessible areas of Tigray.<sup>32</sup> On 28 June 2021, as already mentioned, Tigrayan fighters recaptured the capital Mekelle and large parts of the region. The federal army withdrew under the guise of a unilateral humanitarian ceasefire. The Tigrayans did not recognise the ceasefire, and the conflict spread across the regional borders to the regions of Afar and Amhara (see 1.2).<sup>33</sup>

The conflict, which the federal government called 'a law enforcement operation in Tigray', is said to have claimed thousands of lives within a few weeks, including those of many civilians (see also 1.2.3 and 1.2.6). At the end of June 2021, UNHCR counted 46,505 people who had sought refuge in Sudan from Tigray.<sup>34</sup> More than two million people were displaced as a result of the conflict (see also 2.5 and 4.1).<sup>35</sup> Inhabitants of Tigrayan descent were reportedly driven out by Amhara troops from the areas they controlled, especially Western Tigray (see 1.2.1 and 1.2.3).

The main parties to the conflict, the TDF/TPLF, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), the Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) and the Amhara Regional Special Forces and Amhara militias, are all active in Tigray,<sup>36</sup> with the TDF/TPLF opposing the other parties, which work together in varying combinations.<sup>37</sup> All of the above parties have been linked to human rights violations by human rights organisations. Eritrean soldiers and members of the Amhara militias and Amhara Special Forces are particularly associated with such violations (see also 1.2.1, 1.2.2 and 1.2.3).<sup>38</sup> The consequences of the conflict, including the alleged deliberate starvation of the Tigrayan population (see also 1.2.2), came on top of the food insecurity to which a destructive locust plague had contributed earlier in 2020. At the time of writing of this report, many Tigrayans were in urgent need of humanitarian aid, including food and medical aid (see also 4.3).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Confidential source, 14 June 2021; Africa Confidential, *Citadel Falls but the War goes on*, 3 December 2020; All Africa, *Ethiopia: Tigray Interim Admin CEO Says Mekelle Gets New Mayor, Urges Civil Servants to Resume Work and Cautions Door-to-Door Search for Unlawful Firearms Begins Today*, 15 December 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, page 9, February 2021.

<sup>33</sup> BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia PM says TPLF 'is the only enemy' of Tigray*, 25 July 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Estimates of the number of refugees range from 40,000 to 65,000; the official UNHCR figure at the beginning of August 2021 was 46,505.

<sup>35</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, page 9, February 2021; The Economist, *Ethiopia's government appears to be wielding hunger as a weapon; Ethiopia's civil war*, 21 May 2021; OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE*, 26 July 2021; UNHCR, *Sudan: Emergency Response to Tigray Situation – New Weekly Update #4*, 3 August 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Most regions of Ethiopia have their own special forces. These are well-trained forces organised along normal military lines. The militias are essentially armed civilians, usually under the command of a retired officer or former rebel. They are not organically organised military units and do not normally have heavy weapons at their disposal. The federal army has no formal authority over the militias. These militias are an instrument of the individual regional states. In addition, 'militias' have been in the villages for many years. These are actually locals with a weapon who are responsible for order and protection in rural areas.

<sup>37</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, p. 1, 6 April 2021

<sup>38</sup> The Economist, *Ethiopia's government appears to be wielding hunger as a weapon; Ethiopia's civil war*, 21 May 2021; Confidential source, 26 March 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., p. 1, March 2021 version. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

### *Reporting from and about Tigray*

Both open and confidential sources refer to the barriers to reporting from Tigray. From February 2021, foreign journalists were allowed back into the region. The Ethiopian authorities said they had previously barred journalists from entering the area for security reasons.<sup>40</sup> However, journalists who were admitted to Tigray were unable to travel everywhere freely and large parts of the region remained inaccessible. Certain areas were inaccessible due to the ongoing conflict. Amhara militias and Eritrean troops, for example, did not allow journalists access to the areas under their control.<sup>41</sup> Foreign journalist Simon Marks and analyst William Davison were also expelled from the country by the federal government; they claimed that this was because they were trying to report objectively on the conflict.<sup>42</sup>

Ethiopian journalists covering the conflict were threatened and arrested. Most of the arrested journalists – several dozen – were released after some time. Ten Awlo Media employees were released on 10 August 2021 after being imprisoned for more than a month for their alleged ties to a ‘terrorist organisation’ – a reference to the TPLF. Four other employees of the media station were still in detention at the time of writing of this report. In January 2021, a reporter from Tigray TV was shot dead in Mekelle.<sup>43</sup> It is not known who was behind the reporter’s death. The website of the *Addis Standard* was shut down by the Ethiopian authorities for some time after the online newspaper called the Tigrayan fighters ‘defence forces’ (TDF). By doing so, the newspaper was held to be providing legitimacy to what the federal government considers to be a terrorist group.<sup>44</sup>

Communication with and in Tigray was scarcely possible for a long time. Journalists and researchers had limited contact with people in Tigray by telephone and Internet. People in Tigray’s border area with other regions were able to receive the mobile signal from those regions at times, because mobile traffic had not been cut off by the federal government there. Following the start of the conflict in early November 2020, telephone traffic slowly resumed, with interruptions, in Mekelle and a few other major cities in Tigray in December 2020. In their report on the situation in Tigray, Ghent-based researchers wrote that at the end of April it was still only possible to interview people remotely if they went to Mekelle or other cities.<sup>45</sup> During a visit by a reporter from the Dutch news broadcaster NOS to Tigray in late May 2021, he reported that Mekelle had regained access to the Internet a few days earlier. Outside Mekelle, the federal government was maintaining its shutdown of mobile traffic.<sup>46</sup> After the capture of Mekelle by Tigrayan forces at the end of June 2021, the federal government stopped all telephone and Internet traffic in the

<sup>40</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region’s Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 48, 6 April 2021; BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia and international organisations discuss Tigray*, 3 June 2021.

<sup>41</sup> NOS, *Deur staat voor buitenwereld nog maar op een kier in Ethiopische deelstaat Tigray*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Die Welt, *#Free them All, Simon Marks*, 9 June 2021; Mereba Esset Conversations, *Understanding the war in Tigray: Teklay Haileselassie & William Davison*, 27 May 2021 (YouTube).

<sup>43</sup> BBC News, *Ethiopia’s Tigray crisis: BBC reporter Girmay Gebru freed by military*, 3 March 2021; CPJ, *Ethiopian authorities arrest at least 15 employees of 2 independent media outlets*, 2 July 2021; Addis Standard, *News: 10 staff members of Awlo Media released from prison in Afar; trials are set for Four journalists*, 10 August 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Ethiopian Media Authority, @EthMediaAuth, 15 July 2021: <https://twitter.com/EthMediaAuth/status/1415748816255475713>.

<sup>45</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., p. 4, March 2021 version. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation).

<sup>46</sup> NOS, *Deur staat voor buitenwereld nog maar op een kier in Ethiopische deelstaat Tigray*, 27 May 2021.

region again.<sup>47</sup> A confidential source reported still being able to contact people in Tigray by satellite phone at the end of July 2021.<sup>48</sup>

As well as the physical conflict, there is also a propaganda war in which the warring parties accuse each other of crimes against humanity. In early April 2021, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the international community and the media not to be seduced by the 'propaganda campaign of the TPLF rebels'. The international media tended to 'whitewash the crimes of the TPLF', said the Ethiopian foreign minister.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, a confidential source stated that the federal government was using the narrative that the fight was only against the TPLF and that the TPLF's 'clique' or 'junta' needed to be combated. The struggle had long since ceased to be against the TPLF only, but was against the entire Tigrayan population, he added (for the alleged violations of human rights by the various parties, see 1.2.2 and 1.2.3).<sup>50</sup>

## 1.2 Security situation in Tigray (since November 2020)

### *Ongoing conflict*

On the night of 3 to 4 November 2020, the conflict began with the attack by TPLF-affiliated troops on the Northern Command's federal army bases. In response to the attack, ENDF federal troops supported by various groups including Amhara Special Forces and militias (ADF: Amhara Defence Forces)<sup>51</sup> and Eritrean forces invaded Tigray. Prime Minister Abiy said that the purpose of the military operation by the federal troops and allies was to restore the rule of law in the region and the country, and promised to protect civilians. Over three weeks later, on 28 November 2021, the Ethiopian authorities announced that the Tigrayan capital Mekelle had fallen into federal hands. Prime Minister Abiy prematurely declared victory over the TPLF.<sup>52</sup> The Ethiopian authorities stated that the whole of Tigray was accessible again, although some parts could only be visited with a military escort. An Ethiopian general stated in April 2021 that the federal armed forces had completely defeated the TPLF forces.<sup>53</sup>

At the time of writing of this report, however, the conflict was not yet over. After the Tigrayan troops had first withdrawn to the countryside and to the inhospitable parts of the country (see below), from where the struggle was continued using guerrilla tactics, an offensive was launched in June in which the capital Mekelle was retaken and large parts of Tigray came back under the control of the TDF/TPLF forces. Abiy is reported to have said in April 2021 that it was hard to defeat an 'enemy hiding among the people'.<sup>54</sup> The Ethiopian government announced a unilateral ceasefire on the day that Mekelle was captured by Tigrayan forces. According to the federal

<sup>47</sup> OCHA, *Daily Noon Briefing Highlights: Ethiopia*, 30 June 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Confidential source, 14 July 2021.

<sup>49</sup> MFA Ethiopia (twitter), @mfaethiopia, *Press Release: On the Media and alleged human rights violations and other crimes committed in #Tigray*, 7 April 2021; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia warns international media over TPLF 'propaganda'*, 8 April 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>51</sup> As the Amhara Special Forces and militias are usually mentioned in the same breath, they will be referred to as the ADF for the sake of the report's readability. It should be noted here that Amhara Defence Forces is not an official name of an organisation and that the designation does not represent an attempt to confer legitimacy on the name or organisation.

<sup>52</sup> The Guardian, *Ethiopian troops in 'full control' of Tigray's capital, says country's PM*, 28 November 2020.

<sup>53</sup> FanaBC, *Ethiopia Briefs Ambassadors Of Asian Countries On Critical Issues*, 29 April 2021; BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopian army general says TPLF forces 'fully destroyed'*, 13 April 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Confidential source, 26 March 2021; The Economist, *The war in Tigray is taking a frightful human toll; Ethiopia's war economy*, 15 April 2021; The Economist, *Tigrayan forces have routed the Ethiopian army*, 1 July 2021.

government, the federal troops had withdrawn partly so that a break could be arranged during which the farmers could work their land again.<sup>55</sup> Tigrayan spokesman Getachew Redda called the unilateral ceasefire a 'joke': the TDF/TPLF did not accept the ceasefire and continued the offensive (see Maps 2, 3 and 4).<sup>56</sup>

#### *Armed clashes and control area*

The Geography Department of the University of Ghent has created a map (see Map 1)<sup>57</sup> in an attempt to show where armed clashes have taken place since the outbreak of the conflict. The department itself says that the map is probably not complete,<sup>58</sup> but it does indicate a trend that is confirmed by other sources.<sup>59</sup> The map shows that armed clashes between the warring parties took place throughout Tigray during the initial phase of the conflict. From February 2021, these can be seen to converge towards Central, Eastern and Southern Tigray. A confidential source reported in March 2021 that sporadic fighting was still taking place there.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia declares ceasefire as rebels retake Tigray capital*, 28 June 2021.

<sup>56</sup> CNN, *Rebels in Tigray reject calls for ceasefire after Ethiopian government forces withdraw from regional capital*, 30 June 2021.

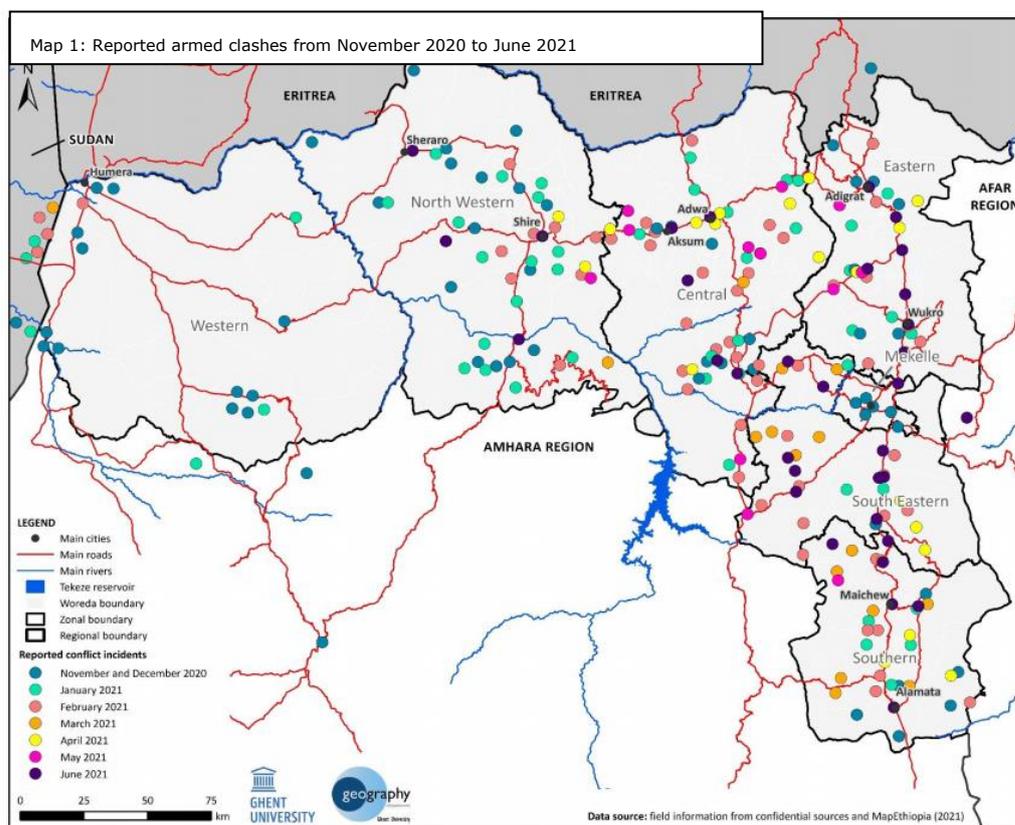
<sup>57</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., p. 3, July 2021 version. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation): The map shows armed clashes such as battles, ambushes, airstrikes, drone attacks and bombings. The authors of the report indicate next to the map that they assume that it is not complete.

<sup>58</sup> On 14 May, the Ethiopian authorities announced the deaths of 320 Tigrayan fighters who were attempting to enter Western Tigray from Sudan. This armed incident, although not confirmed by other sources, is not included in the map of the Department of Geography, for example: BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia army says killed Tigray rebels attempting entry from Sudan*, 14 May 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Confidential source, 22 January 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021.



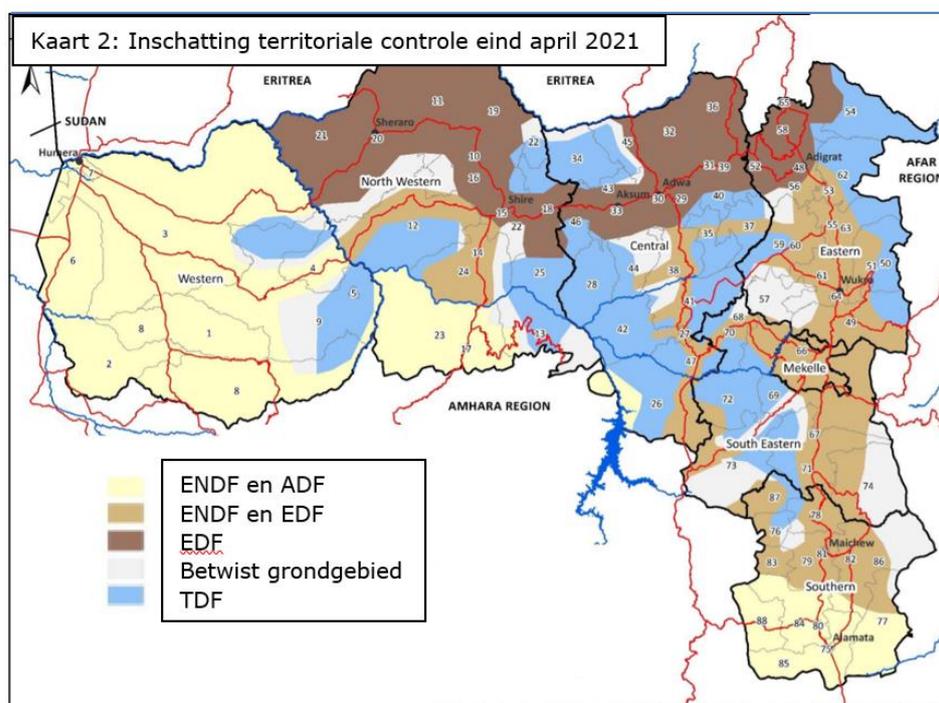
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May 2021 saw a further concentration of the fighting: except for a few incidents, most of the armed clashes took place in Central and Eastern Tigray. These were also the areas over which the TDF/TPLF still had control at the end of April 2021, according to the University of Ghent map (see Map 2).<sup>62</sup> Confidential sources noted that the ENDF had little influence outside the major roads and towns of the areas under the control of the interim government established by the federal authorities. The TDF/TPLF controlled the countryside and the inhospitable parts of Central and Eastern Tigray. In Western Tigray, Amhara militias and Amhara Special Forces were in charge. According to many sources, the large numbers of Eritrean troops present, especially in the north, take no notice of anyone and do things their own way (see 2.1). According to a confidential source, the TDF/TPLF troops were far from defeated and were in fact becoming more effective.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> The boundaries shown on the maps in the report may not fully correspond to reality or current agreements. The maps are intended purely to support the text of this report. For example, the disputed Badme Triangle area lies within the Ethiopian border on Maps 1, 2 and 3, but belongs to Eritrea according to the Treaty of Algiers (see also Map 5 and Box 1).

<sup>62</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., p. 22, March 2021 version. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation).

<sup>63</sup> Confidential source, 19 May 2021; Confidential source, 3 June 2021; ICG, *Ethiopia's Tigray War: A Deadly, Dangerous Stalemate*, 2 April 2021.



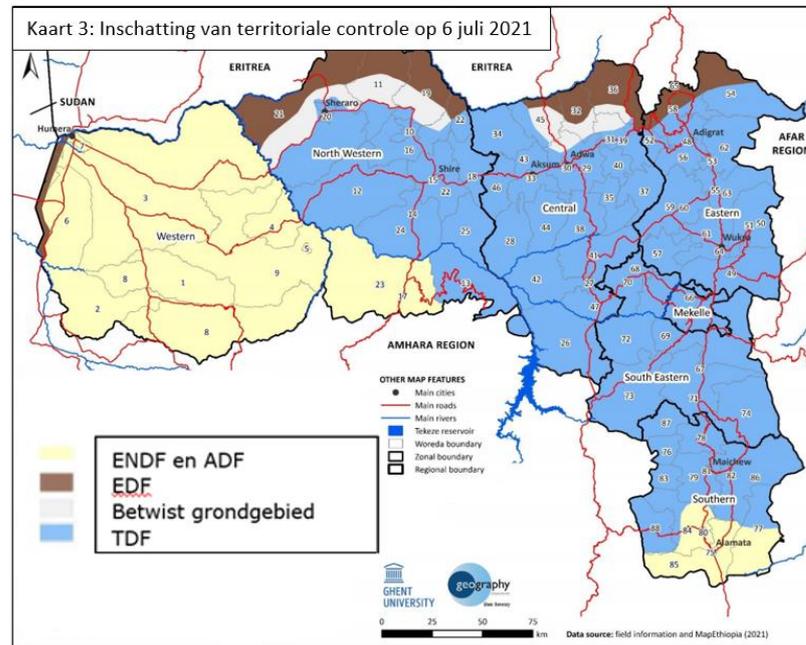
Map 2: Estimated territorial control, end of April 2021

ENDF en ADF	ENDF and ADF
ENDF en EDF	ENDF and EDF
EDF	EDF
Betwist grondgebied	Disputed territory
TDF	TDF

That the TDF/PLF had not been defeated was apparent from the offensive launched by the Tigrayans in mid-June. Mekele was captured on 28 June 2021. Apart from Western Tigray and the southern parts of North-Western Tigray, there were armed clashes in all parts of Tigray during this offensive in late June 2021, as can be seen on Map 1, which shows events up to the end of June. In the course of July 2021, the TDF/PLF took parts of Southern Tigray and armed clashes were also said to be taking place in Western Tigray between the Amhara forces and the TDF/PLF. The conflict also extended beyond Tigray's regional borders: the TDF/PLF invaded parts of Afar and Amhara.<sup>64</sup> Maps 3 (from the University of Ghent) and 4 (from the Twitter account @MapEthiopia<sup>65</sup>) show the estimated territorial control at the beginning and end of July 2021 respectively. At the time of writing of this report, the conflict was still in progress, both in Tigray and beyond, in the Amhara and Afar regions.

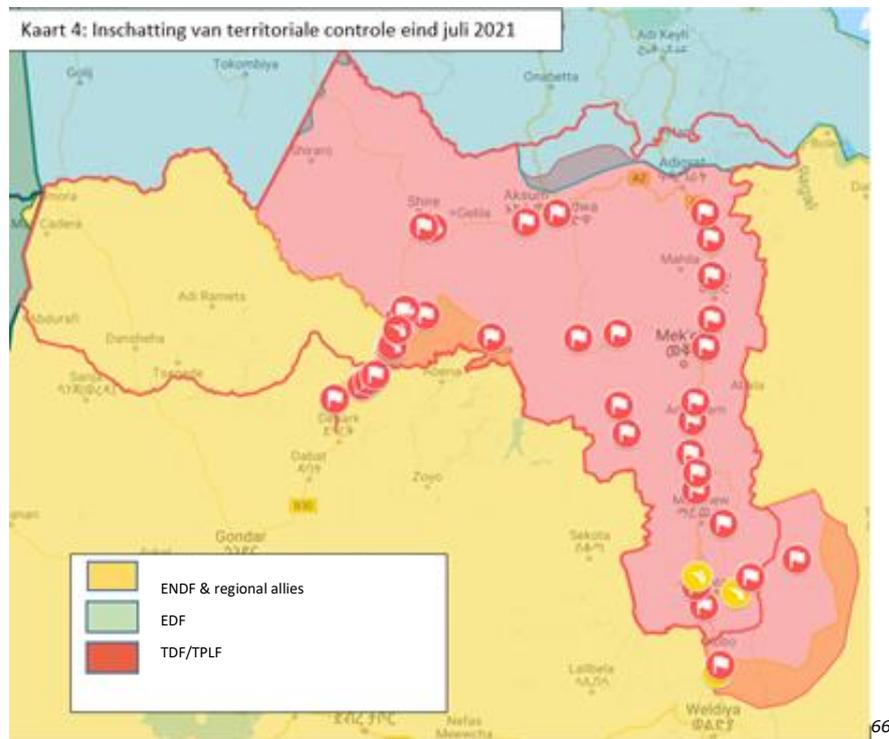
<sup>64</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE Situation Report Last updated*, 9 July 2021.

<sup>65</sup> EthiopiaMap, @MapEthiopia, 8 November 2020: <https://twitter.com/mapethiopia> (accessed 27 July 2021).



Map 3: Estimated territorial control, 6 July 2021

ENDF en ADF	ENDF and ADF
EDF	EDF
Betwist grondgebied	Disputed territory
TDF	TDF



Map 4: Estimated territorial control, end of July 2021

Due to the TDF/TPLF offensive, Abiy Ahmed called on the different regions to join him in the struggle against the TDF/TPLF. The regions of Oromia, SNNPR, Afar, Somali Regional State and Sidama, among others, are said to have responded to the request and sent regional forces to Tigray. The regional presidents of Afar and Amhara called on the inhabitants of their regions to take up arms against the TDF/TPLF.<sup>67</sup> On 10 August 2021, Abiy called on all fit Ethiopian citizens to join the armed forces in order to stop the Tigrayan forces.<sup>68</sup> It is not known to what extent citizens have heeded the appeal by the regional presidents and Prime Minister Abiy. However, a large part of the Ethiopian population seems to back the Ethiopian Prime Minister in his fight against the TDF/TPLF given the many demonstrations in the country, especially in the capital, but also in other regions, showing support for the federal government.<sup>69</sup> A confidential source commented that support for the struggle among the Ethiopian population was not strong and that the demonstrations were largely staged.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> The yellow and red circles represent (armed) activities by the ENDF and allies and the TDF/TPLF respectively. The orange area was disputed territory at the end of July 2021.

<sup>67</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia's Amhara state braces for clashes with TPLF rebels*, 14 July 2021; BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia PM urges national support against fresh TPLF offensive*, 15 July 2021; BBC Monitoring, *BBCM Africa Watchlist for 21 July*; *Ethiopia's TPLF rebels block more humanitarian convoys*, 21 July 2021; VOA News, *Ethiopia's Afar Region Urges Civilians to Fight Tigray Rebels*, 23 July 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia calls on civilians to join army to fight Tigray forces*, 10 August 2021.

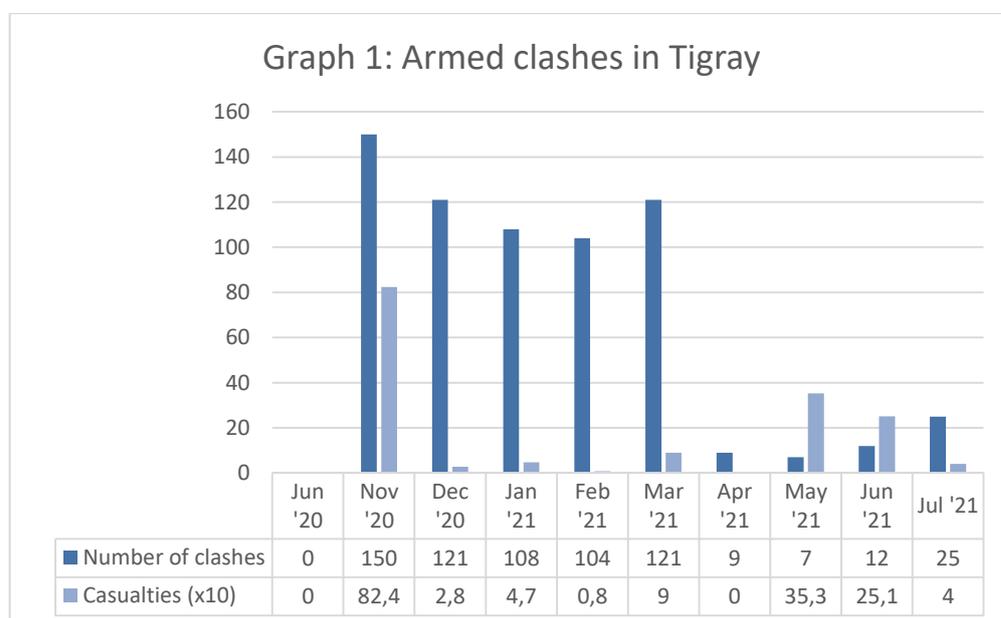
<sup>69</sup> BBC Monitoring (Shabelle Media Network), *Pro-Ethiopian army rally held in capital of Somali region*, 14 August 2021; confidential source, 1 August 2021; ENA, *Ethiopians Rally to Demand Int'l Community Stop Supporting Terrorist TPLF*, 8 August 2021; FanaBC, *PM Abiy Praises Ethiopians For Standing Up For ENDF*, 20 August 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Confidential source, 25 August 2021.

*Victims of armed clashes*

Due to the inaccessibility of large parts of Tigray and the limited access of the Ethiopian and international press to the area, confidential sources state that the figures for victims vary and that there are conflicting reports about the identity of the perpetrators and victims (see also 1.2.3 and 1.2.6).<sup>71</sup> Figures from ACLED<sup>72</sup> have been used to give an idea of the violence and victims. It should be noted here that this is not a precise representation of the number of victims, but is intended to give an idea of the trend. Following the start of the conflict in November 2020, a clear peak in the number of armed clashes between the various warring parties can be seen (see Graph 1). The graph of armed clashes shows a steady decline until March 2021. Compared to the previous months, there were far fewer clashes in April and May. The number of victims of armed clashes also peaks in November 2020. After November 2020, the number drops drastically, with a clear rise in May 2021. ACLED includes in its count at this point the armed incident in which, according to the Ethiopian authorities, 320 Tigrayan fighters were killed by the federal army when they tried to enter Tigray from Sudan in that month.<sup>73</sup>

A confidential source reported in early June 2021 that there was a consolidation of the conflict at that time and that fighting was significantly less intense than at the start of the conflict. He commented that he had heard that the TDF/TPLF was regrouping.<sup>74</sup> As mentioned earlier in this report, the TDF/TPLF launched an offensive at the end of June 2021 in which large parts of Tigray were retaken and the conflict spread to the regions of Afar and Amhara (see earlier in this section).



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<sup>71</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021; Confidential source, 11 March 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Most of the data collected by ACLED are from publicly available secondary reporting. It is therefore possible that an underestimate of the actual figures is given. Casualty numbers can be characterised by subjectivity and inaccurate reporting. ACLED states that it uses the most conservative estimates available: ACCORD (Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation): *Sudan, year 2020: Update on incidents according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)* p. 3, 23 March 2021.

<sup>73</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia army says killed Tigray rebels attempting entry from Sudan*, 14 May 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Confidential source, 4 June 2021.

<sup>75</sup> The graph was created using data from ACLED's dashboard: <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (accessed 5 August 2021): The figures are liable to change as a result of new reports on armed clashes and the number of victims.

The victims of the offensive launched by the TDF/TPLF in June 2021 are not reflected in ACLED's statistics. However, the warring parties each claimed to have killed many of the opposing side's fighters; for example, the TDF/TPLF reported having put out of action (killed, captured or wounded) thousands of federal soldiers in early July 2021. After the armed struggle spread to the Amhara and Afara regions, the federal authorities reported that the federal army and its allies had inflicted heavy casualties on the TDF/TPLF. These figures are not (yet) reflected in ACLED's statistics.<sup>76</sup> A confidential source commented on the figures relating to the violence in Tigray that a lot of reporting is delayed and that the available data are unlikely to be exhaustive.<sup>77</sup>

### *Civilian deaths*

The number of incidents in which the armed parties used violence against civilians also shows a downward trend after the start of the conflict. It should be noted that a disproportionate number of civilian casualties occurred in November compared to other months. These are mainly attributable to the incidents that took place in Mai Kadra (also known as May Cadera or Moya Khadra) and Aksum (also called Axum) in November 2020 (see also 1.2.3).<sup>78</sup> Another incident that explains the high number of civilian casualties in November 2020 is the events in Aksum at the end of November, when Eritrean troops reportedly caused a large number of civilian casualties (see also 1.2.2 and 1.2.3).<sup>79</sup> Although the number of civilian casualties has shown a downward trend since the start of the conflict in November 2020, the food shortages experienced by the population are expected to claim more and more victims (see also 1.2.6). Hunger is reportedly being used by the federal government and allies as a weapon against the Tigrayan population (see also 1.2.2 and 1.2.6).<sup>80</sup>

Following the TDF/TPLF offensive, there has been an increase in reporting of civilian casualties. After the withdrawal of federal forces from Tigray at the end of June 2021, the Raya Rayuma Democratic Party<sup>81</sup> reported that the TDF/TPLF was involved in the killing of civilians suspected of collaborating with the interim government established by the federal government (see also 1.2.3 and 2.3).<sup>82</sup> In July and August 2021, there are also reports of civilian casualties in Amhara and Afar due to the conflict (see 1.2.3 and 3.2.1).

<sup>76</sup> BBC, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Rebel resurgence raises questions for Abiy Ahmed*, 3 July 2021; BBC Monitoring (ESAT TV), *Ethiopian army inflicts 'heavy losses' on Tigray rebels*, 3 August 2021; BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopian army claims victory over rebels in Amhara region*, 16 August 2021; ACLED, <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (accessed 5 August 2021); it should be noted that the ACLED figures used concerned the victims of the violence in the Tigray region, whereas many of the casualties from armed clashes between the federal military and its allies and the TDF/TPLF in July and August 2021 occurred in Amhara and Afar.

<sup>77</sup> Confidential source, 4 June 2021.

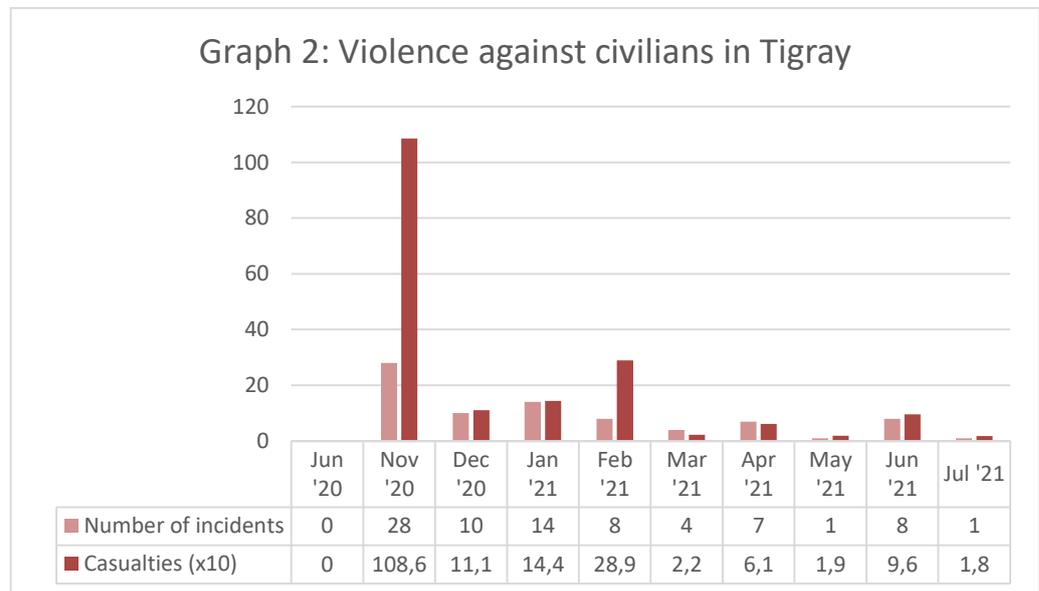
<sup>78</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, pages 49 and 52, February 2021.

<sup>79</sup> BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Corporate Website), *Ethiopia admits Eritrean soldiers killed civilians in Aksum*, 22 May 2021; Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, February 2021; Addis Standard, *Ethiopia Rights Commission confirms Eritrean soldiers massacred civilians in Axum, calls for comprehensive investigation in Tigray*, 24 March 2021: According to Amnesty International, hundreds of civilians were killed as a result of violence by the Eritrean troops. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) concluded from its own investigation that there had been about a hundred civilian casualties.

<sup>80</sup> The Economist, *Tigray is edging closer to famine; Daily chart*, 22 April 2021.

<sup>81</sup> The Raya Rayuma Democratic Party defends the interests of the inhabitants of Raya in Southern Tigray, many of whom are ethnic Amhara and Oromo, but primarily identify with the Raya area.

<sup>82</sup> ENA (Ethiopian News Agency), *Terrorist TPLF Group Brutally Attacking Civilians in Raya Azebo*, 7 June 2021; Ezega News, *TPLF Accused of Engaging in Forced Assimilation of Raya People*, 4 September 2020.



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### Crime

The overall security situation in Tigray has deteriorated, including a significant increase in crime since the start of the conflict. At the start of the conflict, the TPLF released thousands of criminals who engaged in large-scale looting.<sup>84</sup> With the disappearance of the regional authorities, the federal authorities, although they said they were working hard to restore the government structure, were unable to ensure the level of order and security that was in place before the conflict in Tigray, various sources said. Organised crime has grown since the outbreak of the conflict, according to a confidential source.<sup>85</sup>

#### 1.2.1

#### *The main warring parties/actors perpetrating violence in Tigray*

As the General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021 reported, in early November 2020 a conflict broke out between the federal government and allies on the one hand and the Tigrayan security forces on the other. The Tigrayan armed forces, the TPLF/TDF, are said to include the Tigrayan special security forces, militias and the informal youth militia called Samri. The federal forces were assisted by Amhara militias, the Amhara special security forces and the Amhara youth militia Fano. Militias and special security forces from Afar are also said to have fought alongside the federal troops. The report also refers to the alleged Eritrean involvement in the conflict.<sup>86</sup>

On the weekend of 14 and 15 November 2020, a rocket attack was carried out by the Tigrayan side on the capital of its 'arch enemy' Eritrea, extending the conflict beyond Ethiopia's national borders. Eritrea is said to have sent soldiers and equipment to support the ENDF in its conflict against the Tigrayan fighters led by the TPLF.<sup>87</sup> At the beginning of January 2021, at the end of the period covered by the

<sup>83</sup> The graph was created using data from ACLED's dashboard: <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (consulted on 5 August 2021).

<sup>84</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Confidential source, 9 June 2021; confidential source, 10 June 2021; Confidential source, 11 March 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, pages 48-50, February 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 9, February 2021.

general country of origin information report, public sources reported on the involvement of Somali soldiers in the fighting in Tigray. They were said to have been among approximately 4,000 soldiers trained by the Eritrean army. The Somali government denied the deaths of Somali soldiers, but admitted that Somali cadets had been sent to Eritrea, according to open sources. The presence of Somali soldiers in Tigray has not been confirmed.<sup>88</sup>

A more detailed picture of the main parties to the conflict is given below:

*Tigray Defence Force/Tigray People's Liberation Front (TDF/TPLF)*

Although many sources use the terms TPLF and TDF (Tigray Defence Force) interchangeably, numerous sources state that in the current situation it is more appropriate to speak of the TDF. The TDF also has individuals in its ranks who are not necessarily affiliated with the TPLF; many Tigrayans who do not consider themselves sympathisers with or members of the TPLF have now joined the fight against the federal forces and allies.<sup>89</sup> A confidential source said he was well aware that there had been abuses in Ethiopia at the time of the EPRDF/TPLF regime, but that given the current situation in Tigray it was unthinkable for him not to support the struggle against the federal government.<sup>90</sup> The TPLF forms the framework for the TDF, but the TDF is much larger than just the TPLF, according to a confidential source.<sup>91</sup>

According to both open and confidential sources, the atrocities against the Tigrayan civilian population, including mass killings, were a definite stimulus for the recruitment of new fighters for the TPLF/TDF.<sup>92</sup> For example, the military leader of the TDF, General Tsadkan Gebretensae, had been at odds with the TPLF at the start of this century due to a difference of opinion on how to conduct the war with Eritrea. Gebretensae was discharged from the army at the time, but when the conflict began last November, he joined the resistance against the federal army.<sup>93</sup> The TPLF was designated a terrorist organisation by the Ethiopian authorities in early May 2021.<sup>94</sup> The Ethiopian federal government warned the international press not to call 'the fighters of the TPLF a defence force (TDF), and the leaders of the rebels a government'. These terms were said to confer legitimacy on what the federal government regards as a terrorist organisation. The federal government does not recognise the TDF and refuses to use this term itself (see also 1.2.3 and 3.2).<sup>95</sup>

The day after the conflict broke out, ICG wrote that the Tigrayan regional government had a large paramilitary force and well-trained local militias, estimated to number about 250,000 troops together.<sup>96</sup> A diplomat told Reuters that there were between 30,000 and 60,000 effective fighters among them.<sup>97</sup> A confidential source

<sup>88</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 35, February 2021.

<sup>89</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 1, 6 April 2021; confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>92</sup> The Guardian, *Ethiopia is fighting 'difficult and tiresome' guerrilla war in Tigray, says PM*, 4 April 2021; confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>93</sup> BBC News, *Gen Tsadkan Gebretensae: Ethiopia's Tigray rebel mastermind*, 1 July 2021.

<sup>94</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia army says killed Tigray rebels attempting entry from Sudan*, 14 May 2021.

<sup>95</sup> Ethiopia Media Outlet, @EthMediaAuth, 18 July 2021. *Ethiopia warns foreign media over reporting on Tigray*: To avoid confusion, this report will use the combination TPLF/TDF where possible, as the two names are used interchangeably by different parties.

<sup>96</sup> ICG, *Clashes over Ethiopia's Tigray Region: Getting to a Ceasefire and National Dialogue*, 5 November 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Reuters, *Factbox: The forces fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict*, 17 November 2020.

said that at the beginning of November 2020, the Tigrayan regional government had about 37,000 militia members and special security troops. There are now about 200,000 guerrillas in the ranks of the TDF according to this source.<sup>98</sup> They include many Tigrayan soldiers who have deserted from the ENDF.<sup>99</sup>

With one exception<sup>100</sup>, all the opposition parties in Tigray that ran against the TPLF in the federal government's illegal regional elections last September have sided with the TPLF/TDF, according to confidential sources.<sup>101</sup> As mentioned earlier in this report, another source of contacts in Tigray had heard that there is social pressure within Tigray to give up at least one son for the conflict against the federal government.<sup>102</sup> Federal government-affiliated press outlets have accused the TPLF/TDF of forcing minors to fight alongside them.<sup>103</sup> Ethiopian government officials have accused Sudan and Egypt of supporting the TPLF and adding to the unrest in Tigray.<sup>104</sup> The Ethiopian authorities in turn accuse the TPLF of giving support by means of weapons, money and training to other armed opposition groups in Ethiopia such as the OLF/Shane, which like the TPLF has been listed as a terrorist organisation by the federal government since 1 May 2021.<sup>105</sup>

#### *Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF)*

Two diplomats stated in an interview with the news agency Reuters that in November 2020, 40,000 to 50,000 ENDF troops and fighters 'loyal to the federal government' were present in Tigray. Reuters also wrote that according to Janes Security Data Group, by the end of 2020 the ENDF had a total of about 140,000 people under arms, most of whom were in the army.<sup>106</sup> Many senior officers of Tigrayan descent had already been discharged from the army before the conflict, but after 4 November the army was practically purged of Tigrayan soldiers. Many have joined the TDF or are in military detention centres (see also 3.2).<sup>107</sup>

A senior diplomat told Reuters in November 2020 that Prime Minister Abiy was increasingly relying on the support of troops from Amhara in the ground fighting.<sup>108</sup> Confidential sources believe that even before the fighting broke out, the federal government was in talks with the regional government of Amhara and the government of Eritrea about a possible conflict with Tigray, because it lacked sufficient military power itself. The sources do not know to what extent concrete agreements were made and to what extent this coordination took place.<sup>109</sup> A confidential source estimated that after more than half a year of fighting, there were 350,000 to 370,000 federal and allied troops in Tigray in early June 2021. He was unable to say what the exact subdivisions were between the different factions.<sup>110</sup> It is unclear how the lines of command run between the Ethiopian federal army, the

<sup>98</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Confidential source, 15 June 2021.

<sup>100</sup> It is not known which party this is.

<sup>101</sup> Confidential source, 15 June 2021; Confidential source, 10 June 2021; The Tigrayan opposition parties TDP and Arena did not participate in the regional elections in Tigray in September 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Confidential source, 4 June 2021.

<sup>103</sup> ENA, *Youth TPLF Fighter Expose Group of Forcing Teens to Fight with National Defense Force*, 11 November 2020; ENA (Ethiopian News Agency), *Captured Child Soldiers Say Forced to Fight for Fear of Being Killed by TPLF*, 22 July 2021.

<sup>104</sup> BBC Monitoring (Suna News), *Sudan 'accused' of backing unrest in Ethiopia's Tigray*, 6 May 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Confidential source, 26 March 2021

<sup>106</sup> Reuters, *Factbox: The forces fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict*, 17 November 2020.

<sup>107</sup> Confidential source, 15 June 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Reuters, *Factbox: The forces fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict*, 17 November 2020.

<sup>109</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021; Confidential source, 3 June 2021; Confidential source, 26 March 2021.

<sup>110</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) and the Amhara regional special security forces and affiliated militias, but in some areas they have campaigned jointly.<sup>111</sup>

#### *Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF)*

The previous country of origin information report on Ethiopia was still somewhat hesitant about whether Eritrean troops were present in Tigrayan territory, but that presence is now a fait accompli. After months of denial, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed confirmed on 23 March 2021 that Eritrean troops were present in Ethiopia's northern region. In a speech to the Ethiopian parliament, he first thanked Eritrea for opening its borders to fleeing Northern Command soldiers when this unit was attacked 'through treachery'. Abiy stated in his speech that the Eritrean government had decided to maintain control of areas in Tigray because of the relocation of Ethiopian troops from the border with Eritrea to the centre of Tigray to fight the TPLF and because of the missile attack by the TPLF on the Eritrean capital.<sup>112</sup>

Some sources believe that Eritrean forces were already on Tigrayan territory before the rocket attack on Asmara took place on the weekend of 14-15 November 2020. A source said he did not know exactly when the Eritrean troops crossed the border, but that the federal government's operation against the regional government of Tigray was coordinated with the Eritrean authorities.<sup>113</sup> On 9 November 2020, the regional president of Tigray, Debretsion Gebremichael, accused Eritrea of sending troops to the region to assist Ethiopia's federal armed forces.<sup>114</sup> The same day that Gebremichael made these accusations, witnesses are said to have seen mortars<sup>115</sup> being fired from Eritrean territory in the direction of Humera, a town in Western Tigray still controlled at the time by the TPLF.<sup>116</sup>

The Ethiopian federal army apparently has little or no authority over the Eritrean forces in Tigray, which are said to operate autonomously.<sup>117</sup> According to a confidential source, the Abiy government had asked Eritrea several times to withdraw, but the country had refused.<sup>118</sup> According to a confidential source, it seemed fairly likely in May 2021 that there were more Eritrean soldiers present.<sup>119</sup> It is not known how many Eritrean troops are in Ethiopian territory. After the TDF/TPLF offensive at the end of June 2021, the Eritrean forces in Tigray were pushed back, but at the time of writing of this report the EDF was still present in the region (see 1.2).

The uniforms of the Eritrean soldiers are clearly distinguishable from those worn by the Ethiopian soldiers by their colour among other things. However, Eritrean soldiers sometimes wore Ethiopian uniforms. Despite wearing the Ethiopian uniform, the

<sup>111</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 1, 6 April 2021; confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>112</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopian prime minister admits Eritrean troops in Tigray*, 23 March 2021; Confidential source, 26 March 2021.

<sup>113</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>114</sup> Africanews, *Ethiopia Conflict: Tigray accuses Eritrea of involvement*, 11 November 2020; The Jakarta Post, *African bloc wants ceasefire as Ethiopia's Tigray alleges Eritrean incursion*, 10 November 2020.

<sup>115</sup> The UAE is said to have flouted the US arms embargo against Eritrea and provided the country with drones, among other things: The Economist, *Gulf rivalries are spilling into Africa's Horn*; *The Horn of Africa*, 11 February 2021.

<sup>116</sup> Ethiopia Autonomous Media, *The war in Tigray is being complicated by ideological ambitions*, 11 November 2020; World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 25, 6 April 2021

<sup>117</sup> Confidential source, 21 June 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Confidential source, 26 March 2021.

<sup>119</sup> Confidential source, 10 May 2021.

Eritreans are recognisable.<sup>120</sup> The Ethiopian soldiers speak Amharic, whereas the Eritreans speak Tigrinya or Arabic.<sup>121</sup> Unlike the Ethiopian soldiers, who wear standard army boots, the Eritreans walk on plastic footwear called *congo chama* or *shida*. Furthermore, some Eritreans, especially of the Beni-Amir ethnic group, have cultural features such as three scars on their temples on each side of the head.<sup>122</sup>

At the end of May 2021, the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) stated that Eritrean soldiers had also been spotted in other parts of Ethiopia. The OLF said it had reliable evidence that Eritrean soldiers had been guilty of the arbitrary arrest and mistreatment of individuals in the Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regions.<sup>123</sup> A confidential source commented that he was unable to confirm whether this was actually the case, but that he did not consider it unthinkable given the deteriorating security situation in those regions.<sup>124</sup> In the first quarter of 2021, public sources reported fighting between Ethiopian troops and militias and the Sudanese army in the disputed Al-Fashqa area of Sudan. Eritrean troops were said to be fighting alongside the Ethiopians. This information has not been confirmed.<sup>125</sup>

#### *Amhara Special Forces, militias and Fano (ADF)*

Militias, special security forces and the youth militia Fano from Amhara (collective name: ADF, see footnote 53) have been involved in the conflict since it started. The ADF occupy large parts of Western, North-western and Southern Tigray (see 1.2 and Map 5). Dignitaries from the Amhara region have indicated that they will not give up these areas, claiming that areas such as Welkait, the Raya Valley and Humera have traditionally been part of Amhara (see Box 1).<sup>126</sup> A confidential source reported that the presence of Amhara forces in Western Tigray was a thorn in the side of the federal government, but that the Amhara regional government had no intention of removing them from the area.<sup>127</sup> In the areas under the control of the ADF, these forces often operated autonomously and there were few if any ENDF forces present, according to various confidential sources. In Southern Tigray, the ENDF was said to have more of a presence than in Western and North-western Tigray.<sup>128</sup> The ADF was quite well structured, according to a confidential source.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Confidential source, 10 May 2021.

<sup>121</sup> Although the Tigrayans and the Eritreans speak the same language, there are differences. There is a difference in accent, but the Eritreans also use many more Arabic words and expressions in their everyday language, for example (see also paragraph 3.1).

<sup>122</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, page 13, February 2021; Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>123</sup> Oromo Liberation Front, OLF/ABO, *OLF Press Statement Facebook, Eritrean Soldiers are Brutally Persecuting Civilians in Abay Chomen Region of West Oromia*, 30 May 2021; The Africa Report, *Ethiopia/Tigray: Is this Eritrea's final war?*, 28 June 2021.

<sup>124</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>125</sup> BBC Monitoring, *Africa Watchlist, Website says Ethiopian army 'shelling' Sudanese territories*, 16 February 2021; BBC Monitoring (Suna News Agency Website), *Sudan army chief inspects troops on Ethiopia border*, 2 April 2021; Anadolu Agency, *Sudan army pushes to control disputed area with Ethiopia*, 2 March 2021; Bloomberg, *Eritrea Forces Deployed in Disputed Sudan-Ethiopia Area, UN Says*, 24 March 2021.

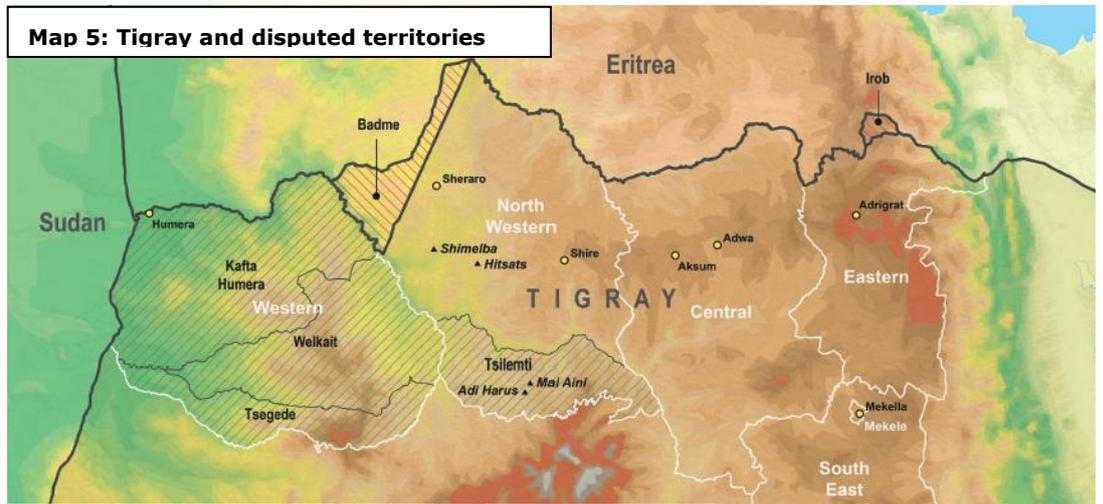
<sup>126</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, page 12, February 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021

<sup>127</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021.

<sup>128</sup> Confidential source, 24 June 2021; confidential source, 21 June 2021; ENA (Ethiopian News Agency), *Terrorist TPLF Group Brutally Attacking Civilians in Raya Azebo*, 7 June 2021.

<sup>129</sup> Confidential source, 21 June 2021.

**Map 5: Tigray and disputed territories**



**Map 6: Ethiopia and the regional states**



-----Box 1: Disputed territories-----

Under the EPRDF/TPLF, Ethiopia changed from a unitary state to a federal state. Under Article 46 of the 1995 Constitution, nine regional states were formed on the basis of 'settlement patterns, language, identity and popular approval'. In the summer of 2020, after a referendum, a tenth regional state, Sidama, was added (see Map 6). The borders of the new regional states crossed previous administrative demarcations. The parts of the Tigray region shaded in green in Map 5 used to belong to mainly Amharic-speaking areas and were added to the Tigray region after the 1995 constitution without any referendum or approval of the local population, according to the Amhara. Before 1991, however, there was no region that bore the specific name Amhara; the Amhara lived in various provinces. Sources mentioned that the Tigrayans also have historical claims to these areas. Until the 1940s, they say, these areas were mainly populated by people of Tigrayan descent. During the first *Woyane* (uprising), the Tigrayans revolted against the then Emperor Haile Selassie in 1943. When the emperor had

put down the rebellion with the help of the British air force, he is said to have taken territories from the Tigrayans in reprisal and encouraged Amhara to settle there.<sup>130</sup>

In 1998, a border war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This war ended in December 2000 when a peace agreement was signed by both sides in the Algerian capital, Algiers. The UN Border Commission established as a result of the agreement determined that Badme and other regions belonged to Eritrea. Ethiopia wanted to negotiate further, whereas Eritrea asked the established borders to be implemented. However, the Badme Triangle and Irob, awarded to Eritrea by the UN Commission, remained under Ethiopia's control (see red shaded areas on Map 5). The 'no-war no-peace' situation that had arisen after the Treaty of Algiers ended in 2018 when the newly appointed Prime Minister of Ethiopia Abiy made peace with Eritrea, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. However, this did not lead to the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from these areas.<sup>131</sup>

----- end of box -----

#### *Other regional forces*

Following reports in early 2021 of Somali troops fighting alongside the federal troops in Tigrayan territory, there have been more frequent reports of this alleged presence in the following months. In May 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Eritrea stated that he had also received reports of the presence of Somali troops near the city of Aksum, which were vigorously denied by the Somali authorities. Despite the denials, parents of Somali soldiers took to the streets in June 2021 to demand the return of their children from northern Ethiopia.<sup>132</sup> As a senior EU envoy, Finland's foreign minister reported to the European Parliament on the ties between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, calling this relationship 'not a very friendly triangle to the rest of the countries in the region'.<sup>133</sup>

Opinions are divided on the involvement of Afar forces in the conflict. A confidential source said that early in the conflict there were Afar regional security forces and militias fighting on the side of the federal forces. However, their contribution was limited, the source stated.<sup>134</sup> Historically, the Afar and the Tigrayans have always had a good relationship. A confidential source therefore considered it unlikely that militias or security forces from Afar had fought alongside the federal forces. According to him, these claims came from the government propaganda machine.<sup>135</sup> There are no disputes over territory between the Afar and the Tigrayans, as there are between the latter and the Amhara; the relationship between Tigray and its eastern neighbour Afar is therefore a lot better, according to a confidential source.<sup>136</sup>

Following the TDF/TPLF offensive in June 2021, Abiy Ahmed called on other regions to provide troops for the conflict. Oromia, Sidama, SNNPR, Somali Regional State and Afar are said to have complied with this request and sent regional forces to the

<sup>130</sup> OmnaTigray, @OmnaTigray, 18 February 2021: <https://twitter.com/OmnaTigray/status/1362508307047604229>; Anadolu Agency, Ethiopia: 10th regional gov't goes official, 18 June 2020; Foreign Policy, Ethiopia's Tigray War Is Fueling Amhara Expansionism, 28 April 2021; confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>131</sup> Ethiopia Observer, *Irob Protests in Tigray Display Local Obstacles to Implementing Eritrea Peace Deal*, 11 June 2018; The Guardian, *Nobel peace prize: Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed wins 2019 award – as it happened*, 11 October 2019.

<sup>132</sup> OHCHR, *Situation of human rights in Eritrea, A/HRC/47/21*, 12 May 2021; BBC Monitoring (Radio Mogadishu), *Somalia denies troops involved in Ethiopia's Tigray war*, 10 June 2021.

<sup>133</sup> Addis Standard, *"ETHIOPIAN LEADERS TOLD ME THEY'RE GOING TO WIPE OUT, DESTROY TIGRYANS", CLAIMS EU ENVOY*, 18 June 2021.

<sup>134</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>136</sup> Confidential source, 4 June 2021.

conflict area (see 1.2).<sup>137</sup> The conflict area has expanded to Afar, among other places, one of the consequences being the displacement of inhabitants of the region. The reason Afar sent troops may be to do with the fact that fighting has also taken place in this region, a confidential source said.<sup>138</sup>

### 1.2.2 *Forms of violence/targeted methods of violence or methods that claim random victims*

On 4 March 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Michelle Bachelet, stated that deeply disturbing reports continued to reach her office about sexual and gender-related violence, extrajudicial killings and large-scale destruction and looting of public and private property in Tigray. OHCHR named all the warring factions, the ENDF, the TPLF, the EDF and the regional forces and affiliated militias from Amhara, as responsible for the abuses.<sup>139</sup> In addition to these crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch (HRW) also cited reports at the end of May 2021 of indiscriminate bombings<sup>140</sup> and large-scale massacres, such as in Mai Kadra and Aksum.<sup>141</sup> In Western Tigray, the ADF also expelled ethnic Tigrayans on a large scale from the area; this was described by the US authorities as 'ethnic cleansing'.<sup>142</sup> IDPs (internally displaced persons) and Eritrean refugees are said to have been forcibly removed by Eritrean and Ethiopian troops from camps where they had sought protection. Hunger was also said to be used as a weapon to weaken the Tigrayan population.<sup>143</sup>

Both open and confidential sources stated that the EDF were responsible for most of the atrocities.<sup>144</sup> The University of Ghent stated in its report on the situation in Tigray that the perpetrators of documented civilian casualties<sup>145</sup> were Eritrean soldiers in 50% of cases, Ethiopian federal soldiers in 20%, either Ethiopian or Eritrean soldiers in 16% and Amhara militias in 4%. Amnesty International (AI) reported that the Eritrean army, for example, had killed civilians in the town of Aksum in a coordinated and systematic operation at the end of November 2020. HRW and the EHRC (Ethiopian Human Rights Commission) also reported the acts of violence carried out by the Eritrean forces in Aksum (see 1.2.3).<sup>146</sup> According to the Ghent researchers, the perpetrating group was unknown in 10% of cases. It should be noted that the university's research focused in particular on the ENDF and allies as perpetrators. Although none of the documented civilian casualties were attributed to the TDF or its allies, members of the TDF may have been among the perpetrators in some of the reported cases, the report said. The report states that given the

<sup>137</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia's Amhara state braces for clashes with TPLF rebels*, 14 July 2021; BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia PM urges national support against fresh TPLF offensive*, 15 July 2021; BBC Monitoring, *BBCM Africa Watchlist for 21 July; Ethiopia's TPLF rebels block more humanitarian convoys*, 21 July 2021.

<sup>138</sup> Confidential source, 15 July 2021.

<sup>139</sup> UN News, *Amidst 'conflict, blanket denials and finger-pointing', UN rights chief calls for probe in Ethiopia's Tigray*, 4 May 2021.

<sup>140</sup> In late May 2021, *The Telegraph* reported the alleged use of phosphorus bombs by the Ethiopian military. This report was strenuously contradicted by the Ethiopian government and has not been confirmed by other sources: *The Telegraph, Exclusive: Ethiopians suffer horrific burns in suspected white phosphorus attacks*, 24 May 2021.

<sup>141</sup> HRW, *Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted*, 28 May 2021; Addis Standard, *NEWS: DOZENS OF CIVILIANS KILLED, INJURED IN MARKET AIRSTRIKE IN TIGRAY; ARMY OFFICIALS SAY COMBATANTS, NOT CIVILIANS THE TARGET*, 24 June 2021.

<sup>142</sup> *The Economist*, *The war in Tigray is taking a frightful human toll; Ethiopia's war economy*, 15 April 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021; confidential source, 21 June 2021.

<sup>143</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, p. 23, 6 April 2021

<sup>144</sup> Confidential source, 21 June 2021; Confidential source, 22 January 2021.

<sup>145</sup> 'Documented' means that the victim's name and other details are known.

<sup>146</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, page 23, February 2021; HRW, *Ethiopia's Axum Findings Ignore Massacre of Civilians*, 12 May 2021; Addis Standard, *News Alert: Ethiopia Rights Commission confirms Eritrean soldiers massacred civilians in Axum, calls for comprehensive investigation in Tigray*, 24 March 2021.

sources consulted, mainly of Tigrayan ethnicity, it may be somewhat biased. Nevertheless, it paints a picture of the relationships between the ENDF, EDF and ADF which is consistent with other sources.<sup>147</sup>

The Eritrean and Ethiopian authorities stated in early April 2021 that the atrocities and crimes against humanity allegedly committed by their forces were grossly exaggerated, while the alleged crimes committed by the TPLF were not being investigated.<sup>148</sup> With regard to alleged atrocities on the part of the TPLF and allied factions, the country of origin information report of February 2021 already mentioned the massacre mainly of Amhara in the village of May Kadra in Western Tigray shortly after the outbreak of the conflict. Militias affiliated with the TPLF and the Tigrayan youth group Samri were named as the main perpetrators. When May Kadra fell into the hands of the ADF, Tigrayans were also said to have been murdered in reprisals by the Amhara side.<sup>149</sup>

According to *The Economist*, there were reliable reports of the burning of crops and the killing of livestock by the federal army and its allies. The publication wrote that if these allegations were true, they constituted war crimes.<sup>150</sup> In particular, the Ethiopian and Eritrean military are mentioned as being behind such practices.<sup>151</sup> On 15 June 2021, the then UN humanitarian coordinator Mark Lowcock<sup>152</sup> stated that Eritrean soldiers in Tigray were using 'famine' as a weapon. The Eritrean authorities replied that Eritrea was not engaged in starving the Tigrayan population into submission, and that Lowcock had been duped by TPLF propaganda.<sup>153</sup> Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed also rejected reports that his government was deliberately starving the people of Tigray. Like the Eritrean authorities, he called this 'pure propaganda'.<sup>154</sup> By contrast, the Ethiopian authorities argued that the TPLF was responsible for attacks on aid convoys and the theft and looting of food supplies. They did not come up with concrete examples when asked.<sup>155</sup> When the federal government forces withdrew from Mekelle at the time of the TDF/TPLF advance in late June 2021, they raided the offices of UNICEF and WFP in the Tigrayan capital and destroyed UNICEF's VSAT system.<sup>156</sup>

### 1.2.3

#### *Indiscriminate violence or violence targeting specific groups*

It is clear from open and confidential sources that both indiscriminate and targeted violence has been used by all parties to the conflict. The mere fact that someone could be a potential fighter for the TDF/TPLF could mean a death sentence. Many TPLF leaders have reportedly been deliberately put out of action by the federal army

<sup>147</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., p. 24, 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation).

<sup>148</sup> Reuters, *Eritrean soldiers kill nine civilians in Tigray, Ethiopian regional official says*, 14 April 2021.

<sup>149</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, pages 48-49, February 2021.

<sup>150</sup> The Economist, *Ethiopia's government appears to be wielding hunger as a weapon; Ethiopia's civil war*, 21 May 2021.

<sup>151</sup> VRT, *Report: "Inwoners van Tigray (Ethiopië) worden bewust op grote schaal uitgehongerd als oorlogswapen"*, 6 April 2021; Confidential source, 10 May 2021; Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., page 44, 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation).

<sup>152</sup> Lowcock was succeeded by the Briton Martin Griffiths in July 2021.

<sup>153</sup> BBC Monitoring (Shabait Website), *Eritrea rejects accusations over Ethiopia's Tigray situation*, 17 June 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021

<sup>154</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Claims of famine in Tigray 'pure propaganda' - Ethiopian PM*, 24 June 2021.

<sup>155</sup> BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia wants Tigray rebels condemned for 'devilish acts'*, 3 June 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021.

<sup>156</sup> Reuters, *UNICEF accuses Ethiopian troops of targeting its Tigray office*, 28 June 2021; AfricaNews, *Ethiopian military loots UNICEF office in Tigray capital*, 29 June 2021; CNN, *Ethiopia's government announce ceasefire as Tigrayan troops retake region's capital*, 29 June 2021.

and allies. On the other hand, the TDF/TPLF has specifically killed employees of the interim government established by the federal government in Tigray. Eritrean refugees in Tigray have been caught in the midst of the trouble. On the one hand, Eritrean refugees, many of whom had fled Eritrea for political reasons, have been rounded up by Eritrean forces and sent back to Eritrea. The fate of many refugees is unknown. On the other hand, they have been targeted by the TDF/TPLF, because they have been regarded as jointly responsible for the misdeeds of the Eritrean military in Tigray. Ordinary civilians in Tigray have been victims of indiscriminate violence, such as revenge attacks, random bombings and indiscriminate shooting at, for example, fleeing civilians. Each category of victims is discussed separately below:

#### *TPLF leaders*

Abiy has stated several times that the federal military operation was not against the Tigrayan people, but against 'our enemies', the TPLF.<sup>157</sup> Following the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray, the Ethiopian authorities declared on 24 November 2020 that the leaders of the TPLF would be charged with high treason and terrorism, among other things.<sup>158</sup> Many TPLF leaders have been arrested or killed. For example, in January 2021, three TPLF leaders, including the former federal minister of foreign affairs, Seyoum Mesfin, were killed. The federal government's explanation was that the men resisted arrest. The BBC News wrote that some doubted this explanation and believed the men had been killed 'in cold blood'.<sup>159</sup> On 1 May 2021, the TPLF was designated a terrorist organisation by the federal government, which could lead to further prosecutions and arrests of members and supporters of the party (see 1.2.1).<sup>160</sup>

#### *Fighters/potential fighters*

AI wrote that when Eritrean soldiers<sup>161</sup> entered the town of Aksum at the end of November 2020, they conducted a specific search for TPLF fighters and militia members. Witnesses with whom AI spoke stated that men and youngsters were killed by the Eritreans if there was the slightest suspicion<sup>162</sup> of involvement with the TPLF.<sup>163</sup> A confidential source believed that just being a young man who could take up arms against the federal government and allies could be a death sentence. He stated that many young men had therefore withdrawn into the mountains or gone to Mekelle, because they thought it was safer there.<sup>164</sup> Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy stated that his troops had difficulty in distinguishing between civilians and combatants. He said that the TPLF/TDF were using guerrilla tactics and the Tigrayan fighters mingled with the civilian population in civilian clothing.<sup>165</sup>

#### *Civilians*

Despite Abiy's statements that the fight was against the TPLF and not Tigrayan

<sup>157</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopian prime minister admits Eritrean troops in Tigray*, 23 March 2021; Reuters, *Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021; Confidential source, 26 March 2021

<sup>158</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, page 18, February 2021.

<sup>159</sup> BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: What a blind man's death reveals*, 1 February 2021; Confidential source, 22 January 2021; The Economist, *After two months of war, Tigray faces starvation; Ethiopia*, 21 January 2021.

<sup>160</sup> Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia to designate TPLF, OLF-Shene as 'terror' groups*, 1 May 2021.

<sup>161</sup> An AI source said this could have been both Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers. The soldiers were wearing Ethiopian uniforms, but this uniform was also worn by Eritreans, the source said.

<sup>162</sup> For example, the *shirit*, a sarong-like wrap associated with TPLF fighters, could be enough to arouse suspicions of involvement. Visual material on mobile phones indicating support for the TPLF was also regarded as evidence, according to AI sources.

<sup>163</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, pp. 7-8, February 2021.

<sup>164</sup> Confidential source, 4 June 2021.

<sup>165</sup> The Guardian, *Ethiopia is fighting 'difficult and tiresome' guerrilla war in Tigray, says PM*, 4 April 2021.

civilians, the ENDF and allies inflicted civilian casualties. In areas where Amhara forces had been, graffiti was found on the walls that read in Amharic that 'Tigray must be swept clean'.<sup>166</sup> It was also stated in a programme on the TV station ESAT TV, which operates from abroad, that the fight was against the entire Tigrayan population.<sup>167</sup> According to a confidential source, a federal government official had said all inhabitants of Tigray were victims of the conflict.<sup>168</sup> The Tigrayan people were being punished, it was said, in order to weaken the TDF and bring it to its knees.<sup>169</sup> The Tigrayans from Western Tigray, which was occupied by Amhara special forces and militia, were forced to leave the area on a large scale.<sup>170</sup> In the areas controlled by Amhara forces, the Tigrayan identity card was taken from residents and replaced with a copy in Amharic, including an Amharic stamp.<sup>171</sup>

There are reports of civilians being subjected to bombing. On 9 November 2020, HRW reported that mortars and tank shells were fired at the city of Humera from the Eritrean border, causing explosions at schools, places of worship and the city's main hospital.<sup>172</sup> In the attack on the Tigrayan city of Aksum in late November 2020, Ethiopian and Eritrean troops are said to have bombed the city without discriminating between targets before they moved in.<sup>173</sup> On 22 June, according to press reports, civilians were killed and injured in an airstrike by federal forces on a market in Togoga, about 25 kilometres west of the capital Mekelle. Health officials spoke of 64 dead and dozens injured. The Ethiopian federal army has admitted to carrying out airstrikes in Tigray, but denied attacking civilian targets.<sup>174</sup> Satellite images were said to show that the market had indeed been bombed.<sup>175</sup>

In addition to indiscriminate bombings, there are also reports of the targeted killing of civilians. The Dutch news broadcaster NOS reported in an article at the end of May 2021 that as well as being 'collateral damage' in the war, civilians said they were directly attacked.<sup>176</sup> Eritrean soldiers are said to have shot at fleeing civilians, including children, in Aksum during the events at the end of November 2020. According to eyewitnesses, the Eritreans then shot at people who tried to get the dead civilians off the streets. The Eritrean soldiers are also said to have carried out extrajudicial executions of men and boys. After the alleged massacre, the Eritreans imprisoned hundreds of male Aksum residents and threatened to kill them if they were attacked. During their detention, the men were mistreated and stripped of their personal belongings.<sup>177</sup> On 8 May 2021, Eritrean forces reportedly killed 19 civilians, including women and children, in the town of Abuna Yemata in North-eastern Tigray.<sup>178</sup> The incidents in both Aksum and Abuna Yemata followed a clash between Eritrean and Tigrayan forces. A confidential source stated that Eritrean

<sup>166</sup> HRW, *Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted*, 28 May 2021.

<sup>167</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>168</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021;

<sup>169</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., p. 44, March 2021 version. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

<sup>170</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021.

<sup>171</sup> Focus on Africa, *Tigray, Irob and Kunama Ethnic Groups Risk Extinction*, 12 April 2021.

<sup>172</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, p. 25, 6 April 2021

<sup>173</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, p. 5, February 2021.

<sup>174</sup> Addis Standard, *NEWS: DOZENS OF CIVILIANS KILLED, INJURED IN MARKET AIRSTRIKE IN TIGRAY; ARMY OFFICIALS SAY COMBATANTS, NOT CIVILIANS THE TARGET*, 24 June 2021; The Independent, *'Like a hell': Ethiopia airstrike survivors recall massacre*, 27 June 2021; BBC Monitoring (ENA Website), *Ethiopia says Tigray bombing reports 'diversionary tactic'*, 24 June 2021; Garowe Online, *ENDF airstrike in Tigray condemned as PM Abiy Ahmed's record is questioned*, 27 June 2021.

<sup>175</sup> BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: What happened the day a bomb hit a market*, 30 November 2021.

<sup>176</sup> NOS, *Deur staat voor buitenwereld nog maar op een kier in Ethiopische deelstaat Tigray*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>177</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, pp. 4-5, February 2021.

<sup>178</sup> The Guardian, *Eritrean soldiers killed 19 civilians in latest Tigray atrocity, locals claim*, 1 June 2021.

forces left villages and civilians alone if they believed that they posed no threat. However, there are also reports of the killing of civilians by Eritrean forces that were not preceded by any confrontation with Tigrayan forces.<sup>179</sup> A confidential source said that while trying to flee from Tigray, he passed through a village in Central Tigray where the bodies of civilians, including children, who had been shot dead were lying in a square. When asked, he was unable to say who the perpetrators were, but he did say that the area was in the hands of the EDF at the time.<sup>180</sup>

In addition to the killing of Tigrayan civilians by the Ethiopian federal army and allies, there have also been incidents in which people of other ethnicities have been killed during the conflict. As mentioned earlier, Tigrayan militias and the Tigrayan youth group Samri killed hundreds of civilians, especially Amhara, during the events in Mai Kadra in November 2020. When the Amhara security forces and militias had driven out the Tigrayan fighters and captured Mai Kadra, they allegedly retaliated against the Tigrayan population, killing dozens of people (see also 1.2). According to the Ethiopian army, Tigrayan fighters attacked a convoy en route from Adwa to Temben in Western Tigray in early April 2021, killing civilians in the process.<sup>181</sup> After TPLF/TDF troops retook parts of Southern Tigray in early July 2021, the ENA said hundreds of residents of Raya, where many ethnic Amhara live, were killed by Tigrayan forces. On Twitter, the federal government was accused of leaving parts of Southern Tigray unprotected.<sup>182</sup>

#### *Eritrean refugees/opposition*

Many of the 96,000 Eritrean refugees in Tigray, large numbers of whom had fled Eritrea to evade forced long-term military service, have been caught in the middle of the conflict, according to a confidential source. On the one hand they fear the Eritrean troops, and on the other hand the Tigrayan population sees them as the enemy because of the abuses of which the Eritrean soldiers are accused.<sup>183</sup>

The two refugee camps in Northern Tigray, Hitsats and Shimelba, have been destroyed and abandoned; the refugees are said to have fled to the southern camps, or to Sudan, or been brought back to Eritrea by Eritrean troops. Eritrean refugees are also said to have been killed by Eritrean troops. Some of the Eritrean refugees are said to have been conscripted by the Eritrean army and forced to take part in the fighting in Tigray.<sup>184</sup> Confidential sources estimate that the fate of between 11,000 and 20,000 Eritrean refugees was unknown (see also 4.1).<sup>185</sup>

In the country of origin information report of February 2021, it was stated that the Eritrean security forces had reportedly targeted Eritrean opposition members in particular.<sup>186</sup> A confidential source reported that he had fled abroad from Tigray via Addis Ababa because he was wanted for working for a radio station that opposed the

<sup>179</sup> Reuters, *Eritrean soldiers kill nine civilians in Tigray, Ethiopian regional official says*, 14 April 2021; BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Corporate Website), *Ethiopia admits Eritrean soldiers killed civilians in Aksum*, 22 May 2021.

<sup>180</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>181</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopian army says TPLF rebels killed civilians in ambush*, 7 April 2021.

<sup>182</sup> ENA (Ethiopian News Agency), *Terrorist TPLF Group Brutally Attacking Civilians in Raya Azebo*, 7 June 2021; Borkena, *TPLF forces reportedly controlled Korem town, pushing further south*, 12 July 2021; Messenbet Assefa, @messiassefa, 13 July 2021; <https://twitter.com/messiassefa/status/1414875664000356352>

<sup>183</sup> Confidential source, 4 June 2021.

<sup>184</sup> Confidential source, 22 January 2021; Confidential source, 3 June 2021; World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 47, 6 April 2021

<sup>185</sup> Confidential source, 21 May 2021; Confidential source, 27 May 2021; confidential source, 5 August 2021.

<sup>186</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 69, February 2020.

Eritrean government from Mekelle.<sup>187</sup> When the TPLF/TDF retook parts of South-western Tigray, including the area where the Mai Aini and Adi Harush refugee camps are located, Eritrean refugees are said to have been the victims of violence, kidnappings and arrests for their alleged affiliation with the Eritrean army. According to the Ethiopian Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA), six Eritrean refugees had been killed by the TPLF/TDF in the recaptured area as of 22 July 2021.<sup>188</sup> At the end of July 2021, UNHCR said it was extremely worried about the fate of the thousands of Eritrean refugees who were 'trapped' in the camps in Tigray due to ongoing fighting between the various parties in and around the camps. Around 24,000 Eritrean refugees in Mai Aini and Adi Harush lived in constant anguish due to intimidation and harassment, according to the UN agency.<sup>189</sup>

#### *International/Ethiopian aid workers*

In the previous report of February 2021, reference was made to international/Ethiopian aid workers who had died during the conflict. Three workers are said to have died when they tried to prevent Eritrean refugees from being taken from the Hitsats refugee camp by Eritrean forces.<sup>190</sup> A confidential source stated at the beginning of May that the situation for aid workers in Tigray was still very risky. At that time, seven aid workers, all local employees, had already died since the outbreak of the conflict.<sup>191</sup> At the end of June, three MSF (*Médecins sans Frontières*) employees were murdered by unknown assailants near the capital Mekelle. Both the TPLF/TDF and Eritrean troops were accused of the murders.<sup>192</sup> It is not clear how many aid workers have been killed during the conflict. The UN's humanitarian coordinator Lowcock reported on 15 June, before the deaths of the MSF employees, that ten aid workers had been killed. By contrast, BBC Monitoring spoke of a total of eight at the end of June 2021.<sup>193</sup>

#### *Members of the interim government*

The federal government has accused the TPLF of murdering or kidnapping dozens of members of the federally appointed interim government in Tigray.<sup>194</sup> The Ethiopian authorities reported in late May that TPLF 'guerrillas' had kidnapped 22 members of the interim government in various parts of Tigray and killed about 20 of them. In late June 2021, the death of Enbza Tadesse was reported on social media. Tadesse, an engineer by trade who worked for the interim government, is said to have been kidnapped and killed by TPLF-affiliated elements.<sup>195</sup> After retaking territory in Tigray, the TPLF/TDF is said to have targeted those suspected of having collaborated with the interim government established by the federal government. These repercussions are said to have resulted in fatalities, but the numbers are unknown. Around 300

<sup>187</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>188</sup> UNHCR, *Statement by UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi on the situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 13 July 2021; FanaBC, *Eritrean Refugees' Situation In Mai-Tsebri Area Continues To Be A Matter Of Grave Concern: ARRA*, 22 July 2021.

<sup>189</sup> UNHCR, *Eritrean refugees in Tigray caught up in conflict*, 27 July 2021.

<sup>190</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 50, February 2020.

<sup>191</sup> Confidential source, 10 May 2021.

<sup>192</sup> FanaBC, *Ethiopian Government Expresses Condolences On Killings Of MSF Staffers In TPLF Hotspots*, 26 June 2021; MSF, *MSF horrified by the brutal murder of three colleagues in Ethiopia*, 25 June 2021.

<sup>193</sup> Confidential source, 29 June 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia expresses condolences over MSF killings, says aid staff warned*, 26 June 2021.

<sup>194</sup> Reuters, *Biden says humanitarian access must be granted in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 27 May 2021; BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia wants Tigray rebels condemned for 'devilish acts'*, 3 June 2021.

<sup>195</sup> Borkena, *TPLF assassinated a member of Interim administration in Tigray*, 24 June 2021.

members and employees of the interim government fled to Addis Ababa after the fall of Mekelle for fear of repercussions.<sup>196</sup>

#### 1.2.4 *Risk for women of becoming victims of violence*

There are numerous examples of sexual violence against women and children.<sup>197</sup> On 19 February 2021, the Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde admitted that women were being raped on a large scale in Tigray without specifying who the perpetrators were.<sup>198</sup> The UN envoy for sexual violence in conflict, Pramila Patten, stated on 14 April 2021 that in the mountainous region of Northern and Central Tigray, women and girls were suffering 'unprecedented sexual violence'.<sup>199</sup>

Estimates range from hundreds to thousands of women, from young girls to elderly women, who have been victims of some form of sexual violence. Some women said they had been systematically raped by different men over several days. The number of reported cases of sexual violence was the tip of the iceberg, according to a doctor. Because of the shame and stigma associated with rape and the lack of medical treatment, many victims do not come forward.<sup>200</sup>

Victims of rape or other forms of sexual violence point in particular to Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers as the perpetrators. Amhara militia members and the special security forces from this region are also said to have committed sexual violence against women of Tigrayan descent in Tigray.<sup>201</sup> Al Jazeera has written about the brutal sterilisation of Tigrayan women by Amhara militia members. One militia member allegedly told his victim that a Tigrayan womb should never bear children.<sup>202</sup> Abiy reportedly said in parliament that anyone who had violated 'our Tigrayan sisters' would be held responsible (see 2.1).<sup>203</sup> Due to the poor housing of IDPs (internally displaced persons), including open spaces, broken windows and doors that could not be closed, OCHA wrote of the increased risk of gender-related violence in locations where IDPs had taken refuge.<sup>204</sup>

On 11 August 2021, an AI report was released about the widespread rape and kidnapping of Tigrayan women and girls by troops fighting for the Ethiopian federal government in Tigray. Sexual violence victims and medical personnel said the ENDF, EDF, Amhara special security forces and Fano militia had engaged in such practices. AI Secretary-General Agnès Callamard stated that rape and sexual violence against women and girls in Tigray had been used as a weapon of war and spoke of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity. From February to April 2021, health facilities in Tigray recorded nearly 1,300 cases of gender-related violence. AI believes that the number of women raped is probably higher, as many survivors have not officially come forward. The Ethiopian government believed that AI's report was flawed, as the research methodology was inadequate and the report was based

<sup>196</sup> BBC Monitoring, *Africa Watchlist for 8 July, Pro-government officials in Ethiopia's Tigray decry 'inhumane acts' by rebels*, 8 July 2021; The Guardian, *Interim government of Tigray flees as rebels seize capital*, 28 June 2021; confidential source, 8 July 2021.

<sup>197</sup> UN Security Council, *Security Council Press Statement on Ethiopia SC/14501*, 22 April 2021.

<sup>198</sup> The Economist, *Soldiers have killed hundreds of civilians in Tigray; The war in Tigray*, 26 February 2021.

<sup>199</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, *Statement of SRSG-SVC Pramila Patten at the Security Council Open Debate on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, 14 April 2021.

<sup>200</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, pages 37-38, 6 April 2021 Reuters, *Health official alleges 'sexual slavery' in Tigray*, 15 April 2021; NOS, *Jeugd wil wraak na getuigenissen van gruwelijke verkrachtingen in Tigray*, 31 May 2021.

<sup>201</sup> EEPA, Conference via Zoom, *The Involvement of Eritreans in the War*, 29 June 2021; Reuters, *Health official alleges 'sexual slavery' in Tigray*, 15 April 2021.

<sup>202</sup> Al Jazeera, *'A Tigrayan womb should never give birth': Rape in Tigray*, 21 April 2021.

<sup>203</sup> Confidential source, 26 March 2021.

<sup>204</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE Situation Report*, 19 February 2021.

mainly on interviews with refugees of Tigrayan descent in refugee camps in Sudan. The Ethiopian government also said it was strange that AI did not recognise the joint initiative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the EHRC (see 2.1).<sup>205</sup>

#### 1.2.5 *Areas/places in Tigray where violence occurs (widespread or specific locations?)*

As already mentioned in 1.2, the conflict area is fluid and dynamic in nature. Map 1 shows that violent clashes have actually taken place in all areas of Tigray. After the federal forces and allies entered Tigray, fighting was concentrated mainly in Central, Eastern, and South/South-eastern Tigray: these were the areas where the TPLF/TDF had retreated to the countryside and to inhospitable areas. From May 2021, it was relatively quiet in the areas of Southern and Western Tigray where the ADF was in control. It should be noted here that incidents are always possible, such as in May 2021 when, according to the federal Ethiopian government, more than 300 Tigrayan fighters were killed trying to enter Western Tigray from Sudan.<sup>206</sup>

In June 2021, the TPLF/TDF launched an offensive in which large parts of Tigray were retaken from the federal army and allies (see Map 4). At the end of July 2021, the conflict crossed regional borders and Tigrayan forces invaded the territory of the Afar and Amhara regions. According to a confidential source, this was done for strategic reasons. The TPLF/TDF hoped, among other things, to establish a buffer zone so that it would be harder for the federal army and allies to invade Tigray a second time. The source also believed that the Tigrayan troops in Amhara and Afar hoped to find supplies and military equipment, as these are in very short supply in Tigray.<sup>207</sup> It is unclear how the conflict is progressing in these regions. Both the TPLF/TDF and the federal government said they had won victories over the other side.<sup>208</sup> According to OCHA, after the TPLF/TDF had taken control of large parts of Tigray, the security situation there remained unpredictable and fast-changing. In the major cities of Mekelle, Adigrat, Adwa, Aksum and Shire, the general situation was calm, without any significant incidents.<sup>209</sup>

#### 1.2.6 *Number of fatalities due to the conflict (warring parties and civilians)*

Due to the security situation and other factors such as blockades by the warring parties, access to Tigray is limited, making it difficult to obtain figures for civilian and military casualties. Media outlets such as AP News, Reuters, The Economist and The Guardian spoke of thousands of deaths among civilians and the warring parties. They repeated one another in doing so, not giving exact numbers and indicating that their figures were estimates.<sup>210</sup> Three Tigrayan opposition parties, the Tigray Independence Party, the National Congress of Great Tigray and *Salsay Weyane Tigray*, estimated in early February 2021 that more than 50,000 civilians had been

<sup>205</sup> AI, *Ethiopia: "I don't know if they realized I was a person": Rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia*, 11 August 2021; NOS, *Amnesty: vrouwen verkracht en ontvoerd door Ethiopische troepen in Tigray*, 11 August 2021; MFA Ethiopia, @mfaethiopia, 11 August 2021; <https://twitter.com/mfaethiopia/status/1425459385250328579>.

<sup>206</sup> EthiopPen, *320 TPLF Fighters killed attempting to enter Ethiopia from Sudan*, 15 May 2021; ENA (Ethiopian News Agency), *Terrorist TPLF Group Brutally Attacking Civilians in Raya Azebo*, 7 June 2021; The Independent, *Lost limbs, rising anger as town is caught up in Tigray war*, 4 June 2021.

<sup>207</sup> Confidential source, 9 July 2021; EEPA, *Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 186*, 13 July 2021.

<sup>208</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopian TV reports army victories against TPLF-linked rebels*, 29 July 2021; The Africa Report, *Ethiopia/Tigray: Is this Eritrea's final war?*, 28 June 2021; Getachew; K. Reda, @reda\_getachew, 27 July 2021: [https://twitter.com/reda\\_getachew/status/1420020908970938371](https://twitter.com/reda_getachew/status/1420020908970938371)

<sup>209</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE Situation Report*, 19 July 2021; NOS, *Deur staat voor buitenwereld nog maar op een kier in Ethiopische deelstaat Tigray*, 27 May 2021; Confidential source, 11 March 2021.

<sup>210</sup> AP News, *UN warns Tigray faces famine risk if aid isn't scaled up*, 27 May 2021; Reuters, *Biden says humanitarian access must be granted in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 27 May 2021; The Guardian, *Eritrean soldiers killed 19 civilians in latest Tigray atrocity, locals claim*, 1 June 2021; The Economist, *The war in Tigray is taking a frightful human toll; Ethiopia's war economy*, 15 April 2021.

killed in the three months of fighting in Tigray.<sup>211</sup> The warring parties claimed in their own statements to have inflicted serious blows on their opponents, referring to hundreds or thousands of deaths. The TDF/TPLF offensive launched in late June 2021 is said to have led to thousands of deaths among those fighting on both sides.<sup>212</sup> The parties also accuse each other of massacring civilians.<sup>213</sup> The Ethiopian attorney-general admitted that civilians had been killed in Aksum by the Ethiopian army and allies in late November 2020, but rejected the figure of 800 first put forward by Amnesty International. The attorney-general believed that 93 people had been killed by a group of Eritrean soldiers, with the majority of the victims being Tigrayan fighters in civilian clothing.<sup>214</sup> Opinions are also divided about the number of victims and their ethnicity during the events in Mai Kadra (also called May Cadera, Mai-Kadra or Moya Khadra) in early November 2020. It is likely that there were casualties on both the Tigrayan and the Amhara side, but it is not clear exactly how many (see also 1.2.3).<sup>215</sup>

The Department of Geography of the University of Ghent wrote in its online report in early July 2021 that 2,805 civilians had been killed from the start of the conflict to 5 July 2021. According to the Belgian investigators, these were the fully documented victims, whose names and other details were known; 92% of the victims were male and 8% were female. In addition to the fully documented cases, the university had a list of 'reported civilian casualties' that included 9,642 victims. On this list, most of the data were missing and the cases could not be verified. The actual number of victims was probably much higher, the researchers at the university said.<sup>216</sup> Data from ACLED for approximately the same time span indicate around 1,850 civilian casualties, more than half of them occurring in November 2020, the first month of the conflict. In terms of the number of casualties in armed clashes, the figure that ACLED gives (about 1,450) is also lower than the thousands of fatalities mentioned in the press.<sup>217</sup>

As well as violent deaths, there are also deaths in Tigray as a result of starvation and acute malnutrition. UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lowcock said in mid-June 2021 that he had received reports that more than 150 people had died of starvation in Tigray. Although the exact numbers of deaths from hunger and acute malnutrition are unknown, the UN is deeply concerned about the millions of inhabitants of Tigray facing severe food shortages and the hundreds of thousands of people, many of them children, in a 'famine-like' condition. A confidential source says it is hard to estimate the number of deaths, but with 350,000 people in need of emergency assistance in order to be saved from starvation, the final number of deaths from

<sup>211</sup> Los Angeles Times, *More than 50,000 Ethiopia civilians have been killed, Tigray opposition says*, 2 February 2021.

<sup>212</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia army says killed Tigray rebels attempting entry from Sudan*, 14 May 2021; BBC Monitoring (Dimitsi Weyane TV Facebook), *Tigray rebels claim killing over 18,000 Ethiopian soldiers*, 29 June 2021; confidential source, 25 August 2021.

<sup>213</sup> ENA (Ethiopian News Agency), *Terrorist TPLF Group Brutally Attacking Civilians in Raya Azebo*, 7 June 2021.

<sup>214</sup> BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Corporate), *Ethiopian attorney-general refutes Aksum massacre claims*, 11 May 2021; Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, page 14, February 2021.

<sup>215</sup> FanaBC, *AG Issues Summary Of Activities To Ensure Accountability Regarding Violations Of IHL In Tigray Region*, 21 May 2021; The Economist, *Soldiers have killed hundreds of civilians in Tigray; The war in Tigray*, 26 February 2021; confidential source, 3 June 2021: The EHRM, among others, investigated the massacre(s) in Mai Kadra and came up with its own findings, but these findings are rejected by opponents of the Ethiopian government. They believe that the EHRM acts as a mouthpiece for the government.

<sup>216</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., pages 23 and 27, July 2021 version. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation); The Economist, *Tigray is edging closer to famine; Daily chart*, 22 April 2021.

<sup>217</sup> <https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard> (accessed 27 July 2021).

starvation will rise significantly. 'It is the worst famine anywhere in the world in 15 years,' said the source (see 4.3).<sup>218</sup>

1.2.7

*Number of injured in relation to the population of the Tigray region*

No information has been obtained on the precise number of injured in relation to the population of the Tigray region (approximately 5,250,000 inhabitants in 2017 according to the *Ethiovisit* website).<sup>219</sup> The website of the private news outlet *Addis Admas* reported on 7 August that it had received information from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that hospitals across Ethiopia were being overwhelmed by soldiers injured in the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Some hospitals were said to be short of medical equipment.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>218</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, IV, 6 April 2021; VRT, *Rapport: "Inwoners van Tigray (Ethiopië) worden bewust op grote schaal uitgehongerd als oorlogswapen"*, 6 April 2021; OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE Situation Report*, 19 July 2021; confidential source, 1 August 2021.

<sup>219</sup> <http://www.ethiovisit.com/ethiopia/ethiopia-regions-and-cities.html> (accessed 29 July 2021): Estimates range from 5 million to 7 million inhabitants in 2021. A confidential source believes that the population is far higher than 7 million, but says that it is hard to arrive at an exact figure as the last census in Ethiopia was many years ago: Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>220</sup> BBC Monitoring (Addis Admas), *Ethiopian hospitals said overwhelmed as fighting rages*, 8 August 2021.

## 2 Position of victims of the conflict in Tigray

### 2.1 **The ability of individuals who are or fear that they may become victims of the conflict to obtain protection from the authorities or other parties**

#### *Protection*

A confidential source stated in late May 2021 that both the political and humanitarian situation in Tigray were deteriorating. It was clear, the source said, that civilians were not protected and were the victims of war crimes.<sup>221</sup> The situation in Tigray is so fluid and fast-changing that it is difficult to give a clear picture of the extent to which the authorities or other parties are able to provide protection to citizens, according to various sources. At the time of writing of this report, the conflict was still in progress, making the position of civilians uncertain.<sup>222</sup>

A confidential source said the interim government had made the restoration of government security and services to civilians a priority. In view of the enormous damage caused by the conflict, this was no easy task, nor did it guarantee that civilians would be protected. Most police officers had returned to work after the federal government regained control of Mekelle in late November 2020, but most of their equipment and vehicles had been damaged or stolen and the federal authorities were reluctant to give guns to Tigrayan police officers.<sup>223</sup> In some cases, it was reportedly the federal troops and allies who posed the threat. For example, in late May 2021, when Shire was still under federal control, 200 IDPs, who according to a confidential source were all young men, were arrested and mistreated by Eritrean and Ethiopian troops during a military raid. The Ethiopian authorities responded that the camps where the IDPs stayed were safe and that the report of the arrest and mistreatment of IDPs did not reflect reality.<sup>224</sup> HRW wrote at the end of May 2021 that parents were keeping their children at home and did not dare to send them to school for fear of Ethiopian federal troops. In the article, the human rights organisation quoted a parent as saying that as long as there were still reports of women and children being raped and murdered, she would not send her children to school.<sup>225</sup>

The warring parties control specific parts of Tigray in varying combinations and in a fluid context. As mentioned in 1.2.2, the Eritrean troops are held responsible for most of the abuses during the conflict. In those areas where Eritrean forces acted jointly with Ethiopian areas, the Eritrean soldiers seemed to take little notice of the Ethiopian military. During the events in Aksum in late November 2020, Ethiopian soldiers tried to prevent Eritrean soldiers from looting. According to an eyewitness, the Eritreans ignored the Ethiopian soldiers and continued their looting.<sup>226</sup> In the attack by Eritrean troops on Adwa in April 2021, the Ethiopian military did manage to intervene. If it had not done so, more innocent civilians would have been killed in the attack, a representative of the interim government said. At least nine civilians

<sup>221</sup> Confidential source, 27 May 2021.

<sup>222</sup> Confidential source, 29 June 2021.

<sup>223</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021; confidential source, 1 August 2021.

<sup>224</sup> UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia, *UN condemns the arbitrary and brutal arrest of at least 200 IDPs in military-led raids in Shire town (Tigray Region)*, 27 May 2021; FanaBC, *Investigation Will Be Carried Out To Verify Facts Related To Allegations Of Arbitrary Arrest Of IDPs In Shire*, Tigray, 28 May 2021; BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia to probe IDPs arrest in Tigray*, 28 May 2021; Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>225</sup> HRW, *Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted*, 28 May 2021.

<sup>226</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, page 21, February 2021.

had been killed and several dozen injured before the intervention, according to the Ethiopian authorities.<sup>227</sup>

Despite the alleged human rights violations by Eritrean troops, the Ethiopian authorities are said to have assigned policing tasks to the Eritreans in cities and rural areas in Tigray.<sup>228</sup> These reports have not been confirmed by other sources. Several sources stated that the federal authorities were unable to ensure security in the areas in Tigray that were under their control. It should be noted that elsewhere in the country, such as in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, in the Oromia Special Zone in the Amhara region and in parts of Oromia, the security situation is also unstable and ethnic violence regularly leads to civilian casualties. In order for the 21 June 2021 elections to be conducted safely, the authorities had to withdraw troops from Tigray to deploy elsewhere in the country, according to a confidential source.<sup>229</sup>

In Western Tigray, where Amhara troops were in control (see Maps 2-4), the feeling of insecurity was high among both refugees and host communities.<sup>230</sup> Most Tigrayans had fled or been forcibly sent to Eastern Tigray (see 1.2.1). Individuals who declared themselves 'Amhara' were allowed to stay, according to a confidential source.<sup>231</sup> Tensions were said to exist between the local population, both Tigrayans and Amhara, and the Amhara who had settled in the region from elsewhere. The 'new' Amhara authorities in Western and Southern Tigray are said to be more of a threat rather than a source of protection for the Tigrayan population. A confidential source had heard that officials in Welkait whose mother tongue was Tigrinya had started speaking Amharic in the office just to show that they were Amhara (see 3.1).<sup>232</sup>

Several confidential sources believed that in the areas controlled by the TDF/TPLF, the organisation could count on the backing and support of the local population. The Tigrayan civilian population was also said to be relatively safe in these areas compared with areas controlled by the ENDF and allies, because the TDF/TPLF provided a certain degree of 'law and order'. A confidential source stated that people of Tigrayan descent were safest in those areas under TDF/TPLF control. He noted that because of the war it was not safe there either, but that many young people, especially young men, were leaving for these areas in the hope of protection and safety.<sup>233</sup>

### *Accountability*

The Ethiopian authorities have regularly stated that investigations should be carried out into crimes/war crimes and other human rights violations committed during the conflict.<sup>234</sup> At the end of May 2021, the Ethiopian attorney-general issued a list of the investigations launched into crimes and human rights violations committed in

<sup>227</sup> Reuters, *Eritrean soldiers kill nine civilians in Tigray, Ethiopian regional official says*, 14 April 2021.

<sup>228</sup> Africa Confidential, *Eritrea Entrenches in Tigray*, 15 April 2021.

<sup>229</sup> Arise News, *Ethiopia Elections: Abiy Ahmed Faces First Vote Amid Conflict*, 21 June 2021; GlobalSecurity.org, *Ethiopia - Election 2021*, undated (website accessed 30 July 2021): [Ethiopia - Election 2021 \(globalsecurity.org\)](https://www.globalsecurity.org/africa/news/ethiopia-election-2021); confidential source, 19 May 2021.

<sup>230</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>231</sup> The February 2021 general country of origin information report cited the example of a person from Welkait who identified himself as Amhara before the conflict began in November 2020. Colonel Demeke Zewdu regarded himself as Amhara and fought for the rights of the Amhara in Welkait, but his father stated on Tigray Online that he was 100% Tigrayan and that his son was falsely presenting himself as Amhara: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 48, February 2021.

<sup>232</sup> Confidential source, 21 June 2021; The Independent, *Lost limbs, rising anger as town is caught up in Tigray war*, 4 June 2021.

<sup>233</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021; confidential source, 6 June 2021; confidential source, 4 June 2021.

<sup>234</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021.

Tigray, including the killing of civilians in Aksum by Eritrean troops.<sup>235</sup> Military prosecutors had charged 28 federal soldiers suspected of killing civilians. In addition, 25 soldiers had been charged with sexual assault and rape. Meanwhile, three soldiers had been convicted of rape and one of killing a civilian. It is not known what sentences the soldiers received. Amnesty International wrote in early August 2021 that no information had been released about the soldiers' trials or about other measures taken by the authorities to bring those responsible to justice.<sup>236</sup> Investigations had also been launched into the massacre of hundreds of civilians in Mai Kadra. The investigation team had identified 202 individuals who may have been involved in the massacre. While many of the suspects had fled to Sudan, 23 suspects, all of Tigrayan descent, according to a confidential source, had been arrested and charged by the Ethiopian authorities.<sup>237</sup> According to Reuters, this was the first public admission by the Ethiopian federal authorities that soldiers had committed crimes against civilians.<sup>238</sup>

According to sources, the charges and investigations were accompanied by inevitable challenges such as a lack of investigators and equipment, the security situation in the region and poor coordination between federal, military and regional investigators. Witnesses are said to have been instructed to make false statements.<sup>239</sup> Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* wrote that a public prosecutor in Mekelle found it hard to accept that in view of the many cases of rape only three soldiers had been convicted for this offence. 'The Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers who are now in charge here are the ones I want to prosecute. So I don't stand a chance,' the prosecutor is said to have sighed.<sup>240</sup>

#### *International investigation*

In a press statement, members of the UN Security Council welcomed the joint efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to investigate the alleged abuses and human rights violations in Tigray. Their investigations would examine human rights violations by all parties. Some sources have expressed doubts about this cooperation because the EHRC is said to be close to the Ethiopian government. The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS) asked the UN Secretary-General to stop cooperating with the EHRC because of its alleged bias.<sup>241</sup> A confidential source believes that the EHRC's investigation into the killings in Aksum was conducted in an independent manner under the circumstances.<sup>242</sup>

On 17 June 2021, the African Union (AU) launched a commission to investigate the alleged human rights violations in Tigray. The Ethiopian government asked the African Union to cease its investigation immediately. The Ethiopian Foreign Ministry statement described the investigation as 'misguided' and 'lacking legal basis'.

<sup>235</sup> BBC Monitoring (Fana Broadcasting Corporate Website), *Ethiopia admits Eritrean soldiers killed civilians in Aksum*, 22 May 2021.

<sup>236</sup> AI, "I DON'T KNOW IF THEY REALIZED I WAS A PERSON" RAPE AND OTHER SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE CONFLICT IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA, page 29, 11 August 2021.

<sup>237</sup> FanaBC, *AG Issues Summary Of Activities To Ensure Accountability Regarding Violations Of IHL In Tigray Region*, 21 May 2021; Confidential source, 16 June 2021.

<sup>238</sup> Reuters, *Four Ethiopian soldiers convicted of crimes against civilians in Tigray*, 21 May 2021; Confidential source, 1 August 2021.

<sup>239</sup> FanaBC, *AG Issues Summary Of Activities To Ensure Accountability Regarding Violations Of IHL In Tigray Region*, 21 May 2021; Confidential source, 16 June 2021; Reuters, *Biden says humanitarian access must be granted in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>240</sup> *De Volkskrant*, *De gebroken trots van Tigray: Uitgemoord omdat we Tigreeërs zijn*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>241</sup> Tghat, *Tigray scholars society urges UN to reverse its decision to involve Ethiopian Human Rights Commission in Tigray HR investigations*, 21 March 2021.

<sup>242</sup> Confidential source, 1 August 2021.

Ethiopia was willing to launch a joint investigation, but members of the African Union commission that was going to conduct the investigation said they would continue to investigate the alleged human rights violations. It is not known what the status of the investigation is.<sup>243</sup>

#### *UN resolution*

Concerning the human rights situation in Tigray, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on 13 July 2021 expressing its deep concern about, among other things, the reports of serious human rights violations, for which all parties involved would be held responsible. The council called on Eritrean troops to withdraw from the Tigray region and stressed the importance of bringing those responsible for human rights abuses to justice. Countries that voted against the resolution included the Russian Federation and China.<sup>244</sup> Russia and China were said to be unwilling to take sides because of economic and ideological interests, i.e. non-interference in internal affairs. On 30 May 2021, some 10,000 Ethiopians took to the streets in Addis Ababa to demonstrate against United States sanctions. They carried portraits of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>245</sup>

## **2.2 Possibilities for protection in different areas/provinces?**

As already mentioned, the security situation in Tigray is very fluid and fast-changing, and it is not possible to give an unambiguous picture. Many Tigrayans fled to the cities of Shire, Adigrat and Mekelle after the conflict broke out in the hope of being safe there. Furthermore, many fled to the countryside or mountains of Central and Eastern Tigray, to where the TPLF and loyalists had retreated after the outbreak of the conflict. The UN stated in the course of the conflict that access to Tigray was limited due to the security situation, although it had improved in large parts of the region after the retaking of much of Tigray by the TDF/TPLF (see 4.3).<sup>246</sup>

A confidential source said that the Tigrayans themselves had little or nothing to fear from the TDF/TPLF, but that most armed clashes naturally took place where this organisation was based, which thus endangered the security of the civilian population.<sup>247</sup> In Western and South-eastern Tigray, where the Amhara forces and militias were in control, there was little international presence. A large part of the Tigrayan population fled elsewhere from these areas.<sup>248</sup> The two refugee camps Hitsats and Shimelba have been destroyed and there are no longer any refugees there. Many of the Eritrean refugees fled to the more southerly camps in Tigray, Mai Aini and Adi Harush, where they hoped to be safe from the Eritrean forces that controlled large parts of Northern Tigray.<sup>249</sup> After the TDF/TPLF offensive, the area

<sup>243</sup> MFA Ethiopia, @mfaethiopia, 17 June 2021: <https://twitter.com/mfaethiopia/status/1405449500852994048>; BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia urges AU to 'immediately cease' Tigray abuses probe*, 17 June 2021; AP News, *Ethiopia urges Tigray rights inquiry to 'immediately cease'*, 17 June 2021; Al Jazeera, *African Union launches probe into alleged rights abuses in Tigray*, 17 June 2021.

<sup>244</sup> OHCHR, *Human Rights Council Adopts Three Resolutions on Human Rights in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia, Human Rights in the Context of HIV and AIDS, and on Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities*, 13 July 2021.

<sup>245</sup> South China Morning Post, *Why China is taking a low profile on Ethiopia's Tigray conflict?*, 6 June 2021.

<sup>246</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE*, 26 July 2021.

<sup>247</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., p. 29, March 2021 version. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation); confidential source, 14 June 2021.

<sup>248</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021; Al Jazeera, *'A Tigrayan womb should never give birth': Rape in Tigray*, 21 April 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021

<sup>249</sup> Confidential source, 2 July 2021.

where the Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps are located also came under Tigrayan control. Eritrean refugees are said to feel unsafe, because the Tigrayan fighters hold them accountable for the abuses of the Eritrean troops in Tigray. Eritrean refugees are said to have been killed by elements associated with the TDF/TPLF (see 1.2.3).<sup>250</sup>

After the violent deaths of three of its employees, MSF announced in early July 2021 that it would suspend operations in Abi Adi, Adigrat and Aksum in Central and Eastern Tigray and recall its employees from these areas due to the unstable security situation.<sup>251</sup>

### **2.3 Differences in protection possibilities for ethnic Tigrayans from Tigray and for other groups from Tigray**

Tigray is a homogeneous region in terms of population groups: statistics from the last official census in 2007 showed that 97% of the region's entire population (approx 4,320,000 in 2007)<sup>252</sup> are ethnic Tigrayan. A confidential source believed that these proportions had not changed much since 2007. He stated that the percentage and number of Tigrayans had probably increased since then.<sup>253</sup> In 2007 about 70,100 Amhara were living mainly in the sparsely populated Western Tigray, representing 1.6% of the entire population. The 2007 census showed that about 7,000 Oromo were living in Tigray. The people of Oromo descent were living mainly in the Raya zone in the South-eastern Tigray. The Irob with around 30,500 people (0.7%) and the Kuname with 3,000 people (0.06%) form two small minorities.<sup>254</sup> Since the Amhara security forces and militias took over large parts of Western and South-eastern Tigray, many Tigrayans have fled to Central and Eastern Tigray or been forcibly deported to these areas. Others have fled across the border into Sudan (see 1.1).

An ethnic group will enjoy the most protection in areas where those in control are from the same group. Due to the fluid and fast-changing nature of the conflict, the protection possibilities for each ethnic group are therefore liable to change. For example, following the withdrawal of federal forces from Tigray, the Raya Rayuma Democratic Party<sup>255</sup> reported that the TDF/TPLF was involved in the killing of civilians suspected of collaborating with the interim government established by the federal government.<sup>256</sup>

Regarding the situation in Western Tigray where the Amhara are in control, a confidential source reported that locals who declared themselves Amhara were allowed to stay in the region.<sup>257</sup> Amhara have moved to Western Tigray from other regions to settle in the abandoned houses. They are thought to have moved at the instigation of the Amhara authorities and are probably protected by the Amhara security forces and militias that are present.<sup>258</sup>

<sup>250</sup> ARRA, @EthRefugee, *Statement on the Eritrean Refugees in Eritrea*, 14 July 2021.

<sup>251</sup> Euronews, *Ethiopia says aid flights to Tigray allowed, but none has yet left the capital*, 7 July 2021.

<sup>252</sup> The precise figures are not known, but the current population of Tigray is thought to be about 5 to 6 million.

<sup>253</sup> Confidential source, 28 June 2021.

<sup>254</sup> Central Statistics Agency, *Population and Housing Census*, pages 7 and 74, 2007.

<sup>255</sup> The Raya Rayuma Democratic Party defends the interests of the inhabitants of Raya in Southern Tigray, many of whom are ethnic Amhara and Oromo, but primarily identify with the Raya area.

<sup>256</sup> ENA (Ethiopian News Agency), *Terrorist TPLF Group Brutally Attacking Civilians in Raya Azebo*, 7 June 2021; Ezega News, *TPLF Accused of Engaging in Forced Assimilation of Raya People*, 4 September 2020.

<sup>257</sup> Confidential source, 9 July 2021.

<sup>258</sup> Foreign Policy, *Ethiopia's Tigray War Is Fuelling Amhara Expansionism*, 28 April 2021.

The author of an article in *Focus on Africa* stated that as a result of the ongoing conflict the Kuname and Irob were at risk of disappearing as communities; however, the article does not clarify the exact nature of the threat.<sup>259</sup> According to both an open and a confidential source, the Kuname living in Western Tigray and the Irob in North-eastern Tigray have suffered at the hands of the Amhara and Eritrean forces respectively who have controlled areas of Tigray. Despite their different ethnicity and language, the Irob and Kuname are said to feel themselves to be part of the Tigrayan community. Dozens of Irob have been killed by Eritrean troops, according to Al Jazeera.<sup>260</sup>

## 2.4 Exclusion of particular groups from protection

It was not possible to establish whether particular groups are excluded from protection. As already stated in the previous sections, the protection possibilities for someone of a particular ethnicity depend mainly on the region where he or she is located.

## 2.5 Possibility of settling in another part of the country to escape the violence in Tigray

To start with, it should be noted that, outside Tigray, Ethiopia has several other regions where the security situation is precarious, such as in Western and Southern Oromia and the regions of Benishangul Gumuz, Somali Regional State and the SNNPR. The security situation has deteriorated across Ethiopia since the outbreak of the Tigray conflict, according to various sources.<sup>261</sup> Many sources agree that because of anti-Tigrayan sentiment, Tigrayans are unlikely to seek refuge outside Tigray. The ethnicity of the IDPs who have fled from Tigray to Amhara and Afar is unclear. A confidential source regarded it as impossible that they should include ethnic Tigrayans, whereas another source believes that the IDP population in Afar and Amhara is of mixed composition. For example, it is thought to include relatives of Northern Command soldiers. These relatives had fled after the military bases of the federal army unit in Tigray were attacked by Tigrayan forces in early November 2020. The Tigrayan diaspora elsewhere in Ethiopia is not large: other than in the capital Addis Ababa, there are no large groups of Tigrayans in other parts of the country, which minimises the possibilities for gaining protection with relatives in these regions.<sup>262</sup>

Many Eritrean refugees have left Tigray for Western Afar, Northern Amhara or Addis Ababa.<sup>263</sup> On 27 June 2021, Ethiopian television reported that refugee camps would be built in the Dabat district in the Northern Gondar zone of the Amhara region to replace the Shimelba and Hitsats camps (see also 4.2).<sup>264</sup>

<sup>259</sup> Focus on Africa, *Tigray, Irob and Kunama Ethnic Groups Risk Extinction*, 12 April 2021.

<sup>260</sup> Omna Tigray, *Dear Ethiopian Propagandists, A Heartfelt Letter from a Tigrayan-Irob Woman*, 4 February 2021; Zewde Tesfay, @zHagos2, 10 April 2020: <https://twitter.com/zHagos2/status/1380990720463364096>; Al Jazeera, *Tiny ethnic group fears extinction as Tigray war enters 6th month*, 4 May 2021; EEPA, *Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 71 - 30 January 2021*, 30 January 2021.

<sup>261</sup> Confidential source, 26 March 2021; Confidential source, 22 January 2021.

<sup>262</sup> Confidential source, 2 July 2021; confidential source, 29 June 2021; confidential source, 10 June 2021; confidential source, 12 July 2021.

<sup>263</sup> Confidential source, 3 June 2021.

<sup>264</sup> BBC Monitoring (ETV), *Ethiopia to move two Eritrean refugee camps away from Tigray*, 27 June 2021

### *Addis Ababa*

There is a significant community of Tigrayans in the capital Addis Ababa. They are present in all neighbourhoods, but Haya Hulet and several neighbourhoods in Bole district are especially mentioned as places where Tigrayans live and have their businesses. In the 2007 census, 170,000 of the nearly 2,740,000 inhabitants were of Tigrayan origin – about 6%.<sup>265</sup> Confidential sources reported that many Tigrayans sought refuge in Addis Ababa after the conflict began in early November 2020. They had come to the capital mainly via the Afar region or by plane, because the border between Tigray and Amhara was practically closed.<sup>266</sup> The extent to which Tigrayans encounter problems in Addis or elsewhere in the country is discussed in 3.2.

#### *2.5.1 Obstacles/limitations/problems that a person may encounter if he/she settles elsewhere in Ethiopia*

When asked, a confidential source stated that the consequences of Covid-19, the economic situation and the security situation in Ethiopia make it difficult for anyone who cannot be taken in by relatives to settle in a different part of the country.<sup>267</sup> In addition, tensions between the various ethnic groups in Ethiopia are a factor when it comes to settling elsewhere in Ethiopia. The position and treatment of Tigrayans in the rest of Ethiopia are discussed in 3.2.

<sup>265</sup> The current population is about 5 million according to the World Population Review website: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/addis-ababa-population> (accessed 30 August 2021).

<sup>266</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021; Central Statistics Agency, *Population and Housing Census*, page 86, 2007; HRW, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared*, 18 August 2021; confidential source, 25 August 2021.

<sup>267</sup> Confidential source, 28 July 2021.

### 3 The position of the Tigrayans

#### 3.1 What characterises the Tigrayan identity/ethnicity?

Tigrayans are an ethno-linguistic group who speak Tigrinya. Tigrinya belongs to the South Semitic language group to which Amharic also belongs. Tigrinya is also spoken in Eritrea, but there are significant differences in accent and word usage between the two variants. Eritreans use more Arabic words and terminology in their everyday language. Another feature that the Tigrayans have in common with Eritreans and Amhara is that the majority belong to the Oriental Orthodox Church. Some Tigrayans are Muslim – between 8 and 10 percent according to the *Atlas of Humanity*. The Islamic Tigrayans are not seen as a separate ethnic group.<sup>268</sup> A confidential source indicates that the Tigrayan community is not homogeneous. According to this source, a Tigrayan from the border region with Amhara is difficult to distinguish in appearance from someone from across the border, and may resemble Amhara more than Tigrayans from Central or Eastern Tigray. These groups have lived side by side for centuries, and the source says that intermarriage is therefore to be expected.<sup>269</sup>

When asked, confidential sources state that the place of birth shown on the identity card (the so-called kebele card), the ethnicity stated on the identity card, the person's mother tongue, his or her accent when speaking the official language of Ethiopia, Amharic, his or her first and last names and certain items of national costume or other cultural features may indicate that the person belongs to the ethnic Tigrayan group.

##### *Place of birth*

As stated in 2.3, 97% of the population in the Tigray region are ethnic Tigrayans. There is therefore a good chance that if a person is shown as coming from Tigray on his or her identity card, he or she is also Tigrayan, but this is not necessarily always the case. Particularly in the districts, or *woredas*, of Welkait, Tegede, Tselemit and Raya<sup>270</sup>, there are inhabitants who regard themselves as ethnically Amharic, but were born in the Tigray region.<sup>271</sup> Traditionally, people of Oromo descent are found in Raya who have adopted Amharic or Tigrinya as their mother tongue over time.<sup>272</sup> A small minority of Afar live in Eastern Tigray.<sup>273</sup> In addition to Amhara and Oromo, the ethnic minorities Irob and Kuname live in Tigray (see 2.3). Unlike the Amhara, who are present in large numbers in the rest of Ethiopia, the Tigrayans are not

<sup>268</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, page 13, February 2021; Confidential source, 10 June 2021; Atlas of Humanity, TIGRAY PEOPLE, ETHIOPIA, accessed 7 July 2021.

<sup>269</sup> Confidential source, 28 June 2021; Passport Party, *Tigray's border conflicts explained*, 11 November 2020.

<sup>270</sup> After the EPRDF/TPLF overthrew the DERG regime and introduced ethno-federalism in the 1994 constitution with regions mainly focused on ethnicity, these areas, which previously belonged to the Amhara-dominated provinces of Gondar and Wollo, were added to the Tigray region. The Amhara believe that these areas belong to Amhara, while the TPLF claims that they were taken from the Tigrayans during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (see Box 1).

<sup>271</sup> Addis Standard, *NEWS ANALYSIS: AUTHORITIES IN TIGRAY ACCEPT CEASEFIRE IN PRINCIPLE, LAY OUT CONDITIONS AS AMHARA REGION PRESIDENT CALLS FOR MORE YOUTH TO MOBILIZE TO DEFEND REGION*, 5 July 2021; Ethiopia Insight, *The Rayan people want an end to rule by Tigray*, 22 February 2019.

<sup>272</sup> Passport Party, *Tigray's border conflicts explained*, 11 November 2020; Ezega News, *TPLF Accused of Engaging in Forced Assimilation of Raya People*, 4 September 2020.

<sup>273</sup> Confidential source, 14 June 2021.

widespread throughout the rest of Ethiopia. However, there are Tigrayan minorities in the Afar and Amhara regions and in Addis Ababa, for example (see 2.5).<sup>274</sup>

#### *Ethnicity shown on the identity card*

During the EDPRF/TPLF period, the holder's ethnic origin was stated on his or her identity card. The Central Statistics Agency wrote in 2007 that the person's ethnic group (also referred to as nation or nationality) is based on his or her 'national or tribal origin'. A confidential source pointed out that as most ethnic groups in Ethiopia had their own language, ethnicity was in fact a matter of ethno-linguistic origin and was therefore linked to a person's mother tongue. The Oromia region and the capital, Addis Ababa, stopped mentioning ethnicity when updating cards after 2018. The other regions are also dropping this practice one by one, but it is not clear what stage they have reached with this. The old cards had to be renewed every two years. The new cards are valid for 5 or 10 years. The new card will read 'citizen of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia', but this has not yet been implemented.<sup>275</sup>

#### *Mother tongue*

The standard language in Tigray is Tigrinya. Amharic, the official language of the federal state, is spoken by most Tigrayans, but Tigrayans have a particular accent which marks them out when they speak Amharic, according to several confidential sources. They add that there are inhabitants of the border areas who speak fluent Amharic without an accent. Tigrayans who live and grew up in Addis Ababa also generally lack the characteristic accent of a person from Tigray when speaking Amharic.<sup>276</sup> According to a confidential source, the small Afar minority in Eastern Tigray speak fluent Tigrinya in addition to Afar, a Cushitic language.<sup>277</sup> The Irob and Kuname also speak their own language, but are said to be fluent Tigrinya-speakers. A confidential source thought that the Irob and Kuname usually have an accent when they speak Tigrinya. Most confidential sources agree that other ethnic groups in Ethiopia that do not live in Tigray or in the border region do not speak Tigrinya. Amharic and Tigrinya may be related; most Amhara do not speak Tigrinya. The majority of Tigrayans in the diaspora speak Tigrinya, although at differing levels.<sup>278</sup>

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Tigrinya is the official language in both Tigray and Eritrea, but there are differences in accent and word usage. During the Derg regime, many Tigrayans sought refuge in Eritrea. After the Derg was expelled in 1991, many Tigrayans returned with their children who had been born in Eritrea. These children are generally also able to speak the Eritrean variant of Tigrinya without an accent.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>274</sup> Central Statistics Agency, *Population and Housing Census 2007*, pages 76 and 78, 2007; Confidential source, 26 June 2021: According to the latest census, in 2007 about 16,000 Tigrayans were living in Afar out of a total of 1.4 million inhabitants, and about 37,000 in Amhara out of a total of 17 million inhabitants. The total population of Ethiopia was about 74 million in 2007; the estimated total population today is 110 million inhabitants.

<sup>275</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2018*, page 38, July 2018; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 55, February 2021; confidential source, 6 August 2021; Central Statistics Agency, *Population and Housing Census*, page 71, 2007; v26 June 2021.

<sup>276</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021, confidential source, 10 June 2021; Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., page 35, 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

<sup>277</sup> Confidential source, 14 June 2021.

<sup>278</sup> Confidential source, 14 June 2021; confidential source, 28 June 2021; Al Jazeera, *Tiny ethnic group fears extinction as Tigray war enters 6th month*, 4 May 2021; Omna Tigray, *Dear Ethiopian Propagandists, A Heartfelt Letter from a Tigrayan-Irob Woman*, 4 February 2021; confidential source, 15 July 2021; confidential source, 25 August 2021.

<sup>279</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

*First and last names*

The Amhara and Tigrayans have names in common because their two languages are related to the extinct Geez language, which is now used only in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, to which the majority of Amhara and Tigrayans belong. Religious names such as Haile ('power'), Gebre ('manifestation'), and Selassie ('trinity') fall into this category. Gebre as a name prefix used in the variant Haile Gebreselassie is common among Tigrayans but not commonly found among other ethnic groups, according to a confidential source, who adds: 'But the athlete Haile Gebreselassie was born in Oromia and his parents are Amhara.'<sup>280</sup> In open sources there are also Tigrayans with names that are more expected in Arabic-speakers, such as a Tigrayan with the name Seid Mussa Omar or Nurhusein Abdulmajid.<sup>281</sup> A confidential source said that the TDF/TPLF spokesman Getachew Reda has a first name which exists in both Tigrinya and Amharic, but his parents chose to give him the Amharic variant.<sup>282</sup>

*Cultural characteristics*

When asked, a confidential source showed small scars on his temple that he said were typical of Tigrayans. They are two parallel scars next to the eye, often on the temple, which are also called 'the eleven' because the scars resemble this number. Certain groups in Eritrea, notably the Tigrinya-speakers, also deliberately mark scars on the face, but these are deeper and below the eyes, the source said. Another confidential source agreed that it was common to create these scars, but that this was much less common among the younger generations. There is a typical hairstyle that many Tigrayan women have,<sup>283</sup> but confidential sources again pointed out that of course this does not apply to every Tigrayan woman. Men and women who adhere to the faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, especially in rural areas, sometimes have a cross tattooed on their foreheads.<sup>284</sup> With regard to identifying Tigrayan ethnicity, a confidential source commented that he did not have a typical Tigrayan name, spoke Amharic without a typical accent, and was not born in Tigray, but still considered himself Tigrayan because his parents' roots were in that region.<sup>285</sup>

### **3.2 Position/treatment of Tigrayans in Tigray outside the conflict (as far as possible) and in the rest of Ethiopia**

As stated in the general country of origin information report of February 2021, after Abiy Ahmed became prime minister, many Tigrayan officers in the army and senior officials were fired and replaced by Abiy supporters. Many Tigrayans felt that they were being marginalised by the current government. Anti-Tigrayan sentiment is said to have increased in the rest of Ethiopia since 2018.<sup>286</sup> Even before ethnic tensions grew in 2018, anti-Tigrayan sentiment caused many Tigrayans to avoid overland

<sup>280</sup> Confidential source, 14 June 2021, confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>281</sup> Focus on Africa, *Tigray, Irob and Kunama Ethnic Groups Risk Extinction*, 12 April 2021; The Independent, *Lost limbs, rising anger as town is caught up in Tigray war*, 4 June 2021.

<sup>282</sup> Confidential source, 15 July 2021.

<sup>283</sup> See also the website of Atlas of Humanity, *Tigray People, Ethiopia* for an example of a woman with a typical Tigrayan hairstyle. This hairstyle has different variants, but is characterised by thin, loose tresses that are braided tightly against the head. The tresses stop at the back of the head and the hair spreads out.

<sup>284</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021; Ethiopianeurology.com, *Unique Tigray facial ritual scar may mark them for killing by Eritrean and Amhara militia*, 2 August 2021; Atlas of Humanity, *TIGRAY PEOPLE, ETHIOPIA*, accessed 7 July 2021.

<sup>285</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>286</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, pages 66-67, February 2021.

travel through the regions of Amhara and Oromia, and even in the disputed Raya zone in Tigray, for fear of being attacked due to their Tigrayan licence plates.<sup>287</sup>

After the conflict started on 4 November 2020, anti-Tigrayan sentiment and repercussions against people of Tigrayan descent increased in Ethiopia (see 3.2.1). As mentioned earlier in this report, Prime Minister Abiy stated that his government's struggle was against the TPLF and called on his compatriots not to discriminate against Tigrayans as a group.<sup>288</sup> Abiy used terms such as 'Satan', 'weed' and 'cancer tumour' to describe the TPLF, which was designated a terrorist organisation by the Ethiopian federal government on 1 May 2021. This would not have helped the general sentiment towards Tigrayan citizens, according to *The Times*.<sup>289</sup> After the capture of Mekelle by the TDF/TDF on 28 June 2021, Prime Minister Abiy accused 'ordinary' Tigrayans of supporting Tigrayan fighters.<sup>290</sup> Finnish Foreign Minister and EU envoy Pekka Haavisto told the European Parliament on 15 June 2021 that in talks with Ethiopian leaders, they said they would 'destroy' the Tigrayans and 'wipe them off the face of the earth for one hundred years'. The Ethiopian government said Haavisto's statements were untrue.<sup>291</sup> The Ethiopian Orthodox Church distanced itself from the statements of the head of the church, Patriarch Abune Mathias, in early May 2021. The patriarch, himself a Tigrayan, had criticised the war. In his statement, he had condemned the murders of the Tigrayan people, the stealing of their goods, the denial of their rights and the thwarting of Tigrayan peasants from working their land.<sup>292</sup>

### 3.2.1 *Tigrayan citizens (in other parts of Ethiopia)*

#### *Ethnic profiling*

Several sources reported that Tigrayans were the target of ethnic profiling. Reuters reported in early May 2021 that according to Tigrayan sources, since the government launched the campaign against the TPLF in early November 2020, an ethnic 'witch hunt' had been unleashed against them. Tigrayans were being arrested, harassed, sacked or suspended from their jobs because of their ethnic origin. Tigrayan academics were no longer allowed to teach at their universities. However, a confidential source reported in early June 2021 that his colleagues of Tigrayan descent were still working at the university in Addis Ababa to which he was attached, but that none of these colleagues had spoken out about the conflict.<sup>293</sup> Tigrayans' bank accounts had been temporarily frozen.<sup>294</sup> In addition, businesses and assets belonging to Tigrayans had been confiscated and sold or given to non-

<sup>287</sup> Passport Party, *Tigray's border conflicts explained*, 11 November 2020.

<sup>288</sup> BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Fears of ethnic profiling stalk conflict*, 25 November 2020; Reuters, *Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021.

<sup>289</sup> *The Times*, *Genocide fears after Ethiopian PM vows to crush 'weeds' of Tigray*, 19 July 2021; Confidential source, 19 May 2021.

<sup>290</sup> AP News, *'Purely ethnic profiling': New wave of Tigrayans detained*, 13 July 2021; EEPA, *Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 186*, 13 July 2021.

<sup>291</sup> Addis Standard, *"ETHIOPIAN LEADERS TOLD ME THEY'RE GOING TO WIPE OUT, DESTROY TIGRYANS", CLAIMS EU ENVOY*, 18 June 2021; Multimedia Centre European Parliament, *DEVE/AFET (recorded webstreaming)*, 15 June 2021. [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/deve-afet\\_20210615-0915-COMMITTEE-DEVE\\_vd](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/deve-afet_20210615-0915-COMMITTEE-DEVE_vd); FanaBC, *Ethiopia Rejects Briefing By Finnish FM Pekka Haavisto To European Parliament*, 18 June 2021.

<sup>292</sup> BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopian Orthodox Church disowns patriarch's view on Tigray*, 10 May 2021; Addis Standard, *NEWS: ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH SAYS WAR IN TIGRAY "BARBARISM" AND "ATTEMPT TO ERASE TIGRAYANS"; SAYS HIS REPEATED PLEAS "CENSORED"*, 8 May 2021.

<sup>293</sup> Confidential source, 9 June 2021.

<sup>294</sup> Reuters, *Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021; BBC Monitoring (Suna News Agency), *Ethiopian asylum-seeking UN soldiers head to camps in Sudan*, 10 May 2021; Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: *Fears of ethnic profiling stalk conflict*, 25 November 2020; *The New York Times*, *As War Goes On in Ethiopia, Ethnic Harassment Is on the Rise*, 12 December 2020.

Tigrayans. The security firm working for several Western embassies in Addis Ababa lost its licence overnight in November 2020 due to alleged links to Tigray.<sup>295</sup>

A confidential source of Tigrayan descent noted that life had become a little easier for his family in Addis Ababa when the federal government and allies felt that they were winning in Tigray, but that since Mekelle had been taken by the TDF/TPLF, his family and other Tigrayans in the Ethiopian capital had kept a low profile by not speaking Tigrinya on the street and not going out much.<sup>296</sup> Another confidential source believed that the Tigrayans outside Tigray were a collectively endangered group due to ethnic profiling.<sup>297</sup> Reuters reported in early May 2021 the arrest of a Tigrayan in Addis Ababa who said he had been arrested for speaking Tigrinya on the street. A spokesman for the federal police was reported to have stated that if innocent civilians were arrested, they were released quickly.<sup>298</sup> According to a confidential source, Eritrean refugees who had fled to the Amhara region had faced hostility because they were mistaken for Tigrayans.<sup>299</sup> An Eritrean refugee who was mistaken for a Tigrayan by Amhara militia members was said to have saved himself by convincing them that he was Eritrean. His attackers had called someone who spoke Tigrinya and this person had confirmed the refugee's Eritrean accent.<sup>300</sup>

Several confidential sources said they could not provide examples (at least before 28 June 2021: see below) of violent actions by civilians against Tigrayan compatriots, but stated that intelligence officers, police officers and kebele officials<sup>301</sup> had entered and looted the houses of Tigrayans outside Tigray, especially in Addis Ababa, and that government officials had arbitrarily arrested Tigrayans.<sup>302</sup>

*After the capture of Mekelle and other parts of Tigray by the TDF/TPLF*

After the TDF/TPLF offensive in which the Tigrayan forces retook large parts of Tigray, a federal government official is said to have declared that Tigrayans should be detained throughout Ethiopia as a precaution, just as the Ethiopian authorities had done with Eritreans living in Ethiopia during the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1998 to 2000. A new wave of ethnic profiling took place throughout Ethiopia, but especially in the capital and other major cities: thousands of Tigrayans were arbitrarily arrested without official charges and Tigrayan businesses were closed down. Many people were released after a few days or weeks, but a large number of detained Tigrayans were still in prison at the end of the reporting period.<sup>303</sup>

Norwegian academic Kjetil Tronvoll tweeted on 7 July 2021 that he had learned that Tigrayan students had been expelled from the campus of Semera University in the Afar region.<sup>304</sup> An Ethiopian restaurant in the Sudanese capital Khartoum was said to have fired all staff of Tigrayan descent. The restaurant is said to have close ties with

<sup>295</sup> The New York Times, *As War Goes On in Ethiopia, Ethnic Harassment Is on the Rise*, 12 December 2020

<sup>296</sup> Confidential source, 8 July 2021; Al Jazeera, *Fear pervades as Tigrayans rounded up after battlefield reversals*, 14 July 2021.

<sup>297</sup> Confidential source, 9 July 2021.

<sup>298</sup> Reuters, *Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021.

<sup>299</sup> Confidential source, 2 July 2021.

<sup>300</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>301</sup> The kebele (neighbourhood or community) is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia. Several kebeles together form a woreda, which can be translated as a district.

<sup>302</sup> Confidential source, 9 June 2021; confidential source, 10 June 2021; confidential source 9 July 2021.

<sup>303</sup> Getachew Assefa, @getachew.zeki, 5 July 2021;

[https://twitter.com/getachew\\_zeki/status/1412113321575129114](https://twitter.com/getachew_zeki/status/1412113321575129114); Al Jazeera, *Fear pervades as Tigrayans rounded up after battlefield reversals*, 14 July 2021; AP News, *'Purely ethnic profiling': New wave of Tigrayans detained*, 13 July 2021; BBC Monitoring (The Reporter Website), *Ethiopia rights body alarmed at crackdown on Tigrayans in Addis Ababa*, 21 July 2021; HRW, *Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared*, 18 August 2021.

<sup>304</sup> Kjetil Tronvoll, @KjetilTronvoll, 7 July 2021: <https://twitter.com/KjetilTronvoll/status/1412781016670949382>

the Ethiopian embassy in Khartoum.<sup>305</sup> A confidential source had heard from relatives in Addis Ababa that in early July 2021 Tigrayans in Addis Ababa had been summoned to meetings in their area. During these meetings, those present were said to have been asked to join the Prosperity Party or one of the two Tigrayan parties that sided with the federal government. According to the confidential source, these were Arena and Dr Aregawi Berhe's party, the *Tigray Democratic Party* (TDP). Anyone who did not join was automatically labelled 'TPLF', the source said.<sup>306</sup> A confidential source stated that Tigrayans still working for the federal government were expected to show support for the government and to speak out against the TDF/TPFL. Within Arena, criticism of the conflict in Tigray was reportedly growing. Many party members were still against the TPLF, but did not want to show their support for the fight against the TPLF. Arena's leader, Abraha Desta, was said to have the feeling of being caught in the middle, being seen as a 'traitor' by both the federal government and the TPLF.<sup>307</sup>

On 17 July 2021, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) expressed its deep concern over reports of, among other things, harassment, arrests, the use of child soldiers and the killing of civilians. EHRC said it had received information about the violent deaths of three inhabitants of Tigrayan origin in the town of Woreta in the Amhara region. The Tigrayans were said to have been killed by an angry mob when the body of a Amhara fighter who had died fighting the TDF/TPFL arrived in the village.<sup>308</sup> A confidential source believed that now that more regions were sending fighters to the front and some of them were not returning alive, anti-Tigrayan sentiment in these regions would increase.<sup>309</sup> A woman of Amharic descent who had a child with a Tigrayan man had fled with the child from Amhara to Sudan due to rising tensions in the region.<sup>310</sup>

-----box 2: Qemant-----

Thousands of Qemant, a small ethnic minority from Amhara, are said to have fled from Amhara to Sudan at the end of July 2021. The exact reason for the flight is unknown.<sup>311</sup> The Qemant have been at odds with their Amhara neighbours for years. Hundreds of people are said to have been killed in clashes in recent years. The Amharic authorities accused the TPLF of using the Qemant issue to sow unrest in the Amhara region and of providing the Qemant with both equipment and training. The Qemant are seen by the Amhara authorities as proxies of the TPLF. The flight of the Qemant could be related to the mandatory mobilisation organised in Amhara after the TDF/TPFL offensive.<sup>312</sup>

-----box 2-----

### *Blocking of bank accounts and freezing of assets*

After the attack by Tigrayan troops on Northern Command bases, the Ethiopian authorities blocked all bank accounts that had been opened in Tigray. Money also

<sup>305</sup> Confidential source, 4 July 2021.

<sup>306</sup> Confidential source, 15 July 2021; Borkena, *Ethiopian Opposition party leaders reacting to Tigray ceasefire*, 1 July 2021.

<sup>307</sup> Confidential source, 25 August 2021.

<sup>308</sup> BBC Monitoring (The Reporter Website), *Ethiopia rights body alarmed at crackdown on Tigrayans in Addis Ababa*, 21 July 2021; EEPA, *Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 187*, 14 July 2021.

<sup>309</sup> Confidential source, 15 July 2021.

<sup>310</sup> Confidential source, 14 July 2021.

<sup>311</sup> BBC Monitoring (Suna News Agency Website), *Thousands of refugees from Ethiopia's Amhara cross into Sudan*, 28 July 2021.

<sup>312</sup> Ethiopia Insight, *Violent Qemant dispute fuelling explosive Amhara-Tigray divide*, 16 December 2018; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia 2021*, page 43, February 2021; confidential source, 1 August 2021; France24, *Caught in the crossfire, Ethiopian minority flees to Sudan*, 21 August 2021.

could not be withdrawn elsewhere in the country if the account had been opened in Tigray. After a few weeks, around late December 2020 or early January 2021, confidential sources say that it was again possible to deposit money into Tigrayan accounts and account holders could again withdraw money from the bank. However, according to confidential sources, it was only possible to withdraw money in the place where a person had opened his or her bank account. Someone who lived in Adigrat but had opened an account in Mekelle could only withdraw money in Mekelle. Since the TDF offensive of late June 2021, federal authorities have again blocked all bank accounts in Tigray.<sup>313</sup> The federal authorities announced in late May 2021 that the assets of TPLF members and leaders would be frozen in order to prevent the financing of 'terrorist' activities.<sup>314</sup> According to a confidential source, this also affected civilians who had no links with the TPLF.<sup>315</sup>

#### *Extortion or blackmail*

*The New York Times* reported in early December 2020 that government officials were extorting money from Tigrayans.<sup>316</sup> Businessmen arrested because of their Tigrayan descent had to pay to be released, according to a confidential source. Another confidential source said a relative in Addis Ababa had been arrested for alleged ties with the TPLF and released after two weeks as there were no grounds for holding him any longer. Before releasing the man of Tigrayan descent, government officials demanded that he pay a 'fine'.<sup>317</sup> The Ethiopian attorney-general admitted there had been abuses in connection with ethnic profiling by Ethiopian government officials, but said these abuses were isolated incidents and would be investigated further.<sup>318</sup>

#### *Critical voices*

Two Tigrayan government officials from the federal government-appointed interim government in Tigray were dismissed for speaking out against the alleged violence and destruction for which Eritrean and Amhara troops were said to be responsible.<sup>319</sup> Dori Asgedom, leader of the Assimba Democratic Party, which represents the interests of the Irob, was arrested by the federal authorities in early 2021 for his opposition to the war.<sup>320</sup> Some ten journalists, including both Tigrayans and people of other ethnic backgrounds, were also arrested for their reporting on the war in Tigray. Some of those who had been arrested at the outset of the conflict and released on bail were arrested again after the capture of Mekelle in late June. A federal police employee said that the twelve journalists arrested in early July had not been arrested because of their profession but because of their involvement in a terrorist group.<sup>321</sup> Not all Tigrayan government officials have been removed from their posts. There are also some who have chosen to no longer represent the Ethiopian state. Berhane Kidanemariam, deputy chief of mission at the Ethiopian embassy in Washington and a Tigrayan, resigned in March 2021 over what he called a 'witch hunt that is taking place against Tigrayans in Ethiopia and in the diaspora'.<sup>322</sup>

<sup>313</sup> Confidential source, 8 July 2021.

<sup>314</sup> ENA, *Court Freezes Assets of TPLF Leaders, Members*, 31 May 2021.

<sup>315</sup> Confidential source, 8 July 2021; AP News, *'Clean out our insides': Ethiopia detains Tigrayans amid war*, 29 April 2021.

<sup>316</sup> *The New York Times*, *As War Goes On in Ethiopia, Ethnic Harassment Is on the Rise*, 12 December 2020

<sup>317</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>318</sup> *The New York Times*, *As War Goes On in Ethiopia, Ethnic Harassment Is on the Rise*, 12 December 2020.

<sup>319</sup> BBC Monitoring (Addis Standard), *Two Ethiopian Tigray officials fired for speaking on abuses*, 16 March 2021.

<sup>320</sup> Al Jazeera, *Tiny ethnic group fears extinction as Tigray war enters 6th month*, 4 May 2021.

<sup>321</sup> International Press Institute, *Six journalists arrested in Ethiopia on trumped-up charges*, 12 November 2020; Addis Standard, *12 JOURNALISTS ARRESTED IN TWO DAYS ; MEDIA AUTHORITY UNAWARE OF THE ARRESTS; FED. POLICE SAYS ARRESTS LINKED TO ASSOCIATION WITH TERRORIST ORGANIZATION*, 2 July 2021.

<sup>322</sup> Al Jazeera, *Top US diplomat decries 'ethnic cleansing' in Ethiopia's Tigray*, 10 March 2021.

### *Military personnel*

Tigrayan soldiers are said to have been placed in special detention camps and military personnel of Tigrayan descent in South Sudan who were part of the UN peacekeeping mission UNISFA in Sudan applied for asylum because they feared being arrested if they returned to Ethiopia. *Suna News* even wrote that the soldiers had expressed fear of being killed. The federal government rejected the allegations of ethnic profiling and said any arrests had been made for security reasons.<sup>323</sup> Soldiers of Tigrayan descent who were part of the Ethiopian contingent of the peacekeeping missions AMISOM and UNMISS<sup>324</sup> are said to have been arrested by soldiers belonging to the Ethiopian federal army, who were also part of the missions, after the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray and sent back to Ethiopia.<sup>325</sup>

According to a confidential source, the federal security apparatus has been purged of almost all officials of Tigrayan descent. The Tigrayans within the security apparatus are said to have fled, been killed or been detained in six military detention centres across the country. According to AP News, Brigadier General Tesfaye Ayalew said that the ranks of the Ethiopian armed forces needed to be cleaned out and that they were now 'completely Ethiopian'. AP News also spoke of thousands of Tigrayan detainees in nine detention centres that mainly held military detainees. Sometimes a person's ethnic profile was sufficient reason for them to be detained, according to AP News.<sup>326</sup> Many soldiers had been detained from the start of the conflict.<sup>327</sup> A list of soldiers and the reason why they had not been promoted appeared on Twitter at the end of May. For all Tigrayans the reason given was 'Tigrayan'.<sup>328</sup>

### **3.3 Basis for these problems (ethnic or political motives)**

As mentioned in 1.2.3 and 3.2, leaders and members of the TPLF experience problems because of their real or alleged political involvement with the party, but there are also examples of Tigrayans who experience problems because of their ethnic origin.

### **3.4 Protection alternatives for Tigrayans living outside Tigray**

As mentioned in 2.1 and 2.2, despite Prime Minister Abiy's claim that the struggle was not against the Tigrayan people, but against the TPLF, Tigrayans in Tigray were unable to find protection or to receive protection from the Ethiopian authorities. Since the TDF/TPLF offensive in mid-June 2021 and the capture of Mekelle by TDF forces, Abiy has allegedly started denouncing Tigrayans collectively rather than just the TPLF. The alleged ethnic profiling of Tigrayans by Ethiopian government officials is reported in 3.2. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) stated in July 2021 that it was monitoring the arrest of Tigrayans and journalists. The commission

<sup>323</sup> Reuters, *Ethiopia's crackdown on ethnic Tigrayans snares thousands*, 7 May 2021; BBC Monitoring (Suna News Agency), *Ethiopian asylum-seeking UN soldiers head to camps in Sudan*, 10 May 2021; BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Fears of ethnic profiling stalk conflict*, 25 November 2020.

<sup>324</sup> AMISOM: African Union Mission to Somalia; UNMISS: United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

<sup>325</sup> Deutsche Welle, *Ethiopia: 'People in Tigray are terrified'*, 25 November 2020; BBC Monitoring, *Local media report infighting among Ethiopian forces in Somalia*, 6 December 2020.

<sup>326</sup> Confidential source, 14 June 2021; AP News, *'Clean out our insides': Ethiopia detains Tigrayans amid war*, 29 April 2021; EEPA, *Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 186*, 13 July 2021.

<sup>327</sup> EEPA, *Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 186*, 13 July 2021.

<sup>328</sup> Tghat, @Tghatmedia, 25 June 2021: <https://twitter.com/TghatMedia/status/1408349455649214464>

said that the measures taken by the government against the Tigrayans raised concerns about the risk of ethnic profiling.<sup>329</sup> Although Daniel Bekele, who has led the EHRC since 2019, says that he operates independently, opponents of the federal government see him as an extension of that government (see also 3.2).<sup>330</sup>

Internal protection alternatives for Tigrayans residing outside Tigray are examined in detail in 2.5 and 4.4.

### 3.5 Problems leaving Ethiopia

The Ethiopian country of origin information report of February 2021 stated that persons with a foreign passport but a Tigrayan surname were not allowed to leave the country.<sup>331</sup> *The New York Times* also reported that the conflict was affecting Tigrayans who wanted to leave Ethiopia. The civil aviation authority was said to ask Ethiopian passengers not only for their passport, but also for their identity card, which shows the bearer's ethnicity<sup>332</sup>.<sup>333</sup> The UK Foreign Office's travel advice stated that due to the ongoing military conflict in Tigray, there are reports of ethnic Tigrayans being prevented from leaving the country from Bole International Airport.<sup>334</sup>

Tigrayan athlete Letesenbet Gidey, who in October 2020, before the start of the armed conflict in November 2020, broke the world record for the 5,000 metres in Valencia, Spain, was kept waiting at the airport in Addis Ababa by a government official before travelling to Spain. According to confidential sources and social media reports, this happened because of her Tigrayan origin. According to a confidential source, after a member of the Ethiopian sports federation, of Oromo descent, intervened, Gidey was allowed to board the plane.<sup>335</sup> In early 2021, the daughter of the late former Prime Minister and leading TPLF figure Meles Zenawi, Semhal Meles, announced that government officials had banned her from flying to the US even though she claimed she had the necessary paperwork, including a valid passport, a visa and a ticket. According to Semhal Meles, she was not on a wanted list and the refusal to allow her to board the plane was illegal and unlawful. The officials allegedly stated that Meles did not have the papers which are needed by anyone who had previously been arrested. In December 2020, the daughter of the former prime minister was detained for two days. Ms Meles stated that she had not been given a reason for the arrest.<sup>336</sup>

Confidential sources confirm ethnic profiling at Addis Ababa International Airport, but have no reports of individuals ultimately being barred from leaving the country. In a single case, the journey was only allowed to continue after bribes had been

<sup>329</sup> AP News, 'Purely ethnic profiling': New wave of Tigrayans detained, 13 July 2021.

<sup>330</sup> The Guardian, *Ethiopia's human rights chief as war rages in Tigray: 'we get accused by all ethnic groups'*, 2 June 2021.

<sup>331</sup> Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia*, page 67, February 2021.

<sup>332</sup> The Ethiopian country of origin information report of February 2021 mentions on page 55 that there are reports that from 2019 that ethnicity will no longer be shown on the kebele card. Whether this is actually the case and whether this transition is gradually occurring has not been established.

<sup>333</sup> The New York Times, *As War Goes On in Ethiopia, Ethnic Harassment Is on the Rise*, 12 December 2020.

<sup>334</sup> Website *Government of the UK*: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ethiopia/safety-and-security> (accessed 15 July 2021).

<sup>335</sup> Confidential source, 14 June 2021; confidential source, 10 June 2021; BBC Sport, *Letesenbet Gidey: Ethiopian breaks two-day-old women's 10,000m world record*, 8 June 2021; FanaBC, *Ethiopia Welcomes Home Triumphant Athlete Letesenbet Gidey*, 9 October 2021; Zecahrias Zelalem, @ZekuZelalem, 8 October 2021: <https://twitter.com/ZekuZelalem/status/1314437146086907904>

<sup>336</sup> Financial Times, *Ethiopia accused of using ethnic profiling to target Tigrayans*, 31 January 2021.

paid. A source who had a European passport was taken out of the queue while he was boarding. According to him, it was because of his Tigrayan surname or place of birth in Tigray. The officer who had taken him out of the queue declined to give the reason for the delay when asked. Ultimately, the person concerned was able to resume his flight.<sup>337</sup> Another confidential source says he was verbally abused at Bole International Airport for being a 'Junta' (a derogatory name for members of the TPLF). He paid bribes to be left alone. The confidential source had been stopped with other Tigrayans; he did not know if the others had eventually made it onto their flight.<sup>338</sup>

<sup>337</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

<sup>338</sup> Confidential source, 10 June 2021.

## 4 Refugees and displaced persons

### 4.1 Flow of displaced persons and/or refugees due to the conflict in Tigray

#### *Number of refugees/IDPs due to conflict*

In the summer of 2020, according to the IOM, there were 1,820,811 internally displaced persons (IDPs) across Ethiopia, just over 100,000 of whom were staying in Tigray at the time.<sup>339</sup> Due to the armed conflict in Tigray, that number had risen to about 700,000 by March 2021.<sup>340</sup> A confidential source said that the actual number was much higher at the time, but many IDPs were left out of the count due to limited access to certain areas in Tigray.<sup>341</sup> At the end of May 2021, the IOM counted 1,918,220 IDPs in Tigray. People had also fled from Tigray to the Afar region (49,643 IDPs) and Amhara (22,305 IDPs), bringing the total number of IDPs due to the conflict to 1,990,168 at the end of May 2021. IOM commented on these figures that the unsafe situation and lack of access in the region presented an ongoing challenge to the organisation.<sup>342</sup> In addition to those who had been internally displaced, more than 40,000 people had crossed the border into Sudan from Tigray to escape the conflict (see also 1.1).<sup>343</sup>

#### *Eritrean refugees in Tigray*

According to UNHCR figures, there were 178,980 Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia before the conflict, 96,223<sup>344</sup> of whom were registered in Tigray. Most of the refugees were living in the four refugee camps in Western Tigray: Mai-Aini (21,682), Hadi-Arush (32,167), Shimelba (8,702) and Hitsats (25,248).<sup>345</sup> The two northern camps Shimelba and Hitsats are in the area controlled by Eritrean forces and have been completely destroyed. The camps have been abandoned and all the refugees have either fled to one of the camps further south or been killed or forcibly returned to Eritrea.<sup>346</sup> ARRA (Administration of Refugee and Returnee Affairs) stated on Twitter on 14 July 2021 that 9,000 Eritrean refugees had been relocated to Mai Aini and Hadi-Arush. About 5,000 refugees are said to be registered in Addis Ababa. An unspecified number are said to have been transferred to the Beralbe camp in Afar. A new camp in Northern Gondar in Amhara was still under construction at the end of the period covered by this report.<sup>347</sup> The fate of 11,000 to 20,000 Eritrean refugees is said to be unknown (see also 1.2.3).<sup>348</sup>

<sup>339</sup> IOM, *ETHIOPIA NATIONAL DISPLACEMENT REPORT 5 Site Assessment Round 22 & Village Assessment Survey Round 5: June – July 2020*, page 15, 10 September 2020.

<sup>340</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia Issue #4*, 15– 28 March 2021, 31 March 2021.

<sup>341</sup> Confidential source, 21 July 2021.

<sup>342</sup> IOM, *Emergency Site Assessment: Northern Ethiopia Crisis 6 Data Collection: 3 – 24 May 2021 Publication Date: 27 June 2021*, 27 June 2021.

<sup>343</sup> UNHCR, *Tigray Situation Update*, 31 March 2021; UNHCR, *Sudan: Emergency Response to Tigray Situation – New Weekly Update #4*, 3 August 2021.

<sup>344</sup> A confidential source noted in this connection that the actual number of Eritrean refugees was probably much higher, as the Ethiopian authorities have recently made it harder for certain categories of Eritreans to register: confidential source, 14 July 2021.

<sup>345</sup> UNHCR, *Tigray Situation Update*, 31 March 2021.

<sup>346</sup> Confidential source, 22 January 2021; World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 46, 6 April 2021

<sup>347</sup> ARRA, @EthRefugee, *Statement on the Eritrean Refugees in Eritrea*, 14 July 2021.

<sup>348</sup> Confidential source, 2 July 2021.

## 4.2 Areas in Ethiopia hosting internally displaced persons

The first point to note with regard to this section is that due to the ongoing conflict in Tigray, the situation is fluid and fast-changing. The warring parties are liable to lose or retake certain areas as the conflict progresses, which may lead to IDP movements. Because many IDPs have fled to inaccessible areas, it is hard to give an exact number.

Many residents of Tigray have fled to the larger cities of Tigray since the outbreak of the conflict. At the end of May 2021, Shire had the highest number of IDPs (673,241). Mekelle and the surrounding area were hosting some 270,000 IDPs, followed by Sheraro (254,102), Adwa (221,860), Aksum (130,000) and Adigrat (86,000).<sup>349</sup> The IDPs in the cities are usually housed with relatives. Large numbers have also fled to rural areas of Tigray, where they have tried to find safe shelter in the mountains, caves or forest.<sup>350</sup>

Generally, the main route taken by IDPs is from Western Tigray to Eastern/South-eastern Tigray. IDPs from Western Tigray have ended up mainly in North-western Tigray, but also in other parts of Tigray. In Western Tigray, there have been numerous reports of forced deportations of ethnic Tigrayans by the ADF. Parts of this area are said to have been depopulated as a result of these deportations. Amhara's regional government is said to have transported ethnic Amhara from other regions to Western Tigray. A confidential source said the forced deportations in the Watkait district were on a much smaller scale than in the rest of Western Tigray. Welkait has much more upland and is described by the source as having an ethnic Tigrayan population that has lived in the area for generations. Because of this, the Amhara regarded them as 'locals'.<sup>351</sup>

In Raya in South-eastern Tigray, where the ADF was in control, there are said to have been hardly any forced deportations because the Amhara also regarded the Tigrayans living there as 'locals'.<sup>352</sup> Raya, where it was relatively quiet throughout the conflict, saw an increase in numbers of IDPs during the TDF offensive in late June 2021. North-western Tigray mainly had IDPs from Western Tigray, but some of its own inhabitants were also displaced within the zone. As well as IDPs from more western zones, Eastern, South-eastern and Central Tigray also had IDPs from their own zone and other zones. Southern Tigray primarily experienced internal displacements: IDPs from this zone were mainly seeking a safer place to stay within the zone. Several sources also mentioned that many IDPs sought refuge close to home. In some cases, IDPs would even return to their homes for brief periods if Eritrean or Ethiopian troops were not around.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>349</sup> IOM, *Emergency Site Assessment: Northern Ethiopia Crisis 6 Data Collection: 3 – 24 May 2021* Publication Date: 27 June 2021, 27 June 2021.

<sup>350</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J. p. 33, 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. Journal of Maps, preprint. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation); De Volkskrant, *De gebroken Trots van Tigray; Uitgemoord omdat we Tigreeërs zijn*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>351</sup> Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J. p. 35, 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. Journal of Maps, preprint. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation); World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, pages 40-41, 6 April 2021.

<sup>352</sup> Confidential source, 9 July 2021.

<sup>353</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, p. 39, 6 April 2021

As mentioned in 2.5, several tens of thousands of IDPs also fled to Afar and Amhara because of the conflict. The IDPs in Amhara were mostly from Western, North-western and Southern Tigray. Part of the population in these zones is of Amhara origin. However, a clear picture cannot be provided of the ethnic origin of the IDPs in Amhara or Afar. According to a confidential source, the ethnicity of the IDPs was not known, but the IDP populations in Amhara and Afar were of mixed composition. When asked, another confidential source expressed the view that Tigrayans would not flee to the Amhara or Afar regions to find refuge there. The camps in these regions for IDPs from Tigray are believed to hold relatives of federal soldiers who were forced to flee when Northern Command bases were attacked by TPLF loyalists in early November 2020. Another source believed that lawlessness in Western and North-western Tigray was many times worse than in Amhara, and that Tigrayans therefore had fled to Amhara. They were safer in Amhara, the source said, than in the areas of Tigray where the Amhara Special Forces and militias were in charge. In Afar, the IDPs were mainly from Eastern Tigray. After the TDF offensive in late June 2021, inhabitants of Southern Tigray in particular sought refuge in Afar.<sup>354</sup> Eritrean refugees from Tigray are also said to have fled to Amhara and Afar.<sup>355</sup>

According to a confidential source, all the refugees who had fled to Sudan because of the conflict were ethnic Tigrayans. Many of them were not staying in the camps, but in makeshift shelters near the border with the Tigray region, because they did not want to flee too far from their homes, the source said.<sup>356</sup> As mentioned earlier in this report, at the end of July 2021 there were reports of thousands of Qemant from Amhara having fled to Sudan (see 3.2).

### 4.3 The actual situation in these areas

Before the outbreak of war in November 2020, Tigray had achieved a certain degree of food security. However, the situation was vulnerable, partly because of low crop yields and natural factors such as pests and drought. Due to the plague of locusts of 2020 and the consequences of Covid-19, the situation was already very precarious.<sup>357</sup> When the conflict broke out, the harvest season had just started, which had a major impact on the food supply. As mentioned in 1.2.2, it is claimed that hunger has been used as a weapon of war. Farmers are said to have been forbidden to cultivate their fields and almost all of the livestock in Tigray are said to have been stolen or slaughtered by Ethiopian and Eritrean troops.<sup>358</sup>

In late May 2021, the UN declared a famine in Tigray, relying on the so-called IPC analysis (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification). The highest rating is IPC-5, catastrophe; 350,000 people in Tigray fell into this category. According to the UN, this was the highest number since 2011, when a quarter of a million Somalis died of starvation in Somalia.<sup>359</sup> UNICEF stated on 14 June 2021 that at least 33,000 children in parts of Tigray were at acute risk of starvation if humanitarian aid did not

<sup>354</sup> Confidential source, 26 June 2021; confidential source, 25 June 2021.

<sup>355</sup> Confidential source, 29 June 2021.

<sup>356</sup> Confidential source, 14 July 2021.

<sup>357</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 1, 6 April 2021; The Economist, *Tigray is edging closer to famine*; *Daily chart*, 22 April 2021; Confidential source, 11 March 2021.

<sup>358</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021; Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, page 9, February 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021.

<sup>359</sup> Oxfam, *Six-fold increase in people suffering famine-like conditions since pandemic began*, 9 July 2021; NRC, *VN: Ruim 350.000 mensen in Tigray lijden honger*, 11 June 2021.

arrive soon.<sup>360</sup> On 19 July 2021, OCHA announced that 400,000 people were in the IPC-5 category, and that more than 1.8 million people were in category 4, meaning that they were in acute food insecurity. The areas affected were mainly Eastern and Central Tigray and certain parts of South-eastern and North-western Tigray, although it should be noted that certain areas in the region were inaccessible due to the conflict.<sup>361</sup> The UN humanitarian coordinator stated in June 2021 that there was famine in Tigray. The Ethiopian government rejected this report, stating that the 'speculations' of a famine were groundless.<sup>362</sup>

As well as the food shortage, Tigray faces humanitarian challenges such as lack of shelter, limited access to clean water, lack of medical care and lack of education. IDPs who have been unable to stay with family are living in places such as makeshift encampments or abandoned schools and universities, many of which have been damaged in the war.<sup>363</sup> A confidential source stated in March 2021 that shelter was available for just three percent of IDPs. As many IDPs had moved into schools, the source said it was unlikely that children would be able to return to school soon. Moreover, the source stated that only ten of the 40 hospitals were in use; the rest had been damaged or looted. In January 2021, Reuters quoted an MSF (*Médecins Sans Frontières*) employee who wondered how they were supposed to perform blood transfusions in the region when there were no refrigerators to store the blood.<sup>364</sup> Many wells were also said to have been damaged.<sup>365</sup> Amnesty International wrote that many water pumps in Aksum had been stolen by Eritrean troops, forcing residents to drink water from wells and rivers.<sup>366</sup>

In May 2021, the IOM visited 301 sites in Tigray, Amhara and Afar where IDPs were being housed because of the conflict. According to the organisation's assessment, a considerable proportion of the IDP population lived in open fields or outdoors on 22 sites<sup>367</sup>. At 235 sites (81%) the population indicated that they wished to return to their place of residence. Reasons given for this were lack of safety and security, lack of food, damaged or destroyed housing and accessibility to the site. Overcrowding was seen by the IDPs as a major problem at 236 sites; at 230 sites the population said that they did not feel safe;<sup>368</sup> at 154 sites the living quarters were not waterproof; and at 193 sites there was no light.<sup>369</sup> On 4 July 2021, after the TDF regained control of Mekelle, according to OCHA, 23 IDP sites in and around Mekelle were unable to access clean water due to the lack of fuel to keep the water pumps working.<sup>370</sup>

<sup>360</sup> UNICEF, *At least 33,000 children in parts of Tigray, Ethiopia, at imminent risk of death as conflict increases famine threat*, 14 June 2021.

<sup>361</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE Situation Report*, 19 July 2021; AP News, *UN warns Tigray faces famine risk if aid isn't scaled up*, 27 May 2021.

<sup>362</sup> BBC News, *Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: UN aid chief says there is famine*, 11 June 2021; BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia dismisses reports of famine in war-torn Tigray*, 10 June 2021.

<sup>363</sup> HRW, *Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted*, 28 May 2021; The Economist, *After two months of war, Tigray faces starvation; Ethiopia*, 21 January 2021; World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, page 40, 6 April 2021

<sup>364</sup> The Economist, *After two months of war, Tigray faces starvation; Ethiopia*, 21 January 2021.

<sup>365</sup> Confidential source, 11 March 2021; The Economist, *After two months of war, Tigray faces starvation; Ethiopia*, 21 January 2021.

<sup>366</sup> Amnesty International, *The Massacre in Axum*, page 22, February 2021.

<sup>367</sup> To be classified as such, a site must contain at least 20 IDP households.

<sup>368</sup> Due to the lack of privacy and poor living conditions, girls and women were at high risk of gender-related violence (see also 1.2.4).

<sup>369</sup> IOM, *Emergency Site Assessment: Northern Ethiopia Crisis 6 Data Collection: 3 — 24 May 2021*, 27 June 2021; Annys, S., Vanden Bempt, T., Negash, E., De Sloover, L., Nyssen, J., page 33, version March 2021. *Tigray: atlas of the humanitarian situation*. *Journal of Maps*, preprint.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181\\_Tigray\\_Atlas\\_of\\_the\\_humanitarian\\_situation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349824181_Tigray_Atlas_of_the_humanitarian_situation)

<sup>370</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE Situation Report Last updated: 9 Jul 2021*, 9 July 2021.

#### 4.3.1 Humanitarian aid/access

The lack of accessibility to certain areas has been much discussed since the start of the conflict. The warring parties have accused each other of not allowing humanitarian aid through. A UN diplomat told *The Economist* that access to areas was being used as a weapon. Even before the conflict began in November 2021, the federal government is said to have tried to mount a blockade of Tigray.<sup>371</sup> A confidential source said in January 2021 that restrictions imposed by the federal government were still impeding humanitarian access. The few humanitarian organisations present in the region were not operational, according to the source. Many people in need of humanitarian aid had fled to inaccessible rural areas under TPLF control.<sup>372</sup> The World Peace Foundation report in April 2021 stated that little was known about the exact volume of humanitarian aid that was needed and the extent to which the demand for humanitarian aid was being met.<sup>373</sup>

In response to UN Representative Mark Lowcock's statement that 150 people had starved to death in the Tigrayan woreda of Ofla, the Ethiopian authorities claimed that no one in Tigray had died of starvation and that humanitarian assistance in the region was going well.<sup>374</sup> However, a confidential source stated in May 2021 that humanitarian aid was still insufficient to help the 4.5 million people in need properly. Rural areas in particular were said to still be too dangerous.<sup>375</sup> Another confidential source believed that IDPs were being kept alive almost exclusively by host communities.<sup>376</sup> Without specifically naming which forces were involved, the UN confirmed in May 2021 that military forces were refusing humanitarian access to certain areas in Tigray. Just 12 percent of the three million people who needed emergency shelter and non-food items were reached in the first few weeks of May 2021, according to the UN.<sup>377</sup>

According to OCHA, after the TDF had taken control of large parts of Tigray in late June 2021, the security situation there remained vulnerable and unpredictable. On 12 July, a humanitarian aid convoy had arrived in Mekelle for the first time in two weeks: the Tigrayan capital was reached overland from Addis Ababa via the Afar region. Parts of Southern Tigray and Western Tigray where the ASF was still in control were inaccessible, as were parts of North-western Tigray, the area to the north of Sheraro and some areas bordering Eritrea. OCHA wrote that despite the convoys that were able to reach Tigray, there were still too few supplies and personnel for all those in need in Tigray.<sup>378</sup> There were reports in July 2021 that both the federal government and the TPLF/TDF were blocking humanitarian aid. The Ethiopian federal government denied having blocked humanitarian aid flights to Tigray.<sup>379</sup> In turn, it accused the TPLF of attacking and blocking aid convoys from Afar. On 20 July 2021, TPLF/TDF-affiliated forces are said to have forcibly stopped a convoy in neighbouring Afar.<sup>380</sup>

<sup>371</sup> *The Economist*, *After two months of war, Tigray faces starvation; Ethiopia*, 21 January 2021.

<sup>372</sup> Confidential source, 22 January 2021:

<sup>373</sup> World Peace Foundation, *Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine*, p. 47, 6 April 2021

<sup>374</sup> FanaBC, *No One Dies From Hunger In Tigray: Commission*, 16 April 2021; Addis Standard, *Breaking: Report received by the UN "just this morning" reveals 150 people died of hunger in Tigray; Eritrean forces, Amhara region authorities restricting humanitarian access*, 15 April 2021; Reuters, *EXCLUSIVE UN official accuses Eritrean forces of deliberately starving Tigray*, 15 June 2021.

<sup>375</sup> Confidential source, 19 May 2021.

<sup>376</sup> Confidential source, 10 May 2021.

<sup>377</sup> Addis Standard, *News Alert: EU says humanitarian aid in Tigray used "as a weapon of war"; warns those responsible "will be held to account"*, 14 May 2021.

<sup>378</sup> OCHA, *ETHIOPIA - TIGRAY REGION HUMANITARIAN UPDATE Situation Report Last updated:*, 19 July 2021; FanaBC, *First Humanitarian Convoy To Enter Tigray For Two Weeks Arrives In Mekelle*, 12 July 2021

<sup>379</sup> BBC Monitoring (FanaBC), *Ethiopia denies blocking humanitarian flights to Tigray*, 9 July 2021.

<sup>380</sup> BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia accuses Tigray rebels of blocking humanitarian convoy*, 21 July 2021.

#### 4.4 Treatment of Tigrayans on returning to Ethiopia from abroad

There is a lot of support (online at least) from the Tigrayan diaspora for the fight against the federal government. The Ethiopian federal authorities therefore regard Tigrayans abroad with suspicion, according to several confidential sources. Ethiopian television has reported on Tigrayans abroad supporting the TPLF financially. Confidential sources also indicated that they sent money to relatives in the region where possible, but said that the money was intended to help their relatives meet their daily needs and not to fund the armed struggle. When asked, the sources were unable to cite any cases of negative treatment of Tigrayans on returning to Ethiopia, but said that nobody of their immediate acquaintance had returned to Ethiopia recently or dared to return because of the tensions in Ethiopia and the ethnic profiling of Tigrayans.<sup>381</sup>

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states continued to repatriate Ethiopian illegal migrant workers after the outbreak of the conflict in Tigray. The repatriation was suspended for a few months due to the coronavirus epidemic, but resumed in September 2020. By July 2021, more than 62,500 Ethiopians had returned from Saudi Arabia since the start of 2021, including 41,180 in the period from 26 June to 15 July 2021. The latter group included 13,781 people from Tigray. A confidential source reported that usually about 40% of Ethiopian returnees were of Tigrayan descent. The exact reason for this is unknown, but it could be because it is easier for Tigrayans to pay for the trip to Saudi Arabia in the first place, as they are slightly wealthier than many other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, another confidential source stated. IOM wrote in its July 2021 overview that many Ethiopian returnees are unable to return to their homes due to the security situation in their home communities or the areas they have to pass through in order to get home. Many of these people were staying in reception centres, including those run by the IOM. A confidential source stated that many of the Tigrayan returnees wanted to return to Tigray despite the violence in the region, which the source regarded as irresponsible. The source was unable to say to what extent the Tigrayans were actually returning to the region.<sup>382</sup>

In May 2021, the *Addis Standard* reported allegations that Tigrayans returning from Saudi Arabia had been detained. In late July 2021, there were reports of young Tigrayan returnees who had been detained and forced by the federal authorities to confess that they had been deployed as child soldiers by the TPLF.<sup>383</sup> As far as is known, reports on these confessions have not appeared in media other than Twitter.

<sup>381</sup> Omna Tigray, *Digital Activism During the Genocidal War in Tigray*, May 2021; Confidential source, 8 July 2021.

<sup>382</sup> ARRA, @EthRefugee, 12 July 2021: <https://twitter.com/EthRefugee/status/1414545150244704256>; Ethiopian Monitor, *Ethiopia Airlifts Close to 10, 000 its Nationals from Saudi Arabia*, 1 July 2021; Confidential source, 2 July 2021; IOM Ethiopia, *Flash Report - Returns from KSA*, 16 July 2021; confidential source, 1 August 2021; confidential source, 28 June 2021.

<sup>383</sup> Addis Standard, *Tigrayans repatriated from Saudi Arabia kept in detention, police unwilling to comment*, 10 May 2021; Gebremeskel Gebremaiam, @GebremeskelGeb, 23 July 2021: <https://twitter.com/GebremeskelGeb/status/1418546447809662976>.

## 5 Appendices

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IOM:

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

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World Peace Foundation:

- ***Starving Tigray, How Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities Have Destroyed an Ethiopian Region's Economy and Food System and Are Threatening Famine***, 6 April 2021.

#### News sources/databases

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ACLED	MSF
Addis Admas	NOS
Addis Standard	OCHA
Africa Confidential	Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
AfricaNews	OHCHR
Al Jazeera	Omna Tigray
Anadolu Agency	Oxfam
AP News	Passport Party
Arise News	Radio Mogadishu
ARRA	Reuters
BBC Monitoring	Security Council
BBC News	Shabait Website
Borkena	
CNN	

CPJ De Volkskrant Die Welt Dimitis Weyane TV EEPA ENA Ethiopia Autonomous Media Ethiopia Insight Ethiopian Monitor Ethiopia Observer EthiopPen ETV Euronews Ezega News FanaBC Financial Times Focus on Africa Focus on Tigray Foreign Policy France24 ICG International Press Institute IOM Human Rights Watch	Shabelle Media Network South China Morning Post Suna News Tghat The Africa Report The Economist The Independent The Jakarta Post The Guardian The New York Times The Telegraph The Times UNHCR UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia UNICEF UN News UN Security Council VRT
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#### Websites/YouTube/Twitter/FaceBook/Zoom

- ARRA, @EthRefugee
- EEPA Conference via Zoom
- EthiopiaMap, @MapEthiopia
- Ethiopian Media Authority, @EthMediaAuth
- Gebremeskel Gebremaiam, @GebremeskelGeb
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- Kjetil Tronvoll, @KjetilTronvoll
- Mereba Esset Conversations (Youtube)
- Messenbet Assefa, @messiassefa
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- Tghat, @Tghatmedia
- Zecarias Zelalem, @ZekuZelalem
- Zewde Tesfay, @zHagos2

## 5.2 List of abbreviations

ACCORD	- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation
ACLED	- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ADF	- Amhara Defence Force
AI	- Amnesty International
AMISOM	- African Union Mission in Somalia
ANDM	- Amhara National Democratic Movement
ARRA	- Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
AU	- African Union
CPJ	- Committee to Protect Journalists
EDF	- Eritrean Defence Forces
EEPA	- Europe External Programme Africa
EHRC	- Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
ENA	- Ethiopian News Agency
ENDF	- Ethiopian National Defence Forces
EPP	- Ethiopian Prosperity Party (see PP)
EPRDF	- Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESAT	- Ethiopian Satellite Television
ETV	- Ethiopian Television
GSTS	- Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals
HRW	- Human Rights Watch
ICG	- International Crisis Group
ICRC	- International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	- Internally Displaced Person
IOM	- International Organization for Migration
IPC	- Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
MSF	- Medecins sans Frontieres
OCHA	- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OCHCR	- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OFC	- Oromo Federal Congress
OLF	- Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	- Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization
PP	- Prosperity Party (see EPP)
SEPDM	- Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
TDF	- Tigray Defence Force
TDP	- Tigray Democratic Party
TPLF	- Tigray People's Liberation Front
UNHCR	- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNISFA	- United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
UNMISS	- United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan
WFP	- World Food Programme