



Tigrayan Advocacy & Development Association (TADA)

211 Clapham Road

London

SW9 0QH

Email: info@tadauk.org

Website: www.tadauk.org

Date: 23/06/2023

**Vaclav Balek,
President of UN Human Rights Council,
Office of The United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights,
Palais des Nations,
CH 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland**

**Permanent Representatives of Member and
Observer States of United Nations Human Rights Council.**

**Re: Threats to Terminate the Mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights
Experts on Ethiopia in September 2023.**

Excellencies,

We, the undersigned civil society and human rights organizations, are alarmed by the 15 February announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia to the Executive Council of the African Union that the Ethiopian government is planning to present a resolution at the upcoming session of the UN Human Rights Council to terminate the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts (ICHREE).

We write to urge your delegations to reject any resolution to prematurely terminate the mandate of ICHREE, and to express your support for the mandate and work of the Commission. The independent mandate and work of ICHREE is crucial to preserve the opportunity for victims of grave international crimes to have access to justice particularly because of the eroding environment for independent media and human rights monitoring of conflict-affected areas of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's attempts to terminate ICHREE's mandate during its term is unprecedented. Not only does it suggest that states can politically manoeuvre to overturn the decisions of the Human Rights Council to avoid independent scrutiny and accountability, but it could also set a dangerous precedent regarding international scrutiny and impunity for rights abuses elsewhere.

In November 2022, the Ethiopian federal government and Tigrayan authorities signed a cessation of hostilities agreement. While the agreement restored some long overdue aspects of civilian life, including easing some restrictions on basic services and humanitarian assistance, independent, effective investigations with a view to prosecution of grave international crimes will be key. **Ethnic Cleansing Persists Under the Pretoria Tigray Truce. Rights Abusers in Western Tigray Zone Face no Accountability for Torture, Forced Expulsions:**<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/01/ethiopia-ethnic-cleansing-persists-under-tigray->

[truce#:~:text=In%20an%20April%202022%20report,crimes%20and%20crimes%20against%20humanity.](#)

- Local authorities and Amhara forces in Western Tigray Zone in northern Ethiopia have continued an ethnic cleansing campaign against Tigrayans since the November 2, 2022, truce agreement.
- The Ethiopian government should suspend, investigate, and appropriately prosecute security forces and officials implicated in serious rights abuses in Western Tigray.
- International law provides that people forcibly removed from their homes have the right to return. However, the current context in Western Tigray is not conducive for voluntary, safe, and dignified returns: <https://www.hrw.org/about/people/laetitia-bader>

Excellencies,

“The November truce in northern Ethiopia has not brought about an end to the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans in Western Tigray Zone,” clearly expressed by Laetita Bader, deputy African director at Human Rights Watch said “If the Ethiopian government is really serious about ensuring justice for abuses, then it should stop opposing independent investigations into the atrocities in Western Tigray and hold abusive officials and commanders to account.

The work and mandate of ICHREE would complement the cessation of hostilities agreement which recognizes the need for accountability and justice. Victims of violations and their families in northern Ethiopia, as well as in other parts of the country, have expressed a lack of trust in state institutions and continue to seek greater international attention to their suffering and for action to end impunity. Ethiopia’s efforts to terminate ICHREE’s work would silence the hope and trust that victims have placed in it, including those who have already engaged with the ICHREE in the hope that their stories would be told.

With ongoing human rights abuses, and credible investigations and accountability at the domestic level still elusive, the Human Rights Council and its members should support those seeking justice and enable ICHREE to continue to fulfil the mandate it was given in 2021: to collect and preserve evidence of serious crimes committed, to identify those responsible, with a view where possible to make such information accessible and usable in support of ongoing and future accountability efforts. We reiterate our call to members and observers of the UN Human Rights Council to block Ethiopia’s efforts to terminate the mandate of the ICHREE, and to confirm your support for the ICHREE and the protection of the integrity of the Human Rights Council and its mandated bodies. **Honouring the ICHREE mandate will enhance peace and Security in Ethiopia & the Region. However, abandoning the mandate in Sept 2023 will make relapse to conflict imminent.**

Excellencies,

The United Nations Human Rights Council established the ICHREE on 17 December 2021 through Resolution S-33/1 and tasked it with investigating and documenting violations of international law committed by *all* parties to the armed conflict since November 2020, with a view to making such information available to support future accountability efforts. In September 2022, the council renewed ICHREE’s mandate for one year. ICHREE provided an oral update to the Council at its 52nd session on 21March2023 and will present its comprehensive report in September 2023.

During, the two and half years armed conflict in northern Ethiopia, all parties to the conflict committed gross human rights violations, that amount to crimes under international law such as war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions. As one of the parties to the armed conflict, the Ethiopia government military and its allied forces, including the Eritrean military, have been implicated in serious international law violations, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. These abuses include targeted attacks on civilians and civilian objects, indiscriminate attacks, mass extrajudicial executions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, denial of humanitarian assistance, arbitrary detention, and pillage. Governments are obligated to provide victims of abuses and their families with a meaningful remedy. Such a right includes access to justice, the right to truth, and reparations for the harm suffered. The absence of genuinely independent, impartial, and competent domestic investigations and prosecution, necessitates the ICHREE to continue to fulfil the mandate it was given in 2021.

The Ethiopian government rejected early calls for independent regional and international investigations, claiming that it was capable of carrying out such investigations itself. Meanwhile, government investigations and accountability steps taken so far to hold its forces and that of its allies, including Eritrean forces, have fallen far short from being credible and effective. Where warring states parties fail to pursue credible and meaningful investigations that can hold those responsible for grave violations to account, the international community should intervene to ensure justice and accountability for international crimes. There are no modalities or will power by the government of Ethiopia to implement the African Union Action Plan. At the regional level, Ethiopian authorities urged the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Commission of Inquiry on Tigray to "cease" its operations in June 2021 and refused to cooperate with the commission after the ACHPR refused to conduct their inquiry jointly with the national Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, a federal body which is micromanaged by the government.

Similarly, Ethiopia has rejected ICHREE's mandate since its inception, refused to cooperate with it, denied ICHREE access to conflict-affected areas inside Ethiopia, and repeatedly taken measures to undermine its work. It introduced resolutions twice at the UN General Assembly for its funding to be denied, most recently in December 2022. Since January, Ethiopia has called on the European Union, which are the penholders on the resolution, as well as ambassadors from the United Kingdom, the United States, and EU member states to terminate the mandate. In his speech during the Executive Council meeting of the African Union on 15 February 2023, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia announced that Ethiopia would submit a resolution to terminate the mandate of ICHREE during the 52nd session of the Council. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-seeks-end-un-ordered-probe-into-tigray-war-abuses-2023-02-27/>. The Ethiopian government's efforts demonstrate its lack of commitment to delivering justice for the millions who have suffered gross human rights violations, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, during the conflict in northern Ethiopia,".

Excellencies,

We, members of the Tigray Advocacy & Development Association- TADAUK demand the 53rd Session of the Human Rights Council to carefully consider:

- 1.** We, members of the Tigray Advocacy & Development Association- TADAUK, are gathered here today in front of the Office of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, to demand that the ongoing mass atrocities committed in Tigray must be stopped and investigated by independent, transparent and international body. As testified by the June 2023 Report on

Tigray, Ethiopia, by Human Rights Watch, the Amhara Paramilitary Fano and Eritrean forces have continued to commit mass atrocities in Tigray. To date over 1.9 million Tigrayans continued to be internally displaced due to genocidal occupation of Tigray.

2. We further demand that the perpetrators of crimes against Humanitarian and International Law - Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity - must be made to face justice.

3. We support the mandate and work of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopian (ICHREE); and strongly oppose Ethiopian, Eritrean & some dictatorial African governments' attempts to hinder-terminate its mandate.

4. Furthermore, we urge the UNHRC and the UN system in general to ensure that the ICHREE has full and unhindered access to Tigray so that it undertakes free, independent and comprehensive investigation.

5. We support the November 2022 Peace Agreement between the Tigrayan Regional Government and the Ethiopian Federal Government. Moreover, we demand its full implementation including the withdrawal of Eritrean and Amhara Regional Forces from Tigray and the unfettered flow of humanitarian assistance.

6. Yet, Western, North-Eastern, North Central and Southern Tigray are still occupied, and mass atrocities are being committed against Tigrayans by Eritrean and Amhara Regional armies. The provision of basic and essential services in Tigray is intermittent and is being used as a weapon of policy by the Ethiopian Government to subjugate Tigrayans. We demand the UNHRC to urge and demand these to stop, and to pressurise the Ethiopian Government to allow unfettered humanitarian access to Tigray.

7. Finally, we thank you and we shall continue to struggle so that justice is done in respect of the people of Tigray, and that the perpetrators of mass atrocities are made to face justice.

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