



Official Correspondence GSTS-O.C-2021-132
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)ⁱ

Classification: OPEN

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CC:

**Member States of the UN
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Geneva

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**Call for Independent and Impartial UN-Mandated Investigation into the Gender-based
Violence Committed on the Women and Girls of Tigray: As Part of the 16 days
Activism 2021 on “Orange the world: End Violence Against Women Now”**

Excellencies,

The war on Tigray, which started on the 4th of November 2020, has resulted in a massive humanitarian crisis with tens of thousands of conflict-related deaths, the displacement of millions, and the large-scale destruction of livelihood and civilian infrastructure. This dire humanitarian situation has been orchestrated and perpetrated by the allied Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), the Amhara Regional Special Forces (ASF), and exacerbated by the grave and unprecedented scale of atrocities, amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide.

A defining feature of this war has been the brutal weaponization of rape and sexual violence by the allied forces that deliberately targeted women and girls from ages 6 to 60. According to a UN report released in April 2021, the [number of women and girls](#) who suffered sexual violence was estimated at 22,500 but accounts on the ground suggest that over 52,000 women and girls have been raped. Accounts so far reported on the magnitude, nature, and cruelty of the gender-based sexual violence committed in Tigray are likely to constitute only the tip of the iceberg due to severe under-reporting because of cultural and societal taboos, lack of access to victims in Western, part of Northern and Eastern Tigray, where atrocities continue and communication blackout imposed by the Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara governments.

According to findings by [Amnesty International](#) and other [organizations](#), the sexual violence perpetrated on Tigrayan women and girls was characterized by “shocking levels of brutality, including rape, gang-rape, beatings, murder, sexual mutilation, dehumanizing verbal assaults, and other forms of torture, often accompanied by ethnic slurs and death threats. Some of the



victims were held in captivity by the perpetrators for days and weeks, in circumstances constituting sexual slavery; others were raped in front of their children and other family members.” Attacks also involved efforts to make victims infecund by burning their reproductive organs, [inserting foreign objects](#) including dirt and pieces of metals, nails, rocks, and plastic into the womb, and [deliberate infection with HIV/AIDS](#) and other STDs, revealing the genocidal intention of the weaponization of sexual violence against Tigrayan women and girls.

Rape was used systematically and deliberately in sadistic ways to inflict maximum pain and humiliation not only on the individual but at the community level. Aside from constituting heinous human rights violations, such large-scale sexual violence has also led to [increased rates of unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, maternal and neonatal death, miscarriage, premature labor, and mental health consequences for survivors](#). Furthermore, rape and sexual violence committed during war result in terrorizing the population, breaking up families, destroying communities, and changing the ethnic makeup for generations to come. By virtue of the systematic and weaponized rape and sexual violence, the lives and dreams of tens of thousands of innocent Tigray women and girls have been ruined.

These horrific reports of sexual violence were also accompanied by the verbally expressed intention of [“cleansing and purifying the victim’s blood”](#) with the aim of eradicating Tigrayan ‘genes’ on the part of the perpetrators. Survivors also recount ethnic slurs and degradation that sought to deliver not only psychological damage to the victim but collective humiliation of the people of Tigray. The scale and gravity of these atrocities led Amnesty International to conclude that they amount to war crimes and potentially crimes against humanity.

Despite ample evidence of the horrific sexual violence committed by the ENDF, EDF and ASF on the women and girls of Tigray, the [joint investigation and report](#) by the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) ignored these reports and the testimonies of brave survivors of such heinous crimes. The report misrepresented the depth, extent, and severity of the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) atrocities. In a way, the International Community and the UN collaborated and perpetuated the violence by silencing the survivors (as heard in comments from the representatives of the UN agencies trying to cover up for the violence in recently leaked audio recordings), ignoring their harrowing stories and testimonies, and minimizing the deliberate campaign against the women and girls of Tigray.

The report’s failure to particularly address such extensive weaponization of sexual violence, particularly at the hands of the ENDF, EDF, ASF, and Fano, an informal Amhara militia group, reveals the bias and methodological flaws in the investigation conducted. The report violates the cardinal principle of believing and documenting the stories of survivors of such heinous crimes against humanity as the first step to justice.

In addition to the miscarriage of justice perpetrated on the survivors of sexual violence by the joint investigation, they are being doubly victimized by the continued complete siege and [de-facto humanitarian blockade](#) that has been imposed by the Ethiopian regime. As a result of this brutal blockade and the complete [destruction of health facilities](#) in Tigray by the allied forces, survivors are prevented from getting lifesaving post-rape health care and related psychosocial support services.



The effects of sexual violence during armed conflicts are not time-bound but are cyclical and leave permanent scars for generations to come making peace elusive especially if left unaddressed properly. Undermining the impacts of sexual violence inhibits post-conflict reconciliation and imperils long-term stability.

Therefore, as part of the [UN Women](#) 16 Days of Activism 2021 efforts to raise global awareness and galvanize advocacy efforts with the theme "Orange the world: End violence against women now!" we, the GSTS and co-signing organizations, call for a united appeal to:

1. recognize the atrocities and widespread, systematic Gender-Based Violence (GBV) committed against the women and girls of Tigray and advocate for programmes and resources that prioritize supporting the most vulnerable women and girls;
2. swiftly call for the convening of a special session of the UN Human Rights Council to table an agenda on the sexual violence committed in Tigray and authorize an independent and impartial UN-mandated Commission of Inquiry (COI) to investigate alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide committed in Tigray including weaponized rape and sexual violence, and hold perpetrators accountable;
3. enforce the UN Security Council's resolutions on sexual violence in conflict and the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war - resolutions, 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), and 2467 (2019);
4. immediately end the siege and de-facto humanitarian blockage and thus ensure access to emergency reproductive health services, psycho-social and material support for survivors of rape and gang rape;
5. demand and intervene for an immediate end to the human rights abuses, including systematic large-scale rape and sexual violence, that continue to be perpetrated by the allied Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces in Western Tigray, by Eritrean Forces in Northern and Eastern Tigray including the Irob minority group and allegations of violations across Ethiopia.

Finally, we, the GSTS and co-signing Tigrayan organizations, remain committed to collaborating with Your Excellencies, Your offices, and other relevant UN organs to the independent UN-mandated investigation of all crimes committed in Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia in general, and weaponized sexual violence in particular, end the ongoing genocide, remove the siege and humanitarian blockage, facilitate negotiated ceasefire and dialogue, as well as ensure accountability aimed at ushering long-lasting peace and mutual coexistence in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region at large.



Sincerely,
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS), and
Co-signing Organizations
25th November 2021



Co-Signatories

1. Mekelle University (MU)
2. Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)
3. OMNA Tigray
4. Tigray Development Association (TDA)-Norge
5. Women of Tigray
6. Union of Tigrayans in Belgium
7. Tigrayans Association in Finland
8. Tigray Frauen Verein in Deutschland e.V.
9. Tigray Action Committee(TAC)
10. TigrayHub
11. Tigray Community Association In Adelaide South Australia (TCAASA)
12. Health Professionals Network for Tigray (HPN)
13. Tigrayan Community Association in South Africa (TCASA)
14. Mekete Tigray UK
15. Tigray Women Association in London, UK
16. Mereba Esset
17. Tigrayan Community of Western Australia (Perth)
18. Tigrayan Women Association in Sweden
19. Tigrayan Association in Switzerland
20. Tigray Diaspora Inter-Religious Council (TDIRC)
21. Tigray-Äthiopischer Verein in Deutschland e.V.
22. Security and Justice for Tigrayans (SJT)
23. HARA-Global Union of Tegar Youth
24. Vereniging van Tigray Nederland
25. Foreningen af Tigrayaner i Danmark (FTD)
26. Tigray Community in Sydney
27. TGHAT
28. Vereniging van Ethiopische Tigreërs in Nederland
29. Stand with Tigray (SWT)
30. Tigrean Association in Canberra
31. Vereniging Tigray Development Association in Nederland
32. Irob Anina Civil Society (IACS)
33. Union of Tigrayans in Europe (UTE)
34. Tigray Development Association (TDA) - South Korea
35. United Tegar Canada (UTC)
36. Tigray community in New Zealand incorporated Auckland
37. Association of Tigrayan Community in Canada (ATCC)
38. Tigray Kultur Verein in Deutschland e.V
39. Enderta Development Association - Germany
40. Entwicklungsinitiative für Tigray - Deutschland e.V.
41. Tigray Youth Network (TYN)
42. Tigray Development Association (TDA) - China
43. Tigray Gemeinde der Kriegsgeschädigten in Deutschland e.V.
44. Tigray Community in Queensland Australia (TCQA)
45. Tigray Unity Germany
46. Kdus Yared - Germany
47. Tinsae Tigray kvinneforening
48. Tigray Muslim Women Association in Europe

ⁱ GSTS is a 501(C), and 33/2011 legally registered non-partisan, not-for-profit, and autonomous Global Knowledge Network of over 3,500 Tigray Scholars and Professionals aimed at creating Knowledge-based economy and society in Tigray, and beyond. It stands for academia, multidisciplinary and cross sectoral research and applied policy development, human capital development, fostering and advancing science, technology, and innovation, technology and knowledge transfer, youth and gender development, migration and displacement, and other educational and development related endeavors. It also works in educational advocacy and collaborates with various stakeholders towards promoting peace, good governance, human rights, and humanitarian activities.