



Official Correspondence GSTS-O.C-2022-435
The Global Society of Tigray Scholars
and Professionals (GSTS)¹

Classification: OPEN
19th December 2022

H.E. Federico Villegas Beltrán
President of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva

H.E. Josep Borrell Fontelles
EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy
Brussels

H.E. Volker Türk
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva

CC:
Member States of UN Human Right Council

**Re: Expressing Alarm and Outrage at the Ethiopian Government’s Call for the
Termination of the Mandate of the ICHREE**

Your Excellencies,

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS) is alarmed and outraged by the [call](#) from the Ethiopian government to terminate the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE). We appeal to the European Union and all member states of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) to categorically reject this outrageous demand and continue to support the ICHREE.

The GSTS welcomed the Pretoria (South Africa) and Nairobi (Kenya) Peace Talks on the record and repeatedly reiterated our belief that a negotiated settlement presents the only viable solution to the deadliest crisis in the world today. At the same time, we strongly aver that an independent and impartial UN-mandated investigation remains to be the only viable route to get justice and bring sustainable peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region at large.

¹GSTS is a 501(C) and 33/2011 legally registered non-partisan, not-for-profit network knowledge network operating all over the world. With over 5,000 members, (approximately 1/5 of whom are PhD holders), GSTS is the largest and most active academic and professional association in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Since the onset of the war on Tigray on 4th November 2020, GSTS has been engaged in research-based fact finding; data collection and documentation, legal analysis and interpretation, and humanitarian advocacy surrounding human rights violations, amounting to war of aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide perpetrated against the Tigrayan people.

We strongly stress that any international collaboration with the Ethiopian government's efforts to circumvent justice and accountability will only serve as further evidence of the uneven treatment of human suffering in the world based on race, colour, and geographical location, and disregard for humanity and international conventions on human rights, international and refugee laws. This will in turn also set a dangerous precedence for other governments who perpetrate heinous atrocity crimes on their own people.

In its recent [report](#), the ICHREE concluded that heinous atrocity crimes have been committed in Tigray including rape, sexual slavery, and sexual violence which have been used as methods of warfare, all amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. With this in mind, we appeal to your excellencies to safeguard the principles-based international order and ensure accountability for the gross violations of human rights, international humanitarian laws, and refugee laws in Tigray, and other parts of Ethiopia, by offering all-rounded support including allocating the necessary human and financial resources, and logistics to the work of the ICHREE.

The mass atrocity crimes committed on the people of Tigray include, but are not limited to:

- civilian deaths of more than 800,000 Tigrayans;
- Extrajudicial executions of civilians with over 283 massacre sites identified;
- Widespread weaponized rape and sexual violence against women and girls;
- Heavy indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombing including using armed drones, targeting the civilian population, private and public infrastructure, and other spaces, including residential homes, hospitals, camps of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugee camps, kindergartens, hydroelectric power grids, and distribution units, places of worship, electric substations, and public transportation, leading the killing of scores of innocent civilians and destruction of public and private spaces;
- The systematic destruction of the Tigrayan economy and livelihoods, and the deliberate destruction of food and livelihood sources critical for survival to induce the starvation of the civilian population;
- Systematic medieval siege and humanitarian blockade, weaponized starvation, and deliberate and long interruption of basic services, including water, electricity, transportation, communication, internet, banking, electricity, fuel, and medical emergencies to deny fundamental needs and rights to over seven million civilian population of Tigray;
- Deliberate destruction and looting of public and private service institutions and properties such as universities, hospitals, pharmacies, health centres, schools, factories, hotels, bakeries, etc.;
- Systematic and state-sponsored genocidal, inflammatory and dehumanizing rhetoric against Tigrayans, including characterizing Tigrayans as terrorists, cancer, invasive weeds, junta, Satan, looters, hyenas, etc., putting all Tigrayans, as a group of people, in and outside of Tigray at grave risk;
- Over 2.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), from Western, North-western, Central, Eastern and Southern Tigray and over 75,000 refugees into Sudan due to forcible and illegal annexure of large swathes of Tigrayan territory by Amhara and Eritrean forces and systematic demographic change through ethnic-cleansing; and

- Systematic destruction and pillage of UNESCO-registered and other heritage and cultural sites, places of worship, identity markers etc.

Though the war's true toll could be much higher, over 800,000 civilians are reported to have perished due to the atrocities committed by the invading forces, man-made starvation, and easily preventable diseases as of April 2022. This data excludes the mass massacres following the renewed war declared and war by the invading forces since the 26th of August 2022. Even after the peace agreement has come into effect more than 65% of the Tigrayan population remains under the brutal occupation of Eritrean and Amhara forces, suffering large-scale massacres, extrajudicial killings, rape and sexual violence, kidnappings, abduction, looting etc. on daily basis.

Your Excellencies,

In post-genocide societies, a transitional justice process is instituted to ensure accountability and justice and lays a foundation for a truth commission, reconciliation and durable peace. A fair and effective investigation, an overreaching requirement for criminal proceedings, is vital to accountability. In the absence of adequate, comprehensive, and effective investigation (in scope and reach), holding perpetrators of crimes accountable is difficult, if not impossible. In international criminal proceedings, the perception of the victim group toward the proceeding matters, and a criminal investigation process that fails to realize the above core objectives erodes the victim group's trust in the proceeding and defeats the purpose and objective of the process.

This cannot be guaranteed by the Ethiopian government because Ethiopia does not have an independent and impartial functioning domestic system capable of investigating such large-scale and complex crimes committed by the state and delivering justice to the victims. All institutions and organs established and funded by the Ethiopian government including the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), The Inter-Ministerial Task Force (IMTF), the National Dialogue Commission (NDC), justice systems, etc. have been weaponized in the war on Tigray and are potential subjects of investigation liable to be held accountable for direct and/or indirect involvement in the egregious atrocities committed against the civilian population of Tigray. Owing to these facts, the joint investigation by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-OHCHR) and the partisan, state-run and government-affiliated body, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) failed to ensure accountability and thus deliver justice for the victims because of impartiality, systematic flaws in its methodologies, and temporal and territory limitations imposed by the Ethiopian government.

With this in mind we reiterate our plea to your excellencies, the EU, the UNHRC and their member states along with the international community at large to repudiate the Ethiopia government's demand to terminate the mandate of ICHREE, and instead stand with justice not with impunity, and with victims not with perpetrators, by reinforcing the support to the UN human rights experts.

GSTS stands ready to collaborate with all good faith international actors and the ICHREE to make the mission of the investigation a success, and establish accountability aimed at ushering long-lasting peace and mutual coexistence in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa region at large.