

PRESS RELEASE

ALLEGATIONS OF MASSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN TIGRAY SUBMITTED IN LANDMARK CASE AGAINST ETHIOPIA

Geneva, Arusha, and New York—Tuesday, 13 December 2022

On Tuesday, allegations of massive human rights violations were submitted to the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (the “African Commission”) against the state of Ethiopia. The submission, filed on behalf of Tigrayan victims of the conflict in Northern Ethiopia, by [Legal Action Worldwide](#) (LAW), the [Pan-African Lawyers Union](#) (PALU), and [Debevoise & Plimpton LLP](#), follows the African Commission’s October decision to indicate emergency provisional measures urging Ethiopia to cease all allegations of violations and ensure full humanitarian access in Tigray.

The African Commission is responsible for promoting the rights contained in the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (the “African Charter”) and ensuring their protection in Africa. When it seized itself of the landmark case on 14 October 2022, the Commission became the first human rights body to consider claims arising out of the armed conflict and humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia.

Tuesday’s submission, which comes just three days after Human Rights Day 2022, highlights in devastating detail the widespread human rights violations committed against Tigrayan civilians, including:

1. Military airstrikes and artillery shelling targeting civilians;
2. Massacres and extrajudicial killings of unarmed civilians, including women, children, and the elderly;
3. Widespread and brutal sexual and gender-based violence against Tigrayan women, men, and children, often wielded as a weapon of war in order to intimidate and dehumanize;
4. Systematic arbitrary detention and torture of Tigrayan civilians on the sole basis of their ethnicity;
5. Attacks on critical civilian infrastructure such as schools, agricultural facilities, and hospitals and clinics, as well as on religious and cultural heritage sites and personnel;
6. Rampant anti-Tigrayan hate speech and propaganda spread by the Federal Government and military officials, including Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed;
7. A punishing power and communications blackout in Tigray, which has prevented most communication between Tigray and the outside world for two years;
8. Massive forced displacement of people from the Tigray region, with civilians forced to flee their homes and even the country out of fear for their safety, often to overcrowded

refugee camps, and with thousands of families forcibly separated as they seek refuge from the fighting and shelling;

9. A devastating humanitarian blockade of the region, which has resulted in thousands of preventable deaths due to famine and severe shortages of medicine and medical supplies; and
10. A failure to investigate and prosecute these violations, as Ethiopia is obliged to do by international law.

A commission of UN experts, the US Government, the EU, and multiple human rights organizations, have found that some of these acts amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.

Ethiopia will now have 60 days to provide its reply to the complainants' submissions. For the next phase, the complainants have requested an oral hearing before the African Commission to present their case on behalf of the witnesses.

The landmark case is more critical than ever. The Peace Agreement signed on 2 November 2022 between the Federal Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front fails to set out the road to justice and accountability for the crimes and human rights violations committed by Ethiopia and its associated forces. Victims, survivors and their communities are left wondering whether this agreement will pave the way for impunity, rather than justice.

A former Tigrayan Ethiopian military officer, who is a witness in these proceedings, stated: *"We have longed for peace and have waited for it for a long time. But I am very worried about whether peace will actually become a reality. Justice has to be served for those who lost their lives. My life was turned upside down by this conflict. I had a good education, a career that was progressing, a family I could support with my income, and dreams to start my own family. All of that was taken away from me. I don't know when I will see my family again. I lost the country that I loved and wanted to serve."*

A former Tigrayan teacher and instructor, who also provided a statement to the complainants, stated: *"Our politicians will forget, but what about the families who suffered in this war? What about the women who were raped? Who will cry for them? Who will bring accountability for them?"*

Antonia Mulvey, Executive Director of LAW, said: *"At a time when there is so much suffering in the world, it is easy for the voices of victims to be stifled. But today, survivors of this, one of the worst human rights and humanitarian crises in current times, speak directly to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and ask them to hear their demands for justice. We implore the African Commission to listen and take action."*

Donald Deya, Chief Executive Officer of PALU, said: *"The African Commission has a unique opportunity to support the peace process sponsored by the African Union. By delivering justice for Tigrayan victims, the African Commission can reaffirm the centrality of accountability in achieving lasting peace in the region."*

Catherine Amirfar, Co-Chair of Debevoise's International Dispute Resolution and Public International Law Groups, said: *"The evidence of Ethiopia's widespread human rights violations is staggering. The African Commission has a critical opportunity to consider the victims' claims and evidence and hold Ethiopia accountable for its breaches of international law. We will continue this essential work on behalf of all Tigrayan victims."*