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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2021]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **The Human Rights Situation in Tigray region**

Since 2018 until now, the Addis Ababa government has witnessed a number of clear political changes that had strong effects on various political, social and security aspects, topped by the government's decision to dissolve the coalition known as the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that consists of four ethnic-based parties and merge them into one party known as Ethiopia prosperity party (EPP), among other practices that resulted in a real crisis between the Addis Ababa government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). From June 2021 until now, August 2021, Ethiopia's northernmost region has been involved in a bloody conflict with the Ethiopian government, and in light of the tense situation and the deterioration of the human rights situation, Elizka Relief Foundation presents this written intervention for the attention of the Human Rights Council and in light of the recommendations submitted to the Fact-Finding Mission to the Tigray region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

### **First: the most recent developments in the Tigray region over the last three months**

There has been a continuous escalation of tensions between Ethiopia's federal government and the TPLF for over one year now. The federal government announced in June 2021 its control of all the border crossings of Tigray region with Sudan and on the borders with Amhara and Afar regions to prevent the entry of humanitarian aid to the residents of Tigray. In response to this move, Tigray forces claimed to have completely destroyed an Ethiopian army division. The Ethiopian forces sought help from Djibouti, but the Tigray forces, after successive victories over the Ethiopian army in July 2020, could restore the Tigray's capital, Mekelle, along with other key cities, about eight months after the government forces seized the majority of the Tigray region, which forced the Ethiopian government to declare a unilateral ceasefire in the region.

Although the Ethiopian government declared a ceasefire, the violence in the region did not only continue but also escalated and reached neighboring regions. In early August 2021, fighting broke out in the Afar region in the northeast of the country, and affected the largest part of the region. In the meanwhile, special forces and militias from a number of Ethiopia's regions began mobilizing to back the federal government's military operations in Tigray, and in a continuous escalation of the crisis, the Addis Ababa government announced on August 11, 2021 to end the unilateral ceasefire and encourage civilians to join the Ethiopian Defense Forces, the armed forces and militias, which portends the continuation of the civil war not only in the Tigray region between the Addis Ababa government and the TPLF, but also in many other regions.

### **Second: The human rights situation in the Tigray region over the last three months**

Undoubtedly, the escalating civil war in Ethiopia has resulted in horrible human rights violations which costs are mainly paid by innocent people. The Ethiopian government forces have not only committed grave violations against civilians, but also summoned the Eritrean forces and used their help to get rid of the TPLF forces. The Eritrean forces have committed atrocities against civilians in the Tigray, where the number of Eritrean forces in Ethiopia has reached over 40 military trucks loaded with soldiers from Eritrea to the Ethiopian city of Hamra. The following section presents the most prominent violations that occurred during the period covered by the intervention.

#### **A. The Right to Life**

Although there is no specific statistics for the number of casualties so far, it is expected that the war has left thousands of civilians and soldiers dead in the fighting on the two fronts. The most prominent incidents are monitored as follows: on June 23, the Ethiopian forces launched an air raid on a market in Tigray, killing more than 80 civilians, and the Ethiopian forces blocked roads and prevented ambulances from entering. On July 22, at least 20 civilians were

killed and tens of thousands were displaced as a result of violent clashes between rebels and pro-government forces in the Ethiopian Afar region, which is neighboring to the Tigray region.

In late July, armed militias from the Afar region massacred hundreds of civilians in Gedamaytu town, which is part of a deep-rooted conflict between the two regions in northeastern Ethiopia.

#### B. The Right to Food

The deteriorating security situation in the region has exacerbated the food crisis. Due to the ongoing conflict and the obstruction of humanitarian aid access to the region by the Ethiopian government, more than 400,000 people are suffering from starvation. In addition, nearly 5.2 million people need humanitarian assistance.

#### C. The Right to Housing and Shelter

As a result of the permanent conflict in the Tigray region, more than 3 million people are in need of shelter, after their homes were destroyed in the war. The Ethiopian government deprived the displaced from being enrolled in schools and colleges; therefore, they were forced to remain in the open without shelter, letting 77% in need of shelter and non-food items in Tigray.

On August 3, 2021, 3,000 Ethiopians crossed the border to Sudan, which is the largest wave of refugees crossing the border between the two countries, since the outbreak of fighting in the Tigray region in November 2020, and the total number of Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan reached nearly 80,000.

#### D. Women's & Girls' Rights

Unfortunately, the Ethiopian forces are using violence against women and girls in their war against the TPLF, as a large number of women and girls under the age of 8 are subjected to daily rape, which often amounts to death. The reported cases of sexual assault amounted to about 830, not to mention dozens of other undeclared cases. It is noteworthy that a number of those cases were committed by the Eritrean forces loyal to the Ethiopian government.

#### E. Cultural & Heritage Rights

In light of the continuous destruction of cultural facilities in the Ethiopian regions, at the beginning of the crisis, the Ethiopian forces destroyed the historic city of Aksum in Tigray, which is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. On August 8, the Tigray Liberation Front announced the destruction of the historic town of Lalibela, listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, which is located in the neighboring Amhara region, where the town of Lalibela is famous for its 13th-century rock-carved churches, is a sacred site for millions of Orthodox Christians.

## Recommendations

Elizka Relief Foundation presents this written intervention for the attention of the Human Rights Council and in light of the recommendations made to the Fact-Finding Mission to the Tigray region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

a. Urging the Government of Ethiopia to provide guarantees by all armed and security agencies for safe routes that enable humanitarian workers to deliver supplies to and from Tigray.

b. Taking all necessary measures to deliver essential supplies to the protesters, in order to prevent the risk of starvation and to work on using appropriate equipment and means of communication, with the need for guarantees through which aid trucks can be protected.

c. Urging the government of Ethiopia to protect the displaced and those fleeing the war and to provide adequate shelter on a temporary basis instead of having to migrate to neighboring countries, in addition to securing the border areas between Sudan and Ethiopia in order to prevent violations in that area, as is already happening.

d. Elizka denounces the policy of summoning foreign forces adopted by the Ethiopian government against the Tigray fighters, and calls for its cessation, and also demands that the necessary measures be taken to expedite the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from Ethiopia and to prosecute the perpetrators of these crimes.

e. Elizka calls for the coordination of cooperation between the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Commission of Inquiry of the Human Rights Council, and not to waste efforts and to work for joint and rapid access to the results of their investigations to serve the rights of the Tigray people.

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