



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
21 March 2023

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-second session

27 February–31 March 2023

Agenda item 4

### Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

## **Written statement\* submitted by Physicians for Human Rights, 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.

[6 February 2023]

---

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



## Humanitarian Crisis and Ongoing Human Rights Violations In The Tigray Region of Ethiopia

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is an international human rights organization that works at the intersection of medicine, science, and law. PHR thanks the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (UN ICHREE) for its work documenting and making accessible information regarding the situation of human rights in Ethiopia.

HPN4T is a nonprofit and non-partisan organization founded by a group of doctors and other professionals committed to improving access to health care and supporting unmet humanitarian needs in Tigray.

We welcomed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) signed November 2, 2022. Despite the agreement, however, millions of people in Tigray continue to suffer from ongoing human rights violations, including lack of access to basic services and medical treatment.

Therefore, we submit here a brief updated report on the status of health care and human rights in Tigray, and we implore this body to play a constructive role in the ongoing efforts to restore peace, provide relief, and ensure accountability. The humanitarian crisis in Tigray is still one of the world's worst and it is imperative that the UN, its Member States, and its agencies continue to take action to ensure access to aid and justice for victims.

Prior to the onset of the war in November 2020, Tigray's robust health care system consisted of two tertiary-care referral hospitals and over 1,000 medical facilities, including primary- and secondary-care hospitals, health centers, and health posts. The joint Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Ethiopian Human Rights Commission investigation from November 2020 to June 2021 found that, after the start of the war, 82% of health centers in Tigray were no longer functional. The healthcare facilities were significantly damaged from shelling, looting, and vandalization, and they lacked medical personnel. A January 2023 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) update "Ethiopia: New footage from Tigray shows widespread destruction of health facilities" revealed that areas in Tigray still lack access to health services.

Further, doctors on the ground report to HPN4T that hospitals across Tigray are currently having problems receiving basic medical supplies, including intravenous (IV) fluids, IV antibiotics, gauze, and laboratory reagents. Health care workers have been forced to use any materials at their disposal to treat the injured, including mothers' scarves as gauze and homemade mixtures of water and table salt to wash body parts. Essential medications, including chemotherapy drugs and other pharmaceutical supplies, are critically needed. The health information management system is in ruins. Nearly 30,000 health care workers have not been paid for over 18 months.

We share this information because, despite the CoHA, the humanitarian crisis in Tigray is far from over. Due to vaccine and medication shortages, there are outbreaks of malaria, rabies, anthrax, polio, measles, and other infectious and communicable diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis. A study conducted by the Tigray Bureau of Health, Mekelle University, and the Tigray Health Research Institute found that the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) as of May 2022 was 840/100,000 live births, nearly five times the pre-war MMR.<sup>(1)</sup> The majority of these deaths occurred at home, due in part to the fact that a fleet of 280 ambulances in Tigray was reduced to 30, as reported by UNICEF in January 2021. Prior to the war, in 2019/2020, 59% of the 280 ambulances were serving mothers going into labor.<sup>(2)</sup>

Millions of people in Tigray are also still suffering from lack of access to food and resulting malnutrition, exacerbating disease outbreaks and health issues. Streets in cities across Tigray are filled with children begging for food, including those orphaned, homeless, and displaced. As of February 2, 2023, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA) bi-weekly situational report, pockets of areas in Tigray remain hard to reach and humanitarian response in newly accessible areas remains highly constrained.<sup>(3)</sup> Challenges to delivering aid include the presence of armed forces and lack of cash.

In addition to hindering aid delivery, the continued presence of Eritrean and other non-Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) forces in Tigray has resulted in ongoing violations

of international human rights, including the rights to life, health, freedom from torture and ill treatment, and equality and non-discrimination, even post-CoHA. There are recent reports of massacres and direct killings of thousands of civilians, ongoing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), forced disappearances, and additional ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray. Tigrayan civilians are still languishing in concentration camps in Tigray and across Ethiopia.<sup>(4)</sup> Diaspora relatives of minority ethnic groups in Tigray, including the Irob and Kunama people, report to HPN4T fears of complete extinction.

Many people, including health care workers, in Tigray feel that the international community has failed them time and time again throughout the course of the war. According to a 2021 Ghent University study reported in the Washington Post, as well as updated 2022 estimates, between 500,000 and 800,000 civilians in Tigray have died due to direct killings, starvation, and lack of health care since November 2020.<sup>(5)</sup> Hundreds of civilians have been killed and injured in drone and air strikes in Tigray. A contact from the Tigray Regional Health Bureau reports to HPN4T that initial research estimates there to be over 200,000 survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). In addition to systematic attacks on the health care system, according to Human Rights Watch, 35 aid workers have been killed in Tigray throughout the war.<sup>(6)</sup> There has been no accountability or justice, despite the UN ICHREE's September 2022 report finding evidence that all parties had engaged in war crimes and the Ethiopian government had committed crimes against humanity.

We appreciate and commend the steps that have been taken to silence the guns and ramp up aid delivery in the three months since the signing of the CoHA agreement. However, confidence in the CoHA is dwindling daily due to lack of full implementation, as well as weak monitoring, verification, and compliance mechanisms. The UN and Member States must act expeditiously to prevent the situation on the ground from deteriorating again. Some of the same human rights violations reported in Tigray are occurring in other regions of Ethiopia, including Oromia, threatening the stability of the entire Ethiopian state and Horn of Africa region at large.

In light of the above statement PHR and HPN4T call on the Human Rights Council to:

- Continue to support the enforcement of the withdrawal of Eritrean and non-ENDF forces, uphold international humanitarian and human rights laws, and ensure full implementation and monitoring of the CoHA.
- Ensure the full rehabilitation of the health care system including repair of damaged infrastructure, full access to necessary medical supplies and medicines, resumption of vaccination campaigns, full access to banking to facilitate health systems operations and providing salaries for health care workers.
- Ensure survivors of CRSV, including children, have access to health care and justice that is comprehensive, survivor-centered, and trauma informed.
- Ensure IDPs and civilians across Ethiopia receive fully unfettered humanitarian aid, including medicine and vaccines, food, water, and shelter, and informed choice for return to their homes.
- Provide funding to UN agencies, local and international NGOs for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, including earmarking emergency and rehabilitation funds specifically for Tigray and monitoring budget allocations.
- Hold all parties accountable and ensure justice for prior and ongoing human rights violations across Ethiopia that are survivor-led.
- Implement international processes for investigation and documentation of human rights violations in Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia, including continued support and full funding for the ICHREE.
- Ensure unrestricted access for human rights investigators to conflict affected areas of Ethiopia, including the UN ICHREE and African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights.
- Support transitional justice processes, including national transitional justice processes reflected in Article 10(3) of the CoHA, using the full spectrum of transitional justice

mechanisms, including criminal accountability, reparations, truth telling, and guarantees of non-recurrence.

- Review Eritrea's membership on the Human Rights Council and consider suspension for gross violations of human rights.

---

Health Professionals Network for Tigray, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

(1) <https://apnews.com/article/health-africa-united-nations-only-on-ap-kenya-cdf2a4cbbd6ea7431a2d2359db1792ce>

(2) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8611430/>

(3) <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ethiopia>

(4) <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ethiopia-conflict-prisoners/>

(5) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/the-worlds-deadliest-war-isnt-in-ukraine-but-in-ethiopia/2022/03/22/eaf4b83c-a9b6-11ec-8a8e-9c6e9fc7a0de\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/the-worlds-deadliest-war-isnt-in-ukraine-but-in-ethiopia/2022/03/22/eaf4b83c-a9b6-11ec-8a8e-9c6e9fc7a0de_story.html)

(6) [https://twitter.com/LaetitiaBader/status/1581537814847533056?s=20&t=biDFd\\_oriwY6S8iVAIDiA](https://twitter.com/LaetitiaBader/status/1581537814847533056?s=20&t=biDFd_oriwY6S8iVAIDiA)