



## **Why the Ethiopian Human Right Commission Should Not be Involved in the Joint Investigation of the War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide in Tigray?**

*Evidences and Analysis on the Biased Reporting, and Lack of [Independence, Integrity, Impartiality, Credibility, Objectivity, Factual Consistency and Professional Competence] of EHRC*

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars  
and Professionals (GSTS)<sup>1</sup>  
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<sup>1</sup> GSTS is a Non-Partisan Global Knowledge Network of 3,000+Tigray Scholars & Professionals, established with the aim of creating Knowledge-based sustainable economy & Society in Tigray & beyond.



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## Executive summary

This report documents and analyses the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) partisan position on the war in Tigray. Through its investigation of public sources (e.g., videos, reports, etc.), this document concludes that the EHRC lacks the calibre and attributes needed to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide being perpetrated in Tigray.

The report presents ample evidences that the EHRC has been engaged in pro-government efforts; and it has been employing tactics that contributed to the unrestrained ethnic polarization in Ethiopia. These issues have manifested in their reporting, as the EHRC has repeatedly released biased information on human rights violations in Ethiopia while also tactfully downplaying the grave humanitarian crises and war crimes in Tigray. Additionally, reports from the EHRC have proved to be inconsistent and partisan. More specifically, the EHRC has selectively highlighted cases that are believed to serve the government's narrative while also modulating the atrocities and consequences of the war in Tigray until they were reported by other human rights agencies.

The EHRC is not only effectively serving the interest of the Federal Government of Ethiopia but also that of the Amhara regional government, which is one of the main actors involved in the war in Tigray. In its reports about Western Tigray, EHRC refrains from admitting that Tigrayans have been ethnically cleansed from the area, despite mounting evidences about the case, including from the USA Department of State. By quoting government officials, it rather attempts to allude that Tigrayans consented to be transported to "chosen destinations". The Federal Government of Ethiopia and Amhara regional government vehemently reject that ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans has been taking place in Western and Southern Tigray. Unfortunately, EHRC is working in support of the two governments in this regard.

Although many reports and videos have shown that Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) members are killing civilians and raping women and girls, the EHRC is quoting a member of the ENDF to report that ENDF was working lawfully and ethically. Additionally, in-line with the federal government's claims, the EHRC report quotes the interim government in Tigray and insinuates to attribute the sexual and gender-based violence to prisoners who escaped following the war, while statistical evidences contrarily show that 89% of the rapes are perpetrated by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers, and Amhara militia. By doing so, the EHRC is defeating the whole purpose of an impartial investigation as it is seeking information from and collaborating with the alleged perpetrators.

These affiliations and partisan tendencies are critical impediments to the independent and impartial investigations concerning the war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Tigray. Given these concerns, we strongly urge that the UN reverses its decision to conduct a joint investigation with the EHRC into the human rights violations and abuses in the context of the war in Tigray. Furthermore, we call on the UN-OHCHR to conduct an independent investigation of the grave crimes committed in Tigray, as neglecting to do so would discount the UN's commitments to human rights, deny a much-deserved justice to millions of victims, threaten the well-being of millions and have a lasting corrosive effect on the UN's standing and legitimacy in the world.



## Background

According to Article 55 of the Ethiopian Constitution, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is accountable to the House of People’s Representatives. However, the Tigrayan people are without representation in the current parliament or House of Federation since the terms of both houses have come to an end on October 5, 2020. Thus, at its current state, the EHRC is not accountable to the Tigrayan people, and Tigrayans lack any institutional pathway to bring their grievances to the EHRC.

Furthermore, the EHRC has a track record of producing reports that undermine the gravity of the human rights violations taking place in Ethiopia. In a report dated to June 17, 2019, Amnesty International (AI) published an extensive report on the EHRC’s failures and limitations<sup>2</sup>. Joan Nyanyuki, AI’s former Director for East Africa, the Horn, and the Great Lakes, is quoted in the report saying “brazen bias against victims and a dismissive stance towards their complaints means that the EHRC’s reports on protestor killings and prison conditions squandered opportunities to make things right for the victims, and everyone else in the country”.

The AI’s assessment further outlines that the EHRC reports also attribute deaths (e.g., protestor deaths) to “unknown” causes; and instead of exposing and holding security forces accountable for human rights abuses, EHRC rather puts the blame on the victims of the human rights violations. We observe strikingly similar trends in the EHRC reports on the war on Tigray. More specifically, the EHRC has refrained from explicitly naming the perpetrators (e.g., Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers) in the sexual violence and civilian massacres that have been widely documented and reported by the international community. The consistent and intentional use of vague language such as “others” in reference to perpetrators inhibits fair reporting and obstructs justice.

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<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International. Ethiopia: Human Rights Commission Must Be Reformed to Correct Miscarriage of Justice, 17 June 2019, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/ethiopia-human-rights-commission-must-be-reformed-to-correct-miscarriage-of-justice/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/ethiopia-human-rights-commission-must-be-reformed-to-correct-miscarriage-of-justice/)



Below we present and analyse publicly available reports and videos to demonstrate critical partisan tendencies by the EHRC. For clarity, we analyse each report separately and provide a summary towards the end of this document.

## Report I - EHRC pro-government and partisan tendencies- video evidence

- 1) In this video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J7iXFbOoTE>), the Chief Commissioner of the EHRC, Dr. Daniel Bekele, argues that the “military operation” in Tigray had fewer casualties than expected. His full statement reads as follows: “it is comforting to learn that the military operation did not result in as severe consequences as it was originally feared to be. There was talk of a huge bloodbath, there was talk of a huge civilian casualties, breakup of the country...” This official statement, which attempts to minimize the extent of victims’ pain and the grave impacts of the war, has not only misled the international community, but it has also encouraged the Ethiopian government to ignore and/or continue committing the atrocities. While the EHRC should have been focused on investigating the atrocities that had occurred, it instead chose to reiterate the government’s narrative as a means of downplaying the conflict and its devastating effects on the civilian population. This sentiment may also imply that the Ethiopian government had planned to cause more harm had the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF) not voluntarily evacuated the cities. Nonetheless, the statement from the EHRC clearly mocks those who were raped, injured, traumatized, humiliated and killed.

As shown in Figure 1, a screenshot of Ethiopia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs twitter account, one can see that the government has effectively used the EHRC’s official statement to defend its indefensible record while atrocities inflicted by Eritrean and Ethiopian troops continue. We note that the chief commissioner is following the government’s characterization of the ongoing war as a “military operation,” despite the fact that much of the international community understands that this is a full-fledged war involving several foreign and domestic actors. Furthermore, while the chief commissioner downplays the consequences, credible reports have outlined more than 150 cases in Tigray where massacres have taken place and thousands of documented civilian casualties.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, millions are suffering from weaponized hunger while tens of thousands of women and girls are being gang-raped by the Amhara militia, Eritrean Forces and Ethiopian soldiers. Recently, the UNFPA Ethiopia branch disclosed that 22,500 women and girls are expected to seek care related to sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>4</sup> Reports also show that these rape cases are often linked to intentions of “cleansing and purifying the victims’ blood,”<sup>5</sup> and “soldiers are targeting Tigrayan women to stop them from giving birth to more Tigrayans,”<sup>6</sup> which constitute standard acts of genocide. Yet, the chief commissioner of the EHRC finds the situation unalarming and comforting. It is unfathomable that this entity can be trusted to investigate the aforementioned war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. We strongly feel that the chief commissioner is partisan, and the EHRC’s track record demonstrates that it cannot be trusted to undertake impartial investigations.

<sup>3</sup> Anny, Sofie & VandenBempt, Tim & Negash, Emnet & De Sloover, Lars & Nyssen, Jan. (2021). Tigray: Atlas of the humanitarian situation.

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/UNFPAEthiopia/status/1377518592682422273>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.channel4.com/news/tigray-the-horrors-of-the-hidden-war>

<sup>6</sup> Walsh, Declan. “They Told Us Not to Resist’: Sexual Violence Pervades Ethiopia’s War.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 1 Apr. 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-sexual-assault.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-sexual-assault.html).

**Figure 1** below shows a transcription of a speech by Dr. Daniel Bekele, which was shared on the official Twitter account of the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Ethiopia, perhaps because it advances the pro-government agenda.

(<https://twitter.com/mfaethiopia/status/1346942309015846918> )



**Figure 1** Ministry of Foreign Affairs quotes Dr. Daniel Bekele of EHRC in a tweet that downplays the war consequences in Tigray

In this video, Dr. Daniel Bekele of the EHRC makes many inaccurate conclusions about the war in Tigray and its consequences.

([https://twitter.com/getachew\\_temare/status/1371202765096124416](https://twitter.com/getachew_temare/status/1371202765096124416)) (the original video of the excerpt can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J7iXFbOoTE>)

2) ) Below we highlight three examples in which Dr. Bekele supports governmental propaganda, serving as yet another testament to the EHRC's partiality:

- a. Bekele starts by arguing that the consequences of the war are to be expected, and thus insinuates that we should not be surprised by the atrocities committed. This is the same rhetoric being spewed by the Ethiopian government and its organs. However, as a human rights agency, EHRC is expected to show outrage and advocacy for every victim, regardless of the scale of the tragedy, or ethnicity of the victim.
- b. Bekele was also deceptive in his assessment of the war. More specifically, he indicated that "the situation in Tigray seems to be improving," whereas the UN and humanitarian agencies have confirmed that the situation in Tigray is deteriorating. By downplaying the dire situation in Tigray, he is amplifying the government propaganda that the federal government is in control and that life is returning to normal. He also indicates that refugee repatriation is underway; yet there is zero evidence to support his claim. On the contrary, those who can are still attempting to flee the war zones in Tigray, even though Ethiopian security forces are blocking their escape using lethal force especially on the Ethiopian-Sudan border.
- c. Bekele has accused refugees in Sudan of being responsible for the Maikadra massacre (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czWvXPWDAQE&t=3312s>). This is an accusation that was put forward by the Ethiopian government without much evidence. PM Abiy Ahmed used the same argument in his parliamentary speech to undermine the credibility of witnesses now at refugee camps in Sudan. It is unfortunate and sad that the chief



commissioner of EHRC would echo this. We note that Amnesty International effectively investigated the Axum massacre primarily through interviews of those who fled to Sudan, and this was later accepted by the EHRC when what Amnesty reported became inescapable. The congruity in the timing of Abiy's lukewarm admission of atrocities and the EHRC's corroboration of the Amnesty report suggests some serious coordination between the Ethiopian government and the EHRC.

- d. In the original video, Bekele also praises the government saying as "a huge amount of political will and commitment on the part of the reform leader to open up the political space and usher a genuine democratic reform in Ethiopia". Given the current repressive political space in Ethiopia and the genocidal war in Tigray, this statement only shows how far Bekele can go to defend the Ethiopian authorities. The opposition political leaders that could potentially pose a real challenge in a fair and free election are all in prison. These include Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) leaders such as Jawar Mohamed, Bekelle Gerba and many OFC candidates are arrested which eventually forced OFC to withdraw from the upcoming election. There are also more than hundreds of thousands of Tigrayan political prisoners including almost all military members and police personnel of Tigrayan origin; business owners, and other ethnically targeted prominent personalities.

## Report II - Selective condemnation of human right violations in Ethiopia

Over the last three years, Ethiopia has witnessed numerous human rights violations across the Benishangul-Gumuz, Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and the Southern regions. A careful observation of the record of the EHRC reveals that the institution has repeatedly shown selective outrage when human rights violations are linked to the Amhara ethnic group. In doing so, the EHRC as an institution has been fuelling ethnic polarization throughout Ethiopia. Moreover, such selective acts of outrage by the EHRC have eroded the trust in the institution among victims across many parts of Ethiopia. This is especially true among Tigrayans, as the EHRC has been alarmingly silent as innumerable human rights violations have occurred in Tigray since November 4, 2020. This is revealing, especially when compared to the speed at which the EHRC responded to reported human right violations on Amharas; the recent killings of civilians in Western Wellega serves as one example. It is important to underscore that many ongoing conflicts across Ethiopia today, including the war on Tigray, have a substantial ethnic component. Given its record, the EHRC is not qualified to conduct impartial investigations that will do justice to most victims across Ethiopia but particularly Tigray.

Below are some examples that demonstrate the EHRC's selective outrage reports:

- 1) On March 24, 2021, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) staff witnessed the extrajudicial killings of at least four civilian men who were dragged off public buses and executed by Ethiopian soldiers.<sup>7</sup> Many individuals and organizations condemned this act. However, the EHRC remained silent about the massacre, despite its quickness to condemn the civilian massacres in Western Wellega on March 30, 2021, since the victims are believed to be of Amhara ethnicity who live in Oromia.<sup>8</sup> The killing of Amhara civilians, or any civilian for that matter, should be condemned in the strongest terms possible. However, in its selective

<sup>7</sup> Kleijer, Karline. "Ethiopia: MSF Staff Attacked after Witnessing Killings by Soldiers in Tigray." Doctors Without Borders - USA, Doctors Without Borders, 24 Mar. 2021, [www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/ethiopia-msf-staff-attacked-after-witnessing-killings-soldiers-tigray](http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/ethiopia-msf-staff-attacked-after-witnessing-killings-soldiers-tigray).

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=1096023254207907&id=202584253551816](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1096023254207907&id=202584253551816)



condemnation, the EHRC has not only failed to do its duty but is also fuelling ethnic polarization in Ethiopia and possibly contributing to the war efforts in Tigray and the broader Ethiopia.

- 2) Despite the communications blackout imposed on Tigray region since November 4, graphic videos and pictures of civilian massacres have emerged. Additionally, some of these massacres have been reported by the media and human rights groups. The aforementioned massacres include the Axum massacre,<sup>9 10</sup>; Mariam Dengelat massacre<sup>11</sup>; Gijet massacre<sup>12</sup>; Adigrat massacre<sup>13</sup> and Mahibere Dego massacre.<sup>14</sup> However, except for the Axum massacre, the EHRC has ignored the evidence and has neglected to address the civilian killings. Even in the case of Axum, the EHRC waited until it was widely talked about following the report by Amnesty International. It also appears that it waited to release its “report” on the Axum massacre until the government officially admitted the presence of Eritrean forces in Tigray and their involvement in inflicting these atrocities following intense international pressure.

### Report III - “Current situation of residents in Tigray region - brief monitoring report”

Page size: 9

Date: undated

Twitter post points to February 11, 2021

<https://twitter.com/EthioHRC/status/1359775853660536838>

Report repository: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oqLUi-artYwDyAv4Z0I3Ox7C0ipk3RyG/view>

#### Short summary of the report:

The EHRC’s report on the humanitarian and human rights violations in Tigray including: 1) administration, infrastructural and social/basic services; 2) provision of humanitarian assistance; 3) health infrastructure and services; 4) sexual and gender-based violence; 5) civilian casualties; and 6) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International . “Eritrean Troops Massacre Hundreds of Civilians in Axum, Ethiopia.” Amnesty International, 26 Feb. 2021, [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/ethiopia-eritrean-troops-massacre-of-hundreds-of-axum-civilians-may-amount-to-crime-against-humanity/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/ethiopia-eritrean-troops-massacre-of-hundreds-of-axum-civilians-may-amount-to-crime-against-humanity/).

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians.” *Human Rights Watch*, 5Mar. 2021, [www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/ethiopia-eritrean-forces-massacre-tigray-civilians#](http://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/ethiopia-eritrean-forces-massacre-tigray-civilians#).

<sup>11</sup> Arvanitidis, Barbara, et al. “Massacre in the Mountains: How an Ethiopian Festival Turned into a Killing Spree.” CNN, Cable News Network, 22 Mar. 2021, [edition.cnn.com/2021/02/26/africa/ethiopia-tigray-dengelat-massacre-intl/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/26/africa/ethiopia-tigray-dengelat-massacre-intl/index.html).

<sup>12</sup> Walsh, Declan. “‘They Told Us Not to Resist’: Sexual Violence Pervades Ethiopia’s War.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 1 Apr. 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-sexual-assault.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-sexual-assault.html).

<sup>13</sup> Osman, Jamal. “Tigray Conflict: the Testimonies of Alleged War Crimes.” *Channel 4 News*, 23 Mar. 2021, [www.channel4.com/news/tigray-conflict-the-testimonies-of-alleged-war-crimes](http://www.channel4.com/news/tigray-conflict-the-testimonies-of-alleged-war-crimes).

<sup>14</sup> Eye, Africa. “Evidence Suggests Ethiopian Military Carried out Massacre in Tigray.” *BBC News*, BBC, 1 Apr. 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56603022](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56603022).





### Key shortcomings (misleading content):

- 1) The report attempts to downplay the depth and breadth of the grave humanitarian and human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Tigray. It does this in various ways, for example, through: 1) careful use of mild language to describe the situation, as well as selective reporting; 2) use of incorrect data; and 3) employing language consistent with government propaganda.
- 2) The report slightly touches on the looting of healthcare services, but never mentions the perpetrators. Instead, and consistent with its behaviour, at one point the commission tried to implicitly blame the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). No other entity is mentioned as a possible perpetrator to facilitate further investigations, even though it is widely reported that Eritrean, Ethiopian and Amhara forces are responsible for the widespread destruction and looting of health care and other institutions' infrastructures. .
- 3) The report repeatedly uses the phrase "ongoing security situation," in an attempt to divert attention to the fact that active war is still ongoing on various fronts of the Tigray region. It is important to note that this is the same characterization used by the Ethiopian Federal Government, which describes the situation in Tigray as "law enforcement" despite the fact that the entire Ethiopian and Eritrean armies are involved.
- 4) It is widely reported<sup>15</sup> and also confirmed by the US state department<sup>16</sup> that ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans from Western Tigray has been ongoing. This is being carried out by Amhara troops and militia, Fano (the Amhara vigilante group), all with the backing of the Amhara regional government and the endorsement of the Ethiopian federal government. However, in its report from Humera (a town in Western Tigray), the EHRC refrains from mentioning that the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans has been taking place. Ambiguously, it quotes an IDP from Humera now sheltering in Mekelle who outlined that "they have learned through their relatives still in Humera and surrounding areas that their homes, cattle, and crops and harvests have all been looted or occupied by other people." By referring to the occupiers as "other people," it deliberately refrains from mentioning the Amhara expansionists who have been ethnically cleansing Tigrayans from Western Tigray. This is again in line with the propaganda being spread by the Ethiopian federal and Amhara region governments, who deny the act of ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans in Western and Southern Tigray, where close to a million people have been uprooted from their homes.
- 5) MSF repeatedly reported that 87% of health facilities in Tigray have been deliberately destroyed (only 13% are functional<sup>17</sup>), with 70% completely looted (sometimes even repurposed for military camps by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers). However, the EHRC makes no mention of any entity in relation to the looting and destruction of healthcare services. Furthermore, it says "The assessment mentioned earlier also shows that not more than 30% of the health facilities are operational as of the writing of this report." This fact is inconsistent with other independent international reports. Furthermore, it is widely reported that Adwa hospital has been completely looted and destroyed by Eritrean

<sup>15</sup> Reuters Staff. "You Don't Belong': Land Dispute Drives New Exodus in Ethiopia's Tigray." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 29 Mar. 2021, [www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-displaced-insight-idUSKBN2BL1B0](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-displaced-insight-idUSKBN2BL1B0).

<sup>16</sup> Hansler, Jennifer. "Blinken: Acts of 'Ethnic Cleansing' Committed in Western Tigray." CNN, Cable News Network, 10 Mar. 2021, [edition.cnn.com/2021/03/10/politics/blinken-tigray-ethnic-cleansing/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/10/politics/blinken-tigray-ethnic-cleansing/index.html).

<sup>17</sup> MSF. "Health Facilities Targeted in Tigray Region, Ethiopia: MSF." Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International, 29 Mar. 2021, [www.msf.org/health-facilities-targeted-tigray-region-ethiopia](http://www.msf.org/health-facilities-targeted-tigray-region-ethiopia).



soldiers. However, the EHRC wrongly attributes the non-functionality of the health facilities in Adwa, Axum, and Shire to the ill-defined “ongoing security situation,” which, like all related Ethiopian propaganda, is clearly an intentionally misleading characterization of the war and its dire consequences in Tigray.

- 6) The report also characterizes damage to civilians as collateral damage (land mines or hand grenades left lying on the ground). It is possible that collateral damages may have occurred, however, there is ample evidence that the majority of civilian deaths are attributable to deliberate and systematic killings by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces and the Amhara troops and militia. This particular report intentionally refrains from mentioning any of these forces as perpetrators.
- 7) Tigray Emergency Coordination Centre (TECC) reported that more than 4.5 million people need emergency food aid.<sup>18</sup> However, the EHRC report slashed this figure to 2.3 million. It further indicated that one million of the 2.3 million already depended on food aid before the war. Therefore, it alludes that only 1.3 million are affected by the ongoing war. These conclusions are consistent with the government’s narrative which has never refrained from using largely manufactured facts and figures.
- 8) The EHRC even goes beyond its mandate to make a political recommendation in favour of the federal and interim governments, calling for all zones and woredas in Tigray need to be communicating through the interim administration for health services to resume. The statement is as follows, “although more efforts are underway in this regard, it will make the task of ensuring that health facilities resume their services if the over 90 Woreda administrations in the more than 7 zones of the region do not establish communication with the Interim Administration soon.”
- 9) Contrary to the constitution, but in line with the claims of the Amhara region, it refers to the Western and Southern Zones of Tigray as “the former Western and Southern Zones of Tigray...” in a deliberate attempt to implicitly support the Amhara region’s narration of forceful annexation of these two provinces from Tigray.
- 10) The report neglects to mention the systemic looting of public and private properties, ethnic cleansing, systematic massacres, cultural and religious cleansing, systemic weaponized rape (slightly addressed), deliberate infection of women and girls with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) by Amhara militia, Eritrean soldiers and Ethiopian forces.
- 11) With respect to the sexual and gender-based violence, the report mentions that “52 instances of rape in Mekelle, 22 in Adigrat, 7 in Wukro and 27 in Ayder (a total of 108) have been reported to health facilities over the past two months alone.” However, it does not mention the perpetrators of the sexual and gender-based crimes. The report insinuates that prisoners escape is one of “the causes for the substantial increase of looting, gender-based violence and other major crimes”. The federal government also attributes the crimes and rapes to prisoners who escaped following the war. However, statistical evidences show that 89% of the sexual violence is perpetrated by Ethiopian soldiers, Eritrean troops,

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<sup>18</sup> BBC . “Ethiopia Tigray Crisis: Fear of Mass Starvation.” BBC News, BBC, 18 Jan. 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55695123](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55695123).



Amhara militia or a combination <sup>19</sup>. A further breakdown of the sample study indicates that 44% of the rapes are performed by Ethiopian soldiers, 33% by Eritrean soldiers, 6% by Amhara militia, 6% by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers, while there is no information for the remaining 11% of the perpetrators. It is unfortunate that EHRC cites the interim administration of Tigray appointed by PM Abiy Ahmed to wrongly attribute the sexual violence crimes to prisoner escapes only to support the federal government's claims.

### Excerpts from the report

Page 2, para 1 "... and the fact that the **former Western and Southern Zones of Tigray** are now under the Amhara Region's administration ..."

Page 2 "As at the time of release of this report, infrastructure services (water, electricity, telecommunications...) are yet to be fully restored in some parts of the region which means banking services have not fully resumed in parts of Tigray region. **Some residents** are, therefore, still not able to access their accounts."

Page 3 p1 "But more coordinated work with humanitarian organisations is indispensable to address the emergency assistance needs of an **estimated total of 2.3 million people, 1 million of whom already depended on humanitarian assistance before the war.**"

"An assessment carried out by the regional health bureau shows that the region's health facilities sustained physical damage and/or were looted including looting of ambulances and some health professionals are believed to have lost their lives in the context of the conflict."

"On the other hand, information obtained from the Regional health bureau shows that **the ongoing security situation**, including in the surrounding areas, has made it difficult to ensure that the health facilities in Adwa, Axum and Shire resume their operations."

"The assessment mentioned earlier also shows that not more than 30% of the health facilities are operational as of the writing of this report."

"Although more efforts are underway in this regard, it will make the task of ensuring that health facilities resume their services if the over 90 Woreda administrations in the more than 7 zones of the region do not establish communication with the Interim Administration soon."

"**Other medical supplies have been looted or taken, including by TPLF fighters.**"

"They eventually **chose to come to Mekelle instead of going back to Humera.**"

"The latter also say they have learned through their relatives still in Humera and surrounding areas that their homes, cattle, and crops and harvests have all been looted or **occupied by other people.**"

<sup>19</sup> Insecurity Insight. 2020. 'Sexual Violence in Ethiopia's Tigray Region 30 March 2021.' Geneva: Insecurity Insight. <http://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sexual-Violence-in-Ethiopia-Tigray-Region-30-March-2021.pdf>



## Report IV - Comparison of EHRC and Amnesty International report on the Axum massacre

Page size: 12

Date: undated

Report repository:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i20a7K4BNnJsoSE89q1Q7xEW5oGhatGX/view>

The table in Appendix A compares the investigations by Amnesty International (AI)<sup>20</sup> to those of the EHRC on the Axum massacre. Additional details are provided in the table; however, we would like to draw the reader's attention to the following observations.

- 1) The Axum massacre has been widely reported on social media since December 2020, and on main stream media since January 2021 (e.g., The Guardian covered it on January 24th<sup>21</sup> and Church Times reported it on January 15<sup>th</sup> <sup>22</sup> ). However, EHRC, despite being a domestic human rights institution, has ignored the massacre until after AI and Human Rights Watch (HRW) investigated it and publicly announced their findings. EHRC neither condemned the massacre nor showed interest in investigating until international pressure mounted.
- 2) The EHRC had to wait until PM Abiy Ahmed publicly admitted the presence of Eritrean soldiers in Tigray to release its report on the Axum massacre. The report depicted Eritrean soldiers as the main perpetrators of the massacre. The Ethiopian government has until recently denied the presence of the Eritrean forces in Tigray. Thus, it appears that the EHRC had to coordinate with the government about the time of release of the report, showing lack of independence to execute its activities on its own.
- 3) Despite having better access to Axum for investigations (including physical access), the EHRC reported a much lower number of casualties than AI did. The AI investigations were conducted primarily remotely using phone interviews. In this case, the EHRC report is only aimed at playing down the well-researched and documented report of AI, and thus once again serving as a cover up to all the heinous atrocities committed by the joint Ethiopian Federal, and Eritrean forces.
- 4) The federal government consistently denied the Axum massacre, arguing that even the November 30 Axum Tsion church celebration was held peacefully. Surprisingly, EHRC's report corroborates the government's narration by quoting that the celebration was conducted in the church. It is important to note that witnesses have told AI that the celebration was cancelled as the city was collectively mourning and traumatized in the days following the massacre.

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<sup>20</sup> Amnesty International. "Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity" <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/ethiopia-eritrean-troops-massacre-of-hundreds-of-axum-civilians-may-amount-to-crime-against-humanity/>

<sup>21</sup> Sherwood, Harriet. "Fabled Ark Could Be among Ancient Treasures in Danger in Ethiopia's Deadly War." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 24 Jan. 2021, [www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/24/fabled-ark-could-be-among-ancient-treasures-in-danger-in-ethiopia-deadly-war](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/24/fabled-ark-could-be-among-ancient-treasures-in-danger-in-ethiopia-deadly-war).

<sup>22</sup> Paveley, Rebecca. "Massacre 'of 750' Reported in Aksum Church Complex, Tigray, Ethiopia." The Church Times - News, Comment, Features, Book Reviews and More, 15 Jan. 2021, [www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/15-january/news/world/massacre-of-750-reported-in-aksum-church-complex-tigray-ethiopia](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/15-january/news/world/massacre-of-750-reported-in-aksum-church-complex-tigray-ethiopia).



## Report V - “Brief monitoring report on the situation of civilians in Humera, Dansha and Bissober”

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In this short review, we will examine the report by the EHRC that covers certain areas in Tigray (e.g., Humera, Dansha and Bissober).

### Humera

Ethiopia Human Rights Commission<sup>23</sup> reported as follows:

parts of the city, apparently caused by the use of heavy artillery. Although the investigation team received reports of serious damages to the area known as Kebele 2, the team was unable to access the said area to verify the reports. Reports indicate that there was heavy shelling of Kebele 2 (Kudar sefer), near Mariam Church and a Mosque between November 9<sup>th</sup> and November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020. According to these reports, public spaces and residential houses in Kebele 2 bore the brunt of the damage. The Commission’s team also visited Humera Hospital which itself sustained serious damage.

**Remark:** This report is incomplete as it does not give a credible reason as to why the EHRC could not access the Kebele 2 area in Humera. The report completely ignores the need to access this area in order to do further investigations. However, other reports by the Human Rights Watch have done investigation in this area and discovered that the area was one of the worst-hit by heavy artillery shelling from Eritrean forces.

The question remains: was the EHRC trying to cover the fact that highly populated urban areas were targets of heavy shelling by the Eritrean army? This question becomes particularly important since the EHRC report was released long before the federal government officially admitted the presence of the Eritrean army in Tigray. It is important to note that the EHRC reported the Axum massacre following the Amnesty report but still in synchrony with the Ethiopian government’s admission of Eritrean presence and the associated atrocities.

Human Rights Watch reported the Kebele 2 case as shown below.<sup>24</sup>

In the western border town of Humera, residents said that on November 9, artillery fired from Eritrea terrified unsuspecting civilians, striking them in their homes and as they fled. The shelling damaged residential areas in the Kebele 02 neighborhood, and struck near a church and a school, near a mosque in Kebele 01, and hit areas near the town’s main hospital.

<sup>23</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X9iK4jPtdgREXCfS1UJ1MhrkuvWhwNjl/view>

<sup>24</sup> HRW. “Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas.” Human Rights Watch, 25 Feb. 2021, [www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/11/ethiopia-unlawful-shelling-tigray-urban-areas](http://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/11/ethiopia-unlawful-shelling-tigray-urban-areas).



In its report, the EHRC outlines.

Humera Hospital staff also told the Commission, “the Hospital refrigerators and equipment are not operating to their full capacity, because of lack of electric power and water services have not resumed and fuel shortage limits the use of the Hospital generator. Ambulances are being used for non-medical purposes. We have provided treatment to women rape victims. There are also reports of unexploded ammunition in parts of the city. Some food aid was provided to all Humera residents, but it was grossly insufficient. The Hospital’s staff have not been paid since October 2020, facing severe food shortage as a result. We are hungry, but people come to the Hospital hoping to find food. A colleague once fainted from hunger while cleaning the Hospital floor. We are going through all this because we want to keep the Hospital running. We go home in turns to protect the Hospital at night, but our own houses also get robbed. We find ethnic slurs written on the hospital’s wall sometimes.”

In the above EHRC report, it is indicated that the Humera hospital refrigerators were dysfunctional, the hospital’s properties were looted, and staff were hungry. However, the report does not mention the perpetrators. Furthermore, the report admits that ambulances were being used for “non-medical purposes,” but it does not precisely mention for which purposes. Although, other reports have outlined that ambulances are being used by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers for military purposes.

#### Dansha

According to the interim coordinator of Dansha, “Tigrayans live peacefully in the area, but those residents who felt at risk were provided with transportation to their chosen destinations”. Regarding the current situation the coordinator informed the Commission’s team, “a platform was set up where residents are encouraged to discuss issues openly in order to facilitate a return to peaceful and respectful co-existence. Nonetheless, we are concerned that TPLF operatives may still attack the woreda to cause discord between residents of Amhara and Tigray ethnic origins.”

Currently, Western Tigray is under occupation by Amhara forces. Tigrayan residents in the area have been forced to leave. However, in quoting the interim administrators installed by the Amhara regional state, the EHRC has tried to paint a false narrative that Tigrayans “who felt at risk were provided with transportation to their chosen destinations.” One must question why the residents felt at risk and what destination would provide them refugee? Where is a “chosen destination” to these people other than their own homes? Furthermore, in quoting a government appointee, the EHRC avoids the mention of the Tigrayan ethnic cleansing that has led to hundreds of thousands being displaced. Many other reports, including MSF<sup>25</sup> and Reuters<sup>26</sup>, reported on Tigrayan residents who were forced to flee for safety. The US Department of State has repeatedly pronounced its grave concerns regarding the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans from Western Tigray. Yet, the Ethiopian government has vehemently

<sup>25</sup> MSF. “Ethiopia: Tigray’s Cities Fill with Displaced People in Need of Aid: MSF.” Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International, 22 Mar. 2021, [www.msf.org/ethiopia-tigray%E2%80%99s-cities-fill-displaced-people-need-aid](http://www.msf.org/ethiopia-tigray%E2%80%99s-cities-fill-displaced-people-need-aid).

<sup>26</sup> Reuters. “‘You Don’t Belong’: Land Dispute Drives New Exodus in Ethiopia’s Tigray.” Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 29 Mar. 2021, [www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-displaced-insight-idUSKBN2BL1B0](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-displaced-insight-idUSKBN2BL1B0).



denied acts of ethnic cleansing in Western Tigray against all odds. Sadly, the EHRC continues to support the government's false narrative through its misleading reporting concerning the forceful evacuation of Tigrayans.

During its first investigation mission to Dansha in mid-November 2020, the Commission met with ENDF representatives, who confirm that Dansha city went through “a very tense period during the war”. The second EHRC mission which travelled to the area in mid-December observed that the security situation in the area had improved. ENDF member the team spoke to at the time indicated that “ENDF was working in a lawful and ethical manner to ensure the protection of the community”. While admitting that “there were people who have fled the area fearing for their safety” he explained that “food assistance and other essential provisions to internally displaced persons currently in Dansha is improving”.

Many reports and videos have shown that ENDF members are killing civilians and raping women and girls. However, the EHRC is quoting a member of the ENDF to report that ENDF was working lawfully and ethically. By doing so, the EHRC is defeating the whole purpose of an impartial investigation as it is seeking information from and collaborating with alleged perpetrators.

### Bisober

Families of victims say that it was only possible to organize burials for the dead five days after the fighting, on November 19, 2020, when the ENDF cleared the area for residents to return. Some of the victims were discovered only then. Some of the bodies were so decomposed that it was not possible to move them to a proper burial site forcing residents to bury them in the backyard of the victims' houses. The Commission's team was able to visit some of these grave sites.

In the paragraph above, while witnesses<sup>27</sup> have expressed that the ENDF killed civilians, the EHRC report tries to paint a very different picture of the ENDF. In an AFP report<sup>28</sup>, families describe how the ENDF killed their men, and family members were left traumatized as they were forced to be stoic as they stayed with the dead for days. This is supported by a recent video investigation by BBC, CNN and Bellingcat,<sup>29</sup> which clearly showed that members of the ENDF were actively taking part in the civilian massacres. Furthermore, the report neglected to mention the shelling on civilian areas, which has been reported by many media outlets, including Al Jazeera.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Bangkok Post Public Company. “'Terrified' Survivors Recount Attacks on Civilians in Tigray.” <https://www.bangkokpost.com>, 15 Dec. 2020, [www.bangkokpost.com/world/2035655/terrified-survivors-recount-attacks-on-civilians-in-tigray](http://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2035655/terrified-survivors-recount-attacks-on-civilians-in-tigray).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmHHvokE3gk>

<sup>29</sup> Bellingcat. “Mahbere Dego: Clues to a Clifftop Massacre in Ethiopia.” Bellingcat, 1 Apr. 2021, [www.bellingcat.com/news/2021/04/01/mahbere-dego-clues-to-a-cliff-top-massacre-in-ethiopia/](http://www.bellingcat.com/news/2021/04/01/mahbere-dego-clues-to-a-cliff-top-massacre-in-ethiopia/).

<sup>30</sup>Al Jazeera. “'Indiscriminate' Shelling Killed Many Civilians in Tigray: HRW.” Conflict News | Al Jazeera, 11 Feb. 2021, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/11/hrw-says-ethiopian-shelling-killed-many-civilians-in-tigray](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/11/hrw-says-ethiopian-shelling-killed-many-civilians-in-tigray).



## Conclusions

Based on the aforementioned documentation and analysis, it can evidently concluded that the reports by the EHRC have failed to adequately address the humanitarian and human rights violations in the war-ridden Tigray region. This document outlines the biases of EHRC and its leaning towards a pro-government agenda. The reports from the EHRC are inconsistent with other facts on the ground, and reports from reputable independent agencies including Amnesty International, CNN and the BBC.

The commission has a record of fuelling ethnic tension (ethnic polarization) by selectively reporting only on massacres that suit its interest and the governments agenda. It systematically and carefully frames its reports to downplay the egregious acts committed by the Ethiopian government and its allied forces in Tigray. In some cases, the head of the EHRC is seen openly promoting the government propaganda (e.g., using the same language, alluding that the situation in Tigray is getting better, openly stating the war is not as devastating as feared, etc.).

Moreover, the EHRC reports deliberately neglect to mention perpetrators; refrain from mentioning the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans; downplay the extent of sexual violence against women and girls; fail to account the deliberate infection of women and girls with HIV/AIDs and other STDs by the Ethiopian federal and Eritrean forces as well as Amhara troops and militia; and modulate the size of the civilian population affected by the war, all to fit into the government's narrative. In summary, there is ample and clear evidence that the EHRC and its leadership do not have the intention, motivation or the capacity to conduct impartial and independent investigation into war crimes and rights violations committed as part of the war on Tigray. Therefore, if the investigations are to be successful, credible and acceptable to the victims, they need to be UN-led investigations that do not include the EHRC.



The Global Society of Tigray Scholars  
and Professionals (GSTS)  
6 April, 2021





**Appendix A: Tabular comparison of EHRC and AI reports on the Axum Massacre**

<b>LISTS</b>	<b>ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHT COMMUSIONER</b>	<b>AMNESTY</b>
<b>REMOTE INVESTIGATION</b>	EHRC also stated that it will continue to remotely monitor the human rights situation including in parts of Tigray that remained inaccessible at the time and that it will inform the public of its findings in due course.	Numerous phone interviews with witnesses in Axum.
<b>PHYSICAL PRESENCE</b>	7 days research at Axsum.	11 days of research at the refugee reception centre in Hamdayet, eastern Sudan, in January 2021.
<b>THE RAPID INVESTIGATION MISSION</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>INVESTIGATION</b>	spoke to survivors, 45 families of victims, eyewitnesses and religious leaders in the city	In all, Amnesty International interviewed 41 witnesses and survivors of the massacre, all ethnic Tigrayans, as well as 20 others with knowledge relevant to the situation names have been
<b>INVESTIGATION TIME</b>	February 27, 2021 - March 5,2021	January, 2021 - February 6,2021
<b>FOCUS GROUP</b>	It also conducted a focus group discussion with over 20 residents of the city and spoke with local Kebele officials, as well as medical personnel of Saint Mary and Aksum Referral Hospitals.	Not mentioned
<b>REASON OF MASSACRES</b>	Most of the residents the Commission talked to say	The massacre was carried out in retaliation for an earlier attack by a



	<p>they do not know the reason why the heavy shooting began. Others gave varying explanations. Some say, “armed local militia started shooting at the Eritrean soldiers and that the angered soldiers began firing at civilians”. <b>Others said, “Eritrean soldiers tried to loot Aksum Tsion Church and when angered residents tried to prevent it the Eritrean soldiers began shooting at civilians”.</b> The Eritrean tried to loot the Church in December 23, 2020. Other sources of the Commission said “some residents joined local militia to attack Eritrean soldiers and the Eritrean soldiers retaliated with vengeful attacks, killing civilians and especially targeting men.”</p>	<p>small number of local militiamen, joined by local residents armed with sticks and stones.</p>
<p><b>MASS DETENTION</b></p>	<p>The Commission also talked to residents who said they have been detained by Eritrean soldiers. On November 29, Eritrean</p>	<p>Two other men Amnesty International spoke to said they were detained in the open air near the airport. One of them said: “They started gathering people, 300-400 in a group; taking them to</p>



	<p>soldiers “rounded up a large number of the city’s <b>young men and took them in areas known as ‘Meshelam’ and ‘Zero Zero’</b>. They remained detained the whole day inside a pit until their release in the evening. The Eritrean soldiers told them <b>‘Tomorrow, Aksum Tsion celebration is also marked in Eritrea so we will let you go and bury the dead today’</b>”</p>	<p>different locations out of the city ... They took us out of the city.” He described the ill-treatment he faced: “They beat us and inflicted military punishment: forcing you to walk with your knees or to crawl on the floor with your abdomen. They didn’t beat me. They would make me sit and stand constantly, like a physical exercise, and rolling while lying down, but I hated this.”<b>The Eritrean soldiers’ threats made it clear that the killings on 28 and 29 November, and in particular the targeting of men of fighting age, represented a coordinated effort to terrorize the population into submission and deter further attacks. One of the men who were detained said:</b> “The Eritrean soldiers surrounded us. One of their officers came up to us and made a speech “You people — if you try fighting us and hold any weapon against us — look at this red soil — we will destroy Axum like this. So don’t do anything against us.”</p>
<p><b>REASON FOR KEEPING THE BODIES UNBURED</b></p>	<p>On November 29, residents tried to recover bodies of people killed on November 28, but Eritrean soldiers prevented them by firing gunshots. <b>The Eritrean soldiers were saying “your people will not be</b></p>	<p>Not mentioned</p>



	<p><b>buried before our soldiers are buried.”</b> Fearing for their lives, residents who had come to recover the bodies fled. They were only allowed to come back for the bodies on November 30.</p>	
<p><b>MASS GRAVES</b></p>	<p>Residents also told the Commission “that they were forced to cover/wrap the bodies in cement bags and other packaging bags and to transport them in manual carts. We buried them in <b>mass graves in Arba’etu Ensessa Church, Enda Michael Church, Endayesus Church and other churches”.</b></p> <p><b>Witnesses identified 9 churches where victims are buried, 7 in Axum and 2 in outskirts of the city.</b></p> <p>The Commission visited two mass graves in Arbaetu Ensessa and Endamichael Churches and obtained some photographs from residents.</p>	<p>The surviving men took up the task of carrying the dead to the town’s churches. Amnesty International spoke to <b>nine men who took part in the process</b>, as well as to eight who witnessed it. The bodies were brought to the Arba’etu Ensessa church (next to the Axum Tsion St Mary Church), as well as St Micheal, Abune Aregawi, Enda-Gaber, Abba Pentalewon and Enda Eyesus (Jesus) churches. The men looked for bodies, piled them onto carts — up to 10 bodies at a time — and pulled these makeshift hearses to a church, before returning to the streets for another run.</p>
<p><b>GRAVES OUTSIDE CHURCHES</b></p>	<p>not mention on the report</p>	<p>In some cases, however, the dead were buried in makeshift graves in the immediate vicinity of where they had been killed.</p>



<p><b>THERE WAS NO PROPER BURIAL.</b></p>	<p>Residents also told the Commission “that they were forced to cover/wrap the bodies in cement bags and other packaging bags and to transport them in manual carts. We buried them in mass graves in Arba’etu Ensesa Church, Enda Michael Church, Endayesus Church and other churches”. Witnesses identified 9 churches where victims are buried, 7 in Axum and 2 in outskirts of the city. The Commission visited two mass graves in Arbaetu Ensesa and Endamichael Churches and obtained some photographs from residents.</p>	<p>I have seen many dead bodies since I was involved in collecting and burial of the dead-on 30 November. We collected the dead using horse/donkey carts. They didn’t allow the priests to conduct funeral requiem for the dead or to clean and prepare the bodies as per the custom. We buried them at the Arba’etu Ensessa Church. While families of the deceased buried them in separate graves, unclaimed bodies were buried in mass graves.”</p>
<p><b>DETAIL INFORMATION ABOUT DEAD BODY COLLECTION</b></p>	<p>not mention on the report</p>	<p>Negasi (name changed), age 21, elaborated on his role in the transporting the bodies: We started after getting the permission. Personally, during that day, with my friends and other people, we brought in a total of 18 dead bodies at different times. I brought five cartloads. First: four people. Then: three people. Then: two people. Then: eight people. Then, the last cart: only one person. That was all on the 20th [Hedar, i.e., 29 November]. The next day, I gathered</p>



		<p>27 dead bodies ... In total I brought 45 bodies. Other men Amnesty International interviewed say they carried comparable numbers of bodies. One, for instance, said he brought a total of 30 bodies to the Arba'etu Ensessa and St Micheal churches; another said he carried three or four cartloads, each bearing seven to 10 bodies, suggesting he moved between 21 and 40 bodies. Yet another said he may have carried over 50 bodies to the churches of St Micheal and Abune Aregawi; he estimated that he saw 400 bodies on 30 November alone. Finally, another told Amnesty International he saw about 200 bodies during various funerals.</p>
<p><b>THE TRAUMA</b></p>	<p>Not mention on the report</p>	<p>The endeavour was gruelling and traumatizing. One man recalled: "I had only seen foods or seeds or money being collected, not bodies. That was a huge deep sadness. It was difficult." In addition to the trauma of seeing and handling so many dead people, including loved ones, the men had to contend with the effects of decomposition and the fear of new killing. The bodies, which had remained in the open for a day or two before residents were allowed to take them away, had begun to decay. "It's smelly and very painful to see dead bodies," recalled one man. And the pallbearers</p>



		wondered whether killings might resume at any moment. “We got scared the soldiers might kill us. It was a tough moment,” he added.
<b>CEREMONY</b>	Residents also say that “although the November 30 Aksum Tsion holiday was marked within the Church’s compound, they have been saddened that the media did not report the state of grief the city was in.”	30 November marked the anniversary of St Mary, a major celebration in Axum, which on another year would have drawn the faithful from across Ethiopia and tourists from around the world. <b>In light of the exceptional circumstances, the celebrations were cancelled.</b> “It was deeply sad,” said one woman. “There were funerals around the church — separate ceremonies. It wasn’t the usual celebration.”
<b>THE NUMBER OF DEATH</b>	Downsized to 100 by EHRC	Two witnesses who spoke to the church authorities at Axum Tsion St Mary church (which encompasses Maryam Zion church proper as well as Arbaetu Ensessa) said 450 identified people were buried in that church alone. The figure excludes people who were buried there but not identified; the dead who were buried in other churches; and those who were buried on the roadside.
<b>LOOTING, HUNGER AND THIRST</b>	These widespread human rights violations are not ordinary crimes but grave contraventions of applicable international and human rights laws and principles, marked by intentionally	In addition to the killings and the detentions, Eritrean soldiers looted Axum systematically and on a massive scale, leaving residents without food or drink. All of the refugees we interviewed spoke of the looting and its terrible impact on daily life. They said



	<p>directed attacks against civilians who were not directly taking part in the hostilities and including intentional looting, destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity (including religious institutions and health facilities). As these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes, it underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into overall human rights situation in Tigray region.</p>	<p>that the looting began as soon as Eritrean forces entered the town on 19 November, but that it escalated in the wake of the 28-29 November massacre.</p> <p>We told Ethiopian soldiers and they tried to help us and asked them to stop. The Eritrean soldier said “Hey you donkey, it’s none of your business” ... They took the TV, a jeep, the fridge, six mattresses, all the groceries and cooking oil, butter, teff, flour, the [furniture of the] kitchen cabinet [itself], clothes, the beers in the fridge, the water pump, and the laptop. They damaged the door ... They took all of this in a Mercedes truck.</p>
<p><b>HUNGER</b></p>	<p>Not mentioned</p>	<p>In the days after the massacre, a woman recalled, “we didn’t have anything to eat or to make money.” On 1 December, another woman said: “The Ethiopian soldiers [using loudspeakers] kept telling us to open our stores but everything had been stolen.” Only a few cafés reopened, she said. A man described the state of the city at that time: The Eritreans had already looted everything, including teff and sorghum. We were very hungry. We couldn’t work. All the property, shops had been stolen. We didn’t do</p>





		anything during that time. And also, there was no bank or network. There was no internet access, and no one understood what's happening in Axum. There was no electricity.
<b>THIRST</b>	No report about the situation	The electricity blackout and the theft of water pumps also affected the city's water supply. Many residents were forced to drink from wells or rivers, which they said was unsafe. One man recalled: "About the water, we were drinking mineral water that we had bought before the war. After that we started drinking from the river and from a well which wasn't safe. That's how we survived. But there was no peace, it's dangerous. You don't feel comfortable even going to drink river water." One woman told of the same problem: "It was kind of hard to survive because there was no water, so we drank water from the river or went around the villages far from the city so we could use river water."
<b>LOOTING OF MEDICINES</b>	Those who decided to stay behind say that some members of ENDF and Eritrean soldiers looted the hospitals. Saint Mary Hospital staff recount how "on November 19, some members of ENDF and Eritrean soldiers came into the hospital. They looted	One man said his brother, who has heart disease, tried to obtain medicine at the pharmacies of the city's two hospitals, but that they had been looted. "28 December was the last time I saw him. He said he was really in suffering and pain from the disease because he didn't have his pill." Another man from a village outside of Axum said that the small clinic in his



	<p>the hospital's pharmacy and other medical equipment and destroyed the ones they did not need. They shot a man in bed in the emergency ward. Eritrean soldiers were insulting the staff ethnic based slurs.”</p> <p>Aksum Referral Hospital was also looted by some members of ENDF and Eritrean soldiers four times over several days.</p>	<p>village had been thoroughly looted, “especially the pharmacy.”</p>
<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION</b>		<p>The survivors of the Axum massacre were robbed of their relatives, their friends, and their neighbours without some measure of accountability for the grievous violations that they have endured; such crimes are likely to continue.</p>