



Crimes against Humanity in Tigray

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Introduction

Ethiopia was seen in the West the as a symbol of African ascent, but as a result of the conflicts and the clash of ideologies slipped towards violent civil war in the light of the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, and the escalation of ethnic conflicts, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces committed war crimes in their offensive to control Aksum inside Tigray, and the Ethiopian army succeeded in launching successive strikes on the territory until it reached the capital of the region "Mekelle" on November 28.

Genocide is one of the most serious and harmful crimes to the human race, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said a "large-scale humanitarian crisis" is unfolding, as thousands of refugees continue to flee genocide in Ethiopia's Tigray region on a daily basis in search of safety in neighboring Eastern Sudan.

The fighting will not stop if it continues at the border of the northern state of Tigray, but its effects may include Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia, as well as the Arab world and the eastern Mediterranean.

The historical background of the conflict.

The background to the struggle for rule in Ethiopia since the rule of King Menlik II, who forcibly subjected the rest of the peoples and ethnicities under his rule in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, coincided with the beginning of European colonialism of the region, and imperial rule in Ethiopia continued for a century until the communist regime rose up with a



bloody coup against King Haile Selassie in ¹1974, but it did not last long; As the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) took power in **1991**, led by Malas Zenawi, who during his presidency Ethiopia experienced an economic boom, but his rule was severely repressive, and political freedoms were non-existent in the country, leading to public discontent and angry revolutions, allowing Abiy Ahmed to run and then come to power in 2018.



Location of Tigray province North of Ethiopia

Power struggle and rebellion

The TPLF has dominated this coalition from 1991 until Abiy Ahmed came to power in April 2018, but After Abiy Ahmed's ascension to power he dismissed prominent TPLF figures for corruption and human rights violations, and in July **2018**, federal government officials accused

(¹) The Marxist regime in Ethiopia was based on of ethnicity, not patriotism, and the fundamental rights are based on their being ethnically indigenous to the constituent federal territories ṽ this has led to the emergence of many notable minorities within the Ethiopian territories, and the larges minorities of Tigray, Amhara and Oromo lived in a state of constant power struggles.



TPLF of attempting to assassinate the prime minister during mass demonstrations in Addis Ababa when a grenade was thrown near the podium, where Abiy Ahmed was addressing a crowd, leaving five dead and more than 140 injured.

The rift grew in late **2019**, Abiy Ahmed dissolved the coalition that brought him to power Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), merging its four constituent entities into a single party, called the Prosperity Party, which was immediately opposed by the (TPLF) who refused to integrate into the entity.

The leaders of the (TPLF) refused to join the Coalition of the (EPRDF), and after the Corona epidemic, the territorial authority opposed the postponement of national elections until next year. In May 2020 the opposition accused the Prime Minister of using the epidemic as a pretext to extend his mandate illegally and the (TPLF) denounced the decision, calling it "unconstitutional", and announced that it would unilaterally hold its own elections on time, as the territory conducted a local ballot in September 2020, which the federal government described as illegal, the Tigray provincial government responded that it would consider Abiy Ahmed's rule illegal from October **5**.

The dispute developed in October 2020, when the central government suspended its funding and severed relations with Tigray, and the Administration of the province stated that this amounted to a "declaration of war", and as such summoned its representatives in elected bodies and cabinets at the federal level, and in reaction to those developments, the Ethiopian parliament decided to classify the (TPLF) as a terrorist movement.



The Front issued a statement saying that Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afwerki (President of Eritrea) are preparing to wage war, stressing its readiness to fight it as the Tigray people's war. The president of the Tigray Region sent an open letter addressed to the heads of state of dozens of countries, warning of the dangers of deteriorating the situation in the country, and appealing to the international community to help defuse the crisis through a comprehensive dialogue. "There is no legitimate entity to manage the country's governance after the end of Abiy Ahmed's government," he said.

Although Tigray represents only 6% of Ethiopia's population, they maintain trained and organized military forces, and the Tigray region accounts for half of the Ethiopian army's strength, and the military operations carried out by Ethiopian forces appear to be trying to break Tigrayan control of the Ethiopian armed forces.

In this charged atmosphere, the federal government announced in November **2020** that Tigray gunmen attacked the "northern sector" of the Ethiopian army. Abiy Ahmed accused the (TPLF) of committing national treason, by attacking Ethiopian military bases in the town of Mekelle although many question this narrative, and see it as an attempt to find practical justifications for a military operation against the territory. Fighting began with air raids and use of heavy artillery with the government aiming to destroy TPLF-controlled weapons depots. Since then, fierce fighting has continued, and Abiy Ahmed was betting on a quick decisive battle, because indecisiveness will have serious consequences for his rule.

Insecurity and stability in Ethiopia will turn into a deeper regional crisis that will harm the stabilization initiatives promoted by Addis Ababa and may end the peace process with Eritrea.



If Tigray succeeds in prolonging the confrontation, it could prompt the leaders of other regions to challenge Abiy Ahmed's government, limit its attempts to strengthen federal control of their regions, nor will the crisis be limited to Ethiopia's borders, but may spillover abroad, given Ethiopia's central location in the Horn of Africa and the region at large.

At the regional level, Egypt is trying to score points against Addis Ababa in its negotiations with Ethiopia in light of the difficult circumstances it finds itself in.

Cairo announced a joint military air exercise with Sudan at The Mori Air Base in northern Sudan, and the organization comes a month after former U.S. President Donald Trump said Egypt could "blow up" the Renaissance dam if no agreement is reached on it, which some have interpreted as a green light from Washington to Egypt to move militarily against the Renaissance Dam.

War crimes in Tigray

According to UN reports, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces committed serious violations of international law, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, and in November 2020, the Ethiopian prime minister ordered a military operation against Tigray, which included heavy and indiscriminate air raids carried out by the Ethiopian Airforce on the cities of Mekelle, Humera, Adigart and rocket attacks in Amhara province, killing at least 83 civilians and displacing thousands.

It was followed by the incursion of Eritrean forces, which caused humanitarian violations and abuses, including massacres in the cities of Aksum and Dengelat in the center of Tigray. The Eritrean army engaged in large-scale looting of civilian property and extrajudicial executions,



Eritrean forces killed hundreds of civilians in the city of Aksum, opened fire in the streets and raided houses, and at the end of the massacres that continued throughout November 2020, Abiy Ahmed declared victory after his forces captured Mekelle, capital of Tigray province despite the (TPLF) pledging to continue fighting.

It is impossible to establish an accurate count of the number of deaths, but it is estimated that more than 200 civilians were killed on November 28 and 29, as well as another massacre in the village of Dengelat north of Mekelle at the same time in which 164 civilians were killed. There were also reports of loss of life, physical and mental injuries, cases of gender-based violence and reports of 108 rapes in hospitals in the capital of The Tigray province.

Hundreds of civilians were stabbed or killed by axes on November 9, 2020, in Mai Kadra, in the deadliest atrocity since the government's November 4th military operation against the regional authorities led by the (TPLF) began.

According to reports, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission accused an informal militia of Tigray youth called "Samri" backed by local security forces loyal to the (TPLF) of targeting seasonal farmers identified as Amaharans, who worked on sesame or sorghum farms. The report stated that the perpetrators had spent all night killing peasants with sticks, knives and axes or strangulation while looting and vandalizing property. The Commission on Human Rights estimated that At least 600 civilians were killed, and the burial of the victims lasted for three days because of the large number of bodies as a result of limited burial capabilities.



The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General reported that some women were raped by military elements, adding that there were increasing reports of sexual violence against girls and women in a number of refugee camps.

The genocide forced more than 80,000 Ethiopians to flee to Sudan for fear of being brutalized by the Ethiopian army and its militias, which had shed children's blood and committed rapes and attacks against unarmed women.

More than 50,000 people, nearly half of them children, have arrived in Sudan, UNHCR has relocated 2,500 refugees from the border to Om Rakouba camp in eastern Sudan, and nearly 6,000 people have arrived at Tondiba camp in Sudan's Qadarif state, according to UNHCR.

More than 5,000 refugees in and around the Shire region living in difficult conditions have been displaced and reportedly forced to sleep in the open without water or food.

During December 2020 and January 2021, more than 136 cases of rape were reported in hospitals east of Tigray, with indications of many other unreported cases. Reliable sources provided information to the United Nations relating to the killing of eight protesters by security forces in February 2021 in Adigrat, Mekelle, Shire and Wakero. Fighting between the federal forces of prime minister Abiy Ahmed's government and the forces of the TPLF, the former ruling party in the region, have resulted in Thousands being killed and hundreds of thousands being displaced, and severe damage to infrastructure.

In December 2020, a massacre took place during a religious ceremony in the town of Denglat, where a group of Eritrean soldiers opened fire on the church during mass, killing priests, entire families and a group of more than 20 pupils at Sunday school.



In Aksum, 750 innocent people were killed on the grounds of St. Mary's Church, all food sources were looted, crops were burnt in the fields, public and private property was looted, monasteries, churches, mosques, hospitals and universities were destroyed, Eritrean refugee camps were broken into, with refugees being abducted and killed.

The United Nations has contributed assistance to displaced people from Tigray province in the May Ayn and Adai Haroush camps, providing water to 280,000 people, 35,000 refugees receiving food aid, and more than 65,000 displaced people receiving shelter and essential household items.

As for civilian losses, these military operations resulted in serious damage to infrastructure in the region, the supply of water and electricity was cut off and damage was done to service facilities and public institutions, most notably the airport of the historic city of Aksum, which completely suspended its service, resulting in the restriction of the movement of food, medical materials and other commodities.

The United States has described the violations in Tigray as ethnic cleansing, with growing concern about the humanitarian situation in the besieged region of 6 million people, and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted during a speech to members of parliament in Addis Ababa, the capital, that "reports indicate that atrocities have been committed in Tigray province, noting that soldiers who raped women or committed other war crimes will be held accountable."

Recently, the Ethiopian prime minister has been under pressure to end the conflict in Tigray, as well as establish an international investigation into allegations of war crimes, as the war



continues amid growing reports of atrocities, and finger-pointing at Eritrean soldiers supporting Ethiopian troops.

Abiy Ahmed claimed many times after the Ethiopian army entered the capital of Tigray that not a single civilian was injured or killed by artillery shelling or bombings, while doctors revealed otherwise as they wrote reports that many people were killed and more injured.

The United Nations has called for an end to atrocities and humanitarian crimes against the people of the territory, and for the start of peaceful talks between the government and the territory after the withdrawal of Eritrean troops and to start resolving the crisis.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet, has called for an "objective and independent investigation" in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, after "establishing serious violations that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity."

"Without prompt, impartial and transparent investigations, and without demanding accountability for those responsible, I fear that human rights violations will continue to be committed with impunity, and the situation will remain unstable for a longtime," the UN commissioner said.



Conclusion

The Tigray movement sought to secede, but backtracked on this demand when it came to power in the early 1990s, and the central government is trying to subdue it with federal forces, given the difficulty of military decisiveness, finding political solutions that would avoid a long-term conflict is the only option to save Ethiopia from deteriorating into an all-out civil war.

The choice of war could exhaust the Ethiopian State, which has already been subjected to many serious political challenges, and could also affect the security and stability of the Horn of Africa and beyond.

The main cause of today's conflict in Ethiopia is an ideological politician, between the movement of defenders of the Constitution, which adopted the principle of ethnic federalism, the unionist movement that believes in the importance of the nation-state, and the increased power of the center at the expense of the territories.

Weeks of fighting in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia have killed hundreds, displaced thousands and left millions in dire need of humanitarian assistance, and UNHCR noted that the worsening crisis is pushing thousands of people to flee, more than half of them children, indicating that the numbers are growing rapidly as the majority of those fleeing to Sudan cross.

Ethiopia views itself as a unique country in Africa, but the successive internal crises it faced, which were all linked to problems of managing ethnic diversity and its serious implications for stability and security, which was damaged by the failure of the ruling regime to achieve equality and justice and to prevent the marginalization and exclusion of the Ethiopian state's constituent ethnicities, some of which resort to taking up arms against the federal government.



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