



# **Violence against the Children of Tigray (A Human Tragedy)**

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**Introduction.**

**Abiy Ahmed and the ethnic crises in Ethiopia.**

**Humanitarian crisis for displaced children in Tigray.**

**Tigray children (a human tragedy).**

**Manifestations of violations against the children of Tigray.**

**Conclusion.**

**References.**



## Introduction

Violence against children in all its forms, and regardless of the circumstances surrounding it, is unacceptable. Violence threatens their existence, reduces the chances of their growth and violence dismantles family structures, affects the cohesion of societies, threatens education and consumes precious national resources. Freedom from such violence is a fundamental right.

Ethiopia is one of the most African countries suffering from ethnic conflicts and major displacement crises during the past two years, following the arrival of Abi Ahmed to the helm of power in Ethiopia 2018, announcing the start of a new phase of democracy, freedom and prosperity but he soon became embroiled in the flames of a civil war against the Tigray region. This resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis. The conflict in Tigray has caused more than a million Ethiopians to flee their country and Sudanese camps are filled with refugees from Ethiopia, most of whom appear to be children.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), many unaccompanied children have been separated from their families while fleeing their homes in the middle of the night, traveling for hours and days with nothing but clothes on their backs to reach safety, with limited access to food, shelter or Care, humanitarian organizations say many children are at risk of abuse and sexual exploitation.

Many Tigrayans have accused the federal government of carrying out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against them, and with the violence continuing, about 2.3 million children in Tigray do not have access to humanitarian aid.

Conflicts like these are difficult to stop if they get out of control, lives lost cannot be restored and the grievances they create remain long-standing, indicating that children are deprived of assistance due to the current circumstances.

The children of Tigray are a difficult humanitarian crisis that needs to find a way to solve; To save more than 2 million children displaced by civil war and



mismanagement of the government of an important country in the heart of Africa.

The report attempts to shed light on the extent of the suffering endured by more than 2 million Ethiopian children, who are still suffering from violence and killing and who do not find anything to eat in extremely difficult humanitarian conditions.

### **Abi Ahmed and the ethnic crises in Ethiopia**

Ethiopia suffers from many ethnic problems. Because of the differences between the ethnicities that make up the state and after he took power in 2018, Prime Minister Abi Ahmed promised to implement numerous reforms and political initiatives that would address the deteriorating ethnic relations in Ethiopia, build national unity, revive the long-stalled democratic process, hold free and fair elections in 2020 and release political prisoners.

But soon those promises were shattered on the rock of reality, and Abi Ahmed established his party (Prosperity), his exclusion of many Tigrayan elites, and his imprisonment of his political opponents, to confirm - beyond any doubt - his continuous quest to establish a new hegemony that meets his ambitions in governance, especially after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize 2019.

The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPF) has been at the top of the Ethiopian political system since the success of the 1991 coup, but things differed with Abi Ahmed's coming to power in April 2018, when he dismissed prominent figures in the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front on charges of corruption and human rights violations.

Abi Ahmed launched a huge propaganda campaign, which he launched to accompany the completion of the "Renaissance Dam", and to use the issue to promote his popularity with the Ethiopians, and to cover up his leadership of a new



political coup, in which he embarks on replacing the rule of the "Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front" with one-man rule.

The dispute between Tigray and Abi Ahmed increased in 2019, when the Prime Minister dissolved the coalition that brought him to power and established his new party (Prosperity Party). The dispute developed in October 2020, when the central government suspended its funding and cut ties with Tigray, and the region's administration asserted that this amounted to a "declaration of war." In this charged atmosphere, the federal government announced in November 2020, that Tigrayan militants attacked the "Northern Sector" of the Ethiopian army. Abi Ahmed accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front of committing national treason, and from that time on, fierce battles began between the two parties.

The cities of Mekele, Hamira and Adigrat in the Tigray region (throughout November 2021) witnessed continuous indiscriminate bombing by the Ethiopian forces, and the Abi Ahmed government imposed severe restrictions on the access of humanitarian relief teams and the media to the region, and reports indicated that his country's forces committed possible war crimes in the region. Tigray is in the north of the country, where fighting continues and government forces are hunting for fleeing provincial leaders.

Thus, the efforts that Abi Ahmed announced about the reformist democratic revolution that he started to put his country on a more liberal path have been marred by increasing violence and ethnic tensions, causing increased instability. its different ethnicities, a power struggle and a political rift within the federal government. This made the popular enthusiasm for his reforms and support to decline continuously and rapidly.



## Tigray Children (A Human Tragedy)

The war in Ethiopia left devastating effects on infrastructure and material losses in the Tigray region, where schools and medical centers were looted, vandalized and occupied by the armed forces and groups of the Ethiopian army and its Eritrean ally.

The Ethiopian forces left behind them human losses that exceeded three thousand dead, and the displacement of more than a million displaced people, and the Ethiopian army forces caused human disasters that cannot be erased such as killing, torture, rape and genocide and made the children of Tigray live a terrible human tragedy that will remain stuck in their minds for a lifetime.

### Locations and numbers of displaced Ethiopian children

Camp name	Camp site	Number of displaced people	Number of children
Tonedbeh	Gedaref State in eastern Sudan	More than 22,000 displaced people	8000 children
Umm Rakuba	Gedaref State in eastern Sudan	Maximum carrying capacity	22,000 children
Hamdayet	Kassala State	42,467 refugees.	21,000 children
Hashaba Center	Gedaref State in eastern Sudan	18,430 refugees,	8500 children

A large proportion of the numbers of these forcibly displaced persons, close to 50% or more, are children accompanied by their families or unaccompanied and there is no doubt that these children, especially if they are unaccompanied, will be subject to all kinds of illegal exploitation and they will be subject to, In one way or another, for all the manifestations and dangers of human trafficking. According to United Nations estimates, more than 30% of refugees are under the age of 18, while 5 percent of them are over 60 years old.



UNICEF also emphasized: "The longer access is delayed (to children), the worse their situation will be, with shortages of food - including ready-to-use therapeutic food used to treat cases of child malnutrition - medicine, water, fuel and other necessities." Urgent, continuous, unconditional and impartial to all families in need, wherever they may be."

Severe acute malnutrition rates are as high as 10% among children under the age of five. Henrietta Fore confirmed: "This is well above the 3% limit set by the World Health Organization and could put the lives of up to 70,000 children at risk."

### **Humanitarian crisis for displaced children in Tigray**

Ethiopian and Eritrean forces invaded the Tigray region, and carried out mass killings, rape and genocide. The United States described the violations in Tigray as ethnic cleansing. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to open an "objective and independent investigation" in the Ethiopian province of Tigray, after "proving that serious violations have occurred that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity."

On the other hand, Abi Ahmed said, "No civilian was killed when the federal forces entered Tigray cities and towns," but the survivors of the bombing attacks say this is not true and despite reaching agreements with the Ethiopian government, humanitarian agencies say they are denied access to Tigray.

An international organization report stressed ***that "most of the refugees in the camps and those who cross into Sudan are in dire need of food, shelter, clean water, sanitation and health care, and indicated that many of them are women and children."***

***The war in Tigray has left behind devastating effects, perhaps the most prominent of which is the tragedy of the Tigray children, whose number exceeds 2.3 million children, who have become displaced between camps inside Tigray in the cities of Mekli and Aksum, and external camps in Sudan.***



The International Organization for Migration reported in March 2021 that there are about 1,000,052 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Tigray region, half of whom are children under the age of 18, and the data indicates that the displaced are fleeing to towns and cities to seek humanitarian assistance and access to basic services.

The displaced live in overcrowded collective shelters. The shelters lack the most basic humanitarian needs, such as life-saving food aid. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has warned that three months after the outbreak of fighting in the Tigray region in northern Ethiopia, grave concern is growing about the plight of children. The United Nations reports that 3,000 unaccompanied or separated children are among the more than 57,000 people who have fled to neighboring Sudan.

"Save the Children International" confirmed that there are about 5,000 children living separately from their parents, six months after the outbreak of conflict in the Ethiopian Tigray region, which puts them at risk of violence and sexual abuse.

### Numbers and locations of internally displaced persons in the Tigray region

Region	Number of Displaced people	Number of children
Shire District	445,309 IDPs reside Highest concentration of IDPs	136,000 children
Aksum	102 thousand displaced	29,000 children
Mekle (the capital of the Tigray region)	80 thousand displaced people distributed in schools and temporary camps.	34,000 children
Afar region	45,343 IDPs	16,000 children
Amhara region	18,781 IDPs	6,000 children





The camps inside Tigray lack the most basic needs such as food and medicine and with the continued presence of government forces and their Eritrean allies inside the Tigray region, it creates a state of chaos and terrorism within the Region, Threatens The Population And Makes Tigray Children In A Difficult Humanitarian Crisis.

***"Respect And Protect The Civilian Population, Especially Women And Children, From All Human Rights Abuses,"*** The UN High Commissioner For Human Rights Said In The Statement.

"Initial Assessments Of 106 Medical Facilities In Tigray Between December 2020 And March 2021 Show That Nearly 70% Of The Facilities Were Looted, 30% Were Damaged, And Only 13% In Tigray Were Functioning," Doctors Without Borders International Said.

"Assessments Of Health Service Availability In More Than Two-Thirds Of The 264 Facilities In The Region Indicate Significant And Widespread Disruptions To Services," WHO Added. Including Vaccination Of Children In Only 28% Of Facilities And Availability Of Nutrition Services In Approximately Only 29% Of Operating Facilities.

### **Manifestations Of Violations Against The Children Of Tigray**

The 1990 African Charter On The Rights And Welfare Of The Child Refers To The "Protection Of Children Through Article 16 "Protection Against Child Abuse And Torture."

Clause (1) States Parties To This Charter Shall Take Specific Legislative, Administrative, Social And Educational Measures To Protect The Child From All Forms Of Torture, Inhuman Or Degrading Treatment, Especially Physical Or Mental Abuse, Or Ill-Treatment, Including Sexual Abuse, While Caring For The Child.

Clause (2) Preventive Measures Under This Article Shall Include Effective Procedures For Establishing Special Follow-Up Units To Provide The Necessary



Support To The Child And To Those Who Care For The Child, As Well As Other Forms Of Prevention For The Identification And Reporting Of Investigations, Treatment And Follow-Up Of Cases Of Child Abuse And Neglect.

It Is Clear That The Conflict In Tigray Has Violated All International Conventions Regarding The Protection Of Children. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Indicated That At Least 20 Children Were Killed In The Church Of Mary Our Lady Of Zion In The Tigray Region (November 2020), And International Organizations Indicated That "Eritrean Forces Killed Hundreds Of Children And Civilians Were Massacred In The Ethiopian Region Of Tigray In November 2020 And There Were Numerous International Reports About Eritrean Attacks In The City Of Aksum, East Of The Neighboring And War-Torn Region Of Tigray. Children For A Whole Month (November 2020).

International Organizations Confirmed That "Ethiopian Forces Committed Brutal Killings In Aksum And Deliberately Did Not Care About The Lives Of Civilians," Adding, "Ethiopian And Eritrean Officials Can No Longer Hide Behind The Veil Of Denial And Space Should Be Given To Achieve Justice And Compensate The Victims And Not Add More Grievances."

"There Is No Doubt That Sexual Violence Is Being Used In This Conflict As A Weapon Of War," The Deputy Secretary-General Of The United Nations For Humanitarian Affairs Confirmed On April 15, 2021, Adding That "The Majority Of Rape Crimes Were Committed By Men In Military Uniform, And The Fingers Of Accusation Are Pointed At The Parties." Disputing".

The United Nations Indicated That Sexual Violence Targets Girls As Young As 8 Years Old. Of The One Million People Displaced By Violence, Children Have Suffered Greatly. Many Of The City's Schools Have Become Camps For The Displaced And Their Corridors Are Filled With Children Who Are Being Treated For Bullet And Shrapnel Wounds, Some Of Whom Have Lost Limbs.

Under-Secretary-General For Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock Noted That "After Six Weeks Of Conflict, The Civilian Death Toll Is Increasing, And Women



And Children Are Arriving In Sudan With Disturbing Stories Of Violence, Deprivation And Abuse, Many Of Whom Have Not Been Able To Flee.”

Thousands Of Children In The Tigray Region Have Been Subjected To Detention By The Ethiopian Forces, As The Ethiopian Army Has Kidnapped A Large Number Of Children And Disappeared In Unknown Places, Noting That More Than A Thousand Children And Adults Have Been Kidnapped From West Tigray Since November 2020 To April 2021.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Confirmed That 16 Children Were Injured As A Result Of The War In The Region, While Some Children In The Hospital Lost Parts Of Their Bodies As A Result Of Landmines And Grenades Left On The Ground.

"Among The Many Children I Spoke With, There Was A Little Girl, A 16-Year-Old Girl Named Marhawit, Who Traveled 300 Kilometers With Her Baby Brother On Her Back From The West Of The Country, Amid Very Heavy Fighting," UNICEF Official James Elder Said. ...300 Km In A Slipper."

Marhawit Was "A Star In Physics, And Now She Is Looking For Food And Has Not Been To A Class For A Year."

Aside From The Education Crisis, Tigray Is Also Under The Weight Of A Food Emergency Linked To The Looting, Destruction Of Medical Centers And Costly Irrigation Systems That Farming Communities Cannot Do Without.

An Eight-Year-Old Ethiopian Boy Told The New York Times That "Living Here (In Um Rakobe Camp) Is The Best After The War Damage In Our Small Village...I Am Happy To Be Here."

Another Child, No More Than 12 Years Old, Described The Scenes Of The Dead On The Road, Saying, **"I Saw Everything With My Own Eyes... And If Things Went As They Were, I Would Never Go Back."**

The Number Of War-Wounded In Tigray Hard Hit By The Fighting Has Steadily Increased, Among Them Are Orphans Who Have Nowhere To Go After Their Recovery.



The United Nations Has Warned That About 2.3 Million Children In The Tigray Region In Northern Ethiopia Are Deprived Of Humanitarian Assistance, With The Conflict Continuing In The Region, And The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Said: “The Protection Of These Children, Many Of Whom Are Refugees And Internally Displaced Persons, Must Be A Priority.”

According To UNICEF, In The Tigray Region, The Level Of Global Acute Malnutrition Has Risen To 34%, Raising Fears That Affected Children May Eventually Be Exposed To Life-Threatening Malnutrition.

"The Only Thing We Know Is That Every Extra Day That Goes Into Waiting For Help Will Only Exacerbate The Suffering Of Children," Said Henrietta Fore, Executive Director Of UNICEF.

UNICEF Is "Concerned From The Start About The Harm This (Conflict) Will Do To Children, And Unfortunately These Fears Are Being Realized." Henrietta Fore Reported That Severe Acute Malnutrition Rates Are As High As 10% Among Children Under Five, And Added: "This Is Much Higher Than The Threshold It Is Set By The World Health Organization At 3% And Could Put The Lives Of Up To 70,000 Children At Risk.

## **Conclusion**

The Armed Conflicts Led By The Ethiopian Army Have Been Neglected In A Severe Humanitarian Crisis, Which Was Represented In The Displacement Of More Than A Million And A Half Ethiopians During The Rule Of Abi Ahmed, And The Number Of Ethiopian Refugees In Sudan Reached 61 Thousand, Following Renewed Clashes In The Tigray Region Between The Ethiopian Army And The “National Front” Liberation Of The Territory”, Amid Expectations That 20,000 Fleeing People Will Enter Sudan In The Next Stage, And The Number Of Ethiopian Refugees In Sudan Will Rise To 200,000.

The United Nations Accused The Eritrean Forces Of Committing Crimes Against Humanity, And Demanded That They Withdraw From The Tigray Region.



The Heads Of Nine United Nations Agencies And Other Officials Have Called For A Halt To Attacks Against Civilians In Ethiopia's Besieged Tigray Region, "Including Rape And Other Horrific Forms Of Sexual Violence."

Recently, The Ethiopian Prime Minister Is Under Pressure To End The Conflict In Tigray And Also Establish An International Investigation Into Allegations Of War Crimes. As The War Continues Amid Growing Reports Of Atrocities Committed, The Finger Is Often Pointed At Eritrean Soldiers Supporting The Ethiopian Forces.

The Tragedy Of The Tigrayan Children Has Come To Put The Human Conscience Before A Difficult Test, And The International Organizations Are Left With Two Options For Them To Choose. Either Help The Tigrayan Children And End Their Suffering And Hold The Ethiopian Government Accountable For War Crimes, Or Leave The Tigrayan Children To Die In The Camps For The Displaced On The Borders Of Their Homeland.

What Is Already Emerging Is A Disturbing Picture Of The Grave And Continuing Violations Of Children, And Unfortunately There Is Also An Emergency In The Areas Of Education And Nutrition, With Widespread Destruction Of The Basic Service Systems On Which Children Depend.

The Presence Of Displaced Persons In Any Country Is One Of The Indicators Of Political Instability And Ignoring Their Presence Is An Indication Of The Failure Of The Administration.