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Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative/ Vice-President
European External Action Service (EEAS)
European Commission

2 September 2021

Dear High Representative Borrell,

ETHIOPIA: EU MUST REDOUBLE ENGAGEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN CONFLICT

We are writing to urge the European Union (EU) and its member states to redouble their engagement on the human rights violations in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

In a recent report [“I don’t know if they realized I was a person”: Rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia](#), Amnesty International documented how federal government troops and other armed forces supporting them in the armed conflict against the Tigray Peoples’ Liberation Front (TPLF) have committed widespread rape against ethnic Tigrayan women and girls during the conflict that began on 4 November 2020. The perpetrators include members of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Amhara Regional Police Special Forces (ASF), and Fano, an informal Amhara militia group. The sexual violence that Amnesty International has documented has been accompanied by shocking levels of brutality, including beatings, death threats, and ethnic slurs. Some of the victims were held in captivity by the perpetrators for days and weeks, in circumstances constituting sexual slavery; others were raped in front of their children and other family members.

The prevalence of rape is hard to estimate, given that sexual violence is generally under-reported due to fear and stigma, and that the Ethiopian government has not granted international non-governmental human rights organizations access to the Tigray region to investigate these crimes. While many, possibly most, survivors of sexual violence have not been able to access medical care during the conflict, health facilities in Tigray registered 1,288 cases of sexual violence from February to April 2021, with doctors indicating that this is higher than in previous years and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, conflict related. Yet many of the survivors Amnesty International interviewed had not visited any health facilities at all, suggesting that these figures are likely to represent a small fraction of the total number of rapes committed. There are limited, if any, protection, rehabilitation, and livelihood services available to survivors of sexual violence in Tigray, because health facilities have been damaged and looted in the conflict and medical personnel have fled. Post-rape care, in particular, has been limited or non-existent.

Given the context, scale, and gravity of the sexual violence committed against women and girls in Tigray, these violations amount to war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity.

The EU and its member states have [called](#) for an immediate cessation of human rights violations including those possibly amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity – including rape and other sexual and gender-based violence, and have welcomed Ethiopian government steps toward the investigation of sexual and gender-based violence, while cautioning that more efforts are needed. The Foreign Affairs Council of 12 July likewise [discussed](#) how “violence and rape are widely used against civilians as a weapon of war” in Tigray, despite the ceasefire, and set out political priorities for the EU and its member states, including “immediately stopping human rights violations.”

In response to ongoing human rights violations in the conflict between the TPLF and the federal government, including those amounting to war crimes or possible crimes against humanity, Amnesty International urges the EU and its member states to:

- **Step up public and private engagement on human rights violations across relations with Ethiopia up to highest level**
- Urge the Ethiopian authorities to:
 - Ensure that **allegations of sexual violence perpetrated since the outbreak of the conflict in the Tigray region are promptly, effectively, independently and impartially investigated**, and that those suspected of criminal responsibility are brought to justice in open, accessible civilian courts in full compliance with international standards for fair trial without recourse to the death penalty. Where appropriate, those suspected of committing rape or sexual slavery should be investigated for the war crimes and crimes against humanity of rape, sexual slavery, torture and persecution
 - **Grant unhindered access to the Tigray region** for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' (ACHPR) Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on the Tigray Region, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry and Special Procedures, as well as for international human rights organizations, so they are able to investigate and document sexual violence and other violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law
 - Ensure that members of the armed and security forces immediately **cease attacks and threats against humanitarian workers and assets** and other obstructions to humanitarian assistance and **ensure immediate and unhindered access for UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations** to all areas of northern Ethiopia for the purposes of providing assistance to civilians, including survivors of sexual violence, affected by the conflict
- Lead efforts at the forthcoming UN Human Rights Council (HRC48) to ensure a robust response to the update by the OHCHR on the human rights and humanitarian catastrophe in Ethiopia's Tigray region, prioritising further steps that could be taken to ensure **comprehensive UN monitoring and reporting on the situation** and to enhance synergies with the important efforts of the ACHPR, including the CoI
- Ensure **sustained support for the human rights of detained opposition political leaders and journalists**, by raising their cases with the Ethiopian authorities, conducting trial observation with diplomatic representation and providing support to their lawyers and families
- Likewise, in line with commitments in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy to combat internet shutdowns in the context of human rights violations, engage with the Ethiopian authorities to **end the communications blackout** in place since November 2020, and immediately restore phone and internet communication networks in the Tigray region.

Thank you in advance for your timely and sustained action for human rights in Ethiopia.

Yours sincerely,



Eve Geddie
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Amnesty International – European Institutions Office