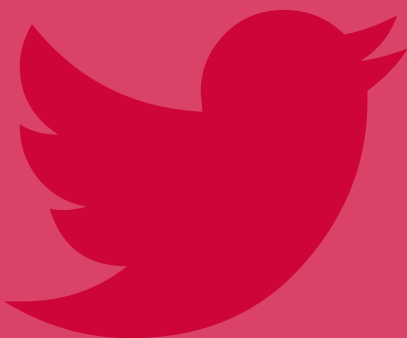


**April 1 – May 25, 2021**

# **Social Media Situation Report on Tigray Conflict**



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## Summary

- ▶ [Eritrea told the United Nations Security Council](#) on April 16, 2021, that it has agreed to start withdrawing its troops from Ethiopia's Tigray region, acknowledging publicly for the first time the country's involvement in the conflict. The [admission in a letter to the UNSC](#) and posted online by Eritrea's Ministry of Information - comes a day after U.N. aid chief Mark Lowcock said the world body had not seen any proof that Eritrean soldiers have withdrawn.
- ▶ Fresh allegations of war crimes continue to come out of Tigray. [The Telegraph](#) came out with a report of white phosphorous attacks on civilians by Eritrean and Ethiopian military. The report claims that exclusive footage and accounts of witnesses and victims smuggled out of the war in Tigray suggests the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies may have used powerful incendiary weapons in civilian areas.
- ▶ Reports of Atrocities, Sexual Violence and Extrajudicial Killings also continue to come out of Tigray. An indiscriminate shooting of civilians in the town of Adwa by Eritrean forces was vastly reported. The exact number of deaths and injuries remain uncertain as different organizations and individual activists provide for varying counts.
- ▶ On May 21, 2021, the [Religious Council of Tigray](#) issued a statement with a list of 326 religious people allegedly killed by Eritrean and Ethiopian forces. The list includes Priests, Sheikhs, pastors and other religious leaders (and their addresses) who allegedly were killed while serving in their respective religious places.
- ▶ On May 21, 2021, [The US Embassy in Ethiopia](#) came out with a statement about the death of humanitarian workers in Ethiopia. According to the statement, since November 2020, seven humanitarian workers have been killed in the Tigray Region alone, and one additional humanitarian has been killed elsewhere in the country. All were killed while supporting life-saving interventions for vulnerable people. The statement "condemned" in the strongest terms the killing of humanitarian workers.
- ▶ The diplomatic relation between Ethiopia and the U.S seem to have taken another level of complexity after the visit of Jefferey Feltman, the new American envoy to the Horn of Africa, who reportedly described the situation in Ethiopian as "[that could make Syria look like child's play](#)".
- ▶ The US Senate has unanimously passed a [resolution](#) calling on the Government of Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and other belligerents to cease all hostilities, protect human rights, allow unfettered humanitarian access, and cooperate with independent investigations of credible atrocity allegations pertaining to the conflict in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia.
- ▶ On May 23, 2021, [U.S State Secretary Anthony J. Blinken](#) released a press statement on putting in place visa restrictions on all Ethiopian and Eritrean government officials and TPLF leaders and economic sanctions on Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- ▶ Despite the efforts of many governmental authorities and non-governmental organizations, the humanitarian situation in Tigray continues to escalate. An alleged death of 150 civilians for hunger in Ofla District, Southern Tigray, has been widely circulating on social media platforms.
- ▶ Allegations of Anti-farming campaign are being reported amid worsening humanitarian situation in Tigray. Abebe Gebrehiwet, Deputy Head of Federal Government appointed Interim Administration of Tigray said, in an [interview with Tigray Television](#), that there is a deliber-

ate campaign to stop farming in Tigray. Without mentioning who exactly is responsible, he said the act is deliberate including by people tasked with law enforcement are preventing Tigrayans from farming as well as blocking seeds from areas including the town of shire, where tens of thousands of displaced people have found refuge due to the ongoing conflict.

- Amid these developments, fake news, hate speech and misinformation continue to come out in a massive scale.

## Context

The conflict on Tigray is aged seventh months now. It is to be recalled that state of emergency declared by the Ethiopian parliament on November 4, 2021, has its applicability lapsed now. No extension was made by the parliament. However, in practice, Tigray remains under the rule of the command post. All restrictions including that of on access to internet service are in place. People in Tigray are not allowed to go outside their homes after 8:00 pm. Hence, despite its legal irregularity, the state of emergency is De facto extended.

Meanwhile, in Tigray a 3-day fasting was being held across all major cities of Tigray. The fasting commenced on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2021. It lasted until 27<sup>th</sup> May. According to several sources the fasting was for all Tigrayans regardless of their religion. During the fasting, all major cities in Tigray remained ghosted, for example, in [Mekelle City](#), almost all Government offices were closed, businesses including government owned (like Banks) were closed, Public transportation was absent, and people stayed at home.

The head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Abune Mathias, has condemned the country's rulers in a video, which according to [CNN](#) was, recorded by Dennis Wadley, director of Bridges of Hope, a US-based charity, saying "they want to destroy the people of Tigray" with actions of "the highest brutality and cruelty".

Looting of aid by Eritrean troops and blockade of aid by Eritrean troops and [Amhara forces](#) have been reported to have taken place in Tigray. Several sources have made reports of different incidents in various parts of Tigray in which these forces have either blocked or looted (specially by members of Eritrean army) humanitarian aid.

# 1. Reports of Atrocities, Extreme Sexual Violence, Extrajudicial Killings and Use of Chemical Weapons



Figure 1: A screenshot taken from [The Guardian's website](#)

On April 2, 2021, The Guardian reported about a group of researchers who compiled a list of people killed during the Tigray conflict. It is apparently one of the most complete public records of the mass killing of civilians during the war. As per the report Almost 2,000 people killed in more than 150 massacres by soldiers, paramilitaries and insurgents in Tigray have been identified by researchers studying the conflict. The oldest victims were in their 90s and the youngest were infants says the report.

According to The Telegraph's report (April 7, 2021), in an exclusive investigation, witnesses tell of 182 civilians killed in Abyi-Adi, a town in the Temben region of central Tigray, on February 10, 2021. Both ENDF soldiers and Eritrean troops reportedly surrounded the area and went from house to house killing.



Figure 2: A screenshot taken from [The Telegraph's website](#)

By the fall of March, 2021, a video containing an alleged massacre of civilians in Tigray by ENDF troops was widely shared in social media platforms. However, no one was able to credibly confirm the setting of this video until [BBC's report](#) of April 1, 2021. An investigation by BBC Africa Eye has uncovered evidence that a massacre in northern Ethiopia was carried out by members of the Ethiopian military. It also reveals the precise location of the atrocity, in which at least 15 men were killed. BBC analyzes the topography shown on the video using satellite imagery and confirmed that the massacre took place close to the town of Mahbere Dego in Tigray region.

Other organizations such as [CNN](#), [NEWSY](#), and [BELLINGCAT](#), an international group of investigators, also came up with similar findings to that of BBC.



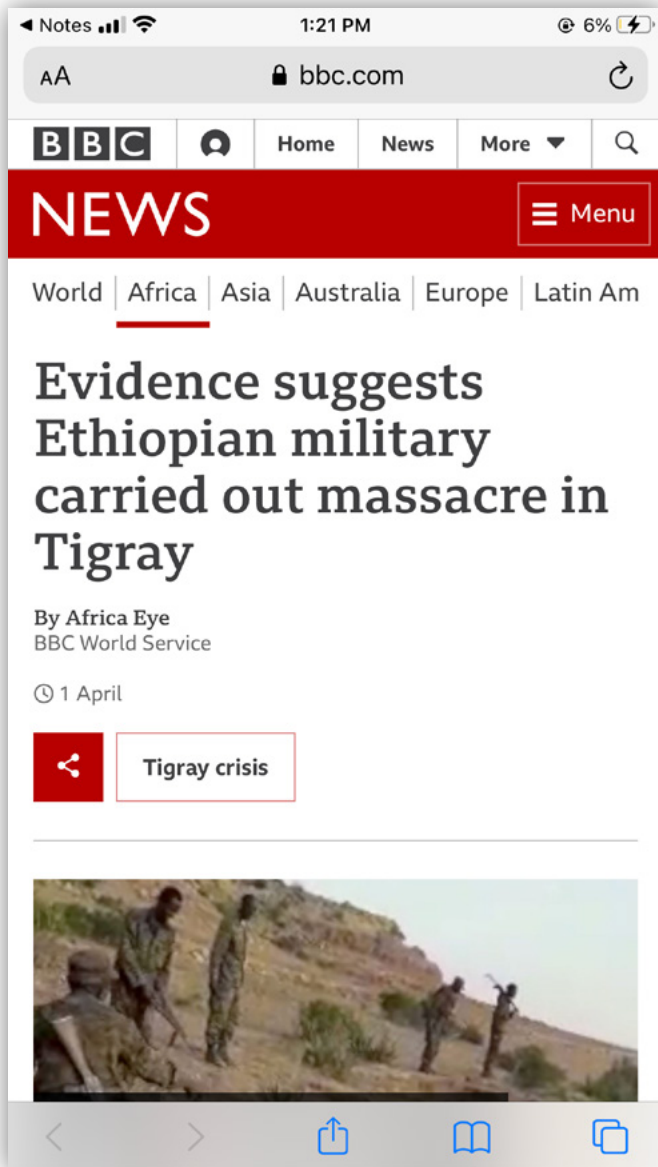


Figure 3: A screenshot taken from [BBC's website](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56484848)

According to multiple sources Eritrean soldiers have killed civilians in Adwa. However, the reported number of casualties vary.

Amnesty International issued a [report](#) about the killings in Adwa. "Instead of leaving Ethiopia's Tigray region, Eritrean troops continue to carry out atrocities there" Amnesty says. Moreover, Amnesty explained the killings in Adwa as "chilling, unprovoked assault on civilians". Amnesty reported three deaths and 19 injuries as a result of an indiscriminate shootings by Eritrean troops on April 12, 2021.



Figure 4: A [tweet](#) from Amnesty International

Medecines Sans Frontieres/Doctors without Borders (MSF), an international crisis medical organization, came out with a similar report. MSF reported that on April 12, 2021, 18 wounded people were admitted to a hospital in Adwa, among which 11 were critically injured.



Figure 5: A tweet from [MSF](#) East Africa



Figure 6: A screenshot taken from [BBC News Tigrinya's](#) Facebook page

According to the BBC, the security head of central zone of Tigray, Seyoum Asgedom, said Eritrean soldiers in trucks started the shootings for the mere reason that “a three wheeled vehicle was blocking their way”. Mr. Seyoum also said that “If it wasn’t for the national defense forces who intervened, they would have continued killing more people.”

On the contrary, the spokesperson for PM Abiy [Billene Seyoum](#) has said the alleged Eritrean soldiers shooting on civilians might have been “TPLF fighters” wearing Eritrean uniforms.



Figure 7: A Facebook [post](#) from Zetseat Saveadna Ananya

According to Zetseat Saveadna Ananya, a pro TPLF activist, ENDF soldiers arbitrarily “killed two civilians and injuring many more” by throwing a hand-held F-15 grenade in Mekelle.

Apart from those extrajudicial killings and massacres, reports of sexual violence continue to come out. Different organizations reported rape and other forms of sexual violence being used as a means of war by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces.



Figure 8: A screenshot taken from [Reuters's website](#)

Reuters interviewed victims of sexual violence who reportedly shared their stories of rape by multiple soldiers for extended period of time. According to Reuters citing Dr. Fasika Amdeselassie, the top public health official for the government-appointed interim administration in Tigray, some women were held captive for extended periods, days or weeks.

Many other international news outlets including [CBSNews](#) and [The New York Times](#) also reported similar stories of alleged victims of sexual violence.

On April 12, 2021, the General Director of Ayder Referral Hospital (largest hospital in Tigray), Dr. Kibrom Gebreselassie held an interview with [VOA Tigrigna](#). Dr. Kibrom

told VOA that patients with cases of sexual violence continue to be admitted to their hospital.

Furthermore, [Addis Standard](#) reported that Pramila Patten, special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, told the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that sexual violence continued to happen against women in Tigray region “with a level of cruelty beyond comprehension” and warned sexual violations including gang rape are still happening.

On May 21, 2021, the [Religious Council of Tigray](#)<sup>1</sup> issued a statement with a list of 326 religious people allegedly killed by Eritrean and Ethiopian forces. The list includes Priests, Sheikhs, pastors and other religious leaders (and their addresses) who allegedly were killed while serving in their respective religious places. According to the statement: -

- ▶ More than 163 Priests, Sheikhs, pastors and other religious leaders were killed in Central Tigray Zone
- ▶ More than 76 Priests, Sheikhs, pastors and other religious leaders were killed in Eastern Tigray Zone
- ▶ More than 44 Priests, Sheikhs, pastors and other religious leaders were killed in Southern and South-Eastern Zones of Tigray
- ▶ More than 43 Priests, Sheikhs, pastors and other religious leaders were killed in North-Western Tigray Zone

These names are only the ones which the council was able to verify during this “first phase” and the list is only part of those actually died during the conflict says the statement. The statement also mentions that 12 Churches and Mosques are destroyed by heavy artillery.

The head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church has condemned the country’s rulers in a video, which according to [CNN](#) was, recorded by Dennis Wadley, director of

<sup>1</sup> The council constitutes the Orthodox Church, the Islam, Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Kale Heywet Church, The Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and Evangelical Churches Fellowship.



Bridges of Hope, a US-based charity, saying “they want to destroy the people of Tigray” with actions of “the highest brutality and cruelty”.



Figure 9: A screenshot taken from [CNN](#)

The video message represents the Patriarch’s first public comments on what he calls “Tigray’s genocide,” since the conflict there began. “What is happening is the carnage of people... particularly the killing of innocents. The youth are being searched out in towns and in villages. Then they have been killed and thrown off the cliffs. They are not even allowed to be buried, as for example in Mahibere Diego,” Abune Mathias said.

“These type of atrocities have never been seen so far, which is very, very offensive. Particularly the rape of women is very disgraceful, shabby, and bad. They have no fear of God or any respect for human dignity,” Abune Mathias added.

The Patriarch addressed his many thwarted attempts to speak out against the ongoing six month “carnage” in the Tigray region. “Unfortunately, all my messages have been banned and prevented. As a result, all my efforts came to nothing. This is because I am not allowed to speak. I spoke out and they held it back. I spoke out again and they held it back. Until now I have not had the opportunity to display my message through the media,” Abune Mathias said. In the video message, Abune Mathias urged world leaders to intervene and stop the violence.

Various international media outlets including [BBC](#), [CNN](#), [Aljazeera](#), [VOA](#), [AFP](#) and [The Washington Post](#) echoed the video message. Locally, different actors responded in basically two ways. Some disagreed with the patriarch, while others supported his message.

Abune Yosief, Secretariat of the Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, appeared on state TV to denounce the message from the patriarch. According to Ethiopian Television (ETV/EBC), Abune Yosief said the “statement” of Abune Mathias is not a decision of the Holy Synod. The statement made by the patriarch is not of the Holy Synod, but rather of his own only.

At the same time, the patriarch’s message has gotten support from many. For example, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church Mekelle Diocese Secretariat and Tigray Branch Office of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church Theology Students Association “[strongly supported](#)” the patriarch’s message.

Subsequently, the US ambassador to Ethiopia, [Amb. Geeta Pasi](#) hosted Abune Mathias at her residence and the two reportedly discussed the situation in Ethiopia and specifically the humanitarian crisis in Tigray, including his video message.



Figure 10: A screenshot taken from [U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa's Facebook page](#)

On May 21, 2021, the [FDRE Attorney General](#) issued “a summary of efforts to ensure accountability regarding violations of international human rights law and other legal norms in the regional state of Tigray “.

The report reiterated that the Federal Government’s military operation was launched in response to the “calculated, coordinated, large scale, treasonous and sudden attack perpetrated against several outposts of the Northern Command of Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) by Tigray Special Police and Militia of the Tigray Regional State.

The report enumerates several steps the FDRE Attorney General claims to have taken.

- ▶ Military prosecutors have pressed charges against 28 soldiers who are suspected of killing civilians in a situation where there was no military necessity.
- ▶ Military prosecutors have pressed charges against 25 soldiers who are suspected of committing acts of sexual violence and rape.

The trials of these suspects are underway and the verdicts are expected to be handed down shortly says the report.

Additionally, three other soldiers have already been convicted and sentenced for rape; one soldier has been convicted and sentenced for killing a civilian the report says.

Furthermore, the report also mentioned that Federal police and Prosecutors focused on investigations of allegations of major atrocities. The report says the investigation team sent to Maikadra identified 202 individuals who are believed to have taken part in the killing in Maikadra, 23 of whom are apprehended and their case is under preliminary inquiry at Federal First Instance Court.

The report also included the killings of civilians in the city of Axum. The report says the investigation is still underway and incomplete and all findings are tentative and subject to corroboration and confirmation.

The report also indicates the next steps are finalizing the investigation and identifying the suspects and expanding the investigation to other parts of the region where there have been credible reports of major crimes and atrocities.



Figure 11: A screenshot taken from the [BBC](#)

According to the [BBC](#) eyewitnesses say, On May 8, 2021, the town of Hawzen was bombarded by heavy artillery. As per the BBC, residences were destroyed and people have died, including children as young as 2-years-old, due to the bombardments. Those who were injured has been taken to

Wukro Hospital and Ayder Referral Hospital for treatment says BBC. Colonel Getnet, Director of Public Relations for the Defense Forces; Asked about the alleged harm to children in and around Hawzen, he said it was wrong to say that a house was destroyed by heavy gunfire says the BBC.

Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), on May 23, 2021, issued a press statement on [“Facts and Concoctions in the Tigray Region”](#). Among other things, she statement warns in advance that “a malicious and irresponsible charge” was to be made by a prominent international publication (without mentioning the name) in the following days alleging the use of chemical weapons against the people of Tigray. The statement “forewarned the world” that the report seeks to further inflame and divide the nation.

Hours after MFA’s statement, [The Telegraph](#) came out with a report alleging white phosphorous attacks on civilians by Eritrean and Ethiopian military. The report claims that exclusive footage and accounts of witnesses and victims smuggled out of the war in Tigray suggests the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies may have used powerful incendiary weapons in civilian areas.

Leading chemical weapons experts said the footage is consistent with white phosphorus, which is banned from use against human targets under international law says The Telegraph.

According to report, the victims include Kisanet Gebremicheal, a 13-year-old girl from the village of Adi’ayqoro in central Tigray who suffered agonizing burns when her home came under attack on April 20. “A heavy weapon hit the house, and fire fell from the roof,” she said on the phone in between sobs. “It burned me immediately. It had the smell of gunpowder.”Footage taken in hospital shortly after Ms. Gebremicheal made it to the medical Centre shows her dark skin entirely burnt away from her arms, legs, face and hands — all that’s left is a white and red paste of flesh and fat says The Telegraph.



Figure 12: A screenshot of [The Telegraph's Report](#)

Ethiopian Ministry of Federal Affairs (MFA) also responded after The Telegraph’s report was out. [MFA](#) categorically rejected the allegations of use of chemical weapons.



## 2. Intentional Destruction and looting of Public and Private Property



Figure 13: A tweet from Tigisti

A Tigrayan activist, Tigisti, tweeted that ENDF soldiers looted, destroyed and trashed Hatsey Yohannes High School, the oldest high school in Tigray, citing Dimtsi Weyane's news on YouTube. This claim was also made by many other activists.



Figure 14: A screenshot of Tigist' Hago + Hirago Hesenbet's post

Tigist' Hago + Hirago Hesenbet, a Tigrayan social media activist, posted photos of stacks of grain burnt to the ground, which she claims are samples of those done by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers. She claims that these two pictures are taken in Adet Wereda of Central Tigray Zone.

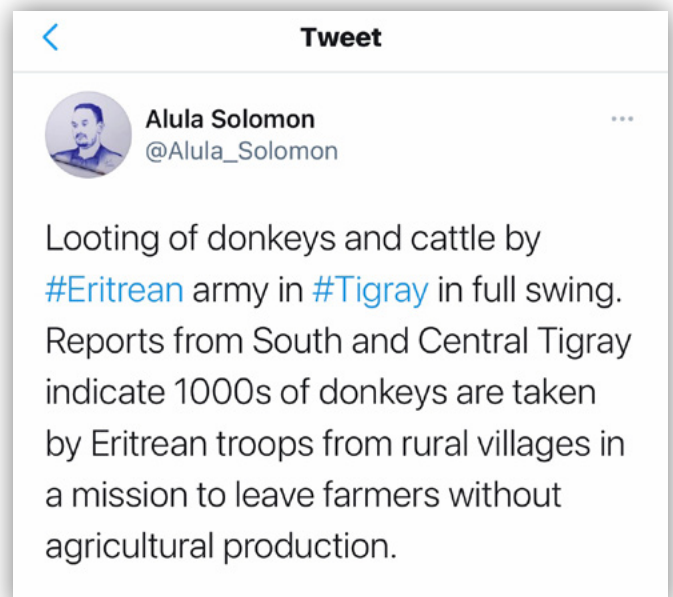


Figure 15: A tweet from Alula Solomon

Another activist and CEO of Tigray Media House (TMH), Alula Solomon claimed that Eritrean soldiers are looting thousands of



donkeys from rural villages of south and central Tigray.



Figure 16: A screenshot of Ztseat Saveadna Ananya's post

Ztseat Saveadna Ananya claims that several trucks, which were allegedly transporting face masks for COVID-19 protection in Tigray were set on fire and destroyed by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers.

### 3. Fighting Continues

Over the course of this reporting period, various indications of continuation of fighting between both sides (i.e. Ethiopian military and allies with Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF)) have been witnessed.



Figure 17: A screenshot taken from [EBC's Facebook page](#)

On April 13, 2021, lieutenant General Bacha Debele, Head of the Army Building Department of ENDF, appeared on state TV for a briefing, in which he mentioned that the activities the "Junta" was conducting on 8 different areas were destroyed. He also added that the ENDF destroyed training camps, where Junta's soldiers were trained, using modern warfare technology.

Mr. Getachew Reda responded to L/General Bacha's claims in an [interview with Tigray Media House \(TMH\)](#) on April 16, 2021. Mr. Getachew said L/General Bacha's allegations are lies to cover for the losses they are facing on battleground.

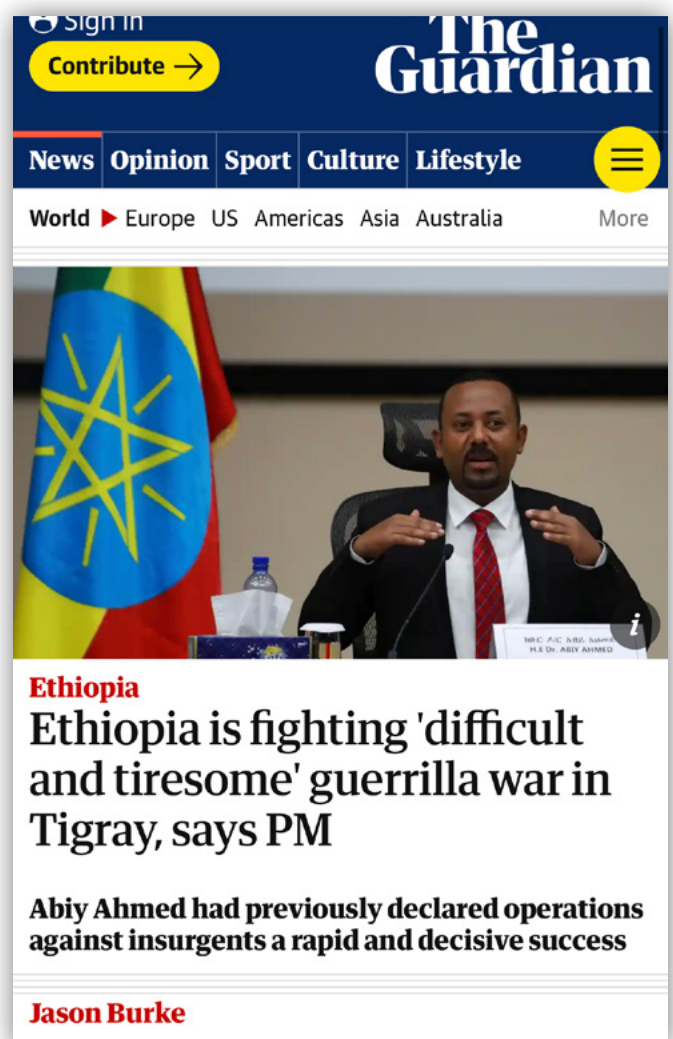


Figure 18: A screenshot taken from [The Guardian's website](#)

The Guardian reports about what PM Abiy said about the Tigray war to parliament on April 4. PM Abiy says "The junta which we had eliminated within three weeks has now turned itself into a guerrilla force, mingled with farmers and started moving from place

to place, Now, we are not able to eliminate it within three months”.



Figure 19: A screenshot of [Kassa Hailemariam's post](#)

According to kassa Hailemariam, a pro-TPLF activist, TPLF fighters shot down MI-35 helicopter and all three on board were killed.

[Alula Solomon](#) claims that the flight leader of fighter helicopter is named Col. Lemma Tafese, second in command of Diredawa Airbase.



Image 1: A screenshot taken from [YouTube account of Tigray Media House](#)

Despite these reports, [lieutenant General Bacha Debele](#), Head of the Army Building Department of ENDF, mentioned in a press briefing on April 23, 2021, that the “helicopter crashed due to technical problems”.

## 4. Blockade and Looting of Humanitarian Aid and Death of Humanitarian Workers

Looting of aid by Eritrean troops and blockade of aid by Eritrean troops and Amhara forces have been reported to have taken place in Tigray. Several sources have made reports of different incidents in various parts of Tigray in which these forces have either blocked or looted (specially by members of Eritrean army) humanitarian aid.



Figure 20: A [tweet](#) from AFP/ [France 24](#), French news agency, also made similar reporting citing AFP itself.

On April 27, 2021, AFP claimed to have obtained government documents showing Eritrean soldiers are blocking and looting food aid in Tigray Region.

As per the [CNN](#), A CNN team traveling through Tigray's central zone witnessed Eritrean soldiers, some disguising themselves in old Ethiopian military uniforms, manning checkpoints, obstructing and occupying critical aid routes, roaming the halls of one of the region's few operating hospitals and threatening medical staff.

Ethiopian security officials working with Tigray's interim administration said that the Ethiopian government has no control over Eritrean soldiers operating in Ethiopia, and that Eritrean forces had blocked roads into central Tigray for over two weeks and in the northwestern part of the region for nearly one month says CNN.



The testimonies, shared at great personal risk, present a horrifying picture of the situation in Tigray that, by many accounts, bears the hallmarks of genocide and has the potential to destabilize the wider Horn of Africa region says CNN.

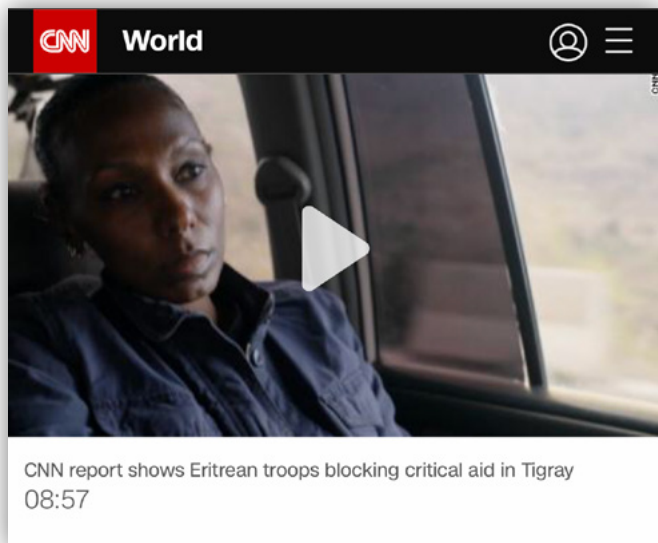


Figure 21: A screenshot taken from the [CNN](#)

[Axumite Media](#), an online media based in Nairobi, Kenya, reported that more than 50 trucks carrying humanitarian aid have been stopped by Amhara special force and Amhara militia at the road between May-Tsebri and Shire Endaslassie.



Figure 22: A screenshot of [Axumite Media's Facebook post](#)

On May 21, 2021, [The US Embassy in Ethiopia](#) came out with a statement about the death off

humanitarian workers in Ethiopia. According to the statement, since November 2020, seven humanitarian workers have been killed in the Tigray Region alone, and one additional humanitarian has been killed elsewhere in the country. All were killed while supporting life-saving interventions for vulnerable people. We condemn in the strongest terms the killing of humanitarian workers. They must stop and those responsible must be brought to justice says the statement.

The statement alleges that the most recent incident is a staff member of a USAID partner being killed on April 28 in Kola Temben, Tigray reportedly by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers. According to the statement citing eyewitnesses, he clearly identified himself as a humanitarian worker and pleaded for his life before he was killed by military actors. The circumstances of this incident reflect a troubling broader deterioration in the safety and security of the environment in which humanitarian workers are operating in Ethiopia every day, as well as the worsening humanitarian and human rights crisis says the statement.



Figure 23: A [tweet](#) from Laura-Mai Gaveriaux

Laura-Mai Gaveriaux, a renown French journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Long Courier Newsletter, claims Eritrean soldiers destroying new equipment in hospitals after being refurbished by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Tigray.

## 5. More Pressure from the International Community

The pressure which the International community has been exerting on Ethiopia has been building up ever since the start of the Tigray war. This time however the level of such pressure seems to be tough than ever.

The diplomatic relation between Ethiopia and the U.S seem to have taken another level of complexity after the visit of Jefferey Feltman, the new American envoy to the Horn of Africa, who reportedly described the situation in Ethiopian as “[that could make Syria look like child’s play](#)”.

On May 15, 2021, U.S Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken issued Statement “on the Continuing Atrocities and Denial of Humanitarian Access in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region”. The United States is gravely concerned by the increasing number of confirmed cases of military forces blocking humanitarian access to parts of the Tigray region says the statement. “This unacceptable behavior places the 5.2 million people in the region in immediate need of humanitarian assistance at even greater risk. The United States unequivocally calls upon the Governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia to take all necessary steps to ensure that their forces in Tigray cease and desist this reprehensible conduct. We also again call on all parties to comply with obligations under international humanitarian law, including those relevant to the protection of civilians, and to cease immediately all hostilities and allow relief to reach those suffering and in greatest need of assistance. The Ethiopian government should lead in this regard and immediately facilitate full and unhindered access for humanitarian actors to all parts of the Tigray region” the statement added.

“There are many credible reports of armed forces in Tigray committing acts of violence against civilians, including gender-based violence and other human rights abuses and atrocities. The conduct of the Eritrean Defense Forces and Amhara regional forces have been particularly egregious. The continued

presence of Eritrean forces in Tigray further undermines Ethiopia’s stability and national unity. We again call upon the Government of Eritrea to remove its forces from Tigray. Both Eritrean and Ethiopian authorities have repeatedly promised such a withdrawal, but we have seen no movement towards implementation” says the statement.

The statement “equally urge the Government of Ethiopia to withdraw Amhara regional forces from the Tigray region and ensure that effective control of western Tigray is returned to the Transitional Government of Tigray. Prime Minister Abiy and President Isaias must hold all those responsible for atrocities accountable”.



Figure 24: A screenshot taken from [U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia](#)

Subsequently, the US Senate has unanimously passed a [resolution](#) calling on the Government of Ethiopia, the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, and other belligerents to cease all hostilities, protect human rights, allow unfettered humanitarian access, and



cooperate with independent investigations of credible atrocity allegations pertaining to the conflict in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia.

The resolution “strongly disapproves” of the escalation of political tensions between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) into armed conflict and condemns in the strongest terms all violence against civilians.

The resolution sponsored by Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman James E. Risch and passed by the Senate on Thursday, called on Eritrea to “immediately and fully withdraw its military forces from Ethiopia” and condemned human rights violations committed by the Eritrean military.

It called for the “swift and complete restoration of electricity, banking, telephone, and internet services throughout the Tigray Region and other parts of Ethiopia where communications have been restricted”.

It also urged US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to ensure that a “full, independent, international investigation into all reports of human rights violations, abuses, and atrocities” committed in the course of the conflict is carried out and that those responsible be held accountable.

These moves by Anthony Blinken and the US Senate fueled anger among various political actors in Ethiopia. Following widespread call for demonstrations in protest of “US intervention on Ethiopia’s domestic affairs” on social media, including by Andargachew Tsige, a senior politician and CEO of Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT), a pro PM Abiy Ahmed TV station, who said he would call for Ethiopians to go out in millions and “[should not hesitate to burn the American flag in front of their embassy](#)”<sup>2</sup>, [US Embassy in Ethiopia](#) cancelled consular services and told people to stay away from the embassy on May 21, 2021.

On May 23, 2021, [U.S State Secretary Anthony J. Blinken](#) released a statement on putting in place visa restrictions on all Ethiopian and

Eritrean government officials and TPLF leaders and economic sanctions on Ethiopia and Eritrea. Here is an excerpt of the statement taken from the [official website of the U.S government](#): -

“The time for action from the international community is now. Today, I am announcing a visa restriction policy under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act on the issuance of visas for any current or former Ethiopian or Eritrean government officials, members of the security forces, or other individuals—to include Amhara regional and irregular forces and members of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)—responsible for, or complicit in, undermining resolution of the crisis in Tigray. This includes those who have conducted wrongful violence or other abuses against people in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, as well as those who have hindered access of humanitarian assistance to those in the region. Immediate family members of such persons may also be subject to these restrictions. Should those responsible for undermining a resolution of the crisis in Tigray fail to reverse course, they should anticipate further actions from the United States and the international community. We call on other governments to join us in taking these actions.

Additionally, we have imposed wide-ranging restrictions on economic and security assistance to Ethiopia and will bring our defense trade control policy in line with them. We will continue humanitarian assistance and certain other critical aid to Ethiopia in areas such as health, food security, basic education, support for women and girls, human rights and democracy, good governance, and conflict mitigation, consistent with available authorities. The United States will continue its existing broad restrictions on assistance to Eritrea.

*The United States reiterates its calls for a durable, political solution to the crisis. We are committed to supporting efforts to resolve the crisis in Tigray and help Ethiopians advance reconciliation and dialogue to overcome current divisions.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Afterwards, Mr. Andargachew retook what he said about burning the American flag.

Ethiopian [Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(MFA\)](#) responded on the following day in a press statement. In the statement the ministry stated that “what is more saddening is the tendency by the U.S. administration to treat the Ethiopian Government on an equal footing with TPLF, which was designated as a terrorist organization by the House of Peoples Representatives two weeks ago”.

The statement accuses the U.S. Administration of attempting to meddle on Ethiopia’s internal affairs. It also states that “the decision by the

U.S. Administration to impose visa restrictions and other measures is not regrettable but also will seriously harm and undermine the constructive spirit of engagement”.

Moreover, the ministry included the following last remark “The Government of Ethiopia will be forced to reassess its relations with the United States, which might have implications beyond our bilateral relationship. The Ethiopian Government will not be deterred by this unfortunate decision of the U.S. Administration.”

## 6. Anti-Farming Campaign and Worsening Humanitarian Crisis

Abebe Gebrehiwet, Deputy Head of Federal Government appointed Interim Administration of Tigray said in an [interview with Tigray Television](#) that there is a deliberate campaign to stop farming in Tigray. Without mentioning who exactly is responsible he said the act is deliberate including by people tasked with law enforcement are preventing Tigrayans from farming as well as blocking seeds from areas including the town of shire, where tens of thousands of displaced people have found refuge due to the ongoing conflict.

Several prominent international media outlets such as [BBC](#), [AFP](#), [France 24](#) reported about the “Anti-Farming Campaign”.

Different international organizations continued to issue warnings that the humanitarian situation in Tigray is worsening, some consider famine is not far away from happening.



Figure 25: A screenshot taken from [France 24](#)



Figure 26: A [tweet](#) from UNOCHA

On April 12, 2021, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said 91% of the total population in Tigray is in need of urgent food assistance.



Figure 27: A screenshot taken from [VOA Amharic's Facebook page](#)

As per VOA Amharic, more than 345,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are sheltered in the city of Shire Endaselassie alone. Moreover, VOA reported that the IDPs are sheltered in places like schools and even under trees.

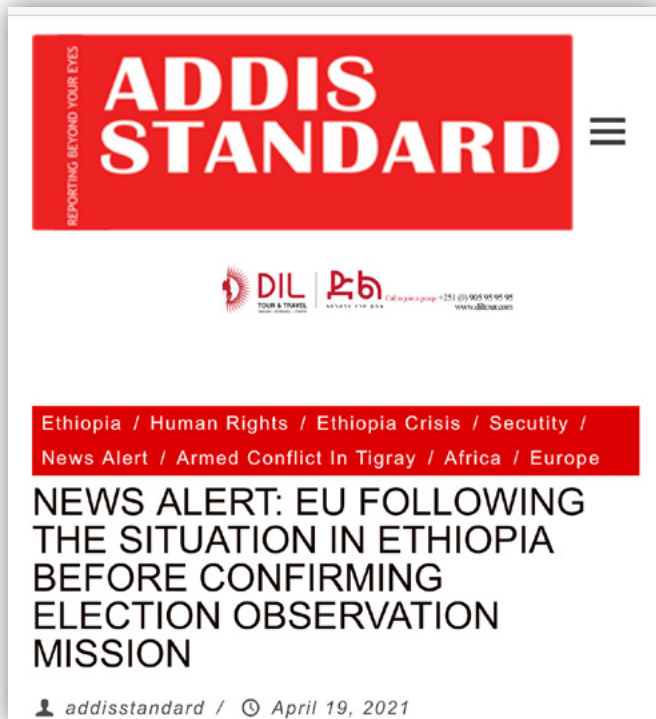


Figure 28: A screenshot taken from Addis Standard's website

According to Addis Standard, on April 15, 2021, Mark Lowcock, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, told members of the UN Security

Council in a closed-door meeting requested by the US under Any other Business (AOB) that he received a report just that morning of 150 people dying from hunger in Ofra woreda just south of Mekelle.



Figure 29: A screenshot taken from [Fana Broadcasting Corporate \(FBC\)'s Facebook page](#)

On the other hand, Head of the National Emergency Coordination Commission, Mr. Mitku Kassa denies this allegation. According to Fana Broadcasting Corporate (FBC), Mr. Mitku said the claims propagated by various media outlets that 150 people died due to hunger in Ofra woreda is false.



Figure 30: A [tweet](#) from [Samantha Power](#)

Samantha Power, Administrator of USAID characterizes the humanitarian situation as



category 5 food emergency and urges the Ethiopian government to act promptly.

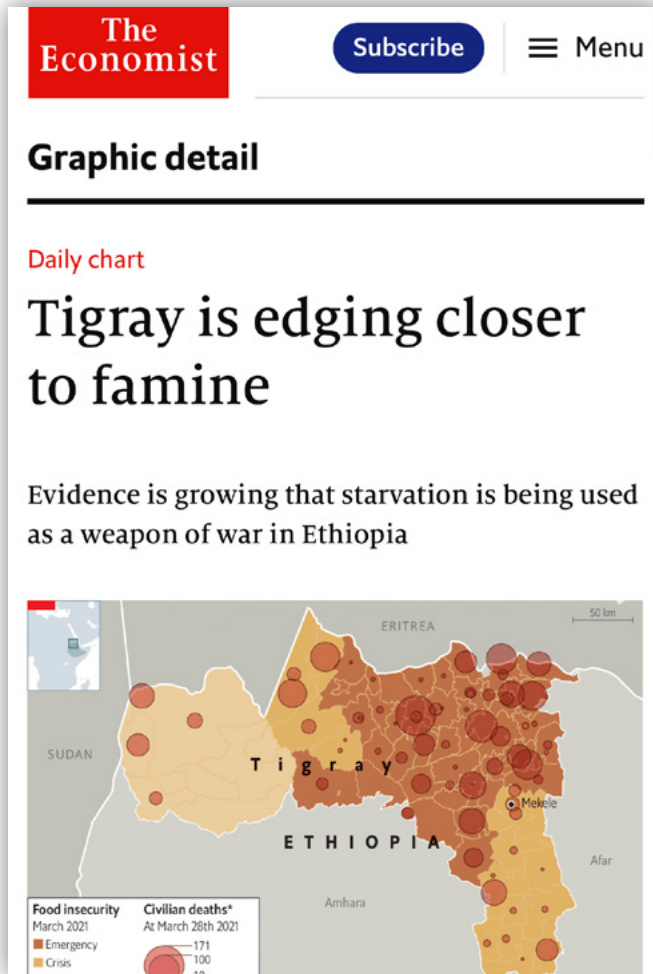


Figure 31: A screenshot taken from [The Economist](#)

According to The Economist the human suffering is widespread in Tigray. Central and eastern Tigray, as well as parts of the north-west, are facing “crisis” or “emergency” hunger levels, according to the UN’s Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), meaning that households are suffering from acute malnutrition sys [The Economist](#). The next and final phase on the IPC scale is “famine” marked by an extreme lack of food, resulting in starvation or death. Before the conflict broke out, Tigray was largely free from hunger; now the UN estimates that 4.5m need food aid.

## 7. “Tigray Fasting”

Meanwhile in Tigray a 3-day fasting was being held across all major cities in Tigray. The fasting commenced on 25th May, 2021. It lasted until 27th May. According to several sources the fasting was for all Tigrayans regardless of their religion. During the fasting, all major cities in Tigray remained ghosted, for example, in [Mekelle City](#), almost all Government offices were closed, businesses including government owned (like Banks) were closed, Public transportation was absent, and people stayed at home.



Image 2a: [Streets](#) of Mekelle City on May 25, 2021





Image 2b: [Streets](#) of Mekelle City on May 25, 2021

## 8. Incitement, Fake News and Hate Speech



Figure 32: A screenshot taken from [AmoraView](#)

This Facebook post from “AmoraView” in Tigrigna caption is read “Traitor is dismissed from his position”.



Figure 33: A screenshot taken from “Ethiopian DJ” Facebook page

The Facebook post reads from “Ethiopian DJ” in Amharic “They would not even accept aid. They are saying they do not want aid from Neftegna. What’s going on people!”



Figure 34: A [Facebook post](#) falsely claims that young people are being kidnapped from refugee camps in Sudan and taken to unknown places.



Figure 35: A [tweet](#) from Kibrom Zebib Sibhatleab

Kibrom Zebib Sibhatleab, a member of executive committee for Baytona, a Tigrayan nationalist party, labels the head of Immigration, Nationality and Vital Events Agency as “the most racist”.



Figure 36: A [post](#) falsely claims that a polish scientist said TPLF induced Eritrean refugee wear Eritrean military uniform and recorded them while they chop off women’s breast.



Figure 37: A screenshot taken from [Kibrom Mulugeta](#)

This Facebook post reads in Tigrigna as “Donkeys are taking donkeys. You will be forced to give them back; You will be beaten up until you return them with additional ones”.





Figure 38: A screenshot of [Mickey Tigray's](#) post

The Tigrigna meaning of this post is “A Tigrayan who has gone mad is the definition for being Eritrean (Tesfeom Mehari)”



Figure 39: A screenshot of [Muktarovich Ousmanova's](#) Facebook post

This Facebook post from [Muktarovich Ousmanova](#) in Amharic is read as “It has come to our attention that this “Juntit” (a member of TPLF) named Lucy Kassa, residing in Addis Ababa, is the one who wrote a false news report for The Telegraph that Ethiopian government used chemical weapons thereby defaming the ENDF. We plead to the concerned organ that she should be legally accounted for.....”



Figure 40: A [tweet](#) from Yared Asrat (የኣቤ ልጅ)

A twitter account with the name “Yared Asrat (የኣቤ ልጅ)” tweeted the following about Ethiopian Orthodox Church Patriarch Abune Mathias: “For I do not want to be a follower of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as headed by this dirty racist individual; I will be distancing myself from following the church indefinitely (until this individual is removed). The church should remove this individual for its own sake.”

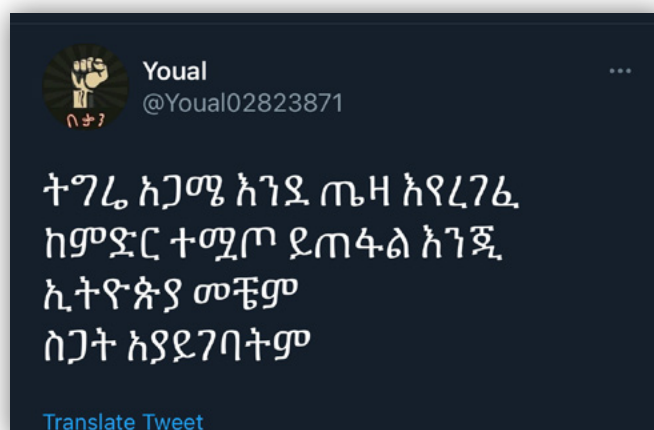


Figure 41: A [tweet](#) from Youalin Amharic read as “Tigre Agame (Tigrayans) will be falling like dew and exterminated from this earth at the cost of Ethiopia’s insecurity”



Figure 42: A [tweet](#) from minilik\_The King

“minilik\_The King” says “Eden Agame, what did you say? We slapped TPLF, a parasite to Ethiopia, and put it to its grave. What’s left of you now is only talk.”

## 9. Other Talks of Social Media

Other than the ones dealt under previous parts of this report, many other issues have been widely discussed on social media.

- ▶ [Ethiopian Ministry of Defense](#) announced on May 14, 2021, that 320 members of the “Junta”<sup>3</sup> were killed by the Ethiopian army in their attempt to cross the Ethiopian border from Sudan. The ministry stated that they were the ones who fled to Sudan after committing atrocities in Maikadra and this time they were trying to bring in various communication devices, firearms and pharmaceuticals.
- ▶ Many Tigrayan and non-Tigrayan activists widely shared a letter allegedly written by The Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau of Amhara Regional State calling for investors to bid for temporary land use over “free investment lands in the Welkayt Tsegede Setit Humera Zone and its Woredas”. Several social media activists condemned this alleged move by

the Amhara State Government. [Solomon Weldegerima](#), a pro-prosperity party activist, in his Facebook post confirmed the authenticity of the letter. Mr. Solomon also mentioned that he communicated the issue with “Officials of Tigray Interim Government” and the aforementioned act has been temporarily stalled.

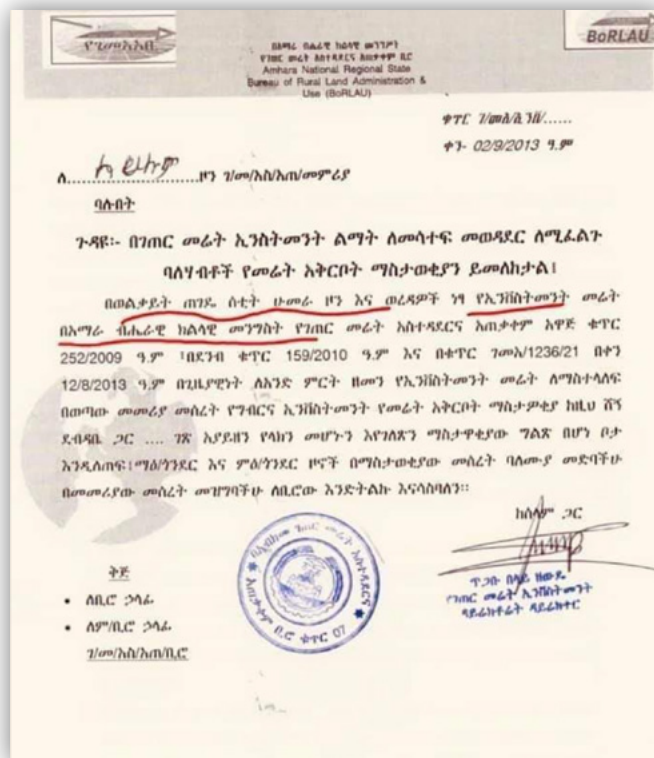


Figure 43: An alleged [letter](#) from The Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau of Amhara Regional State

- ▶ The Expulsion of New York Times reporter Simon Marks was controversial. According to [New York Times](#), “the government gave no explanation for the expulsion of the reporter, who had extensively reported about the war and human rights abuses in the Tigray region”. “On May 20, Ethiopian officials summoned Mr. Marks to a meeting in the capital, Addis Ababa. His press credentials had already been canceled since March, one day after he returned from an approved reporting trip in Tigray. The officials detained him and drove him to the city airport, where he was held for eight hours before being deported on a flight that left around 12:30 a.m. local time on the next day” says New York Times.

[Simon Marks](#) also released a series of tweets following his expulsion from Ethiopia. He said

<sup>3</sup> The term “Junta” is commonly used by Ethiopian government officials to refer to Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF)



Ethiopian immigration officers did not even allowed him to say good bye to his 2-year-old son and partner.



Figure 44: A screenshot taken from [New York Times](#)

- ▶ An article of [The Intercept](#) accuses VOA East Africa service, especially VOA Amharic, of being a propaganda machine of the Ethiopian Government. The article which cites several former and current employees of VOA argues that VOA East Africa service's coverage on the Tigray war largely favored the Ethiopian government, while ignoring its potential war crimes.
- ▶ A magazine has been circulating in the major cities of Tigray over the course of this month. The magazine is named after a pro TPLF youth organization called "Remets/ሬመት". The Tigrigna meaning of the term is ember.



Figure 45: A screenshot taken from [kassa hailemariam's Facebook post](#) showing people reading "Remets" Magazine

- ▶ Abraham Belay, a former Minister of Science and Innovation has been appointed by PM Abiy as a head of Tigray Region Interim Administration replacing Mulu Nega since May 5, 2021. According to the [BBC](#), no explanation was given by the government why the change was made.
- ▶ The alleged release of a pilot of a fighter jet, who allegedly was previously captured in Temben, central Tigray, after his jet was [shot down](#) by TPLF forces, infuriated most Tigrayan social media users and several [activists](#). Many Tigrayans accuse TPLF of "releasing war criminals for propaganda purposes".
- ▶ Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) has been designated as a terrorist organization by the Ethiopian parliament. [House of Peoples' Representative](#) endorsed a recent cabinet decision to the labelling of TPLF as a terrorist organization. The resolution, which was unanimously passed by ruling party MPs, also includes the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).
- ▶ Fana Hagos Berhane (PhD), former

President of Tigray Supreme Court has been appointed as President of Mekelle University replacing Professor Fetien Abay who has been serving as Acting President of the University since mid-September 2020.

- ▶ As per [Ethiopian Press Agency \(EPA\)](#), Fitsum Birhane, a Tigray Media House (TMH) journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Ayga Forum, have been placed under custody as they “broadcast false propaganda from an individual’s house”. The report added that the arrestees have been cooperating with “Anti-peace forces” and they were about to send pharmaceuticals, cloth, broadcasting equipment and documents to the “Junta”.
- ▶ [William Davidson](#), senior analyst at Crisis Group reported about mass arrests of Tigrayans being made in Addis Ababa emphasizing that more of such measures may continue to be taken.

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