



Social Media Situation Report on the Conflict in Ethiopia

Period: July 26 – August 25, 2021

Summary

- On August 3, 2021, [BBC](#) reported about another possible series of human rights violations in the westernmost parts of Tigray, which is still under the control of Amhara forces and the Eritrean army. Bodies with gunshot wounds and hands tied behind their backs have washed up in a river in Sudan that borders Ethiopia, the BBC broadcasted.
- [The Telegraph](#) released an extensive report about an alleged shelling and house to house killing by Tigrayan fighters in a small village in a small village of Amhara region, which The Telegraph says to have corroborated with satellite imagery. As per The Telegraph, the villages were razed to the ground after a lightly armed group of local farmers fired on Tigrayan positions in that area.
- [Human Rights Watch](#) produced a report on alleged human rights violations perpetrated against Tigrayans living in Addis Ababa. As per the report, [Ethiopian](#) authorities since late June 2021 have arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, and committed other abuses against ethnic Tigrayans in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa.
- On August 10, 2021, [Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed](#) issued a call for all eligible civilians to join the armed forces “to halt the destruction of the treasonous and terrorist TPLF organization and the machinations of foreign hands once and for all” as fighting raged in multiple regions of the country. “Now is the right time for all capable Ethiopians who are of age to join the Defense Forces, Special Forces and militias and show your patriotism,” PM office said in a statement.
- On the other hand, Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) announced that they have formed military alliance. The leader of OLA, an armed group



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that Ethiopia’s government has designated a terrorist organization, says his army has struck a military alliance with the Tigray Defense forces who are now pressing toward the capital.

- The [United States government](#) announced that Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) has been sanctioned as per the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned General Filipos Woldeyohannes (Filipos), the Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), for being a leader or official of an entity that is engaged in serious human rights abuse committed during the ongoing conflict in Tigray.
- [United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#) released a statement from the administrator, Samantha Power, on the humanitarian situation on Tigray. The statement dealt about the food situation in Tigray, “where hundreds of thousands are facing famine, food warehouses are virtually empty”. “For the first time in nine months of conflict, aid workers will run out of food to distribute to the millions of people who are going hungry.” USAID says.
- In a related development, USAID Ethiopia said it has begun sending life-saving food to over 476,000 Ethiopians affected by conflict in Afar and Amhara regions.



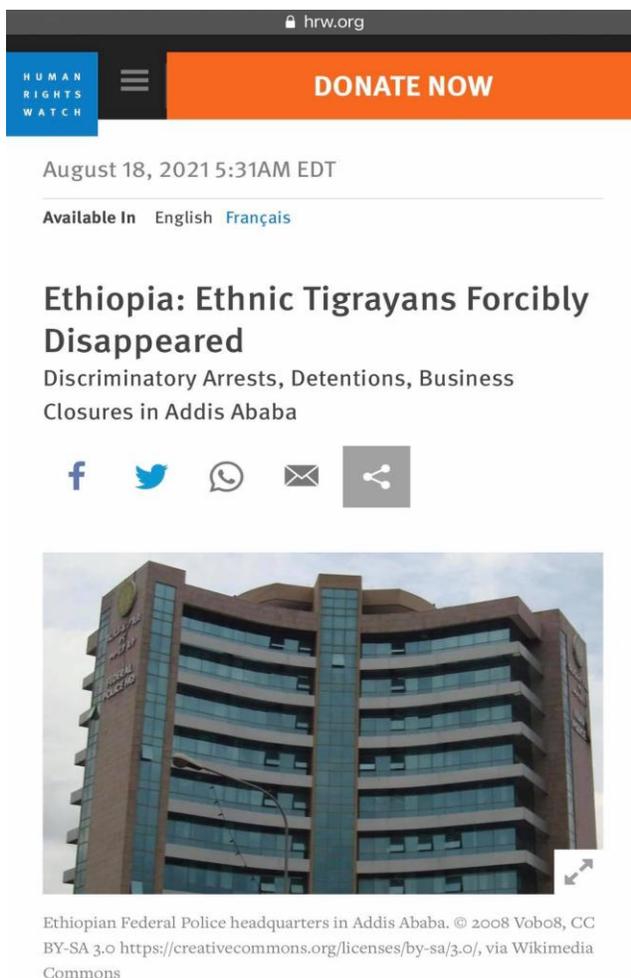
Context

The current situation of the war in northern part of Ethiopia, i.e., in parts of Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions, is characterized by intense fighting with warring sides recruiting more and more citizens into military training. The Ethiopian Federal Government and the Amhara Regional Government are persistently calling for all eligible citizens to join for what they call the “Existence Campaign”.

Given the depletion of aid food stocks in Tigray and fighting spilling over to the Afar and Amhara regions, the humanitarian situation in these parts of Ethiopia seems to have reached its worst stage ever since the commencement of the war nine months ago. Unless immediate action is taken to open the humanitarian corridors, the situation will be destined to further.

Despite these developments, the war in Ethiopia persisted with exchange of offensives and counter-offensives between all parties. In parallel to the armed fighting, intensive and relentless propaganda war is being held on the mainstream media as well as on social media platforms.

1. Reports of Continuous Human Rights Violations on Civilians



[Human Rights Watch](#) produced a report on alleged human rights violations perpetrated against Tigrayans living in Addis Ababa. As per the report, [Ethiopian](#) authorities since late June 2021 have arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, and committed other abuses against ethnic Tigrayans in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa.

Human Rights Watch called the government to “immediately stop its ethnic profiling, which has cast unjustified suspicion on Tigrayans, produce information on everyone being held, and provide redress to victims.”

Figure 1: A screenshot taken from [Human Rights Watch](#)



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The war in Ethiopia has not been limited to fighting in arms, but also including, in an intensive and relentless propaganda war on the mainstream media as well as the social media. Civilians, by many occasions, have been subjects of this merciless propaganda by the warring sides. Fortunately, [BBC](#), a media that has been the most prominent news outlet in exhibiting the devastating situation on the ground, came up with a rare evidence of this trend.

BBC says it was recently offered an interview with teenagers allegedly caught fighting for the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). However, according to the BBC, during the interview, some things left them suspicious. Firstly, the Afar authorities, who offered the interviews to the BBC, “insisted” to conduct them in Amharic, not the native language of the interviewees, Tigrinya. Moreover, after listening the recording carefully, BBC claimed the authorities were telling the teenagers what to say.

“Similar interviews were broadcast on local Ethiopian television channels, with teenagers paraded slowly past the cameras looking like bored senior high school students” says BBC.



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bbc.com

Tigray crisis: Ethiopian teenagers become pawns in propaganda war

By Vivienne Nunis
BBC News, Africa correspondent

🕒 2 days ago



Tigray crisis



The fog of war is a term usually used to describe confusion on the battlefield, but when it comes to Ethiopia, it could just as easily be applied to the bitterly fought information war surrounding the escalating conflict between Tigrayan rebels and government forces

Figure 2: A screenshot taken from [BBC](#)

On August 11, 2021, Amnesty International produced yet another fresh report on the human rights violations perpetrated against women and girls in Tigray. The report provided first-hand account of testimonies of women and girls who faced extreme forms of sexual violence. According to Amnesty's report, soldiers and militias aligned to the Ethiopian government, namely, members of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF), the Amhara Regional Police Special Force (ASF), and Fano, an Amhara militia group, subjected Tigrayan

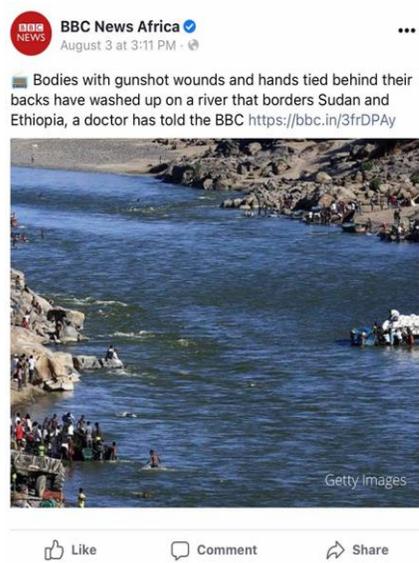
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women and girls to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation and other forms of torture, often using ethnic slurs and death threats.



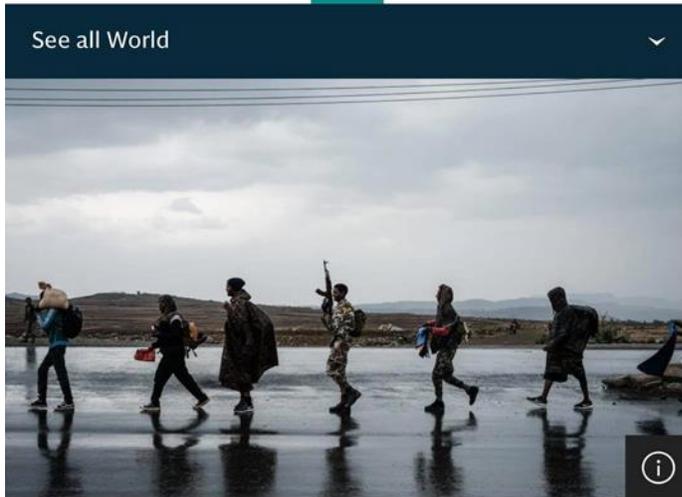
Figure 3: A screenshot taken from [Amnesty](#)

The [BBC](#) came up, once again, with reports of another possible series of human rights violations in Tigray, this time, from the westernmost parts of Tigray, which is still under the control of Amhara forces and the Eritrean army.



Bodies with gunshot wounds and hands tied behind their backs have washed up in a river in Sudan that borders Ethiopia, the BBC broadcasted.

Figure 4: A screenshot taken from [BBC](#)



[The Telegraph](#) released an extensive report about an alleged shelling and house to house killing by Tigrayan fighters in a small village in a small village of Amhara region, which The Telegraph says to have corroborated with satellite imagery.

As per The Telegraph, the villages were razed to the ground after a lightly armed group of local farmers fired on Tigrayan positions in that area.

Figure 5: A screenshot taken from [The Telegraph](#)

2. The War Widens

Amid widespread calls for negotiations between the parties to the conflict, the war continues to escalate.

Following reports that Sudanese Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok is “preparing to launch a mediation between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), with the support of the international community”, [Billene Seyoum](#), Press Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister said the following:



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“The relationship with Sudan at this point is a little bit tricky because the level of trust with some leaders has already been eroded, particularly with the Sudanese army incursion into Ethiopian territory. Trust is the basis of any negotiation, any mediation as well, so that element needs to be thoroughly addressed before Sudan could be entertained as a credible party in terms of facilitating such kind of negotiations”.

Few days later, Sudan recalled its ambassador from Ethiopia. Sources claimed that it is a retaliation

to Ethiopia for rejecting the mediation.



Figure 6: A screenshot taken from [Reuters](#)



On August 10, 2021, [Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed](#) issued a call for all eligible civilians to join the armed forces “to halt the destruction of the treasonous and terrorist TPLF organization and the machinations of

foreign hands once and for all” as fighting raged in multiple regions of the country. “Now is the right time for all capable Ethiopians who are of age to join the Defense Forces, Special Forces and militias and show your patriotism,” PM office said in a statement.

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In an effort to support the Ethiopian government in the war Banks, businesses and civil servants (some claim that it was involuntary) in Ethiopia are pouring millions of dollars into state coffers. According to Bloomberg, citing four Ethiopian banking executives “who asked not to be identified”, reported that a funding round this month raised more than 400 million Birr (\$8.8 million) to the defense force and the government.

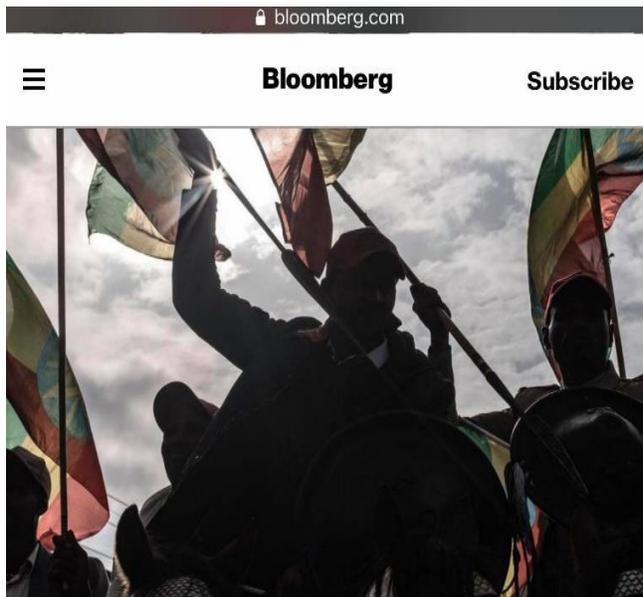


Figure 7: A screenshot taken from [Bloomberg](#)

Photographer: Amanuel Sileshi/AFP/Getty Images

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Banks Pitch In to Help Finance Ethiopian Government’s War Effort

By [Fasika Tadesse](#) and [Simon Marks](#)

August 19, 2021, 12:00 AM EDT

On the other hand, Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) announced that they have formed military alliance. The leader of OLA, an armed group that Ethiopia’s government has designated a terrorist organization, says his army has struck a military alliance with the Tigray Defense forces who are now pressing toward the capital.

“The only solution now is overthrowing this government militarily, speaking the language they want to be spoken to,” Oromo Liberation Army leader Kumsa Diriba, also known as Jaal Marroo,



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reported [Voice of America VOA](#) on August 11, 2021. The Tigrayan forces also released statement confirming the alliance struck with OLA.



Figure 8: A screenshot taken from [VOA](#)

3. Humanitarian Crisis

[United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#) released a statement from the administrator, Samantha Power, on the humanitarian situation on Tigray. To begin with, the statement grounds on the food situation

in Tigray, “where hundreds of thousands are facing famine, food warehouses are virtually empty”. “For the first time in nine months of conflict, aid workers will run out of food to distribute to the millions of people who are going hungry.” USAID says.

The reason for the food shortage, in the words of Samantha Power, is because “the Ethiopian Government is obstructing humanitarian aid and personnel, including land convoys and air access” and called on the Ethiopian Government to immediately allow humanitarian assistance to swiftly move into Tigray in order to prevent a catastrophic stop to food assistance that millions need to survive.



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Power also mentioned about aid workers being harassed, and an increase in troubling and harmful rhetoric coming from the Ethiopian Government against humanitarians. Furthermore, the aid chief urged the TPLF “to halt its offensive and withdraw its forces immediately from the Amhara and Afar regions, the Amhara regional government to withdraw its forces from western Tigray, and the Eritrean government to withdraw its forces immediately and permanently from Ethiopia”.



Figure 9: A [tweet](#) from CP 24

This situation of food shortage in Tigray is more detrimental for children than others. Malnutrition has been rampant on children of Tigray for the past nine months and even more so now, as all routes to Tigray remain blocked including for humanitarian access. According to [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#), in Tigray, 100,000 children are facing life-threatening malnutrition.



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Figure 10: A tweet from [UNICEF](#)



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This tweet from USAID Ethiopia implied that there are more than 476,000 people are displaced from parts of Afar and Amhara regions where conflict is taking place as we speak.

Figure 11: A screenshot taken from [USAID Ethiopia](#)

On top of this the Ethiopian government [suspended two](#) among the most active humanitarian organizations. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), one of only a handful of experienced international groups providing frontline health care to people in conflict areas, said it was told to cease their operations by the government late last month. The Norwegian Refugee Council, which provides assistance to nearly 600,000 people in six regions across Ethiopia, was given similar orders.

The grounds for the suspension as stipulated by the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission are “undermining the famine relief effort, lying, misquoting officials and engaging in a vicious media campaign”.



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Ethiopia Suspends Two Humanitarian Groups From War-Torn Tigray

By [Simon Marks](#)

August 3, 2021, 1:27 PM EDT

Ethiopia suspended the activities of two humanitarian organizations working in the war-torn Tigray region as the conflict in the north of the country enters its ninth month.

Medecins Sans Frontieres, one of only a handful of experienced international groups providing frontline health care to people in conflict areas, said it was told to cease their operations by the government late last month. The Norwegian Refugee Council, which provides assistance to nearly 600,000 people in six regions across Ethiopia, was given similar orders.

Figure 12: A screenshot taken from [Bloomberg](#)

Whereas MSF local office head in Addis Ababa told [The New York Times](#) that they are “facing a situation where you speak out about what you see and then you have no other choice but to leave this country. We have seen a lot and each time we have made some noise.”

4. Other Talks of Social Media

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

- ✓ A video containing a footage of an alleged looting of [aid truck](#) in Afar region went viral across social media platforms. Several social media users who shared this video claim that the local Afar residents carried these acts of looting as they unload the truck and carry foodstuff away.
- ✓ The [United States government](#) announced that Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) has been sanctioned as per the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned General Filipos Woldeyohannes (Filipos), the Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), for being a leader or official of an entity that is engaged in serious human rights abuse committed during the ongoing conflict in Tigray.



Figure 13: A tweet from [Anthony Blinken](#)

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- ✓ The Russian government, which remained largely indifferent towards the war in Ethiopia issued a message in its Foreign Ministry’s official Twitter account. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs twitted on August 19, 2021 that they “are following developments in Ethiopia, where clashes between the government army and the Tigray People's Liberation Front have become more frequent”. The tweet also mentioned that the warring sides “declaring a truce is the only way to end the bloodshed and improve the humanitarian situation”.



Figure 14: A tweet from [MFA Russia](#)



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- ✓ On August 14, 2021, OMNA TIGRAY, a Tigrayan professionals’ group based overseas, released a statement about an allegedly [leaked audio recording](#) of a meeting held by the Ethiopian country offices of various UN agencies on March 26, 2021. OMNA TIGRAY claims that the recording was leaked to the organization by a whistleblower on conditions of anonymity.

According to OMNA, the leaked audio exhibits “a stance of the UN country office in Ethiopia in that evidence needs to be verified and approved by the Ethiopian state, a belligerent to the conflict that stands accused of all manner of atrocities including the weaponization of rape, extrajudicial killings, ethnic cleansing, and genocide”.

Following widespread rumors on social media platforms the UN responded with a statement about the alleged audio recording. [UN Ethiopia](#) said it is “very concerned about recent statements appearing on social and mainstream media claiming that UN agencies and humanitarian partners are operating in Ethiopia in support of partisan political agendas”. Humanitarian assistance provided by the UN and its partners is guided by the four humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence the statement added.

- ✓ Reports of Addis Ababa city authorities closing Tigrayan businesses in the capital continue to come out. According to [Addis Fortune](#), there were multiple reasons local authorities attributed for the closures: sound pollution, non-compliance with food safety rules, tax fraud, and "disrupting peace and security" are some of them. Until the day Fortune’s report was released, the authorities shut down a total of 286 in Bole and Yeka districts alone says Addis Fortune.



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Figure 15: A tweet from [Addis Fortune](#)