



AFRICANDEFENDERS
Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network



DEFENDDEFENDERS
East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

March 17, 2021

Joint NGO Letter to the Chairperson of the African Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat on the situation in Ethiopia

H.E Moussa Faki, Chairperson of the African Union Commission

African Union Headquarters

P.O. Box 3243,

Roosevelt Street W21K19

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

CC:

H.E. Felix Tshisekedi, Chairman of the African Union

H.E. Smail Chergui, (Outgoing African Union Peace and Security Commissioner)

H.E Adeoye Bankole, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security

Hon. Solomon Dersso, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Your Excellency,

We – the co-signatories of this letter, including prominent **African leaders, activists, youth movements, the African diaspora and civil society organizations** – write to you in your capacity as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, to encourage you to urgently address the deteriorating humanitarian and human rights situation in Ethiopia's Tigray region, as well as in other parts of the country. **We cannot afford to remain silent when so many of our brothers and sisters are in dire need of Africa's action and solidarity.**

Since November 4, 2020, the armed conflict between Ethiopian federal government and allied forces, including Eritrean troops, against forces affiliated with the Tigray region's former ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has been marked by widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including crimes that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. This includes indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian

infrastructure, extrajudicial executions, widespread pillaging and destruction of crops, rape and sexual violence, and attacks in and on refugee camps. The conflict and abuses have led to massive displacement both internally and into Sudan and other neighboring countries. The government has heavily restricted access to the region for the media and aid agencies. Over two million are estimated to be currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

Despite initial [diplomatic efforts](#) by AU former Chair President Ramaphosa of South Africa, the Commission, and its organs to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts on the continent, have remained silent as violence and human rights abuses in the Tigray region continue unabated.

Given the presence of multiple armed forces and groups and the poor track record of the warring parties in investigating grave abuses, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should conduct an urgent, independent inquiry focused on establishing the facts, collecting forensic and other criminal evidence, and investigating war crimes and possible crimes against humanity.

Considering your recent [meeting](#) with Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to discuss the modalities of an investigation led by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) of alleged human rights violations in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, we would like to reinforce the important recommendations made by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in its December 2020 [statement](#), which notably urged Ethiopia's Federal Government to:

- ✓ Ensure that humanitarian aid is swiftly provided to the displaced persons and civilians in the conflict areas.
- ✓ Conduct prompt, impartial, and effective investigations into the loss of life of civilians and other human rights violations committed during the armed conflict, hold the perpetrators accountable and provide appropriate and adequate reparations to the victims and their families.

Despite the calls made by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Ethiopia's National Human Rights Commission and other [human rights organisations](#), restrictions on humanitarian access, abuses and suffering of civilians continue.

As concerned African leaders and members of civil society organisations, we are deeply worried about the absence, since the start of the crisis, of an official meeting by the African Union Peace and Security Council on Ethiopia. We are writing to request the following action:

- ✓ For the African Union to hold, in accordance with article 9 and 10 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, an Emergency Peace and Security Council (PSC) meeting to discuss Ethiopia's crisis and take the necessary steps to ensure the protection of civilians, unfettered humanitarian access and an international investigation to document the conduct of all parties, ensure

that evidence of abuses is preserved, and help determine the full impact of the conflict on civilians.

We also call upon you and the Commission to urge the Ethiopian government to:

- ✓ Ensure forces operating alongside the federal government abide by international humanitarian law applicable in the conflict in the Tigray region and respect basic human rights
- ✓ Ensure unhindered access to aid agencies to all of Tigray, and facilitate access in areas under TPLF and presumed Eritrean control
- ✓ Ensure the resumption of the population's access to essential services, such as banking, electricity, and water
- ✓ Restore communication access to all of Tigray so that families can communicate, but to also ensure that reporting on serious abuses can come to light.
- ✓ Fully commit to an independent, international, UN-led investigations into war crimes and possible crimes against humanity in the Tigray region.
- ✓ independent, inquiry into the region to document the conduct of all parties, to ensure that evidence of abuses is preserved, and help determine the full impact of this conflict on civilians.

The African Union has recently extended the 'Silencing the Guns' initiative for an additional ten years. As the search for a long-lasting solution to the crisis in Ethiopia continues, the AU Commission should make accountability for serious human rights abuses a priority of its strategy and intervention. This would be an important signal of the Commission's commitment to lasting peace, security and stability through justice and accountability for violations of international human rights norms.

Yours sincerely,
The undersigned

African Csos and nonprofit organisations

1. Action Chrétienne pour l'Abolition de la Torture (Burundi)
2. African Council for Religious Leaders
3. AfricanDefenders (Pan African Human Rights Defenders Network) (Uganda)
4. African Youth Networks Movement (AYNM)
5. Agir pour des Election Transparentes et Apaisées (AETA).

6. Amis de Nelson Mandela pour les Droits de l'homme (ANMDH).
7. Africa Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies
8. African Youth Networks Movement (AYNM)
9. Article 19 Eastern Africa
10. Association Africaine de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ASADHO)
11. Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE)
12. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
13. Centre for Memory and Development
14. Centre for Multiparty Democracy (CMD)
15. Centre for Strategic Litigation (CSL-Tanzania)
16. Centre for Constitutional Governance-Uganda
17. Chapter Four Uganda
18. Coalition Ivoirienne des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme
19. Community Advocacy and Awareness Trust (CRAWN Trust)
20. Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism (CVPP)
21. Constitution Education Reform Consortium (CRECO)
22. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
23. Econews Africa
24. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
25. Gays and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK)
26. Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies (GLISS)-Uganda
27. Haki Africa
28. Human Rights Defenders Center (Ethiopia)
29. International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)
30. International Commission of Jurists (Kenya)
31. Kenya Defenders Coalition- The National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders
32. Kenya Land Alliance (KLA)

33. Kenyan Human Rights Commission
34. Kenya Transitional Justice Network (KTJN)
35. Kisumu CSO Network
36. Kituo cha Katiba (KCK-Uganda)
37. Kituo cha Sheria
38. International Center for Policy and Conflict
39. La Voix des sans Voix (VSV)
40. Legal Human Rights Centre-Tanzania
41. Legal Resource Centre-South Africa
42. Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme
43. Mouvement des Femmes et des Filles pour la Paix et la Sécurité au Burundi
44. Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI)
45. National Victims and Survivor Network
46. North Africa-The network of the independent Commission for Human rights
47. Nigeria, Open Bar Initiative (OBI)
48. People for Peace
49. Uganda Human Rights Defenders Solidarity Network
50. Réseau pour la Réforme du Secteur de Sécurité et de Justice (RRSSJ)
51. Réseau des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique centrale
52. Réseau Ouest Africain des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme
53. Sierra Leone- Human Rights Defenders Network
54. South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN)
55. Youth Forum for Social Justice
56. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR)

Individuals, leaders

1. Betty Kaari Murungi
2. Emmanuel KABENGELE, National Coordinator (RRSSJ)

3. Chidi Anselm Odinkalu
4. Dr Willy Mutunga
5. Gerard Bisambu, Executive Secretary (AETA)
6. Jean Claude Katende, President (ASADHO)
7. Maina Kiai
8. Muluka Miti-Drummond, UK/Zambia
9. Robert ILUNGA, Executive director (ANMDH)
10. Rostin Manketa, Executive Director (VSV)
11. Haben Girma