



Statement from the Amhara Professionals Union (APU): Biased reporting by HRW, AI & ICG endangers the Amhara in Ethiopia who already face an existential threat
Tuesday, May 3rd, 2022

Introduction

We are deeply concerned over recent biased and irresponsible reporting by Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI) and Crisis Group (CG) on ongoing crises in Ethiopia. Criticisms of the reporting include but are not limited to: one-sided coverage (amplifying claims from one side and diminishing claims from the other), questionable methodology, non-factual information/citations and issuing recommendations outside the scope of or unrelated to the findings which we believe are partisan stances which undermine the motivations behind the reporting. The reporting also irresponsibly scapegoats and pushes unsubstantiated crimes onto a single ethnolinguistic group, the Amhara, who already face a concerted genocidal campaign at the hands of numerous state and non-state affiliated violent armed groups. This targeting is not only reckless and bordering on professional malpractice, but also may contribute to inciting hatred against millions of innocent men, women and children who already live under conditions of poverty, and who already face political exclusion and economic challenges. Needless to say, this is not what we have come to expect from internationally acclaimed institutions.

- We urge these three organizations to rescind these reports and conduct a re-assessment including the methodologies used to inform their body of work. In the paragraphs below, we will outline specific concerns as well as remarks regarding the reports.
- We ask the US Department of State and other international governmental and non-governmental organizations to refrain from referencing these flawed reports.

Regarding the joint-report from Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI)

The [April 6th, 2022 joint HRW-AI report](#), “We Will Erase You from this Land” has been a highly promoted piece claiming to highlight human rights violations in the “Western Tigray Zone” of Ethiopia’s Tigray Region but instead appears to push a one-sided perspective of the war with numerous disputed elements and also irresponsibly labels an entire ethnolinguistic group, the Amhara. It is also noteworthy that the Amhara as well as the Ethiopian people do not recognize the term “Western Tigray” to encompass the Welkait area. Rather, Welkait is a territory, which was forcibly occupied and annexed under the TPLF’s reign of terror until its liberation in mid-late November 2020 as a result of the war in Ethiopia. We observed numerous methodological and data use issues with the report including [unsubstantiated census data falsely claiming that 1.2 million Tigrayans were displaced from the area](#), its reliance on remote telephone interviews from refugees in Sudan, challenges to authenticity of acclaimed evidence (e.g. linguistic experts determined [letters allegedly issued by Amhara militias were written by native Tigigna speakers](#)).



It should be noted that suspected perpetrators of the massacre in Mai-Kadra town (town near the border between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan) are among the refugees in Sudan including officials of the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), militants and a youth vigilante killing squad called Samri - findings from diverse reporting highlighted how the TPLF-allied militants fled to Sudan refugee camps in the period following the Mai-Kadra massacre. It does not also indicate the obvious caveat in the methodology that remote interviewees may have been put under duress during the interview. It also does not report findings of independent investigations conducted and published by organizations and institutions such as the University of Gonder, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Amhara Association of America (AAA) and Genocide Prevention in Ethiopia (GPE). It is questionable and bordering on professional negligence as to why the investigators did not make an effort to go to the region in question despite other journalists welcoming journalists and members of the international community to visit the area.

There have been other credible on ground reports, which have documented over [1,515 Amhara civilians massacred by the TPLF-affiliated militants](#) in Mai-Kadra town alone in early November 2020. It is also noteworthy that the recent joint report comes at the heels of [preliminary reporting from the University of Gonder](#) highlighting the historic genocide perpetrated against the Amhara in the Welkait area. The research team from Gonder University uncovered mass grave sites and concentration camps which contain the bodies of an estimated 60,000 Amhara victims of the historic genocide against residents of Welkait under 40 years of TPLF occupation (1982-2022). Recent investigative reporting from numerous journalists is uncovering evidence of a hidden, decades-long genocide which TPLF affiliates are actively trying to cover-up. For example, [photojournalist Jemal Countess captured striking photographs of residents in Welkait](#) which describe heartbreaking occurrences. Meanwhile, journalists such as Alastair Thompson have amplified [historic atrocities in Welkait](#) including a recent English dubbed version of an investigative documentary released by Amhara regional state media called "Tears of Wolkayt" (Links: [Part 1](#), and [Part 2](#)) in which domestic journalists interviewed residents of Welkait shortly after liberation of various districts in mid-late November 2020.

Additionally, the joint HRW-AI report goes beyond the mandate of such organizations in recommending some type of peacekeeping force within the borders of a sovereign country. We consider this report a form of gas-lighting whereby the victims of atrocities are depicted as victimizers and are not only robbed of justice but are also subject to further suffering, which we find unconscionable. In fact, its one-sided and biased nature amount to propaganda and endangers tens of millions of Amhara who have been subject to decades of atrocities at the hands of the TPLF, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) [also referred to as the Oromo Liberation Army, OLA or OLF "Shene"] and others. The content does not lend itself to the conclusions such as war crimes and ethnic cleansing, which are extremely serious accusations, and require more comprehensive investigation (see Professor Ann Fitz-Gerald's segment from the April 7th, 2022, [Al Jazeera panel](#)).



We once again question the impartiality and professionalism of those who prepared this report. We also believe there needs to be a comprehensive investigation which includes forensic analysis, cross-examination of sources with an aim to verify many of the claims documented in the report. In addition, contrary to claims that the Welkait area was not accessible, multiple renowned journalists and experts have traveled there including journalist Ann Garrison, photojournalist Jemal Countess and media expert Betty “Sheba” Tekeste. Other prominent journalists and analysts including international expert Professor Ann Fitz-Gerald, historian and author Jeff Pearce and journalist Alastair Thompson have all reported on these events through their mediums.

Regarding the April 15, 2022 Crisis Group (CG) Report

The CG typically produces well-researched reports including balanced recommendations. Uncharacteristically, the [April 15, 2022 report from Crisis Group](#) entitled “Building on Ethiopia’s Fragile Truce” appears to be biased and one-sided in that it does not objectively assess the current delicate and volatile situation in Ethiopia (Amhara & Tigray Regions) as well as Eritrea. The Welkait (Amharic: ወልቃይት; transliterated as Wolqayt, Welqait or Wolkait) district has always been part and parcel of the historic Begemider/Gonder province, an Amhara land. There is well documented evidence based on historical, governmental, civic and state regional sources which clearly and without any doubt demonstrate that Welkait, Tegede, Telemt and Setit Humera have always been Amhara lands and that the historic boundary between the Amhara and Tigrayans has always been the Tekezze River ([see the publication by esteemed historian and academic Achamyeleh Tamiru](#)). The TPLF began occupying these districts as early as 1982 and forcibly annexed them without any legal or consultative mechanisms. Specifically, in 1995, the TPLF inaugurated a new constitution which expanded the traditional boundaries of the Tigray province to form the modern Tigray regional state which incorporated districts belonging to the historic Gonder and Wollo provinces which were majority Amhara areas. Since that time it is estimated that over 500,000 Amhara have been displaced. There is currently an in-depth investigation being undertaken by the University of Gonder. We would recommend that the CG contact the researchers and investigators to receive additional information. In addition, the report also appears to be heavily weighted in favor of the TPLF without any consideration of the perspectives and demands of the Amhara and Afar, both of whom have been largely affected by the war. We do not consider the recommendation of the CG constructive, as it seems to border on a politically motivated narrative.

Further Context

The Government of Ethiopia (GoE) led by the ethno-nationalist Oromo Prosperity Party (OPP) appears to be negotiating with the TPLF without consultation and engagement from the Ethiopian people. Importantly, the Amhara have repeatedly protested and denounced the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) as the overwhelming majority do not feel it represents them.



For example, in April 2021, there were [region-wide protests throughout the Amhara Region condemning the OPP-led GoE preceded by rallies by the Amhara diaspora in multiple cities globally](#) for failing to protect Amhara citizens who faced widespread targeted massacres by extremist Oromo ethnonationalist militants and vigilantes particularly in the Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions (e.g. protests in [Finote Selam](#)). After all, many feel the TPLF and OPP are among the many forces regarded as perpetrators of death and destruction for the past 4 years and prior. Since the extremist ethnic Oromo regime led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali came to power in 2018, the Ethiopian people have seen unprecedented levels of mass displacement, savage massacres and ethnic cleansing, particularly of Amharas and non-Oromos in all parts of the country by state-backed Oromo regional forces and militias including the OLF and Oromia Special Forces.

The war in northern Ethiopia is the result of the shortsighted and ethnically narrow-minded Oromo extremists who have controlled the central GoE. We are keenly aware that the Abiy regime had intelligence reports as well as detailed media investigations made public one year before the TPLF attacked the Ethiopia National Defense Force (ENDF) Northern Command. The documents made public by investigative journalists showed that the TPLF were preparing for war one year before they attacked the ENDF northern command on November 4th, 2020.

Over the last 4 years we are certain that engaged stakeholders have observed that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's failed policies, irrational actions and lack of willingness to bring peace may arise in part from his entrenchment in Oromo nationalist ideology. This is coupled with his incompetence and inability to grasp the complex nature of Ethiopia as well as the Horn of Africa region. We also believe this is symptomatic of a failure in government structure whereby the fate of a country of 115 million is at the whim of a single man and a small group of corrupt ethnocratic elites. The shortcomings of Prime Minister Abiy are exacerbated by others in his party who harbor genocidal and extremist views, which make it impossible to administer a diverse country like Ethiopia. We have seen and heard ample evidence to definitively conclude that the Abiy regime and OPP subscribe to the OLF doctrine and are implicated in OLF atrocities. We refer to the conclusions as pointed out in 1992 by Rand corporation consultant and former NSC member Paul B. Henze after extensive travel and interviews:

"Don't let the OLF pretend to represent the interests of the Oromo people. Discredit it for what it really is a bunch of irresponsible adventurers and shallow political leaders seeking advantage for themselves without a clear vision of the future. They will make Ethiopia impossible to govern."

This passage describes exactly what is currently happening in Ethiopia and reverberating in wider region. In fact, it is becoming increasingly obvious to Ethiopians that Prime Minister Abiy and his OPP are actively drawing ethnic and religious divisions for political gain.



We have also surmised through our analysis, that one of the key issues which needs to be addressed to mitigate the widespread chaos is the ethnic apartheid constitution of Ethiopia, which appears inspired by Jim Crow style laws and has instituted first- and second-class citizenship in the country by designating ethnic groups as indigenous or newcomers to land. For example, in the Oromia Region, the regional constitution states that the region exclusively belongs to ethnic Oromo citizens (i.e. civil, property and other fundamental rights). In essence other ethnic groups are interlopers and are living at the will of Oromos. We firmly believe the current constitution is the cause of many of the current problems in the country, reinforces the current apartheid status quo and was forced onto the Ethiopian people by the TPLF and OLF between 1991-1995 while excluding the Amhara and other major groups from the decision process. The common problem over the past 3 decades are the so-called “liberation fronts”, violent armed groups such as the TPLF and OLF which routinely attack civilian populations for political gain. These groups have shown to be anti-democratic and a risk to the long-term stability of the strategic Horn of Africa region. We also believe that the Abiy/OPP regime is an extension of the OLF which does not intend to promote peace and stability in the region.

Our research and studies lead us to conclude the following:

- That the Abiy regime is effectively in collusion with OLF and is dangerous and unreliable, with no true desire for equality and peace in the country.
- We share the assessment that Abiy's main goal according to Ethiopia experts is the domination and hegemony of his ethnic group, the Oromo over all others. We believe this is modeled against the infamous 27 years of TPLF domination and ethnocracy, which the majority of Ethiopians also rejected.
- We are highly confident that peace and stability in Ethiopia can only be achieved by a democratic system of governance, which makes the Amhara participants in the process rather than peripheral onlookers. The people of Ethiopia are tired of the 4 years of constant chaos driven by the Abiy regime and his Oromo extremist allies. We want long and lasting peace.

On behalf of our organization, as members of the global Amhara-Ethiopian diaspora, and as concerned citizens, we are making the following demands towards the GoE and ask that all concerned parties and stakeholders endorse our message:

- We demand that the Abiy regime immediately and without delay recognize Welkait, Tegede, Telemt, Setit Humera, and Raya as part of the historical Amhara homelands.
- We further demand that the Abiy/OPP regime cease its [genocidal amorphous war](#) against the Amhara and other targeted communities of Ethiopia.
- We also ask that all those concerned with the stability and continuation of the Ethiopian state consider that the current OPP-led GoE is neither capable nor willing to resolve the complex issues in Ethiopia.



- We call for the amendment and/or complete revision of the current ethnic apartheid constitution through an inclusive and democratic process. We also encourage that the change follows a citizen-centric framework to placate the current ethnic-based system.
- We demand further that the Amhara have a proportional stake in any national dialogue proceedings. We stress here that the Amhara Regional Government (Amhara Prosperity Party) who are part of Abiy's regime do not represent the Amhara.
- The international community should pressure the Abiy regime to stop the self-induced internal chaos sponsored by his close confidant the President of the Oromia Region, Shimelis Abdisa, an extreme ideologue who has effectively called for mass displacements of non-Oromos, primarily Amharas.
- We call for any independent investigations into war crimes and crimes against humanity to extend prior to November 2020 to ensure all perpetrators are held accountable. These investigations should also encompass genocidal massacres and human rights violations against Amhara people and other vulnerable groups in Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Amhara, Tigray, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region and other regions of Ethiopia. In addition, for any investigations into alleged crimes in disputed/annexed areas such as the Welkait area to begin from the first instances of TPLF occupation (dating back to 1982). And for thorough investigations to encompass allegations of war crimes in the Amhara and Afar Regions, particularly since late June 2021.

Concluding Remarks

APU is extremely disappointed with the coordinated reports released by AI, HRW, and CG that are intended to serve specific agendas and/or as bases for achieving specific policies by other parties. Utilizing armed groups that have committed atrocities and fled to neighboring countries as source for such reports further highlights the danger millions of Ethiopians face each day and the credibility of these institutions. APU deplors the utilization of the term *Western Tigray* by human rights and any other groups or individuals since such references embody a violent annexation of sovereign land, culture, and Amhara people and the sustained ethnic Amhara cleansing that took place on the land by the TPLF. APU further believes the continued utilization of the term *Western Tigray* amounts to endorsements of the genocide committed in Welkait for 40 years and a deliberate strategy to overshadow the mounting evidences of victims whose remains are currently being exhumed from mass graves. Finally, APU strongly believes "in truth and only the truth" that defines the destiny of Ethiopia and that of its 86 ethnic groups that have coexisted for centuries and condemns any and all violent groups that directly or indirectly have inflicted, and continue to inflict sufferings upon the innocent.

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