

September 2023

**To Permanent Representatives of Member and Observer States of the United Nations
Human Rights Council**

***54th session of the UN Human Rights Council: Ethiopia – Renew the mandate of the
ICHREE***

Excellencies,

Ahead of the Human Rights Council's 54th regular session (September 11- October 12, 2023), we, the undersigned civil society and human rights organizations, are writing to **urge your delegation to ensure the Human Rights Council adopts a resolution that extends the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (“the Commission,” or ICHREE) for a further term of one year, until September 2024.**

In light of the ongoing dire human rights situation in Ethiopia, which requires the Human Rights Council's continued attention, it is clear that now is not the time to change the Council's approach and reduce independent investigations and evidence gathering work in the country.

The ICHREE has carried out essential work despite the Ethiopian government's repeated attempts to obstruct its investigations, including by refusing to cooperate with and grant ICHREE's investigators access to conflict-affected areas. The Ethiopian government also [attempted to get the mechanism defunded and prematurely terminated](#). Despite all the challenges, the ICHREE presented its first [report in September 2022 and found](#) reasonable grounds to believe that all parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia had committed war crimes since fighting erupted in Tigray in November 2020. It also found that some of the [crimes it documented were ongoing](#) and underscored the need for an independent, impartial mechanism to address ongoing violations and support accountability efforts.

In November 2022, the Ethiopian federal government and Tigrayan authorities signed a [cessation of hostilities agreement](#). While the agreement ended active hostilities in Tigray, and restored some aspects of civilian life, serious human rights abuses against civilians persist in violation of the agreement. In Tigray, Eritrean Defense Forces have continued to subject women and girls to [rape and other forms of sexual violence](#), while [obstructing humanitarian access](#) in areas under their control. Local authorities and Amhara forces in Western Tigray Zone [continued](#) an [ethnic cleansing campaign](#) against Tigrayans at least until March 2023. An August [statement](#) from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights suggests that arrests, detentions, and displacement of Tigrayans in the Zone are continuing.

Since April 2023, clashes between the Ethiopian military and the local Fano militia broke out across the Amhara region, with media outlets reporting abuses such as unlawful killings, including of humanitarian staff. That month, federal authorities [arrested journalists](#) reporting on the unrest and imposed a [mobile internet ban](#) on the region. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [found](#) that at least 183 people have been killed in fighting since July. As [clashes](#) intensified, the government on August 4 [declared a sweeping state of emergency](#) in the Amhara region, and said that the state of emergency could be extended to any “area of the country as deemed necessary”. The emergency law grants authorities the power to carry out arrests without a warrant, impose curfews, restrict movement, and ban

public assemblies. Under previous states of emergency, authorities have carried out large-scale, ethnically motivated arrests and prolonged detention without charge or trial. Since this state of emergency was implemented, authorities have arrested opposition figures and reportedly [conducted](#) mass arrests outside of the Amhara region, in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, at times holding detainees in informal sites such as schools.

In Oromia, government forces and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) armed group have been fighting in parts of the region since 2019, resulting in [serious abuses](#) against civilians, including [Oromo](#) and [minority communities](#).

After the signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement, the Ethiopian government committed to carrying out national consultations on a transitional justice process with the stated aim of achieving truth, justice, and reconciliation.

Our organizations remain concerned that the national transitional justice process, as set out in the [government's green paper](#), has from the onset emphasized reconciliation over accountability, truth, and redress for victims. To date, government initiatives have not addressed serious concerns over the capacity, transparency, and independence of Ethiopian investigative and judicial institutions to effectively investigate, and where sufficient evidence exists, prosecute crimes under international law.

The November 2021 [joint report](#) by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission also raised concerns that the investigations carried out by Ethiopian institutions did not sufficiently comply with international standards and did not match the scope and breadth of the human rights abuses committed in the country. A government [taskforce](#) established in response to that report has still not released its findings into the events that have occurred in Tigray. The task force's September 2022 [report](#) referred to a handful of prosecutions of Ethiopian soldiers before military courts, without any clarity about the rank of the accused, the nature of the crimes, or the outcome of those cases. The task force has not provided an update on investigations and prosecutions of Ethiopian regional forces or Eritrean Defense Forces.

The ICHREE's March [oral update to the Human Rights Council](#), presented by its chairperson, the eminent African jurist, Mr. Mohamed Chande Othman, also raised concerns about "the lack of [domestic] pathways for accountability for serious violations committed by Eritrean forces" in Ethiopia.

Against the backdrop of the human rights crisis in Ethiopia, and the need for thorough, independent, impartial, and transparent investigations, it is clear that the mandate of the ICHREE remains critical. Renewal of the mandate would also allow the Council to:

Ensure the continued impartial and independent documentation of human rights violations and abuses, which should not be delayed while the government initiates the longer-term process of institutional and legislative reforms to strengthen domestic judicial institutions and address accountability gaps;

Ensure ongoing independent and public reporting and debates, including on domestic accountability measures. While the Ethiopian government has accepted human rights monitoring activities by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, it is important that their findings also be publicly reported. Interactive dialogues at the Human Rights Council provide the only regular space for independent public reporting and debates on human rights developments in the country; and

Ensure the preservation of evidence of crimes under international law and the safe participation of victims and survivors in the investigations with a view to transferring such documentation responsibly to independent and competent judicial authorities in the future.

At its 54th session, the Council should adopt a resolution that extends the ICHREE's mandate for one year to allow it to continue its work and address the magnitude, gravity, and scope of the human rights violations and abuses, some of which may constitute crimes under international law, committed by all parties to the conflict in Ethiopia.

We thank you for your attention to these pressing issues and stand ready to provide your delegation with further information as required.

Sincerely,

1. Alliance of Civil Society Organizations of Tigray (ACSOT), Network of 72 CSOs in Tigray
2. African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS)
3. Africans for the Horn of Africa
4. African Network against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED)
5. Amnesty International
6. Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights
7. Association pour la Défense des Droits de la Personne et des Libertés Publiques (ADL)
8. Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion et Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ATPDH)
9. Association Nigérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ANDDH)
10. Association of Tigrayan Communities in Canada
11. Association of Tigrayans in Denmark
12. Association of Tigrayans in the Netherlands
13. Association of Tigrayans in France
14. Association of Tigrayan Women in Sweden/TKFAS
15. Atrocities Watch Africa
16. The Botswana Centre for Human Rights (DITSHWANELO) - - Gaborone Botswana
17. Center for the Advancement of Human Rights and Democracy (CARD)
18. The Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia
19. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)
20. Dekna Foundation
21. Education and Wisdom Development for Rohingya Women (EWDRW)
22. Ethiopian Canadians for Peace
23. Fédération Internationale pour les droits Humains (FIDH)
24. Forum Mekete Italy
25. Friends of Tigray
26. Giving Back to Our Roots
27. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
28. The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)
29. Health Professionals Network for Tigray (HPN4Tigray)
30. Human Rights Concern - Eritrea (HRCE)
31. Human Rights First (Ethiopia)
32. Human Rights Watch
33. Irob Anina Civil Society (IACS)

34. Lawyers for Human Rights
35. Legal Action Worldwide (LAW)
36. Legacy Tigray
37. Mekete Tigray UK
38. Observatoire des droits de l'Homme au Rwanda (ODHR)
39. Omna Tigray
40. One Day Seyoum
41. Organisation Guinéenne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen (OGDH) - Guinea
42. Organization for Justice and Accountability in the Horn of Africa (OJAH)
43. Oromo Legacy Leadership & Advocacy Association (OLLAA)
44. Pan African Lawyers Association (PALU)
45. Physicians for Human Rights
46. Rescue Tigrayan Rape Victims
47. Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights (RFKHR)
48. Rohingya Student Network (RSN)
49. Rohingya Union for Women Education and Development (RUWED)
50. Rohingya Women Association for Education and Development (RWAED)
51. Samarbeidsfora for Norsk-Tigrayanane (4S-N-T) Norway
52. Security and Justice for Tigrayans (SJT)
53. Sudanese Human Rights Monitor (SHRM)
54. Tigray Action Committee (TAC)
55. Tigray Advocacy & Development -United Kingdom
56. Tigray Human Rights Forum
57. Tigray Youth Association in Italy
58. Tigray Youth Network UK
59. Tsilalna Tigray
60. Union of Tigrayans in Belgium
61. United Tegararu Canada (UTC)
62. United Women of the Horn (UWH)
63. Victims Advocates International (VAI)
64. Women's Association for Women & Victims' Empowerment (WAVE)-Gambia
65. Zimbabwe Human Rights Association