The 4th Universal Periodic Review: Social Services and Values in Ethiopia's Tigray Region

Documenting Gross Violations of Human Rights, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Genocide in Health, Education, and Heritage & Religious Values

5 April 2024

Following significant shifts in circumstances following the submission of the 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations for Ethiopia, it becomes evident that relying on these guidelines to address the current situation is impractical. The outbreak of a genocidal war in Tigray, which commenced in November 2020 after the UPR submission, surpasses mere policy adjustments or minor infractions. As a result, the imperative now lies in redirecting our focus toward alleviating the urgent and profound humanitarian crisis stemming from this war.

Acknowledging the structural shortcomings of the UPR mechanism, it's clear that the situation in Ethiopia today demands greater international attention and action than the UPR mechanism is able to provide. Rather than diligently addressing the UPR recommendations, Ethiopia finds itself embroiled in a state of conflict, resulting in the tragic loss of countless civilian lives across various regions of the country. The dire conditions in Tigray, where the war has inflicted immeasurable suffering and claimed the lives of over a million individuals, demand immediate and resolute attention.

Considering the unprecedented scale of human rights violations targeting ethnic Tigrayans within Tigray and beyond, our assessment and subsequent actions must be tailored to confront the gravity of this crisis. Swift and decisive measures must be implemented to halt the perpetration of atrocities and provide swift relief to those affected by this catastrophic conflict. Furthermore, it is imperative to address the broader context of ongoing atrocities in Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia, underscoring the urgent need for international attention and action.

Introduction

The war in the Tigray region has had a devastating impact on various aspects of social services and values, particularly in education, health, social services institutions, and values, including heritage and religious sites. Among the many schools in Tigray, Atse Yohannes Preparatory School in Mekelle has been severely disrupted and suffered extensive damage and pillaging, impeding efforts to resume classes and causing emotional distress to students and staff. Additionally, attacks on educational institutions, such as Tsegaye Berhe Secondary School in Adwa, have further worsened the crisis, as documented by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Furthermore, the war has significantly affected healthcare infrastructure, with reports from MSF indicating widespread looting, vandalism, and destruction of health facilities across the region. Moreover, the displacement of populations has resulted in overcrowding and resource strain in schools and healthcare facilities.

Moreover, Tigray's rich cultural heritage has not been spared, with reports of deliberate damage and pillaging of significant religious sites and artifacts. The Al-Nejashi Mosque in Negash, the monastery of Debre Damo, and the Ligat Kirkos Church are among the many heritage sites targeted during the war.

These assaults on social services and values have further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Tigray, highlighting the urgent need for international attention and assistance to address the multifaceted challenges faced by the region's population.

A distinguishing characteristic of the Tigray war lies in the challenge of identifying the soldiers' identities or affiliations, as they frequently wore uniforms of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) or, in some cases, the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF). Additionally, members of the Amharic-speaking Amhara Regional Government Special Forces were often assumed to be ENDF members and donned ENDF uniforms. However, identification was often based more on language spoken rather than uniform. Yet, regardless of attire, they all served as instruments of PM Abiy Ahmed's extermination agenda, aimed at annihilating Tigrayans and erasing the region's assets and history. The uniformity of their message was

chillingly consistent: "*Leave No Tigrayan*."[1]

This war involved various forces, all culpable for atrocities, including killing, torture, sexual violence, and the destruction and looting of both government and private property. Our study findings indicate a deliberate targeting of buildings, vehicles, office furniture, equipment, maintenance supplies, consumables, and ICT technologies, including health information management systems. The catastrophic destruction inflicted aimed to dismantle Tigray's social, political, cultural, and economic fabric, both in practice and rhetoric.

Revealing Systematic Destruction: Genocidal Assault on Education in Tigray

Intent on genocide toward education destruction and targeting schools and students is evident in the harrowing events at Abbiyi Addi Teachers' College. The college, once a place of learning, was transformed into a military base and used for detention, torture, and other forms of punishment. Tragically, one teacher and two support staff of the college lost their lives during the authorities' response.[2]

The impact on the college community was profound. Over half of the staff, totaling 105 individuals, were displaced from their workplace. Many students and staff members fell victim to rape and brutal sexual violence, some even in front of their own families. The most horrifying aspect was the coercion of family members to participate in these heinous acts, causing immense cultural and biological shame within the community.[3]

The perpetuation of hate speech further fueled the atrocities. Abusive messages adorned the walls of classrooms, offices, vehicles, and the entire college compound, portraying Tigrayans as subhuman and deserving of extermination. This rhetoric incited deep-seated hostility not only toward Tigrayans but also towards the broader Ethiopian populace, particularly exacerbating tensions between Tigrayan and Amhara communities. Such divisiveness threatens to have long-lasting repercussions throughout the region.

Among the hateful messages, indoctrination of hostility is evident in statements such as:

- "Tigrayans are worse than the devil himself, and they should be exterminated, erased from the face of the earth."

- "Tigray and snakes are one and the same."

- "Tigray must be cleansed."

- "Tigray must be cleansed for the development of the country."

- "Tigrayans are associated with the junta."

- "The Tigray People and the Junta are synonymous."

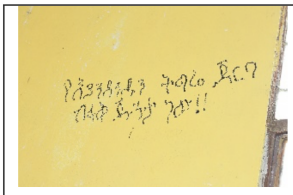
ትግሬን ማመን ሰቐሎ ነው፣ ትግሬ የኢትዮጵያ ኣሲድ ነው፣ ይጥፉ፣ ከኣለም ዘራቸው ይሰረዝ/ይፋቅ፣ ትግራይ ትጠፋለች ገና፤

ምድረ ቅዘናም ወያኔ: የታሪክ ሌቦች፣ የኢትዮጵያውያን ጠላቶች፣ የመሬት ሌቦች፣ የገንዘብ ሌቦች፣ የንፁሀን ህይወት ቀሚዎች፣ ገዳይ መርዞች፣ ኮሮናዎች፣ ውለታ ቢሶች፣ ጅምላ ጨፍጫፊዎች፣ ነቀርሳዎች፣ ይሉኝታ ቢሶች፣ ወዘተዎች (Refer to Figure 6M, 6N, 6O, 6P, and 6Q)፤

[1] 'Leave no Tigrayan': In Ethiopia, an ethnicity is erased on April 7, 2021 https://apnews.com/article/ethiopia-tigray-minority-ethnic-cleansing-sudan-world-news-842741eebf9bf0984946619c0fc15023

[2] Interview made on July 5, 2023 by experts of Tigray Inquiry Commission with Dean of the college and Vice academic dean of the college.

[3] Ibid.



M	N	O
Hate Speech And Abusive Messages-1	Hatreds And Hate Speeches-2.m4v	
P	Q	

Figure 6: Hatreds, Hate Speech and Abusive Messages

Numerous writings exist concerning the Tigray Region, Tigrayans, and their historical relationship with the Ethiopian people. These messages include insults, dehumanization, and the degradation of Tigrayans, which is too distressing to repeat. Even at the entrance gate of the college, the name "Abbiyi Addi College of Teacher Education" was altered to "Abdissa Agga College" (Refer to Figure 7).

Figure 7: Expunging Tigray Names and Identity

These vile expressions of hatred underscore the urgent need for intervention to address the profound trauma inflicted upon the education sector and the broader community in Tigray.

Unveiling the Devastation: War's Impact on Education in Tigray

The war in Ethiopia's Tigray region has left a profound and devastating impact[4], with the loss of over 3,846 teachers and students reported by Ethiopia's Institution of the Ombudsman. Adane Belay, Director of Abuse Prevention at the Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman, highlighted the extensive destruction during the war, revealing staggering statistics: 96 percent of student desks, 95 percent of blackboards, and 88 percent of student classrooms—both completely and partially—were lost. Additionally, 63 percent of textbooks and 31 percent of administrative buildings in the Tigray region suffered damage.[5]

The repercussions of the war extended beyond education, affecting healthcare facilities, with significant damage, while infrastructure like electricity, telecommunications, and water suffered substantial losses.

[4] The Reporter. Tigray schools in ruins, 3,846 students, teachers killed in conflict on May 27, 2023 https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/34244/

[5] Survey made by the Tigray Inquiry Commission with Tigray Education Bureau from July 12 to July 27, 2023

The total property damage across these sectors alone was considerable.[6]

The Tigray Bureau of Education has released a comprehensive report[7] detailing the human and material devastation inflicted upon the education sector. The report, based on surveys conducted until September 2021, covers 91.33% of total schools, excluding western Tigray, areas under Eritrean occupation, and non-participating schools, totaling 2,054 schools.

The findings are alarming, with 2,164 individuals in the education sector losing their lives, including 235 teachers, school principals, and supervisors. The report indicates significant damage to infrastructure, with classrooms, blackboards, and administrative offices being damaged by 88.27%, 95.86%, and 31.65%, respectively. Textbooks, teacher's guides, and library books suffered damages of 63.49%, 58.67%, and 53.4%, respectively.[8]

Moreover, WASH facilities for girls' and boys' toilets, staff toilets, handwashing facilities, and water tanks were reported damaged by 47.22%, 48.70%, 50.54%, 68.82%, and 66.82%, respectively. Electronic facilities, including computers, plasma televisions, and laboratory equipment, also faced significant losses, with percentages ranging from 79.88% to 86.96%.[9]

Government forces repurposed the historic Atse Yohannes Preparatory School in Mekelle[10] as barracks following their takeover of the city in late November 2020. The school remained in military use until mid-April 2021, leaving behind extensive damage and pillaged property. Tigray's interim government reported significant losses, including 288 burned chairs, three destroyed science labs, and various other items crucial for school operations. Ethiopian soldiers also defaced the school with hateful and derogatory messages against the Tigrayan community, further exacerbating the emotional toll on students and staff.

Attempts to reopen schools face significant challenges, with an estimated 25% of schools damaged in the conflict. Additionally, indiscriminate shelling by Ethiopian forces targeted urban areas, striking near schools during military operations in November. The Tsegaye Berhe secondary school in Adwa[11], which used to accommodate over 1200 students, suffered rocket attacks early in the conflict, resulting in severe damage to classrooms and essential educational resources, as documented by Doctors Without Borders (MSF). These attacks not only disrupt education but also force schools to accommodate displaced families, compounding the humanitarian crisis in Tigray.

Evaluating Education Impact in Tigray: Primary Data Collection Methods

In the education sector, prior to the onset of the war, the region boasted 2,221 primary schools and 271 secondary schools, with an enrollment of almost 1.4 million students and approximately 47,000 staff members. However, since November 2020, the war has wrought massive destruction to schools and infrastructure, disrupting both public and private services. In response, the Tigray Inquiry Commission and the Tigray Education Bureau collaborated to collect, process, and analyze comprehensive data on the war's devastation. The summary of the report provides a preliminary assessment of the damage inflicted upon the public education sector in the region.[12]

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Tigray's Bureau of Education: Summary Report on Tigray Education's Human and Material Damage on May 11, 2022 https://www.tghat.com/2022/05/11/tigrays-bureau-of-education-summary-report-on-tigray-educations-human-and-material-damage/

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Human Rights Watch. (2021, May 28). Ethiopia: Tigray Schools Occupied, Looted. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/28/ethiopia-tigray-schools-occupied-looted

[11] Ibid.

[12] Survey made by the Tigray Inquiry Commission with Tigray Education Bureau from July 12 to July 27, 2023

The interruption of schooling has been a dire consequence of the war. For instance, during the 2012 E.C. academic year, there were a total of 1,446,327 students enrolled, comprising 714,392 girls and 777,691 boys. However, there was no schooling at any level in the years 2013 and 2014. Partial learning and teaching resumed only in the 2015 E.C. academic year. Despite two years of complete interruption, only 994,369 students (501,696 female and 492,673 male) were registered in the first six months of the 2015 E.C. academic year. This represents only 56.85% of the expected student population, indicating a significant portion—43.15%—failed to return to school.[13]

Another aspect contributing to the extensive damage is the alternative usage of schools. Respondents reported that armed groups used 260 schools as camps or barricades, 46 schools were converted into jails, and 24 schools were repurposed as storage facilities. Additionally, 184 schools served multiple functions, acting as camps, jails, and storage units.[14]

The human toll of the war is significant, with 2,398 harm reports recorded. Of these, 54.3% involved male victims, and 45.67% involved female victims. Psychological harm was the most commonly reported type, comprising 41.35% of cases, followed by death (11.67%), physical injuries (2.83%), disappearances (1.63%), and torture (1.25%). Other combined forms of harm accounted for 41.27% of cases.[15]

Infrastructure and education materials also suffered extensive damage, with 6,232 different types of service buildings reported as damaged. Classrooms bore the brunt of the destruction, accounting for 26% of reported damage. Additionally, 66% of furniture items, 80% of educational equipment, 50% of vehicles, and 75% of educational facilities were completely damaged.[16]

Perpetrators of the damage were identified, with the Ethiopian Defense Forces (EDF) responsible for 45% of incidents on average, followed by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) at 34%, and other groups such as the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), Somalia troops, Amhara forces, and Afar forces contributing to the remainder.[17]

Assessing the Impact of War on Healthcare Facilities in Tigray

According to a report from the Tigray Health Bureau, prior to the commencement of the devastating war on November 4, 2020, Tigray boasted robust health facilities, including over 720 health posts, 224 health centers, 24 primary hospitals, 14 general hospitals, two comprehensive specialized hospitals, more than 250 ambulances, and a workforce exceeding 20,000 health professionals.[18] The region had been making steady progress in all aspects of healthcare services. However, the health facilities across Ethiopia's Tigray region have been systematically targeted in a deliberate and widespread assault on healthcare infrastructure.

Teams from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that out of 106 health facilities surveyed from mid-December 2020 to early March 2021, nearly 70% had been subjected to looting, while over 30% had sustained damage. Shockingly, only 13% of these facilities were found to be operating normally.[19] Additionally, a recent report by the World Health Organization (WHO)[20] revealed concerning statistics

[13] Tigray Education Bureau report for the year of 2023-2024 academic year

[14] Survey made by the Tigray Inquiry Commission with Tigray Education Bureau from July 12 to July 27, 2023

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Tigray Regional Health Bureau (TRHB)'s bulletin 2015 E.C.

[19] MSF. People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed on 15 March 2021 https://www.msf.org/health-facilities-targeted-tigray-region-ethiopia

[20] AS. News: Two-year war leaves 86% of Tigray's healthcare facilities devastated: new report on October 5, 2023 https://addisstandard.com/news-two-year-war-leaves-86-of-tigrays-healthcare-facilities-devastated-new-report/

regarding the state of healthcare infrastructure in Tigray. Out of the 853 health service delivery units assessed, 86% have suffered varying degrees of structural damage, while 71% of medical equipment remains partially nonfunctional.

Among the affected health institutions is Abi Adi General Hospital, which has incurred extensive damage due to the conflict. Dr. Ashanafi Gebrselassie, a specialized medical doctor at Abi Adi, reports significant resource loss, including skilled staff depletion, directly attributable to the war. Over 85% of the hospital building has sustained damage, resulting in the complete destruction of medical equipment, particularly those used in operating rooms. Furthermore, hospital beds and medical machinery stored in the warehouse have been looted. Prior to the conflict, Abi Adi General Hospital served over 600,000 patients annually, but its current capacity can only accommodate a quarter of that number.[21]

A comprehensive assessment[22] of the impact of the war on healthcare delivery in the Tigray region was conducted, comparing the status of health facilities before November 2020 and from November 2020 to June 2021. Data were gathered between February 2021 and June 2021 amidst an active full-fledged war and communication blackout in Tigray. The findings reveal that only 3.6% of all health facilities are fully functional, with variations across geographic locations.

Through a systematic review, it was identified documents specifically addressing conflict and health issues in Tigray. These documents highlighted attacks on infrastructure, interruptions of health services, outcomes and impacts, and responses and recommendations, emphasizing the urgent need for intervention and support in restoring healthcare services in Tigray.[23]

Assessing Primary Data Collection in Tigray's Health Sector

A comprehensive census was conducted to unveil the impact of the war, blockades, and sieges on the Tigray health sector. This household survey assessment spanned from November 2020 to June 2022 and involved more than 659,673 households. The assessment revealed that 92.8% of respondents had access to health services before the war, delivered by specialized hospitals, general hospitals, primary hospitals, health centers, and health posts. However, 94% of respondents reported a lack of basic health services post-war.[24]

To understand the impact of the conflict on childbirth, we assessed home deliveries during the war period, revealing that 49% of deliveries occurred at home. The main reasons cited for this trend were a lack of transportation, skilled health professionals, and non-functionality of health facilities. Alarmingly, maternal and neonatal mortality rates were higher during the war, attributed to various factors, including a lack of ambulance services, medical supplies, skilled personnel, movement restrictions, blood donations, and essential medications.[25]

The Home to Home service program primarily focuses on the prevention and promotion of health services across seventeen health components through home visits and health education. However, due to the siege and the war, the community has been profoundly affected by easily preventable diseases such as vaccine-preventable diseases, water and foodborne illnesses, and diseases related to poor personal hygiene and environmental sanitation. Additionally, there has been a loss of patients from follow-up care for

[21] Ibid.

[22] ResearchGate. BMJ. Geographical distribution of the health crisis of war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia on 12 January 2022 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360290120_Geographical_distribution_of_the_health_crisis_of_war_in_the_Tigray_region_of_Ethiopia

[23] BMC. Conflict and Health. Perilous medicine in Tigray: a systematic review on 30 May 2023 https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13031-023-00524-x

[24] House hold survey made by Tigray Inquiry Commission from December 31, 2022 to February 10, 2023

[25] House hold survey made by Tigray Inquiry Commission from December 31, 2022 to February 10, 2023

conditions like Tuberculosis and Leprosy, inadequate surveillance for new and emerging illnesses, and deficiencies in maternal and child health services, including family planning, antenatal and postnatal care, nutritional counseling, and vaccination services.[26]

According to respondents, the quality of health services provided by Health Extension Workers (HEWs) was rated as very low (42%), low (28%), high (16%), and very high (11%). Only 1.4% of respondents reported receiving home-to-home health services from health extension workers.[27]

The disruption in healthcare services extended to vaccination, with 70.3% of children not receiving necessary vaccinations. Additionally, the siege and war resulted in a shortage of essential medications, leading to adverse health outcomes, including death, disease, pain, suffering, and psychological distress among families.[28]

A comprehensive assessment conducted by the Tigray Inquiry Commission (TIC) and Tigray Health Bureau (THB) revealed catastrophic destruction of health infrastructure, with a significant percentage of health facilities damaged or vandalized. Before the war, the health sector employed 21,033 health workers, which dwindled to 15,129 by May 2023. According to the findings from sectoral assessments, the primary targets of this war were the buildings, vehicles, office furniture, office equipment, maintenance equipment, consumables, and ICT technologies, including the health information management system. Catastrophic destruction resulting from these attacks has been reported. The findings indicate that out of the total surveyed, 514 health posts (80.6%), 153 health centers (73.6%), 16 primary hospitals (80.0%), 10 general hospitals (83.3%), two specialized hospitals (100%), and 189 private health facilities have been damaged and/or vandalized, either fully or partially, due to the war.[29]

Despite economic support, the federal government imposed a complete siege for over 18 months during active warfare, leading to a rapid deterioration of the economy and rendering healthcare costs unaffordable for the people of Tigray. Healthcare utilization significantly decreased during the war, with hypertension visits dropping by 52.7% and neonatal mortality rates increasing from 20/1000 to 23/1000.

The civil war exacerbated the challenges faced by kidney patients in Tigray, particularly regarding dialysis services. Ayder Referral Hospital, the sole provider of dialysis services, faces operational challenges due to insufficient maintenance, leading to a reduced capacity to serve patients. The high cost of dialysis further burdens patients, with government hospitals in Mekelle charging substantially more than other regions and private hospitals charging exorbitant fees. Despite the Ceasefire of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) signed, many kidney patients still lack essential dialysis materials and medications, further exacerbating the healthcare crisis in Tigray.

Targeting Healthcare Infrastructure in the Tigray Genocidal War: Systematic Destruction

One of the most severely damaged health institutions is Mayani General Hospital, located in Northwestern Tigray, specifically in Sheraro town. Established in February 2014, it was intended to serve a population of 150,000 from Sheraro town and its surrounding areas. Originally constructed by Dr. Marye Mayani to provide maternal and child health services, the Tigray regional government later upgraded the facility to a general hospital by constructing additional buildings and providing the necessary materials and manpower.

[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

The hospital offered a range of inpatient and outpatient services, including medical and surgical services, neonatal intensive care, pediatric care, maternal and child health services (such as antenatal care, delivery services, cesarean deliveries, postnatal care, family planning, and vaccination), ophthalmology, physiotherapy, pharmacy, laboratory services, imaging, and provisions for inpatient meals.[30]

Currently, the hospital is unable to provide both inpatient and outpatient clinical services due to complete destruction resulting from the war in Tigray. The hospital was deliberately targeted and subjected to looting, physical destruction, and arson, resulting in the damage of both medical and non-medical equipment. In August 2021, efforts were made by non-governmental organizations to restore the hospital's functionality. However, in August 2022, the hospital was once again wholly destroyed. The level of destruction during the last war was severe, affecting both the internal and external elements of the hospital buildings.[31]

Regarding medical machines and equipment, critical items such as anesthesia machines, digital X-ray machines, mobile X-ray machines, chemistry machines, gene expert machines, complete blood count machines, ultrasound machines, ECG machines, phototherapy machines, radiant warmers, autoclave sterilization machines, and all pharmaceutical items were either looted or destroyed, rendering them non-functional.[32]

Documenting Targeted Assault on Religious and Heritage Institutions in Tigray

Photographic evidence confirms the bombing of significant Ethiopian churches and mosques. Among these sites, the mosque of Negash, revered as one of Africa's earliest mosques, has been damaged during the conflict in Tigray. Additionally, a report by the European External Programme with Africa (EEPA) highlights a tragic incident on 15 December, where approximately 750 individuals seeking refuge in front of the cathedral of Maryam Seyon (Mary of Zion) – the most sacred church for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians – were reportedly killed. Eyewitnesses suggest that these civilians were slain while attempting to prevent the looting of their church. Moreover, corroborated sources, supported by footage, indicate that the Cherkos Church in Zalambesa was targeted with bombing and subsequent looting. Recent updates from the Society for the Promotion of Museums in Ethiopia reveal that a museum housing artifacts from the pre-Christian era has suffered partial damage and plundering. Additionally, reports from the Telegraph indicate the burning of ancient medieval manuscripts.[33]

Hajj Siraj Mohammed, for five decades, has overseen the management of the renowned al-Nejashi Mosque in northern Ethiopia's Tigray region. However, with the outbreak of conflict last year, the mosque in Negash became a target as Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers advanced towards the town en route to the capital, Mekele.[34]

Reports from both Alula and Wolbert Smidt, a Tigray-focused ethnohistorian at the University of Jena in Germany, indicate incidents of gunfire and shelling at the sixth-century monastery of Debre Damo, located north of the Tigray city of Adigrat.

---

[30] Interview made on July 7, 2023 by experts of Tigray Inquiry Commission with Mayani General Hospital heads

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Tigray's people and their heritage urgently need protecting
Reports of atrocities in the Ethiopian region include the targeting of Tigray's unparallelled cultural treasures 3 FEBRUARY 2021
https://www.apollo-magazine.com/tigray-ethiopia-conflict-cultural-heritage/?amp=1

[34] Africanews and AFP. Heritage sites under siege in Ethiopia's Tigray war on 30/04/2021
https://www.africanews.com/2021/04/30/heritage-sites-under-siege-in-ethiopia-s-tigray-war/

Additionally, an attack on the Ligat Kirkos church, positioned near the border with Eritrea, is believed to have been orchestrated by Eritrean soldiers. This assault is seen as part of an effort to eliminate Tigrayan establishments within territory long disputed by the two countries. Tigray's cultural heritage has suffered deliberate damage and pillaging, though the full extent of this assault is yet to be comprehensively documented.

Primary Data Collection from Religious and Cultural Institutions

From the household survey, the effect of war caused denial in enhancing customary spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. Media access denial and hate speech campaigns aggrieved the level of criminal acts against the people of Tigray. Efforts towards forced changes of identity cards and burning or tearing of local languages such as Tigrigna, Soha, and Kunaman languages were commonly reported by respondents. More than 69% of Tigray heritages suffered different types and levels of damage.[35]

More than 80% of the family's inherited religious heritage has been damaged by different intentions. The significant impacts of religious damage on families are spiritual damage, failure to get service on time, and obstacles to religious journeys ranging from 28% to 25%.[36]

More than 32,332 households face damage to traditional and historical buildings and houses. It was confirmed that building damage to historical buildings like debri, hidmo, adarash, gebela, seqela, bet, mereba, dercukiyt, windows, walls, and others was at a very high level.[37]

More than 39,839 of the households' traditional, historical, and art result properties are damaged. Traditional and historical Art property like shoe, tlfi, gabi, messob, wenfit, sefeey. Kuta, and the like were reported at very high levels of damage.

Damage is reported in Wooden properties such as beds, tables, mesateya, tsahli, eton, and others were damaged at very high levels of damage. Damage was also reported in cultural heritage sites such as obelisks, tombs, crosses, manuscripts, mountains, historical city places, marketplaces, forests, and the like. The nature of destruction is mainly done deliberately in the form of looting and burning.[38]

Religious service delivery before the war was more than 95%. But during the war and siege, 55% service was not delivered, and 45 % service was delivered at a very poor level. More than 35% of the households never celebrate holidays, and 52% celebrate very poorly. But before the war, holidays were celebrated more than 84% at the very highest level.[39]

Regarding the effects on religious practices, individual family members were unable to conduct their spiritual beliefs. Additionally, they faced obstacles in accessing services on time and conducting religious journeys, as well as in observing public holiday celebrations. Instances of sexual violence, killings, and torture were perpetrated in religious and heritage sites.[40] A report from the Tigray Orthodox Church confirmed that 1052 church clergy members were killed, 4055 were physically tortured, and 383 were subjected to rape. More than 292 churches have been partially or fully damaged, including 14 monasteries. Additionally, over 121 churches have faced transgressions of order, with more than 5347 sacred objects looted and vandalized.[41]

---

[35] House hold survey made by Tigray Inquiry Commission from December 31, 2022 to February 10, 2023

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Reported by Tigray Orthodox Church

In the assessment of 713 religious and heritage institutions, 84% of religious utility items were damaged. Among the institutions assessed, almost 70% confirmed that religious and heritage spiritual beliefs and related activities were interrupted during the war. Approximately 38% of religious and heritage buildings were affected by some form of damage.[42]

Of the 713 institutions assessed, 656 heritage books were reported before the war. Among them, 55% were reported as damaged or looted. Out of 363 heritage books that were damaged or looted, 77 were Bible books, 92 were hagiographies of martyrs, 27 were history, law, and other books, 146 were Islamic books, and 21 were Sinkisar.[43]

Destruction of Mosques and Islamic Heritage

A total of 17 mosques and Islamic heritage sites were investigated, among which Al-Njesahi Mosque stands out as one of the most significantly damaged mosques. As clearly defined by numerous bodies, such deliberate attacks and hostilities against civilians and their identities constitute criminal acts recognized by various international conventions and legal frameworks. The Director-General of UNESCO, for instance, addressed this issue in a statement to the UN Security Council in March 2017, stating:

> "*The deliberate destruction of heritage is a war crime; it has become a tactic of war to tear societies apart over the long term, in a strategy of cultural cleansing. This is why defending cultural heritage is more than a cultural issue; it is a security imperative, inseparable from that of defending human lives.*"

From the perspective of the international legal framework, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two protocols, as well as the UNESCO convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property from October 12 to November 14, 1970, provide significant guidance.

Al-Nejashi Mosque, the oldest mosque in Africa established in the 7th century, holds particular significance for the people of the area. Recently renovated with funding from the Turkish government, Al-Nejashi is one of the significant heritage sites of Tigray and holds an important place in Islamic history. Situated near the town of Wukro, it was the first mosque built in Africa and the second in the world. Founded in 612 CE by some of the earliest followers of the Prophet Muhammad who sought refuge from persecution by the ruling Quraysh tribe in Mecca, the mosque was established with the consent of the then-Negus of Aksum, Armah (Ashama ibn Abjar). The mosque contains the tombs of 15 of the Prophet's companions, as some of the group remained in Ethiopia.

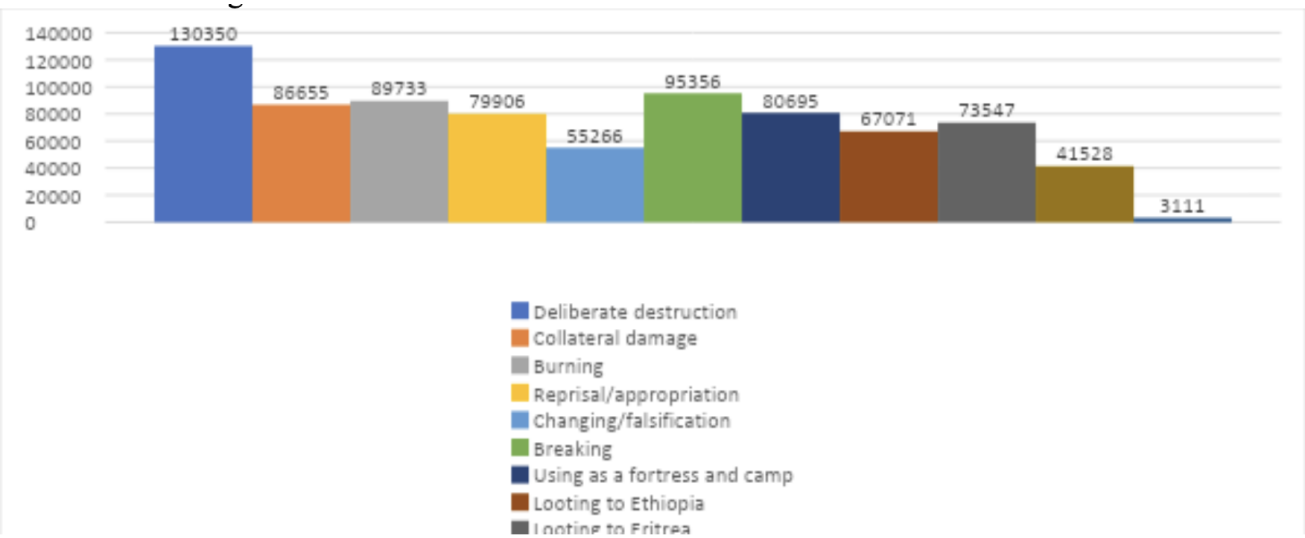
At Negash, the al-Nejashi mosque sustained severe damage, with both the main building and minaret directly hit by artillery fire. These are among the most critical parts of the mosque, with ancient foundations, although parts have been rebuilt repeatedly. While locals assert that Tigrayan fighters had long evacuated the town by the time Eritrean and Ethiopian troops approached, the mosque compound was extensively looted by Eritrean troops following the artillery strikes.

Regarding the incidence of the destruction of the mosque, community elders reported that "artifacts, including religious manuscripts, books, and letters dating as far back as the seventh century, were looted. Quba, Minora, offices, halls, cafeteria, stores, fence, and a shrine holding the remains of followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the mosque were also damaged." A representative of the regional International Association of Muslims in Tigray, Ahmed Siraj, said, "*Eritrean soldiers killed civilians trying to prevent*

[42] Institutional survey made by Tigray Inquiry Commission from January 3 to February 6, 2023
[43] Ibid.

pillaging." Other local residents of the city have reported the number to be over 80.

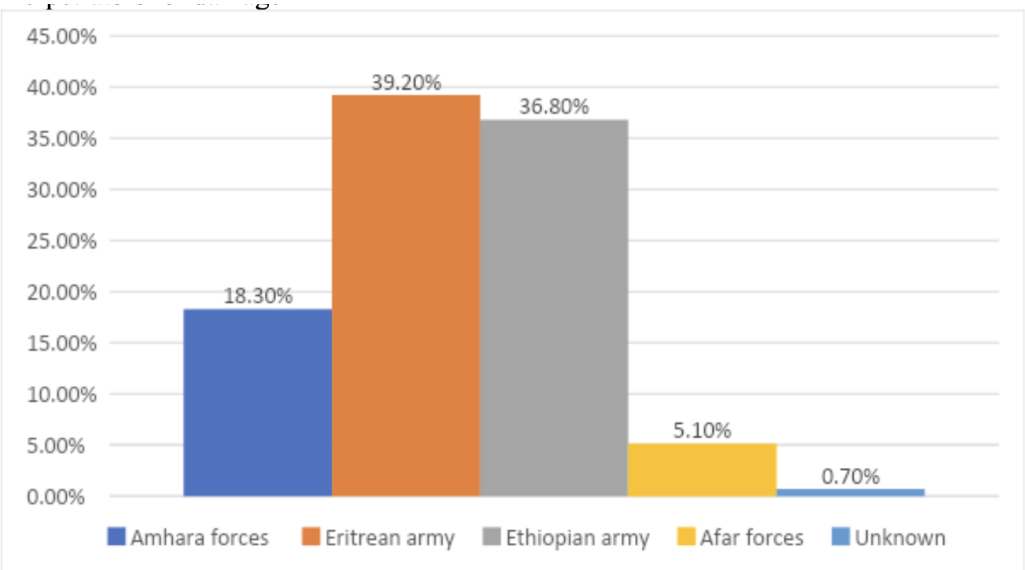
Intentions to Damage Heritage and Religious Sites



The above graph illustrates that the majority of the heritages have been deliberately destroyed and damaged (16.20%), followed by breaking, burning, using as fortresses, collateral damage, appropriation, looting to Eritrea, looting to Ethiopia, heritage falsification, and looting to other countries, respectively (5.20%).[44] As reported by international media, old Ge'ez manuscripts, and Ge'ez books have been observed on sale on eBay.

Responsibility for Heritage Site Damage

[44] Institutional survey made by Tigray Inquiry Commission from January 3 to February 6, 2023



The data from the figure above depict that 39.2% of the heritages have been damaged by the Eritrean army, followed by the Ethiopian army (36.8%), Amhara forces, and Fano (18.3%), and Afar Forces (5.1%), respectively.[45]

Recommendations for Ethiopia

1. Education System Reform and Teacher Training:

[45] Ibid.

- Initiate comprehensive reforms within the education sector to address systemic issues such as inequity and discrimination, ensuring inclusivity and quality education for all. Develop detailed action plans for each reform, outlining objectives and stakeholder responsibilities. Simultaneously, implement robust teacher training programs emphasizing human rights education, conflict resolution, and inclusive teaching practices. Align these efforts with national development agendas and human rights commitments, recognizing education as a fundamental human right and a driver of societal progress.

2. Institutional Capacity Building:

- Allocate resources towards enhancing the capacity of educational institutions and authorities to efficiently manage and govern the education system, fostering transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making processes. Establish precise indicators and benchmarks to systematically monitor progress and evaluate the impact of reforms on advancing human rights within the education sector over a designated five-year timeframe.

3. Health Sector Reform and Professional Training:

- Launch comprehensive reforms within the health sector to address access barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and resource limitations, ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare for all Ethiopians. Develop detailed action plans focusing on healthcare delivery improvement, system strengthening, and addressing health disparities through preventive measures and community engagement.
- Simultaneously, implement comprehensive training programs for healthcare professionals, integrating human rights principles, conflict resolution techniques, and inclusive practices. Offer opportunities for learning and capacity building through fellowships and ongoing professional development initiatives. Align training efforts with national development agendas and human rights commitments, recognizing healthcare as a fundamental human right and a key driver of societal progress.

4. Ensuring Economic Stability and Support for Workers:

- All civil servants and government employees must promptly receive compensation for the 17 months of unpaid wages accumulated during the war. Prioritize adjusting their salaries and budget allocations to accommodate these overdue payments. This action is imperative for stabilizing the economy and providing vital support to workers affected by the war.

5. Heritage Preservation and Cultural Sensitivity in Education:

- Develop and implement strategies to preserve Tigray's heritage and religious sites while promoting cultural sensitivity and diversity in the national curriculum. Collaborate with stakeholders to protect cultural sites and integrate cultural education into the curriculum, fostering critical thinking and tolerance among students. Prioritize initiatives that engage communities and promote sustainable tourism to safeguard Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage for future generations.

6. Organize a Standalone Tigray Post-War Reconstruction and Development Donors Conference:

- Within a year, convene a conference with a strong human rights foundation, demonstrating solidarity with the people of Tigray and providing much-needed support for the region’s recovery and sustainable development. This conference can serve as a catalyst for mobilizing resources, fostering partnerships, and ensuring that the reconstruction and development process in Tigray is inclusive and participatory and respects the fundamental rights of all individuals affected by the war.

To ensure effective implementation, it is crucial to:

a) *Prioritize repair and rebuilding* of essential infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supply, and telecommunication systems, guaranteeing fundamental rights to water and sanitation with pro-poor and inclusive planning.

b) *Encourage meaningful participation* of local communities and stakeholders in the conference and reconstruction process, respecting their rights to information, expression, and assembly.

c) *Implement a fair compensation scheme* for individuals and communities most affected by civilian losses, respecting rights to property and an adequate standard of living within the next five years.

In addition, it is essential to ensure the **full implementation of the CoHA agreement**, reinforcing efforts towards peace and stability in Tigray. Transparency, accountability, and coordination among all actors

involved in the reconstruction process, including the government, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector, are crucial. Establishing a hybrid body to oversee and undertake regular monitoring and evaluation will be essential to assessing progress, identifying challenges, and making necessary adjustments in accordance with human rights principles such as non-discrimination, participation, and the rule of law.

Recommendation for Joint Action from Ethiopia, the International Community, humanitarian groups, and civil society

Establishing a Strategic Planning and Oversight Commission is crucial for coordinating comprehensive reconstruction efforts in Tigray. This commission, comprising representatives from various stakeholders, will oversee the transparent and equitable allocation of resources across critical sectors such as education, health, infrastructure, and heritage preservation. Its key responsibilities include:

- Ensuring efficient and transparent fund utilization.
- Guaranteeing equitable resource distribution and preventing corruption.
- Coordinating reconstruction efforts to avoid duplication and maximize effectiveness.

In its first year, the commission will focus on assessing damage, identifying needs, and developing a strategic roadmap. Regular updates on progress and findings will ensure transparency. At year-end, the commission's effectiveness will be evaluated, potentially serving as a model for other conflict-affected regions in Ethiopia. Ultimately, the commission will transition its responsibilities to local coordination councils to sustain reconstruction efforts.

Recommendations for the International Community

The international community must **support Tigray's reconstruction**, focusing on health, education, and heritage sectors. **Financial aid** should be allocated for education reconstruction, including capacity-building programs. **Advocacy for protecting schools** in conflict zones is crucial. **Unhindered humanitarian access** is necessary for delivering education-related aid effectively. **Monitoring mechanisms** should ensure aid efficiency. Adherence to the **CoHA agreement** is vital for peace and stability in Tigray.