

**PETITION TO THE UNITED NATIONS (UN) AND THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)
ON THE SITUATION OF ERITREAN REFUGEES IN TIGRAY**

SUBMITTED BY CONCERNED ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

JANUARY 2021

BACKGROUND

On 4th November 2020, a deadly conflict broke out in the Tigray region. The civilian population in particular and the over 100, 000 Eritrean refugees in the Tigray region who were already in a bad position have found themselves in a further desperate situation. The conflict has been in and around the refugee camps in the Tigray region and scores have been killed and many injured. There is mounting evidence that armed groups are entering the refugee camps to rob in particular; mobile phones, looting and threatening the refugees.

There has been mounting evidence that many Eritrean refugees are being forcibly repatriated to Eritrea against their will. The Eritrean refugees who have been offered resettlement to a third country, are now being refused to leave Ethiopia by the Federal Government. The Ethiopian Government had kept them in the airport with the aim of returning them to Eritrea. Furthermore, it has been reported that many refugees have been shot by Eritrean Defence Forces and Ethiopia's Federal Government soldiers in the refugee camps, and that the Eritrean Government has started to put those people who have gone back into the war effort.

This is in breach of International law to which Ethiopia is signatory to the 1951 UN Convention for Refugees and is breaching its protection obligations. There are also many who were denied refugee status for a whole host of reasons and are also at grave risk to being sent back to Eritrea. Therefore, the Eritrean humanitarian situation in Ethiopia is grave with those outside of the Tigray region also being targeted.

While the war rages on, access to relevant information for the refugees, international community and the humanitarian providers is almost none existent.

In lieu of the above, cognisant of the ambitions of the African Union and the United Nations to foster peace, protect refugees and enhances easy access to humanitarian support and considering that communication with the people in Tigray is a hurdle, we submit this petition with the demands as seen below.

We call upon the UN and the international community to take urgent steps to end the hostilities taking place in the Horn of Africa. We are deeply concerned to what is transpiring with allegations of war crimes being committed coupled with the lack of communication which makes the situation extremely dangerous and requires monitoring.

The Eritrean soldiers who have been forcibly conscripted to fight in a war that does not involve Eritreans and several of them have already died in the conflict. The human rights of these individuals continue to be abrogated and they are also forced to fight alongside Ethiopian Federal Government forces who are stationed in Eritrea against Tigray.

As the conflict continues it is the civilians that carry the burden of the conflict, the humanitarian access is only available to those areas controlled by the Ethiopian Federal

Government. The humanitarian situation amongst the Tigrayan population itself is getting desperate, this coupled with the bombings and killings that are taking place.

The Eritrean refugees who number around 100,000 in the Tigray region were already in a bad place before the conflict broke out, but this has made their predicament very desperate. There are verified reports of Eritrean refugees being forcibly repatriated to Eritrea, this raises protection issues of Eritrean refugees and it is the Ethiopian Federal Government's duty to protect these refugees.

Some of the people in the refugee camps are high ranking military leaders, human rights activists and opposition members who sought asylum in Ethiopia. Some of these people may have already fled to Sudan or left the camps, but some may have been kidnapped by the regime in Asmara.

It is only the end of hostilities that can truly halt the humanitarian disaster that is unfolding in the Tigray region and which has now expanded to Sudan. The current conflict that has erupted between Sudan and Ethiopia will only increase the humanitarian disaster. There are reports that Eritrean troops are fighting along side Ethiopian Government soldiers against Sudan.

The Eritrean Government continues to violate the human rights of the Eritrean people and people are now starving inside the country. The forced disappearances, incarceration and indefinite national service continues unabated.

We demand that:

- All sides in the conflict show restraint and protect civilians
- Eritrea withdraws all its troops from the conflict in Tigray with immediate effect as this is an internal conflict between Ethiopians.
- Ethiopian military personnel leave Eritrean soil with immediate effect
- Eritrean troops to withdraw from the conflict with Sudan immediately
- All sides come to the negotiating table and end hostilities as a matter of urgency
- The humanitarian corridor remains open to all in the Tigray region to enable humanitarian assistance to reach all in need.
- Ensure that there is humanitarian corridor for Eritreans inside Eritrea
- That the UN and international community act immediately against war crimes and genocide taking place in Tigray now and in Eritrea as per the Commission of Inquiry report on Eritrea 2016.

- Eritrean refugees are protected in line with international law and are immediately evacuated from the Tigray region
- The end of imprisonment, forced disappearance and abductions of Eritrean refugees to Eritrea
- Eritrean refugees are given humanitarian assistance and protection as a matter of urgency
- Immediate humanitarian assistance inside Eritrea is provided as there is starvation inside the country.
- Hold the regime in Asmara to account for committing collective genocide on the Eritrean people.
- The federal government of Ethiopia unlocks all digital communications platforms and strengthen Communication channels with the affected refugees and the outer world established with immediate effect to enable interested humanitarian providers to access relevant information on how to approach the situation
- To ensure all Eritrean refugees who have not been registered, are done so with immediate effect and given the protection that they need.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES ACTION?

The Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia are facing double jeopardy of being in a foreign land and at the same time being forced into a third country with minimal or almost none existent humanitarian support and being repatriated against their will and against the international law on refugees. Repatriated refugees are believed to have been subjected to torture and detention incommunicado by the Eritrean government.

The African union agenda 2063 envisions an Africa free of wars and conflict and reiterates its commitment to advancing human rights, rule of law and good governance. The occurrence in Tigray is a situation that debunks the vision of the African union and the united nations and escalates serious human rights issues and crimes against humanity that need a multipronged approach to bring to an end for the affected people especially the Eritrean refugees.

SIGNATURES SUPPORTING THE PETITION

We the undersigned organizations append our signatures in support of the above petition

No.	Organization	County
1.	Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights	
2.	Transformative Leaders Network- Africa (TRANET-Africa)	Uganda
3.	Youth Forum for Social Justice-Uganda	Uganda
4.	Junub Youth Action Network	South Sudan
5.	Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance (FODAG-)	South Sudan
6.	CIVICUS	South Africa