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Dear Sirs,

On behalf of my client, the Foundation Human Rights for Eritreans, I am writing to urge the Security Council to take action in the war in Tigray, in particular vis-à-vis the role of the State of Eritrea in this conflict. The Foundation is particularly concerned given the grave violations of human rights committed by the Eritrean military forces (the Eritrean Defence Force or “EDF”) in the war in Tigray, and given the deep and far-reaching impact of this war on the human rights of Eritreans both in Eritrea and in the extensive diaspora.

The war in Tigray has been ongoing since 3 November 2020. From the very first moment, the EDF was deeply involved in this war. The EDF wholly consists of conscripts who have been forced to serve under the so-called Eritrean ‘national service’, which has been qualified by the UN Commission of Inquiry as “*enslavement*” and a “*crime against humanity*”. The EDF force includes minors. Currently, Eritrea is understood to be operating in a united front on the border with Tigray and in Western Tigray.

From the early stages of the war in Tigray, there arose clear and credible evidence that the EDF committed grave violations of human rights in Tigray, including the perpetration of massacres, the systematic use of rape and starvation as weapons of war, the deliberate destruction of refugee camps in Tigray and forced return of Eritrean refugees to Eritrea, as well as the deliberate destruction of health facilities in Tigray.

This evidence was confirmed by the first report of the EHRC/OHCHR Joint Investigation into the war in Tigray. The Joint Investigation noted that the abuses were marked by “*extreme brutality*”

that could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, and emphasized that “*the big numbers of violations*” could be linked to Ethiopian and Eritrean forces.¹

As such, the State of Eritrea has exported its long-standing violations of human rights with impunity. A few months ago, the Special Rapporteur for Eritrea observed that the EDF “*continued to be involved in serious human rights and humanitarian law violations in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia.*”² While there was a short lull in the hostilities in Tigray over the past summer during the humanitarian cease-fire, at the end of August the war resumed in full force. Eritrea is a key player in this war, which fact was condemned by the White House on 2 September 2022.³

The war in Tigray also leads to continued grave human rights violations in Tigray, as the Special Rapporteur for Eritrea concluded: “*The involvement of Eritrea in the war in Ethiopia has also compounded the severe human rights challenges Eritrea faces and reinforced pre-existing patterns of violations.*”⁴

The Special Rapporteur for instance mentions a sharp increase since the war in Tigray of so-called ‘giffa’s’ in Eritrea, meaning “[t]he round-up of individuals for the purpose of military conscription”.⁵ Anyone, including children “*as young as 14 year old*”, may be subject to such forced round-up and be sent to fight in the war in Tigray. The Foundation notes that over the past weeks there have been reliable reports of the Eritrean regime again rounding up minors in Eritrea for the latest round of fighting in Tigray.

Furthermore, there has been a sharp increase of activity of the Eritrean regime (the political party PFDJ) in Europe. The PFDJ has attempted to organize events in various European countries, which were mostly prevented from taking place by the authorities (police or local authorities).

These events were designed to spread pro-Eritrea regime propaganda, incite hate and violence and support the war efforts by Awel Seid, who is working closely with the top of the PFDJ on generating support for the war. The festivals were intended to collect resources for the war from the diaspora. Members of the Eritrean diaspora feel threatened by the festivals, which have been prohibited in seven countries. The Eritrean regime, speaking through its spokesperson and at the highest level, has issued concrete threats to anyone opposing the war and their families in Eritrea.

The war in Tigray, in which Eritrea is playing a key role, is devastating the entire region. Human trafficking rings are preying on those desperate to find a safer place. In 2018, the UN Security Council listed two Eritrean and four Libyan traffickers on the Libya Sanctions List. Since then, at least three Eritrean traffickers have been arrested and many more have been identified operating in the region, which leads to its further destabilization.

¹ See PBS Newshour 3 November 2021, “*U.N. report says Ethiopia’s war marked by ‘extreme brutality’*”, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/u-n-report-says-ethiopias-war-marked-by-extreme-brutality>, quoting UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet as saying: “*I would say that the big numbers of violations of human rights are linked to the Ethiopian and Eritrean defense force*”.

² Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, 6 May 2022, A/HRC/50/20, par. 17-20.

³ RFI 2 September 2022, “*US says sending envoy to Ethiopia, condemns Eritrea return to war*”, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international-news/20220902-us-says-sending-envoy-to-ethiopia-condemns-eritrea-return-to-war?ref=tw>.

⁴ Report Special Rapporteur, par. 2.

⁵ Report Special Rapporteur, par. 24-29.

Unfortunately, the gravity and staggering human cost of the war in Tigray – both in Tigray and in Eritrea – has not resulted in an equally grave response from the international community. As Lord Alton pointedly remarked in the House of Lords:⁶

“The War in Ukraine has overshadowed a conflict which has been every bit as devastating as Putin’s War. Often shockingly under reported, Tigray’s War has led to a catastrophic series of brutal attacks and to war crimes which have left millions of people displaced, starving, desperately seeking humanitarian relief.”

Like the war in Ukraine, the war in Tigray is a significant threat to international peace and security. The Foundation is aware this issue is currently under consideration within the Security Council and has been the subject of a Security Council Press Statement (SC/14961). The Foundation **urgently calls upon the Security Council to take further action** by adopting a resolution containing in any case the following.

As a **first step**, Eritrean forces must be withdrawn from Tigray and any involvement of the EDF in the war in Tigray must end as soon as possible. An urgent call to this effect in a Security Council resolution would be appropriate.

Secondly, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence showing the Eritrean regime has perpetrated or has been complicit in grave violations of human rights, not only against its own citizens but also against the people of Tigray. This threatens international peace and security. As a result, the Eritrean regime has been subjected to sanctions by the United States, which considered the war in Tigray an *“unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States”*.⁷ The EU has also instituted sanctions against Eritrean State organs, considering them linked to *“serious violations of human rights”*.⁸

Instituting similar sanctions against the Eritrean regime by the Security Council would be appropriate, as underlined by the Special Rapporteur for Eritrea:⁹

“The Special Rapporteur welcomes the issuance of targeted sanctions against specific individuals and institutions for their involvement in human rights violations, including for their role in the ongoing human rights crisis and military conflict in northern Ethiopia.”

These sanctions should be instated against in any case the following parties:

1. Eritrean Defense Force (EDF)
2. People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)
3. National Security Office of the Government of Eritrea
4. Abraham Kassa Nemariam
5. Yemane Gebreab
6. Hidri Trust
7. Hagos Ghebrehiwet W Kidan

⁶ Lord David Alton 1 September 2022, *“Tigray continues to grievously suffer. International institutions must leave no stone unturned in seeking justice and a durable peace.”*
<https://www.davidalton.net/2022/09/01/tigray-continues-to-grievously-suffer-international-institutions-must-leave-no-stone-unturned-in-seeking-justice-and-a-durable-peace/>.

⁷ Executive Order 14046—Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons With Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia

⁸ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-imposes-further-sanctions-over-serious-violations-of-human-rights-around-the-world/>.

⁹ Report Special Rapporteur, par. 20.

8. Red Sea Trading Corporation

The Foundation is looking forward to seeing decisive Security Council action on this matter.

Yours truly,



Emiel Jurjens – attorney at-law/*advocaat*