

# G7 Foreign Ministers Condemn Atrocity Crimes In Tigray

On April 2, 2021, the G7 Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, issued a statement condemning atrocity crimes in Tigray and called for comprehensive responses: “We condemn the killing of civilians, sexual and gender-based violence, indiscriminate shelling and the forced displacement of residents of Tigray and Eritrean refugees.”



A woman leans on the wall of a damaged house which was shelled as federal-aligned forces entered the city, in Wukro, north of Mekele, on March 1, 2021. Every phase of the four-month-old conflict in Tigray has brought suffering to Wukro, a fast-growing transport hub once best-known for its religious and archaeological sites. Ahead of federal forces’ arrival in late November 2020, heavy shelling leveled homes and businesses and sent plumes of dust and smoke rising above near-deserted streets. (Photo credit: EDUARDO SOTERAS/AFP via Getty Images)

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The statement continues that: “All parties must exercise utmost restraint, ensure the protection of civilians and respect human rights and international law. We urge parties to the conflict to provide immediate, unhindered humanitarian access. We are concerned about worsening food insecurity, with emergency conditions prevailing across extensive areas of central and eastern Tigray. We welcome the recent announcement from Prime Minister Abiy that Eritrean forces will withdraw from Tigray. This process must be swift, unconditional, and verifiable. We call for the end of violence and the establishment of a clear inclusive political process that is acceptable to all Ethiopians, including those in Tigray and which leads to credible elections and a wider national reconciliation process.”

The ongoing armed conflict began on November 4, 2020, when “Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered the Ethiopian Defense Forces (EDF) to militarily engage with the Tigray Regional Paramilitary Police and militia loyal to the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) in what he stated was a response to multiple attacks by the Tigray security forces on the EDF North Command base in Mekelle and other military camps in Tigray Region.” A few days later, on November 9, 2020, evidence of the mass killing of several hundred people, mainly Amharans, in the western Tigray town of Mai Kadra, began to emerge. Subsequent weeks have seen reports of thousands killed, including civilians, and thousands fleeing to Sudan. In December 2020, the U.N. alleged violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including the deliberate targeting of civilians, extrajudicial killings, and widespread looting.

Recent months have seen more and more evidence of atrocities. End of March 2021, researchers from Ghent University, Belgium, reported on the staggering cost of the conflict, with 1,942 fully documented deaths, 6% of victims being children, including infants. However, this number is very conservative. As the report explains, there are 7,259 reported civilian casualties that are yet to be verified. “As lack of media access and a still ongoing communication blockage in many parts of the region make reporting very difficult, the number of verifiable sources is minimal and the number of casualties is most likely an extreme underrepresentation.” The authors of the report further compiled a list of 151 massacres, namely, of atrocities “in which at least 5 unarmed civilians were killed on the same day at the same location.”

To the list of casualties, we need to add the list of all those injured and in need of humanitarian assistance. The numbers are likely to increase. As the report notes, in November 2020, “the Government of Ethiopia stated that the military operation in Tigray was completed, and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed appointed an ‘Interim Government of Tigray.’ However, four months into the conflict, the armed conflict is still ongoing on a large scale, many people are internally displaced and the number of reports on severe atrocities against unarmed civilians is growing rapidly. These reports systematically document massacres, (often extreme) sexual violence, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and mass looting.” Furthermore, end of March 2021, U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that while before the conflict, there were 950,000 people in need of aid, the conflict added (projected) 1.3 million people in need of aid.

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G7 Foreign Ministers are right to condemn the atrocities and ask for comprehensive responses. However, it should not stop at words.

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Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab is a human rights advocate, author and co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response. Ochab works on the topic of genocide, with specific focus on persecution of religious minorities around the world, with main projects including Daesh genocide in Syria and Iraq, Boko Haram atrocities in West Africa, and the situation of religious minorities in South Asia. Ochab has written over 30 UN reports (including Universal Periodic Review reports) and has made oral and written submissions at the Human Rights Council sessions and the UN Forum on Minority Issues. Ochab authored the initiative and proposal to establish the UN International Day Commemorating Victims and Survivors of Religious Persecution. The initiative has led to the establishment of the UN

International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief on August 22. Follow @EwelinaUO

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