



Home Office

# **Report of a Fact-Finding Mission**

## **Ethiopia: Situation of Tigrayans**

**Conducted between 10 to 14 June 2024**

**Published: December 2024**

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# Introduction

## Background

This report contains the (approved) notes of interviews with sources during a fact-finding mission (FFM) to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The FFM was conducted between 10 and 14 June 2024 by 3 officials from Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT), with support from colleagues in the Home Office's International Operations North & East Africa team and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The FFM team was based in Addis Ababa.

**This report does not reflect the views or assessment of the Home Office. All opinions expressed are those of the sources interviewed only.**

For advice on handling particular types of protection claims made by Ethiopian nationals in the UK, see the [Ethiopia Country Policy and Information Notes](#).

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## Purpose

The purpose of the mission was to gather accurate and up-to-date information from a range of sources about the situation of Tigrayans following the cessation of hostilities agreement signed between the federal government and Tigrayan People's Liberation Front in November 2022.

See the [Terms of Reference](#) (ToR) for topics that were identified as relevant to the mission.

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## Research standards

The FFM was undertaken with reference to the [EU \[European Union\] common guidelines on \(Joint\) Fact Finding Missions: a practical tool to assist member states in organizing \(joint\) Fact Finding Missions](#), November 2010 (EU Guidelines 2010), and CPIT's internal guidelines for conducting FFMs.

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## Identification of sources

The FFM team sought to interview a wide range of informed sources, including members of non-government organisations, leaders of Tigrayan opposition groups, international organisations, western embassy officials, government officials, and academics. Sources were identified primarily by desk-based research and in consultation with the FCDO. See [List of sources](#).

The sources contacted and interviewed are those that the FFM team and the FCDO were able to identify as relevant to the mission's ToR. But, as with any FFM, factors including time constraints and availability of sources mean that the list of sources consulted and information provided are not exhaustive.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission initially agreed to be interviewed but on day of the meeting declined to do so.

Representatives of the government (Ministry of Peace) agreed to be interviewed but it was not possible to arrange a mutually convenient time to meet.

That a particular source was interviewed, and the notes of the interview have been included, is not endorsement of that source or the information provided. Rather, all sources and information provided need to be critically assessed and considered against other publicly available material.

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### **Arranging and conducting interviews**

The FFM team conducted 13 face-to-face interviews, consisting of 23 people.

All interviews/correspondence with sources were conducted in English. No interpreters were used during the interviews.

At the start of each interview the FFM team explained the purpose of the mission and the how the information gathered would be used. This included that the notes of the interview may be published in a report on the GOV.UK website and the sources would be able to review the notes before publication.

Sources were also given an [introductory note](#) explaining this.

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### **Notes of interviews/meetings**

The FFM team took notes of all meetings, which were then sent by email to the sources for review and approval. The email explained that if a source did not respond within a specific deadline then CPIT would assume that the source was content with the notes as sent to them.

Three of the interviews (Tigray opposition groups and civil society activists) included several individuals representing different organisations.

Of the 13 interviews,

- 10 sets of the notes were approved by sources with a number making amendments to the original drafts.
- The Civil Society Activists did not respond to CPIT's emails but had given permission orally during the interview for the notes to be published.
- Two sources asked that the interview notes not be used or published.

All sources are described/referred according to their preference as expressed at the interviews or subsequently in email correspondence.

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# Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is the outline of what the FFM sought to cover. Prior to the FFM the following topics were identified as relevant:

- Overview of current political climate
- Demography – size and location of Tigrayan population in Addis Ababa
- the treatment of Tigrayans in Tigray and Addis Ababa generally and those with a political profile including those linked to the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) by the government and wider society
- the socio-economic situation for Tigrayans in Tigray and Addis Ababa including their access services such as health, education, housing, and ability to obtain employment
- the ability of Tigrayans to relocate to Addis Ababa and other regions, and how they are treated in those areas
- the general human rights and humanitarian situation in Tigray, including Western Tigray (Welkait)
- the returns process generally; how are unsuccessful asylum seekers processed/treated on arrival; are they able to get support from any organisations including from the government

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# List of sources

Assistant professor, University of Addis Ababa

Independent consultant

Legal and academic expert

Regional engagement coordinator, British Embassy, Addis Ababa (REC)

Representative of Irob Advocacy Association (RIAA)

Representatives from a human rights organisation

Tigrayan civil society organization (CSO) activists

Tigrayan opposition parties

UK Embassy officials

Western embassy officials

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# FFM introductory note

## Aim of the fact-finding mission

The purpose of our visit is to obtain accurate and up-to-date information on the situation of Tigrayans since the Pretoria Agreement (November 2022) in Tigray and Addis Ababa. We would like to meet with you to fill gaps in our knowledge on this subject.

The fact-finding mission team will be made up of 3 officials from the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT):

## About CPIT

CPIT is part of the UK Home Office, the government department responsible for immigration and asylum. We collect country information through both desk-based research and in-country visits.

The reports CPIT produce are published online. They are used primarily to assist UK immigration officials and judges involved in the asylum and human rights decision-making process.

More information about the CPIT's range of products, including reports of other Fact-Finding Missions, can be found on our website: [Country policy and information notes - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/country-policy-and-information-notes)

## Format of the fact-finding mission

During our visit we will be meeting a range of sources who can provide an informed view on the issues of interest, which are listed below.

We intend to take notes of the meetings. These notes may be made publicly available on the GOV.UK website and/or used in litigation proceedings.

**However, we will not publish any information you provide if you do not consent. If you prefer that the information is not made publicly available, this will be respected.**

We will provide you with an opportunity to review/amend the meeting notes to ensure they are an accurate reflection of our discussions. We will also ask you how you wish to be cited in our final report. If you are not willing to be named individually, you can choose to be identified in more general terms. Examples include by the name of your organisation or department ('an official from the Department of Health'), or by your occupation (an 'academic' or 'journalist').

## Areas of interest

[See [Terms of Reference](#)]

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# Interview notes

## Interview with an independent consultant

**Date:** 10 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** independent consultant (hereafter consultant); 3 CPIT officials

The consultant is of Tigray origin and lives in Addis Ababa but has travelled to Tigray since the war ended. By training an economist, the consultant has worked with national and international NGOs in development, human rights and women rights consultancy and has conducted project evaluations and baseline studies.

### **The FFM team asked the consultant about the current situation in Tigray**

The consultant provided an overview of the current situation in Tigray, focusing on the 3 pillars of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (also known as the Pretoria Agreement). These pillars are the restoration of constitutional order, respect for human rights, and unrestricted humanitarian support. According to the consultant, none of these pillars have been fully implemented, leading to a continued state of unrest and dissatisfaction among the Tigrayan people.

The consultant highlighted that the restoration of constitutional order has not been achieved. West Tigray remains under the control of the Amhara forces, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have not been able to return to their homes and have remained displaced instead. A similar situation exists in Irob Woreda (district), where the area and its people are still under the control of external forces, including Eritrean troops. This ongoing occupation by outside forces indicates that a significant portion of the region and its population remains unsettled, contrary to the agreement's goals.

Regarding respect for human rights, the consultant emphasized that there is much to be desired for the Tigrayan people. The transitional government in Tigray is perceived as weak, and the Eritrean government's involvement in abductions and the lack of job opportunities have left Tigrayans feeling hopeless. Additionally, crime rates are high in towns and cities, further exacerbating the sense of insecurity and instability in the region. These factors collectively undermine the human rights of the Tigrayan population, reflecting a significant gap between the agreement's intentions and the reality on the ground.

On the issue of humanitarian aid the consultant noted that although some aid is being distributed, it is insufficient to meet the needs of the Tigrayan people. Many Tigrayans perceive the lack of comprehensive support as a continuation of the genocide that began during the Tigray war. This perception highlights the deep mistrust and dissatisfaction with the current level of humanitarian assistance. The consultant concluded that the outcome of the Pretoria Agreement could be rated at a mere 15 to 20%, indicating a largely unfulfilled and ineffective implementation of its core objectives.

The consultant further emphasised on the precarious life of the border community particularly that of the Irob and the Kunama. The Irob are estimated to be about 60,000 while the Kunama about 10,000. He said that 23 years ago, men in suits signed the Algiers Agreement, promising to draw lines and bring peace. But instead,



they carved the Irob community in 2 and left them dangling in the wind. Ethiopia wanted to talk, Eritrea refused, and so the border remained an open wound, festering with uncertainty.

The Tigray War then broke out in November 2020, raging like a beast let loose. Eritrea seized further territory in the area when it saw its opportunity. The little community (Irob) is therefore split between 2 countries, with Tigray and Eritrea in charge of different parts of the woreda. However, there is a large swath of land (villages) that have been abandoned by both sides and are left in a state of void where no flag is flown. Cut off from the outside world and forgotten by those who ought to remember, they exist in a state of limbo.

It is true that the policy pertaining to the Irob woreda should focus on preventing the division of a minority group into 2 countries; But then, non-state communities inside the woreda demand additional attention. Life without a government is a hard life. No law to protect them, no service to sustain them. They scrape by, invisible to those who hold power. They face the raw elements, the cold indifference of politics, and the unyielding grip of history. Yet, they endure. They have to. But their endurance should not be a reason for the world's neglect.

Tigrayan businesses do not believe they are safe.

### **Asked if the risk in Tigray was due to the economic situation or because of targeting**

The consultant explained as follows. The consultant, as a witness to the Tigrayan genocide and their suffering, detailed the numerous risks faced by the Tigrayan people. With the rise of the new Prime Minister in 2018, Tigrayans were increasingly marginalized and blamed for the country's problems, despite the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) having led the government in coalition with other parties. The Prime Minister's derogatory characterization of the group as 'daylight hyenas' and the state media's targeted documentaries blurred the distinction between the TPLF and the Tigrayan people. The official narrative portrayed the people and the party as one, resulting in collective punishment for the entire ethnic group.

Bank accounts opened by Tigrayans were frozen, and ethnic profiling became rampant, leading to the closure of Tigrayan-run businesses in Addis Ababa. Tigrayans were detained in concentration camps around the city, and the entire region was sealed off, with no medicine or aid allowed to flow. This situation bore grim parallels to Nazi Germany's concentration camps, albeit without gas chambers. Although these extreme measures have since been lifted, allowing Tigrayans to operate their bank accounts and ending the concentration camps, the trauma and distrust they instilled remain deeply embedded in the Tigrayan community.

Currently, the lingering fear and distrust prevent Tigrayans from feeling safe in Ethiopia. The collective trauma from the past atrocities makes them wary of the possibility of history repeating itself, especially if any disagreements with the TPLF arise. This sense of insecurity is compounded by the lack of guarantees that such ethnic persecution will not happen again. The consultant emphasized that his role in documenting and telling the story of the Tigrayan genocide is not political but a moral responsibility to bear witness to their suffering.

Under these circumstances, many Tigrayans believe that Ethiopia does not offer a durable solution for their safety and well-being. The pervasive sense of insecurity and the trauma from past events make them doubt the country's ability to protect

them from future persecution. Consequently, if given the opportunity, many Tigrayans would choose to flee the country, seeking refuge elsewhere where they might find lasting safety and stability.

Local government cannot reach the 2 (Irob) border communities. The Tigray situation is hard, but harder for the border communities.

### **The FFM team asked about the relationship between TIRA and the FG**

The consultant said that as an outsider, it appears to be a tactical and not a strategic relationship. The TPLF needs to make peace. But there is no mutual trust.

### **Asked if it is possible for Tigrayans to move elsewhere in Ethiopia including Addis Ababa (AA)**

The consultant explained that this is not possible. There are 3 barriers:

1. a misunderstanding of the constitution – Oromo and Amhara believe only people who are ethnic Oromo or Amhara can live in those regions
2. Tigrayans cannot move to Oromia or Amhara because their property rights will not be respected although there is no law that Tigrayans cannot buy property or set up a business. But in practice no-one buys property because of insecurity. However comparatively AA is better for Tigrayans
3. practical problems for road transport, travel is difficult. There are 2 routes: through Amhara/Oromia or Afar. Amhara/Oromia is now a war zone, lots of checkpoints and not safe. Afar is open but the road is long. Tigray remains an island.

### **The FFM team asked about representation of Tigrayans in the federal government (FG)**

The consultant noted that there is no representation of Tigrayans in the military and police nor in any federal agencies including the parliament. There are Tigrayans in the private sector including academia. Tigrayans do not feel confident to be part of Ethiopia's political system and government.

### **The FFM team asked about targeting in Tigray**

The consultant was not aware of targeting and explained that the danger is more from criminals – there is no protection for those owning a business or property. The consultant is not aware the Tigray Interim Regional Authority (TIRA) is targeting people, perhaps opposition groups. He stated that there was an attempt by Tigray opposition groups to hold a demonstration and some of the political leaders were imprisoned in Tigray.

### **The FFM asked about obtaining ID**

The consultant noted that getting a passport was difficult, but not impossible. During the war it was impossible. The elite might find it difficult – the FG would want to know why the person wanted to leave. Even ordinary Tigrayans might find it difficult, but possible. There is a draft legislation that is under review that gives power to the officers at emigration to refuse exit without the need of a court order.

To get a kebele (ward) ID, a person needs evidence of their original kebele ID. This appears to discriminate against Tigrayans who migrate to other parts of Ethiopia.

The consultant explained that it is not mandatory to have a kebele ID to register with

a school in Tigray or AA. On accessing health, it depends on whether it is private or public but one needs to be resident to access health. In AA a person needs a kebele ID to access government health services.

### **The FFM team asked about Tigrayan representation in the FG**

The consultant noted that since 2021, Tigrayans have had no representation in the FG, including in parliament, the police, and cabinet. This exclusion has left a significant gap in the political landscape of the country. During the war, almost all Tigrayan elites were detained and imprisoned, creating a void in leadership and representation. While some Tigrayan workers, such as university employees, have returned to their positions, the majority still feel like second-class citizens due to their lack of political representation and influence.

The consultant opined that the absence of Tigrayan representation in the FG for 5 years poses a serious threat to Ethiopian unity. The lack of inclusion undermines the principles of federalism and equal representation, fostering a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement among Tigrayans. This marginalization can exacerbate ethnic tensions and contribute to a growing divide between Tigray and the central government. The prolonged exclusion of Tigrayans from the political process not only impacts their community but also destabilizes the broader political framework of Ethiopia. Tigrayan politicians may leverage this period of non-representation to argue for secession or greater autonomy, citing the years of exclusion and lack of representation as a basis for their demands. The prolonged absence from the federal government strengthens their case for a separate political trajectory, challenging the notion of a unified Ethiopia.

Confidence in the FG has eroded, the war poisoned everything.

### **The FFM asked how other ethnic groups view Tigrayans**

The consultant noted that some were sympathetic. But the majority have some problems: the Tigrayans are perceived to have betrayed the country.

### **The FFM asked if Tigrayans were targeted for arrest in AA**

The consultant thought that if there were problems between the TPLF and the FG certain Tigrayans would be targeted. Arrests continue but not at the scale that occurred during the war. If problems arise, businesspeople and Tigrayan elite will be targeted. The consultant added that most of those arrested during the war have been released.

### **The FFM asked about the existence of Tigrayan community groups in AA**

The consultant thought most strong Tigrayan institutions have collapsed. There is the Tigray Development Association in Tigray, AA, UK and the US. However, mostly those in human rights were targeted, as well as some politicians and NGOs. No-one speaks out. Nor is there a Tigrayan voice in traditional media.

### **The FFM asked whether Tigrayans can return to Ethiopia**

The consultant addressed the question of whether Tigrayans and Irobs can safely return to Ethiopia, outlining several compelling reasons why return remains unsafe, under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to the refugee convention.

Firstly, the consultant highlighted that the same government responsible for

imprisoning many Tigrayans during the conflict is still in power. This continuity of power presents a significant risk for returnees, as they may face renewed persecution or imprisonment. Additionally, those who left the country illegally risk arrest upon their return, further compounding their insecurity.

Secondly, the consultant emphasized the collapse of social relationships with other ethnic groups and neighbours due to government propaganda during the war. This makes it extremely difficult for Tigrayans to reintegrate safely. Moreover, the economic landscape in Tigray has been devastated, with businesses collapsed and the prospect of starting anew from scratch being daunting and fraught with challenges. The consultant also noted that returning to Tigray itself is unsafe, as the outcome of the Pretoria Agreement remains uncertain, and the possibility of renewed conflict looms large and the role of Eritrean government in the conflict is very high.

Thirdly, the consultant noted that resettling in other regions of Ethiopia is equally unthinkable due to ethnic tensions and misconceptions held by the local populations. This ethnic polarization exacerbates the risks for Tigrayans and Irobs, making it difficult for them to find safe and accepting communities within Ethiopia. For minority ethnic groups like the Irob, the situation is even more dire, as much of their land remains under Eritrean occupation, leaving them effectively stateless and without a secure place to return.

Understanding the pressures Europe faces from illegal migration, the consultant stressed that Europe has not yet seen the full potential of migration flows. He warned that if the situation in Ethiopia further deteriorates, illegal migration could quadruple. Many young people are desperate to flee if given the opportunity. The consultant argued that the solution for the UK and other European countries is not to return those who have already arrived but to support long-term peace and economic initiatives in Tigray and Ethiopia. He believes that the UK can be a force for good in the Horn of Africa, promoting stability and development to address the root causes of migration.

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## **Interview with Tigrayan political parties (TPPs)**

**Date:** 10 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** EMAP - an Executive Member of Arena Party; RTIP - Representative of Tigray Independent Party; Kaibram Berhe (KB) the leader/chairman of Baytona Party; MBP - a member Baytona party; 3 CPIT officials.

All the sources are members of Tigrayan opposition parties, are Tigrayan and live and work in Tigray.

### **The FFM team asked about situation in Tigray**

**KB** noted that the situation in Ethiopia before Abiy became prime minister was full of challenges, so people were hopeful when he came to power there would be a change in the relationship between opposition groups and the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). However, once in power Abiy began to identify and target Tigrayans, with the media playing a role and this eventually led to war [November 2020 to November 2022] and 'genocide' of Tigrayans. Every Tigrayan was labelled a member of the Tigrayan People's

Liberation Front (TPLF).

The behaviour of opposition parties changed to that of survival. KB's party opposed the TPLF but was still classed as part of the TPLF simply because the party was Tigray-based. KB was arrested and tortured during the war, so were many of the party's members. During the war 90% of prisoners were Tigrayans. Most of those arrested were taken from places of work, hospitals and schools. It was indiscriminate and the treatment was very cruel.

The Federal Government (FG) formally stopped hiring Tigrayans in government jobs. Though the war is over the FG has not reversed its policy of not hiring Tigrayans. Properties were also taken (and have still not been returned). This happened all over the country. Tigrayans were also burnt and the act was seen as noble/holy. Tigray was encircled by FG forces and its allies.

The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement [of November 2022 also known as the Pretoria Agreement (PA)] is effective only on paper not in real life. Things on the ground have not changed: property can be taken away by anyone in Addis Ababa (AA) and elsewhere, particularly by militants or FG forces. The FG set a precedent by saying taking Tigrayan property was acceptable. Such statements have not been reversed; this allows injustice to continue.

The degree of migration of Tigrayans to various countries increased, especially to Saudi Arabia. People do not see any hope in Ethiopia: arrest and ill treatment is common – the FG is 'hunting' us. Once arrested, a person can only be released by paying money to the police. How much a person pays depends on the person's wealth – maybe 10,000 to one million birr [approximately £137 to £13,700<sup>1</sup>]

**EMAP** joined the Arena Party 2 years ago as it was the only way to be protected. **EMAP** was appointed a cabinet member of the Tigray regional government which was put in place by the FG during the war in 2020. EMAP accepted the position despite social and family criticism and stayed in post for 4 months during which time EMAP tried to be politically neutral. EMAP said, there were 17 cabinet members in the Tigray regional government who preferred the FG rather than the TPLF but many colleagues were labelled TPLF and imprisoned by the FG during the conflict.

Due to severe political problems a lot of people are leaving, making the risky journey to Europe, especially young people. Tigrayans were victims in every war.

Before the war, Ethiopia was not democratic and it privileged the Amhara and targeted Tigrayans.

During the war there were phrases such as 'take anything you want from Tigrayans', so armed forces were more interested in looting properties and means of livelihoods were targeted. For example, there was confiscation of trucks; one truck would support a family financially. Tigrayans were also denied access to bank accounts, which affected businesses too. A lot of business had to move out of Tigray. A lot of Tigrayan civil servants were removed from their jobs in the FG without notice.

After the war when, EMAP started hiring people for his business, many of former workers had no work. Most investments and farms owned by Tigrayans are out of control of the owners for the last 6 years.

A lot of Chinese employers do not hire Tigrayans so as not to upset the government.

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<sup>1</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

**MBP** noted that previously he was a businessman. **MBP** stated that the society was brain-washed by propaganda. **TPLF** was portrayed as a militia and Tigrayans were associated with the **TPLF**. **MBP** noted that Tigrayans cannot seek to enforce their human rights as per the Pretoria Agreement as they are not treated as humans. **BM** acknowledged that there has been some change since the end of the war but it's difficult to change society.

Migration is high from Tigray comprising mainly of young people due to lack of work and safety. Young Tigrayans, mainly from eastern Tigray where there is conflict with Eritrea, travelled out of Ethiopia to other African countries and Saudi Arabia.

A lot of Tigrayans have also moved to AA. **MBP** estimated that there were around 500,000 Tigrayans in AA before the war. **MBP** said political profiling is very common, Tigrayans do not have the same opportunity in trade and business as other Ethiopians, have been out of jobs for 3 years, have no access to housing, are treated as second class citizens and any project must get permission from the FG.

**MBP** stated that West Tigray is controlled by Amhara warlords, properties have been taken forcefully and people are unable to return home. The FG is aware of this situation but does not do anything. For example, **MBP** knew of a Tigrayan who was deported from Saudi Arabia, they received no support on return. They were treated like animal in Ethiopia. [**MBP** did not elaborate on the type of treatment or how he knew about this case.]

The situation in Tigray is generally very difficult.

**RTIP** had previously worked for the FG and a private institution. During the war **RTIP**'s colleagues in AA were detained and one of them passed away due to lack of medication inside the prison.

**RTIP** said that before the war, migration by Tigrayans out of Ethiopia was not common. This was not associated with any privilege of the previous government, rather they believed they can transform in various aspects of their livelihood in their homeland. But during and after the war a lot of people have left the country mainly because of:

- the political situation
  - discrimination and defamation by the **TPLF** against other parties. For example, the **TPLF** arrested fellow party members 4 months ago in Shire Town
  - political discrimination across Ethiopia. Tigrayans were profiled in employment even to the smallest of jobs. There is discrimination in accessing services and often payment (a bribe) is sought in return for providing services
  - Tigrayans are not represented in the FG - not represented in any of the political and legal institutions
  - discrimination in aid distribution
- economic situation
  - a lot of internal in Tigray and external (for example to Sudan) displacement
  - no job opportunities, work based on supporting the **TPLF**

- travelling from Tigray to other parts of Ethiopia is only possible by air so goods cannot move by land so in practice the PA is not effective. The community is suffering due to inflation.
- security situation
  - no one has any guarantee that they will survive until tomorrow – all security is controlled by the TPLF but people cannot ask for help
  - some towns (particularly Zone and districts towns) are unprotected
  - FG forces have left Tigray but this has left a gap in the provision of security
  - siege of Tigray is continued indirectly by creating various casualties in the neighbouring regions
- social crisis
  - a third of Tigray is occupied by non-Tigrayan forces [in the disputed territories in west, south and north-east Tigray], so people flee the country
  - a lot of uncertainty exists within communities and there is no trust in the FG or the TPLF. RTIP believes the TPLF is more interested in its own political aims rather than people's rights

### **The FFM team asked about the current situation in Tigray**

**KB** noted that the situation is terrible socially, economically, psychologically. The presence of external forces (Eritreans) upsets people and is not accepted by the people and TPLF which might lead to war.

But there is no fighting in the Tigray Interim Regional Administration (TIRA) controlled areas.

Afar forces also control some area in the south-east and Eritrea forces control areas in the east, where the Irob live. The Eritreans have abducted people from their homes and taken them to Sawa in Eritrea to do military service. The Eritreans can forcefully take land, kill people without consequences.

**EMAP** considered that Irob cannot get IDs and passports. Irob are also suspected by Eritreans who fear TPLF infiltration. In areas controlled by Eritreans, families get raped and have to go back to their homes from hospital and may get raped again. EMAP had been to Adigrat Hospital where 20 to 30 women who have been raped attend the hospital every day. One woman said that about 30 people were raped but only one went to hospital. The problem is invisible as not all victims report acts against them. Culture is also a big issue when it comes to reporting rape cases, as there is stigma about rape victims.

### **The FFM team asked about the relationship between the FG and the TIRA**

**RTIP** thought that people fear another war. The TIRA is 51% TPLF, the rest are not politicians – academics, civil society, and so on, but are appointed or financed by TPLF. So, they indirectly support the TPLF.

There are 2 TPLFs: 'original' and 'fake'. The original TPLF opposes Prime Minister Abiy and is marginalised by the FG. It has its own forces. The 'fake' TPLF supports and was created by Abiy and forms the TIRA. The original TPLF view TIRA as 'hybrid Prosperity Party (PP). There is fear and mistrust within the TPLF which may

cause another conflict. RTIP said it is hard to predict the FG's attitude towards TPLF, it is like a mafia style government. RTIP believes the war has never stopped and it continues today, with the regional forces fighting in Tigray. The TPLF and the TIRA might trigger another war. The TIRA are relaxed about social issues affecting Tigray. RTIP added that politically trust is slowly building between the FG and TIRA but on the ground life for individuals has not changed.

### **The FFM team asked if the FG had completely withdrawn from Tigray**

**RTIP** noted that it had not completely done so. It is still present in federal institutions. FG forces are also in West Tigray where they mixed with the Fano (Amhara regional militia). RTIP noted that the FG is present in some irrelevant federal institutions such as Airports and universities. However, we believe that FG and Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) are mandated to keep the borders and territory of the country. Sadly, the ENDF is well aware about the presence of the Eritrean forces in and around the Ethiopian territory. RTIP really felt that the FG either didn't think of the Tigrayan people as Ethiopian citizens or the FG prioritized security in other areas of the nation.

Tigrayans are not targeted in TIRA controlled areas but they are not getting enough food and there is some insecurity, which particularly affects girls.

### **The FFM team asked if TIRA provide public services in Tigray**

**KB** considered that 80% of the services have stopped, no funding for services. Facilities have been damaged, there have been attempts to restore services but these are not able to meet the high demand. FG is willing to restore services but it is beyond its ability to do. A restoration programme will need international assistance.

Education facilities are insufficient. NGOs are working to fix the problem but issues remain. Many teachers are volunteers and do not have a licence to teach. There is no initiative to build schools.

Doctors are leaving as they have not been paid for over 2 years.

Breakdown in services means people are more focussed on basic needs, such as food rather than education or medication.

**EMAP** observed that since the PA public services resumed. For example, banks opened, telecommunication restored, public service resumed which is positive but they are not fully functional. There has been meaningful change on the ground.

### **The FFM team asked how many people have left Tigray**

The sources were not able to provide a number noting that people leave all the time.

### **The FFM asked about the situation in AA for Tigrayans**

**KB** noted there are about 10 million people in AA and maybe one million Tigrayans but there has not been a census. KB thought that a person needs an AA city ID to live in AA. To get an AA ID one has to pay a 10,000 birr (approximately £137<sup>2</sup>) bribe. KB gave an example of 2 Tigrayans who returned from Saudia Arabia and had to pay 10,000 birr to get a city ID. The ID is from the local district (kebele) authority not a national/FG requirement. FG only issues passports. Without a city ID in AA, one cannot access services.

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<sup>2</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024



**EMAP** said that since the war IDs are required to access services. A person needs to pay between 10 to 20,000 birr [approximately £137 and £274<sup>3</sup>] bribe to get the ID. Corruption affects everyone. Tigrayans buy fake city IDs. There are high levels of corruption so one can buy documents.

Tigrayans fear getting healthcare because of stories of them being killed in medical facilities during the war.

A lot of Tigrayans are begging in AA due to lack of employment and support. A lot of Tigrayans and Eritreans get arrested for not having a city ID and are only released after paying bribe. Those who do not pay a bribe remain detained. Tigrayans cannot reside in AA, sort of unwritten law by the city administration.

Without ID it is difficult to travel. Officials target Tigrayans, so that they can make money from bribes, it has become like a business for them. Also, one can't access government service and accessing a bank with a Tigray (kebele) ID requires an AA city ID.

### **The FFM team asked how Tigrayans are identifiable**

**KB** noted that Tigrayans are identified by their accent/language – cannot speak Amharic fluently. Also, distinctive marking on their temples and their names distinguishes them from other Ethiopians.

### **The FFM team asked about arrests of Tigrayans in AA**

**RTIP** noted that during the war all Tigrayans were arrested but currently they arrest based on the identity of specific Tigrayans - prominent political figures, powerful businesspeople, or both. The security apparatus knows that arresting a Tigrayan can gain incomes from their relatives in the form of bribes.

**KB** added the degree of targeting differs; other ethnicities are also targeted but not as much as the Tigrayans. Tigrayans do not have rights to seek protection from police or judiciary. No Tigrayans are in the police force, judiciary or in the government. Many of those arrested during the war had been released.

**EMAP** did not identify a specific profile of those targeted but noted that Tigrayans are still targeted. Adding that vulnerable people, that is people without IDs, are targeted. Those arrested stay in detention until a bribe is paid. The bribe is negotiable but ranged from 10 to 20,000 birr [approximately £137 to £274<sup>4</sup>]. People get arrested multiple times.

**MBP** observed that according to the law one cannot be detained for more than 48 hours, but that is not respected and people are detained until money is paid for release. There are no door-to-door arrests but police target the vulnerable, for example, people without ID. The number of arrests is not the same as during the war. **BM** said businessmen and politicians are targeted but could not provide further details for example which politicians are targeted.

**MBP** added that if a Tigrayan is arrested, there is no set amount of time for detention or particular amount of money to release them, maybe 10 to 15,000 birr [approximately £137 to 206<sup>5</sup>] but it's open to negotiation. Police do not care how long people stay in detention as families are responsible for providing food for the

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<sup>3</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

<sup>4</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

<sup>5</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

detained.

**The FFM team asked if there are Tigrayan organisations/community groups in AA**

**KB** thought Tigrayans fear getting organised. If they do, it's in secret not in open. Any movement/get together is limited. Even weddings have to be small. There are no celebrations of Tigrayan holidays. Historically, Tigrayans lived together, to help each other.

**The FFM team asked about the treatment of Tigrayans travelling out of the country**

**KB** noted that there are 2 payments associated with travelling out of Ethiopia: one is for a visa, the other is a form of bribe to an airport/immigration official. If the bribe is not paid no one can leave the country, especially Tigrayans, even if they have the correct visa/ documentation. **KB** explained that the Amhara and Oromo control the (immigration) bureaucracy and if a Tigrayan wants to leave they must first contact a security person at the airport. 99% of Tigrayans leave illegally. Smuggling routes are common. The FG decision-making culture (which discriminated against Tigrayans) from the war has not been reversed.

**EMAP** noted that it is difficult to get a passport and one has to pay a bribe to the security service to leave the country legally. The amount of bribe depends on the profile and class of the person. Rich people pay more.

**The FFM team asked about Tigrayans returning from overseas**

**KB** said he knew of one example of a person deported from an EU country who was given 2 options: forced military service or prison sentence. **KB** did not know of other examples. There may be situation where people may return, most returnees so far are from Saudi Arabia. A number who returned from Saudi Arabia during the war were arrested. During the conflict returnees from Saudi Arabia were detained because they were seen as dangerous but those who returned as part of the agreement between the government and Saudi Arabia were not detained.

**EMAP** noted that returnees are seen as dangerous and threat to society. Unless its forced return, no one comes back willingly.

**The FFM team asked if the security services monitor movements**

**KB** said yes, they can. Asked how, **EMAP** said the security services are able to monitor people through their identity but can also do it from import documents.

**The FFM team asked if family members of people of interest, such as political opposition are targeted**

**KB** yes, they can be and added that previously family members were not informed about arrests of family members but now they are informed. The situation now is not the same compared to the war period when security forces would arrive with 20 to 30 people and arrest the person's family.

**The FFM team asked if there are challenges in operating a political party in Tigray**

**RTIP** noted that if a person is a member of the TIP, they cannot get any governmental services [in Tigray]. Furthermore, no TIP member is allowed to travel freely throughout districts in order to meet or recruit members. **RTIP** also stated the

TPLF discriminated against members of other political parties. For example, TPLF harassed and arrested a member of TIP who escaped to Uganda after release. RTIP said this happened about 4 months ago. RTIP added that TIP does not operate in AA because it's considered by the FG as a secessionist party.

**EMAP** noted that there are challenges. Arena is not able to operate freely as a political party. The PA has not changed things. Arena faces problem from TPLF and from the FG which treats all parties from Tigray as TPLF.

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## Interview with British Embassy officials (BEOs)

**Date:** 10 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** 2 BEOs; 3 CPIT officials

**The BEOs provided** the wider political context to the situation in Tigray since the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022 (also known as the Pretoria Agreement (PA)).

There has been progress since March 2024 including measures towards demobilization and reintegration of former Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) combatants with support from the UK government and recently the Federal Government (FG) recognized the TPLF as a political party. This progress is partly due to international pressure and monitoring of the peace accord, but the FG also has an interest in doing so.

Ethiopian human rights organizations have noted that across the country, there are growing restrictions on media freedoms and individual freedom of expression, partially reversing the opening-up of civic space introduced by Prime Minister Abiy in 2019

The **BEOs** noted that there were some positive steps in Tigray: the war has ended, and the FG removed the TPLF from its list of terrorist organizations in March 2023. But there has not been further progress for ordinary Tigrayans. There continue to be human rights abuses in the disputed territories and by Eritrean forces abducting Tigrayans, around Humera, and particularly Irob people, moving them to Sawa [national service camp] in Eritrea. In the disputed areas in Western Tigray/Wokaiyt and Southern Tigray/Raya, there are reports of Amharan administrators forcing Tigrayans to take Amharan identity cards to bolster their claims in the region. About 20% of Tigray is occupied by Amhara and Eritrean forces. Central Tigray is controlled by the TPLF/Transitional Interim Regional Authority (TIRA).

The human rights situation in central Tigray (controlled by the TIRA) is broadly ok and consistent with the rest of the country – with limited political opposition but much more difficult in the disputed territories.

There are approximately 600,000 to one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Tigray depending on who you ask. IDPs cannot return to the disputed territories because their land is occupied by Eritreans and Amhara.

There is a huge humanitarian need in Eastern Tigray including the Irob areas (in the border areas with Eritrea) – with reports of near famine conditions.

Nearly everyone in Tigray has been affected by the conflict. There is no redress for

criminal acts against civilians, including sexual violence committed during the conflict and no sign that the government is going to provide this soon. The FG wanted transitional justice to be the solution, but the Tigrayans are opposed to this mechanism as a way of addressing crimes committed during the war, arguing that the ‘perpetrators’ are still in power. This masks that all sides, including Tigrayans, committed abuses. So, redress for ordinary people is a long way off.

Outside of Tigray, Tigrayans are subject to arbitrary acts, as other Ethiopians are, as there is a general decline in rule of law and due process. This particularly impacts on Tigrayans, following the conflict, as they cannot:

- take back properties confiscated during the war – there is no redress mechanism. Tigrayans lost businesses and property in Addis Ababa (AA) during the war, purely because they were Tigrayan - not necessarily combatants.
- they have less social capital (the informal networks and ‘heft’ that people use to survive in Ethiopia - these could be family support or relying on contacts with power or government jobs to intervene over arbitrary/unfair ‘asks’ from government, or family and business networks in AA to navigate increasingly arbitrary rules, or pay bribes, due to the expulsion of Tigrayans from businesses, and jobs during the conflict.
- AA has been affected by displacement and forced evictions affecting poor Ethiopians of all ethnicities. According to reports the ‘beautification project’ has led to the displacement of around 50,000 people in the first wave of demolitions in 2024. This is still ongoing.
- there are now fewer legal protections in AA for all Ethiopians against government actions, but Tigrayans have fewer people to call on for assistance – as Tigrayans were expunged from the government and many kin returned to Tigray during the conflict. The BEOs thought that the issue is about legal protections per se (Government is entitled to demolish properties) but about means to find redress or alternatives when your house is demolished. If you are poor (of any ethnicity) you will suffer as you have few options, if you are a less-poor Tigrayan, you may also suffer because you have fewer ways to try and navigate the problem than others in a similar position. Tigrayans have not received compensation for the confiscation of their properties during the war.

The states of emergency have been used against human rights groups which report on arrests. So, these organizations cannot speak out for individuals arrested. This is the case mostly now with respect to the conflicts with the Amhara and Oromo.

### **The FFM asked about the treatment of Tigrayans in AA**

The BEOs noted that there are fewer reports of arrests targeting Tigrayans although the majority of Tigrayans outside Tigray were in AA. This may be because there are few people speaking on behalf of Tigrayans whilst there are groups speaking on behalf of the Amhara.

### **On the humanitarian situation in Tigray**

The BEOs noted that generally inflation has increased across the country – this might change with a proposed deal with the International Monetary Fund is agreed and reforms implemented.

Ethiopia has a humanitarian crisis, which is particularly bad in Tigray. The UN is underfunded though Ethiopia is its largest humanitarian crisis.

The BEOs said that aid can get into central Tigray. However, land movement into Tigray is difficult. Land travel is not possible from AA to Tigray through the Oromia/Amhara corridor because of insecurity: to travel on this route humanitarian organizations need a military escort. It is possible to travel by land along the Afar corridor, but it is a long way.

By air, there are 8 to 9 flights a day between AA and Mekelle – this might be a reflection of the difficulties encountered with movement by road. It has gotten easier for Tigrayans to move by plane.

Tigrayans are not moving to AA as they are seen as less welcome. Property that was taken by the FG they cannot get back. They are mistrustful of the FG.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans are targeted by the FG in AA**

The BEOs considered the FG's focus is the Amhara, the Tigrayans not the main threat. The FG may be profiling Tigrayans, not arresting them, but acknowledged that there may be less reporting about Tigrayans.

### **The FFM team asked about ID requirements.**

The BEOs stated that there was no national ID card, but there was a kebele level card. Hard to get these cards without being vouched for. This is a general problem - but the way to get a Kebele card is to have an existing resident vouch for you. With many Tigrayans leaving AA, due to the hostile environment, there are fewer left to vouch for newcomers. Tigrayans and others are still coming to Addis seeking work or fleeing hunger.

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## **Interview with representatives of a human rights organisation (RHRO)**

**Date:** 11 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** 2 human rights organisation representatives, 3 CPIT officials

Both sources are members of a human rights organization (HRO) working primarily with human rights defenders.

### **The FFM team asked about the situation in Tigray after CoHA**

The RHRO stated that civil society organizations (CSOs) have been able to travel to Tigray and that they have visited Tigray several times and met with human rights defenders (HRDs) since the end of the conflict. The RHRO explained that the situation of HRDs was not good because of the war, the political situation, and the poor economy. They explained the psychological state of HRDs in Tigray was not ok and that Tigray-based HRDs did not know how to link up with groups in Addis Ababa (AA). Now a lot of HRDs are engaging but are still suffering psychological trauma.

The RHRO added that getting a passport is difficult for all people (not just Tigrayans) and noted that it used to take up to 11 days to obtain a passport but now it takes 3 months. The opening of a new immigration office in Mekelle which will ease the process of getting passports.

There is political division in Tigray – people are fed up with the Tigray People's

Liberation Front (TPLF).

Finding jobs is difficult and HRDs feel stuck. Other family members do not work – so need support, still reliving everything (the conflict).

The representatives said that there has been some positive progress since the signing of the Pretoria Agreement (PA) including the release of people arrested during the conflict, some engagement between the Tigray Interim Regional Authority (TIRA) and the Federal Government (FG) and in transportation and infrastructure - some fixing of roads. But there remain some challenges including unexploded ordnance, high tension in West Tigray where the TPLF are in conflict with the Fano militia, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have not returned and the region is facing drought and famine. The RHRO also said that the youths are on the streets, with nothing to do and there has been an increase in crime. TIRA-controlled areas suffer from criminality and are dangerous at night. Some people beg. The situation of people is difficult.

### **The FFM team asked if the young people are armed**

The RHRO said yes; some are armed but were not sure if the armed youths are part of the military.

### **The FFM team asked about the relationship between the FG and the TIRA**

The RHRO stated that the relationship between the FG and TIRA is complex and difficult to understand. FG and TIRA do appear to be trying to work together. The TPLF (which dominates the TIRA) has different wings with different attitudes towards the FG. There is 'warmongering' between the TIRA and the Amhara. The FG may want the TIRA to fight the Fano. People are tired – caught between the FG and the TPLF.

HRDs are trying to adjust to the current situation in Tigray as well as the rest of the country. However, most of them seem to mention that they do not understand the exact political dynamics. They seem to try to adjust, but often mention their reluctance to accept the FG and come to terms with what has happened in Tigray and the lack of meaningful support in some areas of Tigray. However, HRD do receive support, including from western Embassies and are HRDs very busy in Tigray with lots of projects.

### **The FFM asked if TIRA is receptive to HRDs**

The RHRO representatives observed that:

- Many HRDs fled the country or want to flee still. The rest, mostly those who work in humanitarian aid, advocacy - especially on women's rights, disability rights etc - are trying to continue with their operations. Some/few might have received many projects and grants as well. It is evident that many HRDs are still trying to flee
- HRDs also advocate on human rights issues but they face problems if they criticize the TIRA/TPLF. HRDs have to operate within the framework of the PA.
- HRDs cannot talk to the TPLF, it has monopoly of power.
- Many CSOs operate in Tigray, but HRD have received complaints that the TIRA was making it hard for them to operate. For CSOs to operate they need TIRA's support. The RHRO gave an example of a one-stop centre supporting women,

which mentioned that they are having issues with some 'bodies' because they have been outspoken about the situations there. They said other than visits and many interviews they didn't receive enough support.

### **The FFM asked if there was a profile of groups that was targeted**

The RHRO thought:

- Journalists – some had been arrested during the war by both parties but arrests are still taking place.
- HRDs that criticize the FG are likely to face problems, including arrest. Also, the case with the TIRA. People cannot speak out. The RHRO could not, when asked, provide numbers of journalists or HRDs who have been arrested.
- People who had given evidence to the UN human rights commission about crimes during the conflict had been targeted by the TPLF.

The laws since 2018 for protecting CSOs have improved but they are not implemented, HRDs are not protected in practice. The RHRO thought the situation now, generally in the country, was worse than at any other time in the past. People disappear, and some get released after paying ransom which has become a common thing lately. HRDs and journalists have also been disappearing for few days and they either are found in prison or reappear within few days. Some might seem or sound brainwashed in a way since they seem very grateful and mention to be happy for not being tortured.

The RHRO said that the conflict in Tigray made human rights generally worse.

### **The FFM team asked if the TPLF can operate outside Tigray**

The RHRO thought that at the national level there was change – there has been some political positioning, but the TPLF is likely to remain at the regional level.

### **The FFM team asked if other political parties could operate in Tigray**

The RHRO members said there is a high demand from young Tigrayans for change, but they were not sure if there is scope for other political parties to operate in Tigray. They added that there is lots of discussion about the Prosperity Party and the TPLF working together – maybe!

The RHRO observed that the TPLF has controlled Tigray for 27 years and is dominant. People support it, it has been a 'lifeline' to them. But in the end, most people seem disappointed in the TPLF. People have sacrificed everything for the TPLF, but the TPLF seem to have lost the almost "religious" status it had in Tigray as many do not support it. However, people do not go against TPLF combatants, they are respected for what they have done.

### **The FFM asked if the FG targeted TPLF family member**

The RHRO members said no.

### **The FFM team asked about the provision of humanitarian aid in Tigray**

The RHRO said it was not enough. People are starving. Medical needs are not met, though there is some aid. There is drought leading to famine.

The FG lacks capacity to assist but sends some aid.

The RHRO said that international aid has not been enough. The provision of aid is

affected by other crises such as Ukraine and the government's propaganda that it is self-sufficient may also mean aid is not provided.

**The FFM team asked that since the RHRO had been to Mekelle, did they see business returning**

The RHRO noted that Mekelle is still busy but not as busy as in the past. And there is lots of crime. A lot of people have migrated to AA. There are those already in AA who know how things work, others who move and can use their expertise to work.

**The FFM team asked about the movement of Tigrayans to AA**

The RHRO noted it was smooth by plane. Many people come to get passports; many want to leave as they are not sure what will happen. Asked if those travelling by plane were wealthy Tigrayans, the RHRO said that air fare is not cheap, so people will be expected to pay the price to travel by plane. Land transport is being ruled out as unsafe for most places in Ethiopia and to travel to Tigray by land, one might need to go through conflict zones.

The RHRO noted that some ex-combatants had also left, some had gone into working in drugs. While there is business as usual in Mekelle, reintegration of former combatants did not happen.

There has been a lot of migration from other parts of Tigray to Mekelle.

**The FFM team asked if it was possible to travel by land between Tigray and AA**

The RHRO noted that it was possible, but it is a long way and there are risks because of the armed groups.

**The FFM team asked if Tigrayans were targeted in AA**

The RHRO noted the situation had changed; they were not aware of cases of arrests (since the end of the war). But some people have had their property and businesses taken.

**The FFM team asked about the population of AA and the number of Tigrayans in AA**

The RHRO noted that there had not been a census for almost 20 years, but there were maybe 10 million people in AA. They had no number for the Tigrayan population. The RHRO thought Tigrayans lived in the areas of Hayahulet and others but since the end of the war had scattered across AA. These are also areas where Eritreans live which sometimes creates confusion as to who belongs to what groups (Due to similarity of language spoken).

**The FFM team asked if Tigrayans could access public services in AA**

The RHRO said that many Tigrayans moved to AA because of the war and are still there. They have seen more Tigrayans, especially women with children, begging on the streets.

The RHRO noted that getting a kebele ID (also referred to as a resident ID card) was a problem, but on an individual basis because of corruption and bureaucracy – it was not systematic discrimination against a particular group. Everyone – all ethnic groups - complain about getting these.

The RHRO said that to get a Kebele ID card, a person needs:

- to be resident for 6 months or more in AA



- accommodation
- a sponsor
- 3 witnesses
- If moving from another part of Ethiopia to AA, a person needs a letter of authority from the kebele where they were previously resident.

A kebele card allows access to services such as health, education and subsidized foods. A person can rent accommodation using any identification, not necessarily a kebele or city ID card.

The RHRO said that the new national ID card is easier to get than the Kebele ID card. This is perhaps because the FG is promoting it.

### **The FFM team asked if there are any Tigrayan HR organizations in AA**

The RHRO said that they were not aware of any.

### **The FFM team asked about leaving Ethiopia**

The RHRO considered that generally it was easy to leave Ethiopia but some journalists and HRDs struggle to leave. The RHRO noted that when trying to leave the country, some journalists and HRDs have faced intimidation and verbal assaults at the airport by immigration or other staff. This, however, was not specific to Tigrayans. The RHRO were not aware of barriers preventing Tigrayans from leaving.

The RHRO finished by stating that they wanted transitional justice to be implemented in Tigray to help address the human rights violations that occurred during the war. The situation of Tigrayans needs to be looked at holistically, in the wider context of Ethiopia – there are problems for other groups, such as the Oromo, too.

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## **Interview with a legal and academic expert**

**Date:** 11 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** expert, 2 CPIT officials

The expert had been to Mekelle, Tigray, twice since the end of the war - in May 2023 and May 2024. The expert said the situation in Tigray had begun to look better in May 2024 than the previous year. Now the banks are open, there are flights to Tigray, schools are open (in the towns), and transport within Tigray is better. However, the level of humiliation and destruction remained, and municipal services had not improved citing the example of Mekelle which appeared dirtier than the year before. The expert thought this was because of an internal political crisis in Tigray and a lack of resources. Tigrayans were also more frustrated than a year ago at the lack of progress and that people were leaving in all directions – no hope.

### **The FFM team asked about the situation in Tigray**

The expert considered there were 2 broad areas: the heartland – areas controlled by the Tigrayan Interim Regional Authority (TIRA), split between urban and rural areas and the disputed territories – in the west (also known as Welkait), east (border areas with Eritrea) and south (bordering Amhara and Afar) which are getting worse.

The expert said the heartland areas were safe during the day but there are a lot of

armed groups which are not part of the system (the TIRA). At night there is an increase in crime such as burglaries, abduction and violence against girls. Stopping crime was not a priority for the TIRA.

### **The FFM team asked about the attitude of the federal government (FG) towards TIRA**

The expert stated there had been acrimonious exchanges but slowly the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (also referred to as the Pretoria Agreement (PA)) was taking shape. However, the restoration of the disputed territories – Tigrayan areas claimed and occupied by Amhara and Eritrean forces - and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their home areas had not occurred, adding that the situation was very fragile.

The expert noted that the federal government's (FG) actions were not predictable. While the official narrative was to promote good relations between the FG and the TIRA/Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), non-government commentators – which were informal mouthpieces of the government such as representatives of National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) that have joined the Prosperity Party (PP) in government – were providing a different narrative, suggesting that the TPLF should be split into 2: the hardliners should be separated and arrested while absorbing the moderates into the PP – which is a potential for another round of conflict. TPLF's refusal to join the PP was one of the reasons for the conflicting relations between PP and TPLF before the start of the war in 2020. Seyoum Teshome, government mouthpiece, often airs on his online show such narratives and the above statements are directly attributable to him.

### **The FFM team asked if the narrative was for different audiences, such as the international community**

The expert did not think so, stating that if it was intended for the international community, it would be in English, but the commentary was in Amharic.

In Tigray, there is a 'government within a government'. The TPLF/FG had got used to running a war economy and had not moved back to pre-war approach. There is also confusion within the TIRA – not sure what to do - and a power struggle.

### **The FFM team noted that the TPLF was supposed to have become a legal party, noting an announcement on this had been made the previous week**

The expert noted he had seen the law that was supposed to do this – it was 3 pages long and lacked clarity. The law does not answer whether TPLF's registration will allow it to reclaim confiscated property during the war; whether its registration will have retroactive effect or only with prospective effect and more importantly the law requires FG institutions' (without defining what these bodies are) to approve the application for registration before it is submitted to the electoral Board.

### **The FFM team asked about the general human rights situation in Tigray**

The expert noted that there was 'ordinary' crime but was not aware of politically motivated acts. Tigray opposition parties have been arrested in demonstrations but can usually conduct gatherings.

### **The FFM team asked about humanitarian aid delivery to Tigray**

The expert noted that aid can get there but had not seen it go to Tigrayans, people still lacked basic items. The TIRA has its own priorities, but not including internally

displaced persons (IDPs). The expert had spoken to IDPs on his visits, his experience was that aid was not being provided. Their situation remains dismal.

### **The FFM team asked if IDPs could return to their home areas in Tigray**

The expert thought those in cities were reluctant to do so, but those who had no choice did (only to those safe places like Sheraro). But IDP return to the west, south and border areas close to Eritrea remains a serious security concern.

### **The FFM team asked if private sector/business had resumed in Tigray**

The expert thought only in Mekelle, outside of the city it will take a long time for the region to recover. People are struggling to survive.

### **The FFM team asked about movement between Tigray and Addis Ababa (AA)**

The expert noted that it was possible by plane with 8 to 9 flights daily from AA. There were also 3 flights to Shire and 2 or 3 to Axum. The FFM team suggested this might include many Tigrayans, the expert observed that the flights include international NGO workers. The expert also noted that Tigrayans on the flights were travelling to get passports or other basic administration processes such as renewing driving licenses, short term business opportunities, medical checkups, paying federal taxes.

As to land travel, the Afar route was possible but there were risks and it was expensive (because of the distance). Road travel through parts of Oromia and Amhara was almost non-existent because of insecurity and war in Amhara.

The expert did not think it was good for Tigrayans to relocate to AA – may be for a short time only, 6 months for example, but AA does not feel safe. It had been tough for Tigrayans but was now a little better than it was during the war. The expert observed it was now tough for Amhara in AA.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans can access public services in AA**

The expert was aware, as a practicing lawyer dealing with their legal complaints, that Tigrayans had been removed from positions in public bodies. Perhaps 10% were now allowed to belong to public organizations again but in the lower ranks of the army or police. However, they were only being paid, they could not report to work. Even Tigrayan priests found it difficult to work with many of them dismissed during the war.

### **The FFM asked whether Tigrayans can get IDs**

The expert noted that passports or digital ID do not function well. Without an AA city ID there is a risk of arrest and detention. To live in a kebele/district in AA, a person needs a city ID and sponsor, for example another family member who had lived in the AA district/kebele.

To obtain a passport, a person just needs to prove they are Ethiopian and apply. But it is difficult to obtain a passport, there is backlog of applications. Asked if there were reasons for this, the expert did not know what is being checked on the passports or the reasons for the delay.

### **The FFM team asked about the population of Tigrayans in AA**

The expert reckoned between 500,000 and one million, this was based on estimates for previous elections. Tigrayans live dispersed throughout the city but are more visible mainly Haya Huleti (area '22'; business and residential area), Fiyel Bet and CMC (both in north-east AA, new areas developed by housing co-operatives over

last 15 to 20 years). When asked why Tigrayans chose these areas, the expert noted that Tigrayans go to areas where they have connections and family. There are also a lot of Eritreans in these areas. But much has changed, many 1,000s of Tigrayans have left when the war broke out to Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Rwanda and the West.

### **The FFM team asked about the overall population of AA**

The expert noted that the government estimated between 7 to 8 million people but thought it was more likely to be 15 to 20 million – many people have moved to the city from all regions due to better opportunities and lately because of the insecurity in many regional states.

### **The FFM team asked how Tigrayans are identifiable**

The expert noted, often, by markings on their temples: there is a cultural tradition of making 2 cuts (which appear as the number 11) into which herbs are inserted. This is believed to help people see better, the process causes scarring. Still common in Tigray, particularly in rural areas. Tigrayans also have an accent when speaking Amharic. They are also identifiable by their names.

### **The FFM team asked if there were Tigrayan community groups in AA**

The expert thought it was very risky for these. The expert knew of one group – Human Rights First – composed of Tigrayan lawyers who represent people arrested and which publish reports about human rights. There were many groups before the war, but not anymore.

### **The FFM team asked about the treatment of Tigrayans in AA – noting that during the war, there were reports of 1,000s arrests**

The expert noted that during the war around 50 to 60,000 Tigrayans were arrested and detained, as a conservative estimate. AA became a ‘concentration camp’ – all the police stations were full as well as other public institutions. Since the end of the war, Tigrayans have been released although some remained detained outside of AA, for example in Afar, Oromia and Amhara.

Arrests have reduced since the end of the war but the narrative against Tigrayans continues. The targets of arrests now are: 1) Amhara, then 2) Tigrayans. There may still be round-ups during certain holidays when the government panics about what might happen – people might be arrested for days before and after these events. The expert gave an example of a killing by an Amhara linked to the ‘Fano’ (regional Amhara militia) 2 months previously which led to many Amhara being arrested. The government’s actions are unpredictable.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans could leave Ethiopia legally**

The expert noted it was slowly improving. The expert had left Ethiopia in August 2022 using his own passport on a trip to Europe. At the time, although the expert had all the correct documents, he was not sure if he would be allowed to leave. He was questioned and eventually allowed to exit. But he knows of colleagues who had been refused permission to leave and even detained. The expert also knew of students travelling to China and the USA, for example, using their passports, so it is getting better.

### **The FFM team asked about government treatment of returning Tigrayans including failed asylum seekers**

The expert said he had no experience of this. He thought an ordinary person might be ok, but someone who had a profile, for example someone who had been involved in demonstrations against the government in another country, might face problems.

### **The FFM asked if the Ethiopian government monitors the diaspora**

The expert noted Ethiopia was a high security state, everything is monitored – and demonstrations in other countries might be monitored too.

### **The FFM team asked if family members of someone of interest to the state would be arrested**

The expert suggested speaking to the opposition political parties but added that there may have been some improvement. The expert noted that Tigray opposition parties had become more extreme in their views because of the conflict, and it might take some time to return to normalcy. The government was tough on secessionist parties, not just Tigrayans but other groups too. The government does sometimes target family members who are arrested and killed, for example there were reports of an Oromo linked to the Oromo Liberation Army whose family were killed.

The government needs international pressure to fix what is a regional conflict (in Tigray, Amhara and Oromia), it does not want to. The international community needs to put concerted effort and pressure on the government to address the political issues be it in Tigray or the rest of the country. The government deliberately ignites horizontal conflicts to divide any emerging coalition that may threaten its grip on power. Such pressure is vital both for the Ethiopians and the international community particularly the west that has to face refugee crisis from time to time.

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## **Interview with an associate professor at Addis Ababa University (APAAU)**

**Date:** 11 June 2024

**Location:** Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa

**Present:** associate professor, 3 CPIT officials

APAAU is a lecturer and researcher focusing on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, gender and migration. APAAU noted that the period between the start of the war in Tigray and now has not been easy, the Institute of Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) has been working on intercultural and ethnicity dialogue. APAAU is currently doing a research project on urbanisation and conflict with a focus on the informal economy in Addis Ababa (AA) and other cities. APAAU noted that researching the war between 2020 and 2022 is difficult for practical as well as ethical reasons.

### **The FFM team asked about the impact of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (also known as the Pretoria Agreement (PA)) on Tigray**

APAAU noted that although much had changed in terms of the conflict not so much had changed with respect to the social and economic situation, or infrastructure, which needs time and resources.

On the softer aspects of the end of conflict, there has not been inter communal dialogue between societies living in Tigray, Amhara and other affected regions. But there are various initiatives of elite dialogue (the Federal Government (FG) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)). This is yet to extend to a community level dialogue nor is there increased hostility/hate speech. Previously we saw

academics publishing positions which justified a particular viewpoint and contributed to polarisation of politics. As mentioned earlier, IPSS brought together Amhara, Afar and Tigrayan academics for talks about the war and the role of academics at the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024 – all participated, the rhetoric got better which was positive.

The polarisation of public rhetoric has now shifted from between Tigrayans and other ethnic groups/communities, to mostly between Amhara and Oromo.

APAAU noted that there is now movement of people and goods into and out of Tigray following the end of the war. People move because of work, education and business.

#### **The FFM team asked about numbers of people moving**

APAAU noted that statistics are not available as there has not been a census recently.

#### **The FFM team asked about the relationship between the FG and the Tigray Interim Regional Authority (TIRA)**

APAAU noted that Prosperity Party (PP) politicians are interacting with members of TPLF informally. This may not be in public but there is dialogue between them which is a shift. However, there is pressure on both sides to justify the war (November 2020 to November 2022) and now normalisation (peace) from individuals' constituencies and the media.

#### **The FFM team asked if the TPLF may join the PP**

APAAU did not see the TPLF joining the PP but opined that maybe individuals will but not the TPLF as a whole. APAAU was aware that the TPLF and the government are meeting behind the scenes.

#### **The FFM team asked about the recent law making the TPLF a legal party**

APAAU thought it was a significant progress, a positive step towards harmony but wondered what positions were taken/what was given to achieve this.

#### **The FFM team asked about the human rights situation in TIRA-controlled areas**

APAAU was not able to comment.

#### **The FFM team asked on scope to travel to and from Tigray**

APAAU noted that colleagues had flown to Tigray but land movement is difficult mainly because of what is going on in Amhara. There are a lot of armed threats surrounding AA, such as the Oromo Liberation Front. Movement to Tigray is intermittent because of insecurity.

#### **The FFM team asked if it is possible for Tigrayans to move to and live in AA**

APAAU noted that a person's experience in AA did not only revolve around ethnicity, but a lot also depends on class and the work they do. Before the war there was mass movement from AA to Tigray but during the war, this was somewhat reversed, eventually becoming difficult due to insecurity.

The experience of someone who has access to housing and a job is different from those without. Difficulties in accessing housing has more to do with the economic situation and high living standards rather than the war per se. Those without resources are only able to access informal housing, and this is the same for all

ethnicities.

The ability to migrate is affected by a person's socio-economic status. If a person does not need to rely on government assistance or community support then moving to AA is possible and the FG has no way of tracking the person. But if people need aid, then people become visible as migrants.

### **The FFM team asked about the numbers of Tigrayans in AA**

APAAU did not know.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans face discrimination in acquiring the AA city ID**

APAAU noted that formal housing is used to access ID. To get a (kebele or AA city) ID you need a formal address. Anyone can rent a house without ID, but to obtain an AA city ID a person must go back to their home area, give back their old kebele ID and get a letter confirming that they no longer live there and give the new address details.

In AA, people often rent informal housing, for example multiple people live in the same house to be able to afford rent. And usually, people do not disclose such living arrangements, so they are unable to get an ID. If the person cannot go back to their home area or official documents were destroyed because of the war it is difficult to get a city ID in AA.

Also, the government suspects Eritrean nationals of trying to access Ethiopian passports by posing as Tigrayans, so a Tigrayan registering for a passport for the first time needs to provide ID as well as provide one of their parents' ID.

### **The FFM team asked what AA city ID is used for**

APAAU said that it is used to:

- access work. For example, the city/kebele issues licenses giving a person a right to run a stall on a street corner. Some jobs, though, can be done without a license, for example collecting rubbish. The FG/city government aim to support people to move from the informal to formal sector. A license allows people to save money which they can then use to access a micro-loan to open a formal business. But for most this never happens.
- schooling, although any ID can be used to access public schools. People with residence IDs of another location/ city can access schools in AA.
- healthcare, depends on the level you need (primary, secondary, tertiary) which gets more expensive the higher the level of treatment required. For primary healthcare the city ID is not required but the person may need city ID to get medical treatment provided under medical insurance schemes. APAAU gave the example of neighbourhood insurance schemes. Often despite having ID, a person may not get quality medical treatment as some laboratory tests or medications are simply not available.
- assisting getting a passport. It is difficult for Tigrayans to get a passport because of the suspicion that Eritreans claiming to be Ethiopian. APAAU knew of Tigrayans who needed their own city ID and that of one parent to prove their identity.

### **The FFM team asked if a Tigrayan returning to Ethiopia would have problems**

### **using the ID to travel**

APAAU did not know but believed a passport will be a valid form of ID.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans can migrate to other regions in Ethiopia**

APAAU did not know of any challenges Tigrayans face when moving to other cities.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans experience harassment and arrest in AA**

APAAU did not know if Tigrayans were being targeted, had not come across any reports of cases since the end of the war noting that they were arrested during the war.

### **The FFM team asked about Tigrayan representation in the FG since the end of the war**

APAAU noted that there is a significant decrease in the number of Tigrayans in the police and security services since the war. APAAU added that there are still Tigrayans in the police and military, but they aren't many. These are the people who decided not to join the TPLF during the war.

APAAU noted that Tigrayans had not yet returned to other sectors, including parliament.

### **The FFM team asked if there would be (regional) special forces (SF) in Tigray**

APAAU thought it unlikely as these have been abolished in other regions. SF were part of the police, originally created to protect important persons, such as politicians.

### **The FFM team asked about the size of Tigrayan population in AA**

APAAU did not know. For the AA population, APAAU noted there was a range of estimates between 4 to 7 million, some sources even higher. APAAU also noted that there is no system of tracking internal movement within Ethiopia.

### **The FFM team asked if there are Tigrayan community organisations in AA**

APAAU knew of 2. One is an association of students and graduates of AA University. Another was a woman's rights organisation working on women's health and gender-based violence in Tigray and engaged on peacebuilding. This organisation is registered with government.

APAAU also noted that the [Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations](#) is vocal on behalf of all women's rights and included associations based in Tigray.

### **The FFM team asked if there were organisations that looked at human rights of Tigrayans**

APAAU noted that all civil society organisations (CSOs) do advocacy work. APAAU clarified that it is very difficult to classify CSOs as Tigrayan, Oromo, Amhara etc. This is because most CSOs are, at least officially, try to present themselves as working on a certain rights agenda throughout Ethiopia. To profile the CSOs based on who founded it or who is running it would not be fair. Some organisations have moved to AA.

APAAU did not know if the AA University student's association was formally registered but noted that there are many Tigrayan students at AA University.



## **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans were able to leave the country**

APAAU said yes, they can if they have a passport. APAAU added that there was a time when this was challenging but did not have any information on whether they faced problems currently.

## **The FFM team asked if Tigrayan colleagues had left using their own passport**

APAAU said yes. Adding, that unfortunately many Tigrayan colleagues had left the university too. During the war, Tigrayan academics were not told to stop working at the university and no one from Tigray was told to leave their jobs but many decided to stop work or went on sabbatical.

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## **Interview with civil society organisation activists (CSAs)**

**Date:** 11 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** 4 civil society activists (CSAs); 3 CPIT officials

The activists - CSA1, CSA2, CSA3 and CSA4 – are Tigrayan, work in Tigray and had travelled to Addis Ababa (AA) by plane before the meeting.

### **The FFM team asked about the security situation in Tigray**

**CSA1** considered it to be uncertain with security concerns here and there. Eritrean forces are contesting border areas, which are volatile and are not safe. There is also a new security challenge in most urban areas. Ex-combatants are a threat to internal security, the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process is not fully functional.

**CSA1** added that the Tigray Interim Regional Authority (TIRA) justice system has not fully started to function, internally displaced person (IDP) centres have a high demand for food, industries have not re-opened and job opportunities are limited. Many young people are unemployed, those who are working are doing not very dignified or fulfilling jobs which cannot meet their livelihood demands, for example street markets (stalls).

**CSA2** acknowledged that the ‘silencing of the gun’ is to be celebrated but added that it was not clear what is the situation for around 40% of Tigrayans. Even though it seems that there is security in the TIRA-controlled areas there are still problems with informal (armed) groups, which are not part of the TIRA. Guns are easy to get, people feel insecure and there is a risk of CSO projects being attacked. There is also insecurity in the border areas from Eritrean forces (in the north-east) and Amhara forces (in West Tigray). The TIRA has not established a sustainable peace structure or justice system.

**CSA1** considered that during the war Ethiopian society was brainwashed by propaganda against Tigrayans. The Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was characterised as ‘junta’ and ‘Hyenas’. People’s minds cannot change easily. Tigrayans cannot ask for their rights because they have been dehumanised.

**CSA3** observed that the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (also known as the Pretoria Agreement (PA)) was important. However, its main problem is its implementation. The return of IDPs to their home areas is an issue. There were IDPs in the centre of the TIRA-controlled areas but they were afraid to return to their

homes (in the disputed territories), their land has been taken and there is a potential for conflict with these people.

There is joblessness and a sense of hopelessness - forcing people into crime. People are detached from economic activities, so are choosing to migrate to other regions. But they have also lost trust in other Ethiopians in these areas. There are also a mixture of armed groups including young people, unknown groups and Tigray Defence Forces (part of the TPLF/TIRA). Border areas are occupied by Eritrean forces. In general, there is no strong law enforcement.

**CSA4** noted that large parts of Tigray are occupied by non-Tigrayan forces: West Tigray (known as Welkait by the Amhara) by Amhara militias and the border areas with Eritrea by Eritrean forces. People living in border areas are migrating to other countries. The situation is still bad, with lots of IDPs and people still dying from lack of food.

#### **The FFM asked if the TIRA have overall security control**

**CSA1** did not consider the TIRA to be functioning well or to be well managed. On the capacity of the police, **CSA1** noted that if a person reports a crime to the police, it is registered but the police do not have capacity to follow it up. There is news of many crimes but no investigations are conducted to resolve them.

**CSA2** said the TIRA is not able to control security because of infighting between TPLF factions and because it lacks resources and capability. Also, the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process (DDR) has been delayed, young people are not engaged, and even if it [the DDR] was [operating] there would be no trust in TIRA.

**CSA3** noted that the TIRA does not have control over the 'disputed territories' (north-east, west and south-east Tigray) and that they lack capacity, resources and management skills. There is a sense of insecurity among people, the situation feels like there is no government present.

**CSA4** thought there is no formal government in TIRA.

#### **The FFM asked if the courts were functioning**

**CSA1** considered that before the war Tigray had the strongest court system in Ethiopia but this had been destroyed by the war. After the war the courts had started to open again but judges are not being paid, for almost 17 months now; they are working as volunteers. **CSA1** estimated that 60% of the judges have resigned, because they can earn more as lawyers but did not elaborate on the source of this information. Another problem is the management structure of government which is very weak. There are challenges at local government level (woreda).

#### **The FFM team asked if federal government (FG) forces are still present in Tigray**

**CSA2** was not sure of the combination of FG and TIRA/TPLF forces. The FG forces are still present but they appeared to be doing nothing.

**CSA3** noted FG forces were present alongside Amhara forces in West Tigray (now renamed Northern Gondar). The Amhara administration in West Tigray were providing ID documents to local people.

#### **The FFM asked about the relationship between the TIRA and FG**

**CSA3** said it was progressing positively.

**CSA1** considered that the peace process is not genuine, it is a cover. **CSA1** stated that the prime minister met civil society representatives in Addis Abba (AA) and told them the TPLF needed to calm down otherwise there would be war. **CSA1** did not provide the details of when the meeting occurred. **CSA1** further considered that the peace process was for the international community.

**CSA2** observed there is no fighting but achieving peace is a process, there are many outstanding issues to resolve.

#### **The FFM team asked if it was possible to travel from Tigray to AA**

**CSA1** thought it is not possible to go by road: there are informal checkpoints; Tigrayans are charged to travel; there are security issues; no trusted form of transportation. **CSA1** gave an example of travelling by air to Gambela in western Ethiopia. Once in Gambela CS1 was subjected to many security checks and suspicion. He opined that the people there did not consider him Ethiopian.

**CSA2** noted that road transport is not safe. In the previous week 33 Tigrayans travelling from Mekelle to AA were captured by gangs in Afar and were still missing at the time of the interview. **CSA1** added that there is a suspicion that the Afar government may be involved in this incident.

#### **The FFM team asked if it is possible for Tigrayan to live in other parts of Ethiopia, such as Afar**

**CSA2** did not think it is possible because it's not safe. **CSA1** gave an example of the risks. CS1's organisation was working on a peacebuilding project with 20 Tigray and 20 Afar elders. After the training, 7 of the 20 Tigrayans were killed by the Afar.

#### **The FFM team asked if it is possible to fly to AA**

**CSA1** noted that immediately after the war it was hard but over time it has got better, there is some harassment in AA but is not as bad as in other regions. Some people cannot fly because of security reasons. **CSA1** gave an example of a Tigrayan resident in Australia who advocated for peace during the war not being allowed to travel.

**CSA3** noted that young people were initially not allowed to travel but now they can. **CSA1** added that the FG was afraid ex-combatants might cause trouble.

#### **The FFM team asked about the availability of humanitarian aid in Tigray**

**CSA4** noted that it was blocked but did not know why, thought it a political issue. People have to support themselves, Mekelle supports IDPs. People are fighting amongst themselves for food and aid.

**CSA1** noted that in Mekelle there are 19 IDP centres, with around 600,000 people but no official food aid has been distributed for the last 5 months but was not sure why this was. Suggested that it could be due to bureaucratic problem as the food is there or maybe due to a lack of resource or co-ordination, or due to political interference. There has been unofficial distribution of aid by NGOs but it wasn't enough. **CSA1** provided data from the FG IDP management agency for the total recorded IDP population in Tigray as 688,000 as of mid-2024.

**CSA4** noted that general distribution of aid has stopped. International NGOs (INGOs) suspected FG/TIRA were 'repurposing' aid. So, 4 or 5 months ago the

INGOs piloted a new system for the distribution of aid. **CSA3** thought that a lot of people from international organisations were not able to go to the region but did not elaborate on this.

### **The FFM team asked about what INGOs were operating in Tigray**

The CSOs listed: Catholic Relief Service, World Vision, World Food Programme and UN agencies

**CSA1** stated that that FG says it is providing assistance but it is not visible on the ground.

### **The FFM team asked if IDPs can go back to TIRA-controlled areas**

**CSA3** noted that they can.

**CSA1** noted that 600,000 IDPs are from the disputed territories, where it is not safe to return. **CSA1** provided data from the FG IDP management agency of the number of people displaced from each of the 3 disputed areas as of mid-2024: South – 52,443; North-west – 71,675; and West – 564,910.

### **The FFM team asked about the treatment of Tigrayans by the FG**

**CSA1** stated it's better now and not like how it was during the war. But there are still problems: detention has not totally stopped, there are family members in prison. TIRA states that there are still 2,000 Tigrayans in prison, who are political prisoners. These include people who were in the police, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (FG armed forces), and those returned from Saudi Arabia and Sudan. There are Tigrayans in prison in Afar and Oromia. However, the 'concentration camps' – where people were held in schools, government premises - in AA and elsewhere have closed and most of the people have been released. **CSA1** added that people who were sent to arrest individuals are not trained in human rights so they did not treat prisoners properly.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans are being arrested in AA**

The CSAs did not know.

### **The FFM team asked how Tigrayans are identifiable**

**CSA1** suggested by their language (Tigrayan), accent (when speaking Amharic), ID cards and distinctive scarring on their temples. During the war, colleagues and neighbours who knew them as Tigrayan informed the authorities.

### **The FFM team asked if there are Tigrayans in government**

**CSA1** noted that Tigrayan representation in government (executive) and parliament is not permitted. Also, Tigrayans are not in government bodies.

**CSA3** noted that Tigrayans did not have a seat in parliament and there is just one person in parliament who speaks Tigrinya and claims to be from Tigray but Tigrayans do not accept him as a true Tigrayan. At ministerial level, the judiciary and military, there is no Tigrayan representation.

### **The FFM team asked about the treatment of Tigrayans returning to Ethiopia**

**CSA1** considered that there would be so many problems: they do not have a home and the FG does not accept them properly. Returnees also face the challenge of making a life in Tigray.

## **The FFM team asked CSOs if they knew of people returning to AA**

The CSAs responded that their information was from social media mostly. They claimed that many Tigrayans who returned faced arrest and harassment, documents were taken at the airport. Some women were raped and their possessions taken away. However, the CSOs did not provide details including specific examples or when this happened.

## **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans can get ID documents**

**CSA3** thought it is difficult to obtain a passport and one needed money (to pay a bribe). ID (kebele) cards are not being issued or renewed in Tigray. There was a passport office in Mekelle before the war but was now closed so people have to travel to AA for a passport.

## **The FFM team asked about documents needed for internal travel (including by plane),**

**CSA3** noted a person could use a passport (or an expired passport), driving licence, an organisation (NGO) ID but added that very few have a passport or driving licence.

Specific ID is not always needed to access services in AA as long as there is some sort of ID. It can be difficult to obtain AA city ID.

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## **Interview with a representative of the Irob Advocacy Association (RIAA)**

**Date:** 13 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** RIAA, 3 CPIT officials

The [Irob Advocacy Association](#) (IAA) is a civil society organisation registered with the Federal Government (FG) which has been in operation for 4 years, focussing on the Irob ethnic group.

RIAA lives in Addis Ababa (AA) and was last in Tigray in December 2023.

RIAA explained that the Irob are a minority group in Tigray with an estimated population of 60,000. They have suffered insecurity for 40 years because of the Eritrea/Ethiopia conflict. Irob are mostly Roman catholic and are not aligned to the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

RIAA noted that in the 1970s, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party was led by an Irob – Dr Tesfay Debresay.

RIAA explained that the [Algiers agreement](#) which ended the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000 divided the Irob into 2, split between Eritrea and Ethiopia although Ethiopia did not implement the agreement and cede territory to Eritrea. During the Tigray conflict Eritrea occupied the land assigned to it under the Algiers agreement.

Irob areas have 8 kebeles of which 3 are under Eritrean control, 2 in no man's land and 3, in the western part, under the Tigray Interim Regional Authority (TIRA)/TPLF. Some kebeles are controlled by more than one group. TPLF control is ineffective.

## **The FFM team asked about current security situation in Tigray**

RIAA characterised it as 'chaos' and the cause of this is the internal power struggle

within TPLF, some of its members are in the TIRA, some outside. There are 2 wings of TIRA: i) 'propaganda representatives of the FG', and ii) the TPLF party cadres (hardline) led by Debretsion Gebremichael. The latter has control on the ground in Tigray.

RIAA suggested there is an agreement between the TPLF and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) (Eritrean forces). About 5 months ago war was about to break out between the TPLF and the Eritreans but, following discussions between elders, war was averted. RIAA observed that the TPLF and EPLF see the FG as the common enemy.

### **The FFM team asked about relations between the FG and the TIRA**

RIAA thought the TPLF's hardline faction see Getachew Reda, TIRA's interim leader, as a representative of Prime Minister Abiy. Since the signing of Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (also known as the Pretoria Agreement (PA)), new political alliances have developed. Fano (Amhara militia) are no longer enemies of the TPLF, they see common interest in fighting the FG. **The FFM team questioned such an alliance given Fano forces were occupying West Tigray.** RIAA claimed that Eritrea's president, Isaias Afwerki is the godfather of the Fano, and the Fano is not in West Tigray (also known as Welkait). The Fano and the Welkait Committee – groups occupying West Tigray - are different. While West Tigray is important to the Tigrayan people, the TPLF is interested in power and not Welkait, hence its alliance with the Fano.

### **The FFM team asked if FG forces have left Tigray**

RIAA said yes but clarified that FG forces are in the south (in Alamata) alongside TPLF forces. FG forces were in Irob areas which were contested with Eritrea but withdrew 3 months ago. Since then, there has been no tension between TPLF and Eritrean forces. But the area is insecure for people, war could break out.

### **The FFM team asked about the security situation in Tigray**

RIAA noted that areas under TIRA control are affected by lawlessness and high levels of crime, there is no free movement. By 6 pm everyone goes home for fear of being attacked. Security challenges included the presence of militants with no chain of command and human traffickers. The police are not properly trained. Security forces engage in human trafficking; some officials have been arrested but then released.

### **The FFM team asked if there were specific groups at risk**

RIAA noted that there were many cases of abductions of teenage girls. Militants also target other groups, for control of areas and competition for resources. Abductions in Tigray are for ransom but those occurring in the border areas, for example in Irob for human trafficking. In some areas like the central Tigray zone some militant commanders clash with local farmers for mining minerals like gold.

To illustrate the levels of insecurity, RIAA gave the example of Adigrat, a town near to the Irob areas in the north of Tigray. There are 2 or 3 people killed each week in a population of 160,000. Travel from Adigrat to Ambasit in the Irob areas is blocked by the Eritrean forces, so a journey of 1.5 hours now takes 6 hours. The Irob people are psychologically disturbed by the massacres and abductions committed by Eritrean forces. There is also harassment and rape. The Irob are suspected by both Eritrean and Tigrayans.

RIAA added that Mekelle may be safer than other areas because of the presence of the TIRA. However, the economy in Mekelle is weak, although RIAA acknowledged business has restarted.

### **The FFM team asked about humanitarian assistance in Tigray**

RIAA noted that aid had stopped but had resumed in December 2023 even though it is very limited. Regarding the Irob, aid from the Ethiopian side is not reaching the Irob in their home areas, they have to travel to Adigrat. However, Eritrea is providing aid to the Irob. RIAA added that Irob elders came to AA and met the Minister of Defence asking that the Irob were not divided between Eritrea and Tigray and for aid.

### **The FFM team asked about movement within and from Tigray**

RIAA noted that there is a lot of migration from rural to urban areas in Tigray because of the security situation and for economic reasons. People also migrate to AA and onwards, for example to Uganda. Large numbers of young people have migrated because of the trauma of war/lack of security, and the fear of war again. This includes many young Irob. RIAA was aware of 600 Irob in Libya waiting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Others had emigrated to Yemen. Those wanting to emigrate pay up to 1.4 million Birr [around £19,000<sup>6</sup>] to smugglers to leave.

RIAA noted that the road from Tigray via Amhara to AA is blocked and is not safe. The Afar land route is possible but there are security issues. For example, 37 people were detained and released a day later recently when travelling on this route. That's why people who want to travel to Addis prefer air transportation.

### **The FFM team asked how they could afford the high costs to be smuggled out of Tigray**

RIAA noted that smugglers targeted people with relatives abroad and they ask payments in instalments as they cross borders.

### **The FFM team asked about internal relocation**

RIAA noted that Tigrayans can only go to AA not Afar or Amhara. The Tigrayans do not trust the people in these areas. However, RIAA noted that Tigrayans normally do not stay in AA because they have nothing to do, generally poor economic situation, and they face ID problems and fear arrest.

### **The FFM team asked why it was difficult for Tigrayans to move to AA**

RIAA noted that people need a city ID to live in AA – always asked for city ID. Tigrayans cannot easily get a kebele ID in Tigray as the local authority offices are not always open and working. So, newcomers may have a problem, if security forces ask for their city ID and they do not have it, they may be detained.

But Tigrayans already living in AA have city ID already, so no problem for them.

People can use any ID to access hospitals or education facilities in AA but need AA city ID to rent a house, open a business, and to get employed in AA.

RIAA explained with respect to the AA ID: the government structure in Ethiopia consists of kebele (ward) – woreda (district) - regional government- federal government. However, Addis Ababa and Dire-Dawa city administrations have a parallel power/structure of regional government. So, in all other regions, there are

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<sup>6</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

kebele structures but in Addis Ababa the lowest structure is the woreda. Therefore, the city ID can be taken from the woreda, unlike other regions where the ID is issued at the Kebele level. In regional governments, the kebele ID works for their respective regions without limitation to the kebele that issued it.

### **The FFM team asked about the treatment of Tigrayans (and Irob) in AA.**

RIAA noted that Irob and Tigrayans were seen as the same. During the war – due to propaganda – Tigrayans were arrested based on their ethnicity. Other Ethiopians in AA – neighbours - ganged up against Tigrayans, informing on them. During the war, detention was for 3 months and then release. When the TPLF got within 250km of AA, all Tigrayans were arrested. When the TPLF retreated, many were released.

Since the PA (and the end of the war) the situation has completely changed. Arrests may randomly happen. People are arrested, detained and then released after paying a bribe. RIAA was not aware of specific reasons for this. Arrests may occur also before major celebrations or public holidays and big events for example, the Assembly of AU, Adwa victory, 'Irreechaa' (the Oromo cultural festival). The reason may be out of security fears but the police use it as an income opportunity. The people are then released after 24 hours.

### **The FFM team asked about the number of arrests**

RIAA did not know. However, they were not systematic, not organised, but RIAA added the security forces lack accountability.

### **The FFM team asked if the random arrest and detention happens to other groups**

RIAA thought Amhara were being targeted.

### **The FFM team asked how many Tigrayan live in AA, where they live and what activities they engaged in**

RIAA thought there were maybe 500,000 Tigrayans in AA, and less than 1,000 Irob. They live in Haya hulet (area '22'), Bole, Summit, Safari and CMC.

Tigrayans live alongside Amhara and Oromo, they have no problems.

Tigrayans have no problems moving around AA with AA city with ID.

Before Prime Minister Abiy came to power, Tigrayans owned many businesses in AA. Tigrayans still have businesses, but not confident about their circumstances. RIAA stated that the economic success of individuals in Ethiopia is highly linked with political power, which is derived from ethnic affiliations. For example, when political power is held by the Tigray ethnic group, Tigrayans have significant opportunities. Now that power is in the hands of the Oromo ethnic group, it is expected that Oromos will also receive wide opportunities in the economy.

### **The FFM team asked how a person could get an AA city ID card and what it is used for**

RIAA said that people mostly 'buy' (pay a bribe) to get AA city IDs. It used to cost about 10,000 Birr [around £137], now 20,000 Birr [around £274<sup>7</sup>].

To get an ID formally, a person needs a 'clearance letter' from the local authority of their home area (previous kebele), a sponsor (such as a landlord) and evidence they

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<sup>7</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024



are a property owner. Even when a person has all the correct information and documents, the process can take a long time and they may be refused.

RIAA thought kebele/city IDs are used for obtaining a birth certificate, a marriage certificate, a passport, opening or owning a business, buying a house and accessing hospital services amongst other things.

### **The FFM team asked how a person can obtain an ID if returning from overseas**

RIAA noted it depends on whether they have a passport. RIAA said that almost all who went and lived in the West do not want to come back to Ethiopia for residence, they ask for asylum and citizenship. Those who come back from the Middle East mostly Saudi Arabia, go to the original place where they were born and can get ID from their original kebele. For those who go illegally and are arrested in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the International Organisation for Migration can provide them with travel documents which they can use for a maximum of 6 months Until they go to their place of origin to obtain the Kebele ID.

### **The FFM team asked if there were Tigrayans in the FG**

RIAA noted that for 3 years there has been propoganda against Tigray, with the TPLF being conflated with the Tigrayan people. Before the war, Tigray had 38 (out of 547) seats in the Ethiopian parliament but the TPLF recalled them.

RIAA noted that in ministerial (executive body) offices, there are Tigrayans who are members of the ruling Prosperity Party. RIAA noted there was a defence minister, Abraham Belay, who was from Tigray until recently. However, in the lawmaking bodies (House of People's Representatives and Federation House), there are no Tigrayans. Security area positions have also not been taken by Tigrayans.

The FG security forces are dominated by the Oromo with some Amhara. Tigrayans are being asked back but have not taken up their positions yet.

### **The FFM team asked about the ability of opposition groups to operate in Tigray**

RIAA said that the TPLF does not allow opposition parties to function effectively in Tigray. **Asked how the TPLF prevents the parties from operating**, RIAA noted that, for example, during elections the parties cannot move outside towns, cannot promote their programmes. The TPLF controls the system.

RIAA listed the opposition parties:

- Baytona (National Congress of Great Tigray) party
- Salsay Weyane Tigray (SAWET)
- Tigray Independence Party (TIP)
- Arena Tigray
- Assimba Democratic Party (ADP)
- The Enderta Renaissance party
- Freedom and Equality Party

Baytona, Salsay Wayane and TIP were the most prominent and had formed an alliance. TIP was a secessionist party. Baytona, SAWET, TIP, and ADP did not distance themselves from the TPLF before and during the Tigray war, even though they called themselves opposition parties. However, after the war, especially

following the Pretoria Agreement, they are no longer allies of the TPLF.

### **The FFM team asked if the Tigray parties could operate in AA**

RIAA noted that no party opposing the PP (the ruling party) can organize any kind of gathering if they're not going to support the ruling party's campaign. This happens in several ways: first, the security forces intimidate the parties' leaders directly; second, they withhold permits and security guarantees; and third, they communicate with and warn the meeting hall owners. **The FFM Team asked if it was possible, for example, to hold a meeting in Meskel Square** (one of the largest in AA). RIAA noted regarding Meskel Square, it is only allowed for government-supported and religious events. It costs one million Birr [approximately £13,700<sup>8</sup>] to hire Meskel square. The one million Birr [to hold a rally] is not for political events but for concerts, although none have taken place so far. This applies not only to Tigrayan parties but to all political parties.

### **The FFM team asked about Tigrayans leaving Ethiopia**

RIAA thought free movement is difficult, even if a person fulfilled all the requirements to leave. If a person is involved in a court case, they cannot leave. Normally, an exit permit can be suspended by a court or judge if the traveller is involved in a potential criminal case. However, a newly passed law gives power to the executive body (immigration and citizenship authority) to stop a person from leaving which means anyone who is not in favour of the government can be targeted without a judicial order.

RIAA observed that there is a [new amendment to the immigration proclamation](#) that gives the Director General of the Office of Immigration and Citizenship Service the power to prevent anyone leaving the country. RIAA added that immigration can stop a person at the airport leaving the country, this is the case for everyone. But Tigrayans are recognisable by their names and may face difficulties. However, RIAA did not have recent examples of Tigrayans leaving and facing problems.

### **The FFM team asked about treatment of returnees**

RIAA noted that many thousands had come back from Saudia Arabia (SA) during the war. They were sent out of AA and detained. **Asked about the situation since the PA**, RIAA thought the FG had no facilities to receive people back. RIAA had no experience of Tigrayans returning with a political profile. Of those people returning from SA, they face psychological problems – no money and families may not be happy they are coming back empty-handed – and the Tigray local government is not prepared for them in their home areas. There is no effective administration in Tigray. However, RIAA was not aware of recent examples of treatment of returns by the FG.

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## **Interview with Regional Engagement Coordinator (REC), British Embassy**

**Date:** 13 June 2024

**Location:** British Embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** REC, 3 CPIT officials

REC is an Irob from Tigray with family in Adigrat.

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<sup>8</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to GBP](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

REC has worked for the FCDO for 3 years and travelled to Tigray around 12 times since the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (Pretoria Agreement (PA)) by plane, including to Adigrat, Axum, Mekelle and Shire.

### **The FFM team asked about the security situation in Tigray**

REC observed that people are not attacked by the state or police, but poverty and lawlessness has led to crime. Young girls are reportedly kidnapped by traffickers. The Tigrayan Interim Regional Authority (TIRA) has no capacity to provide security, which has led to the increase in crime. REC did not know who was committing the crime but thought the 100,000 demobilized Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) ex-combatants and returnees from Saudi Arabia might be the main cause. There are no resources to integrate former combatants. Towns are more insecure and have more crimes than rural areas because in rural areas people know each other.

### **The FFM team asked about the situation in the disputed territories**

REC thought the situation was very hard in these areas. Tigrayans have been imprisoned in West Tigray by the Amharan authorities and others are forced to flee to the TIRA-controlled areas, with some initially moving to Sudan.

### **The FFM team asked about the Irob**

REC noted that the Irob are divided into 3 areas. These included those:

- under the control of Eritrean forces
- under the control of TIRA (4 kebeles)
- outside of any state control

REC noted that the Irob were previously allowed to go to a market at Senafe in Eritrea but after Eritrean forces took control of Irob areas access to this town has been stopped. The Eritreans have killed, raped, and confiscated land from the Irob. REC added that the Irob displaced from the Eritrean-controlled areas cannot return there. There is a list of people who have been killed by Eritrean forces on the Irob people's website: [Home \(irobdevelopment.org\)](http://Home(irobdevelopment.org)).

In TIRA-controlled areas the Irob are not targeted by the state, they are able to move to other parts of Tigray. The issue in the TIRA-controlled area is lawlessness and economic challenges. There is limited police presence because TIRA cannot pay salaries.

### **The FFM team asked about controls the Tigray security forces, are these controlled by the TPLF or TIRA?**

REC noted that the TIRA and the TPLF are the same, although there may be some competition within the group, amongst senior members. The TIRA cabinet is formed of TPLF members. However, some factions within the TPLF have different views towards the Federal Government (FG): some want to fight (the 'old guard'), others do not want to fight. The old guard control the Tigrayan security forces. But the Tigrayan people want peace.

### **The FFM team asked about the make-up of the TIRA cabinet**

REC noted that the cabinet was supposed to be 51% TPLF, 49% other. However, only 2 or 3 of the 17-member cabinet were not TPLF. When the TIRA cabinet was

formed after the PA, opposition parties were invited to join and offered 6 seats. However, they refused to join because they claimed the consultation process to create the TIRA had not been democratic and open.

### **The FFM team asked if other political parties besides TPLF can operate in Tigray**

REC considered that there was no issue operating legally and to have offices but there is no democratic culture. For example, the mayor's office does not give permission for other parties to hold meetings or demonstrations in public places or allow them to hire halls for meetings. **Asked if the TPLF harass other parties**, REC gave the example of the arrest and beating of Kaibram Berhe of the Baytona party who had organized a demonstration in September 2023 in Mekelle.

### **The FFM team asked about the humanitarian situation in Tigray including Irob areas**

REC noted that some aid is getting in, but it is very limited.

### **The FFM team asked about the economic situation in Tigray**

REC thought it to be better than during the war. People are trying to open businesses, banks are operating, shops and bakeries are now open. TIRA-controlled areas are much better than other parts of Tigray.

REC noted that Tigray does not get its full budget allocation from the FG adding that this did not only apply to Tigray, but other regions also experience budget shortfalls.

### **The FFM team asked about travel from Tigray to Addis Ababa (AA)**

REC observed that it is ok by air. However, road transport is risky. The Amhara route is completely shut for everyone, not just for Tigrayans. The Afar route is ok, but there are problems. For example, recently 30 to 40 Tigrayans travelling on this route were kidnapped and 7 killed.

### **The FFM team asked about ability of Tigrayans to move to AA**

REC noted that thousands of people had moved to AA, especially those with relatives there. For example, REC's brother in-law had moved and was living with him. There are a lot of Tigrayans in AA, more than before the war started – there also Eritreans. As well as from Tigray, Tigrayans have come from other regions of Ethiopia and those that returned from Saudi Arabia.

### **The FFM team asked about number of Tigrayans in AA**

REC stated that there had not been a census but estimated there were 800,000 Tigrayans in AA before the war and around one million currently.

### **The FFM team asked whether Tigrayans can move to other regions of Ethiopia (other than AA or Tigray)**

REC thought it difficult. Also, difficult for people who are mixed Tigrayan/other ethnic groups to move to other regions of the country.

REC noted that in Tigray the TPLF does not target people based on their ethnicity. The TPLF only targets people if they oppose it.

### **The FFM team asked about the situation in AA for Tigrayans**

REC considered AA to be better than other regions: better security and facilities, and

it is huge – people can ‘hide’ in the city. People can go to a coffee house, go to the bank, and speak Tigrinya. But there can be problems in getting government services, renting a house, getting (city) ID.

REC added that legally there is no discrimination but in practice Tigrayans are treated differently by officials. REC considered that it would be ok for a Tigrayan to renew their passport but getting a new passport (as for his wife and child) was a challenge.

### **The FFM team asked if the delays in getting a passport were down to corruption rather than ethnically based discrimination**

REC thought Tigrayans were targeted based on their identity but added that Amhara and Oromo may also find it difficult to get passports. REC considered that Tigrayans are often targeted for their identity, however Amhara and Oromos are targeted for political reasons.

REC noted that there is no immigration office in Mekelle, so people come to AA for passports. REC added that there may be Tigrayans who get passports, it is easier for those with connections than those without.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans can get an AA city ID**

REC thought this would only be possible by bribery.

To get a city ID a person needs:

- to be sponsored by a resident (a landlord) or have a house ownership document
- to have lived in AA for at least 6 months
- if the person is from Tigray, a clearance certificate or letter from the local authority in Tigray stating they no longer live there

The city ID is provided by the AA metropolitan administration not the FG.

People pay a bribe to get fake or genuine ID. A fake ID may cost between 2 and 5,000 Birr [around £13.5 to £68<sup>9</sup>]; a real ID may cost between 10 to 20,000 Birr [around £137 to £274<sup>10</sup>].

Many other ethnic groups from regions outside of AA also experience problems obtaining city IDs, but REC thought it was especially difficult for Tigrayans.

### **The FFM team asked whether Tigrayans could rent in AA**

REC thought there is no problem for a Tigrayan to rent a house. A person needs a kebele ID and the landlord and tenant have to go to a community/local police office to authorize the rental agreement. Before the conflict it was easy to rent a house without ID, now you need ID.

### **The FFM team pointed out that, according to REC, around 200,000 Tigrayans had migrated to AA since the conflict so how were they able to obtain housing.**

REC noted that the ID laws are not always enforced in practice. Also noted that many people live with family and do not need a rental agreement (or city ID).

### **The FFM team asked what services an ID is needed to access**

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<sup>9</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to British Pounds](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

<sup>10</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to British Pounds](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

REC noted a city ID is needed to open a bank account adding that a Tigrayan kebele ID cannot be used in AA and gave the example of his sister who was unable to access her bank account in AA for lack of city ID. REC added that if a person is stopped by the police, not having a city ID makes them more vulnerable to being detained. If the person has a genuine ID, they are more likely to be released.

### **The FFM team asked if Tigrayans are still arrested and detained by the authorities in AA based on their ethnicity**

REC knew of many Tigrayans arrested. For example, in March 2024, 2 relatives were arrested at a coffee house along with 14 other Tigrayans for speaking Tigrinya and released on a bribe of 10,000 Birr [around £137<sup>11</sup>] each. REC noted that insecurity – arbitrary arrest – is an issue for all ethnic groups but other ethnic groups have representation in the police and government. REC considered it easy for Tigrayans to be detained as they have less influence than other groups. Generally, the civilian administration is weak, the police act with impunity/lack accountability.

### **The FFM team asked about number of arrests in AA**

REC noted that there were lots of reports on social media but could not verify these incidents and did not have specific figures. REC added that people who are detained are not beaten. If someone is arrested, they can be held in detention for a day or 2.

REC further noted that Tigrayans are not specifically targeted – rounded up – but the police know where Tigrayans live and target those areas. Age, gender, class, wealth matter when it comes to arrests. Women are not targeted. If a person is well-known, they are not arrested. If the person is well-connected, they are less likely to get arrested.

There were reports, in March [2024] by the Prosperity Party (PP) that Tigrayan Defense Force ex-combatants had moved to AA, so police took advantage of this to arrest people. The police tend to check young Tigrayans coming to AA.

During the war, the police/PP created an informal monitoring network to observe Tigrayans. But they are not as active now.

### **The FFM team asked about Tigrayan representation in government and other areas of society**

REC noted that there were some Tigrayans working in the courts, civil service, and academia but they were not in decision making (senior) positions. Generally, there are no Tigrayans in the police or parliament. Some Tigrayans have come back to their jobs since the end of the war. There are a lot of Tigrayans in the private sector, for example in the hotel industry.

### **The FFM team asked about the treatment of Tigrayan returnees**

REC observed that Tigrayans do not want to return to Ethiopia, they are afraid of the insecurity.

REC added that Tigrayans in Saudi Arabia do not want to return to Ethiopia, even those in prison. **Asked how REC knows**, he explained that people in Saudi Arabian prisons pass messages on to visitors about their circumstances. Many do not want to return because they do not have money.

REC gave an example of returnee he knew about: about 7 months ago REC's wife's

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<sup>11</sup> Xe.com, [Convert Ethiopian Birr to British Pounds](#) (100 Birr = £1.37), 28 June 2024

cousin had been returned from Saudi Arabia to AA, was held for 2 weeks, released and then assisted by the Red Cross. The cousin came and stayed with REC and after a month left for the Irob areas in Tigray, has now left Ethiopia again and is now in Libya.

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### **Interview with officials of a western embassy**

**Date:** 13 June 2024

**Location:** Western embassy, Addis Ababa

**Present:** 2 officials of a western embassy (OWE); 3 CPIT officials

#### **The FFM team asked about their assessment of the situation in Tigray**

The OWE explained that it was tense and the economic situation is poor with unemployment estimated at 81%. The 3 disputed areas – west, north-east (along the border with Eritrea) and south-east Tigray – are very tense, though they understood that there are plans to return internally displaced persons (IDPs) to these areas. OWE added that large scale fighting has stopped.

The rule of law is an issue. For example, the OWE had heard of children being arrested and imprisoned for 25 years. There is a lot of criminality and corruption, and agreed with the FFM Team's suggestion that the perpetrators were likely to be ex-combatants. They added that generally in Ethiopia the police are known to detain people and demand ransoms for their release. They expect the situation to be the same in Tigray.

Also noted that the disputed areas are far more dangerous than the 'core' areas of Tigray, controlled by the Tigray Interim Regional Authority (TIRA).

#### **The FFM team asked whether the high levels of crime were because of lack of resources or unwillingness of the officials**

The OWE thought both.

#### **The FFM team asked whether it was safer in Mekelle and other urban areas than rural areas**

The OWE thought the urban areas were safer adding that there was more political stability there. However, criminality is higher in Mekelle than rural areas.

#### **The FFM team asked about the relationship between the TIRA and the federal government (FG)**

The OWE noted that the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) controls Tigray. There has been large scale conflict between the TPLF and the FG. Adding that some sources say there is a lot of movement within the disputed areas but were not sure of what is going on in there.

The OWE also noted that there was a lot of recent movement of people in Tigray, including in the disputed areas. They were not sure of the reasons for this.

The OWE added that the TPLF is in control of the core parts of Tigray if there are factions within the TPLF these do not directly affect the people.

The OWE added that the TIRA does not have a great relationship with the federal government (FG).

### **The FFM team asked if authorities profiled/targeted groups in Tigray**

The OWE said they were not aware that there was profiling/targeting of specific groups in Tigray by the authorities.

### **The FFM team asked whether the TPLF would allow opposition parties to function in Tigray**

The OWE officials observed that the TPLF had originally established the political system in Ethiopia from 1990s that had limited political space – expected to be the same now in Tigray although they did not have specific information on this.

### **The FFM team asked if much humanitarian aid was entering Tigray**

The OWE noted that the US had stopped providing food aid in June 2023 but this had resumed in November/December 2023. On resumption aid was prioritised for the most needy: refugees (but not in Tigray) then IDPs (in Tigray and elsewhere). They believed it to be working well now, with local partners. They added that aid for nutrition, lactating mothers, health and education had never stopped – only food aid. Aid is generally accessible in Ethiopia but in some areas, it is delayed. It is difficult to distribute aid in Amhara and Oromia. The officials were not sure about the situation in Tigray.

### **The FFM team asked about the situation for Tigrayans in Addis Ababa (AA)**

The OWE said they were not aware of targeting of Tigrayans by the FG; there is no systematic targeting of Tigrayans. They added that targeted attacks have mostly shifted from Tigrayans (during the war) to Amhara.

### **Asked about the need for ID documents**

The OWE noted there was a general need for ID amongst all groups but were not aware that Tigrayans were being profiled (treated differently from other ethnic groups).

Nor were the officials aware of problems faced by Tigrayans leaving or returning to Ethiopia generally.

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