



Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum
مركز منظمات المجتمع المدني في القرن الأفريقي



Strategic Initiative
for Women in the
Horn of Africa



15 September 2021

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat
Chairperson, African Union Commission
African Union Headquarters
P.O. Box 3243, Roosevelt Street W21K19
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dear Chairperson,

REFERENCE: ATROCITIES AGAINST CIVILIANS IN THE ETHIOPIA CRISIS

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned, are organizations that work to promote the human rights of civilians in conflict and displacement. We write to urge the African Union to take a stronger role in responding to the current conflict in Ethiopia. Ten months after the outbreak of war in Tigray, [UNHCR](#) reports an estimated 650,000 civilians have been displaced within the region and 120,000 have been forced into Sudan. Violent conflict has affected not only Tigrayans but other communities, including Somali, Afar, Amhara and Oromia as well as Eritrean refugees who had been sheltering in Tigray.

Your Excellency, our attention has been drawn to emerging [reports](#) of war crimes and crimes against humanity. We are alarmed by Prime Minister Abiy's use of words such as "weeds", "cancer" and "disease," in describing the TPLF; words eerily reminiscent of the language in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that the TPLF chose not to observe the June ceasefire and that civilians [report](#) that TPLF soldiers are responsible for killings, widespread looting and the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas. We also note with further concern reports by [Amnesty International](#) in August, of rape being used as a weapon of war. These reports have also been raised by the United Nation's Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten in her [statement](#) on January 21, 2021.

Although we welcome the actions that have been taken by the African Union so far on the crisis, particularly in naming former President H.E Olusegun Obasanjo as Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa and authorizing an investigation of human rights abuses under the auspices of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, we believe that the African Union can do more. H.E. former President Obasanjo should:

- support a broad and inclusive political process.
- ensure that the response to the conflict, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' (ACHPR) Commission of Inquiry, have full institutional support. The AU should support the independence of the ACHPR Commission of Inquiry and urge the parties to the conflict to cooperate with it.
- engage in confidence building with all parties to the conflict, some of whom have accused the institution of bias, for an effective response.
- urge the relevant authorities to put in place measures to ensure that women and girls in the region are protected from rape and sexual assault in line with Ethiopia's human rights obligations.

Through its member states on the council, the AU should push for UN support to its leading role in the mediation. Throughout, the AU must accord the interests of the civilians caught up in the conflict the highest priority.

Yours Sincerely,

African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies
African Court Coalition
Al Khatim Adlan Center for Enlightenment & Human Development (KACE)
Atrocities Watch Africa
Civil Society Forum for the Horn of Africa
East African Law Society
Equality Now
Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights
Foundation for Democracy and Accountable Governance (FODAG)
International Refugee Rights Initiative
Mouvement INAMAHORO, Femmes & Filles pour la Paix et la Securite
Pan-African Lawyers Union
Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa