

The Alliance of
Genocide Victim
Communities

Uncovering Foreign Interference in Tigrayan Lives

A report by
Security and Justice for Tigrayans Canada
and
The Alliance of Genocide Victim Communities

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1 | Introduction

This report was prepared by Security and Justice for Tigrayns Canada (SJTC) in collaboration with the Alliance for Genocide Victim Communities (AGVC). It is based on interviews with members of the Tigrayan community and research gathered from publicly available information within designated time constraints. While informative, it is important to note that this report is not intended to be exhaustive in its scope.

This report delves into the phenomenon of foreign interference in relation to the Tigray war, exposing the manipulation and silencing of Tigrayan voices. Through research and firsthand accounts, we uncover the tactics used to distort the truth and undermine the representation of the Tigrayan community.

Foreign entities have not only sought to manipulate and control the narrative about what was happening to Tigray and Tigrayan lives but have also employed coercion, threats, and disinformation campaigns to suppress and silence Tigrayans and their plight. This interference extends to the digital realm where online platforms are used to perpetuate a distorted understanding of the conflict.

Our investigation illuminates the alarming impact of foreign interference, revealing how it undermines human dignity and the right to be heard. This report serves as a testament to the resilience of the Tigrayan community as they strive to reclaim their narrative and garner support amid these challenging times.

1.1 Crisis Rewind: The Root Causes of the Conflict (Pre-November 2020)

The origins of the conflict in Tigray are often misrepresented. The Ethiopian central government claims the strife began in September 2020 following Tigray's regional elections. However, its roots trace back further—potentially as early as 2014. That year, ethnic Oromo youth launched protests against the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which had been in power since 1991. The protesters demanded greater political representation, transparent elections, and an end to land expropriation and the suppression of dissent. The government responded with a harsh military crackdown, leading to widespread unrest and, eventually, the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018.

In the wake of Desalegn's resignation, Abiy Ahmed Ali, leader of the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) and the third chairman of the EPRDF, was selected by EPRDF members to lead an interim government until the scheduled 2020 elections. Upon assuming office, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed initiated a reform agenda that included improving relations with Eritrea, Ethiopia's longstanding adversary. This initiative aimed to resolve tensions stemming from the 1998 Badme War—a brutal two-year border conflict that claimed

nearly 100,000 lives. As part of a verbal peace agreement, Abiy committed to ceding disputed territories along the Tigray-Eritrea border without consulting the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the governing party of the Tigray region. This exclusion further strained relations, as the TPLF and Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki harbored deep animosities rooted in the 1998 war.

The peace agreement initially brought hope. Borders reopened, reuniting families separated by decades of conflict, and a semblance of reconciliation emerged between Abiy and Isaias. However, this optimism was short-lived. Eritrean refugees, fleeing the oppressive regime, sought sanctuary in Tigray, but the borders were soon closed again. Meanwhile, tensions between the TPLF and the central government escalated. Amidst this growing divide, Abiy and Isaias were observed visiting each other's military installations, signaling a deepening alliance against their common rival, the TPLF.

In the weeks leading up to the war, a military buildup around Tigray became evident, amplifying fears of imminent conflict.

1.2 The War on Tigray

On November 4th, 2020, while global attention was focused on the American election, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced a "law and order" campaign aimed at dismantling the elected Tigray regional government, citing an alleged attack by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) on a military base in northern Ethiopia. This declaration was swiftly followed by a complete telecommunications blackout in the region and the revocation of licenses for major international media outlets, severely restricting access to information and exacerbating the isolation of the Tigray region.

The conflict resulted in a catastrophic loss of life, with estimates from reputable sources, such as Ghent University, suggesting that Tigrayan casualties may have reached 600,000. However, precise figures remain difficult to confirm due to restricted access to affected areas. Tigrayan officials have indicated that the actual number of casualties is likely much higher, highlighting the severe and ongoing humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict.

Extensive evidence has emerged pointing to the deliberate targeting of civilians, including widespread reports of airstrikes on civilian infrastructure, indiscriminate shelling, and massacres. Numerous credible sources, including human rights organizations and independent investigations, have documented the systematic use of starvation as a weapon of war, the forced displacement of millions, and the widespread use of sexual violence, particularly against women. War crimes committed during the conflict include extrajudicial killings, torture, and the destruction of vital infrastructure.

The scale and nature of these atrocities, particularly the targeting of Tigrayans based on their ethnicity, provide compelling evidence that the violence constitutes genocide, as found for example in The New Lines Institute's 2024 report, "Genocide in Tigray: Serious breaches of international law in the Tigray conflict, Ethiopia, and paths to accountability." International bodies, including the United Nations and human rights organizations, have raised concerns over the systematic nature of the attacks, which were carried out with the apparent intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Tigrayan ethnic group. The targeted killings, ethnic cleansing, widespread sexual violence, and destruction of Tigray's cultural and religious sites align with established criteria for genocide under international law. The evidence suggests that these acts were not merely collateral damage of war but rather part of a deliberate campaign aimed at erasing the Tigrayan identity.

These documented atrocities and the mounting evidence of genocide underscore the critical importance of accountability mechanisms to address these crimes. However, the international community's failure to sustain independent inquiries and enforce transitional justice measures threatens to undermine efforts to achieve justice and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

The decision to close the only independent inquiry into atrocities committed during the Tigray conflict, coupled with the failure to implement key provisions of the Pretoria Agreement, raises significant concerns for the long-term peace and stability of Ethiopia and the wider Horn of Africa. The closure of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) deprives the region of an essential mechanism for truth-telling and accountability, while the lack of concrete progress on transitional justice undermines efforts to address the root causes of the conflict. Furthermore, the reestablishment of diplomatic ties with Ethiopia, without holding the government and other parties to account for violations of international law, risks perpetuating impunity.

With formal mechanisms for accountability being slow to come, improperly funded and then dismantled, the burden of raising awareness and demanding justice has fallen on the diaspora, who have been at the forefront of efforts to expose the atrocities committed during the conflict. Despite these systemic obstacles, they have worked tirelessly to ensure the voices of Tigrayans are heard and the reality of the conflict is not forgotten. Their advocacy encountered intense opposition, most notably through a coordinated campaign of misinformation and disinformation during the Tigray war. This campaign was deliberate and far-reaching, designed to manipulate public perception, distort the facts, and obscure the truth about the conflict. Multiple actors participated in these efforts, working to control the narrative and suppress accurate reporting on the atrocities in Tigray. These actions further complicated the diaspora's already challenging struggle for justice and accountability.

2 | International examples: Silencing Voices

This section delves into the international examples of the forces of Foreign Interference working to intimidate, coerce, and silence Tigrayans in raising awareness and expressing the violations on their lives and ways of living. These international examples shed light on the extent to which foreign governments will guarantee their impunity persists without unwanted attention or interruptions and the broad-reaching impacts of their coercion, manipulation, and suppression of Tigrayans living outside of Ethiopia.

2.1 A Diplomat Silenced

On March 21st, 2021, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, Berhane Kidanemariam, resigned from his position in protest of “the genocidal war in Tigray, and in protest of all the repression and destruction the government is inflicting on the rest of Ethiopia.”¹ Kidanemariam's decision to step down and openly criticize the Ethiopian government's handling of the conflict immediately made him a target of harassment and threats.

Following his resignation, Kidanemariam has spoken out about the intimidation he faced, including receiving threatening phone calls and messages intended to silence or intimidate him.

He was followed by unmarked cars and harassed while walking near his home in Bethesda, Maryland:

“A car crept up alongside him on the sidewalk. A dark window slid down. One of the men inside, an Ethiopian he vaguely recognized, hailed him with an insulting epithet. Then, with a sinister smile, the man offered him ‘a ride.’ Kidanemariam, 60, kept walking, ignoring the car until it finally gunned away. He wondered how the men knew where he’d be walking.

Another incident happened on June 16, Kidanemariam recalled in an exclusive interview with SpyTalk. It was at a Starbucks on Rockville Pike in Bethesda. He was sitting on the patio enjoying a coffee.

“Two men who I don’t know approached me in a peaceful way,” he says. They exchanged friendly greetings in Amharic. But then the faces of the men suddenly turned into monsters. They started to harass me, calling me a traitor, saying I was a paid spy, etcetera.”²

The intimidation tactics used against Kidanemariam are consistent with the broader pattern of transnational repression observed in the Ethiopian government's response to

¹ Kidanemariam, Berhane. “Statement on the Current Situation in Ethiopia | by Berhane Kidanemariam | Medium.” *Berhane Kidanemariam*, 10 March 2021, <https://berhanekidanemariam.medium.com/statement-on-the-current-situation-in-ethiopia-b468f7ed024a>.

² STEIN, JEFF. “Secret Agents, Threats, Fake News Target Ethiopia Regime's Critics in US.” *Spy Talk*, 05 August 2021 https://www.spytalk.co/p/secret-agents-threats-fake-news-target?utm_source=publication-search

dissenting voices. There have been reports of individuals who express criticism against the government or its policies within the Tigray context facing various forms of harassment, including surveillance, threats, and even physical harm.

2.2 Advocates Intimidated

Around the world, Tigrayan advocates have reported instances of receiving anonymous threatening phone calls. Prominent advocates for the Tigray community, like Meaza Gidey and Millete Birhanemaskel, have faced acts of physical intimidation. Meaza was leading a peaceful protest in Los Angeles when she had a gun drawn at her during a protest.³ Millette told the writers of this report that she was slapped across the face by a member of the Ethiopian diaspora in public. Actions like the drawing of a gun or the physical assault on Millete Birhanemaskel silence Tigrayan advocates by instilling fear and intimidation, undermining their ability to express their views and advocate for their community's rights. Such violent acts not only violate individual rights but also contribute to a broader climate of repression and suppression of dissenting voices.

2.3 Journalists Threatened

Numerous journalists covering the atrocities in Tigray faced fierce backlash, including threats and smear campaigns online and in person following their reports. This includes CNN's Chief International Investigative Correspondent, Nima Elbagir, and award-winning investigative journalist, Lucy Kassa.

In an exclusive interview with BBC News's "The Documentary Podcast," Lucy Kassa details the chilling night of February 8, 2021.⁴ In Ethiopia, journalist Lucy Kassa was at her home in Addis Ababa, diligently compiling testimonies and evidence for a new report that exposed the hidden genocidal war in Tigray, which had been concealed from the public because of the telecommunications blackout. Her reporting presented a starkly contrasting picture of the war compared to the narratives being put forth by the Ethiopian government. One day, she heard an unexpected knock at the door and was confronted by three armed men who violently attacked her and ransacked her home. They subjected her to interrogation regarding her work and tried to draw connections between her ethnicity and her journalistic publications. They warned her to "stop digging into this war" and issued threats against her life before confiscating her laptop and hard drive and leaving.

Nima Elgabir is another courageous journalist who fearlessly uncovered a multitude of hidden atrocities perpetrated by the Ethiopian government and their Eritrean and Amhara

³ Hailemariam, Esayas. "Prosecute the Ethiopian Terrorist Who Pointed a Gun at Unarmed Peaceful Protestors!" *change.org*, 17 April 2021.

⁴ "Ethiopia's Disinformation War." *BBC, The Documentary Podcast*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0chvm18>.

allies. Throughout her time covering the inhumane crisis unfolding in Tigray since the genocidal war that started in November 2020, she had faced incessant targeting and being barraged online with threats for her work uncovering that Eritrean troops were present, operational and committing heinous human rights abuses in Tigray,⁵ that a commercial flagship, Ethiopian airlines, was transporting weaponry and military troops into Tigray,⁶ that Tigrayans were being sent to concentration camps and their tortured, mutilated bodies were washing up the Tekeze river.⁷ She described the war on Tigray as “ethnic cleansing,” stated that it bears “the hallmarks of genocide,” and explained that the information war via social media and other online platforms is a vital component of the aggressors’ strategy.⁸ The Al Jazeera segment, titled “Hate speech and misinformation in Ethiopia’s war,” highlights the way modern-day social interconnecting platforms (i.e. Facebook, X, etc.) also function as modern-day weapons, used to perpetuate misinformation and competing narratives to control unwanted narratives and undermine the traumatic lived experiences of victims of genocide, as well as those who advocate on their behalf.

2.4 Targets of Extradition

Tigrayan individuals and groups have been targeted for extradition to Ethiopia globally. The recent deportation of a large number of Tigrayans by Saudi Arabia serves as a significant example of this trend. After reports surfaced highlighting the appalling conditions in which the Saudi government was holding Ethiopian migrants, there was mounting pressure on Saudi Arabia to address the situation, and they eventually returned a number of them to Ethiopia.⁹

Human Rights Watch noted that 40% of the 40,000 Ethiopians deported from Saudi Arabia were Tigrayan and that the surge in repatriations coincided with an increase in profiling, arbitrary detentions and forcible disappearances of Tigrayans by Ethiopian authorities in Ethiopia.¹⁰ Human Rights Watch’s calls for Saudi Arabia to stop deporting Tigrayan migrants to Ethiopia went unheeded, and they went on to document how

⁵ “Eritrean troops disguised as Ethiopian military are blocking critical aid in Tigray” *CNN*, Website, 13 May 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/12/africa/tigray-axum-aid-blockade-cmd-intl/index.html>

⁶ “Ethiopia used airlines to transport weapons during Tigray conflict” *CNN*, Youtube, 7 October 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2021/10/06/ethiopia-airlines-tigray-weapons-elbagir-amanpour-vpx.cnn>

⁷ “Men are marched out of prison camps. Then corpses float down the river” *CNN*, Website, 10 September 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/05/africa/ethiopia-tigray-humera-sudan-bodies-cmd-intl/index.html>

⁸ “Hate speech and misinformation in Ethiopia’s war.” *YouTube*, Al Jazeera, The Listening Post, 13 November 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCuz4JAWaAU&t=582s>

⁹ Brown, Will, and Zecharias Zelalem. “First migrants released from Saudi detention centres arrive home after Telegraph investigation.” *Telegraph*, 27 January 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/first-migrants-released-saudi-detention-centres-arrive-home/>.

¹⁰ “Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared.” *HRW*, 5 January 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/05/ethiopia-returned-tigrayans-detained-abused>.

Tigrayans who stepped off the planes were immediately detained and abused by Ethiopian authorities.¹¹

Saudi Arabia's actions violated the principle of non-refoulement, a fundamental aspect of key legal frameworks such as the UN Convention Against Torture. Despite acceding to the convention on September 23, 1997, and thus being bound by its obligations, Saudi Arabia detained Ethiopian citizens in an improper manner and deported Tigrayans back to Ethiopia. Tigrayan deportation violated Article 3 of the Convention, which explicitly prohibits state parties from transferring individuals to another state where there is a risk of torture or inhumane treatment.

Moreover, such deportations highlight the complicity of foreign governments in supporting or enabling repressive regimes, contributing to the suppression of dissent and the persecution of specific ethnic groups. There are a number of cases of Tigrayan refugees and asylum seekers around the world being deported back to Ethiopia,¹² and the authors of this report suggest contacting the Tigrayan-Canadian Immigration Association and its founder, Sisay Woldemichael who are excellent sources for these stories.

The Ethiopian government officials' attempt to prosecute and extradite a Tigrayan-American for participating in a reenactment video intended to raise awareness about the crisis in Tigray also highlights the malevolence directed towards Tigrayans.

Michael Berhe, 48, from Boston, played the role of a priest who witnessed the massacre in the holy city of Aksum (or Axum) in a video created by Tigrayan-American activists, which was clearly marked as a dramatic reenactment. The video, which was intended to raise awareness of the atrocities committed in Aksum, was released a few days before Amnesty International's February 2021 release of its report, "The Massacre in Axum," which contained horrifying, disturbing details of how the massacre unfolded. Ethiopian representatives subsequently tried to undermine Amnesty International by associating the organization with the dramatisation video. In response, Amnesty International had to release a statement clarifying that they were not connected to the video and had never met Michael Berhe. The Globe and Mail reported at the time:

...leaked documents show the (Ethiopian) government is still trying to promote the false theory.

¹¹ "Tigrayans Deported From Saudi Abused in Ethiopia, HRW Says." Bloomberg News, 05 January 2022, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/tigrayans-deported-from-saudi-abused-in-ethiopia-hrw-says-1.1703211>

¹² "Djibouti's Refoulement" Sending Tigrayan Refugees to Their Death" OmnaTigray, July 2021, <https://omnatigray.org/djiboutis-refoulement-sending-tigrayan-refugees-to-their-death/#:~:text=The%20situation%20in%20Tigray%20is,also%20sought%20refuge%20in%20Djibouti.>

In one document, Foreign Affairs Ministry official Yanit Abera Habtemariam recommends that Mr. Berhe be prosecuted for crimes against the state, so he could be deported from the United States to Ethiopia. In another document, Ethiopian diplomat Gebeyehu Ganga asks his country's embassy in Washington to find out if U.S. authorities will hand him over to Ethiopia. The Globe e-mailed both officials to request comment, but they did not respond.

Mr. Berhe, an interpreter at a hospital in Boston, said he has received a barrage of death threats from pro-government Ethiopians. 'They've compared my innocent act with war crimes committed by murderers,' he told The Globe in an interview.

'For me, it's evidence of just how far the government wants to go to silence Tigrayans.'¹³

The Ethiopian government's efforts to prosecute and extradite a Tigrayan-American involved in a reenactment video highlight their dedication to intimidation, disinformation, and a lack of regard for truth within the Ethiopian diplomatic community and government officials.

3 | Canadian Examples: Silencing Voices

3.1 Online Repression of Tigrayan-Canadians

The Ethiopian government's strategies of restricting communication and access to Tigray have created an environment that fosters the spread of disinformation and misinformation, impacting public opinion.¹⁴ International journalists, impartial investigators, and human rights organizations are still being denied entry to Tigray. The online harassment targeting of individuals discussing the conflict in Tigray, combined with the dissemination of false information, represents a form of foreign interference. This interference significantly restricts Tigrayan-Canadians' ability to express their views openly and hinders their efforts to raise awareness about the conflict, leading to distorted public discourse, manipulated perceptions and heightened communal divides. These factors ultimately impede progress toward peace and justice. This behaviour aligns with wider patterns of external interference seen in online spaces, where malicious actors linked to governments use digital platforms to create division, control narratives, and suppress opposition. Like other diaspora communities impacted by

¹³ York, Geoffrey, and Zecherias Zelalem. "Tigray conflict sparks a war of fake tweets and intense propaganda." The Globe and Mail, 1 April 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-tigray-conflict-sparks-a-war-of-fake-tweets-and-false-propaganda>.

¹⁴ Wilmut, Claire, et al. "Dueling Information Campaigns: The War Over the Narrative in Tigray." *Media Manipulation Casebook*, 20 August 2021, <https://mediamanipulation.org/case-studies/dueling-information-campaigns-war-over-narrative-tigray>

conflicts, the Tigrayan-Canadians who encountered this online harassment and manipulation carry significant risks of psychological and social repercussions.^{15 16}

The authors of this report have received numerous accounts from advocates for the Tigrayan people in Canada regarding enduring and persistent online harassment and intimidation. These reports describe incidents on various platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter (now known as X), Instagram, and Clubhouse, which have been ongoing since the start of the conflict in Tigray. The harassment reported includes actions such as defamation, virtual harassment, online mobbing, cyberstalking, and doxxing. Additionally, frequent threats have been made against the well-being of users, their property, assets, businesses, and families in Tigray. Sadly, the current situation still sees virulent and dehumanizing hate speech being directed towards Tigrayans online.

Tseday Makbib is an Ethiopian-Canadian based in Toronto with no Tigrayan heritage. She is a prominent figure in East African and Ethiopian online communities and a single mother to twin sons, both of whom are autistic. Tseday began speaking out against the war and its genocidal intent early on, immediately becoming the target of intense online harassment and receiving numerous death threats. Tseday is currently being sued by a representative of Eritrea's HGDEF and has been openly declared as persona non grata by members of the ruling Prosperity Party in Ethiopia. She briefly describes the impact of this in a letter attached as APPENDIX B:

"The individuals spreading lies about me are affiliated with Ethiopian government social media accounts. While the recent threats are not direct, they still put my life at risk because of the intentional misinformation being disseminated about me.

The most recent incident occurred in October 2023 on TikTok, where over 3000 people listened to a discussion, followed by a subsequent session that continued to spread misinformation. This situation endangers my life and places my family back home at risk of being abducted, as it is alleged that I am managing "TPLF's money" from Canada. Many individuals in Ethiopia are being abducted in exchange for ransom money, which is my greatest fear. I rarely communicate with my family back home out of fear their rights would be violated in order to silence me. Moreover, another impact of the defamation was that I was unable to return to Ethiopia when my father passed away. I wanted to attend his funeral but it was (still is) too risky for me to travel to Ethiopia while such defamation continues."

Tseday has developed health disorders from the stress of this experience.

¹⁵ Jamie Ducharme. "Watching War Unfold on Social Media Affects Your Mental Health." March 8, 2022 <https://time.com/6155630/ukraine-war-social-media-mental-health/>

¹⁶ Vintilă, Mona et al. "Fake news during the war in Ukraine: coping strategies and fear of war in the general population of Romania and in aid workers." *Frontiers in psychology* vol. 14 1151794. 12 May. 2023, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1151794

The deliberate propagation of false information and misinformation not only diminishes the credibility of Tigrayan voices and their advocacy allies but also perpetuates detrimental stereotypes and narratives that marginalize the Tigrayan diaspora on a global scale. Misinformation and disinformation regarding the conflict in Tigray have fueled confusion, discord, and distrust.

The amplification and circulation of false information have played a significant part in the genocide on Tigray and have inflicted real harm on individuals and communities. An example of the extent of this impact can be found in the case of Dr. Meareg Amare Abrha. Dr. Meareg Amare Abrha was a widely respected Tigrayan chemistry professor who was murdered after false and inflammatory posts about him were spread on Facebook. His killers were directed to his home by these posts, which included his photograph and address. The messages accused him of ethnic bias and political allegiance due to his Tigrayan ethnicity amidst a broader campaign of incitement against Tigrayans during the ongoing conflict. Despite appeals to Facebook to remove the posts, the content stayed up until it was too late, leading to his brutal murder on November 3, 2021.¹⁷

The online mobbing of advocates for Tigray, combined with the use of hashtags that falsely associate them with or label them as members of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has had significant and harmful consequences for Tigrayans and their allies. In addition to conflating all Tigrayans and their allies as members of TPLF, it also contributes to a false narrative that presents the TPLF as a recognized terrorist group. These narratives have emboldened and justified the Ethiopian government's actions against Tigrayans, resulting in instances where Tigrayans have faced unexpected interrogations, detentions, torture and death based on their ethnicity and suspected political beliefs. These damaging narratives that imply ethnic identity is a basis for suspicion, discrimination, and alienation have also seemingly permeated foreign governments, including Canada, as Tigrayans have sometimes found themselves facing lines of questioning about their affiliation with the TPLF.

Dr. Abel Gidey, a non-political emergency room physician who worked tirelessly at Ayder Hospital in Mekelle during the Tigray war to save the injured on all sides of the conflict, recounts being questioned by government officials in Canada regarding his political stance in testimony attached to this document as APPENDIX A:

...during the Subcommittee on International Human Rights (SDIR) hearing, I faced a particularly challenging moment when I was questioned about my alleged membership with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). It was an unfair and baseless accusation that aimed to discredit my testimony and undermine the credibility of the Tigray genocide. Being questioned about my affiliation with the TPLF was deeply hurtful and

¹⁷ "Son sues Meta over father's killing in Ethiopia." Peter Mwai, BBC. December 14, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-63938628>

frustrating. It was an attempt to portray me as biased or politically motivated rather than acknowledging the truth of the genocide and the suffering endured by countless innocent people. The questioning not only discredited my experiences but also highlighted the challenges faced by survivors in seeking justice and recognition for their ordeal.

Not long after my testimony, I faced a similar challenging and disheartening experience with the Immigration and Refugee Board. They interrogated me, doubting my ethnicity and even inquired about my membership with the TPLF. It was a difficult moment for me. Despite my efforts to provide evidence and documentation of my refugee status, my immigration process has been significantly delayed. This unfortunate delay has prevented me from reuniting with my family, adding to the emotional strain and uncertainty we already face.

This testimony illustrates the far-reaching impacts and control foreign interference has on victims across the global diaspora. False narratives and conspiracy theories disseminated through social media platforms and online forums foster skepticism and doubt, thereby affecting the ability of Tigrayan Canadians to have their authentic concerns and experiences heard and acknowledged. Such interference obstructs the pursuit of truth, justice, and accountability, impeding meaningful dialogue and reconciliation efforts.

The coordinated efforts to discredit individuals who are exposing the atrocities against Tigrayans and advocating for a resolution to the crisis, along with the intense personal attacks they face, have instilled fear in many Tigrayan-Canadians, human rights advocates, social influencers, and policymakers. This fear has hindered them from openly sharing their perspectives.

3.2 Threats in Canada and Ethiopia

Tigrayan Canadians have reported experiencing a significant sense of fear and intimidation due to the grave threats and human rights abuses faced by their families and loved ones in Ethiopia. The widespread reports of Tigrayans being rounded up and detained, individuals disappearing without a trace, and properties and businesses being confiscated or shuttered have created an atmosphere of terror and uncertainty.^{18 19}

Tigrayan Canadian Kibrom Kahssay from Edmonton, Alberta, described his experience in Appendix D, with photo and video evidence attached in APPENDIX H, I and J:

¹⁸ "Abuses against civilians part of 'systemic attack' against Tigrayans in Ethiopia, rights groups allege." *CBC*, 6 April 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/ethiopia-violence-report-1.6409958>.

¹⁹ "Crimes against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Western Tigray Zone." *Human Rights Watch*, 6 April 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/06/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-ethiopias-western-tigray-zone>.

I felt a strong obligation to be a voice for my voiceless people in Tigray. With the help of my colleagues, I travelled to various protests to advocate for the Tigrayan cause. My car became a mobile billboard, covered with posters depicting the plight of Tigray civilians and QR codes to inform Canadians about the situation and urge them to stand against the war. However, my activism came with significant risks. I received numerous threats from members of the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in Canada. They warned me that if I ventured into certain areas, they would burn me and my car. They also expressed a desire to find me alone so they could kill me. During a protest in Edmonton, my photo was published in the Edmonton Journal. The next morning, I found a threatening letter under my door, stating, "You will both die like your people soon, wait." I reported this to the RCMP, who visited my home, took notes, and advised me to protect myself. In another incident, a neighbour informed me that he saw two men vandalizing my car at midnight. They peeled off my posters and slashed one of my tires. I reported this to the RCMP, who promised to investigate but found that the apartment's security cameras were not functioning. Despite this, they reiterated my right to protest and advised me to take precautions. I continued my activism, replacing the damaged posters on my car. Unfortunately, my car was vandalized again, this time with scratches on the passenger side. I reported this to the police as well ... The threats and harassment extended to social media, where I received abusive messages. My activism also led to threats against my family in Addis Ababa. Some individuals warned me that there would be consequences if I didn't stop my activities. True to their threats, my family members, who had no connection to Tigray and did not even speak Tigrinya, were arrested and tortured. One day, while shopping with my friend's sister at a Superstore, an Eritrean government supporter and her son confronted me. The woman threatened that I would be killed soon, and her son attempted to provoke a physical altercation. Witnesses at the scene defended me, and when the police arrived, they decided not to press charges against the woman and her son but advised me to be careful. Throughout this period, I felt terrified, depressed, stressed, and miserable. The RCMP's responses often felt insufficient, and I spent much of my time confined to my home, dealing with both physical pain and the psychological burden of the threats and harassment.

The well-founded fear of having loved ones subjected to arbitrary detention in Ethiopia or kidnapped for ransom has weighed heavily on Tigrayan-Canadians, making them hesitant to publicly advocate for their community or share their personal stories, even with their full identities concealed. Sieru Kebede from Toronto conveyed this story in a testimony attached as APPENDIX C:

"...several ethnic Tigrayans around the world, including myself, decided to open a Twitter account for the first time to let the world know of what the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea were doing to our people in the dark. I, too created an account but soon changed my name to protect my family members and relatives back home. I had three brothers that lived in Addis at that time, where 2 have since fled to Rwanda. And I had an aunt, an uncle, grandparents and cousins that were stuck in Tigray. In Tigray, the soldiers were stopping civilians and forcing them to unlock their phones. Any image or media that had pictures of TPLF leadership or had documentation of atrocities committed was cause for arrest and, most of the time, execution.

In Addis Ababa, there were community checkpoints where government collaborators were stopping anyone, checking their IDs to see if they have Tigrinya sounding names or last names, or born in Tigray and detaining them en masse. They also used to search their facebook and other social media accounts to see if they have content they deemed an opposition to them, even if someone else posted it. I did not want to give the government leverage, to use my family members to silence me, as I was regularly posting and sharing with my family. “

The necessity for online anonymity not only underscores the vulnerability of Tigrayan-Canadians but also reveals the immense concern they have for the safety and well-being of their families in Ethiopia. The emotional toll of navigating silence and anonymity while witnessing the suffering of their loved ones, as civilians were targeted for various forms of abuse, as their home communities were intentionally destroyed, adds an additional layer of pain and distress to an already challenging situation. Consequently, Tigrayan-Canadians experience a heightened sense of isolation and frustration as their primary focus becomes prioritizing the safety and security of their families.

3.3 Echoing Addis, Severed Ties and a Change of Identity.

The Tigrayan-Canadian priests from an Ethiopian Orthodox church shared with the authors of this report the significant social suffering experienced by Tigrayans in Canada as a result of the genocide they faced, mentioning that friendships and marriages ended, businesses failed, churches were divided, people lost their jobs, and children felt disconnected from their parents who were preoccupied with worry for relatives in Ethiopia.

The stress was exacerbated by the challenge of communicating with relatives due to the federal government's two-year telecommunication shutdown in Tigray. However, there was also a deep strain caused by the deliberate severing of ties between Ethiopian Canadians of other ethnic backgrounds and Tigrayan-Canadians, as well as their intentional efforts to portray all Tigrayans as malevolent or terrorists. A Tigrayan-Canadian in Toronto, Messel Desta, tweeted about this type of experience on the subway in Toronto, “This Ethiopian couple in front of me heard me talking on the phone in Tigrigna regarding #Tigray and saw my traditional Tigrayan hairstyle, and told their kids to watch out for ‘people like them’ and that ‘they’re the most evil creatures on the planet’. I’m speechless.”²⁰ Two months later, Messel tweets about an Ethiopian woman in Toronto who was speaking terribly about Tigrayans during a hair appointment, calling them “junta this, junta that” until Messel answered a phone call in Tigrinya, ending the tirade.²¹

²⁰ Desta, Messel. *Twitter Post*. 2nd November 2022. <https://x.com/messeldestaxo/status/1587904645070000129>

²¹ Desta, Messel. *Twitter Post*. 3rd September 2022. <https://x.com/messeldestaxo/status/1566105247432732673>

Helen Beyene, a Tigrayan-Canadian, reported on her loss of a church community at Saint Mary Church in Gatineau, Quebec, in APPENDIX E:

Here in Ottawa-Gatineau, out of nine church board committee members, three were Tigrayan. The other six, and the priest who is also not Tigrayan, have taken control over the church. Tigrayan children, as well as adults, are intentionally excluded from the choir. The leaders delayed the members' board committee elections, and amended bylaws without bringing it to the general assembly to vote. They also added 18 fake members from different parts of Canada as well as Ethiopia. They held elections without all the members. Just a few people have controlled the entire church. Tigrayans who challenged the priest and chairman have been threatened with legal action, and so on.

Another Tigrayan-Canadian from the Toronto area who wished to remain anonymous described to the authors of this report how disorienting these types of losses were, "I used to call myself Ethiopian-Canadian. I had many friends in the Ethiopian-Canadian community and spent years helping set up a community association. I helped a number of Ethiopians immigrate to Canada over the years, and we collectively worked for the betterment of all of us. When the war broke out, I lost my entire social circle. They took the side of the Ethiopian federal government spread false narratives, and I heard malicious lies about the Tigrayan people being repeated. I am Tigrayan, and I had never called myself Tigrayan. I called myself Ethiopian, Ethiopian-Canadian. I stopped calling myself Ethiopian because it was clear they no longer identified me as an Ethiopian. It was very difficult to realize that I had lost all of my friends. Everyone. Some people I'd been friends with for 20-30 years, and I had watched their kids grow up. It was very hard.."

During a period when the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, faced budget constraints due to excessive spending on the Tigray war, he made the decision to close down several embassies worldwide. As part of this process, he recalled ambassadors and notably expressed his confidence in the Ethiopian diaspora, stating that they were more effective at defending his actions than his own ambassadors.²² The Ethiopian-Canadian community reportedly began advocating the viewpoints of the Ethiopian government from early in the war, expressing these perspectives in meetings with members of parliament in Canada, voicing them at community rallies, and propagating false narratives about Tigrayans to other Canadians. The non-Tigrayan Ethiopian-Canadian community vastly surpasses the Tigrayan-Canadian population in Canada. The overall lack of public awareness about the region, the complete telecommunication shutdown in Tigray imposed by the federal government, and the

²² "The world watches as Abiy loses it — and risks losing Ethiopia, too." Alex De Waal, World Peace Foundation, September 17, 2021.
<https://worldpeacefoundation.org/blog/the-world-watches-as-abiy-loses-it-and-risks-losing-ethiopia-too/>

prohibition of foreign journalists' access to Tigray,²³ collectively heightened the challenge for Tigrayan-Canadians to have their voices heard in Canada.

A small community banded together. Our anonymous Tigrayan-Canadian who lost his friends went on to say, "I had to rebuild everything. But I found Tigrayan-Canadians, and we began to advocate for the end of the war and for Tigrayan human rights. This Tigrayan-Canadian community is amazing, and their support has meant so much through the darkest days. "

3.4 Narratives of the Tigray War in Canada

Tigrayans in Ethiopia, Canada and around the world have faced a concerted effort to gaslight, diminish and dismiss their lived experiences. In Canada, this has had an effect on how and whether Tigrayan experiences have been heard.

In 2021, a scheduled webinar at Wilfrid Laurier University set to explore the impact of war on Tigrayan families and children was abruptly cancelled due to pressure from a Canadian professor and a group supportive of the Ethiopian federal government, the Ethio-Canadian Network for Advocacy and Support (ECNAS). This cancellation deprived the Tigrayan community of a crucial platform to share their stories and seek essential support during a severe crisis. In response, 56 academics signed a letter, published by African Arguments, urging Wilfrid Laurier's Office of the President to provide a public statement of accountability, reaffirm the university's commitment to academic freedom and the combatting of harassment and racism, and grant the panel organizers the opportunity to reschedule the event. An excerpt from the letter explains the circumstances surrounding the cancellation of the webinar, with the full letter attached as APPENDIX G:

"Understanding the Implications of War on Children and Families in Tigray," was scheduled to happen on Monday, October 25th as part of an undergraduate course titled "International Social Work" offered by the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. It was organized by Professor Bree Akesson, Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Global Adversity and Wellbeing and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Work, and Ethiopian-Canadian community activists Tsion Tekie and Kassaye Berhanu-MacDonald, an adoptee from the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. The panel was sponsored by WLU's Centre for Research on Security Practices, the Tshepo Institute for the Study of Contemporary Africa, and United Tegar Canada, a community organization created in 2020 in response to the war on Tigray.

²³ "As Ethiopia Fights in Tigray Region, a Crackdown on Journalists", Declan Walsh. The New York Times, May 13, 2021.:<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/13/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-journalists.html>

However, on the afternoon of Friday, October 22nd, the Office of the President notified organizers that they could not proceed with the panel scheduled for the following Monday. The administration reached this decision following multiple emails and a threatening letter protesting the panel's focus on Tigray from Dr. Tihut Asfaw of the Ethio-Canadian Network for Advocacy and Support (ECNAS), a partisan, pro-war organization which fundraises "to support lobbying to fight misinformation and disinformation by the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front]." The ECNAS position was supported by Professor Ann Fitz-Gerald, who at this point had written extensively in support of the Ethiopian government's military operations in Tigray. Furthermore, the Ethiopian co-organizers were subject to harassment and abuse on the basis of presumed ethnic Tigrayan identity - to the extent of being referred to as "terrorists" - and the panel targeted by automated bots filling up registration for the virtual event. This is consistent with the escalation of "coordinated inauthentic behaviour" and organized disinformation campaigns in virtual space in support of the war identified by researchers and social media services such as Facebook.

The Ethiopian-Canadian and Tigrayan-Canadian organizers expressed profound frustration to the authors of this report that this non-political webinar was cancelled and that they faced active politicization and vilification, being wrongly labelled as terrorists and TPLF members.

Notably, during a Canadian author's expert testimony at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights (SDIR) hearing regarding the situation in Tigray on October 28, 2022, the expert witness suggested that independent articles and reports emerging from the conflict were written by "gullible Western journalists" and proceeded to undermine the reporting of Amnesty International.²⁴ When this expert witness was shortly thereafter questioned by a member of the Canadian Parliament about evidence of the expert's harmful online speech targeting Tigrayans, the witness refused to adhere to the rules of the SDIR hearing and abruptly left the proceedings early. The authors of this report were told that this disruptive and dismissive action felt similar to the challenges faced by other Tigrayans when sharing their stories in different environments.

Both the above-noted Canadian professor and Canadian author received public recognition from the Ethio-Canadian Network for Advocacy and Support "for their contribution in their endeavour to explain the Ethiopian version of truth."²⁵

Despite the signing of the Pretoria Agreement on November 2, 2022, disruptions, dismissal, and denial persist in public discussions, university webinars, and other forums where the atrocities in Tigray are being addressed. For example, during a Queen's

²⁴ "CURRENT SITUATION IN TIGRAY." House of Commons, Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, 28 October 2022, (starts @ 9:34:38 mins) <https://parl.vu.parl.gc.ca/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20221028/-1/37919?Embedded=true&globalstreamId=20&viewMode=3>.

²⁵ "Jeff Pearce, Prof. Ann Fitzgerald Awarded for Defending Ethiopian Version of Truth Abroad." ENA, 6 December 2021, https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_31262.

University webinar titled "Conceptualizing Tegarū's Experiences of Injustice Through a Decolonial Onto-Epistemology of Meadi," held on March 7, 2024, Professor Fisseha Gidey Gebremedhin's presentation was sabotaged by participants who used vulgar language and displayed obscene images on the screen, ultimately leading to the cancellation of the question and answer session. Unfortunately, such behaviour is not uncommon in webinars, public digital spaces, and any other public forums where Tigrayan stories are shared.

4 | Conclusion

Foreign interference undermines the voices of Tigrayan-Canadians, perpetuating a distorted narrative of their lived realities and silencing their concerns. This interference manifests in multiple forms, such as disinformation campaigns perpetuating Ethiopian government narratives about what was happening to Tigrayans in attempts to cover up and silence Tigrayan voices, using coercion and threats, and deploying intimidation tactics in both physical and digital realms. Tigrayan-Canadians remain dedicated to seeking justice and accountability for the atrocities in Tigray, grappling with vulnerabilities and emotional strains as they navigate safety considerations for themselves and their families.

4.1 Call to Action

It is the responsibility of our government to ensure the protection of Canadian citizens from any form of coercion or undue influence by foreign entities, as such actions contradict the principles of sovereignty and self-determination. Permitting such interference may not only compromise our national interests and security but also undermine the integrity of our democratic processes and the freedom of our citizens. Therefore, safeguarding Canadians from external pressure is essential for upholding our values and safeguarding our nation's autonomy.

The Canadian government should acknowledge the unique challenges faced by Tigrayan Canadians and take concrete steps to address the various forms of foreign interference they encounter. This could involve:

- combating disinformation campaigns,
- explicitly criminalizing online harassment,
- enhancing transparency in governance processes,
- creating a designated task force to address foreign interference,
- creating and distributing educational materials for targeted victim communities in Canada,
- creating protocol for response to foreign interference,

- training law enforcement officers on responding to incidents of foreign interference,
- creating a hotline or reporting mechanism for sharing these instances when they occur, and
- offering assistance to Tigrayan-Canadians who are vulnerable to surveillance, intimidation, coercion, and other forms of threats.

There are thirty-seven recommendations outlined in the Human Rights Action Group's report entitled "Combatting Transnational Repression and Foreign Interference in Canada," which was fully endorsed and supported by the Alliance of Genocide Victim Communities (AGVC) and Security and Justice for Tigrayans Canada (SJTC).

The Canadian government should ensure the safety and welfare of Tigrayan Canadians, protecting their rights. Moreover, Canada holds the potential to play a crucial role cutting through disinformation and in raising awareness about the under-reported crisis in Tigray, a region that has not received the level of attention commensurate with the severity of the situation.

Dr. Abel Gidey | *May 23rd 2024*

Once upon a time, in the heart of Tigray, Ethiopia, I lived a life filled with purpose and dedication. As a physician, I was deeply committed to providing healthcare and saving lives in my community. Little did I know that my life would soon take an unimaginable turn as Tigray became engulfed in a genocidal war. In November 2020, the conflict erupted in Tigray, causing widespread devastation, displacement, and unimaginable suffering. My wife, our two young children, and I found ourselves caught in the middle of this horrific war. The once peaceful and vibrant region we called home was now torn apart by violence and chaos. Despite the dangers and constant threats, I remained dedicated to my duty as a physician. I worked tirelessly to provide medical assistance to those affected by the war, often risking my own life in the process. Every day, I witnessed the atrocities and the toll it took on my people, fueling my determination to alleviate their suffering.

As the war intensified, I realised that I had to make a difficult decision to protect my family. With heavy hearts, we made the arduous journey to seek refuge in neighbouring Sudan. We were grateful for the safety we enjoyed, but our hearts were heavy with the memories of our homeland and the devastation we had witnessed. Despite the difficult circumstances, I continued using my medical skills to help fellow refugees, providing much-needed care and support.

Eventually, I had the opportunity to come to Canada. As a survivor of the Tigray genocide and a witness to the atrocities that took place, I felt a deep sense of responsibility to share my experiences and contribute to the pursuit of justice. When I was given the opportunity to participate in the SDIR hearing, I knew it was a chance to shed light on the horrors that occurred in Tigray and advocate for the rights of my people. I wanted to ensure that the truth about the Tigray genocide was heard and acknowledged by Canada and the broader international community. The world needed to know the extent of the violence and the suffering endured by innocent civilians. By sharing my firsthand experiences and providing evidence, I hoped to strengthen the case for international intervention and support.

However, during the SDIR hearing, I faced a particularly challenging moment when I was questioned about my alleged membership with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). It was an unfair and baseless accusation that aimed to discredit my testimony and undermine the credibility of the Tigray genocide. Being questioned about my affiliation with the TPLF was deeply hurtful and frustrating. It was an attempt to portray me as biased or politically motivated rather than acknowledging the truth of the genocide and the suffering endured by countless innocent people. The questioning not only discredited my experiences but also highlighted the challenges faced by survivors in seeking justice and recognition for their ordeal.

Not long after my testimony, I faced a similar challenging and disheartening experience with the Immigration and Refugee Board. They interrogated me, doubting my ethnicity and even inquired.

About my membership with the TPLF. It was a difficult moment for me. Despite my efforts to provide evidence and documentation of my refugee status, my immigration process has been significantly delayed. This unfortunate delay has prevented me from reuniting with my family, adding to the emotional strain and uncertainty we already face.

It is disheartening to know that those who have already endured so much continue to face obstacles in my journey to rebuild our lives in Canada. The immigration system should prioritize the well-being and reunification of families, especially in cases where individuals have fled from conflict and persecution. It is crucial for authorities to recognize the unique circumstances faced by survivors of genocide and provide us with the support and compassion we deserve. By streamlining the immigration process and ensuring fair and thorough assessments, individuals like me can be given the opportunity to reunite with our loved ones and begin rebuilding our lives in a safe and welcoming environment. My story serves as a reminder of the importance of empathy, understanding, and efficient immigration processes to help those who have endured unimaginable hardships find solace and security in their new home.

Furthermore, the inquiry into my involvement with the TPLF made me hesitant to speak out publicly about what was happening in Tigray. I feared that my words would be misconstrued and my intentions would be questioned. It was disheartening to witness how far-reaching the transnational repression of Ethiopia and Eritrea is and how it could potentially affect my life here in Canada by casting doubt on my credibility and impeding my efforts to advocate for justice. Despite these challenges, I remain steadfast in my commitment to raising awareness about the atrocities in Tigray and seeking justice for the victims. I believe that by sharing my story and continuing to advocate for the rights of my people, I can contribute to a brighter future for Tigray and prevent similar tragedies from occurring again.

The impact of agents from Ethiopia and Eritrea on my life here in Canada is significant. Their attempts to discredit my testimony and hinder the immigration process have added to the emotional strain and uncertainty that my family and I already face. They have been trying to exclude me from the larger community by following me in restaurants, shops and even at church. It is disheartening to experience these lingering effects of the conflict, even in a safe and welcoming country like Canada.

However, I remain resilient and determined to overcome these obstacles. Throughout my journey, I carry the scars of the genocidal war in Tigray. But I also carry resilience, hope, and a determination to make a difference. Driven by my experiences, I have become an advocate for peace and justice, raising awareness about the atrocities in Tigray and working towards a brighter future for my homeland. I will continue to work towards raising awareness, seeking justice, and rebuilding my life in Canada. My journey from Tigray to Sudan and ultimately to Canada is a testament that hope can emerge from the depths of despair and that the human spirit can prevail against all odds. My hope is that through the SDIR hearing and other platforms, the truth about the Tigray genocide will be uncovered, and those responsible will be held accountable.

Tseday Mekbib | *May 23rd 2024*

Due to the use of my real name during my advocacy for Tigray, I am currently considered persona non grata in Ethiopia. The individuals spreading lies about me seem to be affiliated with Ethiopian government social media accounts. While the recent threats are not direct, they still put my life at risk because of the intentional misinformation being disseminated about me.

The most recent incident occurred in October 2023 on TikTok, where over 3000 people listened to a discussion, followed by a subsequent session that continued to spread misinformation. This situation endangers my life and places my family back home at risk of being abducted, as it is alleged that I am managing "TPLF's money" from Canada. Many individuals in Ethiopia are being abducted in exchange for ransom money, which is my greatest fear. I rarely communicate with my family back home out of fear their rights would be violated in order to silence me. Moreover, another impact of the defamation was that I was unable to return to Ethiopia when my father passed away. I wanted to attend his funeral but it was (still is) too risky for me to travel to Ethiopia while such defamation continues.

I am also dealing with a defamation lawsuit filed by Aman Biedemariam, who is based in Washington, DC, working for the Eritrean government. This lawsuit, which is still in process in the Ontario Court of Justice, is an attempt to silence me and is a threat to my freedom of speech. In response to my tweets condemning his reprehensible comments and support for war crimes, Mr. Biedemariam accused me of defamation.

These experiences have significantly affected my health. I have an autoimmune disorder called Hashimoto's, which flares up with stress and anxiety. The defamation on social media platforms has caused me considerable stress.

Sieru Kebede | *May 17th 2024*

My experience of the Tigray Genocide as a Canadian activist:

After the war broke out between Ethiopia and Tigray in 2020, all of Tigray was cut off from any means of communication, with phone lines, internet, news, transport, and electricity completely blocked out. Tigray is where my grandparents and relatives live. It was very hard to know what is going on and the few pieces of information that was leaked were horror stories of the genocide taking place in the dark. As a result, several ethnic Tigrayans, around the world, including myself, decided to open a twitter account for the first time to let the world know of what the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea were doing to our people in the dark. I too created an account but soon changed my name to protect my family members and relatives back home. I had 3 brothers that lived in Addis at that time where 2 have since fled to Rwanda. And I had an aunt, an uncle, grandparents and cousins that were stuck in Tigray. In Tigray, the soldiers were stopping civilians and forcing them to unlock their phones. Any image or media that had pictures of TPLF leadership or had documentation of atrocities committed was cause for arrest and most of the time execution. In Addis Ababa, there were community checkpoints where government collaborators were stopping anyone, checking their IDs to see if they have Tigrinya sounding names or last names, or born in Tigray and detaining them en masse. They also used to search their facebook and other social media accounts to see if they have content they deemed an opposition to them, even if someone else posted it. I did not want to give the government leverage, to use my family members to silence me, as I was regularly posting and sharing with my family. This is very common practice in Eritrea as well, and used to silence diaspora activists. This same practice was widely used by Abiy's government during the war. Relatives of activists or government opposition figures are not spared from being targeted, even when they have nothing to do with the decisions of their family member's activism. This practice has continued in Ethiopia, post the war with Tigray, against opposition figures in Oromia, Amhara, Addis Ababa and other places. I had to unfriend all my siblings that were in Addis Ababa during the war. I was active in posting news and content exposing the atrocities of the government on Facebook and Twitter, so I had to distance myself from my own family to protect them. The pressure to be silent came from within the diaspora community too. Almost every Ethiopian friend or non-Tigrayan community member I talked to, either denied that this was happening to us, or labelled us as terrorists, pro-TPLF, liars, etc. to whitewash what was happening in Tigray. The non- Tigrayan Ethiopians went to the extent of staging multiple protests to discredit our protests and media campaigns. It was a time in which I lost all my Ethiopian friends and still do. It was a time when I learned who was my ally and who hated my ethnicity. It was a traumatic experience for us all, Canadian-Tigrayans, made worse by the lack of acknowledgement or support by our own Canadian government. We spent several days protesting in front of CBC and Ottawa Parliament to no avail. We had no one but ourselves to save us, so we all gave it all, in the hopes that someone will care.

Kibrom Kahssay | *May 18th 2024*

When the Tigray war erupted, I found myself in a challenging situation. I was already dealing with a severe neck spine injury from work and was awaiting surgery. Despite my physical pain and the impending surgery, I felt a strong obligation to be a voice for my voiceless people in Tigray. With the help of my colleagues, I travelled to various protests to advocate for the Tigrayan cause. My car became a mobile billboard, covered with posters depicting the plight of Tigray civilians and QR codes to inform Canadians about the situation and urge them to stand against the war. However, my activism came with significant risks. I received numerous threats from members of the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in Canada. They warned me that if I ventured into certain areas, they would burn me and my car. They also expressed a desire to find me alone so they could kill me. During a protest in Edmonton, my photo was published in the Edmonton Journal. The next morning, I found a threatening letter under my door, stating, "You will both die like your people soon, wait." I reported this to the RCMP, who visited my home, took notes, and advised me to protect myself. In another incident, a neighbour informed me that he saw two men vandalising my car at midnight. They peeled off my posters and slashed one of my tires. I reported this to the RCMP, who promised to investigate but found that the apartment's security cameras were not functioning. Despite this, they reiterated my right to protest and advised me to take precautions. I continued my activism, replacing the damaged posters on my car. Unfortunately, my car was vandalised again, this time with scratches on the passenger side. I reported this to the police as well. Amidst all this turmoil, I received a call from the hospital to schedule my neck spine surgery. The combination of physical pain, psychological stress, and fear was overwhelming, but I am grateful that the surgery went well. The threats and harassment extended to social media, where I received abusive messages. My activism also led to threats against my family in Addis Ababa. Some individuals warned me that there would be consequences if I didn't stop my activities. True to their threats, my family members, who had no connection to Tigray and did not even speak Tigrinya, were arrested and tortured. One day, while shopping with my friend's sister at a Superstore, an Eritrean government supporter and her son confronted me. The woman threatened that I would be killed soon, and her son attempted to provoke a physical altercation. Witnesses at the scene defended me, and when the police arrived, they decided not to press charges against the woman and her son but advised me to be careful. Throughout this period, I felt terrified, depressed, stressed, and miserable. The RCMP's responses often felt insufficient, and I spent much of my time confined to my home, dealing with both physical pain and the psychological burden of the threats and harassment. This testimony reflects the harrowing experiences I endured during the Tigray war, and the profound impact it had on my life.

APPENDIX E | Tigrayan-Canadian Testimony

Helen Beyene| May 23rd, 2024

We're from Ottawa and Gatineau, of ethnic Tigrayan origin, and the majority of the congregation of Saint Mary Church, at 411 rue Jean-Rene Monette, have been discriminated against and targeted because of our ethnicity. When the genocidal war broke out between the Tigray provincial government and the Ethiopian Federal government on November 04, 2020, the Ethiopian government targeted Tigrayan origin based on their ethnicity. Almost all of Tigrayan who lived outside of Tigray had been taken to concentration camps. Here in Ottawa-Gatineau, out of nine church board committee members, three were Tigrayan. The other six, and the priest who is also not Tigrayan, have taken control over the church. Tigrayan children, as well as adults, are intentionally excluded from the choir. The leaders delayed the members' board committee elections, and amended bylaws without bringing it to the general assembly to vote. They also added 18 fake members from different parts of Canada as well as Ethiopia. They held elections without all the members. Just a few people have controlled the entire church. Tigrayans who challenged the priest and chairman have been threatened with legal action, and so on. At the moment, our church has been taken over by a few individuals who happened to be members of the committee board when the genocidal war broke out.



APPENDIX G | Wilfrid Laurier University webinar | letter from academics opposing webinar cancellation

Dr. Deborah MacLatchy
President and Vice-Chancellor
Office of the President
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, Ontario
president@wlu.ca

CC: Wilfrid Laurier Faculty Association; Canadian Association of University Teachers

Dear President MacLatchy,

We, the undersigned scholars and researchers, write to express our grave concerns over Wilfrid Laurier University's decision to indefinitely postpone a virtual event focusing on the ongoing civil war in Ethiopia after a campaign of interference.

The scale of human suffering as a result of Ethiopian military operations, allied militia violence, and the blockage of humanitarian aid in the Tigray Region since November 2020 has been well-documented by the United Nations, humanitarian relief organizations, and human rights groups: over five million people in urgent need of [humanitarian assistance](#), over two million [displaced](#), widespread starvation and [famine conditions](#), [sexual violence](#) as a weapon of war, and the [targeting of ethnic Tigrayans](#) for arbitrary detention and disappearance. Mass displacement - including high numbers of [unaccompanied refugee children](#) - and the interruption of child protection systems in Tigray makes the ongoing crisis an urgent and relevant case for thinking about the impact of conflict on family separation and reunification.

The panel, entitled “Understanding the Implications of War on Children and Families in Tigray,” was to explore these pressing issues on Monday, October 25th as part of the undergraduate course “International Social Work” offered by the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. It was organized by Professor Bree Akesson, Canada Research Chair (Tier II) in Global Adversity and Wellbeing and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Work, and Ethiopian-Canadian community activists Tsion Tekie and Kassaye Berhanu-MacDonald, an adoptee from the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. The panel was sponsored by WLU's Centre for Research on Security Practices, the Tshepo Institute for the Study of Contemporary Africa, and United Tegar Canada, a community organization created in 2020 in response to the war on Tigray.

On the afternoon of Friday, October 22nd, the Office of the President notified organizers that they could not proceed with the panel scheduled for the following Monday. The administration reached this decision following multiple emails and a threatening letter protesting the panel's focus on Tigray from Dr. Tihut Asfaw of the Ethio-Canadian Network for Advocacy and Support (ECNAS), a partisan, pro-war organization which [fundraises](#) “to support lobbying to fight misinformation and disinformation by the TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front].” The ECNAS position was supported by Professor Ann Fitz-Gerald, Director of the Balsillie School of International Affairs and Professor of International

Security in WLU's Department of Political Science, who has [written extensively](#) in [support](#) of the Ethiopian government's military operations in Tigray. Furthermore, the Ethiopian co-organizers have been subject to harassment and abuse on the basis of presumed ethnic Tigrayan identity - to the extent of being referred to as "terrorists" - and the panel targeted by automated bots filling up registration for the virtual event. This is consistent with the escalation of "coordinated inauthentic behavior" and organized disinformation campaigns in virtual space in support of the war [identified by researchers](#) and social media services such as [Facebook](#).

Academic freedom is a foundational principle of higher education in Canada and as scholars and researchers, we are committed to the view that the University should be a place for the free exchange of ideas and debate without fear of intimidation, retaliation, or interference.

We therefore call on Wilfrid Laurier University to immediately:

- Issue a statement of accountability and apology from the Office of the President to clarify the process by which the decision to indefinitely postpone the panel was made and to outline steps to rectify the situation;
- Affirm the university's commitment to academic freedom and defending the right to speak, write, and teach without political interference;
- Affirm the university's commitment to addressing harassment and anti-Black racism;
- Allow the organizers of the event to proceed with the panel as planned and reschedule a date in the near future.

Should the university refuse to act, we urge the Wilfrid Laurier Faculty Association and the Canadian Association of University Teachers to thoroughly investigate this failure to uphold academic freedom at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Signed,

NAME, TITLE, AFFILIATION

Martha Kuwee Kumsa, Professor Emerita, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University
Jennifer Lavoie, Associate Professor of Criminology and Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University
Sue Ferguson, Associate Professor Emerita of Digital Media & Journalism, Wilfrid Laurier University
Todd Gordon, Associate Professor of Law & Society, Wilfrid Laurier University
Marcia Oliver, Associate Professor of Law & Society, Wilfrid Laurier University
Jasmin Zine, Professor of Sociology, Wilfrid Laurier University
Sarah Matthews, Associate Professor of Global Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University
Greg Bird, Associate Professor of Sociology, Wilfrid Laurier University
Peter Eglin, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Wilfrid Laurier University
Garry Potter, Professor of Sociology, Wilfrid Laurier University
Tsion Tekie, EdD, Education Leadership, Western University
A. Catherine D'Andrea, Professor of Archaeology, Director, Eastern Tigray Archaeological Project (ETAP), Department of Archaeology, Simon Fraser University
Awet Weldemichael, Professor and Queen's National Scholar, Queen's University
Alissa Trotz, Professor, Caribbean Studies and Women and Gender Studies, University of Toronto

Thashika Pillay, Assistant Professor of Education, Queen's University

Susan Dianne Brophy, Associate Professor, Legal Studies, St. Jerome's University (federated with the University of Waterloo)

David Bishop, Associate Professor of History, Bishop's University

Tag Elkhazin, Professor (Retired), Senior Fellow NPSIA, Carleton University

Safia Aidid, Arts & Science Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Toronto

Patrick Wight, Africa Insight Editor & Lecturer, Institute For the Study of International Development, McGill University

Mulugeta Atakhelti, Professor, St. Clair College

Jeffrey Sachs, Instructor, Department of Politics and History & Classics, Acadia University

Elleni Centime Zeleke, Assistant Professor of African Studies, Columbia University

John Comaroff, Hugh K. Foster Professor of African and African American Studies and of Anthropology, Harvard University

Jean Comaroff, Alfred North Whitehead Professor of African and African American Studies and of Anthropology, Harvard University

Laura Fair, Professor, Columbia University

Sean Jacobs, Associate Professor, The New School; Founder and Editor, Africa is a Country

Bhakti Shringarpure, Associate Professor of English & Women's, Gender & Sexuality, University of Connecticut

Adom Getachew, Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Political Science and the College, University of Chicago

Lidwien Kapteijns, Kendall/Hodder Professor of History, Wellesley College

Jason Mosley, Associate Senior Researcher, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and Research Fellow, African Studies Centre, Oxford University

Sarah Vaughan, PhD, Independent Researcher, United Kingdom

Wolbert G.C. Smidt, Associate Professor in Ethnohistory, Mekelle University

Lahra Smith, Associate Professor, Georgetown University

Amber Murrey, Associate Professor of Human Geography, Oxford University

Lauren Carruth, Associate Professor, School of International Service, American University

Nisrin Elamin, Assistant Professor International Studies, Bryn Mawr College

Samar Al-Bulushi, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Irvine

Rachael Hill, Assistant Professor of African History, California State University, Pomona

Sarah Balakrishnan, SSHRC Fellow and Assistant Professor of History, University of Minnesota

Suban Nur Cooley, Assistant Professor of English, New Mexico State University

David McNally, Cullen Distinguished Professor of History & Business, University of Houston

Iman Mohamed, PhD Candidate in History, Harvard University

Ayantü Tibeso, PhD Candidate, UCLA

John Young, PhD, Simon Fraser University

APPENDIX H | Photo Evidence 1: Screenshot of Kibrom Kahssay on the front cover of Edmonton Journal

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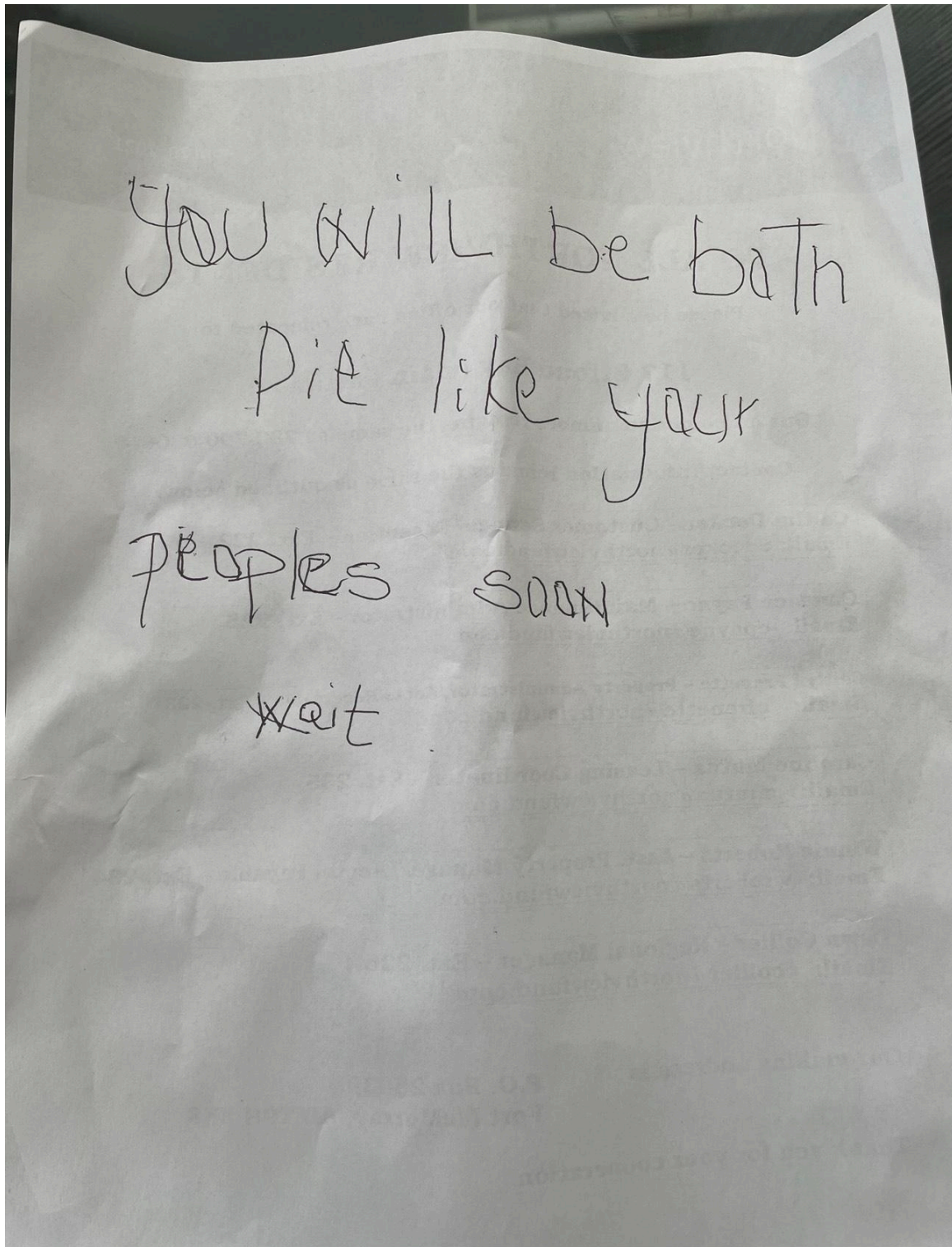
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Demonstrators protesting genocide in the Tigray region of Ethiopia by Ethiopian federal government and Eritrean troops drove in a caravan through Edmonton on Saturday, April 24, 2021. Photo by Ian Kucerak

Demonstrators protesting violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia by Ethiopian federal government

edmontonjournal.com — Private



APPENDIX J | Vimeo link to video evidence of Kibrom Kahssay's vandalized vehicle

Vimeo login:

Username: makeda.leul@gmail.com

Password: SJTC2024!

Link: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/950035360>