

# **Ethiopia: Tigrayan forces murder, rape and pillage in attacks on civilians in Amhara towns**

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Amnesty International

Fighters affiliated with the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) deliberately killed dozens of people, gang-raped dozens of women and girls – some as young as 14 – and looted private and public property in two areas of northern Ethiopia’s Amhara region, Amnesty International said **in a new report released today**.

The atrocities were perpetrated in and around Chenna and Kobo in late August and early September 2021, shortly after Tigrayan forces took control of the areas in July. The attacks were often characterized by additional acts of violence and brutality, death threats, and the use of ethnic slurs and derogatory remarks. In Kobo, Tigrayan forces were apparently lashing out at the civilian population in retaliation for increased resistance from local militias and armed residents.

“Tigrayan forces have shown utter disregard for fundamental rules of international humanitarian law which all warring parties must follow. Evidence is mounting of a pattern of Tigrayan forces committing war crimes and possible crimes against humanity in areas under their control in the Amhara region from July 2021 onwards. This includes repeated incidents of widespread rape, summary killings and looting, including from hospitals,” said Sarah Jackson, Deputy Regional Director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes at Amnesty International.

“The TPLF leadership must put an immediate end to the atrocities we have documented and remove from its forces anyone suspected of involvement in such crimes.”

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## **Summary killings in Kobo**

In Kobo, a town in the north-east of the Amhara region, Tigrayan fighters deliberately killed unarmed civilians, seemingly in revenge for losses among their ranks at the hands of Amhara militias and armed farmers. Amnesty International interviewed 27 witnesses and survivors, including some who helped to collect and bury the bodies.

Ten Kobo residents told Amnesty International that in the afternoon of 9 September 2021, Tigrayan fighters summarily killed their relatives and neighbours outside their homes.

“First they shot my brother Taddese... He died on the spot. My other brother and my brother-in-law tried to move away and were both shot in the back and killed... they shot me in my left

shoulder... I stayed down, pretending to be dead,” a survivor told Amnesty International.

Twelve other Kobo residents said that they found the bodies of local residents and labourers who had been killed execution-style – shot in the head, chest or back, some with their hands tied behind their backs.

“The first dead bodies we saw were by the school fence. There were 20 bodies lying in their underwear and facing the fence and three more bodies in the school compound. Most were shot at the back of their heads and some in the back. Those who were shot at the back of their heads could not be recognized because their faces were partially blown off,” one male resident said.

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***A male resident of Kobo***

Satellite imagery analysis by Amnesty International’s Crisis Evidence Lab shows evidence of new burial sites on the grounds of St. George’s Church and St. Michael’s Church, where residents said they had buried those killed on 9 September.

Deliberate killings of civilians – or of captured, surrendered, or wounded fighters – constitute war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity.



A time series of satellite imagery shows the increase in graves at St. Michael’s church graveyard, where witnesses told Amnesty International some of those summarily killed on 9 September were buried. © 2022 Maxar Technologies (L); © 2022 Planet Labs (C); Image: 19 December 2021 © 2022 CNES/Airbus (R).

## Sexual violence in Chenna

From July 2021 onwards, in and around Chenna, a village north of Bahir Dar, the capital of the Amhara region, Tigrayan forces raped dozens of women and girls as young as 14, often in the victims' own homes after having forced them to provide food and cook for them.

The sexual violence was accompanied by shocking levels of brutality, including beatings, death threats, and ethnic slurs. Fourteen of the 30 survivors interviewed by Amnesty International said that they were gang-raped by multiple Tigrayan fighters, and some were raped in front of their children. Seven of the survivors were girls under the age of 18.

Lucy, a 14-year-old seventh-grade student, and her mother were both raped by Tigrayan fighters in their home in Did-Bahr. She told Amnesty International: "I was at home with my mother and my grandmother when two young men with rifles came to our home in the morning at about 11. One of them wore military clothes and the other wore civilian clothes. They spoke a mix of Tigrinya and some Amharic. They said 'Our families were raped and now it is our turn to rape you.' One of them raped me in the courtyard and the other raped my mother inside the house. My mother is very sick now, she is very depressed and desperate. We don't speak about what happened; it is impossible."

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***Lucy, a 14-year-old girl from Did-Bahr***

Salam, a 29-year-old woman, described how four Tigrayan fighters locked her older parents in a separate room and then gang-raped her over a 15-hour period.

Many of the survivors suffered severe and long-term physical and psychological damage, including 10 who remained hospitalized three months after they were raped. Doctors who provided medical care to rape survivors told Amnesty International that two rape survivors had to be treated for lacerations likely caused by having the bayonets of rifles inserted into their genitals.

Amnesty International has previously documented similar patterns of Tigrayan fighters raping Amhara women and girls in [Nifas Mewcha](#), and has received credible reports of rape from other areas of the Amhara region. Such atrocities constitute war crimes and, potentially, crimes against humanity.

## Looting of civilian property

In both Kobo and the Chenna area, residents told Amnesty International that Tigrayan fighters stole possessions from their homes and shops and looted and vandalized public properties, including medical clinics and schools.

The looting and damage to medical facilities made it impossible for rape survivors and other residents in need of medical care to obtain treatment locally, forcing them to wait until they could reach hospitals in Debarq, Gondar and Bahir Dar weeks later. For rape survivors, this was far too late to receive crucial post-rape care, some of which needs to be administered within 72 hours.

“These atrocities yet again drive home the need for swift action by the international community to investigate abuses by all sides, bring those responsible to account and ensure that survivors can realise their rights,” said Sarah Jackson.

“For too long, the international community has been failing victims and survivors of crimes under international law in Ethiopia. The United Nations and African Union must deploy relevant investigation teams to the region. The international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia, established by the UN Human Rights Council in December, must also be permitted to start its work and be granted access to the country as soon as possible.”

## Background

The conflict in Tigray broke out in November 2020 and spread to other regions of northern Ethiopia from July 2021. Amnesty International has documented a **range of violations** by all parties to the conflict, including massacres, extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings, sexual and other gender-based violence and arbitrary detentions by Ethiopian government forces and allied militias and by Eritrean forces acting alongside them.