

## **Rubbing salt to the wound of Tigray!**

Response to Amnesty International/ AI report on sexual violence

As much as we were grateful for the Amnesty International (AI) report in the past on the heinous crime of sexual violence in Tigray; which was backed by evidence. We are shocked to hear the Kenya based AI office claimed it had interviewed 30 people yet there is no evidence to back it up, neither a hospital doctor's report as evidence, nor an audio or video and digital or witness report. There were plenty of evidences in case of Tigray to validate the crime.

As much as we condemn any rape crime committed on equal terms, regardless of who the perpetrators are, we reject the false equivalence as well as false allegation not backed by any evidence.

Unless AI have chosen to promote their own self-interest over truth and accountability, further undermining its fragile integrity. When it was caught in 2020 wrongly accusing Tigrayans of brutally murdering hundreds of Amhara in Maikadra, only to realise it was indeed Amharas who had murdered Tigrayans, we would have thought they had learned their lesson to not trust Amhara contacts in the country if they want to maintain any semblance of integrity. Should AI depend on external self-serving agents to ascertain the reliability of information instead of having its own independent investigators in the first place?

Or is it a bargain for AI, at the expense of credibility, to continue to gain access to Ethiopia in the future, that they need to appease the government so they have an interest in promoting the government message that rape and executions happen on both sides of war so the world ought not get upset about evidence of gruesome Tigrayan genocide committed by the government and foreign forces in unison. With that intention in mind, it appears that AI have been very one-sided in their reporting!

True, access to Tigrayan victims is limited by the lack of access to the region and the lack of fuel to move around. However, there is an abundance of video evidence from doctors in Tigray's hospitals of women struggling to survive the brutal rapes by ENDF, ENF and FANO fighters, including the painful operation of nails and plastic bags being removed from the vagina of a young woman. In case of the alleged rapes in Amhara AI provided no such evidence, except hear-say reportage from unsubstantiated sources who may have their own ethnic bias against Tigrayans.

There is contemporaneous video evidence of the brutality committed by Eritrean National Forces and Ethiopian National Defence Forces filmed and released by

brave Tigrayans hiding in their homes. On the other hand, AI provides no such concrete evidence of crimes perpetrated against Amhara by the Tigrayans. Further damning evidence against ENDF soldiers was captured on their own phones, confiscated and posted by TDF fighters showing the commands of Amhara officers to massacre innocent unarmed young men in Tigray. AI does not come up with a shred of evidence that rape or for that matter any crimes were committed by Tigrayans, except foul cries to arrest the attention of the world. Unlike Tigray Amhara region is not besieged 360 degree with no access to media, food, internet, electricity medicine or else so, why is AI not reporting from base and show it to the world? It can claim it's impossible to do that in Tigray but Amhara region?

Their report is shameful for its lack of scrutiny also integrity and impartiality as a consequence it undermines the work of AI.

So, to waste time arguing whether the AI report, compiled with Amhara's assistance and scrutiny, is a valid argument in equating atrocities on both sides of the war, is missing the point.

It appears AI caved in to the demands of the Amharas need to be shown as wronged and their rights violated in order to gain access to the region the government controls so as to be seen that AI is carrying out its duties entrusted by the world community when in fact it is failing to. They should have learned their lesson after Maikadra!

However, the bigger question is why does the Amhara voice feel compelled to promote 'whataboutism'?

It feels that AI is going down the road of delegitimising the investigation into government-directed genocide in Tigray: executions and massacres, rape to 'Amharanise women and impregnate them with Amhara sperm as well as to sterilise and mutilate them to prevent future Tigrayan generations?

These were publicly-announced directives from both Abiy Ahmed and his government as well as Isaias and his soldiers as they carried out the rapes. There is indeed documentation from the Eritrean government that all Tigrayans over the age of seven should be killed. Has AI found any such evidence of intent from the TPLF? How does it claim to know TPLF intent? The intention to harm and change the cultural and ethnic makeup fully or part is part of genocidal act, rape was a weapon for that act, it is not the number of Tigrayans you killed it is the intention to destroy that the war was declared by the state of the country and its army and help of other invaders to destroy its own people permanently hence rape was part of that genocidal act, there is no comparison to Amhara region. There own Fano vigilantes will do anything and make up a story, however show us a valid evidence we will push that. Tigray government asked to

conduct investigation while the Ethiopian government has refused any form of investigation in Tigray, AI crying a crocodile tears for Abiy is not amusing at all.

The TPLF is a political organisation with little or no influence over the military strategy of the TDF. Furthermore, neither people of Tigray, nor the TPLF and the Tigray Defence Force, ever stated a desire for revenge yet they are victims of false allegation as well as genocidal mission to annihilate them. Secondly, the overwhelming success of the TDF requires careful adherence to strict standards - deviations into homes for gang rape would only undermine the focused military strategy. Rogue soldiers exist in all wars, but rape as a weapon of war has decisively been a strategy avoided by the TDF. Furthermore, it is public knowledge that the TDF released thousands of captured soldiers to show Tigrayan humanity. We are happy to hear all the evidences out backed with irrefutable evidence.

If AI wants to redeem itself this time, they should come clean about who was involved in sourcing their material. How many Tigrayans helped compile their report or check for authenticity, who validated their report and whether their evidence is available for scrutiny by those accused of the crimes they have documented!

The world's shame for not offering any assistance to Tigray throughout this tragedy is now compounded by an internationally-renowned human rights organisation using its reputation to pour salt into the wounds of the civilians struggling to recover from the genocide in Tigray. Shame on you Amnesty International putting its bias and self-interest than reflecting the ground reality.

**Eyeru Gidey**