



Delegates of CSW68
New York

11 March 2024

Dear Commission Delegate

As you and your fellow delegates gather for CSW 68, we, a group of academics, politicians and human rights defenders, women and our male allies, highlight the urgent need for action over the proliferation of conflict-related sexual violence.

We bring to your attention the horrific findings of recent research, “Bodies as Battlefields” conducted by a women academic who was trapped in Tigray, Ethiopia, during the two year conflict there. She recently presented her academic findings on the conflict-related sexual violence that occurred.

Since the Tigray conflict, there have been recent harrowing reports of conflict-related sexual violence against women in the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, which add to the urgency of our appeal to you to ensure that this subject is addressed by the CSW.

The research in Tigray, based on interviews with survivors, found that the conflict-related sexual violence in her country included:

- Mutilation of women’s genitals and other body parts;
- Insertion of foreign objects into women’s vaginas;
- Gang-rape of individual women, usually by three to 10 armed combatants;
- Forcing of family members to witness or participate in the act;
- Exposure of survivors to multiple incidents of rape, including sexual slavery, with survivors typically held for two to 35 days; and
- HIV/AIDS being intentionally transmitted through rape to reduce the number of the targeted population.

These findings of the exceptional nature of conflict-related sexual violence in Tigray are echoed in the experience of women in other conflict zones, where there are also accounts of the blinding of women to prevent identification of perpetrators.

In addition to the physical, psychological and social consequences, the Tigray research found there were profound economic consequences for the survivors and the wider community.

The recommendations in the recent Tigray research include the strengthening of local, national and international institutions to protect women, and to provide justice and prevent further conflict-related sexual violence. In addition, it highlights the need for measures to counter the extreme economic exclusion of women who are ostracised by their community because of the abuses inflicted on them.

Both of these subjects – institutional strengthening and economic empowerment with a gender perspective – are on the agenda for this year's conference. We would therefore ask that as part of your discussions, the position of women affected by conflict-related sexual violence be specifically addressed.

We would further request that you and fellow delegates ask that the subject of women affected by conflict-related sexual violence be put on the agenda for next year's CSW. Eliminating violence against women in public life was included in the 2021 agenda: however, this did not include the issue of conflict-related sexual violence.

The international community has passed repeated resolutions, including 1325, 1888, 2106, 2467, condemning conflict-related sexual violence and setting out remedial action. There is a special UN Representative on sexual violence in conflict and an International Day for the elimination of sexual violence in conflict. But warm words have not provided justice for the women of Tigray, or the Rohingya, Uyghur, Yazidi or other women who have been targeted with grotesque conflict-related sexual violence. Nor has it prevented women in Ukraine, Gaza or Israel being subjected to extreme sexual violence linked to the conflict in their countries. Combatants continue to target sexual violence against women with complete impunity. Their military and political leaders either permit, enable or promote the violence, safe in the knowledge they will not be held to account.

Putting the subject on the agenda for next year's CSW, will give fresh impetus to the global campaign. It will provide a beacon of hope to the hundreds of thousands of women affected by conflict-related sexual violence globally, and act as a warning to perpetrators that the international community will act on its commitment to eliminate this gross injustice.

We wish you every success in your deliberations at CSW68. Many women around the world look to you to provide a lead in creating a more equal and just world.

With best wishes

Julia Duncan-Cassell, former Minister of Gender, Liberia, and President of the European External Programme with Africa

Kokob Gebru Kidanu, Vice President of the European External Programme with Africa, Researcher, Sexual Violence. Against Women, Mekelle University, Tigray, Ethiopia

Filsan Abdi Former Minister for Women, Children and Youth, Ethiopia, and founder of the Horn Peace Institute

Lord David Alton, member of the House of Lords, UK, member of the House of Lords select committee on international relations and human rights advocate

Sally Keeble, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for International Development, UK

Mirjam van Reisen, Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Amelda Khudeeda Project Manager, Yazda

Tsedale Lemma, CEO, JAKENN publishing PLc. The Publisher of Addis Standard Publications

Rita Kahsay, Irob Anina Civil Society

Ilham Ibrahim, Sudan Organisation for Research and Development, Sudan

Sarah Vaughan, Author “Understanding Ethiopia’s Tigray War”, UK

Alex de Waal, Executive director of World Peace Foundation, Tufts University

Rebecca Tinsley, founder and CEO, Waging Peace

Ewelina Ochab, Human rights defender, and co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response

Prof. Dr. Francisca Oladipo, Vice Chancellor, TAU, Nigeria

Prof. Dr. James Narendra, Mekelle University, Tigray, Ethiopia

Prof. Dr. Khamati Shilabukha, Nairobi University, Kenya

Meaza Gebremedhin, Independent researcher & human rights defender, Tigray, Ethiopia

Arjun Karki, LDC Watch, Kathmandu, Nepal

Lieve Franssen, Advisory council member of VODAN Africa, Belgium

Ewelina U. Ochab, IBA's Human Rights Institute and co-founder of the Coalition for Genocide Response

Chessie Baldwin, Researcher, University of Exeter, University of Reading, UK

Diederik van Iwaarden, Chair Europe External programme with Africa, Belgium

Dr. Araya Abrha Medhanyie, Mekelle University, Ethiopia

Dr. Selam Kidane, Lecturer, UK

Gebre Kirstos Gebremeskel, TGHAT, The Netherlands

Malgorzata Tarasiewicz, Network of East-West Women, NEWW, Poland

Hadish Mebrahtu, Mahber Selam, The Netherlands

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Martin Plaut, Senior Research Fellow King's College London, UK

Tom Claes, Journalist, MO, Belgium

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Shishay Equar, Lecture, Department of Journalism and Communication at Mekelle University, Tigray, Ethiopia

Dr. Awet Hailezgi Tefera, Lecturer, Mekelle University, Tigray Ethiopia

Eberhard Hitzler, Independent Expert Horn of Africa, Germany

Wolfgang Heinrich, peace building, conflict transformation and political analysis consultant, Germany

Rahima Mahmut, UK Director, World Uyghur Congress

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Dr. Reginald Nalagala, Tangaza University, Kenya

Beyene Gerezghier, Eritrean Bright Future Movement, The Netherlands

Dr. Sakinat Folorunsa, Lecturer, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria

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Edmund Yakani, Executive Director, Community Empowerment for Progress Organisation, South Sudan

Christian F Nunes, National Organisation for Women NOW, USA

Amelda Khudeeda, Duhok, Iraq

Organisations signing the letter:

The Global Society of Tigrayan Scholars and Professionals (GSTS)

Europe External Programme with Africa (EEPA)

Union of Tigrayans in Belgium

Tigrayan Advocacy & Development Association UK

Tigray Youth Network UK

Mekete Tigray UK

Association of Tigrayans in Denmark

Association of Tigrayans in France

Tigray Development Association in France

Association of Tigrayans in the Netherlands

Association Tigray Development Association in the Netherlands (TDA NL)

Association Tigray's Women in Netherlands

Dekna Foundation

Tigrayan Youth Association in Italy

Forum Mekete, Italy

Tigrayan Scholars in Italy (TSI)

Cultural Association and Social Promotion of the Tigray Community in Italy

Volunteer Association for the Development of Tigray, Italy

Association for the Development of Tigray (AST)

Associations of Tigrayan Community in Bologna

Tigray Community Association in Tuscany (ACTT)

Association of Tigrayan Women in Italy

Tigrayhjelpen Norway

Tigray Community Switzerland
Association of Tigrayan Women in Sweden/TKFS
Union of Tigrayan Associations in Sweden
TGHAT
Irob Anima
Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum
Release Eritrea
Mahber Selam
Network of East-West Women, NEWW
Human Rights Defenders Eritrea
Sanctuary Foundation, Nairobi
LDC Watch
Irob Anina Civil Society
Congolese Solidariteit
Resurrection of the Tigrayan and Eritrean People

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