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January 21, 2021

Ambassador Redwan Hussein
State Minister of Foreign Affairs
Spokesperson for the State of Emergency Taskforce
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Menelik II Avenue
P.O. Box 393
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Transmitted via email

Re: Alleged Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law in Tigray

Dear Ambassador Redwan Hussein,

I am writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch to share with you the preliminary findings of our research on apparently indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects in the towns of Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in Ethiopia's Tigray region in November 2020, and to request your response to several questions below.

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that documents human rights abuses by states and non-state armed groups in more than 100 countries around the world. For several decades, we have conducted research and advocacy on a range of rights issues in Ethiopia.

Human Rights Watch strives to reflect all perspectives in our research and publications. We would therefore appreciate your response in writing by January 29, 2021 to the questions below to ensure your views are reflected in our reporting as well as any other information that will shed light on these events and allegations of civilian harm.

Preliminary findings:



HRW.org

Between November 2020 and January 2021, Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed 32 survivors, witnesses, and relatives about the military operations in Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in which civilians were killed and injured and civilian homes and infrastructure were damaged and destroyed. We also analyzed satellite imagery, video footage, and photographs to corroborate witness accounts.

Humera

Twenty-three people from Humera said that on November 9, between approximately 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., the town was repeatedly hit by heavy artillery fire coming from the Eritrean border. They said that the attacks hit residential homes, businesses, and civilian infrastructure particularly in Kebeles 02 and 01 and struck residents. They also reported that attacks continued the following day, on November 10, with shelling beginning after approximately 10 a.m.

Human Rights Watch research found that while Tigrayan local militia were in the town on November 9, they had not set up significant defensive systems. Tigrayan special police forces were also reportedly not present in the city at the time of the attack on November 9.

Medical officials, from the town's Kahsay Aberra hospital, said that the shelling on November 9 killed at least 46 civilians and wounded over 100. Human Rights Watch also received credible reports that at least 32 civilians were killed, including an 18-months-old infant.

Satellite imagery analysis recorded on November 10 shows multiple sites of impact in Humera, with a concentration of damage visible near a mosque in the western part of the town, and a confirmation of damage to the Africa Hotel in Kebele 02.

Mekelle

Six people told Human Rights Watch that on November 28, artillery fire that began after approximately 8:30 a.m. struck at least two areas in Mekelle, Ayder sub-city and Kebele 15. They said that artillery fired after approximately 9 a.m. hit a residential compound in the Ayder sub-city area of Mekelle, near Hamza mosque, a market, and a school, killing a family of four, including two girls ages 4 and 13, and injuring six others, including a boy age 9.

Credible sources also reported the deaths of 27 people, including two more children, and over 100 wounded as a result of the shelling on November 28.

Analysis of photographs and videos obtained by Human Rights Watch, and satellite images recorded at 11 a.m. on November 29, revealed at least two impacts. Both impact sites reveal damage to residential structures, including at least two homes in Ayder sub-city.

Residents interviewed suggested that Tigrayan special police forces and local militia were not near the Ayder sub-city area when the residential compound was struck and said that there were no military targets in the area at the time of the shelling.

Shire

Shelling began in Shire town in the early morning hours of November 17. Human Rights Watch interviewed two residents of Shire who said that shelling struck an industrial area in the northwestern part of the town and hit the Zenith Hair Oil Factory, as well as civilian homes, buildings, and infrastructure, including Dejene Hotel, Gebar Shire Hotel, Shire University's agricultural campus, and residential areas near the Abuna Aregawi church.

Human Rights Watch reviewed photographs and videos and analyzed satellite imagery that confirm damage to civilian structures in the city, including smoke rising from the Zenith Hair Oil Factory on November 17 at 11:04 a.m.

General Questions:

For each of the towns and dates described above, we would appreciate answers to the following questions in as much detail as possible and any other information that will shed light on the attacks and subsequent investigations.

1. Please spell out the armed forces, including federal, regional, and foreign forces that participated in the military operations in Humera, Shire, and Mekelle.
2. Please describe the military objectives in each of the three towns, including available information on the specific location and composition of belligerent forces.
3. Before and during attacks in Humera on November 9-10, 2020; in Shire on November 16-17, 2020; and in Mekelle, on November 28,

- 2020, what precautions did the Ethiopian federal and its allied forces take to ensure that attacks were only carried out against lawful targets and were taken to minimize harm to civilians and civilian structures?
4. Before the operations in Humera, Shire, and Mekelle, did Ethiopian federal and allied forces issue any advanced warnings to civilians? If yes, please share the details of what the warnings included, how they were shared, including the means of communication, and in what language.
 5. Has the Ethiopian government begun investigations, disciplinary actions, or prosecutions against any military personnel and allied regional forces and militia who may have committed or been involved in war crimes in the fighting in Tigray, or as a matter of command responsibility? If so, what is the status and outcome of those investigations?

We kindly request that you communicate your response to me by **January 29, 2021**.

Human Rights Watch is continuing to monitor and document the human rights situation in Tigray and would also be pleased to discuss our research findings and broader human rights issues with you or your staff at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Laetitia Bader (Jan 21, 2021 05:02 EST)

Laetitia Bader
Horn of Africa director,
Africa division, Human Rights Watch

CC: H.E. Demeke Mekonnen, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

CC: H.E. Minister Kenea Yadeta, Minister of Defense

CC: H.E. Minister Muferihat Kemal, Minister of Peace