



# **VOICES** **FROM** **TIGRAY**

**CONFLICT RELATED SEXUAL**  
**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**  
**IN TIGRAY**

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May 25th 2021

14:00 – 16:00 EAT

13:00 – 15:00 CET

07:00 – 09:00 US EST

# **Introduction of the Webinar – Paddy Maguinness**

**Paddy has lived through the conflict in Northern Ireland and also has first-hand experience of how communities are torn apart due to conflict.**

**He has a long track-record in dealing with conflicts around the world. Paddy will be moderating the session.**



# **Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell**

**Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell is the former Minister for Gender and Social Protection, Liberia, Julia, has been actively following the situation in Tigray and very concerned about the role of violence against women in this war. Julia will be chairing the session.**

# **Assita Kanko**

**A Belgian journalist, human rights activist and politician who was elected as a Member of the European Parliament in 2019 representing the New Flemish Alliance.**

**Assita Kanko has been very active right from the beginning on the situation in Tigray and has played a lead role in the European Parliament.**

**Her voice carries all the way back to Tigray and is a voice of hope to many.**

**TESTIMONIES**  
**FROM TIGRAY**

# VOICES

FROM

**TIGRAY**



Women in Tigray have fled to neighbouring countries, including to Kenya from where they have begun to collect testimonies of their experiences on Conflict-related Sexual Violence against Women.

Presentation of **Testimonies 1** followed by

**Testimonies 2**

# **SPEAKING FROM**

## **TIGRAY**



**Women in Tigray have been collecting information on the situation of Violence against Women before and during the conflict. The testimonies discuss the **Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against Women.****

**Presentation of Testimonies 3**

# **Victor Odero**

**Victor Odero is the author of the report by the International Rescue Committee on Sexual Violence against Women in Tigray after a comprehensive gender assessment of the situation in Tigray.**

**Victor is a lawyer and has 16 years of experience in humanitarian aid work, specialising in policy advocacy.**



# IRC Rapid Assessment Findings





**“It is the Darkness that Scares Us”  
The Gendered Impact of Crisis in the Time of  
COVID-19**

*Results from a Rapid Gender Analysis in Tigray*

# Methodology and Approach

## Sample:

186 clients engaged (49% women and girls; 51% men and boys; 18-35 years (57.8%); 36-55 (36.8%); 65+ (5.2%))

## Validation:

- Round 2: 6 KIIs on specific topics
- 3 validation calls with the Tigray team
- Interviews with Sector Leads
- Validation webinar!

## Limitations:

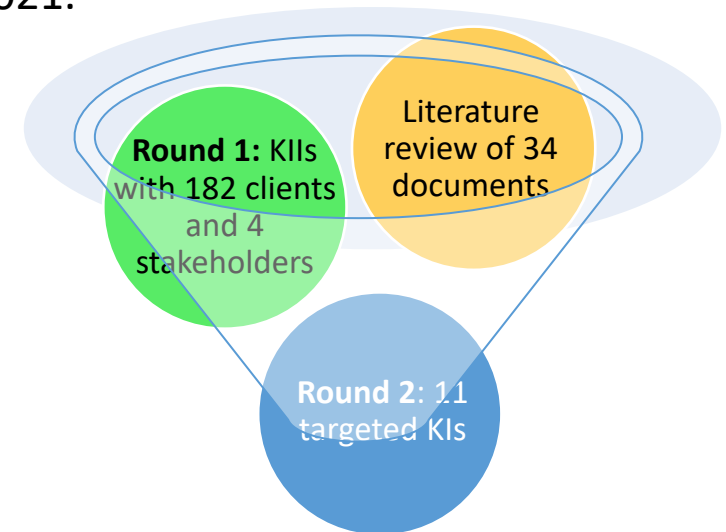
- Network coverage
- Competing priorities of project teams.
- Urgent need for report - Round 2 on specific topics called off

## Desk review:

Analysis of 34 gender related news reports from news agencies, UN agencies and INGOs between 12<sup>th</sup> November to 31<sup>st</sup> March.

## Timeline:

March 2021 – April 2021.



## **Locations: Seven sites and three main locations across Tigray (Shire, Shimelba, Hitsats, Mai-Aini, Adi Harush, Embadanso, Mai Tsebrii)**

1. Shire - Axum University, IDP camp
2. Shire - Embadanso, IDP camp
3. Shire – school, IDP camp
4. Hiitsats, Refugee camp
5. Mai-Ayni Refugee Camp
6. Adi-Harush Refugee Camp
7. Mai Tsebri. IDP camp

# Objectives

- 1) To understand how the crisis is affecting diverse groups
- 1) To ensure that IRC's emergency programming is responsive to the unique needs, priorities and constraints of different client groups

## Findings:

1. Livelihoods
2. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and client safety
3. Gender dynamics and social norms
4. Access to aid (Food, shelter, WASH, health)

## Trends in GBV – Conflict – Related

- **Low reporting of GBV in media. Only 18% of articles on Tigray mentioned GBV; 6% discuss ongoing GBV.** (Desk review of 34 articles / reports from 12<sup>th</sup> November to 31<sup>st</sup> March.)
- **Majority of cases reported to IRC involved gang rape of women and girls.**  
**Insights Report:**
  - 50% of reported cases involved gang rape with more than 5 men.
  - **Perpetrators:** Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers; Amhara special forces implicated but not frequently mentioned.
  - **Locations:** home (39%), military camp (21%), walking on road (18%), hospital (11%), open area (11%), convent (4%).

‘What they are telling us is that the Eritrean Military have been sexually abusing them including gang raping them. In one household a father was forced to rape his daughter.’

KII with Protection staff based in Tigray

## Trends in GBV – Ongoing

**Insight #21:** *GBV in community continues and is more common than pre-conflict because of breakdown* in social structures, sanctions for perpetrators, fear of retaliation, increase in alcoholism, lack of food/cash, exposure during conflict, disagreement between couples, lack of reporting mechanisms and services.

**Insight #22:** *More social stigma against reporting than before, when” more pressing concerns ” like hunger, food and shelter.*

**Insight #23:** *Lack of medical services for GBV survivors.* Only Suhul hospital has PEP. Health workers not trained to receive cases. Survivors being turned away.

## Recommendations

### Donors:

- **Treat GBV prevention and response as an emergency issue** and make immediate investments to improve quality of care and referrals. Address attitudes that downgrade the importance of GBV.
- Given that a lack of livelihoods is contributing to women and girls being exploited in exchange for money to buy food, make **immediate investments to improve their livelihoods.**

### Donors and Service Providers:

- **Fund and provide GBV case management and clinical care** to sexual assault survivors. Integrate GBV case management in health response.
- **Fund and establish women's and girls' safe spaces**, where women, girls and GBV survivors can access basic emotional support, accurate information about services and referrals to the required services.

### Service Providers:

- Provide all staff involved in the Tigray response with **mandatory training on the humanitarian principles** and their organization's code of conduct.





Overview of Conflict-  
Related Sexual Violence  
in Tigray

# Conflict Related Sexual Violence against Women in Tigray

- Although gender-based violence is largely underreported, at least 22,500 survivors of sexual violence in Tigray are estimated to seek clinical management of rape services. (UNFPA, 2021)
- Conflict-related Sexual Violence is perpetrated against the civilian population in Tigray.
- The available figures are a 'top of the iceberg': there is underreporting as large parts of Tigray can not be reached, there is fear for reprisals, collapse of local administrations and local health facilities, and there is shame.
- Journalists, doctors and therapists reporting on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence have been threatened or expelled, including search of a hospital after CNN reported on Sexual Violence with information obtained from doctors.

# Modus Operandi

- Conflict-Related Sexual Violence has been reported from all over Tigray.
- Locations: rape at home (39%); in isolated places (military camps) (21%), alongside the road (18%) and in the hospital (11%) (Insecurity Insight, 30 March 2021).
- Rape often includes following elements: public rape, forced viewing by family members including husbands and children; or their forced involvement in the rape; abduction; gang rape over multiple days together with other violence such as withholding of food; killing of witnesses and children.
- Survivors and victims include elderly women and girls as young as 8 years old
- Incidents involving single survivors: 67%, Mass rapes: 33% (Insecurity Insight)

# Perpetrators

- The perpetrators allegedly are: Eritrean troops (33%), Ethiopian ENDF (44%), both Eritrean and ENDF (6%) and Amhara militia (6%) (Insecurity Insight, 30 March 2021)
- Many survivors identify their attackers through language, accent, typical shoe ware, tattoos and body marks and other cultural traits. As a result, identification of perpetrators is not based on uniforms alone.

# Rape as a Weapon of War

Reports that rape is conducted with intent as a weapon of war:

- “We are here to make you HIV-positive” – doctors report vast increase of HIV positive patients
- Humiliation, terrorisation and traumatising to break the morale
- Purpose of “cleansing the blood-line”, derogatory references to ‘woyane’ or ‘junta’, dehumanising the population as a people
- “the problem is your womb” – direct references to the use of violence to genocidal intentions
- References to the execution of rape being ordered by superiors

# Sources

- Insecurity Insight: [http://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sexual-Violence-in-Ethiopia-Tigray-Region-30-March-2021.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0nCQnUxR0ILANu1YM4c\\_zwnHVxUpt1v0vT1AsQj5MIfAwWYFwN4ICn1QY](http://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sexual-Violence-in-Ethiopia-Tigray-Region-30-March-2021.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0nCQnUxR0ILANu1YM4c_zwnHVxUpt1v0vT1AsQj5MIfAwWYFwN4ICn1QY)

-> Investigation of Insecurity Insight was based on 36 reported incidents between 4 November and March 2021, involving 106 women and girls, and at least 144 perpetrators.

- UNFPA: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/unfpa-ethiopia-response-tigray-crisis-situation-report-1-15-april-2021>

# **PERSPECTIVES FROM THE REGION**

# **Refugees from Tigray in Sudan**

**MOHAMMED ALAMIN** is a Sudanese Journalist working as a correspondent for the Bloomberg news agency. He also does freelance work with several international publications such as the Middle East Eye, the New Humanitarian, Anadolu News Agency, Voice of America, and others.

Mohammed Alamin has investigated the situation on Violence against Women reported by women from Tigray who have fled to Sudan. He reports on his observations made from Sudan.



# **Testimonies from Eritreans and Ethiopians on the situation in Tigray**

**SELAM KIDANE is Eritrean, born in Ethiopia. She has done extensive research in the torture and sadistic sexual violence committed against Eritreans in Eritrea and outside Eritrea in human trafficking such as in Sinai.**

**She has frequently visited the camps of Eritrean refugees in Tigray where Eritrean refugees were hosted by the Tigray regional government.**

# **The Perspective of African Women for Peace in the Horn**

MARIAM BASAJJA, born in Uganda, is the young woman's leader of the Africa Women's Appeal on Peace in the Horn which was launched in December 2020.

# **The European Perspective of Rape as a War Crime - East and West Women's Network**

~~MALGORZATA 'GOSIA' TARASIESICZ~~ is a courageous women's leader with a long history in the women's wing of Poland's opposition movement solidarity. She is a women's rights activist.

She was actively involved in the campaign to declare Rape a Weapon of War during the war in Yugoslavia. She has written on the situation in Tigray.

# Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a War Crime

- 2008 UN Security Council affirmed that  
*rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide.*
- The International Criminal Court first ruling and conviction for rape as war crime was made in the case of former Congolese vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba in 2018. The case was the first before the ICC to focus on ‘sexual violence as a weapon of war, as well as on a senior military official whose forces carried out the atrocities’.



# **Tigray Perspective**

**MEAZA GIDEY GEBREMEDHIN is an International Relations researcher, human rights advocate and representative of Omna Tigray, a nonpartisan global organisation that advocates for Tigrayans and other marginalized people.**

**She is also a Co-Founder of the first independent women's rights movement in Tigray.**

# Remarks

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**Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell**

Former Minister for Gender and  
Social Protection, Liberia

# **Response to questions from the audience**

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- Paddy Maguinness

# Closing Remarks

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**Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell**

Former Minister for Gender and  
Social Protection, Liberia

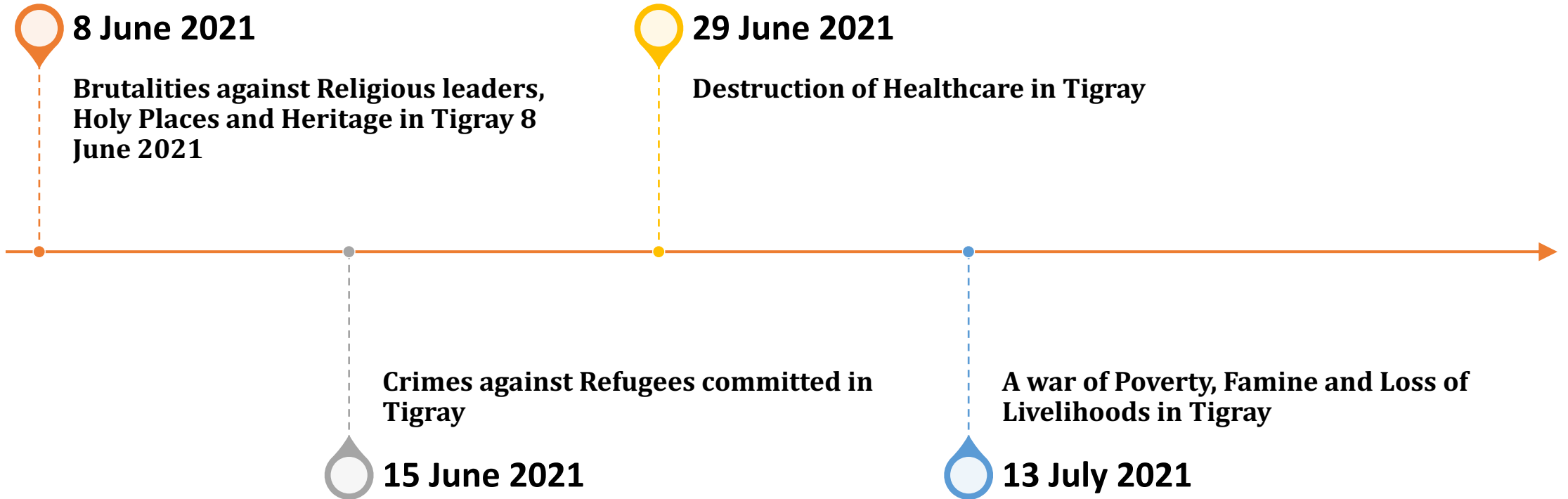


# Concluding Remarks

The perpetration of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence has not diminished and is spreading across the Horn. There is an urgent need to address the situation in the Horn:

- The withdrawal of all foreign troops, particularly those from Eritrea
- The referral of the deployment by Eritrea of National Service in a foreign jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court
- All parties in Tigray to end with immediate effect the impunity of the use of Rape as a Weapon of War

# Announcement of Upcoming Webinars



**Thank You For  
Attending**

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