



ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL- EHRCO

EHRCO Stands for Democracy, the Rule of Law and the Respect of Human Rights

EHRCO Preliminary Investigation Report on Major Human Rights Violations in and around Maikadra

December 25, 2020

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council - EHRCO has been closely following the armed conflict between the Tigray regional government and the federal government since November 4, 2020. In a series of notices since the day of the conflict, EHRCO has been urging that the conflict should not endanger the safety and security of civilians and their objects. However, during the conflict, civilians suffered a variety of physical and psychological abuses, as well as serious human rights violations, including brutal killings and sexual assaults. Of these, the November 9, 2020 massacre in *Maikadra* was a major one.

EHRCO sent a team of human rights investigation experts to the area to investigate the alleged human rights violations from December 3 to 11, 2020, and conducted field inspections in *Makadra, Humera, Abderafi, Abrahajira, Dansha, and Gondar* towns. The investigation team traveled to the affected areas and gathered information from the victims, the families of the victims, eyewitnesses, funeral directors, and church fathers, officials of temporary government institutions, and other sources. In addition, the group toured mass graves inside and outside the church and also found unburied bodies.

The Main Findings of the Investigation

Following the extensive sesame and sorghum farms in and around *Maikadra*, daily laborers, commonly known as "*Salug*", came to live in large numbers. They spend the night in the so-called "*breastfeeding mother/father*". It was these civilian daily laborers who became victims of the attack.

Since the beginning of the conflict, residents of the town, especially those of other ethnic groups, had been in a serious threat due to heavy clashes between the Tigray regional government and Federal Government security forces on the city's border areas. Two days before the *Maikadra* incident, the *Maikadra* local police and the Tigray Special Forces conducted a door-to-door search of people holding Sudanese SIM cards and destroyed them alleging that they would transfer information. People who worried about the situation tried to escape to the Amhara Region but they were unable to exit because all exit points from the city were closed by Tigray Special Forces and militia members.

Victims said that on the day of the attack (November 9, 2020) police and Special Forces, as well as Tigrayan youths (mostly coming from the *Samri* neighborhood) ordered no one to leave their homes. They testified that the young people danced in large numbers in different parts of the city, and in some places starting at 11:00 am, and also in the area known as *Gimb Sefer*, where most Amharas live, starting from 3:00 pm, they began looking for Identification cards and they spoke to victims in Tigrigna and identified those who could not respond and began to attack them.

The attack was mostly carried out using tools such as machetes, knives, axes, and ropes. It was discovered that the targets were mostly young men. The attack was based on ethnicity and targeted mostly Amharas and a few other minority ethnic groups. The incident took place mainly in the town of *Maikadra*, by a group of Tigrayan youths from the *Samri* and other kebeles. According to the victims, each youth group was supported and shielded by armed members of the Tigray Special Forces and the militia.

The search and burial of those killed in the attack took place from November 11 - 15. Among them, 86 of the burial sites were found in the *Abune Aregawi Church* in *Maikadra* with an average of 5 - 10 people in each burial site, as well as several beds used to carry corpses were also found. Besides, it has been confirmed that there are mass graves where 42 people are buried near the church compound, 57 people in the area known as *Selela Mesmer*, 56 people on *Wolde-Ab Road*, 6 people near Kebele 04 bridge area, and 18 people near the flooding area.

Victims also reported that there are bodies that had not yet been found or buried during the search and members of the EHRCO investigation team have also confirmed this by looking at the unburied corpse. Moreover, they explained that in some places the weather was so hot that it made it difficult to pick up the bodies of the dead and they were buried at the same spot where it was found.

In addition to the town of *Maikadra*, the team found similar attacks in *Humera* and *Dansha*. It confirmed from the families of the victims that six people had been killed with machetes, axes, and bullets in *Humera* town and because their bodies were left unburied and exposed to the sun for several days it is now buried in a place called *Enidiris*. In *Dansha*, 12- and 15-year-olds were also beaten to death with an axe and their funeral was held at *St. George's Church*.

According to EHRCO's field observations and data collection, more than 1,100 civilians were killed in the attack. At least 122 people suffered from serious injuries and they are receiving treatment at *Abderafi* and *Gondar* hospitals. Victims' statements indicate that the perpetrators were vandalizing and looting property.

On the other hand, the investigation team has collected evidences that show of sexual assault cases such as rape that occurred on the day of the incidence in *Miakadra*. Six of the victims stated that they had been raped by more than 10 youths who carried out the attack. Members of the investigation team were able to confirm that the victims who spoke at the time were in a state of apparent physical and psychological harm and they did not receive any physical or psychological treatment after the attack. EHRCO urges relevant government bodies and humanitarian organizations to pay attention as they need urgent physical and psychological treatment.

Moreover, the EHRCO investigation team confirmed that following the situation in and around *Maikadra*, an unestimated amount of property was destroyed and looted, and many people left their homes and displaced to other parts of the country, and crossed the border into *Sudan*. The details of the destruction, looting, and the status of internally displaced persons, and refugees will be discussed by the forthcoming detailed human rights report of EHRCO.

EHRCO also found out that during this atrocious event there were Tigrayan's who protected individuals from the attack by shielding them and giving them information to help them flee. Since they left the area due to fear, the investigation team was unable to contact the Tigrayan's involved in this humanitarian and ethical activity, but many survivors of the traumatic event by their help have testified their humanism.

Therefore EHRCO has confirmed that the heinous and inhuman act committed in and around *Maikadra* on November 9, 2020, resulting in grave human rights violations. Hence, EHRCO urges for the proper investigation of these tragic events and for all direct and indirect perpetrators to be brought to justice.

EHRCO with the participation of senior human rights experts will soon release a comprehensive human rights report which contains details of this tragic incident including the type and extent of the damage, background history, legal and substance analysis, and recommendations.

December 25, 2020

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

EHRCO has an honorary position in the African Commission on Peoples and Human Rights: is a member of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), a member of the Anti-Torture organization (OMCT), and the founding member of the East and Africa Human Rights Defenders Defender (Defenders Defender).