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IN FOCUS

**Persisting Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Tigray Region and a  
Political Profile on Tunisia**

AFRICA IN BRIEF

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## Report Review

# Persisting Ethnic Cleansing in Ethiopia's Tigray Region: Four Takeaways

Anu Maria Joseph



Image source: Narimanel-Mofty/APPhoto

On 1 June, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report titled "[Ethiopia: Ethnic Cleansing Persists Under Tigray Truce.](#)" The Deputy African Director of the Human Rights Watch, Carine Kaneza Nantulya, stated: "The November truce in northern Ethiopia has not brought about an end to the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans in Western Tigray Zone; If the Ethiopian government is really serious about ensuring justice for abuses, then it should stop opposing independent investigations into the atrocities in Western Tigray and hold abusive officials and commanders to account."

The Human Rights Watch has called on the Ethiopian government to "suspend, investigate and appropriately prosecute" officials who have committed human rights abuses in Western Tigray.

On 6 June, Al Jazeera quoted the Ethiopian government rejecting the allegations by the HRW, stating: "This distorted and misleading portrayal of the situation attempts to undermine peaceful coexistence and fuel inter-ethnic conflict and obstruct the national efforts for peace and reconciliation."

The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region between the Ethiopian federal forces, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF),

and respective allies (Amhara forces, Eritrean forces and Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) ended with the signing of a peace agreement in November 2022. Although the deal has ended the hostilities, the peace remains negative in Tigray. The report by the HRW says the Ethnic Tigrayans are being targeted, facing human rights violations and forced expulsions.

Following are four takeaways of the HRW report.

**1. Continuing ethnic cleansing of the Tigrayans despite the peace agreement**  
During September 2022-April 2023, HRW interviewed 35 people, including the victims of the abuses, aid agencies and witnesses. It found out that despite the truce agreement, Amhara security forces known as "Amhara Liyu," a militia group known as "Fano," and interim authorities were engaged in forced expulsions, killings in detention, torture, and inhuman treatment of ethnic Tigrayans in Western Tigray Zone. The detainees were held for an extended period in police stations, prisons, military camps and other unofficial sites in the region. Several interviewees said 70 people, including residents and detainees, were forcibly expelled from the Western Tigray region. HRW quotes a Reuters report on the Fano militia expelling 2,800 people from five detention sites in Western Tigray in early November, including men, women, and children. Nearly 47,000 UN registered displaced people in Sudan told HRW they are threatened by officials and security forces in Tigray against returning home.

## **2. Lack of accountability and justice to the human rights abuses in Tigray**

The Ethiopian government has shown little interest in prosecuting those who committed human rights atrocities in Tigray. An Inter-Ministerial Task Force set up by the Ministry of Justice had previously promised to investigate the atrocities in Western Tigray by December 2022. The government has not yet released any details of these inquiries or prosecuted anyone for the atrocities. When Ethiopia was under review by the UN Committee against Torture in May, Ethiopian officials downplayed the allegations of ethnic cleansing.

## **3. Little international monitoring and investigations in Western Tigray**

Although the international actors, including the EU and the US, had emphasized the priority of justice for the victims of human rights atrocities, they failed to initiate concrete benchmarks to hold the perpetrators accountable. Instead, right after the signing of the peace agreement, many actors, including the US and the EU, sought to revive strained relations with the Ethiopian government besides stressing accountability for the atrocities. On 15 March, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to strengthen bilateral relations. On 4 April, the EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrel, said that the normalization of ties with Ethiopia would depend on the development of the peace process and refrained from addressing the lack of progress on justice for the victims.

## **4. Emphasis on the need for monitoring by national, regional and international actors**

The report has emphasised the role of national, regional and international actors

in monitoring the human rights abuses in Tigray. The HRW calls on the Ethiopian government to ensure that human rights monitors, including the National Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, have access to the conflict-hit regions to conduct investigations. It emphasizes the need to establish an independent body for the Ethiopian government to monitor the repatriation of displaced communities. It highlights that the African Union Monitoring Mission, which is to visit Western Tigray in June, should publicly report on rights abuses and humanitarian access in the region. It stresses concerted efforts by international actors to support the mechanisms of monitoring and investigating violence.

## **In perspective**

This is not the first time ethnic cleansing has been reported in Tigray. Since the conflict broke out in November 2020, Tigrayans have been ethnically targeted. HRW released similar reports on ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia during April, June and December 2022. Although the peace agreement in Tigray mentions justice to the victims of the abuse, an end to a civil conflict between two forces, TPLF and Ethiopian federal forces, does not mean an end to ethnic indifferences. Referring to a truce as a yardstick for a sudden end to ethnic cleansing is unfeasible. The issue lies deep within the ethnic complexities of Ethiopian society. Ethnic issues in Tigray need to be addressed through the grassroots. The recommendation for a comprehensive monitoring mechanism has a relativity that it will unlikely address the issue.

## COMMENTARY

**Tunisia: A Political Profile**

Jerry Franklin

**Major Events 2021-2023**

On 25 July 2021, President Kais Saied granted himself full executive powers by dismissing the Prime Minister, Hichem Mechichi, froze the parliament, and revoked legislators' parliamentary immunity. Simultaneously, Tunisia dealt with three interconnected crises: the pandemic, worsening economic condition, and political stagnation and polarization. Initially, the power grab gained popular support as people wanted the economy back on track and root out corruption. However, the opposition called the move a coup against the revolution and the constitution. On 11 October 2021, Saied appointed a new government under Prime Minister Najla Bouden Romdhane. Later, he issued a presidential proclamation that allowed him to rule by decree.

In 2022, Saied dissolved Tunisia's High Judicial Council and dissolved the parliament. On 26 July 2022, Saied bought a new constitution for referendum. People supported the new constitution that increased the president's powers and limited the parliament's powers. On 17 December 2022, elections were held to elect members for the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP). The elections received a low turnout after major parties, including the Ennahda party, boycotted the election.

On 13 March 2023, Tunisia's new parliament convened, marking the first time the country had a functioning legislature since Saied suspended the previous parliament. The main opposition alliance, National Salvation Front (NSF), stated that they will not recognize the new parliament, claiming the elections held in December were unconstitutional. Saied was accused of using the judiciary as a

tool of repression. In recent months, thirty opposition figures, deemed critical to President Kais Saied, were arrested including Rached Ghannouchi, leader of the Ennahda party, on charges of plotting against state security. This was widely considered as Saied's move to subdue his political opponents and consolidate control. Besides, a series of protests are ongoing against Saied over the country's high unemployment rate and rising inflation alongside opposition parties' continued calls for anti-government protests.

**Major Actors**

**Kais Saied:** The President is at the centre of the entire political crisis. He does not belong to any political party. His term in office turned controversial after his unilateral replacement of a parliamentary system with a presidential system.

**Rached Ghannouchi:** A former Tunisian Parliament Speaker and politician heading the largest party, the Ennahda Party. Ennahdha, a self-styled "Muslim democrat" party with its roots in political Islam, has dominated politics in Tunisia since the 2011 revolution. Ghannouchi has emerged as one of Saied's biggest critics, aiming to maintain the legacy of Tunisia's revolution and the pro-democratic struggle in Tunisia and the Arab world.

**Nabil Karoui:** A former member of the Parliament, he leads the country's Heart of Tunisia Party, one of the parties that had a large majority of seats in the now-suspended Parliament, after Ennahda. Unlike the Ennahda party, the Heart of Tunisia demands a secular state.

**Ahmed Nejib Chebbi:** Leader of Tunisia's National Salvation Front, an opposition

alliance consisting of the Ennahda Party, Heart of Tunisia Party, and other political groups with the ultimate objective of restoring democracy in the country.

Abir Moussi: A key leader in Tunisian politics in opposing the Islamist Ennahda Party. She has been leading the country's Free Destourian Party, devoted to restoring the ideologies of the Constitutional Democratic Rally party that was the ruling party at the time of the pre-Tunisian Revolution.

Civil Society Groups and Tunisia General Labour Union (UGTT) Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail demand to safeguard their economic and social rights, criticizing the worsened living conditions due to inflation and lessening purchasing power.

The ideologies and demands of each anti-Saied actor differ from each other, marking a polarised opposition.

## Major Issues

### 1. Political Divide

Saied used scorched-earth policies to expand his powers and suppress his opposition which led to a series of protests in Tunisia demanding the step down of Saied from the presidency. The National Salvation Front coalition is leading the anti-government rallies in Tunisia. Civil Society Groups and Tunisia General Labour Union (UGTT) play a critical role as they mobilize people to conduct protests and rallies against the current regime. They have been demanding national dialogue, press freedoms, union freedoms, and political freedoms.

### 2. Polarised Society

President Saied's power grab and policies have deepened the split between pro- and anti-Saied groups, leading to a polarized society. The pro-Saied group supports his campaign against corruption, and against external interference. The anti-Saied

groups accuse him of taking control of all authority and striking at democracy. Additionally, people are dissatisfied with the collapsing economy.

### 3. Violation of Rights

There is a significant decline in the freedom of press and expression. The government has harassed, detained, and prosecuted activists, journalists, political opponents, and social media users for alleged violations of free expression, including criticism against President Saied, the security forces, and the army. Some were tried before military tribunals. Occasionally, police used disproportionate force against demonstrators. Tunisian law continues to discriminate against women in inheritance rights. After Saied made anti-immigrant comments against African migrants in February 2023, black African foreigners and sub-saharan migrants faced greater violence and arbitrary arrests.

### 4. Economic and Social Challenges

Tunisia faces a major trade imbalance, rising prices, and unemployment. Due to the country's limited access to foreign financing, local debt financing has been in crisis. Tunisia's inflation rate hit 10.4 percent in February 2023, the highest in almost three decades, owing primarily to rising energy and food prices. These factors have put enormous strain on the economy, making it more critical to enact changes to promote long-term growth.

### What does the political crisis in Tunisia say?

The democracy, which the country has taken a decade to build after the Arab Spring, is being dismantled by President Kais Saied. The new constitution provided a presidential system, institutionalizing the one-man reign of Saied, and concentrated authority in the presidency without checks and balances. Saied's power grab has weakened the government institutions that were supposed to check his powers. Saied severely weakened the judiciary's

independence. These measures have slowed the country's democratic transition. By all indications, Tunisia's new government is moving further away from the liberal democratic form. The opposition parties and people who oppose the current regime consider the rule of

Saied as a de-facto dictatorship. Tunisia was successful in building a democracy but failed to sustain it. The series of protests in Tunisia showcases the dissatisfaction of people with the leadership of Saied.

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## AFRICA IN BRIEF

7 June - 13 June

By Jerry Franklin and Ryan Marcus

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### TUNISIA

#### Italy's Prime Minister discuss Tunisian migration

On 7 June, BBC reported that Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni visited Tunisia to address the issue of irregular migration. The Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, warned that Europe could witness a huge migration wave due to irregular migration. Additionally, Meloni discussed the border surveillance and repatriation of undocumented migrants. Meloni pledged to grant USD 750 million in aid to Tunisia to avoid an economic meltdown in Tunisia and to address the illegal migration issue. ("[Italy's far-right prime minister visits Tunisia to discuss migration](#)," *BBC*, 7 June 2023)

### ALGERIA

#### UN Security Council elects Algeria as a non-permanent member

On 7 June, BBC reported that Algeria has been elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council representing Africa. The country will serve from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025. Algeria would join Ecuador, Japan, Mozambique, and Switzerland as non-permanent members. ("[Sierra Leone, Algeria elected to UN Security Council](#)," *BBC*, 7 June 2023)

### SUDAN

#### Attack on Saudi Arabia embassy

On 8 June, BBC reported that the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the

armed groups for invading and vandalizing its embassy in Khartoum. Saudi Arabia and the US have been involved in peace talks with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since the clashes erupted in mid-April 2023. The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the kingdom rejects all forms of violence and vandalism against diplomatic mission representations. Saudi Arabia and the US have been involved in peace talks with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since the clashes erupted in mid-April 2023. The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, visited Saudi Arabia on 7 June where two countries pledged to continue efforts to end the fighting in Sudan. ("[Saudi Arabia condemns attack on its embassy in Sudan](#)," *BBC*, 8 June 2023)

### SOUTH SUDAN

#### Intercommunal fighting causes the death of 13 people

On 9 June, Al Jazeera reported that a clash erupted between two ethnic communities in the camp for displaced people located in Malakal, Upper Nile. A man from the Shilluk community was stabbed to death on 8 June which sparked riots. There were more than 50,000 people in the camp. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) spokesperson Ben Malor stated that 13 people were reported dead. Furthermore,

Malor stated that UNMISS and South Sudan's army have increased security around the camp. The violence has been prominent in the areas despite the peace deal in 2018. ("[Fighting in South Sudan camp leaves 13 displaced people dead: UN](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 9 June 2023)

## ETHIOPIA

### The US stops the food aid

On 8 June, BBC reported that the US suspended food aid to Ethiopia citing a diversion of funds. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) stated: "We made the difficult but necessary decision that we cannot move forward with distribution of food assistance until reforms are in place." The USAID stated that some officials have diverted the aid using military units across the country. Meanwhile, more than 20 million people need food aid due to the drought and the recent northern Tigray war. ("[US suspends food aid to Ethiopia over fraud fears](#)," *BBC*, 8 June 2023)

## SOUTH AFRICA

### President Ramaphosa and Putin discuss peace mission bid

On 8 June, BBC reported that South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the forthcoming peace mission by six African leaders regarding the Russia-Ukraine war. The leaders of Comoros, Egypt, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia are involved in the peace bid. The leaders discussed ways of bringing an end to the conflict and agreed to engage with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on a ceasefire. A separate Russia-Africa summit has been scheduled for the end of July 2023 in St. Petersburg. ("[Putin welcomes African peace mission bid- SA leader](#)," *BBC*, 8 June 2023)

## DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

### More than 45 people were killed in a displacement camp

On 12 June, Al Jazeera reported that a coalition of militia groups called the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO) killed more than 45 displaced people at the Lala displacement site in the Djugu region. The UN Peacekeeping mission stated: "This attack constitutes a serious violation of international law and wishes to recall that deliberate attacks against civilian populations can constitute war crimes". Additionally, the mission extended its condolences to the victims' families. ("[More than 45 killed in attack on DR Congo displacement camp: UN](#)," *Al Jazeera*, 12 June 2023)

## NIGERIA

### Nigeria: President Tinubu addresses the end of fuel subsidies

On 12 June, Africanews reported that Nigerian President Bola Tinubu addressed the citizens to cooperate as prices of petrol, transport, and food soared due to the abolition of fuel subsidies which were costing billions of euros. Tinubu stated that the government will increase its investments in transportation infrastructure, education, electricity supply, healthcare, and other public services. Nigeria is largely dependent on imported fuel due to its failing state refineries. Following the subsidy abolition, the country must cope with fuel and electricity shortages which force them to use generators or withstand a lack of power supply, and the cost of a liter of petrol has risen from 190 naira to around 540 naira. ("[Nigeria president calls for patience amidst the end of fuel subsidies](#)," *Africanews*, 12 June 2023)

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### [About NIAS Africa Studies](#)

As a part of the area studies initiatives, the Institute started a focussed study on Pakistan in 2020. In 2021, it expanded the area studies to include Europe Studies, China Reader, and Maritime Studies. In 2022, the Science, Technology and International Relations (STIR) programme at the Institute is further expanding its area studies, to include Africa.

The primary focus of NIAS Africa studies would be on the following five verticals: contemporary political issues, colonial legacies, problems of governance, civil-military equations, and the rise of radical Islamic groups. The primary objective is to study Africa from an internal prism. ,

NIAS Africa Studies would include a series of expert lectures, workshops, publications and a weekly exclusively focussed on Africa. The initiative also aims to create a network of young scholars studying Africa and also African scholars studying in various Indian institutions.

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### [About the team](#)

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