

54/2022

7 September 2022

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**Hunger as a weapon of war.
Tigray (Ethiopia)**[Visit the WEBSITE](#)[Receive the E-NEWSLETTER](#)

Hunger as a weapon of war. Tigray (Ethiopia)

Abstract:

This document analyzes the use of hunger as a weapon of war, considering its definition and elements; using as a case example the situation that Ethiopia is experiencing in general, and analyzing the Tigray region in particular. Special attention is paid to the difficulties found in the distribution of responsibilities and criminal prosecution and in the task of stopping the consequent humanitarian crisis

Keywords:

Hunger as a weapon of war, Hunger, Food Security, Ethiopia, Tigray

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

El hambre como arma de guerra. Tigray (Etiopía)

Resumen:

En el presente documento se analiza la utilización de hambre como arma de guerra, atendiendo a su definición y elementos constitutivos; y se estudia la situación que está viviendo Etiopía en general y la región de Tigray de manera particular. Se pone especial atención a las dificultades para el reparto de responsabilidades y enjuiciamiento penal y las que se encuentran en la tarea de frenar la crisis humanitaria consecuente.

Palabras clave:

Hambre como arma de guerra, hambre, seguridad alimentaria, Etiopía, Tigray.

How to cite this document:

PALACIÁN DE INZA, Blanca. *Hunger as a weapon of war. Tigray (Ethiopia)*. IEEE Analysis Paper 54./2022.

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA54_2022_BLAPAL_Hambre_E NG.pdf and/or [bie³ link](#) (accessed on day/month/year)

INTRODUCTION

The words of Alex de Waal¹ on the risk of starvation having generally decreased over the last 30 years thanks not only to humanitarian efforts, but also to the decline of political attitudes that consider human beings as expendable, have already been mentioned in a previous paper.

However, de Waal's statement was made in 2018, since when this trend has in fact been reversing. In May 2022, UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that the number of people suffering from food insecurity had doubled in the previous two years. Specifically, he stated that more than half a million people are living in famine conditions, a more than 500% increase since 2016. Guterres called these figures "terrifying", declaring that "if you don't feed the people, you will feed the conflict"². And at a meeting of the Call to Action for Global Food Security, he also warned that "the Russian invasion of Ukraine is amplifying and accelerating the factors involved: climate change, COVID-19 and inequality. The war is threatening to push tens of millions of people to the brink of food insecurity, followed by malnutrition, mass starvation and famine, in a crisis that could last for years"³.

In most of these situations of famine, and as pointed out by the Secretary-General, it is political actions, COVID-19 and inequality that are playing the predominant role. Of course, in most of the cases we cannot speak of deliberate provocation of hunger as a weapon of war. Diverse circumstances and actors play a role in the existence of hunger. Armed conflict and associated population displacement are factors that have a high impact on famine. To this effect, the report⁴ by Sophie Douce for Le Monde Afrique shows that in Africa, far away from Europe, and particularly from Ukraine, war continues to kill every day. The deaths caused by the refugee crises discussed in the article are considered the "ten most neglected crises in the world"⁵. These ten crises are the ones

¹ DE WAAL, Alex. "Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine", Polity. 2018, pp. X, XI.

² EUROPA PRESS. "The UN warns that the number of food insecure people has doubled in two years", 19/05/2022. Available at: <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-onu-advierte-numero-personas-sufren-inseguridad-alimentaria-duplicado-dos-anos-20220519040954.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ DOUCE, Sophie. "Il y a une forme d'eurocentrisme, voire de racisme, dans la répartition de l'aide internationale", Le Monde, 01/06/2022. Available at: ["Il y a une forme d'eurocentrisme, voire de racisme, dans la répartition de l'aide internationale " \(lemonde.fr\)](https://www.lemonde.fr/aide-internationale/article/2022/06/01/il-y-a-une-forme-d-eurocentrisme-voire-de-racisme-dans-la-repartition-de-l-aide-internationale_1811160_1016616.html)

⁵ The list of neglected crises has been compiled according to these three conditions: lack of international political will, lack of media attention and lack of humanitarian aid.

mentioned in the recent 2021 report ⁶ by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and, for the first time, all of them are located on the African continent. They are taking place in countries with conflicts that are provoking food crises aggravated, as the UN Secretary General pointed out, by the effects of the war in Ukraine, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The crises highlighted in this report are the following:

THE WORLD'S MOST NEGLECTED DISPLACEMENT CRISES. 2021

1	DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
2	BURKINA FASO
3	CAMEROON
4	SOUTHERN SUDAN
5	CHAD
6	MALI
7	SUDAN
8	NIGERIA
9	BURUNDI
10	ETHIOPIA

If we focus on the last crisis listed, the one in Ethiopia, there seem to be clear indications of the use of hunger as a weapon of war, as will be covered in this paper.

FOOD SECURITY

At this point, it is appropriate to clarify the concept of food security to be able to follow the words of the UN Secretary General.

The definition of food insecurity was agreed in the Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security in 2009, and its opposite proposed. To this effect, it is considered that "food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life"⁷. This concept includes four dimensions: availability, access, usage and stability⁸.

⁶ NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL. "The world's most neglected displacement crises in 2021", June 2022. Available at: <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/neglected-2021/the-worlds-most-neglected-displacement-crisis-2021.pdf>

⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security. World Summit on Food Security. Rome: 2009. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/4A2BA55CAA500C0B49257682001F0FBB-Informe_completo.pdf.

⁸ BULGACH G. What do we mean by food insecurity? The shocking situation in Argentina. Evidence, update in outpatient practice. 2019;22(2):e002010. doi: 10.51987/evidencia.v22i2.4222. Cited by: Bulgach G, Vázquez Peña F, Carrara C, Kopitowski K. Inseguridad alimentaria en el área de influencia del Centro de Medicina Familiar y

In 2013, the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies produced the monographic Strategy Paper to Food Security⁹. The introduction to this book, written by its former coordinator, Santos Castro¹⁰, outlines the first steps taken to prevent food insecurity and the chain of scourges it causes, in addition to the fallacy that hunger is an inevitable problem.

In this regard, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in force since 1976, assigns member states the obligation to respect and protect the right to food of their inhabitants¹¹. Santos was emphatic in that the food needed exists, that it is on the international markets, but that in millions of cases there is a long distance that is impossible to travel between the markets and the mouths of those who are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. Once again, we find that political decisions are the key to solving the problem. In this regard, the food exists but it does not reach those who need it. Ultimately, he points out, it is not a problem of technical capacity but of political will¹².

MEASURING HUNGER

Now that it has been clarified that political will is one of the causes of hunger, the next step is to consider what conditions must be in place for hunger to be considered a scourge. It should be borne in mind that there must be a clear intent to cause starvation for this action or actions to constitute a war crime and, as will be seen on this point, there must be a certain threshold of severity for the situation to be considered starvation. And it is from its very definition that the greatest difficulties stem, because not only is proving this voluntariness very complicated, but so is measuring the threshold. Existing measurement tools should be seen as indicative but by no means exhaustive or conclusive on their own.

Comunitaria "San Pantaleón" (Province of Buenos Aires) [Food insecurity in the area of influence of the Center of Family and Community Medicine "San Pantaleón" (Province of Buenos Aires)]. Rev Fac Cien Med Univ Nac Cordoba. 2021 Dec 28;78(4):340-346. Spanish. doi: 10.31053/1853.0605.v78.n4.30252.

⁹ VV.AA. "Food Security and Global Security", Strategy Notebook 161, IEEE, 2013. Available at: [Food Security and Global Security \(ieeee.es\)](https://ieeee.es/food-security-and-global-security)

¹⁰ Advisor to the IEEE, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1993-1996) and FAO Assistant Director for Europe (1997-1998).

¹¹ VV.AA. *Op.Cit.*p.11

¹² *Ibid.* p.15

Measurement tools exist, developed by the *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification* (IPC) initiative¹³ in 2004 to analyse the case of Somalia. The classification established by this initiative is currently the most widely used.

Its analysis tools aim to answer six questions:

1. How serious is the situation?
2. When will stocks be affected?
3. Where are the people most affected?
4. How many people are affected?
5. Why does this happen?
6. Who are most affected?

Having answered these questions, the CPI uses the following assessment scales:

1. minimum insecurity
2. degree of dietary stress
3. crisis stage
4. emergency
5. catastrophe and famine.



IFC: Chronic Food Insecurity (Chronic Food Insecurity)

However, a major famine can occur without it or its earlier stages having been declared, and if a population lives in stage 4 for a long period of time, mortality can reach very

¹³ Official website: <https://www.ipcinfo.org>

high levels. For these reasons, while this classification must be considered as the best available guidance, it is nonetheless inconclusive guidance.

Other tools, such as the one developed by FAO¹⁴, analyse the so-called FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale) data by applying the Rasch model¹⁵. In addition, indicators based on the respondents' experience are added to classify the severity of the situation. These indicators are as follows:

1- WORRIED: Have you ever been worried about not having enough food to eat due to lack of money or other resources?
2- HEALTHY: Thinking back over the last 12 months, was there a time when you were unable to eat healthy, nutritious food due to lack of money or other resources?
3- FEWFOOD: Have you ever been forced to eat little variety of food due to lack of money or other resources?
4- SKIPPED MEALS: Have you ever had to skip a meal during the day because you did not have enough money or other resources to obtain food?
5- ATELESS (ATELESS) Thinking back over the last 12 months, was there a time when you ate less than you thought you should because of lack of money or other resources?
6- RUNOUT (RUNOUT): In your household, have you run out of food due to lack of money or other resources?
7- HUNGRY: Have you ever been hungry but not eaten because there was not enough money or other resources to obtain food?
8 - WHLDAY: During the last 12 months, has there been a time when you stopped eating for a whole day due to lack of money or other resources?

¹⁴ Available on the website: <https://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/analyse-data/en/>

¹⁵ The Rasch model is used to measure a latent phenomenon that is not directly observable, by means of a series of scores obtained for different items by different individuals. BADENES PLÁ, Nuria. "The Rasch Model applied to the multidimensional measurement of poverty in Spain: Blessed are those who have a TV, even if they do not eat meat". Complutense University and Fundación Acción Familiar. 2009. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es>

According to these parameters, a person is considered severely food insecure, to have run out of food or to have gone a day or more without food. In other words, they have most likely gone hungry. While severe food insecurity is at the extreme end of the scale, even moderate food insecurity is a concern. For the moderately food insecure, access to food is uncertain¹⁶.

However, as noted above, the reliability of the measurement tools available is questionable. The data are nothing more than indicative. Useful, but indicative. A recent study in Argentina¹⁷, for example, showed a response rate of just 44%.

This links up with the second point to be addressed after measurement. Famine is a long process, in many cases extending over not months but years that can lead to widespread starvation of the population. Warnings for the Tigray region of Ethiopia have been in place for a year now¹⁸. The drought, how the war in Ukraine is affecting grain supplies in the Horn of Africa, the war itself in the Horn of Africa and the humanitarian organisations being prevented from assisting the civilian population with their basic needs have all accelerated the process. During this period, social, medical and food shortages, etc., have worsened, leading to high mortality rates.

No modern-day famine has developed unnoticed despite the limitations of measuring indicators. Even under conditions of the strictest censorship, those in power have been aware of the unfolding calamity. In the case of Tigray, while the President himself denies the humanitarian disaster, this does not mean that he is unaware of it.

Humanitarian information systems, which cannot operate under censorship, undoubtedly provide diagnoses of the dimensions of food crises and indicate what actions need to be taken to alleviate them. Meanwhile, at earlier stages, the stress in all orders suffered by the population is of critical importance and is on a deteriorating course. While it is therefore necessary to act upstream, this is not possible if humanitarian intervention is hampered.

¹⁶ UNITED NATIONS. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "Hunger and food insecurity". Available at: <https://www.fao.org/hunger/es/>

¹⁷ Bulgach G, Vázquez Peña F, Carrara C, Kopitowski K. Inseguridad alimentaria en el área de influencia del Centro de Medicina Familiar y Comunitaria "San Pantaleón" (Province of Buenos Aires) [Food insecurity in the area of influence of the Center of Family and Community Medicine "San Pantaleón" (Province of Buenos Aires)]. Rev Fac Cien Med Univ Nac Cordoba. 2021 Dec 28; 78(4):340-346. Spanish. doi: 10.31053/1853.0605.v78.n4.30252.

¹⁸ Ibid.

As might be expected, the use of hunger as a weapon of war does not necessarily have an immediate effect, but is also a process of slow lethality. How it is defined and condemned in international law is explained below.

INTERNATIONAL LAW

The use of starvation as a weapon of war is prohibited in all types of conflict, although the Rome Statute¹⁹ has only made it a war crime in international armed conflicts. Filling this gap with reference to internal armed conflicts, in Resolution 2417 (2018) and reiterated in Resolution 2573 (2021), the United Nations established the condemnation of the use of starvation as a technique of warfare regardless of the type of armed conflict in which it takes place²⁰.

Notably, in Additional Protocol I (1977) to the 1949 Geneva Conventions²¹, the provocation of starvation had already been defined as a war crime and its use prohibited²². And although here too reference was only made to its prohibition in international armed conflicts, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, state practice establishes this rule as one of customary international law applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts²³.

There are three requirements for provocation of starvation to be considered a war crime:

- intentionality or recklessness
- acts of destruction of the means of production, processing and distribution of food and water, as well as any other objects necessary for life; the displacement of populations away from their means of subsistence, and hindering humanitarian access to vulnerable populations

¹⁹UN: General Assembly, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8(2)(b)(xxv). 17 July 1998, ISBN No. 92-9227-227-6, available at: [https://www.un.org/spanish/law/icc/statute/spanish/rome_statute\(s\).pdf](https://www.un.org/spanish/law/icc/statute/spanish/rome_statute(s).pdf)

²⁰ ZAPPALÀ, Salvatore. "Conflict Related Hunger, 'Starvation Crimes' and UN Security Council Resolution 2417 (2018)". *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, Volume 17, Issue 4, September 2019, Pages 881-906. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqz047>

²¹ Additional Protocol I (1977) to the Geneva Conventions, art. 54, para. 1

²² *Ibid.* Rule 53. Starvation of the civilian population is prohibited as a method of warfare.

²³ HENCKAERTS, J.M; DOSWALD-BECK, L. "Customary International Humanitarian Law", Vol.1. Rules. International Committee of the Red Cross, no. 2007. Available at: https://www.icrc.org/es/doc/assets/files/other/icrc_003_pcustom.pdf

- and the outcome, which may include suffering and increased mortality associated with deprivation of food and/or other objects and activities necessary to sustain life (including health and shelter).

The first requirement is particularly interesting, with clear intent not the only evidence for provoking starvation to be considered a war crime. Recklessness also becomes a criminal act when political superiors have knowledge that mass starvation will take place or is already happening as a result of their actions, but they "recklessly continue to pursue these policies despite knowing that they are causing mass starvation"²⁴.

Last, we cannot end this brief allusion to international law without mentioning that not only is international law applicable in armed conflicts, but it is also applicable to human rights obligations, including the right to food²⁵.

THE CASE OF TIGRAY (ETHIOPIA)



Figure: Map of the region surrounding Ethiopia. Marked in red is the region of Tigray.

As mentioned in the previous section on measuring hunger, there is clear evidence of its use as a weapon of war in the armed conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia.

²⁴ MARCUS, David. "Famine Crimes in International Law." *The American Journal of International Law* 97, no. 2 (2003): 245–81. e7 p. 247. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3100102>

²⁵ HUTTER, Simone. Starvation in Armed Conflicts: An Analysis Based on the Right to Food', *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, Volume 17, Issue 4, September 2019, pp. 723-752, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mqz056>

This armed conflict can be summed up by quoting Juan Mora Tebas, who explains how it is rooted in long-standing tension between the central government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The TPLF was the dominant political force throughout the country until Abiy, Ethiopia's current president, came to power in 2018 and introduced a series of far-reaching reforms. "Relations deteriorated further when in June 2020 Abiy postponed the national elections due to COVID-19, leading to open warfare. This conflict, aside from having triggered a deep humanitarian crisis, not only weakened the Ethiopian state internally, as any concession to Tigray could be claimed by any of the other regions, but it also destabilised the entire Horn of Africa region".²⁶

Using the CPI measurement model mentioned above, the results obtained in June 2021²⁷ indicated that 350,000 Tigrines were experiencing catastrophic starvation conditions, i.e., level 5, the highest in the classification. This data could not be updated due to difficulties accessing the region by humanitarian organisations, but according to Omna Tigray's news²⁸, the region is experiencing the world's worst famine in the last decade²⁹.

INTENTIONALITY: PROHIBITION OF ACCESS FOR HUMANITARIAN PERSONNEL

As indicated above, deprivation of food and/or other objects and activities necessary to sustain life (including health and shelter) are elements included in the consideration of the promotion of hunger as a war crime. Examples in this respect include the closure in early June 2022 of the Ayder Referral Hospital, the largest and only functioning hospital

²⁶ MORA TEBAS, Juan A. "Conflict in Tigray (Ethiopia): Possible "domino effect"?", IEEE Analysis Paper 25/2022. Available at: [Conflict in Tigray \(Ethiopia\): Possible "domino effect"?](https://ieeee.es/Conflict%20in%20Tigray%20(Ethiopia)%20Possible%20%22domino%20effect%22%3F) (ieeee.es)

²⁷ CPI. "IPC Ethiopia Alert. July 2021. Available at: [ETHIOPIA: Famine Review Committee confirms very high levels of acute food insecurity and Risk of Famine in Tigray | IPC Global Platform \(ipcinfo.org\)](https://www.ipcinfo.org/ethiopia/alert)

²⁸ Omna Tigray defines itself as a collective of international Tigray professionals from diverse backgrounds, who have come together in response to the war and genocide perpetrated against the people of Tigray. Likewise, it describes itself as a global non-partisan, non-profit organisation in the USA, Canada, Europe and Australia, the purpose of which is to advocate effectively for an end to the war, to call for unrestricted humanitarian aid for the people of Tigray and to promote the economic development of Tigray.

²⁹ SHEEPSHANKS, Octavia. "Man-made Famine in Tigray - The World's Worst Hunger Crisis in a Decade". Omna Tigray, February 2022. Available at: [Man-made Famine in Tigray - The World's Worst Hunger Crisis in a Decade - Omna Tigray](https://www.omnatigray.com/man-made-famine-in-tigray-the-worlds-worst-hunger-crisis-in-a-decade)

in Ethiopia's Tigray region, due to lack of medicine, anaesthesia and oxygen and 20 months without supplies³⁰.

At the same time, the Ethiopian government, which alternately allows and denies the delivery of humanitarian aid, is accusing humanitarian organisations of providing supplies that could be used by rebel forces³¹. Regardless of the veracity or otherwise of these allegations, impeding humanitarian access to populations in need is a further element constituting a war crime³². Likewise, both the director general of the World Health Organisation, the Ethiopian Tedros Adhanom, and the UN secretary general himself, have stated that the humanitarian aid reaching the Tigray region is very insufficient³³ and is even "causing hell" in the region³⁴. In the same statements, Adhanom claims that although medicines have been allowed to be sent to other Ethiopian regions, this has not been the case for the Tigray region since July 2021. For his part, and as early as January 2022, Guterres warned that the humanitarian situation is aggravated by the continued suspension of essential basic services such as banking, electricity and communications.

The Secretary-General's Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, S/2022/381 of 10 May 2022³⁵, also lists multiple elements that confirm the warnings mentioned above:

In this regard, the report again explains the lack of electricity, telecommunications and banking services and the cuts in commercial supply chains in the Tigray region. Health facilities, equipment and transport have been attacked and looted and hospitals have been used for military purposes. Hundreds of health facilities in Ethiopia's Afar, Amara

³⁰ TEKLE, Tesfa-Alem. "Health crisis looms in Tigray as main hospital closes". The East African, 5/06/2022. Available at: [The East African](#)

³¹ AFRICA RADIO. "Ethiopia: le gouvernement accuse les agences humanitaires de livrer du matériel interdit et trop de carburant au Tigré", 20/06/2022. Available at: [Africa Radio](#)

³² In the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Article 8(2)(b)(xxv). 1998: "Intentionally using the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including by wilfully preventing relief supplies as provided for in the Geneva Conventions".

³³ EUROPA PRESS: "Guterres warns that humanitarian aid in Ethiopia is 'far below what is needed'", 13/05/2022. Available at: <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-guterres-alerta-ayuda-humanitaria-etiofia-muy-debajo-necesario-20220513062248.html>

³⁴ Statements by Tedros Adhanom available on Youtube: [Hell' created by Tigray blockade says WHO chief | AFP - YouTube](#)

³⁵ UNITED NATIONS. NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL. "Protection of civilians in armed conflict Report of the Secretary-General", S/2022/381, 10 May 2022. Available at: [N2232173.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

and Tigray regions have been damaged and many have been rendered unusable. Médecins Sans Frontières suspended its operations in central Ethiopia's Tigray region after the deaths of three health workers.

Furthermore, it has been reported that in November 2021, more than 9 million people in northern Ethiopia were in need of urgent food aid, and as of July an estimated 400,000 people in the Tigray region have been facing famine-like conditions. The report goes on to state that the parties to the conflict were continuing to generate food insecurity by preventing food production, cutting off access to food and destroying food sources essential for civilian survival. In northern Ethiopia, agricultural production was being severely hampered as people were being forced to abandon their farms, crops were being destroyed and livestock were being looted or slaughtered. In some parts of Tigray, people were reportedly being prevented from farming. Restrictions on access to the region - even for commercial commodities - were severely limiting the availability of seeds and other agricultural inputs, as well as stocks of food aid and fuel. In July 2022, the United Nations estimated that hunger was threatening 350,000 people in the Tigray region³⁶.

According to the same report, in Ethiopia from July to December 2021, humanitarian workers faced major impediments to transporting key supplies such as fuel and medicines to the Tigray region due to fighting, attacks and looting of aid convoys and long bureaucratic delays. During this period, of the estimated 500 trucks per week of relief supplies needed, only 11% reached Tigray.

As part of their joint investigation into the conflict in this region of Ethiopia, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission³⁷ found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that all parties had committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

³⁶ FRANCE24, "Ethiopia: UN warns that famine threatens 350,000 people in Tigray". 10/06/2021. Available at: [Ethiopia: UN warns that famine threatens 350,000 people in Tigris \(france24.com\)](https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210610-ethiopia-un-warns-famine-tigray)

³⁷ OHCHR - UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, EHRC - Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. "Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia". November 2021. Available at: [OHCHR-EHRC-Tigray-Report.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/other-documents/ohchr-ehrc-tigray-report)

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, also spoke along the same lines, pointing to the need for accountability: "The Tigray conflict has been characterised by extreme brutality. The gravity and seriousness of the documented violations and abuses underline the need to hold the perpetrators on all sides accountable," she said on launching the report³⁸, which gives an account of the atrocities committed against the population during the conflict: indiscriminate attacks, killings and extrajudicial executions, torture, rioting and looting, arbitrary arrests, violence against women and girls, and so on.

According to an Israeli media outlet³⁹, the research for the report was hampered by intimidation and restrictions by the authorities, and accordingly could not take into account some of the places most affected by the war. Bachelet affirms that all combatants have committed abuses that may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Nada Al-Nashif, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights⁴⁰, also commented on this report, recalling that it concluded that all parties to the conflict had committed human rights violations and abuses to varying degrees, as well as violations of international humanitarian and refugee law.

However, Bachelet herself told the press that while the report does not explicitly name Ethiopian and Eritrean troops as responsible for most of the violations, "I would say that the large numbers of human rights violations are associated with the Ethiopian and Eritrean defence forces"⁴¹.

In any case, it will be the action of the mechanisms of international jurisdiction and their investigations that will determine the actors and the crimes committed.

³⁸ Cited in: UNITED HANDS. "The Tigray war (Ethiopia), a conflict of extreme brutality. 03/11/2011. Available at: <https://www.manosunidas.org/noticia/2021/guerra-tigray-etio-ia-brutalidad>

³⁹ NEWS FROM ISRAEL. "UN: Ethiopia's war is marked by "extreme brutality" and atrocities". 03/11/2021. Available at: <https://israelnoticias.com/onu/onu-la-guerra-de-etio-ia-esta-marcada-por-la-extrema-brutalidad-y-las-atrocidades/>

⁴⁰ UNITED NATIONS. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Grave Situation of Human Rights in Ethiopia", 17/12/2021. Available at: [Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the grave situation of human rights in Ethiopia - OHCHR](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees-and-returnees/2021/12/17/special-session-of-the-human-rights-council-on-the-grave-situation-of-human-rights-in-ethiopia-ohchr)

⁴¹ CLARIN. "War in Ethiopia: UN spoke of "extreme brutality and possible crimes against humanity"", 03/11/2021. Available at: https://www.clarin.com/mundo/guerra-etio-ia-onu-hablo-brutalidad-extrema-posibles-crimenes-humanidad-0_FWiwgdqnvu.html

Meanwhile, the consequences are already being strongly felt. The blockade that the region was under in November 2021⁴² had already caused an increase in malnutrition that had claimed many lives among the most vulnerable population, and mainly children under five years of age. Children are not going to school, crops have failed,...

Already a few months earlier, in July 2021, the UN had warned of the crisis situation in Tigray⁴³: "a mass starvation is taking place in Tigray".

INTENTIONALITY: BAN ON ACCESS TO JOURNALISTS

While awaiting the investigations of the international mechanisms, it is the obstacles to journalists' access and work that constitute the greatest difficulty in assessing the true situation of the population, because without information the most appropriate action for humanitarian work, for the visibility of the problems and for possible future accountability cannot be taken. In May 2022, the Ethiopian government expelled correspondent for The Economist⁴⁴ and contributor to Foreign Policy and The Guardian, Tom Gardner, from the country on the grounds that he had the wrong approach to the conflict. In the same month, Africa News reported a government crackdown on journalists and activists that led to the arrest of more than 4,500 people⁴⁵. Among the detainees were four employees of a US-based media outlet. Already in May 2021, New York Times correspondent Simon Marks was expelled from Ethiopia⁴⁶.

Despite this obstacle to information, Humans Rights Watch was able to include some relevant data in its 2022 report on Ethiopia⁴⁷ indicating that the current humanitarian and human rights situation in the country has deteriorated even beyond the 2021 situation. Civilians, once again, are bearing the brunt of the conflict in the Tigray region

⁴²LE SOLEIL. "Le gouvernement éthiopien dément vouloir "asphyxier" le Tigré", 02/07/2021. Available at: [Le gouvernement éthiopien dément vouloir "asphyxier" le Tigré | Monde | Actualités | Le Soleil - Québec](#)

⁴³FRANCE24. "UN warns that nearly two million Ethiopians are on the brink of famine in Tigray", 03/07/2021. Available at: [UN warns that nearly two million Ethiopians are on the brink of starvation in Tigray \(france24.com\)](#)

⁴⁴LE MONDE. "L'Ethiopie expulse le correspondant de " The Economist ", 17/05/2022. Available at: [Ethiopia expels The Economist correspondent \(lemonde.fr\)](#)

⁴⁵AFRICA NEWS. "Ethiopia launches crackdown on journalists and activists", 28/05/2022. Available at: [AfricaNews](#) Also covered by [Europa Press](#)

⁴⁶LE MONDE. *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁷HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. "Ethiopia. Events of 2021". Available at: [World Report 2022. Ethiopia | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

and elsewhere. They are suffering abuse by security forces, attacks by armed groups and other forms of violence.

As we have seen, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, think tanks, etc. all indicate the same: that in Ethiopia atrocities have been committed and continue to be committed against the population, among which we can highlight the use of hunger as a weapon of war.

CONCLUSIONS

It is one thing for international law to prohibit certain actions, but it is quite another to set in motion an effective path towards the assumption of the associated criminal responsibility. Despite the more than palpable evidence of the use of hunger as a weapon of war in conflicts such as Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Ethiopia, there has been little or no meaningful attempt to prosecute this crime. The reality is that there is apparent impunity.

Tigray, which would appear to represent yet another case of hunger being used as a weapon of war, needs an immediate ceasefire to allow free access for humanitarian aid without which the famine will only worsen. A thorough and independent investigation into the crimes allegedly committed by all parties to the conflict is also urged. But "how can you expect humanitarian corridors to be opened, war crimes to be stopped and atrocities to be accounted for simply by issuing a petition?"⁴⁸

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⁴⁸African Arguments, Tigray dispatch; "How do you expect to stop war crimes with a request?" 1 September 2021. Available at <https://africanarguments.org/2021/09/tigray-dispatch-how-do-you-expect-to-stop-war-crimes-with-a-request/>