



**United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Chair of UN Action Network, Ms. Pramila Patten, urges the Government of Ethiopia to promptly sign onto an agreement with the United Nations to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence**

*Press Statement: For Immediate Release*  
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Extreme brutality and sexual violence have been hallmarks of the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Amid increasing and spreading hostilities and a worsening humanitarian situation in Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions, I am deeply concerned by continuing reports of targeted attacks against women, girls, boys, and men, including the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, a form of retaliation, punishment, humiliation, and also to stigmatize individuals based on their real or perceived ethnic identity. As the Chair of UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, a network of 20 United Nations entities unified in the aim of ending sexual violence during and in the wake of conflict, I reiterate my urgent call to all parties to the conflict, to immediately cease every form of sexual violence and end hostilities to pave the way for an inclusive and gender-responsive ceasefire and peacebuilding efforts.

I am greatly concerned about the findings of the joint report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 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, published on 03 November 2021 which documents numerous and disturbing patterns of sexual violence perpetrated with appalling levels of brutality and concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that violations of international human rights and humanitarian law related to sexual violence have been committed by all parties to the conflict, including the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, Eritrean Defence Forces, Tigray Special Forces, Tigrayan militia, and the Amhara Special Forces. I am appalled by the brutality of alleged violations, including cases of rape and gang rape, as well as violations against the elderly and women with disabilities. It is shocking that elderly women have been brutally beaten, threatened at gun point or killed when they tried to rescue their daughters from rape.

It is concerning that since the release of the joint investigation report, further disturbing information is coming to light regarding sexual violence being currently perpetrated in the Amhara and Afar regions which were not covered in the geographic scope of the joint investigation and report.



Furthermore, I am deeply concerned about reports of obstruction of humanitarian aid and intimidation and targeting of service providers as a result of which, victims and survivors are having little or no access to critical health care, mental health and psychosocial support services. In addition, the lack of fuel, cash and telecommunications is further impeding humanitarian operations and the timely provision to survivors of essential lifesaving assistance, such as mental health and psychosocial support services, clinical management of rape including post rape kits and treatment to prevent HIV and STI transmission. It is also hindering UN entities and their partners from delivering services geared towards preventing further sexual violence, including in refugee and IDP settings, where the opening of safe spaces for women and girls and access to dignity kits and sexual and reproductive health services may help ensure their physical security and ability to seek other assistance.

In line with their obligations under international humanitarian law, I call on all parties to the conflict, to immediately facilitate full and unhindered humanitarian access to conflict-affected and traumatized populations, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

I note that the Government of Ethiopia has accepted the joint report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has even announced some follow up measures to implement its recommendations, such as the establishment of an inter-ministerial implementation task force, with a specific subcommittee focusing on sexual and gender-based violence. It is critical that in the course of its work, the task force prioritizes the security and protection of survivors, witnesses and communities and informs survivors about existing referral pathways throughout criminal investigation and accountability processes, to ensure that their immediate medical and psychosocial needs are addressed. In this regard, I welcome the recent launch of the National Standard Operating Procedures for shelter services to women and girls' survivors of violence in Ethiopia.

In implementing the recommendations of the joint investigation report, I further urge the authorities to give due consideration to the demands of women that the restoration and the restitution of what they have lost in the conflict, be a central component of accountability for the violations and abuses committed against them. This includes acknowledgment of and the truth about all the violations perpetrated against them and their loved ones, restoration of their means of livelihood and sources of income, reparations for all the harms suffered including loss of homes and other property. It is also critical that responses to sexual violence are designed in an age-appropriate way as many survivors are children.

Since March, I have engaged with the Ethiopian authorities on prevention and response measures that are urgently required to end sexual violence and on 09 June 2021, my Office transmitted to the national authorities a draft Framework of Cooperation with the United Nations to Prevent and Address Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, pursuant to Security Council resolutions 2106 (2013) and 2467 (2019). The draft focuses on a range of preventive measures, particularly through



justice and accountability, and emphasizes the criticality of full and unimpeded humanitarian access including for the provision of comprehensive services for survivors.

Such a Framework of Cooperation is critical for a rigorous and sustained response as it will enable the United Nations, through the UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict network and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence, to provide concrete and targeted support to national authorities, survivors, their communities, and local women's organizations and networks. The Framework of Cooperation offers a clear and structured basis for the cooperation of the United Nations with the aforementioned inter-ministerial task force and its subcommittee on sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, the agreement can serve as a basis to mobilize donor support for the implementation of the sexual and gender-based violence response. I therefore urge the Government to promptly sign this agreement and reiterate the full support of the United Nations in this regard.

Even as we focus collectively on justice and accountability as an essential aspect of prevention of sexual violence, we must ensure that survivors' immediate needs are met and that they have access to the resources necessary to recover from their deep trauma, to enable them to rebuild their lives, and meaningfully participate in the creation of a more stable, peaceful, and inclusive Ethiopian society.

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