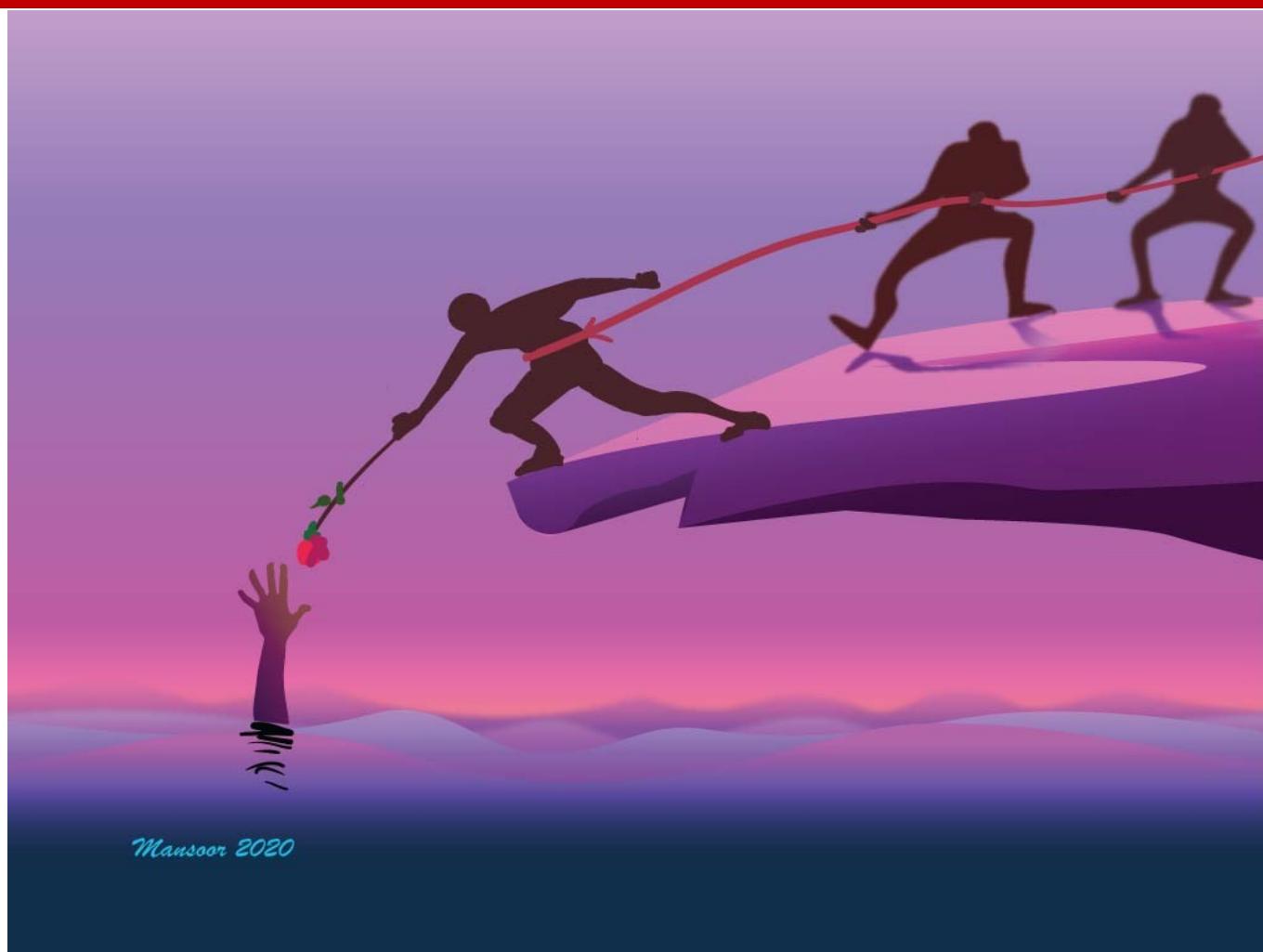


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FIRST LIGHT

Against the Evil of War



Mansoor 2020

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The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT)
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First Light

First Light, which is published semi-annually, is intended to provide solid information to the interested readers about the scourge of torture, war, genocide, crimes against humanity and human trafficking and their effects and what we can do in aiding survivors to overcome the after-effects of their horrible experiences. The CCVT views itself as part of a larger global community and is committed to the struggle for human rights, peace, justice and the end of the practice of torture, war, genocide, crimes against humanity and human trafficking.

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Mandate: The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) aids survivors of torture, war, genocide and crimes against humanity to overcome the lasting effects of torture and war. Working with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. **The CCVT gives hope after the horror.**

Editor's Note: The information provided in this publication is not controlled by the CCVT and therefore may not reflect the Centre's views.

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In This Issue

- 4 **Letter of an Ethiopian Refugee Claimant to the Editor**

By Rigbe Tsige

- 5 **Feel the War**

BY: Elena Solokhina

- 6 **War in Tigray and Crimes of International Law**

By Mulugeta Abai

- 27 **The Hanging of Angélique (poem)**

Nadia Murad

- 30 **The Crime of Rape and Sexual Violence in Tigray**

By Mulugeta Abai

- 36 **Internal Displacement: The Invisible Cost of War**

By Cal Furlong

- 38 **An Investigation into Uighur Genocide in XinJiang, and the long-term impact of “Re-education” camps on Uighur Children**

By Gabrielle Alloherverdi

- 43 **March 25/26: Global Action Days to End War in Yemen**

By Anne Khan

In This Issue (continued)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 46 | A Trilogy by Anthony Frolov |
| 46 | Wronged and Invaded |
| 47 | Feelings of a Captured Soul |
| 47 | New Life on New Soil |
| | |
| 48 | Sri Lanka – The Fight for Justice |
| By Lotus Sahana Alphonsus & Noelle Alphonsus | |
| | |
| 51 | Reflections of A Youth Counsellor: Supporting Refugee Survivors of Sexual Violence |
| by Nadia Umadat | |
| | |
| 54 | Success story |
| By Mona Kalil | |
| | |
| 56 | Eduardo Galeano against War |
| | |
| 57 | A Reflection: Supporting Separated Refugee Youth |
| By Leah MacDonald | |
| | |
| 58 | Rohingya Genocide in Myanmar |
| CCVT letter to the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs | |

In This Issue (continued)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 60 | Canada and Ukrainian Plane Crash in Iran |
| CCVT Letter to the Right honorable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada | |
| 62 | After-effects of Armed conflict Between Azerbaijan and Armenia |
| CCVT letter to the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne Minister of Foreign Affairs | |
| | |
| 64 | Journalists at Risk |
| CCVT Letter to the Right honorable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada | |
| | |
| 65 | Resettlement of Tigrayan Refugees |
| CCVT Letter to the Right honorable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada | |
| | |
| 67 | The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery |
| By: Ezat Mossallanejad | |
| | |
| 70 | CCVT Programs and Services |
| A short explanation of ten current programs offered by the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) | |
| | |
| 72 | A quote |
| From Mahmoud Darwish | |

Letter of an Ethiopian Refugee Claimant to the Editor

By Rigbe Tsige



November 11, 2020

Dear Editor,

As a woman of Ethiopian origin and an asylum seeker in Canada I am extremely concerned about the violence and aggression by the federal government of Ethiopia in collaboration with the Eritrean government towards its own people. I would like to bring it to your attention that Ethiopia is currently on the verge of a catastrophic civil war.

Since the current prime minister took power, thousands of people have been internally displaced; many government officials including the chief of staff have been mysteriously murdered; female university students have

been abducted; regional leaders were executed. The country has witnessed ethnic-based mass murders and internal displacements - a day-to-day observation in Oromia, Amhara, Southern and Tigray regional states.

A week before, the prime minister declared war against the Tigray regional state, in the northern part of Ethiopia and home of about seven million Tigrayans. In recent days, air bombardments used against Mekelle the capital city of Tigray regional state and some other parts of the region. The purpose of this attack is to Isolate the people of Tigray from the rest of the world. Mr. Ahmed has cut off the power supply, internet connection, telephone service, air, and land transport and all means of communication. In addition to this, the central government has declared state of emergency in Tigray and Oromia regional states. Because of this, people have become frustrated. Due to their fear and frustration, people have been unable to run their day-to-day activities. Despite, the international community efforts in encouraging both sides to come to the negotiation table, the federal government is putting pressure against its own people with a genocidal policy.

As a result of the black out of communication in Tigray, I personally could not communicate with my family (sister, brother, cousins, aunts and uncles). I do not know where they are.

Currently. The federal troops are engaged in fierce fighting against the people of Tigray in all fronts. They have blocked all roads preventing food and humanitarian aid entering Tigray. The prime minister of Ethiopia, in collaboration with the Eritrean president Isaias Afwerki, the notorious tyrant, is now attacking

his own people from Eritrean side.

People of Tigrayan origin residing in other parts of Ethiopia are being removed from their jobs only because they are Tigrayans. They include civil servants, private business owners, commercial aircraft "pilots". All Tigrayan members of the defense force and security guards were expelled from their duties and put under house arrest. On social media and other government outlets, the prime minister is inciting ethnic cleansing policy against the people of Tigray living in the other parts of Ethiopia by encouraging people to be vigilant of "individuals Tigrayans."

Furthermore, Mr. Ahmed has imposed travel restrictions, particularly against individuals of Tigray ethnicity.

Ethiopia is about to enter a dangerous ethnic-based civil war, and I believe that you may be able to expose the dangerous situation to different concerned bodies:

Demanding for the immediate cessation of hostilities and war against the Tigrayan people.

Demanding an immediate cessation of killings and ethnic based violence and displacement of people in all parts of Ethiopia.

Facilitating or initiating a national peace and reconciliation dialogue for the establishment of an all-inclusive transitional government in Ethiopia.

Pressuring the prime minister of Ethiopia to stop the atrocities through imposing travel and other sanctions.

I am hopeful that you will make a great contribution to be a voice for the voiceless innocent people.

Thank you

Rigbie Tsige

*Feel the War
By Elena Solokhina*

Don't talk about war, don't talk!
But live it through with feelings all unlocked!

You are a baby, all alone and hungry.
You are a child whose mother nobody can find.
You are teenager in the world, that's armed and angry,
Preparing to kill yourself to calm your tired mind.

You are a soldier after war returning,
Of living tired, hungry, very sick.
Without father, daughter - no childhood,
Without son, a mother, walking with a stick.

This is the face of war - heart wrenching image.
World leaders, headsmen and complicit folks
Don't talk about war, don't talk!
It screams before your eyes without words.

Elena Solokhina
*Employment Services and Skills Training
CCVT*



War in Tigray and Crimes of International Law

By Mulugeta Abai



Almost all wars are intertwined with cover-ups and keeping people in darkness by the ruling cliques and war-mongering forces. The extent of war crimes and crimes against humanity, therefore, may come to the fore years after the initial outbreak of the war. This is particularly true about the present war in Tigray, Ethiopia, specifically when we consider that Ethiopia's government has openly rejected frequent calls for independent investigations into the deadly and devastating conflict in Tigray, by mentioning that it "doesn't need a babysitter". This essay is a modest attempt to investigate the heinous crimes of international na-

ture in Tigray by relying on the available sources, testimonies by witnesses and official statements.

Root Causes of the Conflict

War should neither be judged by its spontaneous outbreak nor by propaganda of the parties involved in the conflict. According to the German general and military theorist, Karl von Clausewitz:

"War is not an independent phenomenon, but the continuation of politics by different means. Consequently, the main lines of every major strategic plan are largely political in nature, and their political character increases the more the plan encompasses the entire war and the entire state. The plan for the war results directly from the political conditions of the two belligerent states as well as from their relations to other powers." (1).

On November 4, 2020, Ethiopian Prime Minister, Mr. Abiy Ahmed Ali, formally

declared war on the Tigray National Regional State (TNRS) calling his action a “law enforcement operation” in order to “protect the constitution and restore the rule of the law.” The roots of this war, however, can be traced back to few months after his sudden ascendance to power.

In April 2018, the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) selected Mr. Ahmed to be the interim Prime Minister with the mission of bringing peace and harmony to the ethnically fragmented Ethiopia. He was mandated to lead the country through a national free and fair election by May 2020. Before Mr. Ahmed’s coming to power, Ethiopia was ruled by EPRDF, a coalition of four parties, including Tigray Peo-

ple’s Liberation Front (TPLF) that ruled the regional and autonomous Tigray National Regional State (TNRS). It should be acknowledged that the TPLF’s representation in the cabinet and parliament has always been minimal and it had not held prime minister’s office for the past eight years. The TPLF, however, had a great influence over the EPRDF and Tigrayans dominated the Ethiopian security agencies due to their historical struggles against the Derg regime of terror and the secessionist move by Mr. Afwerki of Eritrea.

During the first few months of his rule, Mr. Ahmed introduced some far reaching civil liberty reforms and released political prisoners. In July 9, 2018, he concluded a

peace accord with the Eritrean tyrant, Mr. Isaias Afwerki, who had been ruling the Eritrea with an iron fist since 1993. This persuaded the Nobel Prize Committee to grant Mr. Ahmed the 2019 Nobel Prize on Peace on October 11, 2019.

Mr. Ahmed’s peace agreement with Mr. Afwerki, was considered by many, in those days, as shaking hand with the devil due to the latter’s human rights records. Since its independence, Eritrea has been notorious as a closed, military and totalitarian society referred to by human rights advocates as “an open-air prison” or the “North Korea of Africa”. The regime has maintained full control of every aspect of people’s life.

Despite neighbourhood between Tigray and Eritrea and their ethnic similarity, Mr. Ahmed did not involve Tigray and its leader Mr. Debretson Gebremichael in peace negotiations. The lack of transparency and denial of Tigrayan participation, suspected the latter to consider the pact as a conspiracy between Ahmed and Afwerki to eliminate the TPLF. (2)

Hopes soon turned into the despair in Ethiopia, as the Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed failed to control army, police and militia from brutal suppression of ethnic movements in different part of the country. Mr. Ahmed failed to acknowledge



First Light

that Ethiopia, like many African nations, is a diverse multi-ethnic society. Ethiopian population is composed of more than 70 ethnic groups: Oromo (34.49%), Amhara (26.89%), Somali (6.20%), Tigrayans (6.07%), Sidama (4.1%), Gurage (2.53%), Welleyta (2.31%), Hadiya (1.74%), Afar (1.73%), (3). The Ethiopian constitution of 8 December 1994, has provided for a far-reaching decentralization based on ethnic diversity. It guarantees "free cooperation between equal Ethiopian peo-

ment has failed to make sustainable efforts to protect displaced people and sustain inter-ethnic violence. This has led to further displacement in ethnically diverse Ethiopia. More often than not Mr. Ahmed has forced displaced people to return to their homes without any guarantee for their safety and security.

In response to inter-communal conflicts, Mr. Ahmed provided the military, police and local militia with free hands to suppress any vestige of the opposition. According to the Amnesty International, on a single day in December 2018, soldiers from the federal military killed 13 people



Timkat celebration in Mekelle January 19, 2014

ples." (Beken, C.v.d., 2012, p. 146)

More than 2 million people in Ethiopia are internally displaced due to inter-communal conflicts and violence. Among them is the displacement of over a million Somalis from their homes in Oromia into the desert of the Ogaden. Mr. Ahmed's govern-

in the town of Finchawa in West Guji. One of those killed was an old woman selling milk on the street. Some 10,000 people, suspected of supporting the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), were detained and tortured by security forces in an operation started in January 2019. Families were evicted from their homes. Houses were destroyed and burnt. At least 39 people were extra-judicially executed in

Oromia's East Guji and West Guji zones. In January 2019, the security forces attacked a Qemant settlement in Metema and killed fifty-eight people within 24 hours. This brutal attack resulted in the displacement of hundreds of people. (4) According to the Guardian (May 29, 2020), in Oromia's Guji district the unrest had driven 80,000 people from their homes by the start of the year 2020. (5) The 34-year-old Oromo-language pop singer and song writer, Haacaaluu Hundessa, was shot dead by unknown assailants in Addis Ababa in the night of June 29, 2020. His music gave voice to Oromo people who are desperate for economic well being and self-rule. Despite being an Oromo himself, Prime Minister Ahmed, have paid little attention to the plight of Oromo people and their call for self-determination. Hundessa's murder sparked demonstration across Oromia region with police intervention. The death toll was at least 166 people, injuries 167 and 1,084 arrests, including the arrest of high-ranking opposition leaders such as the media magnate and activist Jawar Mohammed. Officials repeatedly pointed to the involvement of Oromo Liberation Front and TPLF. (6) Mr. Ahmed's records made him so unpopular that within several months "Abiy must go" became a new slogan. Intoxicated with power, he chose not to go. He concentrated power in his own hands, filled government's positions with his allies and repeatedly overruled Parliament. He charged Tigrayans with corruption and purged them from the government, security services and state-owned corporations. In December 2019, he disbanded the EPRDF and merged several ethnically based regional parties into a single party named the Prosperity Party, in which the TPLF was excluded. He

suppressed opposition through imprisonment of their leaders and shutting down the internet.

Mr. Ahmed's term of office was up to October 5, 2020. He suspended the national election in August in the pretext of Covid-19 and postponed it for nine to twelve months.

The TNRS and the TPLF considered this as unconstitutional and conducted their regional elections as was scheduled for September 9, 2020, based on the constitutional provision that national and regional elections must be held every five years. TPLF won 98% of the votes, duly established its own state government. Mr. Ahmed spared no time to reveal his hostilities by rejecting the election and even forbidding international reporters from flying to Tigray, at the Bole International Airport, to witness the elections.

The federal and regional governments did not recognise each other and regarded the other party as illegal. On November 4, 2020, Mr. Ahmed condemned the TPLF as a terrorist group, labelled its leaders as a gang of criminals and declared war against Tigray. The war, among others, rooted in opposing visions about future direction of Ethiopia. While, Mr. Ahmed advocates, a centralized state with power at the hands of the prime minister, the TPLF supports a multinational federal policy with cultural, linguistic, and economic autonomy for the states, as explicitly expressed in the Ethiopian constitution. The government's establishment of the Administrative Boundaries and Identity Issues Commission on 20 December 2020 can be considered as a manifestation of this difference. The Commission was directly responsible to the prime

First Light

minister who was mandated to look into the reasons behind identity and border conflicts and suggest solutions to parliament. This was criticized by TPLF and others as an anti-democratic move with the intention of restriction the authority of regional states in this matter. (7)

Before Mr. Ahmed, Ethiopia was one of the most economic growth success in Africa for 15 years. This was mainly due to the rejection of the neo-liberal model of economic growth. Unlike

ployed the Ethiopian National Defence Force (the army), mobilized the Special Forces, the State Police, the militia, and civilian volunteers from Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) in an onslaught against Tigray. Mr. Ahmed utilized full support from Eritrea in this operation. On Nov. 8th, the Ethiopian army announced that there would be "no mercy" for Mekelle's residents when its soldiers "encircle" the city. (9) Mr. Ahmed refused scores of calls from outside for the peaceful settlement of



On November 4, 2020, the Ethiopian PM, Mr. Abiy Ahmed, deployed army against Tigray region

EPRDF, Abiy Ahmed has frequently shown his intension to introduce his own open and liberal economy: "The dramatic change brought by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018 repudiated the authoritarian economic model that was previously seen as an important aspect of Ethiopia's positive development story." (8)

The War

On November 4, 2020, Mr. Ahmed de-

the dispute and pressed on with the offensive. On November 22, 2020, military spokesman Colonel Dejene Tsegaye told state-run Ethiopia Broadcasting Corporation that "the next phases are the decisive part of the operation, which is to encircle Mekelle using tanks". He warned the residents of this city of half a million populations as follows: "We want to send a message to the public in Mekelle to save yourselves from any artillery attacks and free yourselves from the junta ... After that, there will be

no mercy." This was followed by the message of Mr. Ahmed: "We urge you to surrender peacefully within 72 hours, recognising that you are at the point of no return." (10)

The Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister announced that Ethiopian Air Force planes had carried out multiple air strikes against TPLF military installations.

The army took control of Tigray's capital of Mekelle on 28th of November. The TPLF leadership retreated to the mountains. Local resistance has reportedly been continuing. Tigray remained sealed off from the world during and even after the military operations.

Thousands of people, including civilians and four aid workers, were killed and nearly a million fled their homes during air strikes and ground battles in Tigray. An estimated 55,000 people have so far fled to neighboring Sudan. More than half of those uprooted as a result of war are children. Mekelle, and other cities, are left with the shortage of food, fuel, running water and inadequate medical care. Eritrean refugees are facing the threats of life and starvation.

Crimes of International nature

Among the first United Nations document dealing with crime of international nature is the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, 9 December 1948. According to Article II of this convention, "genocide means... acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."



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Tigray Leader, Debretion Gebremichael, called for peace and asked the African Union to intervene.

Throughout human history, attempts have been made to regulate the way states can wage war. These include at a minimum standard that belligerent parties should observe during the war (*jus in bello*) and after the conflict (*jus post bellum*). The aim of such attempts has been to alleviate the suffering of all sides. It was not until 1864 that the rules of war were enshrined in the First Geneva Convention adopted by twelve governments. This ground-breaking document laid the foundation for the International Humanitarian Law (the four Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949) to limit the impacts of war on non-

First Light

combatants. It protects those who are wounded during the war or shipwrecks, captives and the civilian population. International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is also known as the law of war or the law of armed conflict.

Torture is also considered a crime against the family of nations under common article 3 of the IHL and article 6 of the *UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, adopted by General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1984. This was reiterated by the Rome Statute for International Criminal Court (ICC)

The Rome Statute of ICC established the International Criminal Court as a permanent institution with jurisdiction over “persons for the most serious crimes of international concern” which “shall be complementary to national criminal jurisdictions.” (Rome Statute, Art. 1) The court has jurisdiction with respect to: (a) The crime of genocide; (b) Crimes against humanity; (c) War crimes; and (d) The crime of aggression. (Art. 5)

The states parties to the Rome Statute of ICC defined the crime of aggression in their amendment to the Statute adopted by consensus on 11 June 2010 at the Kampala Review Conference. According to Article 8 bis of this amendment:

“crime of aggression” means the planning, preparation, initiation or execution, by a person in a position effectively to exercise control over or to direct the political or military action of

a State, of an act of aggression which, by its character, gravity and scale, constitutes a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations... act of aggression means the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State.... Any of the following acts, regardless of a declaration of war, shall qualify as an act of aggression: (a) The invasion or attack by the armed forces of a State of the territory of another State, or any military occupation, however temporary, resulting from such invasion or attack, or any annexation by the use of force of the territory of another State or part thereof; (b) Bombardment by the armed forces of a State against the territory of another State or the use of any weapons by a State against the territory of another State....” (11)

The definition of the crime of genocide in Rome Statute is similar to the definition given in Article 2 of the 1948 Genocide Convention mentioned above.

The concept of “crime against humanity” that was introduced by the Nuremberg Tribunal, is well defined in Article 7 of the Rome Statute. It states that the following acts constitute crimes against humanity, when they are committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: (a) Murder; (b) Extermination; (c) Enslavement;

(d) Deportation or forcible transfer of population; (e) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; (f) Torture; (g) Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; (h) Persecution against any identifiable group... on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender grounds ...; (i) Enforced disappearance of persons; (j) The crime of apartheid; and (k) Other inhumane acts of a similar character.

The definition of war crimes in the Rome Statute is based on the provisions of the International Humanitarian Law. According to these provisions, war crimes consist of willful killing, torture, wilfully causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or health, extensive destruction and appropriation of property, compelling a prisoner of war or other protected person to serve in the forces of a hostile Power, wilfully depriving a prisoner of war or other protected person of the rights of fair and regular trial, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement, taking of hostages. (Article 8)

It is important to note the difference between war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Though they partly overlap, crimes against humanity may occur in war or peaceful times; also, unlike genocide, crimes against humanity are not intended to fully or partially destroy a group of people. A Crime Against Humanity means any act, as listed by the Rome Statute, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack. Also, these

crimes are systematic and widespread and carried out against an identifiable group irrespective of the make up of that particular group.

The Rome Statute for International Criminal Court is based upon the principle of "complementarity". The ICC intervenes only when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute and its jurisdiction is not retroactive. It can only investigate and prosecute crimes committed after 1 July 2002. It is difficult for the ICC to act in a country that has not ratified the Rome Statute unless the state where the crime has been committed accepts its jurisdiction. When a crime constitutes a threat to international peace and security, the UN Security Council can refer the case situation to the ICC. The Council also has the authority to postpone any investigation.

In its actual practice, the ICC is not mandated to prosecute authorities in power. Such prosecutions can be taken as violation of the principle of national sovereignty. Given today's system of international relations and the UN structure, it is hard to expect the UN Security Council to activate the ICC for prosecution of ruling tyrants. Such decisions can be vetoed by a permanent member of the Security Council due to its close military, economic and political ties with the offending ruling power.

Application of International Law

Due to the lack transparency, it is very difficult to examine the perpetration of some categories of crime of internation-

First Light

al nature in Tigray's conflict: the crime of torture, treatment of wounded soldiers, violation of the rights of prisoners of war, sexual violence, etc. This is due to the shutdown of internet, severing telephone communications, strict censorship and blocking journalist and independent observers from access to Tigray. It is, however, easier to examine the crimes of international nature in the following areas:

The War of Aggression

In early June 2018, the Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed revealed his intention of militarization of the country. During a meeting with senior military officers, he said: "Following the efforts made to build capacity of our national defense, we built one of the strongest ground and air force in Africa.... We should build our naval force capacity in the future." (12) He added that the military reforms should "take into account current fast changing world, socio-economic and political situation in Ethiopia." (13) He exposed his ambition, despite the fact that the landlocked Ethiopia had disbanded its navy following the secession of Eritrea in 1993 and the army was relatively a small one.

Before waging war against Tigray, Mr. Ahmed had used army against Oromia, the conflict against the Sidama nation ahead of the referendum for statehood in November 2019, and the suppression against the Wolaita and Konso involving fighter planes, missile and rocket attacks, artillery shelling, drones, and infantry units.



War of aggression against the people of Tigray

Article 95 (1-a) of the Ethiopian Constitution allows deployment of army in exceptional circumstances:

"The Council of Ministers of the Federal Government may declare a state of emergency in the event of external aggression or where conditions arise which endanger the constitutional order and cannot be brought under control by means of normal law enforcement measures, or in the cases of natural disaster or epidemic endangering public health." (14)

Article 33 of the United Nations Charter has provided for the peaceful settlement of the most serious conflicts before considering armed intervention:

"The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice."

Mr. Ahmed deliberately ignored these national and international provisions and began his war propaganda against Tigrayan people, while there was no condition

tion whatsoever to “endanger the constitutional order.” He declared war on the most stable and peaceful state government that had been legally elected by 98% of Tigrayans’ votes. There was no emergency situation to compel him respond by militarily power.

Mr. Ahmed rejected peaceful negotiations and refused all appeals for mediation by independent people and agencies. The African Union (AU) made an abortive attempt for mediation and Tigray’s President Mr. Debretsiion Gebremichael, wrote to the South African President, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, requesting for an “all-inclusive and comprehensive dialogue [to] avert an all-out civil war in the country”. An AU delegation was sent to Addis Ababa, but Mr. Ahmed refused any mediation or dialogue with the “criminal” TPLF, as he had rejected appeals by the European Union, the UN and the US. (15)

The Canadian Foreign Minister, Mr. Champagne, called for a peaceful solution and protection of civilians. The British Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, spoke with Mr. Ahmed called for “de-escalation of the Tigray conflict”. The US government also called for immediate action to restore peace and protect civilian. Human rights and humanitarian agencies across the globe requested immediate ceasefire and access to Tigray for humanitarian assistance. Anti-war Ethiopians in diaspora demonstrated in many countries including USA, South Africa, Belgium, Netherlands, and Norway demanding immediate end to hostilities. The Noble Committee, which rarely expresses views about the actions of past Nobel laureates, issued the following statement on November 17, 2020: “It repeats today what it has stated before, namely that it is the responsibility of all

the involved parties to end the escalating violence and to solve disagreements and conflicts by peaceful means.” (16) Mr. Ahmed ignored all these appeals and reiterated his position that “Ethiopia is being run by a strong functional government. It doesn’t need a babysitter.” (17) Mr. Ahmed followed the foot-prints of his predecessors, more vehemently, in not looking for a multi-lateral solution to the Ethiopian disputes. According to Human Rights Watch, in a report entitled “Ethiopia Events of 2018”:

“Despite its role as a member of both the UN Security Council and, until the end of 2018, the UN Human Rights Council, Ethiopia maintains its history of non-cooperation with UN mechanisms. Other than the UN special rapporteur on Eritrea, no special rapporteur has been permitted to visit since 2006. The rapporteurs on torture, freedom of opinion and expression, and peaceful assembly, among others, all have outstanding requests to visit the country.” (18)

Mr. Ahmed’s war against people of Tigray is devoid of any legal basis. It is an unjust war of fratricide with the sinister capacity of setting ethnic groups in Ethiopia against one another. It is, therefore, a war against all nations in the country, not just Tigray. It is a war against democracy and fundamental rights of humankind. It can easily spread to the Horn of Africa and threaten peace and security of the world. It is also a crime against peace, that was defined by the principle of the Nuremberg Trial that was later (in 1950)

First Light

enshrined in international law: "planning, preparation, initiation, or waging of wars of aggression, or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances, or participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing". (19) In the course of the Nuremberg Trial the war of aggression was considered as a supreme crime:

"The charges in the indictment that the defendants planned and waged an aggressive war are charges of utmost gravity. War is essentially an evil thing. Its consequences are not confined to the belligerent states alone but affects the whole world. To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." (20)

As an ex-soldier, Mr. Ahmed was well aware of the impacts of war on the most vulnerable people. While receiving Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, he made the following remarks:

"There are those who have never seen war but glorify and romanticize it. They have not seen the fear, They have not seen the fatigue, They have not seen the destruction and heart-break, Nor they have felt the mournful emptiness of

war after the carnage. War is the epitome of hell for all involved. I know because I have been there and back. I have seen brothers slaughtering brothers on the battlefield. I have seen older men, women, and children trembling in terror under the deadly shower of bullets and artillery shells. You see, I was not only a combatant in war. I was also a witness to its cruelty and what it can do to people. War makes for bitter men. Heartless and savage men." (21)

Hypocrisy, double-standard and greed for staying in power without electoral mandate prompted Mr. Ahmed to unleash the beasts of hatred and hubris and wage a devastating war of aggression without cause against the most vulnerable people of his country. The aggressive war in Tigray has all the characteristics of the "war of aggression" specified in the article 8bis of Rome Statute of ICC, except the fact that the parties to the aggression are not two sovereign states. This is the flaw in the Kampala amendment of June 11, 2020 to the Rome Statute that has not included aggression of non-state parties on the one hand and that of a federal government against an autonomous regional state on the other. These loopholes may be rectified during the future people's tribunals against war-mongering elements like Mr. Ahmed.

Murder and Extermination

Murder, according to the international law, involves “a deliberate taking of a person’s life” and represents “the core crimes against humanity.” (Endnote 22, p. 71) According to an ICC document, for the crime of murder to exist, “the perpetrator must kill one or more persons. His conduct must be committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population”. (Endnote 22, p. 72) Extermination refers to the mass murder of a demographic group. According to Article 7-2-b of the Rome Statute for ICC, “Extermination” includes the intentional infliction of conditions of life, inter alia the deprivation of access to food and medicine, calculated to bring about the destruction of part of a population.” There is no demarcation line between murder and extermination:

“The requirements of murder are also applicable to extermination”.

(Endnote 22, p. 72)

The military aggression against Tigray resulted in the murder and extermination of thousands of people, including civilian population. Hate propaganda and incitement to violence, fueled the fire of ethnic conflicts. A horrible massacre happened in Mai Kadra, a town in the north western part of Tigray with the population of 45000 people including Tigrayans, Amhara and other ethnic groups. On November 9, 2020,

according to Amnesty International, attackers, affiliated with TPLF, armed with machetes and knives, stabbed residents to death. The bloodshed continued persistently for almost 24 hours. Some 600 civilians, mainly from Amhara group, are thought to be exterminated. An eye-witness has told the Amnesty International: “Police and TPLF youth militias went all over town searching for non-Tigrayans to kill. Men turned into bloodthirsty beasts that day.” (23) While Mr. Abiy Ahmed blamed the massacre on forces loyal to the Tigray regional government, the TPLF denied the accusation. Due to the complete shutdown of Tigray’s communication and strict prohibition of the journalists’ freedom, it is difficult to verify each side’s claims. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, has called for further

investigation: “It is essential that there are investigations into allegations of human rights violations there against



both Amharans and Tigrayans.” Criminals always hide their shocking crime through the use of the darkness. (24)

It is beyond any doubt that federal government forces or their allied ethnic mili-

First Light

tias have also committed murder and extermination in Tigray. Tigrayan refugees in the Sudanese refugee camps, have recounted about the massacre of Tigrayan civilians in Mai Kadra by Ethiopian federal forces and members of an Amhara militia: “Some said they had seen hundreds of bodies and described scenes of ethnically motivated attacks, including killings with knives and beatings.” (25) According to the Al Jazeera’s correspondence, Mohamed Vall, reporting from Um Rakuba refugee camp near the Sudanese border, refugees coming from Ethiopia were recounting instances of looting, as well as witnessing “two rounds of violence: the first being the military coming in to chase the rebels [away], and the second [being] members of local militia, particularly Amhara militia called Fano, who come after the defeat of the rebels to loot inside the homes and expel civilians from their places”. (26)

The Guardian has reported that a “refugee, who gave his name only as Abraham, saw corpses in civilian clothes as he fled the Tigrayan town of Humera towards the border with Sudan. ‘Nobody can bury them, they were outside on the road,’ he recounted from Hamdayet, a Sudanese border transit point.” (27) And this is the testimony of a doctor in a Tigray hospital who has recently moved to Addis Ababa: “Along the way, I saw nine burned tanks, ruined houses and damaged power grids. I also saw at least 15 makeshift graves in the town of Mehoni.” (28)

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, has pointed to “multiple reports that the Amhara “Fano” militia had committed human rights abuses, including killing civilians and looting, in addition

to unverified allegations that Eritrean troops were present in Tigray and had been involved in the hostilities and serious violations of international law. She has raised concerns about violation of international law in Tigray:

“We have received allegations concerning violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, including artillery strikes on populated areas, the deliberate targeting of civilians, extrajudicial killings and widespread looting” (29)

Ethiopia’s government has always rejected calls for independent investigations into the possibility of the perpetration of international crimes in Tigray. Another instance of Mr. Ahmed’s policy of extermination is his deliberate attempt of not to grant access to war-torn areas to provide people with much-needed humanitarian aid food and medicine. This a blatant violation of the aforementioned Article 7-2-b of the Rome Statute of the ICC.

Crimes against Civilians

Parties to the war in Tigray are the Ethiopian federal government, Amhara regional forces and militia, plus the Eritrean government on the one side, and TPLF special forces and regional militias on the other. It is a type of non-international armed conflict governed by the common Article 3 the Geneva Conventions (International Humanitarian

Law) of 12 August 1949, when one or more non-state armed groups are involved. The Convention governs conflicts between non-state groups as well. Ethiopia ratified all 4 Geneva Conventions in 1969 and is also a party to Protocol II to the Conventions that guarantees further protections for combatants and civilians during non-international armed conflicts. The IHL has prohibited attacks against civilian objects (by arti-

of airstrikes around Mekelle. On November 7, shelling along the border of the Amhara and Tigray region killed 6 and reportedly wounded over 60 combatants. The warning of the Ethiopian army to residents was ineffective, as airstrikes and heavy bombardments in populated urban areas did not allow them to escape to more secure zones. (30)

On December 3, 2020, the New York Times reached out doctors in Tigray re-

Fighter jets, tanks and heavy artillery were used against civilians in Tigray regions



lery or other means), indiscriminate or disproportionate civilian harm, the use of heavy artillery (weapons with a wide blast range) and incidental harm to civilians.

At the beginning of the war, the Ethiopian Air Force (EAF) started its attacks by bombing Mekelle, partially destroying a hotel in the inner city. Eritrean forces, reportedly, supported the operation by drones provided to them by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The TPLF forces have also used missiles against Amhara and other locations in Eritrea. According to Human Rights Watch, on November 6, the Ethiopian army conducted a round

porting “indiscriminate artillery barrages on civilian areas, looting by armed men and the deaths of at least 27 civilians and injuries of more than 100.” A physician who moved to Addis Ababa from Tigray, has shared his observations about reported civilian casualties in Mekelle on November 28, 2020: “I witnessed 16 civilian deaths. Comparing it to other towns, people were relieved about the figure. On that day, there were artilleries on the outskirts of the city, their sound so heavy that it shook windows... there was still widespread fear, uncertainty and confusion among many.” (31)

First Light

Since the beginning of the conflict, the Tigray regions have remained largely cut off from the rest of the world with food, medicine, clean water, fuel and other basic necessities desperately needed for war-affected and displaced population. The aid trucks remained waiting at the border of Tigray for weeks, but the Ethiopian government repeatedly objected to allowing a humanitarian corridor in what it called external “interference”. This happened despite repeated warning from humanitarian agencies about the compounding risk of life and suffering to the most vulnerable population. It was not until December 12, 2020 that the first international aid convoy carrying medicines and relief supplies arrived in Mekelle. This deliberate delay caused sufferings and casualties for civilians and death for patients who were in desperate need of life-saving medications.

The article 23 of the 4th Geneva Conventions Relative to the Protection of Civilian Person provides that state parties “shall allow the free passage of all consignments of medical and hospital stores” and it should be done “as rapidly as possible”. This is reiterated in the Rule 55 of the International Committee of the Red Cross: “parties to a conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of impartially distributed humanitarian relief for civilians in need.” (32) This necessitates the freedom of movement of humanitarian workers to perform their duties effectively. Similarly, article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified by Ethiopia on 11th of June 1993) provides that the states parties “recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improve-

ment of living conditions.” Ethiopia is a party to core human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Ethiopia is also party to regional human rights treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the African Union Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

The complete shutdown of internet and phone communications to around six million people in Tigray have acted as collective punishment to the civilian people. It violates multiple rights guaranteed under the international and regional human rights instruments Ethiopia has acceded to, including the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, information and the right to free assembly. According to the Human Rights Watch:

Internet and phone shutdowns can cause considerable harm to the civilian population, including leading to possible injury and death by preventing civilians from communicating with each other about safety considerations, access to medical facilities, and sources of food and shelter. They also hinder the work of journalists and human rights monitors who can provide information on the situation on the ground, including the reporting of possible laws-of-war violations. (33)

There are between 1 to 2 million Internally Displaced People in Ethiopia. The invasion against Tigray displaced 100,000 people



The invasion of Tigray has delivered its most destructive blow on children. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that despite an agreement on access, some 2.3 million children in the region are cut off from humanitarian assistance amid the violence. The agency's Executive Director, Ms. Henrietta Fore, has raised her serious concern in this respect:

"We are extremely concerned that the longer access to them is delayed, the worse their situation will be-

come as supplies of food, including ready-to-use therapeutic food for the treatment of child malnutrition, medicines, water, fuel and other essentials run low". (34)

This deprivation is against customary international law including the UN Convention of the Right of the Child (CRC), Ethiopia is a party to. Article 24 of the CRC obligate the state parties to guarantee "right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health" and the article 27 stipulates that "States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living ade-

First Light

quate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

Forcible Transfer of Population

According to Article 7 (d) of the Rome Statute for ICC, "Deportation or forcible transfer of population means forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present". Heavy casualties and destruction, mass

[pro-government] militia said they would kill us because we are from Tigray. They told us, 'You have 24 hours to leave', and they began to loot our animals and property." (35)

Before crossing the border, refugees spent days on the run, facing starvation, being stopped by armed groups who robbed their belongings. Many hid for long hours in bushes to avoid being spotted. They entered Sudan with nothing but clothes in their back. 50% of refu-

More than 65,000 Tigrayan refugees live under awkward conditions in Sudan



displacement of 100,000 people from Tigray, 55,000 refugees in Sudan: this is the sheer balance sheet of the war of aggression against Tigray. What will follow is the testimony of Shimei Abra Adiko, an Ethiopian refugee in Sudan: "The

gees in Sudan are children with inadequate means to survive. Tigrayan refugees in Sudan are unable to restock food, medical and other emergency supplies. Local communities, with their little

resources, cannot be of much help to them. A great number of refugees have starved for days. They suffer from physical and mental health complications. Children suffer from flashbacks and frequent nightmares about dead bodies. Families have been torn apart by the conflict. Hundreds of refugees have lost contact with their loved ones.

The condition of around 100,000 Eritrean refugees in four refugee camps in Tigray is not better. They had escaped Eritrea due the gross human rights violations of Mr. Afwerki's tyrannical regime including compulsory and indefinite military service and daily surveillance. With the outbreak of war, they caught in a conflict that put their safety and survival at great risk. According to the reports received by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a great number of them have been killed, recruited, kidnapped and forcibly returned to Eritrea by the Eritrean forces in Tigray with the consent or acquiesce of the Ethiopian army. The UNHCR and other aid agencies have not had access to the four main camps hosting Eritrean refugees - Shimelba, Hitsats, Mai-Ayni and Adi Harsush. Food has run out for Eritrean refugees in Tigray camps. (36)

Following the intensification of conflict in Tigray, a number of Eritrean refugees managed to escape Tigray to Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia. Following the occupation of Mekelle on November 28, 2020, Ethiopian government spared no time to forcibly return them to the Tigray camps, deliberately neglecting the risk to their life and security. The government did not inform the UNHCR of its relocation plan and put refugees on buses back to the risky border area with Eritrea. Mr. Babar Baloch, the UNHCR spokesman, called the reports about relocation

"alarming" and mentioned that "any *refoulement* would be absolutely unacceptable." (37) The International Organization for Migration said it was "extremely concerned" about the refugees' "forced" return and denied its collaboration with the government of Ethiopia in this respect. (38)

The forcible relocation of Eritrean refugees, masterminded by Mr. Ahmed, is a blatant violation of the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in the article 33 of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as well as the non-derogable right of every human person not to be return to torture (article 3 of the UN Convention against Torture)

Massive Discriminations

Since taking office in 2018, the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has pursued a policy of massive discriminations against oppositional ethnic groups including and specifically Tigrayans and their leadership. He removed many Tigrayans from government and security posts and arrested many in the pretext of rights abuse and corruption. In a further move, Ethiopia's parliament stripped 39 members of TPLF, including regional president Gebremichael, of immunity from prosecution. Police arrested 242 Tigrayans charging them of conspiracy against the government. (39)

Elsewhere in the country, ethnic profiling of Tigrayans has reached an alarming point. The Ethiopian police is seeking the list of ethnic Tigrayans all over the country in an attempt to arrest and persecute them as "traitors". The government's newly formed State of Emergency Task Force for Tigray has systematically attempted to hunt people, Tigrayans and

First Light

others, suspicious of working for the TPLF in the capital Addis Ababa and elsewhere. There are fears of reprisals against Tigrayans living around Ethiopia. According to Ezekiel Gebissa President of the Ethio Multinational Federalist Support Force:

“They are illegally dismissed from jobs, their properties destroyed, their assets frozen and travels restricted. Mass arrest, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearance of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and in other towns have intensified, aggravating the precariousness of their life in Ethiopia.” (40)

Article 7 (h) of the Rome Statute for ICC has classified “persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender” as a crime against humanity. According to article 4 (a) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified by Ethiopia on 23 June 1976), it is “an offence punishable by law... all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin”.

Conclusion

The invasion of Tigray by Mr. Abiy Ahmed and his allies is a war crime and crime against humanity and peace with the sinister potential of disintegration the multi-ethnic country of Ethiopia. Multiple crimes of international nature have been committed by the Ethiopian government, although the TPLF is also

not free from blemish. The occupation of Mekelle by the federal government does not mean the end of the armed conflict. The TPLF has an effective force of trained, dedicated and experienced guerrilla combatants and the support of Tigrayan people who had sacrifice their lives for 16 years to save Ethiopia from the nightmare of the Derg. With the suppression of the Tigrayan’s people movement for autonomy, Tigray may choose to secede from Ethiopia and pave the way for balkanization of the country. There is also a possibility that the TPLF makes a unity with the Eritrean rebels who are struggling against the tyrannical regime of Afwerki with the prospect of the unification of Tigrigna speaking people in both sides of the border. In the meantime, the possibility of a military coup should not be ruled out. There is hardly any doubt that there is no military solution to the ethnic problems in Ethiopia and elsewhere. War is the crudest absurdity of the entire human existence. The only ray of hope is the triumph of federalism in Ethiopia and recognition the human rights of all ethnic and religious communities to participate voluntarily, meaningfully and effectively in all aspects of the Ethiopian life.

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First Light

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Genocides do not begin with mass murder. That's where they end up. Genocides and other mass atrocity crimes begin with words - specifically, with powerful people dehumanizing a powerless minority. Once they are seen as less than human, anything is possible, even mass murder.

Andrew Stroehlein

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THE HANGING OF ANGÉLIQUE

Marie-Joseph Angélique (1705-1734) was an Black woman, born in Madeira, Portugal and enslaved there. She was transported to North America and in 1725, at the age of 20, the French businessman François Poulin de Francheville bought her to do domestic work in his house in Montréal. After his death in 1733, her ownership went to his widow madam Thérèse de Couagne. Throughout these years, Angélique remained rebellious against her enslavement. In December 1733, she made an abortive attempt to buy her freedom from Madame de Francheville. In early 1934, she fled with the assistance of her lover, Claude Thibault, a bonded worker from France. They were caught by police after 2 weeks. Angélique was returned to her owner and Claude ended up in jail.

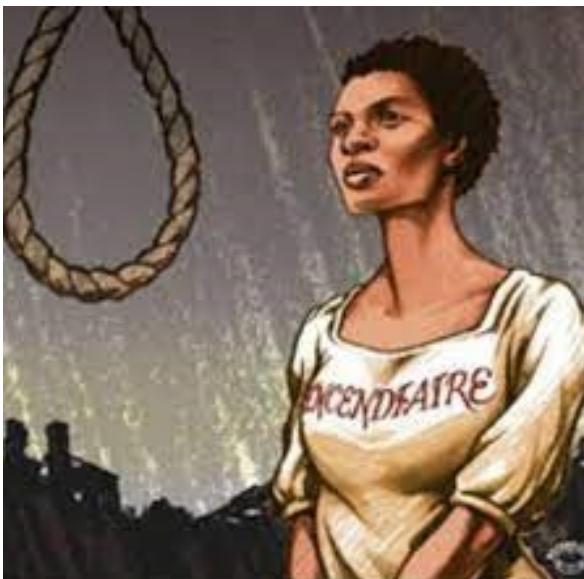
On the evening of Saturday 10 April 1734, a huge fire engulfed a big section of Montreal in which 46 buildings were burnt. Angélique was accused of starting the fire and was arrested by police on April 11th and was charged with arson. In the French legal system of the 18th century, the accused was presumed guilty unless proved

otherwise. Jury and Lawyers were banned from practicing in French colonies, including New France (today's Quebec).

During her six-week tribunal, Angélique denied her accusation and insisted on her innocence. It was under severe torture that Angélique broke and "confessed". On the morning of 21 June 1734, Angélique experienced abhorrent techniques of medieval torture in her jail. They placed her broken body in garbage cart with a burning torch in her hand (the symbol of arson). She was then taken to the Notre-Dame Basilica church and made confess to her crime, and beg pardon of god, the king and the people. She was then hanged. After exhibiting her body on a scaffold for two hours, they placed it on a pyre and burnt. The ashes

scattered in the wind. Angélique is respected today as a symbol of Black resistance and freedom. In February 2012, a public square, facing City Hall in Montreal, was named *Place Marie-Josèphe Angélique* to her honour. The following poem is taken from Afua Cooper. (2007). *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press. Our special thanks to the CCVT volunteer Dr. Ari Barbalat for sharing the poem.

I buried the twins that evening
they died of smallpox



First Light

were only 8 months old
Madame came too to the funeral
and said to me by way of consolation
'c'est la vie,
I too have lost my own.'
I went back to work
went back to work in Madame's house
that same evening and at supper she
yelled at me
and box me full in the face because
I overturned the gravy bowl in her lap

I remember my journey from my island
to this island
From Rhode Island to Montreal
Lived in Rhode Island all my life 'till
monsieur came from Montreal on one of
his business trips
he bought me because he said I looked
like a healthy wench.
Monsieur died soon after and madame
never forgave me
but I had nothing to do with it, he died of
consumption

The twins died too.
After we buried them that evening
my heart changed position in my chest
and I was seized with one desire and
one desire only
and that was to leave the prison of this
island
But where could I go
because throughout the whole world
in all the continents people who look like
me
were bound
But still, all I could see was
my feet running, no chains, no rope, no
shackles
free

Madame talking to her best friend

and confessor Father Labadie
'I'm going to sell that negress, she's
getting too much
for me, she's getting too uppity
And furthermore since François died I
just can't seem to manage too well,
perhaps the church is interested?'
I bring in the food and pretend like ah
neva hear
and I serve the food good and proper
was on my best behaviour
roll back mi lip and skin mi teeth
roll back my yai and show the white
den I went back to mi room in the cel-
lar
and mek mi plan

Smoke, smoke, too much smoke
only intend fi one house fi burn
fire, fire, too much fire
but it done go so already
and I running
my feet unshackled, unbound,
free
running pass di city limits
while behind me di fire rage
and my raging heart change back into
its rightful position

He was running too
an apprentice, from France
I gave him all my food to take me or
show me
the way to New England but he tek the
food
and leave me while I was sleeping
an the constables caught me

I don't utter a word as I sit here in the
jailhouse
Father Labadie come to confess me
but I refuse
their god is not my god

'Arson is one of the worst crime in New France Marie,' he say to me, 'confess now and save your soul.'

But I don't hear him outside, the mob want to rip me from limb to limb but I not afraid, a strange calm fill my body and I at peace, peace, perfect peace

Guilty, the judge pronounce and the sentence: to be tortured, my hands cut off my body burned and the ashes scattered to the four corners of the earth I break down, my body crumple in a heap and before my eyes I see the twins and they look so alive as if they waiting for me to come nurse them The sentence is reduced Now I am to be hanged only and my body burned Father Labadie come back for di confession And I confess
is I Marie who set the fire
I say yes
I start it in madame's house by the river
50 building destroy
the hospital, the cathedral
I confess
is I Marie who burn this city
so write that down Father Labadie
write down my story so it can be known
in history
with my heart burning I take the sacrament and accept the final rites outside the guard is waiting to take me to the hangman's noose Soon I will be free from the prison of this island and I will fly and fly and fly.

Nadia Murad



Nadia Murad Basee Taha, a Yazidi girl, was born in 1993, in the mountainous Kurdish village of Kocho in Northern Iraq. The forces if the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) attacked her village on 15 August 2014. They separated the men from the women and children and took the entire population (more than 1800 people) to the school of the village. They decapitated 600 Yazidi men, shot some and burned others alive. They abducted 1,000 women and children, took boys to their base to turn them into child soldiers. They held women and girls in their captivity as sexual slaves and subjected them to rape and sordid sexual violence.

Nadia lost six brothers during this ghoulish operation. She was taken to the city of Mosul as a slave, experienced notorious techniques of torture and gender-related persecutions including beating, burning and frequent rapes. She took a rare opportunity and escaped successfully and ended up in a refugee camp in November 2014. Germany accepted her as a refugee in 2015. Nadia began a brave struggle for human rights and dignity with special focus on women's rights and anti-genocide campaigns. Her memoir published in November 2017, under the title of *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*. In 2018, she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her "efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict".

Following are some quotes from Nadia:

"I still think that being forced to leave your home out of fear is one of the worst injustices a human being can face."

"My story, told honestly and matter-of-factly, is the best weapon I have against terrorism, and I plan on using it until those terrorists are put on trial."

"I do not seek more sympathy; I want to translate those feelings into actions on the ground."

"Deciding to be honest was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made, and also the most important."

The Crimes of Rape and Sexual Violence in Tigray

By Mulugeta Abai

Almost two months have passed since the occupation of Tigray by the Ethiopian army with the order of the Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed Ali. Despite strict censorship and lack of accessibility by independent observers, cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity come to the fore one after another. Among these crimes are shocking news about rape, sexual violence and enforced prostitutions perpetrated by the occupying forces of Ethiopia and Eritrea. In a press statement issued in New York on January 21, 2021, Ms. Pramila Patten, the United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the UN Under-Secretary-General, made the following remarks:

“I am greatly concerned by serious allegations of sexual violence in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, including a high number of alleged rapes in the capital, Mekelle. There are also disturbing reports of individuals allegedly forced to rape members of their own family, under threats of imminent violence. Some women have also reportedly been forced by military elements to have sex in exchange for basic commodi-

ties, while medical centres have indicated an increase in the demand for emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) which is often an indicator of sexual violence in conflict. In addition, there are increasing reports of sexual violence against women and girls in a number of refugee camps.” (1)

The U.N. humanitarian chief for East and southern Africa, Ms. Gemma Connell, made the following remarks on January 22, 2021:

“We are horrified by the reports and allegations we have received of sexual violence during the conflict in Tigray. The survivors of these alleged attacks must not be seen as statistics but as individual women and girls whose lives have been profoundly altered by the violations committed against

them." (2)

In early January 2021, the Ethiopian state TV broadcast footage of the meeting of the Ethiopian security officials in Mekelle. During this meeting an unidentified military official raised his concern about rapes in Mekelle:

"Why are women being raped in Mekelle city? It wouldn't be shocking had it been happening during the

Reuters has been unable to verify the accounts of rape, due to the lack of media access and communications ban in Tigray regions. (4)

The Reuters news agency has received more reports about the perpetration of the crime of rape in Tigray. Five aid workers have told Reuters about other women survivors of rape identifying their victimizers as militia fighters from Ethiopia's Amhara region or Eritrean soldiers.



Military personnel forces men to rape family members

war, because it is not manageable so it could be expected. But at this moment while federal police and local police are back in town, it is still happening." (3)

A 25-year-old woman at the Hamdayet refugee camp in Sudan, where she had fled from Tigray, has testified to Reuters that a man in Ethiopian federal army uniform threatened her at the gun point: "Choose, either I kill you or rape you". (3)

A physician in a refugee camp, named Tewadrous, has reported about two cases of rape he had handled. A woman survivor, who had escaped from Rawyan town in Tigray, has told the doctor of three soldiers who broke in her house and assaulted her. A husband was forced to kneel and watch while his wife was raped by soldiers they identified as Eritrean. A medical worker in Adigrat has told the Reuter about the treatment of six women who had been raped by a group

First Light

of soldiers and told not to seek help afterward. According to a medical worker who had treated both survivors, in Mekelle, one man was beaten up after begging soldiers to stop raping a 19-year-old. Mekelle charity Elshadai has prepared 50 beds for rape victims. (5) Ms. Patten has urgently called for access to the region:

“While noting the volatile security situation in the Tigray region, the hampered physical access in many parts of Tigray, and the dire situation of civilians especially refugees, it remains critical that humanitarian actors and independent human rights monitors be granted immediate, unconditional and sustained access to the entirety of the Tigray region, including IDP and refugee camps where new arrivals have allegedly reported cases of sexual violence.” (6)

She has invited the government of Ethiopia “to promptly allow for an independent inquiry into all allegations of sexual and other forms of violence, to establish the facts and hold perpetrators accountable, provide redress to victims, and prevent further grave violations.” (7) Ms. Patten’s call upon the authorities for an independent inquiry has remain unheeded. It should be acknowledged that conflict-related rape, enforced prostitution and sexual violence are global evils. The horror of unarmed women facing sexual violence by armed men is historical and worldwide. Sexual crimes against women like gang rapes, forced prostitution and sexual enslavement have always happened in the course of genocides, wars

and even in times of peace. The world has witnessed the widespread perpetration of these ghoulish crimes in many war-trodden regions of the world including Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Sudan. As a weapon of war, the crime of rape has been perpetrated to traumatize and to terrorize women and make them unable to support the rebels. Armed forces have systematically targeted civilians by raping women with the intent of punishing, and humiliating the entire community. In the course of 1994, genocide in Rwanda, rape was systematically used as one of the weapons of genocide: “In almost every case, these crimes were inflicted upon women after they had witnessed the torture and killings of their relatives, and the destruction and looting of their houses. Some women were forced to kill their own children before or after being raped.” (8) Many women were raped and killed immediately and many survivors chose to hide their stories rather than being detested by their community. Apart



The Ethiopian government confirmed the crime of rape in Tigray

from the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorders and severe re-traumatization, hundreds of survivors gave birth to the babies of their cruel rap-

ists. Many more received life-long suffering from infections and diseases caused by rape, including AIDS.

Rape was also used as a weapon of war during genocide in former Yugoslavia. Serbian forces raped women publicly in the presence of friends, relatives and family members “in a pattern of intimidation and abuse focused on forcing the Croatian or Bosnian population to flee.” (9)

In Sierra Leone, gender-related violence including rape, gang-rapes, sexual slavery, and enforced prostitution were perpetrated by belligerent forces, specifically the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), who was responsible for 93 per cent of sexual crimes in the course of the civil war. (10) According to one report, there

were between 215,000 and 257,000 women victims of rape and sexual violence during the conflict. According to another estimate, one out of eight households had been subjected to sexual violence. Victims' families were left destitute, with emotional wounds that would never heal: “The emotional and physical trauma suffered by these victims will continue for a lifetime.” (11) In Sudan, large numbers of militia and government forces killed civilians and abducted and raped dozens of women and girls due to their ethnic origin calling them “slaves” as they “beat them with whips, gun butts or fists.” (12)

Rape leaves durable impacts on survivors. often results in sexually transmitted infections. In Sierra Leonean con-



Rape is a war crime and crime against humanity according to the international law

flict, for example, between 70 to 90 per cent of rape survivors tested positive for sexually transmitted diseases. (13) Apart from physical complications, like infections or HIV/AIDS, rape's psychological scars are also devastating. Many survivors have developed a sense of guilt and lack of self-worth. Instead of blaming their victimizers, they blame themselves. Internalization, as such, is highly detrimental to the recovery of the survivors.

Rape is one of the least reported techniques of torture and weapons of war. For a long time, it was not even recog-

rape on survivors, make tremendously difficult the investigation and prosecution of gender-related international crimes. Survivors of sexual tortures are suffering from ostracism and stigmatization and are normally reluctant to share their horrible experiences – especially with male investigators. It is also difficult to find witnesses to crimes of this type. This is why Investigations in international tribunals have been performed with utmost care and vigilance given the risk of retraumatization for survivors during the process of investigation. The need for debriefing services has occasionally become an utmost necessity during this process. In 1994, the International Tribunal for



Systemic rapes and sexual violence have acted as a hidden war against civilian population in Tigray

nized as a torture or war crime. Various reasons including shame, danger of excommunication, lack of a safe environment to speak, etc. have contributed to the denial and secrecy around rape. The multiple negative impacts of the

Rwanda and former Yugoslavia recognized sexual violence against women (rape, sexual enslavement, forced prostitution, etc.) as a form of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity: “Rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime

against humanity and a constitutive act with respect to genocide." (14) This ruling set a precedence that was used in other cases as well.

This was confirmed by Articles 7 and 8 of the Rome Statute for International Criminal Court (adopted in July 1998) according to which rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization are specified as crimes against humanity and war crimes. This was one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century, as before that little international attention had been paid to this abhorrent human tragedy. Rape was considered a component of every war and not a form of international crime. For a long time, national systems and international tribunals failed to investigate or prosecute crimes of sexual or gender torture.

Responsibility for these heinous crimes in Tigray goes to both the state and the individual perpetrators. The state is responsible, because it waged a war of aggression with predictable consequences on the one hand and it has failed to protect civilians due to its consent or acquiescence of the crimes committed by military forces. Individual perpetrators and commanders cannot avoid their responsibilities with the excuse of exceptional or unmanageable circumstances or subordination to their superiors.

The international community must not close its eyes on the war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Ethiopian government and military forces of Ethiopia and Eritrea in Tigray, as it did not in Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone and Sudan. The crimes of rape and sexual violence in Tigray have specifically been committed against vulnerable groups such as refugee and displaced women in refugee camps and in war-ravaged areas, due to their total lack of protection.

When rape is a systemic component of political coercion, it endangers the achieve-

ment of peace and security, with its long-term and catastrophic outcomes. If not properly addressed, this type of sordid violence will continue for year after the termination of the war. While impunity for perpetrators of most heinous international crimes is a global obstacle, impunity for perpetrators of rape and sexual violence is more widespread. Prevention is impossible without addressing this impunity.

Finally, it should be emphasized that survivors must be empowered with the holistic rehabilitation support along with compensation, reparation and restitution. They must raise their voices against the impunity of their victimizers. The full participation of women in peace process and in addressing the awkward problem of impunity must be guaranteed.

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Internal Displacement: The Invisible Cost of War

By Cal Furlong



In 1998, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, wrote that “internal displacement has emerged as one of the great human tragedies of our time.” That same year, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was founded under a UN mandate to provide data and analysis on the largely unseen humanitarian catastrophe that Mr. Annan was calling attention to people who have been forced to flee their homes by conflict or disasters, but have been unable or unwilling to leave their country. Their findings have been staggering.

Internal displacement, already a massive global phenomenon at the turn of the century, has risen at an alarming rate. According to IDMC reports, the number of internally displaced persons, or IDPs, has more than doubled in the last decade, from approximately 25 million in 2010 to more than 50 million last year. The precarious, fluid nature of displacement means that over the time, millions may cease to be categorized as IDPs, either by returning to their community of origin or fleeing across an international border. Unfortunately, new rounds of expulsion more than compensate for any reduction in the numbers, adding to the grave tally - 2019 saw 33.3 million novel displacements alone. The fact that these are only conservative estimates makes the figures even more sobering.

“The key driver of internal displacement is conflict and violence,” says Louisa Yasukawa, a research associate with the Centre. Although in any given year, acute crises stemming from natural disasters may account for the majority of displacements, those resulting from conflict are often longer-term and more persistent. “Particularly in the case of violence, [IDPs often endure] multiple displacements,” she

adds.

A large part of IDMC's mission is to collect data on the quantity and nature of displacements across the globe, summarized in an annual report - their 2020 findings are set to be released in May of this year. But Ms. Yasukawa is part of a team that focuses on investigating the impacts and consequences that result from the problem. "Displacement poses significant disruptions to people's individual circumstances, be it their housing conditions, livelihoods, health, education, and part of our work looks at trying to measure these impacts on the individuals." IDMC's case studies, she says, repeatedly show people trapped in a double bind. Displacement first results in a loss of income and property, particularly for rural-to-urban migrants who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. At the same time, the situation itself imposes significant costs. The additional expenses of travel, shelter, food, water, sanitation, and medical care put people already in financial crisis under impossible strain. These burdens disproportionately fall on women and girls who, in addition to being overrepresented in the statistics, are often vulnerable to gender-based violence during displacement. And this is just the short-term picture. "There are longer-term costs that we haven't been able to measure at an individual level, for instance disruptions to children's education can have a longer-term impact on their livelihood and opportunities," says Ms. Yasukawa.

In addition to being crushed at the micro-level, these costs radiate outwards, creating massive knock-on effects. One of Ms. Yasukawa's most recent projects, a report from last year entitled "the Ripple Effect," estimates that in 2019 alone, the global economic losses resulting from internal displacement added up to, at minimum, 20 billion USD. "There's a huge human toll to internal displacement that is not just on the individuals displaced," she says, "but it can flow onto the host communities, governments, humanitarian agencies...the economic cost in the long term can have a significant impact in terms of GDP and longer-term growth." For developing countries with economies already shattered by war, the burden is stultifying—for example, IDMC's calculations show that displacement costs measure as high as 21% of GDP in Somalia, and 14% in Syria. In an age of globalization, these effects have far-reaching implications. "If you're not motivated from a purely humanitarian perspective, then at least a financial perspective should motivate actors to seek to address [displacement] as quickly as possible, and

prevent it."

Despite the scale of the problem, internal displacement continues to be direly underappreciated and insufficiently addressed. "It remains such an invisible issue," Ms. Yasukawa states, a hint of frustration colouring her professional tone, "particularly on the global stage, when there are far more people who are displaced within their countries than people who are refugees." Unlike those who seek safety across borders, the internally displaced usually lack even nominal legal protections. Part of the tragedy of the situation, she argues, is that, with the exception of the UN's non-binding set of guiding principles, "there's not an international scheme of the sense of the [1951] Refugee Convention to address the needs of IDPs... there's still such a gap...even just the term 'internal displacement,' it's not as common in terms of the language [used] when we talk about forced migration."

But Ms. Yasukawa and her colleagues continue striving to bring the issue to light. "When we're writing the information that we're collecting, we're hoping that it can inform humanitarian actors and policymakers at government level." The findings of location and context-specific case studies, she says, are used by NGOs and other humanitarian actors on the ground to shape and direct their interventions, while the big picture data is aimed at raising awareness on the part of the general public and, more importantly, state officials. "I think that this work is a way of highlighting another aspect of internal displacement...the fact that the impacts aren't only humanitarian risks, which in themselves are significant risks that should see prompt action, but we feel that actually showing the economic impacts can be a useful way of showing the value of investing in prevention methods, and also addressing it as quickly as possible to reduce the costs."

Mitigation efforts, she adds, require a balance of humanitarian and development-based approaches, both immediate relief and long-term investment. Effective interventions range from medical and food aid to infrastructure projects, early warning systems, and educational programs to increase IDPs' employment opportunities. But Ms. Yasukawa is quick to point out that, when it comes to war, the only durable solution to displacement is peacebuilding. "We can talk about different ways to reduce displacement or even reduce the effects, but at the end of the day, in countries affected by armed conflict, it's going to be the cessation of hostilities that's really key."

Cal Furlong is a freelance writer, researcher, and CCVT volunteer. He leads a honky-tonk band in Toronto, Ontario.

An Investigation into Uighur Genocide in XinJiang, and the long-term impact of “Re-education” camps on Uighur Children

By Gabrielle Allohverdi



Uighur Past and Present

In early 2017, several mainstream news reports emerged revealing the mass detention of Chinese-Muslims into Re-education Camps established by the Chinese Communist Party. The large-scale imprisonment of Uighur people, ethnic Turkic Muslims in western China, were taking place in response to recent policies aimed at eliminating the threat of religious terrorism (Raza, 2019) (Davis, 2019). Nearly 10 million Uighurs reside in Xinjiang province, and the Uighur people have had a contentious history with the Han Chinese population. During the 18th century Qing dynasty,

Han migration to the region was heavily promoted and assimilation encouraged through spread of Confucian education. Later, under the Maoist regime in the 1950's, many ethnic minority leaders were weakened or eradicated to ensure allegiance to the newly formed communist government. Ethnic minorities were subsequently removed from political positions and silenced from larger conversations (Raza, 2019). As of 2019, the Chinese government has detained at least 1.5 million individuals, primarily of Turkic Muslim and Uighur descent, within such camps that are branded as schools offering employment training to assist in settlement within mainstream society (Lipes, 2019). Video evidence and testimony, however, paint a different scene, where individuals are imprisoned on the sole basis of studying their religion abroad, writing books on the topic of Uighur culture or criticizing government officials (Raza, 2019). Imprisoned individuals are subsequently forced to study communist party literature and many escapees report enduring physical beatings, torture, rape, and involuntary sterilization (Raza, 2019) (Rakhima & Satyawati, 2019).

Amid the blatant silencing and abuse, lies a more insidious attack on the community with longer lasting effects. After

imprisonment, Uighur children often undergo forced separation from their families into state-controlled kindergartens for indefinite periods of time, away from their communities. Parents speak of their children being forcibly taken and experiencing curriculum designed to strip them of any remnants of their Muslim identity and Uighur culture (Yi, 2019). To support these efforts, numerous “pre-schools” have popped up within Xinjiang in the past few years and suggesting an increasing number of children are being institutionalized. Living a life away from one’s family can pose long term threats to the healthy development of a child that is likely to hinder the child well into adult life, supported by both psychological literature and testimony of the effects of colonial re-education schools implemented in Western society.

The psychology of saying goodbye

Parents play an important role in mitigating the effects of environmental stress on children. During times of war, political turmoil or persecution, parents present a stabilising factor in a child’s life. Early parent-child separation research conducted during WW2, for instance, found that children sent away from their families in evacuation reported more psychological distress than children who remained with their families experiencing environmental stressors (Freud & Birligmane, 1943). The institutionalization of abandoned or orphaned children is a common practice around the world in both developed and developing countries. A meta-review conducted by Waddoups et al., (2019) found that separated children are at an increased likelihood for developmental impairments such as hyperactivity, inattention, and disinhibition and these effects occur whether separa-

tion is voluntary or involuntary. Moreover, a cross-sectional longitudinal study looking at immigrant adaption status among 282 adolescents, found that children that had been separated from their mothers for 4 years or more reported higher levels of anxiety and depression symptoms compared to those that had never been separated (Suárez-Orozco, Bang & Kim, 2011).

In a more recent example, the crackdown by the Trump administration on illegal border crossing between the Mexico-US border resulted in the displacement of many children. The prosecution of adult migrants, regardless of whether they were travelling with minors or not, meant many children were forcibly removed from their family (Waddoups, Yoshikawa & Strouf, 2019). This resulted in up to 3000 children being separated. While research on the behavioural effects of such separation are sparse, preliminary reports suggest mostly negative outcomes, with greater displays of depressive affect and school absenteeism (Chaudry et al., 2010). While the government has since reversed this policy, the damage has unfortunately still been done. Children cannot regain the crucial developmental time necessary to lead healthy and stable lives. These children will be thrust into American society with the lingering effects of this separation and struggle to be healthy members of their society and communities.

Uighur Children and Forced Separation

The forced separation of Uighur children into state sponsored kindergartens is on a different scale of severity, given the

First Light

decreased possibility of reunification with their families and the active attempts to suppress their Muslim and Uighur culture. The forced Sinicization of Uighur children is motived in part by the outdated and misinformed idea that all cultures have the capacity to “civilize” if they undertake the culture of an already civilized society (Davis, 2019). Reports paint a grim picture for the detained children, with schools having increased surveillance and playgrounds surrounded by barbed wire (Sudworth, 2019). Classes are exclusively taught in Chinese, and students are required to sing and dance to propagandistic songs (HRW,2020). Government publications attempt to tout the benefits of such schooling, such as the removal of any tendencies towards “extreme thought” and the opportunity to learn basic hygiene and manners (HRW,2020).

One former teacher from a XinJiang boarding school, however, reports that students are not necessarily thriving educationally, stating “Students in boarding schools have more time to study, but this doesn’t mean that they get better grades. On the contrary, their academic performance becomes worse...They live in fear and are in no mood to study” (Yi, 2019). Children live in fear and sadness from the separation from their parents and are clearly not flourishing. Despite it all, wide-spread seizure of Uighur children persists as the Han population are reassured that the measures taken are effec-



tively and actively reducing terrorism, none-the-wiser.

Canadian Residential Schools and Inter-Generational Impact

Much of this follows an eerily similar narrative to what has occurred on Canadian soil, and is, arguably, equally dismissed by the general population. Church run residential schools in Canada were instantiated between the 1870s to the 1990s, with the last residential school closing in 1996 (Moon-Riley, Copeland, Metz & Currie, 2019). The aim of such schools was to remove Indigenous children from their families and assimilate

them into European settler life. Children were forbidden from speaking or practicing their native culture, exposed to neglect and starvation, and endured frequent physical, emotional, and sexual abuse that was not admitted by the government

until 2008 (Chief-Moon Riley et al., 2017). As is to be expected, numerous reports provide evidence for the lasting psychological impacts of this schooling on indigenous children and that has carried onto further generations. Individuals who attended residential schools are at risk for higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse (Wilk, Maltby & Cooke, 2017). Having a parent that attended a residential school is also associated with an increased risk of suicidal ideation and attempts among indigenous youth (Bombay et al., 2018). In considering all this evidence, it is not

difficult to see the future of many Uighur children through the eyes of their indigenous counterparts in Canada. It is troubling to anticipate the long-term effects of state-sponsored boarding schools and the effect this separation will have on future Uighur generations if action is not taken immediately to stop it. Canadian residential schools have undeniably not helped indigenous children in any capacity to live better lives, and the Chinese ones will likely not help Uighur children either. It is imperative we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Moving forward

The forced separation of Uighur children and the imprisonment of Uighur adults is a serious human rights transgression that will likely result in long-term mental health effects on Uighur generations to come. The propagandistic and unwavering conformity demanded of Uighur society by the Chinese government leaves no room for ethnic minorities to live and continue living peacefully in their native land. What is being offered to the general population as protection against terrorism, is in reality the abuse and ethnic cleansing of a long-established community. It is important to recognize the capacity for institutionalized racism and ethnic cleansing among all cultures and that must be overcome on a personal and societal level through tolerant acceptance of ethnic minorities.

"I think the most confusing thing we're taught is that we have one ruling class, and no dominated classes.... that we don't have people who are dominated over" says Lena*, a close friend and University of Toronto psychology graduate from China "I don't think that many [Chinese] people know about this, or

care about this, because most people don't think that it will happen to them... when you mention Islam, people only recall the terrorist attacks and it's seen as this negative thing... I feel very sad that they group all Uighur people in this terrible depiction".

Some attempts have been made to place more economic pressure and distance ties with China. While companies Nike and H&M have stated they will no longer source any products from XinJiang, they were subsequently met with boycotting from Chinese retailers expressing anger what was deemed as spreading rumours (Reuters, 2021). We do not stand for such behaviour in the west and should not remain silent in its repetition in the east. As the Canadian government knows only too well what lies ahead for these children and adults, it is morally imperative that Canada encourages the world powers persist in placing pressure on the Chinese government to cease the kidnapping of Uighur children and mass genocide of the Uighur population. It is only through this, that Uighur children may possibly have a future of reunification at home.

**Name changed to maintain anonymity*

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March 25/26: Global Action Days to End War in Yemen

By: Anne Khan



As an educator, community leader, social worker, human rights, women rights, children rights, equity, justice, peace and

anti-war activist, I am actively participating, volunteering and leading with fellow activists at the Canada Peace Network and various organizations on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. We are putting call to action to the Canadian government and Canadian public to take action on Canada's role in this war, and diplomatic action to end the war in Yemen altogether. There is urgency for Canada and for all, to advocate and take action on the unrestricted access for humanitarian assistance in Yemen, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Yemen is the worst humanitarian crisis, as declared by the UN. Yemen was one of the poorest countries in the Middle East, before the onset of the war on March 25, 2015.

The situation in Yemen is getting dire and may severely worsen quickly if coordinated humanitarian community response is hauled. The World Food Programme (WFP) has already faced serious challenges with regards to access and various constraints to deliver humanitarian crisis assistance and intervention to the vulnerable and war-torn people of the country. The COIVD-19 pandemic now has worsened the catastrophe of the Yemeni people, along with a shadow pandemic of extreme crisis of famine, vi-

First Light

olence, poverty and of human life and dignity. The malnutrition rates of women and children are among the worst in the world. According to World Food Programme (WFP), 1.2 million women, and 2-3 million children are in need of acute malnutrition treatment, of which 400,000 of these children are at the risk of dying (CNN, WFP, 2020). On March 16, 2021, United Nations Security Council in its briefing warned on Yemen “speeding” towards massive famine (UN Security Council, 2021).

On March 1, 2021, Global Affairs Canada announced, \$69.9 million in funding in continued response to the humanitarian needs of the vulnerable and war-torn people in Yemen in 2021. This new funding, in line with Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, will support UN agencies, the Red Cross, and other non-governmental organizations. This will provide life-saving food, support health care, clean water and sanitation, with a focus on the urgent needs of women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen (Global Affairs Canada, 2021).



Quick facts

Since the start of the conflict in 2015, Canada has provided over \$295 million in humanitarian funding to support food assistance, clean water and sanitation, shelter, protection and health care, including reproductive and sexual health services.

In addition to humanitarian support, Canada is investing in peace and stability in Yemen. Since December 2018, Canada has provided over \$22 million in peace and security assistance in Yemen to support the UN-led peace process (Global Affairs Canada, 2021).

Yet more Critical Action needs to be done...

Canada Peace Network's CALL TO ACTION

“Join the Global Day of Action to End the War on Yemen

March 25/26 2021

March 25/26 marks 6 years of a brutal U.S.-backed, Canada-armed Saudi-led war in Yem-

en. Alongside an indiscriminate and ongoing bombing campaign, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), backed by the United States, have imposed an air, land and sea blockade on Yemen. The blockade has caused critical fuel and food shortages, resulting in

400,000 children at risk of dying in Yemen, as reported by CNN. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations had declared Yemen the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Now Yemen is facing famine along with the Covid-19 pandemic, with an overwhelmed medical system devastated by war and blockade.

Alongside the U.S. and U.K., Canada also has blood on its hands, as it also continues to profit from selling arms to Saudi Arabia and other countries in the military coalition. On September 28, 2020, the UN Human Rights Council named Canada as one of the parties fueling the ongoing war in Yemen by continuing arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Canada exported nearly \$2.9 billion worth of military equipment to Saudi Arabia in 2019.

The war on Yemen must stop!

Antiwar and peace activists and organizations are marking 6 years of the war on Yemen with days of action on March 25 and 26. As fellow activists across Canada, we encourage you to continue holding actions in your towns and cities. Actions can include street actions, car caravans, webinars, letter writing, and social media campaigns, considering your local situation.

Action Ideas & Resources

Share your action or posts against war on Yemen on social media using the hashtag #YemenCantWait and #CanadaStopArmingSaudi. There is also sample social media messaging at <https://tinyurl.com/y7d45aar> and shareable graphics at <https://tinyurl.com/5rpjvvnz>

Deliver a letter: 68 organizations across Canada have signed [a letter](#) to demand that Canada Stop Arming Saudi and to highlight 28 companies in Canada complicit in this arms deal. The letter has been delivered in person to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's office, as well as a number of other MPs and companies listed in it. We encourage others to also deliver the letter to government officials and named companies in their areas. If you take this action, remember to take a photo of the delivery and post it on social media using the hashtags #CanadaStopArmingSaudi and #YemenCantWait. Photos of letter deliveries are being collected and posted here: <https://peaceandjusticenetwork.ca/takingactionstostoparmingssaudi/>

Residents of Canada are invited to sign these two parliamentary petitions:

[Petition 3122](#), sponsored by MP Matthew Green

[Petition 3075](#), sponsored by MP Jenica Atwin

Use a protest poster for your protests or to post on social media. Post the image or take a selfie with it!

To Justin Trudeau at <https://docdro.id/Bt8cqD>

To Joseph Biden at <https://www.docdroid.net/AVSipmK>

To Boris Johnson at <https://www.docdroid.net/2neSzmo>

General posters: <https://www.docdroid.net/oIxlDv> or <https://www.docdroid.net/eIEtW5z>

Whatever action you decide to take, remember to reflect your action on social media with the hashtag

First Light

#CanadaStopArmingSaudi and
#YemenCantWait. Activists and organizations across Canada can amplify one another's actions! (Canada Peace Network, 2021)

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UNHCR Canada

https://give.unhcr.ca/page/52680/donate/1?ea.tracking.id=SEM21_Yemen&utm_campaign=CA_PS_EN_YE&qclid=Cj0KCQjwPaCBhDkARIaISZN7QBCvNqCu6rdj5FqGGNknGbNnExpUVyDtQmx8WXfXBkD2NmzOCbEccaAhNMEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds

Canada Peace Network

<https://peaceandjusticenetwork.ca/>

Anne Khan is a peace, human rights and women rights activist. She is community leader, educator, mental health and disability management specialist, counsellor and a volunteer with the CCVT.



WRONGED AND INVADED

I am Abdul. My life became a bottomless Hell at only twenty-three.

Let me relate my grisly and ghastly, ghastly and grisly story to thee...

Those dreadful, deranged demons thought they were Kings.

They stormed in uninvited and seized all our things.

They did not want to compromise or talk,
Rather they preferred to sneer and mock.

They never looked at our real faces,
Choosing to judge us by colour and no other basis.

They said we were a waste of space
And wished us gone from every Earthly place.

One pitch-dark perilous night, they burst through our fence,
Yelling, raging, and to us, making no sense.

Many a good man's blood was spilled that night.
No human words can describe the gruesome sight.

We fought and we fought for our cherished lands to the last,
Trying to protect our future, our present, our past.

But there were too few of our brave men:
We were outnumbered one to ten.

Our fair, humble homes were razed to the ground.
Most were killed, many were bound.

Those few that somehow managed to flee
Took solemn refuge on the jagged rocks near the foaming sea.

But I was wounded in the ruthless, ravaging war
And taken prisoner bleeding, aching and sore.

FEELINGS OF A CAP-TURED SOUL

I was captured
Desperately defending my birth soil
On that very day
When I turned twenty-four.

My life in my homeland turned into
A life of rushing by bullets and torture.
What did I feel?
Who was I? Was I at all?

Stressing,
Falling,
Melting
into Nothing.

Struggling,
Straining,
Pressure rising,
Overloaded.

Hardly breathing,
Gasping,
Suffocating,
Breathless.

Slipping,
Tumbling,
Bending,
Disfigured.

Puncturing,
Bursting,
Flooding,
Sunk.

Becoming lost,
Getting left out,
Wasting,
Decayed.

Drained away,
Colourless,
Blank,
Void

NEW LIFE ON NEW SOIL

Under cover of dense darkness, I landed on new soil
last night.
Then, through a giant Canadian airport made turns left
and right.

Wretchedly reduced now to two pieces of luggage in a
corner of my tiny room.
And worse -- in my head, I carry years of war, years of
gloom.

Here, in this unknown to me place, I have not a soli-
tary friend,
And if I need some help, who will lend a graceful
hand?

They say there is opportunity to be found in this land.
But for someone who has just come out of a life of
debris, dust and sand??

But wait! I am a human: a human with a burning, pas-
sionate soul!
Perhaps, I can yet make my life be whole!

I want to make something of my life!
Maybe even raise a couple playful kids... and find a
loving wife!

Alas, but I have not more education than grade eight,
How could I earn enough and pull my weight??

And then my age of forty-four: my beard is grey at
best, if not completely white,
Who will want to see me in the day or sleep by me at
night?

But I have come too far, and to surrender now...
That I cannot, will not allow!

There, there! I see the majestic sun disk rising up in
this new sky!
I shall, I shall just go forth and keep my spirits high!

I try today, I try tomorrow,
Perhaps one day I'll have much joy and not just sor-
row....

*Anthony Frolov is a volunteer with the CCVT: "I
am Antony. I love writing. I also like to read and
discuss short stories."*

Sri Lanka - Fight for Justice

By Lotus Sahana Alphonsus, HBSc, MD Candidate & Noelle Alphonsus, BA, HBScN Candidate

Introduction

When we started our journey to the war-ravaged areas in Northern Sri Lanka, we prepared ourselves to see overwhelming signs of destruction and physical trauma. What we were not prepared for was the immense amount of insufferable grief and psychological trauma that survivors were struggling with. As medical and nursing students, people often came to us for advice on minor ailments and wounds, but mental health is what was truly affecting their well-being. Even though the war ended more than a decade ago, people explained that they continued to feel threatened and retraumatized by post-war policies and the inability to get answers for what they experienced. It is a common assumption that once war is over, the worst is over, and the country can now rebuild. But close attention must be paid to how it rebuilds itself and if it continues to set the stage for further discrimination and marginalization of a people.

Sri Lanka: The war is over but the fight for justice remains

As we stood waiting in the sweltering heat for the next bus to take us to our native village in Sri Lanka, we noticed a frail, elderly woman silently sobbing a few spots down from us. We helped her up into the bus, and soon learned her name was Mariyama, and this was a trip she's been making a few times a month for the past 10 years in search of her daughter. Mariyama pulled out many pictures of her daughter from her purse and explained that she had disappeared after the war. Witnesses had vividly remembered seeing her daughter being forcefully taken by the infamous white vans, which were used by politically affiliated groups to abduct, torture and disappear individuals under the guise of national safety (International Truth & Justice Project, 2021). She

tearfully explained that her daughter was a ball of energy, loved kids and had dreams of becoming a teacher. Sadly, Mariyama had no other immediate family left, as her husband had died of "depression" from constantly wondering what had happened to their only child. Unfortunately, Mariyama's story would not be unique, and we met many families experiencing similar fates. The United Nations (UN) has found Sri-Lanka home to the one of the highest numbers of enforced disappearances in the world, where it is estimated up to 100,000 people were disappeared by the state (Amnesty International, 2020). The majority of the disappeared are Tamil and over 10 years later, families continue to cling on to hope while the government refuses to provide adequate answers as to what happened.

The 30-year long civil war occurred between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The LTTE was fighting for a separate independent state for the country's Tamil minority after decades of rising ethnic tensions and deepening discrimination against minorities (Spencer, 2002). Looking further back the reasons for the conflict are multifactorial with many stemming from the passing of laws disenfranchising Tamils and Sri-Lanka's colonial history which is rooted in the legacy of British imperialism (Spencer, 2002). Regardless of how the conflict began, what cannot be contested is how it ended. The final stages of the war were described as a "bloodbath", where tens of thousands of trapped Tamil civilians were killed, and war crimes were committed by both involved parties (Macrae, 2013). The LTTE has been eliminated. However, Sri Lankan security forces and in-



volved government officials remain free, and they must answer for crimes that were committed.

Among the gross human rights violations, sufficient credible evidence shows intentional shelling of civilians, hospitals and humanitarian operations as well as the execution of surrendering LTTE rebels (International Crisis Group, 2010).

When Sri-Lanka's civil war came to an end in May 2009 (UNHRC, 2021), we remember colleagues who were unfamiliar with the war commenting that this is great news, and the country can now start to rebuild.

Many assume that once a conflict is over, the rest of it is simple. However, what people fail to consider is that moving forward requires

genuine reconciliation that is conducive to the rebuilding of trust and healing; none of these are simple in Sri-Lanka. For instance, government authorities continue to deny their role in enforced disappearances and war crimes even in the presence of compelling video evidence (Macrae, 2013). Furthermore, military personnel who were incriminated in alleged war crimes by the United Nations have even been pardoned and appointed to senior government positions (Amnesty International, 2020). In 2020, newly elected President Gotabaya Rajapaksa withdrew from a 2015 United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) "Resolution 30/1" that was looking to end impunity and promote reconciliation. Instead, the Sri

This is Killi, one of many mothers that we met that continues to hold on to hope that her missing daughter will one day return. "I will never stop waiting for my daughter, I know she is out there somewhere, I wish they would



Lankan government dismissively commented that they did not want foreign forces interfering with their domestic affairs and they continue to resist international investigations of alleged war crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Concerningly last year, for the first time President Rajapaksa commented on the missing, admitting that they were all dead ("Sri Lanka Civil War", 2020). However, for the resilient family members who have been holding continuous protests for the missing, this just led to more questions and resurfaced feelings of betrayal. There cannot be closure, no way to move forward, without acknowledgement, accountability and justice for what they have endured.

Unfortunately, the policies and actions of the current government are further retraumatizing marginalized communities and are a major cause for concern. In early 2021, the annual report by the United Nations High Commissioner highlighted concerning red flags stating that "Sri Lanka is on an alarming path towards recurrence of grave human rights violations" (UNHRC, 2021). There is increased militarization, a rise of ethno-nationalistic ideology and ongoing surveillance in the war affected regions; many families protesting for their missing loved ones have been intimidated and threatened to cease their efforts (UNHRC, 2021). There are credible allegations

First Light

of ongoing violations, including torture and sexual violence by Sri Lankan security forces of mainly Tamils suspected of any links to the LTTE or anti-government activities (International Truth & Justice Project, 2021). In a shocking and appalling move, the Sri Lankan authorities received international backlash in January 2021 for bulldozing the Mullivaikkal memorial (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The Mullivaikkal memorial was a monument built to commemorate thousands of innocent Tamil civilian men, women and children who were massacred during the final phase of the war which claimed an estimated 70,000 - 140,000 lives (Jeyasundaram, 2019). The destruction of this memorial highlights the Sri Lankan regimes' attempt to erase history and the denial of Tamils' right to mourn and honour the death of their loved ones. Being able to understand what happened to the missing and grieve the ones that have died is a basic right and inflicting this pain to minority communities further adds to the collective trauma and stress they experience.

But even amongst intimidation and threats to safety, survivors continue to stand up for justice. In February 2021, twelve years after the war, the minority Tamils and Muslims took part in a five day "P2P" protest where they marched over 400 kilometers from Pottuvil to Polikandy ("From Pottuvil to Polikandy", 2021). This was the largest protest since the ending of the war and aimed to bring international attention to the ongoing issues faced by minorities. People marched against forced cremations, the detention of political prisoners without trial and denial of war crimes among many other reasons ("From Pottuvil to Polikandy", 2021). In this remarkable show of resilience and unity among minorities, were also many mothers like Mariyama holding up a sea of photographs of their loved ones. During the protest, many were anxiously waiting for the upcoming United Nations meeting that would decide if a resolution seeking accountability and international oversight in Sri Lanka would be adopted; this resolution was vehemently opposed by the Sri Lankan government. On March 23, this resolution termed "Resolution 46/1" was successfully passed and it allows the UN to collect and assess evidence of international crimes committed by Sri Lankan authorities so that the international community can take the proper actions for

accountability and justice. Families of the disappeared who have felt abandoned by the Sri Lankan state now have renewed hope that the UNHRC will bring them the answers they desperately need.

Yes, the war is over, but the scars of war cannot be healed if they continue to be reopened. Although it has been over a decade since the war ended, survivors continue to endure trauma and live in the fear of harm and death. There have been no real attempts to form bridges and current policies are moving in the opposite direction of reconciliation. If there is impunity and no attempts at reforming structures that facilitated human rights violations, then there always remains a threat that the past will be repeated. Additionally, without international inquiry other countries in conflict may be motivated to follow Sri-Lanka's method of eliminating conflict by modeling their pattern of unrestrained military actions and the disregard of humanitarian issues (International Crisis Group, 2010). The survivors of war and torture, even against all they face, show unbelievable and fearless determination. A substantial amount of evidence including eyewitness accounts, satellite images and videos have been collected; it is now up to the international community, who once turned a blind eye, to finally do what is right and offer the survivors the justice that is owed to them. Sadly, many parents who were campaigning relentlessly for over a decade have died without ever knowing what happened to their missing loved ones. Mariyama's spirit remains strong, "the day my daughter is truly gone is the day I stop fighting for her".

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Lotus and Noelle Alphonsus are medical and nursing students very passionate about health equity and helping newcomer populations navigate the healthcare system. They have both worked closely with survivors of sexual assault, human trafficking and refugee populations.

Reflections of A Youth Counsellor: Supporting Refugee Survivors of Sexual Violence

By Nadia Umadat



I have worked extensively with young people through my years at CCVT. I am always startled with the realization that while we might be close in age our life experiences could not be further apart. The hardships faced by refugees during the pre, peri and post periods of their migration journeys have always seemed a million miles away from my sheltered North American upbringing. When I am asked to describe my work at the Centre, I often compare it to something out of a movie. Prior to my employment here, these stories only existed for me on the big screen. Now, my daily work affords me the privilege of knowing and supporting brave asylum seekers and bearing witness to their stories.

My caseload is predominately compromised of individuals who are female identified. To

First Light

date, I have enjoyed it immensely. Although our life circumstances may seem like polar opposites, I often find myself reflecting on our noticeable commonalities. I enjoy most of my clients as people and in another universe that would allow it, we might even be friends. I would like to think this spirit of comradery spills over into my work and helps to solidify our therapeutic alliance and rapport.

Based on the community support, the CCVT provides its holistic services to survivors of torture, war, crimes against humanity, genocide and human trafficking. As you can imagine, dear reader, the stories many of these folks share are horrific; especially, the disclosure of sexual violence. I know this is a triggering topic, but it is important to the work that we do. It well documented that these types of violence, particularly the act of rape are systemic and deliberate tools that are used to employ cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in times of conflict situations, with military objectives. The intent is to have long-lasting destabilizing effects on its targets, which it does. (1)

When I worked as a placement student at the CCVT prior to my current role as Youth Mental Health Counsellor, one of the first clients I interacted with had escaped a war in her country. She was a newlywed at the time the conflict began. She had been raped by a soldier which resulted in pregnancy. Not only did she experience mental and physical health challenges, she endured relationship difficulties; all of which hindered her ability to care for her child. She recognized the physiological impacts and displayed immense courage in her journey to wellness, while she continued to fight for her right to stay in Canada. All these years later, I find myself thinking of her from time to time. Appallingly, I have learned that her story is a common enough occurrence, although not everyone is in a position to seek remedy.

Now as a counsellor, I have observed of my clients who are survivors of rape and sexual violence share at various stages of our journey. Sometimes it is within our first intake

session and they have tangible and practical needs such as medical attention or documentation for their upcoming hearings. They disclose out of necessity. Or they want to provide explanations for certain behaviors they have developed. Sometimes it comes out randomly, at the end of a session many months down the road because they feel it is the right time to reveal more of their difficulties. Sometimes they never do say it out loud. I may read it on their basis of claim or a doctor's letter and make referrals with that experience in mind. But, when they do open up, their pain is palpable.

Here in Canada and the western world we are going through a time when the plight of women is on the forefront of gender-based discourse. Spurred on by the rise of the Me-Too movement and social media, culture and sentiment are slowly turning in an empowered direction. However, there is so much work to be done on the grassroots. Funding, mental health treatment and other resources cannot meet the demand needed in the Toronto area. Stigma towards survivors of rape and sexual violence are still pervasive. And if we, as a developed society fall short, it is magnified for my clients coming from less privileged parts of the globe.

They often say they have told very few people, or no one at all. Some have omitted it from their initial refugee claims because they could not bear the thought of a court room full of people evaluating its credibility despite its relevance to their case. In addition to the many tears that are shed, that border on hysteria, my clients always look down or look away. They are too embarrassed to make eye contact with me in a safe space. As if they are no longer worthy of the respect they may have otherwise been entitled to. Others discuss feeling unclean, as if they can't wash off the traces of their assailant. Some share their feelings of shame. Shame of loved ones finding out, or their communities and families thinking they encouraged and enticed their attacker. There are the individuals who worry they will never be able to marry, forever to be classified as 'used' goods. To me, it should

seem obvious to these beautiful souls that these thoughts and fears have no merit. But indoctrination and internalization of these narratives of people who have experienced rape and sexual violence have been ingrained in all of us, to a degree. The only difference is that here in Canada we have counter narratives that continue to gain wider traction.

I do my best to dispel all of the distorted thoughts that come up in session. I attempt to reassure my brave clients that their experiences will not lessen their personhood and they can still be successful in their goals and dreams. I convey messages of healing and restoration. But, I often fear my words do not make the desired impact. Through our conversations I gain a sense that most people believe in Canada, an unburdening will occur. Open dialogue and plentiful assistance will be the norm. On arrival there is surprise and disappointment discovering dismissive misogyny still permeates our society, dispelling some of the hope.

Our service users hail from areas where cultural attitudes supersede psycho-education on how to properly support survivors and eliminate stigmatization. In Canada, survivors encounter diasporic groups with traditional mentalities and feel the sting of mainstream micro aggressions. Officially sanctioned campaigns work towards denouncing silence and promoting sharing. However, funding cuts, program cancellations and outrageous wait times implicitly relay the (un) importance of the matter in today's agenda.

For asylum seekers, there has been recent progression. The Immigration and Refugee Board (2020) has taken a much-needed initiative with the creation of a Gender Related Task Force. (2) For refugee claimants who have experienced rape and sexual violence, it can be re-traumatizing to have them recount their experiences. Previously, intimate details were examined and pulled apart by members with little experiences or understanding on the issue, allowing biases and assumptions to reign in this high stakes deci-

sion making process. The new task force provided mandatory training for its adjudicating members with a focus on the effects of trauma on memory. Additionally, survivors will no longer be required to recount their sexual assault experiences, a triumph heralded by lawyers and human rights advocates. While this is a good start, what happens after the hearing? What other avenues can offer support to survivors of rape and sexual violence? And what can we do to ensure these avenues get implemented?

We all have a role to play in supporting survivors of sexual violence, including asylum seekers. I encourage you to be intentional in your voting strategies. Ensure that your desired candidate has a platform and plan to improve social services favorable to womxn and refugees. Hold your elected officials accountable and contact your city councilors and MPs to highlight this as an issue of concern and demand funding allocation for counselling, community health initiatives and specialized training. I also ask you consider donating your time, resources and other talents to agencies with programs supporting sexual assault survivors and female identified asylum seekers. Finally, be cognizant of the power of speech. We can make a difference by openly encouraging survivors to come forward and access care in safe places. The narratives at play around us can be formidable, but not permanent. Our attitudes, thoughts, actions and words can one day change a society for the better.

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Nadia Umadat is a graduate of York University. She has been working as a Child and Youth Counsellor since 2016 with CCVT. Prior to that, she was both a CCVT student placement and volunteer. She works in the realms of case management, counselling and group facilitation in the CCVT Scarborough location.

Success story By Mona Kalil



I have had the privilege of serving the CCVT young client, Bidhya Bhattacharai, since 2019. She had joined CCVT in January 2017. She used to work as a full-time radio journalist in Nepal, and simultaneously as a second-year student of Master of Educational English. As a dedicated journalist, she was interviewing various members of political parties. She was a supporter of the National Democratic Party (NDP) of Nepal, along with his family members. She was professionally allowed to ask party members questions that were submitted by the audience with total freedom.

During a panel discussion with members of the NDP and the ruling Maoist Party, Bidhya

asked a question, which upset the representative of the Maoist Party. He left and threatened her that as a supporter of the NDP, she would face the consequences. On November 23, 2015, she finished her work around 9 p.m. and departed for her residence by bus and got off in a stop that was 15 minutes walk to her residence. She had to cross a rice patty field. She was terrified when she found that two men were following her. They called her and identified themselves as members of the Maoist Party. She remembers that they snatched her bag and took out her phone.

When she came to her consciousness around 11 p.m., she realized that she had been hit on the head and her dresses were moved from her body. She had been raped. Instead of going to her residence, she took a taxi to her family home that was 1.5 hours away from the residence. The following day she went to the hospital, where she was kept for three days. Doctors told her that she had been mentally shocked and should return every week for a total of a month.

Bidhya reported the horrible crime to the police who promised to look into the matter, with no outcome. Life became so horrible that she was left with no choice but to leave everybody and everything behind and escape her homeland. She arrived in Canada on December 20th, 2015. When she came to know about the CCVT and its holistic services, she knocked our door and we accepted her with all our heart and referred her to the CCVT mentorship program, as per her request. When she moved to Mississauga in

2019, we continued offering her our services through the CCVT Mississauga branch.

I came to know, with great sadness, that her refugee claim had been rejected and she had exhausted all local remedies except applying to stay in Canada on Humanitarian and Compassionate (H & C) grounds that is not an effective remedy. She was desperately looking for a fresh psychiatric report that should have been provided by the CCVT in-house psychiatrist Dr. Funmi, because the latter had already seen her. It took me lots of time and efforts to book her an appointment, mainly because of unavailability of the doctor or the patient. At this time, Bidhya received the shocking news of her only brother's death in Nepal. She was unable to go for his funeral due to her well-founded fear of persecution there. The horizon for staying in Canada was blur. This made Bidhya extremely sad and emotional, crying most of the time. I paid special attention to her, providing her with my regular settlement and trauma counselling on the one hand and looking for a remedy on the other.

I doubled my efforts and finally got an appoint with Dr. Funmi for December 2019. Bidhya visited Dr. Funmi and received her psychiatrist report after some time. I also provided her with the CCVT letter of support in January 2020. I tried my best to promote her coping capacity and encouraged her to work tirelessly towards the success of her case. Bidhya was working at Italian Bakery, and she was very satisfied with her job.

As Bidhya's mental health was important, I requested Dr. Funmi for the continuation of treatment. Bidhya visited Dr. Funmi for follow up on Monday Jan 20. I gave Bidhya one bag of the donation packages that made her very happy.

The spread of Covid-19 and its consequent

panic shattered all my hopes. I lost my telephone contact with Bidhya. Dr. Funmi had to postpone her appointment due to the pandemic. I arranged a virtual meeting between Bidhya and Dr. Funmi with tremendous difficulties. It happened on March 30, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. It was a step forward, but I was terribly concerned about Bidhya's protection vis-à-vis Crona-19. I spent quite some time and provided her with information to that effect. I encouraged her to email me if she needed any help or advice.

Another great challenge was Bidhya's financial condition that was deteriorating on a daily basis and she was not eligible for Employment Insurance. I provided her with the link for financial support. Living under awful condition of abject poverty affected Bidhya's mental health. Dr. Funmi met with Bidhya again on April 14th and prescribed medications.

Life became so intolerable for Bidhya that she found all doors closed to her. A gloomy day came when my talented client did not have enough money to cover her living expenses. This made her so frustrated that she could not respond to my frequent telephone and email messages. I could not even leave her a telephone message, as she did not have an answering machine. I was also worried about the outcome of her H & C application.

I called Bidhya again and she finally answered. I found her in a dire condition, due to the lack of any income and her ineligibility for receiving any assistance. For a long time, she did not have a work permit and it was not until a few days before the COVID-19 that she received it. She had not paid her rent for the 2 months and I gave her food bank lists and some resources to apply for financial support. They gave her only \$70 and she used it for food. I encouraged her to continue with her job search and try to find a job related to her career.

First Light

The good day came when Bidhya got a job and began working, but she still had to pay \$1700 for rent. She was living between hope and despair, as her Humanitarian & Compassionate application was still in process and that made her ineligible for any kind of government assistance. This made my client so upset that she stopped answering my calls. I helped her to get the special fund from the Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and we delivered the money to her house.

After a relatively long and tormenting silence, Bidhya answered my call. I was thrilled by finding her happy and learning that she had finally received Personal Support Worker (PSW) Certificate and was working with Erin Meadows Long Term Care. She was so busy at work that she could not talk a lot. She indicated that she had updated Immigration about her current position. Finally, a day came when I called Bidhya and learned that she had been approved to become a Permanent Resident. Tears of joy ran from my eyes when she thanked me for my “patience, understanding and ongoing supports” during the awkward time and the great challenges she was enduring. I congratulated her from the bottom of my heart and wished her a blessed future in Canada.

Bidhya's approval came, because she sent the application for refugee status based on the fact that she was working in Canada's health care sector during Covid-19 (since July 2020) and had covered the minimum number of hours. She was lucky, as it took her only a month to complete the whole process including her medical examination. She emailed me a copy of the letter of approval and I assured her of our ongoing support.

Mona Kalil is working with the CCVT as a Settlement and Mental Health Counsellor

EDUARDO GALEANO AGAINST WAR



The celebrated Uruguayan writer, novelist and human rights advocate, Eduardo Hughes Galeano (1940 - 2015), is the author of masterpieces such as Open Veins of Latin America, Memory of Fire Trilogy (1982–1986), The Book of Embraces, and Upside-down. He is among the most eminent literary figures of Latin American. Following are some of his reflections against the war:

Almost all wars, perhaps all, are trade wars connected with some material interest. They are always disguised as sacred wars, made in the name of God, or civilization or progress. But all of them, or almost all of the wars, have been trade wars.

Each time a new war is disclosed in the name of the fight of the good against evil, those who are killed are all poor. It's always the same story repeating once and again and again.

Most of wars or military coups or invasions are done in the name of democracy against democracy.

A Reflection: Supporting Separated Refugee Youth

By Leah MacDonald



As the Child and Youth Settlement Counselor at CCVT, I have had the privilege of supporting unaccompanied refugee youth from all over the world. At the CCVT, my role includes providing settlement services and support to children and youth ages 6-29 years old who have experienced persecution, war and/or genocide. I support the service-users through their integration process in Canada. The CCVT also works towards the protection of refugee survivors nationally and internationally. In this article, I hope to highlight my experiences supporting a vulnerable and complex population of refugees,

unaccompanied youth.

When refugee youth arrive in Canada most are bearing the loss of many precious things. Whether it be the loss of family, culture, language, friends, and support networks. Separated youth leave not by choice but for the protection of their lives. Whether fleeing religious persecution, war, violence, or discrimination, youth leave behind important experiences unfinished, such as relationships, completing their education and moving out of the family home, to name a few. The experiences of refugee youth are not just complex but intersecting. Trauma radiates through pre and post migration including the stressors of moving to a new country and the barriers that are prevalent once they settle in Canada. As well, through migration, there can be exposure to violence and the loss of homes, family, friends, and usual comforts. Following arrival in Canada, an unaccompanied youth may face the challenges of navigating numerous barriers alone such as housing, education, precarious immigration status, racism and language. Many of the youth, I have worked with, have experienced complex traumas with symptoms ranging from nightmares, guilt, loss of appetite, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. At the CCVT, I work to provide a space where the youth feel validated and heard. I listen to their narratives with deep empathy and let the youth know that they are not alone. Through a holistic framework, with other internal supports at the CCVT, such as the child and youth psychiatrist, youth are ensured that there is always someone to talk to.

First Light

A big sense of support and hope for many of the youth is communicating with family members back home knowing that they will one day be reunited. However, when complications in their country of origin such as war occurs, this can leave youth unable to communicate with their family, thus leading to an increase in existing symptoms and/or an onslaught of new ones. I have had youth who have lost total communication with their family in the middle of a war and youth who could not locate a sibling in a refugee camp. These are the realities that the CCVT youth face. We work hard to build the youths resiliency and maintain hope.

One major aspect I focus on when supporting unaccompanied youth is building their social supports in Canada. Whether it be connecting with other newcomer youth through youth programs, bonding with a mentor through CCVT's youth mentorship program or connecting with peers through educational programs, volunteering or job placements. I have found building up the youth's social networks extremely imperative to the healing process. There are, of course, challenges that they encounter through the healing and integration process such as the difficulty of securing permanent housing, lack of mental health resources, the rigorous and long refugee claim process and extreme isolation. However, I do my very best as a counsellor to support the youth navigate these processes and ensure they never feel alone.

My hopes as a child and youth settlement counsellor, are to have specific mental health resources available for refugee children and youth, to expedite children and youth refugee hearings, for all levels of government to provide greater funding for refugee children and youth specific programs, and for our education systems to be trauma-informed and culturally competent.

Leah MacDonald is the Child and Youth Settlement Counsellor at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) .

Rohingya Genocide in Myanmar

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Lester B. Pearson, Tower A, 10th Floor
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa ON K1A 0G2

27 January 2020

Dear honorable Champagne,

We learned with great pleasure that following two years of extensive investigations, the United Nations International Court of Justice (ICJ), on Tuesday 21st of January 2020, ordered the government of Myanmar (Burma) to take urgent measures in protection of its Rohingya population from the crime of genocide. As is well known to you, the ICJ case against Myanmar had been filed by the government of the west African nation of Gambia following the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya community by the Myanmar army's in 2017. This tragic act of genocide forced 740,000 Rohingya to leave everything behind and escape to the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. In its submission to the this top-most international court, the government of Gambia stated that Myanmar's actions against the Rohingya population of this country "include killing, causing serious bodily and mental harm, inflicting conditions that are calculated to bring about physical destruction, imposing measures to prevent births are intended to destroy the Rohingya group in whole or in part".

It is unfortunate that the Nobel Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto president of Myanmar, attended the ICJ's session denying the crime of genocide in her country and extending her practical support to the Myanmar's military. Fortunately, the ICJ rejected her excuses and based its ruling on objective facts.

The ICJ's ruling is a breakthrough and a great moral victory for the family of nations,

as it addresses the global problem of impunity and serves the ideal of justice to thousands of victims and survivors. It is a very significant ruling,

as it is a global confirmation that the monstrous crimes had been perpetrated against a totally innocent minority Moslem community in Myanmar.

The ICJ's verdict has promoted the morale of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and has created new hopes for them to be repatriated to their country in peace, safety and dignity. We strongly feel that Canada is in a unique position to make this genuine aspiration happen.

As is well known to you, honorable minister, there is no mechanism within the ICJ's system to enforce its ruling on the

government of Myanmar. It is up to democratic countries like Canada to use their moral authorities and other means towards the implementation of the ICJ's verdict. We expect you, honorable minister, to utilize the ICJ's order in pressuring the government of Myanmar to change its policy of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya community there. The remaining Rohingya population in Myanmar must be granted full citizenship and state protection. We expect you to work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) towards repatriation of over one million Rohingya refugees who live under awkward conditions in thirty six camps in

Bangladesh. In our opinion, the influential neighbouring countries like China and India can play a positive role in convincing the government of Myanmar to cooperate. In the meantime, we appeal to you, honorable minister, to work towards protection and relief of Rohingya's refugees in Bangladesh.

Thank you for your consideration and I am looking forward to hearing from you. With warm regards and in the hope of more collaborations in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director



Canada and Ukrainian Plane Crash in Iran

The Right honorable Justin Trudeau,
P.C., M.P.

Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, ON. K1A 0A2

13 January 2020

Dear Right Honourable Trudeau,

We, at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), were shocked and distressed by the news about the crash of the Ukraine International Airline, Flight number PS752 on Wednesday January 8, 2020. You were among the first global leaders who mentioned about the possibility of a missile attack. As is well known to you, the right honorable Prime Minister, after three days of denial the Iranian government admitted that its military forces had “unintentionally” shot down the Ukrainian jetliner, killing all 176 aboard, including 57 Canadians.

We are proud of you, Mr. Prime Minis-

ter, for taking positive steps in support of Canadian families affected by this horrible tragedy. Thank you for sending Canadian experts to Iran on a fact finding mission and for extending Canadian further support for the affected families. We admire your efforts in dispatching consular and immigration officials across Canada to extend their help to the bereaved families. Your personal involvements including attending the vigil in Toronto and memorial services in Edmonton are highly meaningful to each and every Canadian. Availability of a direct line for emergency and consular assistance is

also a great help to the bereaved families.

Mr. Prime Minister, since its inception in 1977, the CCVT has served hundreds of Iranian clients who have been denied justice and have experi-

enced abhorrent techniques of torture such as mock executions and rape - which according to our records is being used as a form of political torture. We carefully monitor the escalation of violence in Iran and would like to share our concerns with you. The government's



missiles attack against the Ukrainian commercial plane, in our opinion, is a manifestation of a deep-rooted tyranny in Iran that is endangering global peace and security. We reiterate the content of our letter of January 06, 2020 and appeal to you to rely on the moral authority of the Canadian society and utilize all unilateral, bilateral and multilateral means to stop the present hostilities and bring the long-term stability to the Middle Eastern region.

In the meantime, we request that you continue with your good efforts and work towards the following objectives with regards to the shooting down of Ukrainian plane in Iran:

Please utilize all possible means and pressure the Iranian government to accept full investigations by an independent international team with the involvement of Canada, Ukraine and other countries.

We agree with you, Mr. Prime Minister, that the Iranian regime must accept full responsibility for shooting down the plane. Justice must be served; perpetrators must be prosecuted. This may need the intervention of an international judicial team.

Affected families must fully be compensated financially. Financial compensation should be extended to Ukrainian government for its irreparable damage.

The bereaved families in Iran must be given full freedom to organize mourning services in their own traditions.

The Iranian government must publicly and unequivocally apologize to all parties concerned in-

cluding affected families, the Ukrainian and Canadian people. Freedom of speech and protest with regards to this tragic event must be guaranteed in Iran. It is unfortunate that the Iranian government has already taken steps to suppress peaceful demonstrations of people in connection with this event.

The Iranian government must respect its obligations under international human rights instruments and guarantees that it would prevent similar tragedies in the future.

It is of utmost significance that your esteemed government provide full support to agencies such as the CCVT in facilitating debriefing sessions for the affected families, the Iranian community and the community at large.

We wish you the best of luck in your great endeavours, beloved Prime Minister, and assure you of the continuation of our collaboration in the future. We will be pleased to offer our expertise, specifically with regards to providing mental health support to the affected families and debriefing sessions for the Canadian people. We also look forward to working with you on global peace and human rights both in Canada and overseas.

With best wishes and in the hope of more co-operations in future,

Yours sincerely,

Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director

After-effects of Armed Conflict Between Azerbaijan and Armenia

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Lester B. Pearson, Tower A, 10th Floor
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa ON K1A 0G2

February 9, 2021

Dear Honourable Champagne,

We at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) are highly concerned about the aftermath of the armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. As is well known to you, the Turkish-back offensive of the Azerbaijani army against Armenian-supported forces in the Nagorno-Karabakh region erupted on September 27, 2020. The fighting ended on November 9, 2020, with a joint statement of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia. It was followed by a trilateral ceasefire agreement signed between these countries (November 10., 2020) and the deployment of several thousand Russian peacekeeping forces to the border areas. The war resulted in thousands of casualties and a deep humanitarian crisis with over 100,000 displaced Armenians. They are living an awkward life of displacement in the middle of a global pandemic and a severe winter condition.

According to the Amnesty International (AI), both Azerbaijani and Armenian military forces committed war crimes during

this six-week armed conflict. Report about blatant violation of the International Humanitarian Law is based on the AI's verification of 22 videos depicting extrajudicial executions, the ill-treatment of prisoners of war, the decapitation of captives and the desecration of the corpses of hostile forces.

Based on the reports of the Human Rights Watch, Azerbaijan and Armenia hold scores of Prisoners of War (POWs), who live under awful conditions including lack of safety, forced confession, physical abuse and constant humiliation. The Human Rights Watch has reported about the Armenian POWs being subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by the Azerbaijani military forces. The videos received by this prestigious human rights agency show "Azerbaijani captors variously slapping, kicking, and prodding Armenian POWs, and compelling them, under obvious duress and with the apparent intent to humiliate, to kiss the Azerbaijani flag, praise Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, swear at Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and declare that Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijan."

The maltreatment of POWs and other captives is strictly prohibited under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and article 8 of the Rome Statute for International Criminal Court. According to Article 13

of the Geneva Convention III, relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War: "Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention."

We, at the CCVT, are highly concerned about the precarious ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh. We urge the Canadian government to utilize all bilateral, regional and multilateral means with regards to the aftermath of this conflict and work towards a durable peace, respect for international human rights instruments, humanitarian relief, immediate release of POWs and an end to impunity. The outbreak of a new war will produce more casualties, more displacements, more destruction, more poverty, more deprivation and all sorts of epidemic diseases. We specifically demand the following measures by your esteemed government:

Please call upon all relevant actors to provide full access for humanitarian relief to reach the civilian population in the affected areas. There is a need for collaboration with the United Nations entities to provide assistance to war-affected survivors.

Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment against the POWs and other captives must immediately be stopped and they must be protected according to the international humanitarian and human rights instruments.

POWs and other captives must immediately be released and be re-

turned to their families according to the article 8 of the tripartite agreement that calls for the "exchange of prisoners of war, hostages and other detainees as well as the remains of the fatalities."

The governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia must be urged to allow external and independent investigations, preferably from the Office of the UN Human Rights Commissioner, about the violation of international law by their military forces. Authorities of the belligerent countries must identify and prosecute all those responsible for violation of International Humanitarian Law, including commanders who ordered or consented to these heinous crimes.

The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan must engage in an ongoing dialogue about durable peace, security of people, stability of the region and prosperity of people based on mutual cooperation.

Canada has a history of accepting the greatest challenges in global human rights leadership. We expect your government to protect Canadian values and play a leading role in bringing an everlasting peace in this sensitive region of the world.

With best wishes and in the hope of more co-operations in the future,

Yours sincerely,

Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director

Journalists at Risk

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C.,
M.P.

Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, ON. K1A 0A2

February 20, 2021

Dear Right Honourable Trudeau,

We at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) are highly concerned about the safety and security of writers, artists, journalists, human rights supporters and relief workers around the globe. We strongly believe that with her brilliant record as a global human rights leader and with her longstanding position as a peace-loving country and supporter of the civil and political rights, Canada is in a unique position to contribute towards protection of this category of intellectual and vulnerable section of our human family. We are particularly concerned about journalists, who are at great risk and have been remained unprotected around the world. They are at risk, because they oppose human rights violations, expose corruption, cover conflicts and report about injustice and violence. We appeal to you to rely on the moral authority of the Canadian society and utilize all unilateral, bilateral and multilateral means to protect them on the one hand and provide them with a safe refuge in Canada on the other.

We are disturbed by the recent report of the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression about the brutal murder of more than fifty journalists across the world in 2019. Scores of others have experienced imprisonment, severe torture and disappearace without a trace. There are quite a few journalists who have escaped their countries of origin looking for protection. Over the past 10 years, a journalist or media worker has been killed every four days. In Ethiopia, for instance, before and after the outbreak of War

in Northern Tigray, journalists have faced systematic detention, widespread threats and intimidation – and even physical attacks, torture, risk of life and house being ransacked.

Journalists face physical, psychological, judicial and economic threats at the hands of state actors and politicians in the course of exercising their professional job. Despite all these difficulties, journalists continue doing their job with heroic resiliency and dedication in hostile environments. History will remember the coronavirus campaign through reports by journalists across the world, many of whom are putting their health and even their lives at risk in order to cover the pandemic from the frontlines.

Once again, we, at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, appeal to you, the right honourable Prime Minister of Canada, to utilize all possible means to:

Ensure the safety and security of journalists around the world in a way that they can continue with their professional missions in a peaceful atmosphere.

Take effective measures to protect the safety of journalists at risk and release those who languish in jails and detention centers.

Address the impunity of perpetrators and prosecute those responsible for murder, disappearance and imprisonment of journalists.

Create a favorable environment for free, independent and diverse media at the global level in line with provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Right and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

We strongly support the suggestion of the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression that the Canadian government adopts a fast-track program for the resettlement of "Journalists at Risk," including those who are unable to leave their countries of origin seeking protec-

tion in a third country. By establishing the "Journalists at Risk" category within the Canadian refugee protection program, Canada will set an example for other democratic countries to come up with similar programs in protection of journalists at risk. I assure you, Mr. Prime Minister, that the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture will extend its deep-rooted expertise in addressing the settlement, resettlement and integration needs of this category of refugees as well as their past traumas and mental health issues.

As you may be aware, the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) is the first of its kind to be established in North America and the second oldest in the world. We are called upon by other agencies, locally and internationally, to share our expertise with them on a regular basis. Last year alone, we provided our holistic services to 2816 survivors of torture, genocide, war and crimes against humanity coming from 94 countries including 1669 women, 1142 men and 5 transgender (76.84% adults, 12.53% youth, 6.64% seniors and 4% children). CCVT aids torture survivors to overcome the lasting effects of torture and war. Working with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families.

Canada has a history of accepting the greatest challenges in global human rights leadership. We expect your government to protect Canadian values and play a leading role in protection of journalists at risk. Please help us to continue adhering to these basic principles that make Canada admired and respected.

With best wishes and in the hope of more cooperations in the future,

Yours sincerely,

Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director

Resettlement of Tigrayan Refugees

The Right honorable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington Street,
Ottawa, ON. K1A 0A2

April 14, 2021

Dear Right Honourable Justin Trudeau,

We, at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), along with hundreds of sister agencies across the globe, are highly concerned about the aggravating humanitarian crisis resulting from the occupation of Tigray region by the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces. Heavy casualties and destruction, mass displacement of 100,000 people from Tigray, 65,000 Tigrayan refugees in Sudan: this is the sheer balance sheet of the war. We are extremely concerned about the awkward condition of refugees and internally displaced civilians who have fled war-ravaged areas trying to live in overcrowded camps facing the risks of starvation, extermination, rape and sexual violence. They continue to face acute shortages of food, drinking water, fuel, shelter, and sanitation. Children suffer from flashbacks and frequent nightmares about dead bodies. Families have been torn apart by the conflict. Hundreds of refugees have lost contact with their loved ones. Situation is not much better for internally displaced people. The Ethiopian government has restricted their access to essential humanitarian relief supplies. This widespread disaster has resulted in the tragic death of hundreds of refugees and displaced civilians.

The Tigrayan refugees and displaced people suffer from the risk of life and security on a daily basis. The sinister process of full intimidation is at work, as the Ethiopian police is active in targeting ethnic Tigrayans for reprisal all over the country. We have received authentic reports about the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies, along with para-

First Light

military forces, penetrating camps killing, looting and raping vulnerable population. They have systematically perpetrated the heinous crimes of rape and sexual violence in Tigray regions and the camps.

Mr. Prime Minister, Canada is respected all over the globe for her brilliant history of refugee protection. In the spring of 1999, Canada initiated the program of resettlement of 5,000 Kosovar refugees, as part of an international emergency evacuation organized by the United Nations. Your own announcement, Mr. Prime Minister, about the resettlement of the Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Canada was praised all over the world. Your esteemed government resettled more than 25,000 Syrian refugees between November 2015 and February 29, 2016 and the program continued throughout 2016. In both cases, the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT) collaborated with the government towards effective settlement and resettlement of these highly vulnerable refugees, addressing their mental health problems as well.

I am sure you agree with me Mr. Prime Minister, that there is an urgent need for the resettlement of most venerable sections of Tigrayan refugees and displaced people in Canada, specifically resettlement of women and children at risk plus those with family connections in this great country.

Mr. Prime Minister! Canada is respected all over the world as a global human rights leader and as a prestigious peace-loving nation. We are, therefore, in a unique position to contribute towards amelioration of the appalling conditions of refugees and displaced people in Ethiopia. We urgently appeal to you to collaborate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) towards immediate resettlement of the most vulnerable sections of Ethiopian refugees and displaced

people. The process of resettlement for those with family connections in Canada should be expedited. The CCVT will be pleased to contribute towards this great task.

Mr. Prime Minister, we also request you to ask the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other international financial corporations as well as friendly countries like the USA to stop granting loans and financial assistance to the Ethiopian government until and unless it takes effective measures for peace, the protection and relief of refugees and displaced civilians as well as repatriation of Tigrayan refugees under international supervision.

We also appeal to you, Mr. Prime Minister, to contribute to the international efforts in finding a political solution based on full rights for all Ethiopian citizens.

Mr. Prime Minister, please act before it is too late. The Canadian Centre for Vic-

More than 65000 Tigrayan refugees live in Sudan



tims of Torture (CCVT) along with many other agencies in Canada are willing to help you in addressing the present crisis in Ethiopia and in finding a durable solution.

Canada has accepted the greatest challenges in global human rights leadership. We expect your government to protect Canadian values and play a leading role in resettlement of uprooted Ethiopians and finding an effective solution for the present humanitarian crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia. Please help us to continue adhering to the basic principles that make Canada admired and respected.

With best wishes and in the hope of more co-operation in the future,

Yours sincerely,

Mulugeta Abai
Executive Director

The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery By Ezat Mossallanejad

The horrific bombardments of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 remain in the collective memory of the Japanese people who have received global sympathy as victims of war. However, Japan's colonial history is largely disregarded and there is little talk about Japanese occupation of large parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through to the end of World War II.

It wasn't until the year 1990, when this colonial memory was vividly revived and a handful of women started talking about their experiences as "comfort women" after decades of silence. These "comfort women" or "Ianfu" were forced into sexual servitude to Japanese Imperial Armed Forces before and during the World War II. Although estimates vary, a number of historians estimate that around 200,000 women experienced sexual slavery in 2000 comfort stations. They were from 19 countries including Korea, China, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan, the Dutch East Indies, Indonesia, and Japan. Girls, as young as 12, were taken from their homes through coercion, intimidation and deception. Most came from poor rural backgrounds. As a result of multiple rapes, many of the women were later unable to bear children and were never able to marry.

Scholars and women human rights activists have considered this institutionalized system of enforced prostitution by the Japanese government and military as, "unprecedented in its cruelty and magnitude included gang rapes, forced abortions, humiliation, and sexual violence resulting in mutilation, death, or eventual suicide in one of the largest cases of human trafficking in the 20th century." (Hata, I., 2018, p. 231)

The Japanese Imperial Armed Forces justified this barbaric controlled system by claiming that it reduced the number of rapes in areas where its forces were stationed; that it prevented sexually transmitted diseases; that it countered the threat of espionage and provided a recreation facility for soldiers; that sex would improve soldiers' morale and relieve them of "combat stress". The celebrated Japanese historian and a founding member of the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility, Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki, is one of the first scholars who unearthed documentary evidence proving the role of the Japanese government and military in creating this sinister human tragedy: "The observation that there were commanders who silently condoned rape, considering it good for 'building troop moral'; that the vast majority of military leaders did not intervene; and that commissioned officers took the lead in going to comfort stations are bitter indications of the conditions of the time. The fact that military comfort stations were not effective in preventing rapes is clearly demonstrated." (Yoshiaki. Y., 1893, .68)

As was mentioned earlier, at the end of the World War II, the Allied Forces established the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, in which many Japanese military and political leaders were found guilty of crimes against humanity and other war related crimes. This tribunal, unfortunately, suffered from gender blindness and never addressed the crimes of sexual slavery against the so-called "comfort women". As far as Japan is concerned, there has hardly existed the tradition of prosecution of perpetrators of war crimes, genocide and crimes again humanity there. The international community perceived wartime rape as an inevitable consequence of hostilities and, therefore, hardly raised its voice.

As over 80 per cent of the 'comfort women' were Korean, the issue was initially addressed by the Korean Council for the Women that had been founded in 1990. The Council publicized the plight of "comfort women" through demonstrations, TV programs and by taking the issue to the United Nations and various international women's conferences. The council successfully organized regular Wednesday Demonstrations. It lobbied the Korean government and asked the Japanese government for the public admission of the crime, an official apology, a serious fact-finding attempt, building monuments for victims, compensation and re-writing the history. In August 1991, the Korean human rights activist and survivor of Japanese sexual slavery, Ms. Kim Hak-sun, broke the silence and publicized her horrified experiences. In December 1991, she filed a class-action lawsuit against the Japanese government with a court in Tokyo along with two other Korean "comfort women". This was followed by eight more lawsuits. Women survivors became frustrated, as all their attempts did not bring them justice.

The endeavors were not totally in vain, as the Japanese government acknowledged "moral responsibility" in 1993 and made several formal and informal apologies. In 1995, it established the semi-official Asian Women's Fund to distribute "atonement money", made up of private donations rather than government funding. With all intents and purposes, this charity fund was a gesture by the Japanese authorities to conceal the state's legal obligations. In the meantime, Japan continued to deny legal responsibility arguing that the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and other bilateral agreements had protected it from any kind of legal commitment.

At this time, struggle of "comfort women" got a new momentum and the Japanese women activists showed their solidarity with other survivors. Korean and Japa-

First Light

nese feminists rallied together and mobilized others to go beyond a narrow national approach. They viewed the problem with an international human rights perspective learning from the experience of Bertrand Russell of 1966-67. The broader crime of sexual violence had already been addressed by various international tribunals and the Rome Statute for International Criminal Court, was adopted in July 1998.

At this point, I would like to commemorate an eloquent Japanese woman who played a major role in seeking justice for "comfort women". Matsui Yaylori (1934-2002) was a Japanese journalist, author of several books and a brilliant activist for the human rights of women. In 1977, she founded the Asian Women Association with the goal of strengthening solidarity between Japanese women and women in the rest of Asia. In 1981, while working as a reporter in Singapore, she met some "comfort women" who shared their hair-raising stories with her. She shared their stories with the participants at the New York 1988 Conference on International Trafficking in Women. (Theodore de Bary, Wm., 2008, pp. 901-3) In 1998, Matsui contributed towards the establishment of Japanese branch of Violence Against Women in War Network (VAWW-NET).

The goal of VAWW-NET-Japan was "the protection of women from violence, especially sexual violence." The first aim was "promoting the cause of 'comfort women' siding with other movements, Japanese and otherwise." (Dian, 2017, M, p. 97). It was this prestigious agency that mobilized women's groups across the globe towards the organization of an international tribunal against the Japanese government.

The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery (WIWCT) was held in the main auditorium of Kudan Kaikan Hall in Tokyo for four days December 8-12, 2000 with an active media presence and a Japanese and international audience of more than 1300 people each day. The Tribunal took place after two and a half years of intense preparatory work including finalizing the tribunal's charter.

The tribunal was presided over by Gabrielle McDonald, the American jurist and former head of the International War Crimes Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Patricia Viseur-Sellers (Legal Adviser for Gender-Related Crimes in the Office of the Prosecutor for the ICTY and the Rwanda Tribunal) acted as chief prosecutor. Other prominent members of the tribunal were as follows: Carmen Argibay, member of the Supreme Court of Argentina and President of the International Association of Women Judges; Christine Chinkin, Professor of International Law in London and participant in many UN Observer Missions; and Willy Mutunga, president of the Kenyan Bar Association and of the Kenya Human Rights Commission. (<https://journals.openedition.org/cliovhg/508#toco2n5>)

During the tribunal, "four judges from four countries, eight prosecuting teams from eight regions, three conveners from three countries, and members of supporting NGOs from all over the world, also showed the 'international solidarity' of people behind the Tribunal." (Rumi, 2001, p. 50) An interesting point was that both South and North Korea collaborated as a united team for the prosecution. (Kratoska, P.H., 2006, p. 319) The tribunal heard testimonies from 64 survivors of the "comfort women" system from China, South and North Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Indonesia as well as one Dutch survivor and a woman from East Timor. Four Japanese scholars, a researcher from Netherlands and an activist from former Yugoslavia spoke at the tribunal and provided insights about Emperor's responsibilities. (Szczepanska, K., 2014). Eight regional teams of prosecutors presented cases on behalf of the victims. The tribunal also took testimonies from two former soldiers, Kaneko Yasuji (b. 1920) and Suzuki Yoshio (b. 1920). Three Japanese lawyers acted as *amici curiae* (independent advisers) and elaborated on the position of the Japanese government who had refused to participate in the tribunal. (<https://journals.openedition.org/cliovhg/508#toco2n5>)

The tribunal found Emperor and the other 9 defendants guilty of war crimes and crime against humanity. (Johns, F, Joyce, R. & Pahuja, S., 2011, p. 151) It found General Iwane Matsui guilty of facilitating the system of women's sexual slavery. It should be noted that Matsui was the commander of the expeditionary force that was sent to China in 1937. He was convicted of war crimes by the Tokyo Tribunal and had been executed in 1948. His post mortem condemnation was in fact the condemnation of the Japanese army, as the verdict against the Emperor spoke to the responsibility of the Japanese state. Moreover, the verdict against the Emperor was of great symbolic significance because "it highlighted the indelible link between the Emperor's impunity from prosecution and that of the Japanese government and high-ranking Japanese officials." (Savery, L., 2007, p. 176) Besides, it challenged the myth about divine origin of the emperor and the taboo of his infallibility.

On December 4th 2001, the tribunal released its 200-page verdict in Hague. Following are the last two paragraphs of the final judgement:

"The Crimes committed against these survivors remain one of the greatest unacknowledged and unremedied injustices of the Second World War. There are no museums, no graves for the unknown "comfort woman", no education of future generations, and there have been no judgement days for the victims of Japan's military sexual slavery and the rampant sexual violence and brutality that characterized its aggressive war. Accordingly, through this Judgment, this Tribunal in-

tends to honor all the women victimized by Japan's military sexual slavery system. The Judges recognize the great fortitude and dignity of the survivors who have toiled to survive and reconstruct their shattered lives and who have faced down fear and shame to tell their stories to the world and testify before us. Many of the women who have come forward to fight for justice have died unsung heroes. While the names inscribed in history's page have been, at best, those of the men who commit the crimes or who prosecute them, rather than the women who suffer them, this Judgement bears the names of the survivors who took the stand to tell their stories, and thereby, for four days at least, put wrong on the scaffold and truth on the throne." (As quoted in Riddle, R.I., 2010, pp. 19-20)

Following are the main demands and recommendations of the WIWCT:

Japan should respect its moral and legal responsibilities and, thereby, offer apology, compensation and reparation to the survivors;

The Japanese government must establish a mechanism for further investigation of the crimes and the punishment of the perpetrators;

The government must contribute towards the establishment of a memorial, museum and library, to the honor of victims and survivors;

Japanese public must be educated about the reality of the "comfort women" and the role of the Japanese army and the government;

As the tribunal lacked any kind of enforcement authority, it called upon the United Nations and all countries to push the Japanese government to respect its legal and moral obligations towards victims and survivors.

The tribunal went beyond the demand for apology, reparation and compensation to urge for the punishment that is typical of a feminist approach, viewing sexual slavery as a legal crime that must be punished with no statute of limitation. Punishment is instrumental in healing the survivors by promoting their coping capacity and challenging the problem of their internalization. It helps restoring their stolen dignity, sensitizing the society in providing support and deterring similar crimes in the future. Besides, the call for punishment should also be regarded as a means of challenging the prevailing apathy of Japanese people and the collective forgetfulness of the new generation. The tribunal made a strong focus on the Japanese government's legal responsibility rather than its thus called moral obligations. Therefore, state funds should be replaced with the Asian Women's Fund, as a means of reparation and recovery of survivors.

The tribunal raised the voices of the voiceless women, made a strong unity among survivors and their supporters and consolidated the global solidarity of women's movements for emancipation. The tribunal made frequent references about the 'voices of global civil society', the discourse of 'international common sense', 'international justice' and Japan's accountability to the 'peoples of the world.' (Sakamoto, R, 2001 p. 56) The Tribunal contributed to the further development of the international humanitarian law and the rights of individuals to seek justice in international bodies. It introduced a new approach to the rules of morality and it led to the empowerment

of the civil society.

More than twenty years have passed since the verdict of WIWCT. The government of Japan has failed to respect its judgement and recommendations. In March 2007, the then Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, outraged former "comfort women" and the international community by saying that "there was no evidence to prove there was coercion as initially suggested." (As quoted in DiFilippo, A., 2012, p. 208) This type of continuing denial from the Japanese government not only deepens the wounds of former "comfort women" but also furthers the lack of accountability. Now most survivors are over 90 years old. They do not have much time left to heal. Denial as such is an insult to their dignity and harmful to their healing. Despite Japanese government's ineffective actions, the tribunal's legacy contributed to the resolution of an unresolved historical problem. It has, for sure, strengthened feminist movements all over the globe. There has been plenty of civil society initiatives with regards to the issue since the release of the tribunal's verdicts in 2001. The VAWW NET has published books, videos and pamphlets to that effect. In May 2002, the organizers of the tribunal along with VAWW NET activists organized a solidarity conference in which they urged the Japanese authorities to implement the recommendation of the WIWCT. As a result of a tireless efforts of the feminist and civil society groups, the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace was built in Tokyo in 2005 and the 1992 House of Sharing was expanded in Seoul in 2017. The organizers of WIWCT rallied together in an international symposium in December 2010 and evaluated the outcome of the tribunal. Despite all these achievements, there is a long spiral way towards restoring the rights and dignity of so called "comfort women" due to the prevalence of racism, sexism and xenophobia in Japanese society and elsewhere.

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