

FORUM:	Advisory Panel
ISSUE:	Measures to Combat Governmental Oppression on Media and Free Expression in Ethiopia
STUDENT OFFICER:	Yerin Lee
POSITION:	Deputy President of Advisory Panel

Introduction

Freedom of expression is protected in international law as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Articles 10 and 19. Article 10 of the UDHR states, "Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him." In other words, Article 10 supports individuals to express their views through diverse ways, including media: the internet, published articles, books, television, radio broadcasting, art, and more. Also, it allows people to gain information from others. Furthermore, Article 19 states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" The phrase "regardless of frontiers" of Article 19 means that everyone as human beings have the right to share information with any other person. The free press is supposed to report facts, intellectuals are supposed to share the truth or how uncomfortable it might make them.

Surprisingly, the free and uncensored press is vital to this freedom being connected to the political system. The independent media hold governments to account, facilitate the enjoyment of other fundamental freedoms, and shed light on matters of public interest.

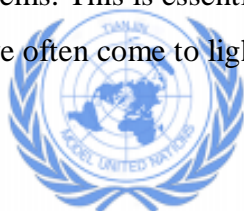
Elaborating more on how the government

and the media, the free, independent,

and pluralistic press based on freedom of information and expression is a core element of any functioning democracy. The democratic stability should protect the freedom of expression within their laws and the sustained action to ensure that freedom of expression is effectively guaranteed through independent and impartial justice systems. This is essential because problems like torture, discrimination, corruption, or misuse of power have often come to light because of the work of investigative journalists.



Ethiopian Journalists on the run.



TIANMUN

Currently, Ethiopia is one of the top countries with human rights issues concerning the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) founded by the UN Human Rights Council in 2023. The Government repressed civil society organizations through restrictions that were intended on limiting their independence and efficacy. The authorities controlled the media with constant propaganda, limited access to information, and conducted surveillance of their perceived adversaries at home and abroad. The Ethiopia Media Authority suspended any news outlet in Ethiopia to prevent any journalists and outspoken public figures from reporting or critiquing rights abuses linked to the Tigray conflict. The Ethiopian council passed a nationwide state of emergency on November 4, which induced self-censorship by the media and risked emboldening harsh elements within the security forces, further exacerbating the human rights situation in Ethiopia as well as risk factor in the financial situation in Ethiopia.

Background

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is what the government of Ethiopia is formed by. In the constitution, it states in Article 29, Right of Thought, Opinion, and Expression, in several terms, “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or print, in art, or through any media of his choice.” For this all branches of the Ethiopian government are legalized to follow Article 29 in Right of Thought, Opinion, and Expression. In addition, the Ethiopian government has signed several international human rights treaties which guarantee online and offline freedom and access to information. However, the government's actions beg to differ in the past couple of years.

Starting in 2019, Ethiopia began shutting down the internet eight times during public protests and



Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali stating his promise to improve press freedom conditions

unnecessarily during national exams. The internet was then wholly restored on July 2nd with no explanation or indication stating the reason of shut-down. This happened again on January 3rd of 2020, when the authorities disconnected mobile phone networks, landlines, and internet services in western Oromia’s Kellem Wellega,

West Wellega, and Horo Gudru Wellega zone. In East Wellega, residents reported the

reason for the internet and social media block using call services or texts, but only to those in major



towns. Human Rights Watch stated that these restrictions affect essential services, reporting on critical events, and human rights investigations, and could risk making an already bad humanitarian situation even worse. These communications blackouts became even worse under the rule of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, where the situation lasted until February 3rd in Oromina for “Security Reasons”.

Not only the internet shutdowns were a severe problem, but also 17 journalists were arrested and detained that year. In March 2020, journalist Yayeew Shimelis was detained by security forces after posting feeds related to government work on COVID-19 casualties on Facebook. On August 9th, three other journalists from Asrat TV were taken into custody but without any explanation from the security forces. Other incidents were on September 4th, Natnael Gecho was detained for “inciting violence using his Facebook,” and on the 14th, Temesgen Dessalegn and Mizgan Zinabe, the editors of Feteach Magazine, for defamation and violation of the country. On October 26th, Ermias Mulugeta, the chief of Addis Maleda, was sent in case of arbitrary detention, but the police offered no reasons for his arrest.

On November 4th, 2021, the Ethiopian parliament approved the state of emergency proclamation, and with that, the internet and phone connectivity were cut off in the Tigray region.



Refugees at a makeshift camp in Tigray

According to the joint report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission on November 3rd, 2021, the report details the impact of the conflict on the restrictions on freedom of movement, expression, media, and information access. The report also stated that the internet shutdown prevented journalists from effectively reporting and stopped civilians from communicating with their families about their safety or obtaining critical information. The discontinued connectivity in the Tigray region continued for 2 years. The state of emergency increased the risk of arbitrary arrest and detention of opposition group members, and these intimidations of the media delayed the information flow during the ongoing conflict.

Problems Raised

Inadequate Access to Present-Days

Ethiopia having a past of jailing journalists and detaining them, is currently rejecting the access of U.N. investigators. On September 20th, 2022, Ethiopia left the U.N. investigators that accused Addis Ababa of possible ongoing crimes against humanity in its war-torn Tigray region. The Commission of



Soldiers in front of the ministry where 6 U.N staff detained

Human Rights Experts in Ethiopia has found evidence of widespread violations by all sides but has no way of sharing it with the public for humanitarian aid. Kaari Betty Murungi, one of the commission's three independent rights experts, says, "We have reasonable ground to believe it amounts to a crime against humanity and to believe that the federal government is using starvation as a method of warfare." However, with no

investigators being able to access the war-torn

Tigray region, there is no evidence that the government of Ethiopia used humanitarian aid as an instrument of war (France). Not only the investigators of the United Nations lost access, but also the Ethiopian government planned a resolution to terminate the mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts (ICREE). However, without the ICHREE, mandating the experts could set a dangerous precedent regarding the country's scrutiny and impunity for rights abuses. Credible investigations on accountability at the domestic level in Ethiopia are still elusive. Thus, the Human Rights Council managed to block Ethiopia's efforts to terminate the mandate of ICHREE.



Delegates at the opening of the session of the Human Rights Council on Ethiopia's resolution to terminate the mandate of ICHREE

Detrimental Financial Crisis

In November 2020, Ethiopia's Tigray region entered a deadly war between Tigrayan rebels and

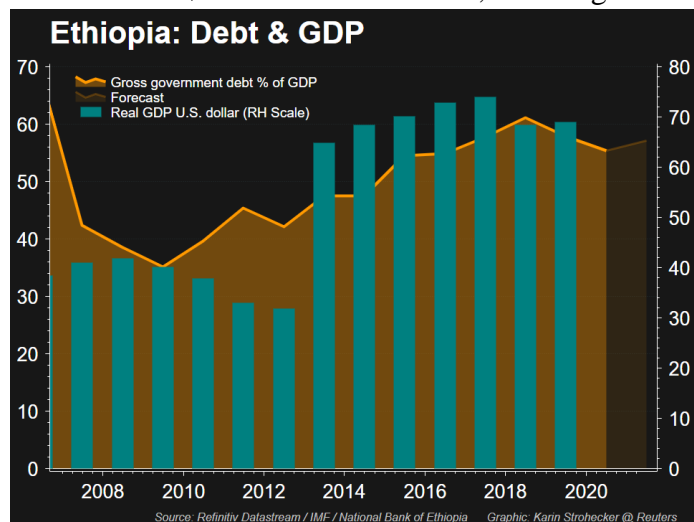


Rebel Fighters Outside of Mekelle at the beginning of the Tigray War

government forces. Since the war started, Tigray, home to more than 5 million people, has been mostly without internet, telecommunications, and banking. And the economy lost \$400 million in just the beginning of the war. Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, had a 22-month-long power outage because of this war. So, internet black continues despite the restoration of electricity after a truce was signed

between the government and Tigray fighters to end the two years long war last November. Due to the blackout,

the damage had been done, with many businesses shutting down and residents fleeing the town. In 2020, the country lost \$ 100 million to internet outage, which rose to \$164.5 million in 2021, affecting 21.3 million users. There was no internet connection for a total of 8760 hours in 2022, sabotaging the digital payment systems, businesses, and efforts by human rights groups to use social media to document and report crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Tigray, home to over 5 million people before the war. In total, Ethiopian businesses alone in 2022 lost \$145.8 million. The report from Quartz notes that the internet shutdown in the Tigray region is “one of the longest” they have ever documented.



Ethiopia's Debt and Financial Crisis were due to constant internet blackouts even before the war.

International Actions

Capacity Building for the security of freedom of expression

The UN Plan of Action seeks to impact the ground through capacity-building pieces of training for security forces, the judiciary, and even journalists. These efforts involve assisting the national government in developing and enacting legal frameworks favorable to freedom of expression. UNESCO has signed initiatives to strengthen policies related to freedom of expression which guarantees access to



TIANMUN

information, the safety of journalists, and ending impunity for crimes committed against them (Unesco. UN). Also, the UNESCO Director General's Reports emphasize the observatory of killed journalists which provides updated information on the killing of journalists and the judicial status of ongoing and unresolved cases. This allows public access for people towards UNESCO's work on monitoring and reporting on the safety of journalists. In addition, UNESCO is working with the judiciary and security forces to support their role in protecting and ensuring an environment conducive to freedom of



expression, access to information, and other fundamental freedoms. First, a training program tailored for members of the judiciary as well as security forces is being implemented at a global scale. This will enable critical actions in carrying out their mission of maintaining public order while respecting human rights, freedom of expression, and the

safety of journalists. Another incentive is how UNESCO organizes training for law enforcement officers to strengthen their capacities in maintaining public order. The organization will partner with Ethiopian Police University to reinforce the role of security forces for journalists and media representatives.

International investigation fund for human rights violation

The U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) underscores the critical need to continue monitoring human rights abuses in Ethiopia. The International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia expresses the need to continue documenting crimes under international law and human rights violations and abuses and preserve the evidence of crimes currently being committed in the country. This decision is created in the hope to the victims of the ongoing human rights violations in Ethiopia that someone is standing with them and that all those suspected of criminal responsibility are being watched to ensure justice and truth for victims.

Therefore, the UN General Assembly's budget committee funded a new UN commission investigating possible war crimes and other violations in northern Ethiopia. Since the conflict in November 2020 in Ethiopia's Tigray region, Ethiopian authorities have rejected calls for international investigations and denied all severe abuses. The conflict in northern Ethiopia involved serious rights violations and displaced millions. The funding is needed for UN mechanisms to carry out their mandated tasks (Ensure). For this, the Ethiopian government must give full access to the Commission and fully support its work. However, the Ethiopian government on January 4th of, 2022, Ethiopia tried to pass a text that would block funding for the commission but was not able to garner enough votes. According to a



chart during the UNHRC meeting, 66 member states voted against Ethiopia, with only 27 in favor and 39 abstentions. The UN secretary general's spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, stated, "Look, as a matter of principle, we believe that our commission (ICHRE) agreed on by member states, by the Human Rights Council, should be funded".

Key Players

United Nations Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Committee is concerned about reports of severe and widespread human rights violations against civilians by all parties to the conflict in Tigray. Ethiopia should investigate alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law to ensure victims receive full reparation. The Committee urges Ethiopia to protect freedom of expression, arbitrary arrests, and detentions of dissidents. This includes the unjustified internet and phone shutdowns and requesting all such restrictions be legal, proportional, and independently overseen. Recently, the Human Rights Council has also formed a meeting for funding an investigation into Ethiopia's stance on jailing journalists due to the oppression of freedom of expression.



The International Commission Human Rights Experts in stance on independent investigation on Ethiopia for further human rights violations

Possible Solutions

Urging the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on jurisdiction over the violation of human rights

The International Court of Justice's role is to settle, by international law, legal disputes submitted by the authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies. The Ethiopian government should go under the International Court of Justice court with the given evidence and reports followed by the Human Rights Council on violating freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is protected by international law, therefore, should be followed by all founding members of the United Nations. As Ethiopia is under



the system of the United Nations, the country is majorly contradicting the law by jailing journalists and all those who express themselves express themselves. As reports have mentioned, with the rise of prime minister Abiy Ahmed, the jailing of all citizens who have expressed the situation of current Ethiopia has increased, as well as the extended time in internet shutdown. The ICJ must request the prime minister for a meeting to investigate the reasons for the unjustified internet shutdown and uprising reports on how there are still jailed journalists, media-related staff, and others. Not only should the ICJ encourage but enforce its decisions on letting the Ethiopian government open their country for United Nations Investigators and civil organizations to investigate the citizens and how the people have been impacted due to the economic crisis due to the internet shutdown and limited access to the media.

Collaboration with allied UN countries and peacekeeping troops for access in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian government has denied access to UN investigators, and other civil organizations to come to their country for report purposes. Thus the UN organizations don't have access to current situations on the shifting effects due to the suppression of individual liberty. However, one thing the Ethiopian government might let down their guard to are their allies. In one of the United Nations States such as Russia, China, and the US are well-known allies of Ethiopia. The other UN organs, UNHRC, UNSC, and others can request collaboration with the three nations listed above for information and the help that Ethiopia will need. The UN countries will be able to understand the reasons, the funds needed, and the situation the citizens face such as financial problems or inability to reach out to their family members. With the extra help from the allies of Ethiopia, the civil organizations near the country and the UN organizations will have a way of communicating what is currently happening in Ethiopia.

Glossary

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is an independent federal state body established per the FDRE Constitution & reporting to parliament as a national human rights institution with the mandate for promoting and protecting human rights.



የኢትዮጵያ
ሰብአዊ መብቶች ኮሚሽን
ETHIOPIAN HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

Logo for EHRC

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the



TIANMUN

world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 as a common standard of achievements of all peoples and all nations (“Universal”)

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The international covenant on civil and political rights was adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by the General Assembly on December 16 1966. The ICCPR aims to protect civil and political rights: freedom from discrimination, equality between men and women, the right to life, freedom of expression, and so forth.

International Commission of Human Rights Experts (ICHREE)

The ICHREE was established on December 17th of 2021 through resolution S-33/1 and was tasked with investigating and documenting violations of international law committed by all parties to the armed conflict since November 2020, with a view to making such information available to support future accountability efforts.



Logo of ICHREE

The UN Plan of Action

The UN Plan of Action aims to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers in conflict and non-conflict situations to strengthen peace, democracy, and development worldwide.

Sources

- “Article 10: Freedom of Expression.” *Article 10: Freedom of Expression / Equality and Human Rights Commission*, 3 June 2021, www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights-act/article-10-freedom-expression.
- “Background to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Optional Protocols.” *OHCHR*, www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/ccpr/background-international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights-and-optional-protocols#:~:text=The%20ICCPR%20aims%20to%20ensure,Right%20to%20life. Accessed 10 July 2023.
- “The Court: International Court of Justice.” *The Court / INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE*, www.icj-cij.org/court. Accessed 12 July 2023.
- “Ensure Funding for UN Investigation in Ethiopia.” *Human Rights Watch*, 30 Mar. 2022, www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/30/ensure-funding-un-investigation-ethiopia.
- “Ethiopia Anger over Texting and Internet Blackouts.” *BBC News*, 16 June 2019, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48653392.
- “Ethiopia Fails to Block UN Funding for Human Rights Investigation.” *France 24*, 1 Apr. 2022, www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220401-ethiopia-fails-to-block-un-funding-for-human-rights-investigation.
- “Ethiopia: Communications Shutdown Takes Heavy Toll.” *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Oct. 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/09/ethiopia-communications-shutdown-takes-heavy-toll.
- “Ethiopia: UNHRC Decision Underscores Critical Need to Continue Monitoring Human Rights Abuses.” *Amnesty International*, 10 Oct. 2022, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/ethiopia-unhrc-decision-underscores-critical-need/.**
- France-Presse, Agence. “Ethiopia Rejects UN Report Warning of Crimes against Humanity in Tigray.” *VOA*, 21 Sept. 2022, www.voanews.com/a/ethiopia-rejects-un-report-warning-of-crimes-against-humanity-in-tigray-/6756357.html.
- “Freedom of Expression, Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists - Commissioner for Human Rights - Commissioner for Human Rights - Wwv.Coe.Int.” *Commissioner for Human Rights*, www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/thematic-work/media-freedom. Accessed 10 July 2023.
- Kiai, Mugambi. “Ethiopia: Freedom of Expression under Threat during Ongoing Conflict.” *ARTICLE 19*, 25 Nov. 2021, www.article19.org/resources/ethiopia-freedom-of-expression-under-threat-during-ongoing-conflict/.**
- Neuberger, David, et al. “Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom as a Driver for All Human Rights - Just Security.” *Just Security - A Forum on Law, Rights, and U.S. National Security*, 3 May 2023, www.justsecurity.org/86418/freedom-of-expression-and-media-freedom-as-a-driver-for-all-human-rights/.
- Ngila, Faustine. “Ethiopia Lost \$146 Million Due to Internet Blackouts in 2022.” *Quartz*, 12 Jan. 2023, qz.com/ethiopia-lost-146-million-due-to-internet-blackouts-1849978475/.



“Observatory of Killed Journalists.” *UNESCO.Org*, www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/observatory. Accessed 11 July 2023.

Ogunjuyigbe. “Ethiopia Has Lost \$410 Million to a War-Induced Internet Shutdown.” *Ventures Africa*, 16 Jan. 2023, venturesafrica.com/ethiopia-has-lost-410-million-to-a-war-induced-internet-shutdown/.

“Threats to Terminate the Mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia.” *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Feb. 2023, www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/28/threats-terminate-mandate-international-commission-human-rights-experts-ethiopia.

“Training for Security Forces in Promoting Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Journalists.” *UNESCO*, 6 Apr. 2022, en.unesco.org/events/training-security-forces-promoting-freedom-expression-and-safety-journalists.

“UN Human Rights Committee Issues Findings on Ethiopia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Philippines and Russia.” *OHCHR*, 3 Nov. 2022, www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/11/un-human-rights-committee-issues-findings-ethiopia-japan-kyrgyzstan.

Unesco. “Training Security Forces and the Judiciary on Freedom of Expression.” *UNESCO.Org*, www.unesco.org/en/freedom-expression-rule-law/training-security-forces-judiciary. Accessed 11 July 2023.

Unesco. “UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.” *UNESCO.Org*, www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action. Accessed 11 July 2023.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.” *Refworld*, www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5a84.html. Accessed 10 July 2023.

“Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=Article%2019,media%20and%20regardless%20of%20frontiers. Accessed 10 July 2023.

Vivian. “Ethiopia’s Press Freedom Dreams under Abiy Ahmed Turning into Nightmare.” *African Freedom of Expression Exchange*, 16 Nov. 2020, www.africafex.org/digital-rights/ethiopias-press-freedom-dreams-under-abiy-ahmed-turning-into-nightmare.

“World Report 2023: Rights Trends in Ethiopia.” *Human Rights Watch*, 20 Jan. 2023, www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ethiopia.

