

GSTS's Press Statement on the Violent Measures Taken Against Protestors in Tigray

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals (GSTS) vehemently denounces the distressing events that transpired in Mekelle, Tigray on the 7th of September 2023. The unjust and brutal actions taken including beatings, detention and intimidation against civilian protestors, including journalists, opposition party leaders, and members of various segments of the Tigray society have deeply shaken our community and are in stark contradiction to the values we uphold dearly.

According to the Tigray Constitution, Article 30 of the FDRE Constitution and international human rights instruments to which Ethiopia is a signatory, the right to engage in protests and the freedom of expression are sacrosanct. These rights are the bedrock of any democratic society, which Tigray, in particular, bears a unique responsibility to uphold while emerging from the over two-year-long genocidal war. Thus, any effort to encroach upon and diminish them constitutes a serious breach of the principles of justice, people's rights to freedom of expression and association, equality, and the rule of law.

Though it is the responsibility of the police/security force to ensure the safe and peaceful conduct of rallies, however, based on the information we have gathered so far including video footage, it seems the Tigray police failed in the responsibility to safeguard protestors and instead deployed unnecessary, excessive, and disproportionate force, defeating the very purpose and duties of law enforcement forces and institutions.

The people of Tigray have fought hard to secure their rights and freedom, enduring severe hardships and suffering. It is profoundly distressing and disheartening to witness their own government further suppressing them, particularly through violence against those who are exercising their constitutional and internationally recognized rights.

We, therefore, urge the Tigray-Interim Regional Administration (T-IRA) to take the following actions swiftly and decisively:

1. Uphold and respect the rights of all Tigrayans, and prevent any recurrence of such brutal actions against civilian protestors;
2. Foster an environment in which citizens can freely voice their concerns or grievances without fear of reprisal, violence, or suppression;
3. Ensure immediate provision of medical attention for those injured at the hands of the security forces;
4. Immediately release of all peaceful protestors detained by the security forces;
5. Initiate a comprehensive impartial, independent, and transparent investigation into the events leading up to and on September 7, ensuring that responsible police and security officials are held accountable for their actions;

6. Recognize the intermingling of government and party functions, and in line with previous GSTS recommendations and the TIRA's public pledge, as expressed in media statements through its President, immediately implement the separation of party and state functions, especially in the areas of law enforcement and the judiciary system; and ensuring the protection and promotion of group (s) and individual rights, free media etc.

We also urge the public to remain composed, vigilant, and discerning of divisive tactics that aim to fracture and weaken our social fabric and unity. We also appeal to all parties and social media users to exercise restraint and refrain from spreading provocative and divisive messages.

Finally, we once again urge the Tigray Interim Regional Administration to attentively heed its citizens, honour their rights, and pursue constructive and civic ways to address and resolve public demands and grievances.

We strongly aspire to see a more inclusive and democratic future that safeguards and benefits all Tigrayans.

The Global Society of Tigray Scholars and Professionals

8th September 2023

For media enquiries regarding this press release and other issues, please contact the GSTS communication team via GSTS.TigrayProfessionals@protonmail.com

