



**“Human Right First”**



## **Police Brutality and Suppression of Free Speech at Mekelle University**

### **Urgent Appeal To:**

Amnesty International  
Human Rights Watch,  
Committee to Protect Journalists,  
Crisis Action Group

### **Subject: Gross Violations of Human Rights at Mekelle University**

We, the undersigned Tigrayan Civil Society Organizations, write to express our grave concern regarding a recent incident of police brutality against students peacefully protesting, and suppression of freedom of speech at Mekelle University, Tigray. This incident represents a blatant disregard for fundamental human rights and a continuation of a disturbing pattern of suppression.

### **Peaceful Protest Crushed**

Over 250 students, already burdened by the educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the genocidal war in Tigray, were met with excessive force by Tigray police while demonstrating against an arbitrary extension of their graduation date. This decision by the university leadership came after previous agreements to facilitate graduation by Fall 2024 were disregarded. The students, having exhausted all avenues for negotiation, resorted to a peaceful protest as a last resort to have their voices heard.

### **Excessive use of Force, Arrests, and Targeting of Journalists**

The Tigray police response to this peaceful assembly was wholly disproportionate. They used violence to disperse the crowd, causing injuries and arresting over 10 students. This egregious act was further compounded by the arrest of Adhanom Sertse, a journalist for Tigray Public Media, who was simply documenting the protest. Mr. Sertse's family has already been internally displaced due to the forceful and illegal occupation of Western Tigray by Amhara forces, and relies on his meager journalistic earnings to survive. His arrest serves as a chilling reminder of the lengths authorities are willing to go to silence dissent.

### **A Pattern of Impunity and Denial of Rights**

The journalist has been released but this incident is not an isolated event. The Tigray authorities have a documented history of denying opposition groups their right to peaceful assembly. Last September, journalists were targeted and wounded for documenting a demonstration organized by opposition political parties. The Tigray authorities have consistently shown a lack of accountability, releasing detainees without addressing the underlying violations. Hence, the undersigning CSOs are calling for your Action i.e continued investigation and accountability on



## “Human Right First”



this trending denial of basic human rights violations on Tigrayans in Tigray, Ethiopia.

We strongly believe that the right to peaceful protest is a cornerstone of any functioning democracy. As an international institution established to monitor and ensure human rights are not trampled by the power holding entities, we urge you, the esteemed human rights organizations, to voice, investigate this incident thoroughly and act. Those responsible for the excessive force, arbitrary arrests, and suppression of free speech must be held accountable.

The continued disregard against the violations of human rights in Tigray is encouraging transgressors and demands immediate attention. We implore you to intervene and ensure that the fundamental rights of all Tigrayans are respected and protected.

Regards,

Human Rights First

Omna Tigray

Solidarity of Tigrayans for Independence and Liberty

Union of Tigrayans in Europe (UTE)

### **Local news sources:**

1. DW reports the arrest of more than 10 students and the brutal handling of the protestors <https://www.dw.com/am/%E1%88%98%E1%89%80%E1%88%8C-%E1%8B%89%E1%88%B5%E1%8C%A5-%E1%88%B0%E1%88%8D%E1%8D%8D-%E1%8B%A8%E1%8B%88%E1%8C%A1-%E1%89%B0%E1%88%9B%E1%88%AA%E1%8B%8E%E1%89%BD-%E1%89%B0%E1%8B%B0%E1%89%A0%E1%8B%B0%E1%89%A1/a-68753084>
2. My Views on News also reported on the background of the protest and the excessive force used by police <https://myviewsonnews.net/mekelle-university-students-beaten-by-police/>
3. Red Sea observer reports that more than 10 students are illegally arrested and some students including female are injured <https://youtu.be/NbB753z8F4s?si=2MJvoqAdPIMlbCmk>
4. Yabele Media documents the arrest of journalist Adhanom Sertse alongside protesting students <https://sertselemedia.com/2024/04/05/7414/>