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## Make the sky safe again: Ending impunity for drone attacks in Tigray

by WORLD PEACE FOUNDATION on JANUARY 17, 2022

By Meron Gebreanayye, Saba Mah'derom, Kiros Teklay and Kisanet Haile Molla

The extensive [use of military unmanned](#) aerial vehicles ('armed drones'), for lethal strikes by the Ethiopian government in the Tigray region is fast becoming [one of the most devastating](#) but neglected human rights violations in the world. The limited international attention paid to the use of drones in the Tigray war has, up to now, focused on how the use of drones has affected the course of the war in favor of the Ethiopian government. There is a common assumption that drone strikes are carefully targeted on military targets and minimize civilian casualties. Although the information blackout prevents a systematic assessment of the evidence, accumulating reports show that the impacts on civilians are devastating. Daily attacks on urban areas with large populations, including loss of civilian lives and destruction of civilian infrastructure have failed to incite the concern and outrage it merits.

Between October 18, 2021 and January 4, 2022, at least 143 people had been killed and 213 wounded from airstrikes, mostly by drones. On January 9, at least 56 people were killed in a drone attack on a camp for internally displaced people in North West Tigray. As a result, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announced that "humanitarian partners suspended activities in the area due to the ongoing threats of drone strikes". On January 11, 17 civilians, mostly women, were killed and dozens injured after a flour mill was struck in Mai Tsebri. It is to be recalled that on October 22, an air strike near the airport coincided with the landing time of a UN humanitarian flight. As a consequence, the UN [cancelled](#) further humanitarian flights to Mekelle. Drones are promoted as precision weapons but time and time again the outcomes of attacks shows that either drones are deliberately used to target civilians or these weapons lack precision.

Open source investigations have revealed that the Ethiopian government has imported drones from [China](#), [Iran](#), [Israel](#), [Turkey](#), and the [United Arab Emirates](#) (UAE) to aid its efforts in the brutal civil war it has been prosecuting in Tigray for more than 14 months. This has been supplemented with extensive military aid provided by the [UAE](#), as well as by [Turkey](#), [Iran](#) and [China](#). Ethiopian Airlines, the flag carrier of Ethiopia has also [been implicated](#) in providing the military an airbridge. Moreover, [additional infrastructure](#) has been built to support the expanded drone operations. The presence of armed drones flying over towns and cities have not only been confirmed by testimonies from Tigray but also by independent [open source investigation](#) at least once, while additional images that have been [circulating](#) on social media provide visual confirmation.

Since October 18, the Ethiopian government has launched repeated drone attacks on the Tigrayan towns and cities of Alamata, Chercher, Dedebeit, Korem, Maichew, Mai Tsebri, Milazat, Mekelle, Mekhoni and Shire. This recent campaign of attacks [started](#) in Mekelle. Following this initial attack, the Ethiopian government spokesperson, Mr. Legesse Tulu, boldly denied the devastating attack on a densely populated city by inquiring: "Why would the Ethiopian government attack its own city? Mekele is an Ethiopian city".

The attacks have since progressed to aggressive aerial bombardment of cities, towns, a camp for internally displaced people in Dedebeit where at least 56 people were killed, a refugee camp near Mai Tsebri where three Eritrean refugees were killed, a market in [Alamata](#) where 28 people were killed and more than 80 people were injured, an attack on a public transport bus in [Milazat](#) where 30 people were killed, and an attack on a flour mill in Mai Tsebri, where 17 were killed and many injured. During this same period, Mekelle has reportedly been attacked at least 13 times with reports of multiple civilian deaths and destruction of property. Critical civilian structures have also been targeted, including a [power substation](#) in Mekelle and the region's main [hydroelectric dam](#) resulting in power blackout.

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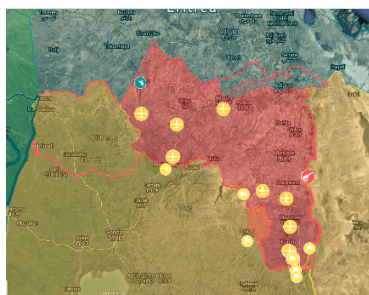


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Google map of Tigray (L) demonstrates drone attacks on cities and towns (yellow plane symbols). This map (courtesy of @MapEthiopia, version 15 Jan 2022) shows areas under Tigrayan forces (red), Eritrean forces (green) and Amhara militia /Ethiopian forces (yellow). Google map of Tigray (R) is for reference to demonstrate Tigray's borders before 3 November 2020.

This is *not* a comprehensive list of Ethiopia's drone strikes in Tigray since [the beginning of the conflict](#) on November 3, 2020, but a highlight of the serial attacks outside combat zones over the last three months only, based on reports from the regional media and humanitarian sources.

The world's inattention to this crisis has to a degree been facilitated by the draconian media and [communication blackout](#) imposed by the Ethiopian government for the better part of the last 14 months. Despite these efforts to cut off Tigray from the world, with the obvious intention to keep grave human rights and humanitarian violations out of sight of the international community, visual documentation in the immediate aftermath of bombings by armed drones persistently reveal the extent to which these attacks devastate civilians, including children, women and the elderly. These grim videos from Tigray reveal hellish scenes of bodies strewn on blood-stained ground, burnt public transport vehicles, destroyed homes and severely damaged public and private infrastructure. Eyewitness testimonies from humanitarian workers and other observers also confirm the drone attacks have targeted civilian objects and have resulted in civilian deaths.

These images and testimonies, however, belie the claims made by the Ethiopian government, which proudly claims that [these technologies](#), and operations are to "[neutralise identified terrorist cells and terrorist hideouts](#)." This justification is nonetheless the only one that has been forthcoming to support the expanded use of drones since October 2021 against civilian settlements and hundreds of kilometers outside of any combat areas. Regardless of the rationale, proffered, there is no doubt that this falls far short of the requirements of international humanitarian law standards, including the rules of distinction, proportionality, and military necessity, while protecting fundamental right to life and principle of human dignity.

The humanitarian, legal and ethical concerns related to armed drones are not new: there is a widespread understanding among states, researchers, humanitarian organisations and civil society on their impact, especially when used against urban targets. This was echoed in the discussions of the recent (December 2021) [sixth review conference](#) of the United Nations convention on certain conventional weapons, although the conference ended [without meaningful consensus](#).

Until such a time the laws of armed drones are clarified and there is a body to monitor and report on violations to the laws, the international community must take steps to make the sky safe for Tigrayans again.

Governments have the primary responsibility to protect the lives of civilians, especially during armed conflict. Contrary to expectations, Abiy Ahmed's government is implementing a campaign of drone attacks in areas outside active combat zones. These same areas are also under government-imposed [humanitarian blockade](#). Already, Ethiopian forces and allied militia stand accused of a range of human rights abuses, including [forced displacement](#) and [detention on ethnic grounds](#), [mass extrajudicial killings](#), [weaponized sexual and gender-based violence](#) and the use of [starvation as a weapon of war](#). These violations have led the European Union and U.S. government to pause some budget support, and most recently, Ethiopia has lost its [Africa Growth and Opportunity Act \(AGOA\) beneficiary status](#), a lucrative program which enhances market access to the U.S. for qualifying sub-Saharan African countries.

This has not stopped violations of international human rights and humanitarian law targeting civilians and civilian infrastructures, which makes life insecure and unbearable for millions of Tigrayans already suffering man-made famine. It is also critical to highlight that these aerial attacks are being conducted as the region is gripped by lack of medical supplies, including surgical gloves, insulin and other essentials. Even as health professionals from Tigray and around the world [put out pleas for medical aid](#) to be allowed to salvage the Tigrayan health care system, three civilians critically injured in the Dedebit drone strike died in the hospital as a result of lack of medical resources to provide them with the treatment they needed.



## *Tigrayans should not be looking at the sky with terror.*

Communications blackout, indifference of the international community and an elastic interpretation of sovereignty have given Abiy Ahmed's government an unrivalled opportunity to conduct aerial attacks against civilians and civilian objects with impunity. Tigrayans should not be looking at the sky with terror. The onus of ending the tragedy in Tigray falls squarely on the international community. Incommensurate, half-hearted and inadequate multilateral response has already emboldened gross violations of universal human rights and international humanitarian laws to continue with impunity. Concerns of further devastation are growing each day as open source investigation [continues to reveal](#) newly obtained drones.

The most frequently utilized drones terrorizing Tigrayans are the Turkish Bayraktar weapons system. These drones [use parts manufactured by seven different U.S. companies](#) as well as Austrian, British, Canadian, French and German suppliers. If those companies were to cease supplying Turkey's factories, the drones could not fly, or could not kill.

It is, therefore, essential for the United Nations, the African Union and Ethiopia's development partners to take prompt and decisive action to stop immediately the shipping to and use of armed drones in Ethiopia; to condemn strikes that target civilians, especially in towns and cities; to support efforts to make public the use and impact of drones by the Ethiopian government and its allies; and to strengthen efforts of the [recently established](#) U.N. international commission of human rights experts on Ethiopia to investigate all reports of civilian casualties from drone strikes, incendiary devices and other forms of aerial bombardments, with a view to hold human rights violators accountable, including those from foreign countries that are supplying drones, components for drones, manpower or intelligence. Victims of violations must receive justice, reparation including restitution, and – most important of all – guarantees of non-repetition.

In the end, a roadmap that sets out a path towards sustainable peace is necessary. All stakeholders that are trusted by both parties to lead peace efforts must do so with determination, courage, transparency, integrity, and urgency. Essential to peace is accountability. Today, foreign countries supplying or operating drones in Ethiopia, or providing the components for those drones, must cease feeding the war machine and instead allow peace to prevail.

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Photo: [Turkish made Bayraktar TB2 UCAV](#), wikimedia (CC BY 4.0)

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## Mekelle: a city under siege

by MULUGETA GEBREHIWOT BERHE on FEBRUARY 7, 2022

*This is the first of a three part essay by Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe, describing how the war that began in 2020 has fundamentally altered life in Tigrayan capital city, Mekelle.*

Beautiful Mekelle is limping under siege. It is already more than six months since it fell under a complete siege. No telecommunication and internet services, no banking and related services and businesses, no electricity, no commercial flights in and out, no land communication outside Tigray as it is 360 degrees encircled by hostile forces. In July, Abiy Ahmed, in his publicly televised speech to his parliament said that he 'has reduced Mekelle' — the once vibrant city with a pre-war estimated population of 700,000 that was one of the economic and political centers of Ethiopia — 'to Beshasha,' a small district town where he grew up in Jima, Agaro.

His statement was followed by an interview with General Abebaw Tadesse, a retired but reinstated Lieutenant General, who was asked why the ENDF evacuated Mekelle and most of Tigray. He said the following: We have destroyed all the institutions of the government, we have destroyed all the social and economic infrastructure, and through these actions we have fulfilled our objectives. He was publicly admitting that his army and its allies have downgraded Tigray to what it is today. General Abebaw tacitly expressed the objectives of the military campaign: destruction, pure and simple. As a recognition of what he and his army did, this retired Lt. Gen. is now promoted into a four star general.

We invite you to Mekelle. You are free to come if you can pass through the blockade. You are free to travel navigate the city and witness yourself that Abiy Ahmed has succeeded in reducing Mekelle not to a village like Beshasha, but something worse than that.

When you arrive, this is what you will see.

### ***first of all, you will see a hungry city.***

Data from the [bureau of health](#) of the regional administration indicate that the nutrition situation across Tigray has also been steadily getting worse. Currently over 1.6 million children under five and lactating and pregnant women need nutrition intervention as the rate of malnutrition rate among this group has gone up to 60 percent. Across Tigray, 54 percent of water points are not functional, affecting water access to 3.5 million people. As a result of this humanitarian catastrophe, the famine classification is expected to reach the highest level, IPC 5, in the coming few months.

This what you see when you move into Mekelle. Hundreds of thousands of displaced people live in shelters. They live in school compounds and Kebelle meeting halls turned into makeshift camps. Most depend on the support of the city dwellers, as they receive little support from the provisional administration in place from December until June. Since July, the priority of the city dwellers shifted towards supporting the TDF which left the IDPs without food support. Men and women with families employ themselves as cleaners, daily laborers, and any other job they may find. Most live on just one meal per-day by selling whatever valuables they had. Fig fruit massively supplied from the surrounding villages served as the main source of food for the months of July and August. The fig season was then replaced by guava fruits as of the end of August. A single fruit of fig and guava were being sold for 3 Birr and 5 Birr respectively against its usual price of 1-2 Birr per piece. The stores of all humanitarian organizations have run empty as a result of the complete siege of Mekelle from any outside assistance. For this reason, the city is full of hungry people which you can visibly see while walking on the streets.

The overall condition of children in the region is critical. Data from the [regional health bureau](#) indicates that acute malnutrition in children under five has hit 29.1 percent, of which 7.1 percent have been diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition (SAM). Let me take you to Ayder, the referral hospital in the city, and give you a short tour of the Pediatrics and Child Health Department of the hospital which is treating children affected by hunger among other things. Here are some of the figures you hear from the head of the department as related to children under treatment for malnutrition.

The department along the Pediatrics and Child Health department of Mekelle hospital regularly screens children under 5 years old from the IDP centers in Mekelle for mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC), a measure of malnutrition. They

screened 879 children in January 2021, 2749 in May, and 14... in August. The rate of children diagnosed for malnutrition was 8.9% for January; 11.4% for May; and, 20.26% for the month of August. Out of the 300 children diagnosed for malnutrition and undertreatment at the two hospitals, 260 of them were suffering from Medium Acute Malnutrition (MAM) and the remaining were diagnosed as reaching the stage of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM). By January this year, the level of SAM was 7% and MAM was 22%.

The number of SAM cases of children treated in the referral hospital has tripled as of September 2021. Unless the current problem of supplies to the hospital (both medical and non-medical inputs), Dr. Mohamed Mustafa, head of the Pediatrics and Child Health Department indicates that the 260 children with MAM may soon join those children suffering SAM. Sixteen children died in the two hospitals in the months of July – October 2020. The hospital used to administer 10 different vaccines for children and none of them are being delivered now so that we might see diseases like polio re-emerging in the coming months. After a continuous blockage of any medical supplies the ICRC has now began airlifting some medical supplies, a small move enough to capture headlines in major new outlets. Whether this supply will be enough to re-instate children's vaccination is yet to be seen.

The referral system in Tigray is broken as most of the rural clinics and hospitals are ransacked and non-operational. For this reason, children and mothers who arrive at the referral hospital arrive in critical condition. Dr. Mohammed remembers a woman who carried her child to the hospital and who immediately collapsed of hunger at her arrival to the front-line desk of the hospital. Both mother and child were treated for malnutrition and related health problems. It is very common to find the parents of affected children to be themselves afflicted by hunger.

Dr. Mohamed indicates that a number of the children under treatment for MAM and SAM also come from families who normally had a good income who can't access their deposits and assets elsewhere due to the complete siege of the city. He cited the example of the son of a physician he treated for MAM as an indication to how much the famine has affected society including the middle class in Mekelle. Underweight delivery of children (less than 2.5 kgs at birth) is increasing observed by physicians, a problem with multiple, often life-long, health effects on a child.

### ***you will see a dark city***

The federal government made sure that the electric line connecting Tigray to the national grid was cut and there was no electricity in the city for the first six weeks after the TDF took over. The engineers of Tigray then diverted the power generated from the Tekeze dam to Tigray and Mekelle started getting light as of the third week of July, but that was again interrupted for four more weeks as the dam was overflowing due to heavy rains and stopped generating until the water could get lower. During those days even those people with generators were hardly using them as the cost of benzine (when available) exceeded 600 Birr per liter as opposed to its official price of 25 Birr per liter while diesel is now fetching 350 Birr per liter when available. The price of a single candle rose from 3 Birr per piece to 30 Birr per piece.

The city during those days was dark in the evenings and Mekelle had no night life. For that matter, you no longer hear loud music coming out of bars and pubs. Most of them are closed and those opened serve locally brewed beverages like *sewa* and *tselim sewa* (locally brewed beer), or *meis* (honey wine or mead). These are the common notices posted you see at the entrance of those opened bars and pubs: '*Sewa Alena*' '*Filter Alena*' '*Mies Alena-Mies Hagereselam*'. Whenever bars have something to sell, their transaction cost and therefore their selling cost is high and not affordable for the customers that are caught by cash shortage as they can't withdraw any money from their bank accounts.

There are hardly any cars in the streets of Mekelle due to the unavailability of fuel in gas stations. What can be bought in the streets is smuggled and costs beyond what most people can afford. The little fuel left in the city is rationed to the few taxis that operate. This has made the waiting time for a taxi long and expensive when found. As a result, most people in Mekelle walk.

### ***you will see hospitals with no medicine and functioning diagnosis equipment***

Some pharmacies and drug stores are closed as their shelves emptied. Many of them open their doors for few hours, but do not offer much. There are too many stories of the untimely death of patients who were surviving under drug regimens for chronic health issues. Replenishment of drugs for patients of diabetics, hypertension, and HIV patients are not available. The only kidney dialysis center in Ayder referral hospital has stopped providing service for patients over the last three months and several of its patients have already died as a result of the discontinued services.

Here are some more facts you will find at the referral hospital. Drug availability in the hospital before the eruption of the conflict averaged 70 – 80% of its requirements. As the war began, the availability of medicines continually decreased month-by-month to reach 20 – 30% after the city fell under a complete siege. Hospital data indicates that the total stock of antibiotics and anti-pain medication will last only for two weeks. It has already run out of chemotherapy, and several lab and kidney dialysis agents. The whole city, for that matter the whole region, currently doesn't have a single functioning advanced imaging equipment like CT-Scan and MIR due to lack of parts. The ICRC has begun airlifting some medical supplies as of last week each day dropping three to four quintals of medical supplies, a news that have already captured the headlines of major media outlets. Whether this supply will continue and make significant difference in the service is yet to be seen.

The overall condition of the health services in Tigray is one of the most heart-breaking moments for Tigraian physicians. Dr. Mohammed Mustafa says in frustration: 'You know how to diagnose a disease. You have the equipment and the expertise to do the diagnosis. But you can't diagnose either a reagent is not available or the machine needs a replacement for a fast-moving item. You diagnose a patient for a disease and you prescribe the medicine; but you don't have that medicine whose cost at times is token when available. Yet, you see that patient dying because there is nothing you could do to save her/his life. What else could be heart breaking for a physician who availed him/her self for a service?'

## ***you will hear horrendous stories of sexual violence in its hospitals and safe houses***

Women and girls in Mekelle, like the rest of the Tigraian women and girls, have suffered a lot as the ENDF, EDF, Amhara militia, and assortment of forces on a genocide mission used sexual violence as an instrument of their war. There are several safe houses that accommodate victims of sexual violence for medical treatment along psychological and physical rehabilitation. Let me take you to the one-stop service center at Ayder Referral hospital to just give you a glimpse of what happened in Tigray in the last twelve months.

At the center you will find Mihira Redae, a social worker responsible for coordinating the center who will give you a briefing on the services of the service center once you got the clearance from the hospital authority to do so. Victims of sexual violence face multiple problems: medical, psychological, and social problems. As of October 2020, the center has facilitated the hospitalized treatment of 470 women and girl victims of sexual violence for multiple medical, psychological, and social problems. The center has also facilitated the interruption of rape-induced pregnancy for over 238 women and girls as out-patients.

Mihira narrates the stories she heard from victims: that most rapes were perpetrated against married women and usually in front of their children and family members and at times in front of their husbands. The crimes were committed along with dehumanizing insults on the victims. The pervasiveness of crime was so much that soldiers of the ENDF even raped a medical school student within the compound of the referral hospital.

Helen Girmay, a mother of two, was one of the victims of sexual violence from Eedaga Hamus. The soldiers of the EDF and ENDF killed her 12-year-old son. She was then gang-raped while seeing her slain son in front of her. She came to Ayder hospital with multiple medical problems and traumatized by the brutality she faced. Helen had exposed the atrocities to the public several times and the center felt she was fully rehabilitated. However, Mihira, with tears in her eyes, told me that she just heard of Helen's death.

Nigisti (her name changed) is a sixteen-year-old from the rural areas of central Tigray. She was raped by EDF soldiers at the age of fifteen. She didn't realize that she was pregnant from the rape until it was too late to interrupt the pregnancy, as it would have been medically dangerous to her health. Her parents were then outraged by her pregnancy and kicked her out of the house, advising her that if and when she wishes to return and be readmitted to the family, should come back without the child. She has now given birth to a healthy child and is nursing him in a safe house.

There are a number of rape victims who have now given birth to children conceived as a result of rape. Some of them do not have any psychological attachment with the new-born ones and others are trying to cope. Hadash Aschenaki, the legal counselor of the center, says that the many new mothers are considering giving the children up for adoption and the center is considering whether this could be in the best interest of the kids and their mothers.

After hearing to the horrendous stories of sexual violence you become puzzled by how a perverted political motive could turn human beings into beasts, capable of committing crimes in this manner.

***This essay continues in two more parts.***

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## Mekelle: a city under siege, part 2

by MULUGETA GEBREHIWOT BERHE on FEBRUARY 8, 2022

*This is the second of a three part essay by Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe, describing how the war that began in 2020 has fundamentally altered life in Tigrayan capital city, Mekelle. Follow the links for [Part 1](#).*

### **You will see empty stores.**

Many convenience stores and grocery shops are closed and those opened offer few goods and grocery with expensive prices. You may be asked to provide 25 Birr for a roll of a tissue paper that used to be sold for 2 Birr. You may be asked 50 Birr for a bar of bath soap you used to pay 10 Birr. You may be asked 70 Birr for a kilo of banana and 80 birr for a kilo of orange for 50 Birr which used to respectively cost not more than 14 and 18 Birr. Farmers and traders are discouraged to avail them to the market due to unavailability of transport and heavy costs for its when available.

Coffee shops which Deki Mekelle (literally: those fromMekelle) used to call *Kef* houses (which literally means ‘sitting’ houses for someone interested in passing time) are now almost empty. Many of the vendors have closed their shops and joined the TDF and some are active in some other tasks related to the resistance. Those open are rarely full of customers as they used to be and mostly not in their usual outfit, with nicely cut or made hair and fashionable clothes. You hardly see the usual snobbish Deki Mekelle on the streets and coffee shops. Most of them have joined the TDF, some are busy doing something for the resistance, and attending to your hair and dressing well has become a taboo for the rest.

Sitting in the coffee shops, you may find elderly men and women, decently dressed, standing on your side not looking into your eyes but mumbling a few words asking for support. You usually don’t hear the exact words, as they don’t know how to beg. They never before asked for alms in their entire life. Probably, many of them were being supported by their kids working elsewhere in Ethiopia or in the diaspora. Today, they no longer have any means for contacting their family and cannot get any money transferred. Some of them are retired civil servants, soldiers. They used to live on their retirement benefits that have ceased to come as of the last six months as part of the complete siege of Tigray by Abiy Ahmed. This is one of the heart-breaking experiences you see walking in Mekelle or sitting in a coffee shop.

While Mekelle has closed its fuel stations due to lack of supply, I imagine Beshasha would have at least an open fuel station selling fuel at government regulated prices. Unlike Mekelle, Beshasha may also have one or more bank branches connected to their headquarters with proper cash flows.

As opposed to the closed and empty shelf pharmacies of Mekelle, the drug shops of Beshasha do have regular supply of medicine. If you fail to find what you need you can take a ride to Agaro, Jima, and even fly to Addis Ababa for a better medical service. The bars of Beshasha are not forced to close as a result of lack of beverage supplies. Bedelle beer brewery is not far from Jimma and, unlike the beverage factories in Tigray, can access the supplies it needs to produce. Fortunately, the essence of Mekelle was not its material conditions but its spirit of love, equality, and integrity that persevered atrocities of a similar nature.

### **You will find a city with no telecom and internet connection**

It may be difficult to understand modern city life without telecommunication. You can’t call a friend for a chat or a colleague for a business discussion. You should either walk to her/his house, send someone to ask for an appointment, or be lucky enough to accidentally meet the person while on some other business so that you can take an appointment. The engineers of Tigray made the land line telephone in Mekelle work as of the second week of September, but there were only few lines working as before the war almost everyone shifted to mobile phones and internet connections.

Mekelle has no internet data connection, with the exception few outlets owned by some international humanitarian organizations. As a result, people rarely get an internet connection, and when they do the bandwidth is low, and they use it for voice calling their relatives on those few lucky occasions when they make a connection. You can access various Ethiopian television channels based in Ethiopia and abroad, including the channels of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation.

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However, few of them share information, but serve primarily as an extension of propaganda program of the regime. As a result, people fill this gap by accessing the information posted by private users and activists. Some people who accessed their social media take screen shots of whatever post they thought important to read and share it with their friends. As a result, you see music shops and individuals with a laptop and a smart phone on the sidewalk of hotels, shops, and walkways sharing social media screen shots and YouTube stories via flash disks at a cost. It is not uncommon to see youngsters gathered sharing and exchanging screen shots and flash disc copies of YouTube recordings.

You may talk to one of the vendors to understand more about the magnitude of this information selling business. I talked to some of the vendors and here are my findings. This business started in November 2020 when the regime cut Tigray from electric grid connectivity as part of its war strategy. Individuals began going to hotels with generators so that they could access live TV live broadcasts. As most people neither had the time nor the money to spend to sit in hotels and watch TV, some music shops began dubbing news and 'important' programs related to the war on Tigray and began selling them to customers via flash disk and by using wireless transfer methods to smartphones using software like Bluetooth and Xender.

At the end of November, Mekelle fell under the full control of the ENDF and the EDF. Listening to the short-lived Dimtsi Woyane TV (DW TV) and Tigray Media House (TMH) in public places was barred, a development that boosted the market of sharing via flash disks and other applications for wireless data transfer. Many customers with Facebook accounts have little knowledge on efficient ways of searching information on Tigray and people spend a lot of time on Facebook wasting a lot of money. For this reason, the music shops began employing graduates, who were knowledgeable about who is affiliated with whom and can systematically search information and/or opinions of different actors on a certain issue. They then take screen shots and assemble them in a way so that customers can update themselves at a shorter time and a lower cost.

I found Hailemichael Mezgebe and Addis Fantahun, both Mekelle university graduates of economics, running this business using a single laptop on the side road of *Romanat Plaza* at the center of the city. They informed me that once Mekelle was out of any internet and telephone connection, they used to go to places where internet connection is available to download data from YouTube and screenshot Facebook postings of political activists, sharing them with customers.

Hailemichael says, we know the media groups based on their affiliations. We download commentaries and discussions from YouTube based on their affiliations. Kelo media and OMN usually post commentaries opposed to Prosperity Party by Oromo opposition activists. Ethio-360 bring commentaries are usually anti TPLF (which often times also become anti-Tigraian). This outlet also accuses the Prosperity Party as a party that promotes Oromo dominance. ESAT essentially brings the voices of Amhara elites in support of Abiy Ahmed but also includes the voices of pro-government non-Amhara activists as well.

He also indicated that they download commentaries from Tigray Media House and internet-based broadcasts of Rara media, Axumite media, and Dedebit media for Tigraian voices from all corners and not necessarily pro-TPLF voices. He confidently indicates that they know a range of bloggers and Facebook activists associated with the key officials of the federal government of Ethiopia and the regional administration of Tigray, they are all called image builders.

Nowadays, they buy the screenshots and the downloads from others with data connection and distribute to their customers. They don't add anything to it except that they provide it at proximity to their customers. Both of them earn 300-400 Birr per day on this business while those with shops and established customers earn up to 1,000 Birr on this business alone.

*This is the second installment of a three part essay. Please follow the links to access [Part 1](#).*

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