

Statement by the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence within the Tigray region of Ethiopia

We, the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies (Call to Action on GBV), a global network of more than 90 states, donors, international organisations and NGOs, are deeply concerned by the ongoing reports of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, occurring as a result of the crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

Continued fighting, break-down of security systems, insecurity throughout the region and involvement of multiple armed actors as well as critical humanitarian needs and dire living conditions have created a high-risk environment and forced displacement in which GBV is a horrifying and widespread daily reality for women and girls.

Reports are numerous and, this is expected to be the tip of the iceberg. GBV is notoriously under-reported due to the fear of stigmatisation or retaliation, limited access to trusted service providers and impunity for perpetrators.

Survivors of GBV are experiencing significant challenges accessing safe shelter, health services, psychosocial support, case management, protection by law enforcement and the justice system generally. This is in part due to a great shortage of service providers, the security risks, ongoing power cuts, and damaged as well as looted and attacked health facilities. Local civil society organisations, government institutions, and NGOs, including women-led organisations, who provided GBV services pre-crisis, face challenges responding to such a crisis and require financial and technical support as well as security.

The Call to Action on GBV welcomes the statements made by the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict on 21st January, the IASC principals on 23rd March, the G7 on 2nd April 2021 and GBV AOR on 19th April. We recognise the efforts made by GBV prevention and response actors in Ethiopia, despite security and other challenges. More needs to be done.

Aligned with the Call to Action 2021-2025 Road Map and the GBV Accountability Framework and prior to the upcoming launch of the Humanitarian Response Plan for Ethiopia, we highlight the need **for a comprehensive effort to prevent and respond to GBV in Tigray region:**

- 1. Prioritisation of GBV prevention and response** through strong leadership and coordination between humanitarian, development and peace actors.
- 2. Ensure GBV risks are identified and mitigation actions are resourced across all sectors** in accordance with the [IASC Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#).

3. **Place the safety and well-being of women and girls front and centre** in the delivery of assistance and their access to services, including MHPSS and sexual and reproductive health services.
4. **Allocate resources for an immediate and sustained scale-up of GBV prevention and response services**, including through:
 - **Immediate deployment of GBV technical experts** with experience in mainstreaming GBV risk mitigation as well as GBV service provision in fragile contexts.
 - **Fund and partner with local civil society organisations, particularly women's organisations**, providing innovative and flexible support to address their financial, technical, logistical and security barriers and ensure staff care is prioritized for frontline responders.
5. **Promote survivor-centred access to justice and accountability**, which places the rights, safety and wishes of survivors at the centre of accountability mechanisms

GBV is not an inevitable consequence of conflict. It can and should be prevented.