

290 Tigray

“It’s clear that rape and sexual violence have been used as a weapon of war to inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in Tigray. Hundreds have been subjected to brutal treatment aimed at degrading and dehumanizing them.”

Agnès Callamard, Secretary General, Amnesty International

The systematic, strategic use of rape and gang rape as a formal weapon of war and ethnic cleansing, designed to spread terror, humiliate and impregnate women, infect victims with HIV/AIDS, and shatter enemy societies, is relatively new, at least officially.

World War II introduced the first documented cases of weaponized rape, sexual slavery, and torture. Japan’s campaign of mass rape, enslavement, and murder in Nanking, China and other occupied countries, was followed by Soviet soldiers, who committed mass rape of German women after the fall of Berlin. American soldiers perpetrated wide-scale rape during the Vietnam War, notably in the massacre at My Lai. The practice appeared in civil wars in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nicaragua, Kashmir, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Darfur and Rwanda, among others. In the Balkans, Serb soldiers targeted Muslim women to fulfill a directive of ethnic cleansing.

The practice continues today in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and now in Ukraine.

In 2019, the United Nations passed a resolution to combat rape in conflict; the resolution was watered down significantly after the U.S. objected to language on victims’ support from family planning clinics.