

**MSF**  
July 2025

# **MSF review into the killing of three MSF staff on 24 June 2021 in Tigray, Ethiopia**





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**María, Tedros and Yohannes**

# Foreword

María Hernández Matas, Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael and Yohannes Halefom Reda lost their lives over four years ago. They were brutally killed on 24 June 2021 while trying to help people affected by the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia.

Four years on, despite considerable efforts, we still do not have answers, nor an official response from the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) about the killing of our colleagues – answers owed to their families and to MSF staff. We therefore feel compelled to publish our own internal review of the incident.

Their commitment, strength and compassion were extraordinary. They represented the best of our organisation, and their memory will stay with us forever.

We dedicate this report to María, Tedros, and Yohannes – you walk with us in the hardest moments, in the sweetest ones, in the moments of sadness and happiness.

Nothing we do will change what happened and give their lives back to their loved ones. We continue to miss them terribly and to mourn them as friends and colleagues. They are in our minds and hearts every day. They will always be part of our collective memory and *raison d'être*.

María, Tedros and Yohannes, may you continue inspiring us.

**Paula Gil**  
President of MSF Spain

**Raquel Ayora**  
General Director of MSF Spain



# Acronyms

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<b>EDF</b>	Eritrean Defence Forces
<b>ENDF</b>	Ethiopian National Defence Forces
<b>FDRE</b>	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced people
<b>MoD</b>	Ministry of Defence
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MoJ</b>	Ministry of Justice
<b>MoP</b>	Ministry of Peace
<b>MSF</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>SNNPR</b>	Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region
<b>TF</b>	Tigrayan Forces
<b>TPLF</b>	Tigray People's Liberation Front

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# Executive summary

## 1 OVERVIEW

On 24 June 2021, three Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff, María Hernández Matas, Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael, and Yohannes Halefom Reda, were brutally killed in central Tigray, Ethiopia.

This report presents the findings of an internal review carried out by MSF to try to understand what happened to our colleagues. The review was started in the days immediately following the incident and was carried out over more than a year. This is standard practice at MSF following a critical incident with a review aimed at understanding who conducted the attack, how, and with what motive, and to provide facts to inform MSF's engagement with parties to the conflict about what happened that day. The internal review was also important for the families of those who were killed, as it enabled MSF to share its understanding of the circumstances in which their loved ones lost their lives.

Over the past four years, MSF has relentlessly tried to understand the full circumstances in which María, Tedros, and Yohannes lost their lives and obtain an acknowledgement of responsibility for their deaths. MSF has tirelessly attempted to engage with both the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) — whose forces were both present in the area where the killings took place — and asked specific questions regarding the presence of their respective armed forces and their potential involvement in the incident. As this review found that an Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) convoy was present on the road at the time of the attack, MSF asked the FDRE to fulfil its obligation to carry out a thorough investigation into the killings and to clarify its understanding of the events and the potential involvement of its armed forces. Given the findings of this review, MSF invested heavily in bilateral engagement with the FDRE in relation to these elements and the FDRE repeatedly assured MSF that an official investigation was underway. MSF also requested the TPLF to carry out its own investigation into the incident.

Despite repeated assurances from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) that the FDRE was conducting a credible and impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding the killing of our colleagues, to date, neither MSF nor the victims' families have received any official communication or substantiated answers from the Ethiopian authorities about what happened that day.

In the absence of receiving the outcome of any credible and transparent investigation from the FDRE, MSF is making the findings of this internal review public to share what we were able to establish about what happened to our colleagues, including the potential involvement of the ENDF. MSF



feels a moral obligation to make these findings public out of respect for our colleagues, whose lives were taken while they sought to assist people in need.

## **2 EVENTS ON 24 AND 25 JUNE 2021**

The conflict in northern Ethiopia started in Tigray region in November 2020, with fighting between the ENDF, its allies, and Tigrayan fighters affiliated with the political party, the TPLF.<sup>1</sup>

On 24 June 2021, three MSF staff, María Hernández Matas, Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael, and Yohannes Halefom Reda drove south from the town of Abi Adi in central Tigray to assess medical needs in the surrounding area.

That afternoon, the MSF base in Abi Adi lost contact with the team. This was reported to the Tigrayan Forces (TF) in Abi Adi and, in the absence of any ENDF presence in Abi Adi town, MSF's team in Mekelle informed the head of security for the Interim Government. An MSF search team was sent from Abi Adi town but was unable to locate their colleagues and had to turn back due to the tense security situation in the area and the evening curfew in place in and around Abi Adi, which prohibited the movement of vehicles.

Later that evening, the GPS coordinates from the car's tracking device were retrieved and, the following day, an MSF search team was able to locate the MSF vehicle and the three MSF colleagues, who had been killed. The killings took place on the main road south of Abi Adi towards Yech'illa, just south of Gerebgiba bridge.

## **3 MAIN FINDINGS**

The information gathered in the course of this internal review allowed MSF to piece together crucial elements of what happened on 24 June 2021. The main findings are as follows:

### **In the weeks leading up to the killings, there was increasing hostility from ENDF and allied forces towards aid workers**

The review clearly found that, in the weeks prior to the incident, not only was the conflict intensifying, but the attitudes of ENDF and Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) personnel were becoming increasingly hostile towards humanitarian workers operating in Tigray region, including in Abi Adi. MSF teams experienced increasing harassment from ENDF and EDF soldiers, including frequent searches, accusations of non-neutrality, physical violence and harassment, including in and around Abi Adi. It also came at a time when the FDRE's public rhetoric towards humanitarian organisations was becoming increasingly aggressive.<sup>2</sup> MSF believes that this contributed to a

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1 This armed group, the self-proclaimed Tigray Defence Forces, will be referred to as Tigrayan Forces (TF) in this report.

2 During this time, senior representatives of the FDRE made a series of unsubstantiated public accusations against humanitarian organisations, including allegations that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had been smuggling weapons to the TF and

climate of mistrust towards the few international humanitarian organisations working in Tigray.

### **The killings occurred at a time when the conflict in Tigray was shifting dramatically**

In the days preceding 24 June 2021, the TF was making significant military gains and the ENDF and its allies were retreating from Tigray region.<sup>3</sup> Between 18 and 21 June 2021, there was heavy fighting in Abi Adi and Yech'illa towns and the TF took control of Yech'illa on 20 June 2021 and Abi Adi town on 22 June 2021.<sup>4</sup> Following these military losses, ENDF troops retreated from the Abi Adi area. On 21 and 22 June 2021, the MSF team in Abi Adi saw a large contingent of ENDF personnel leave and move out of town in a convoy of hundreds of vehicles carrying soldiers and weaponry, after which there was no further presence of ENDF in the town.

### **The attack was an intentional and targeted killing of three clearly identified humanitarian aid workers**

The review clearly established that the attack on María, Tedros, and Yohannes was an intentional and targeted killing of three clearly identified humanitarian aid workers. The bodies of María, Tedros, and Yohannes were found at distances of 100 to 400 metres from the MSF car, each with multiple gunshot wounds. They were shot at close range, facing the direction of their attackers, and were all found wearing white vests clearly marked with the MSF logo, meaning they were clearly identifiable and recognisable as humanitarian workers and civilians at the time of their deaths. The car in which they were driving was also marked with the MSF logo and flag; it had been shot at multiple times and extensively burned.

### **ENDF was present on the road where the killings took place on the day of the incident**

MSF found a large body of corroborating evidence that placed a convoy of retreating ENDF troops on the road where the killings took place on the day of the incident.

The information gathered in the review indicated that on 24 June 2021, military presence was divided along the road where María, Tedros, and Yohannes were killed. From 23 June 2021, the TF was in control of Abi Adi

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hiding TF fighters in their vehicles. For example, on 12 June 2021, a senior FDRE official announced that the government had “credible evidence, indicating that some actors have attempted to smuggle weapons to arm the terrorist cell under the guise of humanitarian assistance”. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia H.E. Demeke Mekonnen's message on undue pressures on Ethiopia regarding the situation in the Tigray Region, (12 June 2021), available [here](#).

3 See Katharine Houreld, Giulia Paravicini, and Maggie Fick, 'Analysis: Ethiopia govt withdrawal from Tigray capital opens new chapter in war', Reuters (2 July 2021). Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-govt-withdrawal-tigray-capital-opens-new-chapter-war-2021-07-02/>

4 See Reuters, 'Grim Aftermath of Ethiopian battle offers rare clues of brutal war', 27 July 2021 [updated on 24 August 2021], available at <https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/grim-aftermath-of-ethiopian-battle-offers-rare-clues-of-brutal-war>.

town and the perimeter. While the TF was likely present in the wider area, MSF could find no evidence that the TF was present on the stretch of road where María, Tedros, and Yohannes were killed.

When the ENDF convoy retreated from Adi Abi on 21 and 22 June 2021, they left in a large slow-moving convoy, comprising hundreds of vehicles. Multiple public sources confirm that the ENDF convoy was ambushed by the TF just north of Yech'illa on 26 June 2021, two days after the killing of the MSF staff and four days after the convoy left Adi Abi. There are no other accessible roads in this area linking Adi Abi to Yech'illa, clearly indicating that between 22 and 26 June 2021 the convoy was present on the road where the MSF team was killed.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, civilian sources with whom MSF spoke at the scene of the incident reported that ENDF soldiers travelling at the end of the convoy had occupied houses next to where the MSF colleagues were found and had not moved south towards Yech'illa until late on 24 June 2021 or early on the morning of 25 June 2021. This information would place ENDF at the precise location where MSF's staff were killed on the day of the attack.

### **Beyond the confirmed presence of the ENDF in the area, what remains to be clarified is the level and nature of their involvement in the attack**

MSF received some concerning witness reports that directly implicated ENDF soldiers in the incident. Several eyewitnesses separately approached MSF to provide accounts; these included civilian witnesses who had been part of the withdrawing ENDF convoy in different capacities.<sup>6</sup> All of the witnesses proactively approached MSF to present their accounts and were under no pressure to provide a statement.

One witness reported overhearing a conversation on a military radio between an ENDF commander standing near one of the vehicles in the main convoy and a soldier from another ENDF unit – likely to be a spotter team of soldiers stationed at the very end of the convoy (and therefore closest to the location where the three MSF staff were found). The witness overheard the soldier informing the ENDF commander that a white car was approaching. The ENDF commander gave an order to shoot. The next incoming message on the

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5 Several publicly available sources report the withdrawal of the ENDF convoy and the attack on or around 26 June 2021. See Reuters, 'Grim Aftermath of Ethiopian battle offers rare clues of brutal war', 27 July 2021 [updated on 24 August 2021], available at <https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/grim-aftermath-of-ethiopian-battle-offers-rare-clues-of-brutal-war>. Additional photographs of the ambushed convoy from the Reuters report are available on Twitter, posted on 27 July 2021, <https://twitter.com/giuliaparavicin/status/1420024788987305990?lang=en>. See also Tigray Media House, 20 July, 'Aftermath of a TF ambush on an ENDF convoy ቤጥ ትግረኛ News | July 2021|, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=BbWjB9tZx-o>. Twitter feed, 27 July 2021, "video showing the Aftermath of Ethiopian Army convoy ambushed by TF is geolocated at southern Tigray, at Yechilay @ 13.30067,38.99713" <https://twitter.com/quen10tarantino/status/1420069100873732096>

6 To protect the identity and security of the witnesses, this review does not disclose the details of the circumstances in which these individuals were travelling with the ENDF convoy that day. MSF can confirm, however, that all of the witnesses interviewed for this review approached MSF voluntarily and were under no pressure to speak, and that none of the sources were detained by the TF or any other group at the time of providing their accounts.

radio from the soldier informed the ENDF commander that the unit had tried to shoot, but the car had turned back towards Abi Adi and stopped, at which point the ENDF commander reportedly gave the order to “go and catch them” and “remove them”.

#### **4 MSF’S SEARCH FOR ANSWERS**

Over the past four years, MSF has extensively engaged in bilateral high-level meetings with both the FDRE and the TPLF. MSF held over 20 face-to-face meetings with FDRE officials and sent numerous written communications, repeatedly urging the FDRE to provide a credible account of what happened to our colleagues. A comprehensive overview of MSF’s engagement over the past four years is included at the end of this report in Annex I.

Throughout this four-year engagement, MSF received conflicting information from the FDRE about whether an investigation was underway. After initial reassurances that an impartial, civilian-led inquiry was being conducted by the MoJ, on 11 July 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) orally shared several preliminary conclusions from the FDRE investigation with MSF, which MSF considered to be insufficient and unsubstantiated. This included the FDRE’s conclusion that the ENDF was not present in the area at the time of the incident and the FDRE’s presumption that the TPLF was responsible. The MFA advised MSF that while the case remained open, the findings could be shared with the bereaved families as the official account, and that that no further meetings would be held to discuss the case. However, in June 2023 — following the second anniversary of the killings — MSF was told the case was still under investigation. In support of this process, MSF submitted a full written copy of its internal review, along with supporting materials, to the MoJ on 23 October 2023.

Despite MSF’s repeated follow-up, as of June 2025, there has been no further communication from the MoJ. All indications point to the fact that the promised investigation has stalled. In the absence of receiving the outcomes of a credible investigation after four years, MSF deems it time to publicly release its internal review of the killing of María, Tedros, and Yohannes.

Today, humanitarian workers are being killed in growing numbers while carrying out life-saving work and these attacks continue with impunity. Across the board, States are failing to properly investigate incidents or hold perpetrators to account for gross violations of international law. MSF hopes that by pursuing the truth of what happened to our colleagues in Tigray, we can contribute to building a safer environment for humanitarians — not only in Ethiopia, but in conflict zones around the world.

## 1 ABOUT THIS REPORT

On 24 June 2021, three Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) staff – María Hernández Matas, emergency coordinator; Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael, driver; and Yohannes Halefom Reda, assistant coordinator with a medical degree – were driving southeast of Abi Adi, in the central zone of Tigray region, in northern Ethiopia, to assess medical needs.

Just over an hour into their journey, they were intercepted and killed, each suffering multiple gunshot wounds. Their bodies were found at distances of 100 to 400 metres from their car. The car itself was shot multiple times from behind and was extensively burned. The MSF flag and logo were on the vehicle and on clothing worn by each of the staff members, meaning that they were clearly recognisable as civilians and humanitarian workers at the time of the incident. The killings took place on a main road between Abi Adi and Yech'illa, two towns in and around which intense military fighting between the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) and the Tigrayan Forces (TF) had taken place in the days before the incident. No party or individual claimed responsibility for the killings.

This report presents a public version of the internal review carried out by MSF in the months immediately following the incident, between July and September 2021, and is based on information available at that time (see methodology below). This type of review has become standard practice in MSF following a critical security incident.

The information gathered during the review allowed MSF to reconstruct a detailed picture of the route that the MSF car took, as well as the exact location and time of the killings. MSF was also able to establish which of the warring parties were present on the road at the time and location of the attack and the broader context in which the killings occurred.

Over the past four years, MSF has engaged extensively with the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in order to understand what happened to our colleagues that day and to obtain an acknowledgement of responsibility for their deaths. Immediately following the killings, MSF requested meetings with representatives of both the FDRE and TPLF to discuss the incident, calling on both parties to conduct thorough investigations into the case and to share the findings. MSF has also shared key findings from its internal review with both the FDRE and TPLF, with questions relevant to each party related to the presence and activity of their respective armed forces/groups.

Despite repeated assurances from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) that the FDRE was conducting a credible and impartial investigation into the circumstances surrounding the killing of our colleagues, four years on, neither MSF nor

the victims' families have received any official communication or credible answers from the Ethiopian authorities about what happened that day. As a result, MSF feels a moral obligation to make the findings of our internal review public out of respect for our colleagues, whose lives were taken while they dedicated themselves to assisting those in need.

MSF hopes that by pursuing the truth of what happened to our colleagues in Tigray, we can help challenge the impunity surrounding attacks on aid workers, and contribute to building a safer environment for humanitarian workers – not only in Ethiopia, but in conflict zones around the world, where we strive to provide lifesaving assistance to populations most in need.

## **Methodology**

The review was conducted internally by MSF and was led by two senior staff with experience in the investigation of critical incidents. Eighty-five documents were reviewed, including internal MSF sources and external documents and photographs. Information was gathered from the GPS tracker of the MSF vehicle, calls made by the satellite phone of the MSF team, and open-source documents. These sources were reviewed, together with publicly available information such as media and social media articles, posts and imagery, as well as additional open-source geolocation analysis. MSF also accessed commercially and publicly available satellite imagery to see if it could corroborate the other accounts received of the presence of armed forces in the area.<sup>7</sup>

All the information in this review was gathered after the incident occurred and for the purpose of this review. As such, the scope and content go far beyond the routine information that MSF teams gather in day-to-day operations, which focuses on only the necessary information to ensure appropriate security management for our teams.

More than 30 interviews were conducted with MSF staff involved in project operations in Tigray region and with external experts. Interviews were carried out via online communication platforms during July and August 2021. MSF also received accounts from civilian eyewitnesses who volunteered to share information. In line with the standard practice for MSF internal reviews, the families of María, Tedros and Yohannes did not participate directly in the process itself.

After María, Tedros and Yohannes' bodies were recovered from the scene of the incident, MSF medical staff carefully and caringly attended to their colleagues and examined their bodies in Abi Adi hospital. MSF medical staff were also present at a further examination of their bodies in Ayder referral hospital in Mekelle, alongside hospital staff, including the head of

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<sup>7</sup> MSF consulted open-source satellite imagery available in the public domain from Google Earth, Airbus, and Sentinel (European Space Agency), as well as images obtained from a commercial third-party provider, Apollo Mapping. This is not routine practice for MSF and the images were all obtained after the attack on 24 June 2021 for the sole purpose of this review.

the Regional Health Bureau, nominated by the federally appointed Tigray Regional State Interim Administration.

MSF notes that there are some limitations to this review. Firstly, during the period of the review, communication with people in Tigray region was extremely challenging. The area had no functional internet or telephone network following the incident, and MSF had a greatly reduced presence on the ground following the killings. Secondly, since the attack involved firearms and the use of an incendiary device, the reviewers consulted independent forensic and ballistic experts who analysed photographs of the scene of the incident. These experts were not present in Tigray at the time of the incident. Thirdly, the attack took place in a remote area where active fighting was extremely recent. Due to security concerns and access constraints, MSF did not proactively approach soldiers/fighters who may have directly witnessed the incident. There were no surviving MSF eyewitnesses.

Despite these limitations, MSF was able to consult multiple information sources, which enabled the reviewers to triangulate and corroborate information and build a picture of the events of 24 June 2021. The internal review was later updated to include some additional information received since September 2021. This includes some additional witness accounts from civilians who approached MSF, as well as media reports on the conflict. In addition, this report outlines all the steps MSF has taken to engage with the FDRE and TPLF to seek clarity about what happened to our colleagues.

### **Note on place names and language**

In Tigray region, place names are sometimes better known either by their Tigrinya or by their Amharic name. Transliterations of names from the original Ge'ez script to the Latin alphabet may differ slightly between this report and other documents.

The Executive Summary of this report has been translated into other languages to make it accessible to a wider audience. The original English version remains the official and authoritative text. In the case of any discrepancies between versions, the English version shall take precedence.

## **2 MSF'S HUMANITARIAN AND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN ETHIOPIA**

MSF has worked in Ethiopia for almost 40 years, responding to medical and humanitarian needs affecting Ethiopian citizens and refugees seeking safety in the country. Over the years, MSF teams have responded to various emergencies related to conflict and mass displacement, epidemics, malnutrition and natural disasters, and in areas where people have had limited access to healthcare. In all locations, MSF works in coordination with and in support of the Ethiopian Ministry of Health to provide free and quality healthcare.

In 2020-21, MSF teams assisted communities in nine out of ten regions in Ethiopia: Addis Ababa; Afar; Amhara; Benishangul-Gumuz; Gambella; Oromia; Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's (SNNP); Somali; and Tigray.

Activities ranged from providing primary and secondary healthcare to South Sudanese refugees in camps in Gambella region, to running mobile clinics in remote areas of Somali region, to treating people for neglected diseases such as kala azar and snakebite envenoming in Amhara region.

In January 2021, MSF teams opened an emergency medical programme to improve access to primary and secondary healthcare for people affected by violence in Metekel zone in Benishangul-Gumuz region, and for displaced families who had fled to Chagni in Amhara region. MSF teams also responded to flooding and disease outbreaks in Afar and SNNP regions, providing mobile clinics to ensure access to primary healthcare and improving access to clean water and sanitation. MSF also provided secondary healthcare care to people from Sababuru woreda in Guji zone, Oromia region.

In Addis Ababa, MSF provided medical and mental health support to Ethiopian migrants deported from Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Lebanon. MSF teams also supported the Regional Health Bureaux and Ethiopian Public Health Institute in their emergency disease surveillance activities, with the aim of covering most of the country, enabling teams to investigate health alerts promptly and effectively.

MSF continues to operate in Ethiopia; however, in August 2022, MSF Spain made the difficult decision to close its programmes in the country. This decision was taken in light of the failure of the FDRE to provide MSF with a credible account of the killings of our colleagues María, Tedros and Yohannes.

### **MSF's medical and humanitarian assistance in Tigray region**

The armed conflict in Tigray region began in November 2020 and had a devastating impact on the population of Tigray, estimated at 5.6 million people,<sup>8</sup> and of the surrounding regions. The conflict's dynamics and military tactics were characterised by widespread violence against the civilian population, including massacres, indiscriminate attacks, and the widespread and systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Thousands of civilians are estimated to have been killed, and, at the peak of the crisis, three million people were displaced due to the conflict, 1.8 million within Tigray region itself.<sup>9</sup> People faced food insecurity and loss of livelihoods due to looting or forced displacement.<sup>10</sup>

In December 2020, MSF began providing medical care and humanitarian assistance in Tigray to cover basic health needs for the most vulnerable people affected by the conflict in the region. The health system in rural areas had practically collapsed, severely compromising people's access to

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8 OCHA, Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update - Situation Report No. 1 (7 November 2020)

9 Ethiopia Protection Cluster, Protection Analysis Update May 2022 (6 May 2022).

10 WFP, Ethiopia - Tigray Emergency Food Security Assessment: Tigray Crisis response, August 2022 (18 August 2022)





**Image:** Map of MSF’s medical activities in Ethiopia January 2020 - June 2021  
© MSF

medical care.<sup>11</sup> During the height of the conflict, Tigray was largely cut off from banking systems, communications networks and supply routes, which increased people’s humanitarian needs.

MSF ran medical projects in the cities and towns of Adigrat, Axum, Adwa, Abi Adi, Shire, Sheraro, Humera, Dansha and Samre, as well as projects in Sudan for refugees fleeing Tigray. Activities included running, rehabilitating and supporting primary and secondary health facilities to ensure lifesaving services were available, as well as establishing alternative referral systems to hospitals across the region. MSF teams worked in Adigrat hospital, Axum university hospital and Abi Adi hospital, supporting the emergency room, the operating theatre, paediatrics (including malnutrition treatment), and sexual and reproductive health services, including maternity care and support for survivors of sexual violence. MSF also provided support with water and sanitation in the hospitals to ensure quality of care.

<sup>11</sup> Between mid-December 2020 and early March 2021, MSF teams visited 106 medical facilities across Tigray region. Of the facilities assessed, 30 per cent had been damaged, 73 per cent had been looted and 87 per cent were no longer functioning or fully functioning. See MSF, ‘Health facilities targeted in Tigray region, Ethiopia’ (15 March 2021)

**Photos:** Images of MSF medical activities in Tigray region in March 2021

© MSF



Since early 2021, MSF mobile teams based in these locations had progressively expanded their activities to rural towns, mountainous areas and villages in parts of the region where the health system was not functioning. MSF teams referred patients to MSF-supported hospitals in Axum, Adigrat and Abi Adi, as well as to Ayder referral hospital, a tertiary-level facility in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray region. From December 2020 to June 2021, MSF's teams in Axum, Adigrat and Abi Adi provided more than 30,000 outpatient consultations, delivered more than 3,600 babies, provided more than 20,000 routine vaccinations, conducted more than 900 surgeries, and treated more than 750 people wounded by intentional violence.

**Photo:** Panoramic view of Abi Adi town from the hospital

© MSF

## **MSF in Abi Adi**

Abi Adi is a town in the Central zone of Tigray region, with a population of around 35,000 people prior to the recent conflict. When the fighting erupted in Tigray in late 2020, the town became an important strategic location for the parties to the conflict, as it is situated along two key access routes, one running north to south and linking Adwa to the state of Amhara, and the other providing access to the west of Tigray from Mekelle.

An MSF team first visited Abi Adi on 13 January 2021 after a period of intense fighting, when the town was under the control of the ENDF and its allies. It had been visibly looted, with few public services in operation. Many people had been displaced to Abi Adi and surrounding areas from other locations in Tigray and health services were almost non-existent. The hospital, which served an estimated 500,000 people prior to the conflict, was occupied by the ENDF as a military base and stabilisation centre.

MSF started activities in late January 2021, reinforcing Abi Adi's only primary healthcare centre, as the hospital was not open to the civilian population. Before MSF's arrival, the healthcare centre was only open during the day and offered basic services. MSF opened the healthcare centre for 24 hours a day and started providing previously unavailable services including emergency care, paediatric care, maternity care, care for survivors of sexual violence, inpatient services, and referrals to other hospitals for specialist treatment.



**Photo:** Broken medical equipment at Abi Adi hospital in March 2021, after it was occupied by military forces during the early months of the conflict

© MSF



As few medical facilities were still operational in the rural communities surrounding Abi Adi, MSF also began providing medical care through mobile clinics, operating four ambulances and facilitating referrals of sick and wounded patients to health facilities in Abi Adi, Axum and Mekelle. MSF also conducted vaccination campaigns, carried out food distributions, and provided displaced people with clean drinking water.

In March 2021, the ENDF left the hospital, and MSF took over the functioning of the hospital, contracting additional staff and restoring medical services including maternity care, operating theatres, a blood bank and a laboratory. From this time, Abi Adi hospital was the only operational hospital in the area. Between March and June 2021, MSF teams in Abi Adi hospital provided 1,315 emergency room consultations, assisted 436 births and carried out 1,500 antenatal consultations.

At the time of the incident, MSF's Abi Adi project comprised 14 international staff (the number fluctuated during the project duration) and 107 Ethiopian staff contracted directly by MSF. The team was led by an emergency coordinator, María Hernández Matas, a highly experienced MSF coordinator who had worked in conflict-affected and highly insecure contexts including Central African Republic, Mexico, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen. Before arriving in Abi Adi, María had been managing MSF's emergency projects in Adigrat and Axum and was therefore familiar with the context in Tigray region. Yohannes Halefom Reda joined MSF in February 2021 as assistant coordinator in Abi Adi, helping MSF to start activities in the area. Yohannes was an experienced public health professional and, prior to joining MSF, worked for other international organisations as well as serving as medical director of Samre hospital in southeastern Tigray. Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael was born and raised in Abi Adi and graduated from Abi Adi Technical and Vocational College. He joined MSF in May 2021 as a driver, having worked in a similar role for other organisations.

## MSF's negotiated access and security management protocols

As in all MSF projects in Ethiopia, the MSF team in Abi Adi followed rigorous security management protocols. In line with MSF's global policy and practice, the security plan for Tigray was based on a thorough analysis of threats and risks and a set of mitigation measures that included negotiated access, acceptance, security monitoring and standard operational procedures. A main pillar of the security strategy involved building and maintaining a strong security network with contacts in the local population, relevant local authorities and all military forces and armed groups. MSF's access to and within Tigray was negotiated with – and explicitly accepted by – all parties to the conflict, as well as relevant civilian authorities at both regional and federal level, who granted access and issued necessary permits for MSF to operate in various locations across eastern and central Tigray.

As a medical humanitarian organisation acting in accordance with principles of neutrality and impartiality, which are enshrined under international humanitarian law and the MSF charter, MSF did not use armed escorts anywhere in Ethiopia, including in Abi Adi. In order to operate safely and effectively and to deliver aid impartially to those in need, it is vital that MSF teams – and the medical and humanitarian assistance they provide – are distinguishable from military or security actors.

The decision not to use armed escorts was clearly agreed with the federal and regional authorities, including at a meeting with the state minister for peace in Addis Ababa when MSF first established operations in Tigray in December 2020.<sup>12</sup> The issue of armed escorts was never raised again at any level by the Ethiopian armed forces or authorities.

On 22 December 2020, MSF received a clearance letter from the Ministry of Peace (MoP) granting MSF permission to conduct humanitarian activities in Tigray. MSF then obtained a clearance letter from the federally appointed Tigray Regional State Interim Administration in Mekelle, signed by the interim president of the region, granting MSF full access to the region to deliver medical care. This was renewed in May 2021, again at the level of the interim president of the region.

To negotiate access and reach patients and populations in need, MSF teams working in Tigray, including in Abi Adi, engaged in daily dialogue with local communities, staff and patients in health facilities, with the civil administration, as well as with military command structures (both TF and ENDF) at Mekelle and local levels. Prior to any movement of staff and patients, MSF teams would cross-check sources to verify the security of planned routes and inform the military forces present in the area of any planned movements. During movements, MSF staff maintained regular contact with the MSF base in Abi Adi via satellite phones and radios, and always clearly identified themselves as humanitarian workers, wearing MSF

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<sup>12</sup> Despite this clear agreement, on 26 June 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a tweet stating "The gov't of #Ethiopia would like to express condolences on the death of three #MSF staffers, a Spaniard & 2 Ethiopians in Abi Adi, Tigray where TPLF actively operates. The gov'ts call for military escort in such areas was to avoid such tragic killings by the irresponsible group." See [here](#).

vests and travelling in vehicles clearly identified with the MSF logo and two MSF flags.

In Abi Adi, the MSF team had a high level of acceptance in the town and surrounding communities. When MSF first arrived in Abi Adi in January 2021, the town was under ENDF control and MSF established daily contact with ENDF military interlocutors. To conduct outreach visits to mobile clinic sites outside Abi Adi town and facilitate the referral of patients to a higher level of healthcare, MSF would inform the ENDF commander or colonel in the town of intended movements and the ENDF would tell MSF whether the route was open or whether there was still active fighting in the area. Interactions with the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), who were present in the area when MSF arrived and then controlled Abi Adi town in March 2021, were more challenging as, despite significant efforts, MSF was unable to obtain high-level contacts with the EDF military structure. For most of the time that MSF worked in Abi Adi, the TF was not present in the town, so contact with TF for the purposes of discussing access and security took place only in rural areas when MSF visited with mobile clinics. When the TF took control of Abi Adi town on 22 June 2021, the MSF team established new contacts with the incoming forces.

While operating in conflict settings is never without risks, these protocols were designed to reduce and manage risks to MSF staff. MSF teams also continuously analysed the context and operating environment, weighing the potential risks against the impact of activities, and assessing organisational capacity to mitigate identified risks on an ongoing basis. This enabled effective humanitarian dialogue with all parties. As a result, MSF teams successfully negotiated hundreds of movements of staff, patients and supplies across Tigray between December 2020 and the end of June 2021, including running ambulance services in remote communities and making regular patient referrals to both Abi Adi and Mekelle hospitals.

Following the incident, MSF carried out a detailed review of its security management in Ethiopia, looking specifically at Tigray region. The objectives were to analyse the appropriateness of risk analysis, security strategy, protocols and management practices of operations in Tigray to enable organisational learning. MSF's internal security review concluded that the team had followed the procedures outlined in the project security plan and no causality was established between a fault in MSF's security management and the killing of María, Tedros and Yohannes.

### 3 CONTEXT IN ABI ADI AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS AROUND THE TIME OF THE KILLINGS

#### Context in the weeks preceding the killings

Abi Adi and the surrounding area was a site of active fighting throughout the conflict, and military control of the town had changed several times since MSF arrived in January 2021. As a result, MSF teams were used to negotiating access with changing armed actors.<sup>13</sup>

In the weeks leading up to 24 June 2021, there were frequent clashes between the TF and the ENDF and its allies in various areas in and around Abi Adi. While these clashes were not unusual in the context, it was clear to MSF teams that the intensity of the fighting had increased.

During this time, additional ENDF military divisions were brought in from other areas of central Tigray to strengthen the forces around Abi Adi. By 18 June 2021, the MSF team in Abi Adi was engaging with four different ENDF colonels in Abi Adi town.

Between 18 and 21 June 2021, significant battles occurred between the TF and the ENDF and its allies in Abi Adi town and Yech'illa. On 21 June 2021 the ENDF and EDF started evacuating their military base in Abi Adi and moving out of town, and the TF took control of the town from the evening of 22 June 2021. The ENDF left in a large, organised convoy, comprising cars, buses and many military trucks, including mounted heavy weaponry. The MSF team in Abi Adi directly witnessed the ENDF contingent starting to leave on 21 June 2021 and, by early morning on 22 June 2021, all ENDF soldiers had left the town. The convoy left Abi Adi and headed south, taking the road to Yech'illa in the direction of the regional boundary between Tigray and Amhara. Media and witness reports corroborate these statements.<sup>14</sup> From 22 June 2021, once the divisions had left town, it was difficult for MSF's team in Abi Adi to know exactly where ENDF troops were. EDF soldiers were last seen in Abi Adi town on 21 June 2021.<sup>15</sup>

TF forces entered Abi Adi town during the evening of 22 June 2021, after the ENDF convoy had left town and moved south. At this point, two days before the MSF incident, the TF was in control of Abi Adi town and its perimeter, while its forces were reportedly present in Yech'illa town, south of Abi Adi. Fighting continued in surrounding areas from 22 June 2021 onwards where control was disputed.

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13 Between January and June 2021, Abi Adi town was under the control of the ENDF, EDF and TF at different periods. Throughout the whole period, MSF teams were able to negotiate access to deliver lifesaving medical services to the local population in Abi Adi town and surrounding areas, regardless of the armed forces present.

14 AP News "Eritrean forces withdraw from key towns in Ethiopia's Tigray". 29 June 2021.

15 Multiple sources indicate that the EDF moved north when the ENDF withdrew. During the movement of MSF staff out of Abi Adi on 22 June 2021, EDF soldiers were only observed from Werkamba onwards.

## Increasing hostility towards humanitarian workers by ENDF and its allies

In the weeks prior to the incident, there were numerous events that signalled growing hostility by FDRE and ENDF personnel in the field towards humanitarian workers across Tigray, including in and around Abi Adi.

At the national level, the federal government's attitude towards international organisations became increasingly aggressive in the months and weeks preceding the incident. This included public accusations by senior politicians, including the deputy prime minister, of humanitarian organisations smuggling weapons to the TF and hiding TF soldiers in their vehicles.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout May and June 2021, aid organisations working across Tigray, including MSF, saw increasing blockages at checkpoints, the locations of which became increasingly unpredictable, resulting in delays in moving humanitarian supplies. In numerous locations across the region, there were reports of humanitarian workers experiencing temporary arrests, interrogations and physical violence at checkpoints managed by the ENDF and its allies.<sup>17</sup> In September 2021, the UN reported that a total of 23 humanitarian workers had been killed in Tigray since the onset of the conflict.<sup>18</sup>

In the weeks leading up to the incident, the MSF team in Abi Adi reported that interactions with ENDF and EDF personnel were becoming increasingly tense, both in Abi Adi town and at checkpoints in surrounding areas. The ENDF brought new military divisions into the area during this period and many soldiers were not familiar with MSF. Up until this point, there had been one ENDF colonel stationed in the town who was MSF's main point of contact in the ENDF. From around 18 June 2021, three additional ENDF colonels arrived, each in charge of a different military division, and this made interactions even more challenging.

Checkpoint locations were also changing frequently with the arrival of new ENDF and EDF troops. MSF teams travelling on the roads in and out of contested areas faced increased checks and repeated accusations from ENDF and EDF soldiers of being spies, collaborating with or supporting the TF or the 'junta'.<sup>19</sup> The accusations and heightened vehicle searches became more frequent and intense, and harassment, intimidation and aggression

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16 For example, on 12 June 2021, Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign Affairs Demeke Mekonnen announced that the government had "credible evidence, indicating that some actors have attempted to smuggle weapons to arm the terrorist cell under the guise of humanitarian assistance". Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia H.E. Demeke Mekonnen's message on undue pressures on Ethiopia regarding the situation in the Tigray Region (12 June 2021), available [here](#).

17 OCHA and others reported, for example, that on 17 June 2021 the EDF stopped and physically assaulted a vaccination team in Asgeda woreda, Northwestern zone, Tigray. In Southeastern zone, food aid convoys were denied access to Wajirat woreda. At the end of June 2021, humanitarian operations in Mekelle and towards Adigrat, Abi Adi and southern Tigray were curtailed due to denials and interference by "armed elements." See OCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 24 June 2021. OCHA reported that on 28 June, ENDF elements entered humanitarian partner offices in Mekelle, Dansha and Abdurafi and took telecommunications and internet equipment. See OCHA, Tigray: Humanitarian Access Snapshot June 2021, released on 30 June 2021.

18 See H.C. a.i. Statement on the killing of 23 aid workers in the Tigray region since the start of the crisis' (2 September 2021). Available [here](#).

19 A term used by the FDRE and its supporters to refer to the TPLF.



towards the team were occurring daily. MSF reported these incidents to the ENDF command in Abi Adi town, as well as in Mekelle through the MSF coordination team there, and received assurances that its teams could move safely to carry out much needed medical assistance. On 19 June 2021, the ENDF came several times to the hospital in Abi Adi requesting water, food, medicines and other supplies, but also with the apparent aim of using it as a military vantage point. The MSF team managed to maintain the agreement of no military presence in the hospital – an agreement reached with all parties in March 2021, when MSF started to work in the hospital – and MSF remained in sole control of the medical facility, but the negotiations were tense. On 21 June 2021, the day that ENDF soldiers started to withdraw from Abi Adi, the MSF team experienced threats and aggressive behaviour from ENDF soldiers while trying to move staff and patients in Abi Adi town.

By the evening of 22 June 2021, the ENDF had fully withdrawn from Abi Adi and the TF entered the town. On 23 and 24 June 2021, the town was calm and MSF teams reported no issues moving to and from the hospital or passing through TF checkpoints outside the town.

Throughout MSF's operations in Abi Adi, between the end of January and up until the incident, MSF's teams experienced several periods of similarly tense – although less acute – interactions with ENDF ground personnel. These incidents of harassment were reported to the ENDF command in Abi Adi town, as well as in Mekelle by the MSF coordination team there. Until May 2021, MSF was in contact with the security advisor of the Tigray Interim Administration, an ENDF general. When the state of emergency ended in May 2021, however, there was a change in command structure and the ENDF was no longer in charge of the command post in Mekelle. Instead, the main contact at Mekelle level was the head of the Security Task Force, who was not in the ENDF, and who was responsible for access and security at Mekelle level. From this time onwards, despite requests, MSF did not have a senior contact in the ENDF in Mekelle and relied on interactions at the local level where its teams were operating.

As in any insecure environment, MSF was constantly monitoring the contexts in which its teams were operating in Tigray, including in Abi Adi, and taking reactive decisions about if and when to suspend activities, as well as considering additional mitigation measures that might need to be adopted to allow lifesaving medical activities to continue.

### **MSF activities in Abi Adi in the days leading up to the killings**

From 18 June 2021, the MSF team stopped all outreach activities outside Abi Adi town due to the ongoing fighting. The team sheltered in the MSF base in Abi Adi town, making only essential movements to the hospital in town.

On 22 June 2021, the MSF team cautiously resumed medical activities outside Abi Adi town. A medical team travelled to Gororo (northwest of Abi Adi) to conduct a mobile clinic and to pick up wounded people. During this visit, the team received reports of wounded casualties in seven different villages surrounding Abi Adi, including in a village called Shoate Egum, south of Abi Adi.

On 23 June 2021, MSF teams were able to move again to several locations around Abi Adi, reaching as far south as Sele before deciding to halt activities when they observed planes overhead heading south and heard shelling. The team referred war-wounded civilians and at least 17 wounded combatants (including both wounded ENDF soldiers and TF fighters) from Sele, Limat, Rubakese and Guya to the MSF-supported Abi Adi hospital for treatment. In Sele they found evidence of heavy fighting from the previous day, observing burned houses and dead bodies on the ground. The team also received information of a market bombing in Togogo with injured people.

#### **4 THE KILLING OF MSF STAFF ON 24 JUNE 2021**

On 24 June 2021, the day of the incident, the MSF team had identified two priority areas beyond Sele for medical assessments, based on reports from the previous day of numerous casualties. These locations were Shoate Egum, a village south of Abi Adi on the route south from the Yech'illa/Agbe junction, and Togogo, a village on the route east from the same junction towards Hagere Selam.

After doing comprehensive security checks in town and obtaining assurances that it was safe to move, María and Yohannes travelled south (Tedros joined them later). They drove first to Rubakese, to gather more information and to assess the feasibility of reaching either Togogo or Shoate Egum, stopping at a TF checkpoint en route and at the TF barracks in Rubakese.

The team collected a number of wounded patients in Rubakese and organised an MSF ambulance to refer them to Abi Adi hospital. Tedros arrived at this point and joined María and Yohannes to continue their journey. Based on further security checks, including at the TF checkpoint at the edge of Abi Adi town and with a TF colonel in Rubakese barracks, María agreed with the MSF team in Abi Adi that she, Yohannes and Tedros would continue and head east from the Yech'illa/Agbe junction towards Togogo on the route to Hagere Selam, while another MSF team would move south towards Shoate Egum.

That afternoon, the MSF base in Abi Adi lost contact with María, Tedros and Yohannes. This was reported to the TPLF and, in the absence of any ENDF presence in Abi Adi, MSF's team in Mekelle also informed the head of security for the Interim Government. An MSF search team was sent from Abi Adi town to locate them. They assumed that the team had moved towards Togogo, as discussed, and took that road. They were not able to locate their colleagues and turned back due to the tense security situation in the area toward Togogo and due to the evening curfew in place in and around Abi Adi, which prohibited the movement of vehicles.

Later that evening, the GPS coordinates from the car's tracking device were retrieved and showed that the car was heading south from the Yech'illa/Agbe junction towards Shoate Egum, not towards Togogo and Hagere Selam as had been agreed with the team earlier that day. The information gathered in this review found that María and Yohannes had not received conclusive information that the road east towards Hagere Selam was clear and likely changed their route to move south to Shoate Egum, which was the other village on the movement plan and which they understood to be safely accessible.

On 25 June 2021, as soon as all security checks to move were completed, the MSF search team drove in the direction of the last GPS location of the car, travelling south towards Shoate Egum. They discovered the bodies of María, Tedros and Yohannes with multiple gunshot wounds, close to the MSF car in which they had been travelling, which was burned and riddled with bullet holes.

# Timeline

Based on extensive interviews with MSF staff and a review of all records of calls and security meetings that day, as well as the GPS coordinates of the MSF vehicle in which María, Tedros and Yohannes were travelling, MSF has been able to piece together the following timeline of events on 24 June 2021.

<b>24 JUNE 2021</b>		
<i>Local Time</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Additional Detail</i>
07:00	<b>María and Yohannes conduct usual morning security check with contacts in Abi Adi.</b>	
07:30	<b>Daily team meeting takes place at MSF base in Abi Adi in which two movements are agreed – one to Guya, west of Abi Adi, and one to assess medical needs to the south and east of Abi Adi.</b>	María and Yohannes lead the southern/eastern assessment and plan to go first to Rubakese and then to assess feasibility of reaching Togogo and/or Shoate Egum.
10:30	<b>María and Yohannes leave Abi Adi for Rubakese.</b>	María and Yohannes travel in one MSF ambulance with a driver (not Tedros), accompanied by a second MSF ambulance.
10:30 –11:37	<b>María and Yohannes stop at TF checkpoint at the turn-off to Rubakese. They speak with a TF colonel. They later meet with a TF general in Rubakese.</b>	The exact content of these discussions is not known, as only María and Yohannes are present. According to information that María shares later with other MSF team members, she received information that the road from the Yech'illa/Agbe junction to Shoate Egum was “freed” and that the road to Hagere Selam was possibly open and that it was accessible by two different routes.
11:37 –11:39	<b>María calls MSF base in Abi Adi.</b>	Routine movement update.
11:48	<b>María calls MSF base in Abi Adi.</b>	María requests an additional MSF vehicle to collect seven wounded people from Rubakese.
12:50	<b>María calls MSF base in Abi Adi.</b>	They confirm meeting point on Rubakese road. The other MSF team is en route.

13:15 – 13:30	<b>María and Yohannes meet the additional MSF vehicle. They stop at TF check-point at the turn-off to Rubakese and agree movement plan.</b>	<p>The second MSF team from Abi Adi arrives in a Land Cruiser, driven by Tedros. María agrees with the second MSF team that she, Yohannes and Tedros will take the Land Cruiser and head east towards Hagere Selam and Togogo and see how far they can get.</p> <p>They agree that the second MSF team will return to Abi Adi town with the seven patients in the two MSF ambulances, hand over the patients to the hospital, pick up additional medical staff and then try to reach Shoate Egum.</p> <p>María confirms that she has received information from the TF that the road south from the Yech'illa/Agbe junction to Shoate Egum is open and that the road to Hagere Selam is possibly open and that there are two potential routes.</p>
13:44	<b>The two MSF ambulances depart for Abi Adi. María stays to talk with the TF colonel at the Rubakese checkpoint.</b>	The content of María's discussion with the TF colonel is not known.
13:50	<b>The second MSF team and two ambulances arrive in Abi Adi.</b>	They take the seven injured patients to Abi Adi hospital.
13:59	<b>María calls MSF base in Abi Adi.</b>	She confirms that she, Tedros and Yohannes will proceed east towards Hagere Selam and Togogo, while the second MSF team will move south from Abi Adi towards Shoate Egum.
14:30	<b>The second MSF team leaves Abi Adi town for Shoate Egum.</b>	
14:33, 14:34, 14:35	<b>María attempts to call MSF base in Abi Adi three times.</b>	The calls do not connect. This is not unusual in areas with a poor signal.
14:37	<b>María calls MSF base in Abi Adi.</b>	María informs the base that there is a TF roadblock just past Sele (southeast of Abi Adi). She states that she has permission from a TF contact for all MSF vehicles to pass. <b>This is the last contact between María and the MSF base in Abi Adi.</b>
14:39	<b>María sends an SMS to the second MSF team which is heading to Shoate Egum.</b>	She informs them about the roadblock at Sele, telling them they can pass as MSF has a 'green light' from a TF colonel.

14:39	<i>GPS tracker records the car as heading south, rather than east to Hagere Selam as planned; the car is located 1.4 km from the Yech'illa/Agbe junction towards Shoate Egum, travelling at 19 km/h.</i>	
14:45	<b>The second MSF team stops at the TF checkpoint at the turn-off to Rubakese to confirm security of planned route.</b>	TF colonel reconfirms that the Shoate Egum road is "freed and cleared". TF colonel states he had asked María to wait an hour so he could provide additional information on the road to Hagere Selam and Togogo, but that she left before the hour had passed.
14:54	<i>GPS tracker records the car as heading south towards Shoate Egum, traveling at 13 km/h.</i>	
14:55, 14:56	<b>María attempts to call the second MSF team.</b>	The call does not connect.
	<b>The second MSF team passes the roadblock outside Sele.</b>	They stop to ask a passing group of TF fighters if they have seen an MSF car on the road ahead. The fighters confirm that they saw an MSF car pass about ten minutes earlier in the direction of the Yech'illa/Agbe junction.
15:00	<b>The second MSF team arrives at the Yechilla/Agbe junction and attempts to call María.</b>	There is no answer. The team assumes that María, Tedros and Yohannes are heading east towards Hagere Selam and Togogo as planned and proceed south towards Shoate Egum.
15:04, 15:08	<b>María attempts to call MSF base in Abi Adi twice.</b>	The calls do not connect. This is not unusual in areas with a poor signal.
15:09	<i>GPS tracker records the car as still heading south towards Shoate Egum.</i>	
15:16, 15:16, 15:18, 15:19, 15:19	<b>María attempts to call MSF base in Abi Adi base five times.</b>	Three calls connect but the operator cannot hear anything. This is not unusual in areas with a poor signal.

15:18	<b>The second MSF team heads south to-wards Shoate Egum and sees smoke in the distance.</b>	<p>The team stops but they do not hear any shelling or shooting. They continue their movement south.</p> <p>The road is deserted, but they see signs of recent fighting. Empty shells, soldiers' boots and clothing and empty food cans are strewn across the middle of the road, and they see recently extinguished fires. They observe one fresh set of tyre tracks on the road, easily distinguishable from older tracks. They see no soldiers and there are no TF checkpoints observed on the road from the Yech'illa/Agbe junction to Gerebgiba bridge.</p> <p>They meet a civilian on the road, who says he has observed movements of ENDF vehicles over the past few days, including on 23 June 2021.</p>
15:21	<b>The second MSF team sees more smoke, this time much closer.</b>	
15:24	<i>GPS tracker records the car as having stopped. At this point the tracker is still functional and the last GPS location is registered near Senawalwa, on the road between Sele and Yech'illa. The car is facing north, in the direction of Abi Adi (latitude 13.43625; longitude 39.003717). The second MSF team is 4.2 km north of where María, Tedros and Yohannes' car is later discovered.</i>	
15:44	<b>The second MSF team stops just before Gerebgiba bridge.</b>	As well as seeing smoke, they hear artillery fire. They decide to return to Abi Adi.
15:45	<b>The second MSF team messages María and turns back to return to Abi Adi.</b>	The team sends an SMS to María's satellite phone informing her of their location, of the fact that they heard artillery fire and saw smoke, and that they are returning to Abi Adi.
16:00	<b>MSF base in Abi Adi reports missing contact with María, Tedros and Yohannes.</b>	The base has not had radio contact with María for almost 90 minutes.
17:55	<b>MSF team in Abi Adi contacts UN and international NGOs to crosscheck security and access information.</b>	There are no reports of security incidents, except for reports of gunfire east of Hagere Selam earlier in the day.
18:00	<b>MSF search team departs Abi Adi hospital to gather information on whereabouts of María, Tedros and Yohannes and the situation on the ground.</b>	The team intends to move towards Togogo/Hagere Selam, which is the route they believe María, Tedros and Yohannes to have taken.

18:20	<b>MSF search team stops at TF checkpoint at the turn-off to Rubakese.</b>	A TF soldier informs them that he saw one MSF car leave to-wards Sele and later return from the same direction, while an-other MSF car departed in the same direction but did not return.
18:25	<b>The TF calls the MSF team in Abi Adi.</b>	The TF informs them that fighting took place in Menewe, east of Sele towards Hagere Selam, that day but that the fighting is now over.
18:30	<b>MSF search team stops at the checkpoint at the Yech'illa/Agbe junction.</b>	The checkpoint is unsupervised, but the team talks to a group of young men who confirm that they saw two different MSF vehi-cles moving towards Shoate Egum and that only one returned. The men also tell the team that there is an ENDF military post 5-10 minutes up the eastern road at Menewe, towards Hagere Selam.
	<b>MSF search team continues east towards Hagere Selam.</b>	
18:40	<b>MSF search team meets two ENDF soldiers on the road towards Hagere Salem.</b>	The soldiers climb out of a ditch and appear scared. They ask the MSF team to give them a lift to Hagere Salem, which the team declines.
18:49	<b>MSF search team turns back towards Abi Adi.</b>	
19:07	<b>MSF informs the head of security for the Interim Government in Mekelle about the loss of contact with MSF team.</b>	
20:00	<b>MSF search team speaks with TF colonel at the TF checkpoint on the turn-off to Rubakese.</b>	The colonel confirms that earlier that day María had asked about the road south to Shoate Egum and he had told her it was clear, but that he was unable at that point to confirm whether the route to Hagere Selam/Togogo was clear. After she left, he was able to confirm that the road to Hagere Selam/Togogo had been clear since midday.
20:46	<b>MSF office in Addis Ababa confirms the last known location of María, Tedros and Yohannes' car with the GPS car tracking company.</b>	MSF finds out that María, Tedros and Yohannes actually took the route south towards Shoate Egum.



21:40	<b>MSF contacts UN Department for Safety and Security and international NGOs.</b>	They report presence of both TF and ENDF along the route to Shoate Egum, but it is not clear who is in control.
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### 25 JUNE 21

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<i>Local Time</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Additional Detail</i>
7:00	<b>MSF team in Abi Adi conduct morning security check.</b>	<p>Contacts in town inform MSF that ENDF had tried to move east towards Hagere Selam but was pushed south towards Yech'illa, and that the presence of ENDF and TF along the route towards Shoate Egum was divided on 24 June 2021 as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yech'illa/Agbe junction to just north of Gerebgiba bridge under TF control</li> <li>• Gerebgiba bridge to Shoate Egum had ENDF presence</li> <li>• South from Shoate Egum (Hujum) to Yech'illa under TF control</li> </ul>
10:04	<b>MSF search team departs for TF checkpoint at turn-off to Rubakese.</b>	<p>TF colonel informs MSF team that fighting ended the previous night. He says that the road is now under TF control and NGOs can travel to Yech'illa, but that there might still be ENDF presence along the route. The team proceeds south.<sup>20</sup></p>
11:35	<b>MSF search team reaches Yech'illa/Agbe junction heading south.</b>	<p>The team sees recently used artillery, empty wooden crates, burnt-out trucks, recent traces of blood and the remains of food.</p>
11:53	<b>MSF search team stops at Gerebgiba bridge.</b>	<p>The team speaks to civilians who say the road is clear all the way south, past the Senawalwa junction.</p>

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<sup>20</sup> This contradicts information provided to the MSF team on 24 June 2021. After gathering and triangulating multiple sources, this review was able to establish that ENDF personnel were still present in the area for some days and that the large ENDF convoy, which travelled south towards Yech'illa, was attacked by TF forces on or around 26 June 2021.

11:53- 12:45	<b>MSF search team continues south and discovers María, Yohannes and Tedros' car.</b>	<p>The MSF team first finds a looted ambulance; 1–2 km further south they see María, Tedros and Yohannes' car ahead at the side of the road and stop.</p> <p>The MSF team sees houses at the side of the road and speaks to three civilians who say they returned to their houses that morning. They say that the ENDF had occupied their houses, leaving the evening of the previous day (24 June 2021) or early on the morning of the same day (25 June 2021). They watched the soldiers from the hillside where they were hiding.</p> <p>The MSF team sees a group of young unarmed men coming down the hill to the road. One of the group states that there are three bodies not far from the MSF car, including one body of a foreigner.</p> <p>The team sees airplanes approaching and leaves the vehicles to seek cover. They wait for the planes to pass.</p>
12.56	<b>MSF search team calls the MSF coordination team in Mekelle.</b>	<p>They agree that the team will proceed on foot towards the bodies. The two drivers stay close to the cars.</p>
13:13	<b>MSF search team discovers the bodies of Tedros, María and Yohannes.</b>	<p>The team proceeds on foot and passes the MSF car. One hundred metres ahead they see the body of Tedros lying on the main road.</p> <p>They continue to walk south, off the road, and find the bodies of Yohannes and María. The team hears detonations and sees planes overhead.</p> <p>They walk back towards the car and see nine bodies, apparently civilians. These bodies were not visible from the road.</p> <p>The team drives back to the bodies of Yohannes and María to place them in the search team's vehicle. Then they recover the body of Tedros. They return to Abi Adi.</p>

## 5 ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS

Based on the timeline above, photographs, commercially available and open-source satellite imagery, eyewitness accounts and media reports, MSF’s internal review was able to detail the significant events leading up to the killing of our colleagues.

### Route taken by María, Tedros and Yohannes

At various points on their journey, the team received information about the security of the road. We know that on the morning of 24 June 2021, María and Yohannes spoke to a TF colonel at the Rubakese checkpoint, controlled by the TF, just outside Abi Adi town and that they had another meeting with a TF general in Rubakese. The exact content of these discussions is not known, as only María and Yohannes attended the meetings. However, based on the updates that María later shared with other MSF staff and on interviews carried out after the incident, María and Yohannes were told that MSF had approvals to pass a TF roadblock at Sele (which did not have fighters present), that the road south from Agbe to Shoate Egum was “freed”, and that the road east to Togogo and Hagere Selam was possibly open, with two potential routes.

Initially, María, Tedros and Yohannes had intended to move east from the Yech’illa/Agbe junction towards Togogo, with another MSF team heading south towards Shoate Egum. At 13:59, María again confirmed this plan with the MSF base in Abi Adi. However, information later retrieved from the car’s tracking device indicates that at 14:39 their car was heading south from the Yech’illa/Agbe junction towards Shoate Egum.



We do not know exactly when María, Tedros and Yohannes changed their route or why. María was an emergency coordinator with considerable experience working in conflict-affected settings. It is likely that, without receiving conclusive information that the eastern route toward Hagere Salem was clear, María did not want to proceed and decided to take the southern route, which they understood to be clear. Later that day, MSF received several accounts of fighting in the direction of Togogo, and the MSF search team travelling that evening saw stranded ENDF soldiers on the road. The possibility that the car was hijacked appears extremely unlikely, given that María called the MSF base at 14:37, two minutes before the GPS showed that the car changed direction, and presumably just after leaving the Sele roadblock. In that call, she was reportedly relaxed and did not raise any concerns.

Based on the GPS information obtained from the car's tracking device following the incident, the second MSF team moving along the same road to Shoate Egum on 24 June 2021 was an estimated 10 to 15 minutes behind María, Tedros and Yohannes. At 15:18 the second MSF team saw smoke in the distance. The road was empty and the team did not see any soldiers or military activity on the route, but they saw signs of previous fighting, with empty artillery shells and soldiers' boots and clothing strewn across the middle of the road. The second team met a civilian on the road who told them that he had observed movements of ENDF vehicles in the past few days, including on 23 June 2021. At 15:44, the second MSF team stopped just before Gerebgiba bridge. They saw smoke again, now much closer, and heard a sound that could have been artillery fire. They informed the MSF base that they would return to Abi Adi.

### **The scene of the incident**

On the morning of 25 June 2021, the MSF team in Abi Adi dispatched another search team. The bodies of María, Tedros and Yohannes were found by this team at 13:13. They were found with multiple gunshot wounds, in two different locations within walking distance of the MSF car in which they had been travelling; the car was found burned and riddled with bullet holes.

Their car was found on the route towards Shoate Egum, near Senawalwa, south of the Yech'illa/Agbe junction between Sele and Yech'illa. This was the last known GPS signal communicated via the vehicle tracking device and provided by the tracking company (latitude 13.43625; longitude 39.003717). The location is about 50 minutes' drive from Abi Adi town.

The vehicle was clearly visible from the road, pointing slightly off to the right with its wheels facing straight. No skid marks were visible. The car was facing northwards, towards Abi Adi. According to the tracked GPS coordinates and the mileage between them, the vehicle must have turned around to return northwards in almost exactly the spot where it was eventually found.

The MSF flag at the rear of the vehicle was half burned but still visible and recognisable. The MSF flag at the front of the car had been removed. The license plate was still legible. At the time the vehicle was found, the car was still hot, with the right rear tyre smoking slightly.

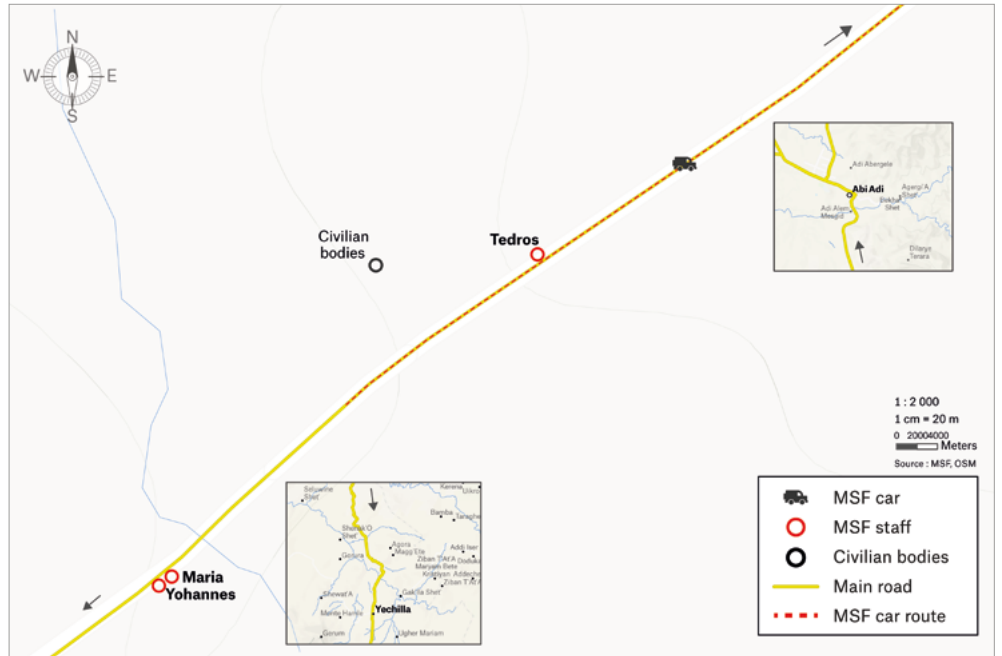
**Photo:** The car in which Maria, Tedros and Yohannes were travelling, in a photograph taken by the MSF search team on 25 June 2021

© MSF



**Image:** Scene of the incident, showing the position and direction of the MSF car and the locations where the bodies of the three MSF staff and other civilians were found

© MSF



At least five bullet holes towards the back of the car were later identified from photographs. The photos also show additional bullet holes (understood to be exit holes) at the front of the car above the windshield. The spread of bullets seen on the back of the car indicate that the shooter(s) was (were) likely at some distance from the rear of the vehicle (50 to 100 metres), probably shooting an AK-47 type weapon of low calibre such as 7.62 mm. It is possible that more shots were fired into the windows of the vehicle, causing no visible entry or exit holes but causing the glass to shatter.

The fire in the vehicle would have caused any remaining glass to collapse entirely from the window frames. The exit holes above the windshield were likely ricocheted bullets, judging by the size of the holes. The lack of grouping

of entry or exit bullets indicate that the shots fired toward the vehicle were not fired in a controlled way but were intended to indiscriminately strike the car. The car had suffered severe fire damage. There was no evidence of projectile impact to the vehicle or fragmentation damage to the car frame, tyres or body work. Both the main and reserve fuel tanks appeared to be intact.

The types of wounds inflicted on the bodies and the bullet holes in the car indicate that, while the initial attack on the car could have been a case of mistaken identity, the subsequent killings were intentional and carried out at close range. María, Tedros and Yohannes were all facing their attackers when shot and were found wearing their white vests, clearly marked with the MSF logo on the front and back, meaning they were clearly identifiable and recognisable as humanitarian workers and civilians at the time of their deaths.

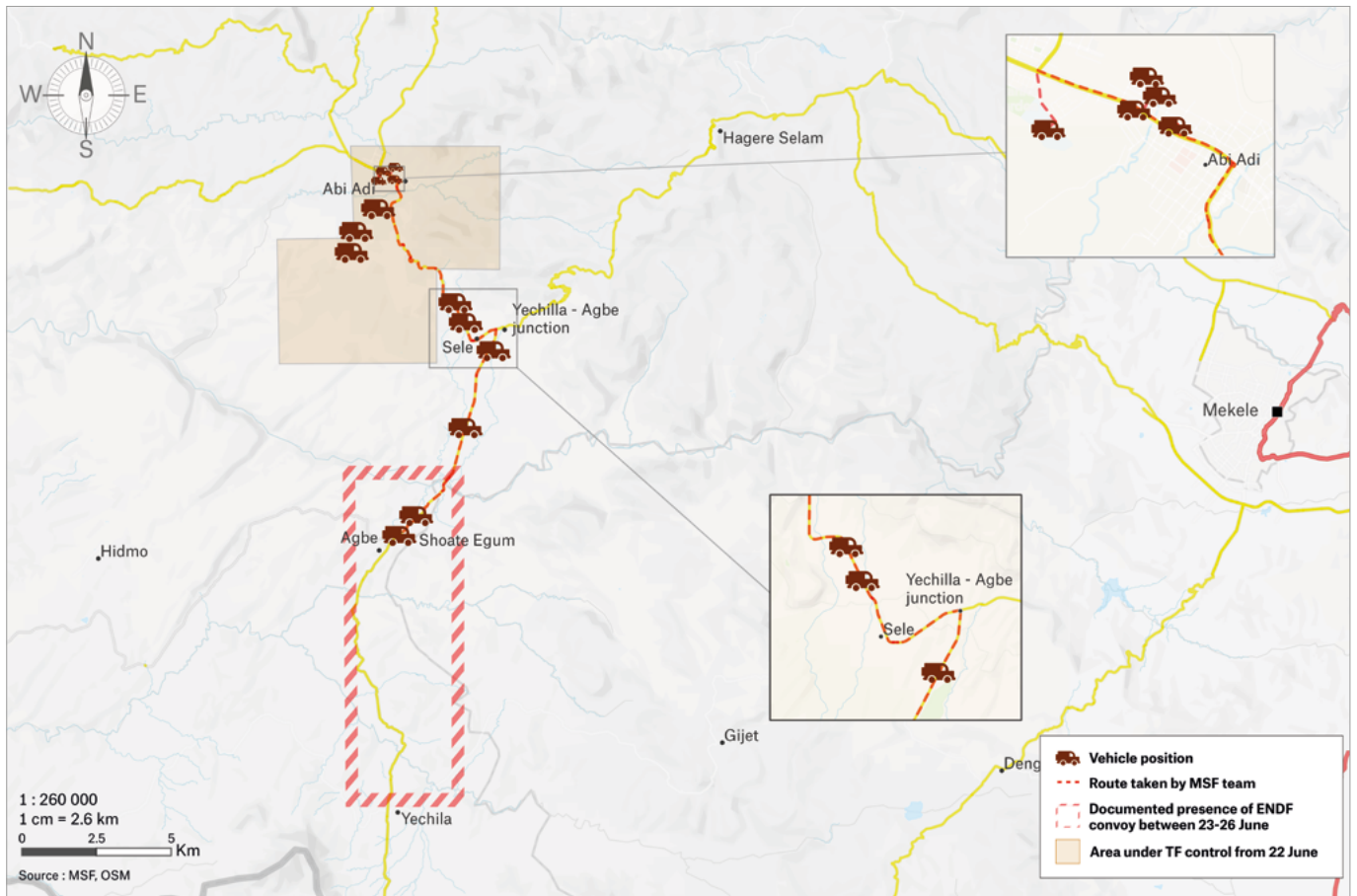
The MSF search team also found nine additional bodies, all in civilian clothes, lying 50 to 60 metres to the northwest of the road where María, Tedros and Yohannes' bodies were found. These bodies were not visible from the road and were only seen when the search team walked off-road. On 22 June 2021, two days before María, Tedros and Yohannes were killed, the MSF team in Abi Adi received reports of a group of displaced people who had been captured and detained by the ENDF at the Teaching College in Abi Adi, which the ENDF was using as a base when it had control of the town. MSF was informed that some of the captured people had been murdered before the ENDF left, while others had been abducted and taken away with the departing convoy. The same day, MSF team went to the Teaching College to look for sick or wounded people and found 21 dead bodies inside with no survivors. The authorities later identified the nine bodies found close to María, Tedros and Yohannes as belonging to this group of people. The presence of these additional civilian casualties in the immediate area where María, Tedros and Yohannes were killed indicates that the attack took place at a time when there was ongoing brutal violence, including against civilians.

### **Presence of TF and large ENDF convoy along the route**

The incident took place at a time when military presence in the area was shifting and ENDF troops were withdrawing. The specific location where the incident took place was in a zone of active battle in the days prior to the incident, and the killings occurred on the route taken by the large convoy of retreating ENDF troops.

According to the information gathered in this review, María, Tedros and Yohannes believed that the road on which they were later killed was safe to travel on and clear of ENDF troops as far as Shoate Egum. The second MSF team travelling along the same route shortly after them was also told by the TF that this route was 'freed'. This contradicts information later provided to MSF by the TF confirming that the whole area was not under their control until 25 June 2021.

Information received later indicated that on 24 June 2021, the military presence along the road where María, Tedros and Yohannes were killed was divided between the ENDF and the TF. TF control of Abi Adi town and TF presence on the northern section of the route was confirmed first-hand by MSF teams. The second MSF car, and later the MSF search team, passed TF-



**Image:** Military/armed group presence 22–26 June 2021  
© MSF

operated checkpoints at Rubakese and the Yech’illa/Agbe junction, but saw no more TF forces on the road further south. The second MSF team travelling along the same road towards Shoate Egum not far behind María, Tedros and Yohannes on 24 June 2021 did not see any soldiers on the road but did observe signs of recent fighting. No checkpoints were observed between the Yech’illa/Agbe junction and Gerebgiba bridge, where the second MSF team turned back towards Abi Adi.

South of Gerebgiba bridge, on the section of road where the MSF car was found, the large ENDF convoy that MSF had witnessed leaving Abi Adi on 21–22 June 2021 was moving slowly south along the road itself, surrounded by TF forces. TF personnel were also likely present in the wider area, but MSF could find no evidence that they were present on the road taken by María, Tedros and Yohannes south of the Yech’illa/Agbe junction, including in the location where the MSF team was killed.

The MSF team in Abi Adi saw a large contingent of ENDF personnel move out of town on 21 and 22 June 2021. They travelled in a large, slow-moving convoy, comprising hundreds of vehicles, including commandeered civilian buses and cars, as well as weaponry. Hundreds of ENDF soldiers walking alongside the convoy were seen by MSF as the convoy left Abi Adi. The MSF team heard reports of stranded ENDF soldiers left behind on the outskirts of Abi Adi; these reports came from wounded ENDF soldiers who were receiving treatment at the hospital in the days prior to the incident. From 22 June 2021 onwards, the MSF Abi Adi team itself identified pockets of ENDF troops to

the south of Abi Adi from the hospital's elevated hillside location. The MSF team that went out to search for María, Tedros and Yohannes on the night of 24 June 2021 also encountered two retreating ENDF soldiers on the road east towards Hagere Selam.

Between 22 and 26 June 2021, the ENDF convoy moved slowly south from Abi Adi to just north of Yech'illa, stopping and starting along the route. On the afternoon of 24 June 2021, MSF received information from a civilian in the area around Gerebgiba bridge, just north of the incident, that the convoy had passed through that area on the previous day, 23 June 2021. Civilian sources with whom MSF spoke at the scene of the incident reported that ENDF soldiers had occupied houses just next to where MSF colleagues had been found and had only moved south towards Yech'illa late on 24 June 2021 or early on the morning of 25 June 2021. These civilians directly witnessed ENDF soldiers stopping along the road and entering houses. Various accounts received indicate that these soldiers were part of a unit travelling at the very end of the convoy and that the main body of the convoy was slightly ahead and moving slowly south towards Yech'illa.

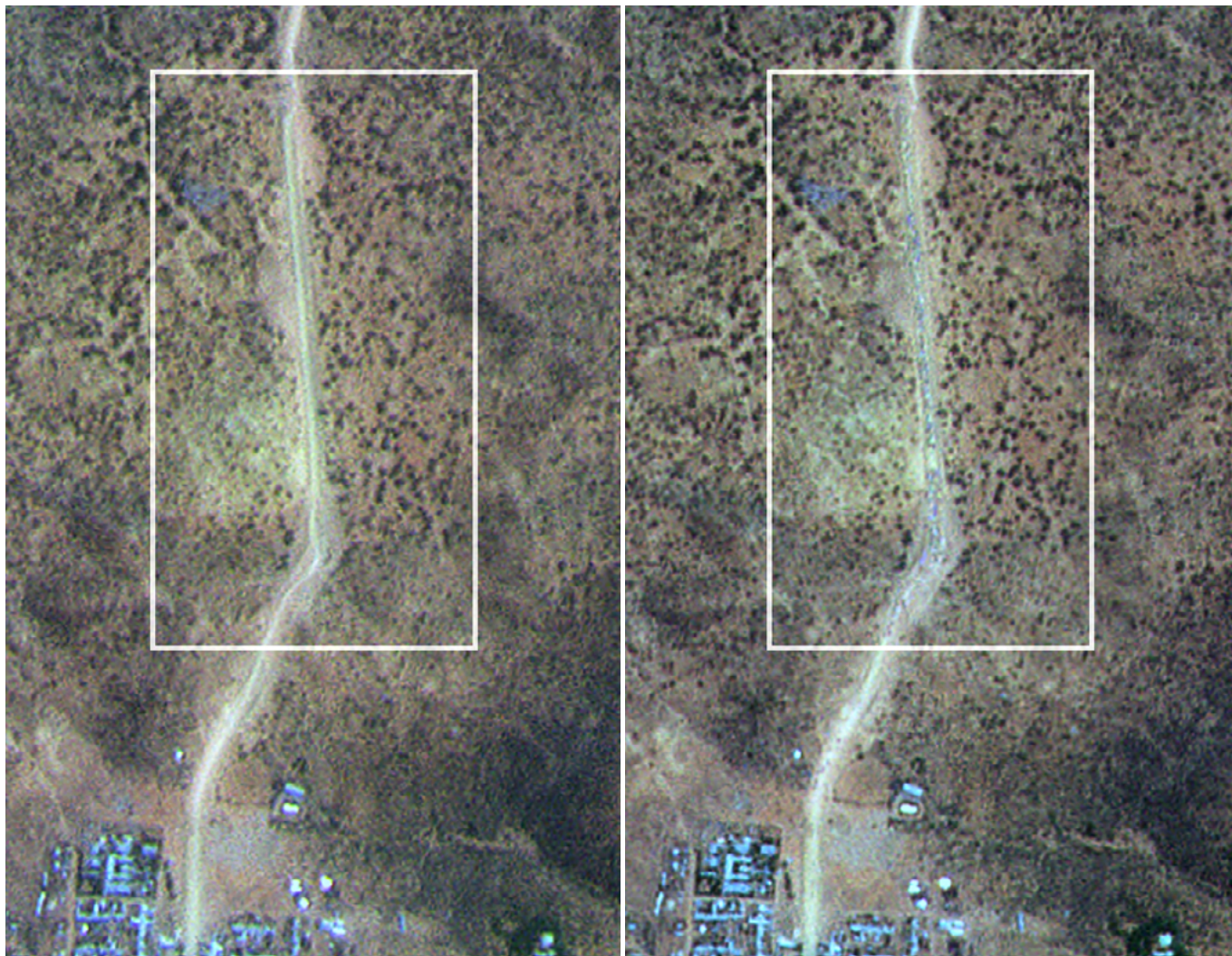
Media reports, photos and open-source video footage show that a large ENDF convoy was ambushed by the TF just north of Yech'illa on or around 26 June 2021, two days after the incident and four days after the convoy left Abi Adi. The ambush took place around 19 km south of where the incident happened.<sup>21</sup> Video footage circulated on social media following the attack shows a large number of abandoned and burned vehicles, consistent with reports of the size and scale of the convoy that left Abi Adi town on 22 June 2021. This footage has been geolocated to a point 900 metres north of the entrance to Yech'illa town.<sup>22</sup> There are no other accessible roads in this area linking Abi Adi to Yech'illa, confirming that the convoy was present further north on this route and had passed along the road where the MSF team was killed.

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21 Reuters, 'Grim Aftermath of Ethiopian battle offers rare clues of brutal war', 27 July 2021 [updated on 24 August 2021], available at <https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/grim-aftermath-of-ethiopian-battle-offers-rare-clues-of-brutal-war>. Additional photographs of the ambushed convoy from the Reuters report are available on Twitter, posted on 27 July 2021, <https://twitter.com/giuliaparavicin/status/1420024788987305990?lang=en>. See also Tigray Media House, 20 July 2021, 'Aftermath of a TF ambush on an ENDF convoy ከፍ ትግርኛ News | July 2021| previously available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=BbWjB9tZx-o>. Twitter feed, 27 July 2021, "video showing the Aftermath of Ethiopian Army convoy ambushed by TF is geolocated at southern Tigray ,at Yechilay @ 13.30067,38.99713" <https://twitter.com/quen10tarantino/status/1420069100873732096>

22 See Twitter feed, 27 July 2021, "video showing the Aftermath of Ethiopian Army convoy ambushed by TF is geolocated at southern Tigray ,at Yechilay @ 13.30067,38.99713" <https://twitter.com/quen10tarantino/status/1420069100873732096>.





**Image:** On the right, a satellite image taken on 26 June 2021 of a stretch of road 19 km south of where the MSF team was found (latitude 13.30067; longitude 38.99713), 900 metres north of Yech'illa town, shows a series of vehicles in tight linear formation on the main road, spanning a distance of approximately 800 metres. On the left, an image from 22 June 2021 of the same stretch of road shows the road was clear of vehicles on that day. (Source: Planet labs Inc)

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### Satellite imagery corroborating the location of the ENDF convoy

MSF also consulted open-source and commercially available satellite imagery to help piece together and corroborate the information received from other sources.<sup>23</sup> The distance between Abi Adi and Yech'illa is 48 km, and the MSF car was found just over halfway between these two towns (20 km north of Yech'illa). Satellite images taken on 26 June 2021 of a stretch of the road 19 km south of where the MSF team was found (latitude 13.30067; longitude 38.99713), 900 metres north of the entrance to Yech'illa town, clearly show a series of vehicles in tight linear formation on the main road, spanning a distance of approximately 800 metres.<sup>24</sup> This is consistent with

<sup>23</sup> MSF consulted open-source satellite imagery available in the public domain from Google Earth, Airbus, and Sentinel (European Space Agency), as well as images obtained from a commercial third-party provider, Apollo Mapping. This is not routine practice for MSF and the images were all obtained after the attack on 24 June 2021 for the sole purpose of this review.

<sup>24</sup> MSF obtained the image from 26 June 2021 from a commercial third-party provider, Apollo Mapping (Source: Planet labs Inc). Includes material © (2021) Planet Labs Inc. All rights reserved.

the description of the ENDF convoy that left Abi Adi between 21 and 22 June 2021, which was described by witnesses, including the MSF team in Abi Adi. Witness reports received by MSF placed the ENDF convoy on 23 June 2021 (one day before the killings) just north of where the MSF team was attacked and, on 24 June 2021, placed ENDF soldiers at the specific location of the killings. These witnesses indicated that the ENDF only moved south towards Yech'illa on the evening of 24 June 2021 or early on the morning on 25 June 2021. The photographs and video from open-source media reports of the attack on the ENDF convoy on 26 June 2021 were geolocated to the same stretch of road captured in the satellite image from the same date, which shows the appearance of a long line of vehicles that day.<sup>25</sup> Images from 23 February 2022, again of this same stretch of road, show what appears to be a collection of vehicles that have been regrouped and moved just off the main road.<sup>26</sup> This again corroborates the media reports of an attack on an ENDF convoy and is consistent with the photographs and reports of burned vehicles left at the side of the road.<sup>27</sup>

Based on all the information gathered from various sources, including satellite imagery, witness accounts and public media reports, the presence of a large number of ENDF troops in the area of the attack on the MSF team is well established and clearly supported by a large body of corroborating evidence.

MSF also received some concerning witness reports that directly implicated ENDF forces in the incident. Several eyewitnesses – both civilian and military – separately approached MSF to provide accounts. These included civilian witnesses who had been part of the withdrawing ENDF convoy in various capacities.<sup>28</sup> None of the witnesses who approached MSF to present their accounts was in a situation of detention and none was under any pressure to provide a statement. The witnesses separately confirmed to MSF that the ENDF convoy had indeed left Abi Adi on 21 and 22 June 2021 with hundreds of vehicles and ENDF soldiers. Soon after the slow-moving ENDF convoy passed the village of Shoate Egum, several days into the trip, the convoy came to a stop. One witness reported overhearing a conversation on a military radio between an ENDF commander standing near one of the vehicles in the main convoy, and a soldier from another ENDF unit – likely to be a spotter team of soldiers stationed at the very end of the convoy. The witness overheard the soldier inform the ENDF commander that a white

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25 See twitter feed, 27 July 2021, “video showing the Aftermath of Ethiopian Army convoy ambushed by TF is geolocated at southern Tigray ,at Yechilay @ 13.30067,38.99713” <https://twitter.com/quen10tarantino/status/1420069100873732096>.

26 Google Earth - Image© 2022 CNES / Airbus.

27 Additional photographs of the ambushed convoy from the Reuters report are available on Twitter, posted on 27 July 2021, <https://twitter.com/giuliaparavicin/status/1420024788987305990?lang=en>. See also twitter feed, 27 July 2021, “video showing the Aftermath of Ethiopian Army convoy ambushed by TF is geolocated at southern Tigray ,at Yechilay @ 13.30067,38.99713” <https://twitter.com/quen10tarantino/status/1420069100873732096>.

28 To protect the identity and security of the witnesses, this review does not disclose the details of the circumstances in which these individuals were travelling with the ENDF convoy that day. MSF can confirm, however, that all of the witnesses interviewed for this review approached MSF voluntarily and were under no pressure to speak, and that none of the witnesses was detained by the TF or any other authority at the time of providing their account.

car was approaching. The ENDF commander gave an order to the soldier to shoot. The next incoming message on the radio from the soldier informed the ENDF commander that the unit had tried to shoot but the car had turned back towards Abi Adi and had stopped, at which point the ENDF commander reportedly gave the order to “go and catch them” and “remove them”.<sup>29</sup>

**Image:** Screenshots from Google Earth satellite imagery taken on 23 February 2022 show a collection of vehicles that have been regrouped and moved just off the main road 900 metres north of the entrance to Yech'illa town

© GOOGLE EARTH - IMAGE 2022  
CNES/AIRBUS



<sup>29</sup> These accounts are extremely similar to the account provided in the New York Times investigation into the killings, published on 17 March 2022, but come from a different source. In the New York Times report, an ENDF soldier captured in Mekelle reports witnessing a radio exchange in which an ENDF commander gave an order to shoot at a white car and then to “finish them off”. MSF received these eyewitness accounts some months before the New York Times started its investigation and they were not part of the *New York Times* report.

## **Impact of the killings on MSF activities**

Immediately following the killings of the MSF staff, the remaining MSF team and other humanitarian agencies based in Abi Adi evacuated their staff and suspended operations from 26 June 2021, severely reducing the local population's access to healthcare and lifesaving assistance.

In the days following the incident, MSF withdrew its teams and suspended operations in the towns of Abi Adi, Adigrat and Axum, in central and eastern Tigray region. MSF also suspended its emergency intervention in Metekel zone, Benishangul-Gumuz region, and put its emergency response team on standby. In November 2021, MSF Spain further suspended activities in other parts of the country, including a project in Addis Ababa and a project in Guji in Oromia region, due to increased security risks and the lack of progress on our request for clarification of the circumstances surrounding the killing of María, Tedros and Yohannes. In July 2022, MSF was verbally informed by the MFA of some preliminary conclusions, although the FDRE had not yet closed its investigation into the killings. MSF requested more information and for the findings to be officially communicated. When no response was received to MSF's request to convene an official meeting to discuss the case at the appropriate level, MSF Spain took the painful decision to permanently close its operations in Ethiopia in August 2022.

## **MSF's search for answers**

For the past four years, MSF has relentlessly tried to understand the full circumstances in which María, Tedros and Yohannes lost their lives and to obtain an acknowledgment of responsibility.

Based on MSF's prior experience managing critical incidents in contexts involving both state armed forces and armed opposition forces, MSF immediately requested that both parties to the conflict conduct internal investigations to determine their involvement, if any, in the killings. Informed by the preliminary results of its internal review, MSF specifically requested that the parties assess if any potential involvement stemmed from unlawful practices, inadequate rules of engagement, or a breakdown in the chain of command.

Under international law, the host government holds primary responsibility for ensuring the security and protection of humanitarian personnel. Since 2021, MSF has consistently urged the FDRE to carry out a credible, impartial and thorough investigation into the killings of our colleagues. To this end, MSF engaged in several high-level meetings, submitted dozens of formal meeting requests, and shared the contents of its internal review with the MoJ on 23 October 2023. In addition to seeking an official account, MSF called on the relevant authorities to adopt concrete measures to strengthen the safety and security of humanitarian workers operating in Ethiopia. These include establishing effective humanitarian notification mechanisms and reinforcing all parties' obligations under international law to respect and protect humanitarian workers through the adoption of improved safety protocols. MSF also called on FDRE officials to put an end to the anti-humanitarian rhetoric that further endangers aid workers.

Almost seven weeks after María, Tedros and Yohannes were killed, MSF met with the minister of peace on 11 August 2021; this was MSF's first meeting with a senior representative of the FDRE. The following month, on 2 September 2021, MSF met with the then-attorney general (later appointed FDRE minister of justice), who assured MSF that a civilian-led investigation under the auspices of the Attorney General's Office would be completed.

On 11 November 2021, a high-level MSF delegation travelled to Addis Ababa to meet with the state minister for foreign affairs and representatives from the MoJ to present the preliminary findings of MSF's internal review. MSF's review clearly indicated the presence of the ENDF on the road at the time of the incident and MSF requested clarification regarding the ENDF's potential involvement in the incident. The FDRE informed MSF that an investigation was ongoing and expressed its appreciation for the information shared, noting that it would support its own investigation led by the MoJ.

Between late December 2021 and early February 2022, MSF had multiple meetings with representatives from the Ministries of Justice and Defence to discuss the case. In all these meetings, MSF was repeatedly assured that an investigation was taking place and that findings would be shared. In one of these meetings, the FDRE accepted that the findings of MSF's review "proved" that the ENDF was present.

On 17 March 2022, the *New York Times* published its investigation into the killings. The story placed responsibility for the killings on the ENDF, including the direct involvement of an ENDF commander from the 31st division.<sup>30</sup> Immediately following the release of the *New York Times* article, MSF requested urgent bilateral meetings with the FDRE to discuss the allegations and to call for an update on the FDRE's investigation.

A critical turning point in MSF's engagement with the FDRE came on 11 July 2022, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) presented MSF with several preliminary findings from the official FDRE investigation. Key elements included the claim that the ENDF was not present in the area of the incident, as it had allegedly already withdrawn by 24 June 2021, as well as the FDRE's presumption that the TPLF was responsible for the killings. The FDRE's finding that the ENDF was not present in the area of the incident is not only inconsistent with the information gathered in MSF's internal review, but it also contradicts information exchanged on several occasions over the previous year between MSF and representatives of the FDRE. MSF was told that these findings could not be provided in writing, as the case remained open, but should nonetheless be shared with the bereaved families as the official account. In the absence of a more detailed briefing, MSF considered that the conclusions presented during the 11 July 2022 meeting were not supported by evidence, raising serious concerns about the credibility of the FDRE's investigation. When MSF requested a further meeting to discuss the case, the MFA stated that these were the only findings it could share and that no further meetings would be held. A month later, on 2 August 2022,

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30 *New York Times*, 17 March, available here: [Who Killed Three Aid Workers for Doctors Without Borders in Ethiopia? - The New York Times](#)

MSF Spain formally notified the MFA of its decision to close its operations in Ethiopia due to the lack of accountability for the killing of its three staff members.

Following the second anniversary of the killings, in July 2023 MSF again received indications that an investigation was underway. At the request of a MoJ representative responsible for the case, on 23 October 2023 MSF provided both written and electronic copies of its internal review, along with supporting materials, including vehicle GPS data, satellite phone call logs, open-source and commercial satellite imagery showing ENDF presence on the road, photographs of the scene, and the victims' death certificates.

In December 2023, MSF received indications that a joint investigation was being conducted by federal investigative authorities and members of the Tigray Interim Administration, under the leadership of the MoJ. MSF sent a delegation to Addis Ababa to learn more about the status of the investigation and to extend its full cooperation. However, following a meeting with the MoJ on 22 December 2023, MSF's offer to support the investigation was not followed up, and MSF's subsequent formal requests for a further discussion on the progress of the investigation remained unanswered. All indications suggest that this investigation has not progressed.

On 26 October 2024, a local Ethiopian media outlet reported that the state minister of justice had warned investigators to cease their work, shortly after they returned to Addis Ababa after completing their investigation in Tigray.<sup>31</sup> After this media report surfaced, MSF urgently contacted the MoJ to request a meeting and seek clarification on the status of the investigation, but no response was received. In December 2024, MSF sent formal letters to the newly appointed ministers of justice and foreign affairs, pressing for the investigation's completion and reiterating MSF's request for a meeting. Again, no response was received.

As of June 2025, despite several formal requests, neither MSF nor the victims' families have received any concrete updates on the status or progress of the FDRE investigation, as all engagement attempts have gone unanswered. MSF therefore urges the authorities either to share the findings of this investigation or to ensure its prompt completion.

Engagement with the TPLF was limited by the constraints in travelling to Tigray, but senior MSF representatives had multiple telephone exchanges with TPLF leadership, as well as two meetings in Mekelle. In these exchanges, MSF asked for clarifications about the presence of TF troops at the time of the incident and for more details on the information passed to María and Yohannes by TF forces at the Rubakese checkpoint on 24 June 2021, including why they were told the road to Shoate Egum was "freed" if TF forces knew that there were withdrawing ENDF troops trapped in the area. In response to MSF's request that the TPLF conduct its own investigation into the killings, the TPLF said it would facilitate an MSF or third-party investigation into the case, indicating that it could not carry this out itself

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31 Meseret Media (26 October 2024) <[https://x.com/MeseretMedia/status/1850261752879128755?t=e2Lh9N\\_tnSbaPJ1SegKlfw&s=19](https://x.com/MeseretMedia/status/1850261752879128755?t=e2Lh9N_tnSbaPJ1SegKlfw&s=19)>

as the results would be perceived as biased. On 24 March 2022, the TPLF also publicly called for an independent investigation to be carried out by an independent international body, not led by either the FDRE or the TPLF. Until now, despite multiple requests from MSF, the TPLF has not provided an adequate response to MSF's questions. These outstanding responses are still required, as they remain relevant to the overall understanding of the incident.

Options for independent investigations into the case have been limited. In 2021, a joint investigation into alleged violations of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law committed by all parties to the conflict in Tigray was carried out by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). While the killing of the MSF staff occurred within the time period covered by the joint investigation, it was not investigated as part of the initial report.

In December 2021, the UN Human Rights Council mandated an international investigation into war crimes and human rights abuses in Ethiopia and, in July 2022, the FDRE granted the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) access to the country. On 19 September 2022, the ICHREE released its initial findings. The report noted that 23 humanitarian workers had been killed in Ethiopia since the beginning of the conflict in the north of the country, including three MSF staff, and that the FDRE had so far not adequately investigated any of these killings.<sup>32</sup> In 2023 the mandate of ICHREE was not renewed, allegedly under significant pressure from the FDRE.<sup>33</sup> The FDRE stated its commitment to investigate alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian law, as outlined in the Pretoria Agreement which brought about a cessation of hostilities. However, as of June 2025, no such mechanism is operational.

MSF also agreed to cooperate with the Spanish judicial authorities, which included sharing a copy of its internal review as supporting documentation for the Spanish investigation. In June 2021, the Office of the Prosecutor of the Spanish High Court (*Audiencia Nacional*) opened investigation proceedings (*diligencias de investigación*). Spain recognises universal jurisdiction in specific, limited cases – including for crimes committed against persons protected under international humanitarian law (IHL) in armed conflict, such as medical staff and humanitarian workers providing assistance.<sup>34</sup>

In September 2021, MSF made itself available to the Spanish Prosecutor's Office to provide relevant information available at that time which could assist in establishing the facts and circumstances of the killings and lead to the identification of the perpetrators. In December 2021, MSF was informed that the Prosecutor's Office had concluded the investigation proceedings and had

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32 Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (A/HRC/51/46) (19 September 2022). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ichre-ethiopa/index>.

33 Threats to Terminate the Mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia" (28 February 2023) Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/28/threats-terminate-mandate-international-commission-human-rights-experts-ethiopia>

34 Law 1/2014, amending Law 6/1985, of 1 July, on the Judicial Power concerning universal justice

filed a complaint (*querrela*) with the relevant Central Criminal Investigation Court (*Juzgado Central de Instrucción*) of the High Court. This action means that the prosecutor had ascertained the commission of the crime and found enough elements to exercise the criminal action in accordance with the requirements of the law. To this date the investigation remains open.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The information gathered in the course of this internal review allowed MSF to piece together crucial elements of what happened on 24 June 2021. This includes details about the route taken by the MSF team, the precise chronology of events that day, including the time, location and factual circumstances of the killings, as well as the broader context in which the incident occurred.

The review clearly established that the attack on María, Tedros and Yohannes was an intentional and targeted killing. They were clearly identifiable as humanitarian workers and were shot at close range, while facing their attackers.

**Photo:** Olive tree in the memory of María, Tedros and Yohannes at the headquarters of MSF Spain in Barcelona

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Furthermore, the review found a large body of corroborating evidence that placed a convoy of retreating ENDF troops on the road where the killings took place on the day of the incident. Beyond the confirmed presence of the ENDF in the area, what remains to be clarified is the level and nature of their involvement in the attack. MSF received some concerning witness reports that directly implicated ENDF soldiers in the incident.

The review also documented a concerning trend of anti-humanitarian rhetoric at the time of the incident. In the weeks leading up to the killings, not only was the conflict intensifying, but the attitudes of ENDF and Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) personnel were becoming increasingly hostile towards humanitarian workers operating in Tigray region, including in Abi Adi. This came at a time when, at the national level, the FDRE's public rhetoric towards humanitarian organisations was also becoming increasingly aggressive. MSF believes this pattern of anti-humanitarian rhetoric contributed to a climate of mistrust towards the few international humanitarian organisations working in Tigray.

Over the past four years, MSF has relentlessly attempted to engage with both the FDRE and TPLF to understand what happened to our colleagues and to ask the FDRE to fulfil its obligations to pursue a credible and thorough investigation into the killings. This includes sharing the details of our own internal review. MSF's review clearly demonstrates that it was – and remains – feasible to gather facts about the incident and to understand the circumstances in which our colleagues were killed. MSF believes it would have been achievable for the FDRE to complete a credible investigation had there been sufficient political will.

Despite repeated assurances from the Ministry of Justice that the FDRE was conducting an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the killing of our colleagues, to date, neither MSF nor the victims' families have received any official communication or credible answers from the Ethiopian authorities about what happened that day. As a result, MSF can only conclude that the FDRE has failed to fulfil its moral and legal obligations to conclude an investigation into the attack. The lack of action by the FDRE has compelled MSF to release its internal review after four long years of waiting for a credible account.

MSF also requested the TPLF to conduct its own investigation into the incident and submitted questions related to the presence and activity of the TF. MSF calls on the TPLF to provide clear answers to MSF's outstanding questions about the information provided to María and Yohannes on 24 June 2021. Until now, despite multiple requests from MSF and bilateral meetings with TPLF leadership, the TPLF has not provided an adequate response to these questions.

The brutal murders of María, Tedros and Yohannes is an emblematic case, with implications for the wider humanitarian community working in Ethiopia and beyond. With no investigation or formal acknowledgement of such an egregious attack on humanitarian workers, it sets a dangerous precedent, not only in Ethiopia, but also in other locations around the world where aid workers are striving to serve those most in need. Globally, attacks on humanitarian workers and medical professionals are on the rise and are happening with increasing impunity. Across the board, states are failing to

uphold their obligations to investigate and prosecute serious violations of international law, and to take steps to prevent their recurrence.

The intentional killing of three protected aid workers – clearly identified and carrying out their duties with an international NGO – must sound the alarm about the broader pattern of violence inflicted on the civilian population.

Nothing that we do can change what happened or give back the lives of María, Tedros and Yohannes to their loved ones. It is a tragic fact that their families are not alone in their grief. Many thousands of families have lost loved ones and suffered irreparable harm due to the widespread violence against civilians during the conflict in Tigray. Thousands continue to wait for answers. It is MSF's hope that, in publishing this review, we can contribute to building a safer environment for humanitarian workers and civilians – not only in Ethiopia, but in conflict zones around the world.

## Annex I

### Timeline of MSF's bilateral engagement with parties to the conflict

<i>Date</i>	<i>Type of Contact</i>	<i>Summary</i>
25/06/21	<b>MFA tweet</b>	First public communication from the FDRE on the incident: "The gov't of <a href="#">#Ethiopia</a> would like to express condolences on the death of three <a href="#">#MSF</a> staffers, a Spaniard & 2 Ethiopians in Abi Adi, Tigray where TPLF actively operates. The gov'ts call for military escort in such areas was to avoid such tragic killings by the irresponsible group." See <a href="#">here</a> .
05/07/21	<b>Letters from MSF to key line ministries, including the MFA, MoP and MoD</b>	Written request for urgent meetings to discuss the incident, the need for a formal investigation to establish the facts, circumstances and responsibilities of the killings, and to discuss safety and security of MSF staff.
06/07/21	<b>Letter from MSF to TPLF chairman</b>	Written request for an urgent meeting to discuss the incident, the need for a formal investigation to establish the facts, circumstances and responsibilities of the killings, and to discuss safety and security of MSF staff.
16/07/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and the Early Warning Response &amp; Sustainable Solutions Department, MoP</b>	First MSF meeting with a FDRE representative since the incident, but not to discuss the killings. The MoP representative commits to set up a meeting with the minister to discuss the 24 June events.
23/07/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and International Organisation Affairs Directorate, MFA</b>	MSF is informed that the deputy prime minister/minister of foreign affairs and state minister cannot accommodate MSF's meeting requests due to their busy schedules, but that MSF may try to renew the request by letter.
26/07/21 - 27/07/21	<b>Letters from MSF to MoP and MFA</b>	MSF re-submits letters requesting a meeting, following MFA advice.

03/08/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and TPLF chairman</b>	Preliminary meeting in which the contacts of MSF leadership are shared for further discussion. TPLF chairman confirms that the TPLF will support an independent investigation but cannot carry one out itself.
11/08/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and minister of peace</b>	<p>First ministerial meeting to discuss the incident. The minister informs MSF that she has instructed the attorney general to launch an investigation with the federal and regional police but, due to access constraints, it has not yet been possible to start.</p> <p>MSF's request for a direct channel with the ENDF to discuss humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures is declined. MSF is advised that these issues should be communicated through the MoP.</p>
11/08/21	<b>MoP tweets</b>	<p>After the meeting with MSF, <u>MoP issues two tweets</u>:</p> <p>HE Ms. Muffrihat Kamil, Minister of Peace, held discussions with Ms Teresa Sancristoval, Director of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) – Spain.</p> <p>She added evidence indicates that the incident was carried out by TPLF to attract international attention. The ongoing humanitarian activities in various parts of the country would continue as long as they abide by the laws and regulations of the country.</p>
13/08/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and MFA</b>	MSF is told that an FDRE investigation has started but that it is hard to gather evidence. MSF is advised to approach the ENDF through MFA to discuss any security matters, including the establishment of humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures.
02/09/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and the attorney general</b>	The attorney general confirms that a civilian investigation has started, under his supervision and carried out by the Federal Police. MSF is told that the ENDF has already been asked to provide information on their deployments in the area where the incident took place.

15/09/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and TPLF administrator</b>	The TPLF administrator confirms that the TPLF has started an investigation, under his responsibility.
26/10/21	<b>Letters from MSF to MFA, MoP, MoJ and MoD</b>	To renew request for meetings and to follow up on the investigation status.
11/11/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and state minister for foreign affairs, as well as representatives from MFA and MoJ</b>	MSF presents the preliminary findings of its internal fact-finding review. The MoJ confirms that the investigation is ongoing, that the elements shared by MSF will be considered, and that they will provide answers quickly. MSF is asked to submit a written document summarising the outstanding questions for clarification from the fact-finding, as well as details of the request to discuss humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures and protection of the medical mission.
12/11/21	<b>Document submitted by MSF to MFA and MoJ</b>	MSF submits a document to the MFA and MoJ outlining questions for clarification from its internal fact-finding review, and MSF's request to establish a direct line of contact with the ENDF to discuss humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures, and protection of the medical mission.
16/11/21	<b>Letter from MSF to deputy prime minister/minister of foreign affairs of Ethiopia</b>	Request for a meeting to follow up on vital safety and security matters impacting MSF operations in Ethiopia.
01/12/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and International Organisation Affairs Directorate, MFA</b>	MFA confirms that it has asked MoJ and MoD to clarify the points outlined in MSF's fact-finding presentation on 11 November and that the case is now before the newly established Inter-Ministerial Taskforce on Investigations and Prosecutions, chaired by the MoJ. MFA says it cannot facilitate a channel to MoD or ENDF to discuss humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures, but that MSF's requests have been communicated.

21/12/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and International Organisation Affairs Directorate, MFA</b>	<p>The MFA requested the meeting and asks MSF to provide an update on operations. The MFA reiterates the FDRE's commitment to investigate and says the file is with the Attorney General's office and the MoD, advising MSF to contact these ministries directly for an update.</p> <p>The MFA asks MSF to submit a letter outlining the geographical areas in which MSF would like to work, and the requests made to the FDRE related to humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures, and protection of the medical mission.</p>
23/12/21	<b>Letter from MSF to MFA International Organisation Affairs Directorate, MFA</b>	<p>Following a request by the MFA, MSF submits a letter outlining the key asks communicated to the FDRE: an investigation into the killings and findings to be shared; a direct line of communication with the ENDF to discuss humanitarian identification, notification, and security procedures; and tangible reassurance of support to MSF's medical humanitarian mission.</p>
23/12/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	<p>MSF requests an update on the investigation and the role of the new inter-ministerial taskforce mentioned by the MFA. Only procedural updates are offered and the MoJ confirms that the case is still under the management of the MoJ. The MoJ offers to organise a meeting with the current investigation committee and advises MSF to meet bilaterally with the MoD.</p>
27/12/21	<b>Meeting between MSF and Legal Directorate, MoD</b>	<p>First meeting between MSF and the MoD/ ENDF at federal level. The MoD confirms that the MFA has shared MSF's questions from the internal fact-finding review but that it does not yet have enough information to know what happened. In response to MSF's request to discuss humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures, the MoD says it must be discussed with the Federal Police and MoJ.</p>

04/01/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and Legal Directorate, MoD</b>	MSF is informed that the case is under the MFA and that MSF should maintain contact with MFA line for updates. MoD confirms that the ENDF was present in the area where the MSF incident took place but that they do not have further details. MSF is advised to discuss humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures in a joint meeting with the MoD, MoJ, MFA, and Federal Police.
12/01/22	<b>Phone call between MSF and TPLF chairman</b>	MSF reiterates its request for clarification on the information provided to our teams prior to the movement to Shoate Egum on the day of the incident.
12/01/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and commissioner-general, Federal Police</b>	The Federal Police informs MSF that it has investigated the case and that the TPLF was found responsible for the killings. In response to MSF's request to establish humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures, MSF is advised that it can notify the Federal Police of staff movements.
13/01/22	<b>Phone call from MoJ to MSF</b>	MSF is informed that the Investigation Committee is active and comprises four representatives, one each from the MoD, MFA, MoJ, and Federal Police.
18/01/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	The objective of the meeting is to receive a briefing on the FDRE investigation committee, but only the MoJ can attend. MoJ confirms it is still leading the investigation, and that the MoD is gathering information.
20/01/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and Legal Directorate, MoD</b>	MoD confirms that it is still investigating, but that it has not received any requests for information from the MoJ.
28/01/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and Legal Directorate, MoD</b>	MSF briefs MoD on the preliminary findings of its internal fact-finding review, which were shared with the MFA and MoJ on 11 November 2021.

04/02/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	MoJ informs MSF that evidence from MoD has been collected and that the MoJ has instructed the Federal Police to submit additional questions to the MoD which are pending a response. The MoJ commits to convene another meeting with the attorney general/minister of justice, as well as a representative from the MFA, ideally the state minister for foreign affairs, to inform MSF officially where the FDRE is with the investigation.
08/02/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and ENDF representatives in the office of the Minister of Defence</b>	MSF is informed that an internal process for the investigation has started and that MoD lawyers are in charge of the MoD's part in the investigation. MSF is asked to be patient as the MoD prefers to wait for the internal process to be completed before sharing information, due to the sensitive nature of the case.
08/02/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and Legal Directorate, MoD</b>	MoD confirms that it has received a letter from the Federal Police formally instructing it to investigate specific questions related to MSF's case. MSF is informed that the MoD is now trying to collect the relevant information and that it will wait until the investigation has been concluded to share any findings with MSF.
22/02/22	<b>Phone call between MSF and TPLF chairman</b>	MSF calls to reiterate its request for the TPLF to carry out its own internal investigation to address our specific questions.
17/03/22	<b>Phone calls between MSF and MoD, MoJ and MFA</b>	MSF requests meetings with MFA, MoJ and MoD to discuss the information published in the <i>New York Times</i> investigation released that day. MFA says that the state minister for foreign affairs will call MSF's general director to discuss. Contact details are shared but no call is received.
22/03/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and International Organisation Affairs Directorate, MFA</b>	MFA informs MSF that the state minister for foreign affairs will meet with MSF's general director and will provide a date.



25/03/22	<b>FDRE press briefing by MFA spokesperson</b>	As part of the MFA's routine biweekly press briefing, the MSF case and NYT article is discussed – available <a href="#">here</a> : In the statement, the MFA “expressed its regret for the death of these MSF employees suggesting that the deceased should have asked for a military escort to avoid such tragic killings”. The MFA does not deny the allegations presented in the NYT but dismisses the claims as baseless because they rely on testimony from ENDF soldiers in prison in Tigray. They then state that a thorough investigation is required but that the circumstances have not allowed for further investigation as the area is under TPLF control.
29/03/22	<b>Letter from MSF to state minister for foreign affairs</b>	Written request for a meeting to discuss the open case of the three MSF staff killed in Tigray on 24 June 2021.
05/04/22	<b>Letter from MSF to MoJ</b>	Written request for a meeting to discuss the open case of the three MSF staff killed in Tigray on 24 June 2021.
26/04/22	<b>Letter from MSF to MoD</b>	Written request for an urgent meeting to discuss the open case of the three MSF staff killed in Tigray on 24 June 2021.
27/04/22	<b>Meeting between MSF, state minister for defence, and director of cooperation, MoD</b>	MoD confirms that the investigation is ongoing, and that the MoD will try to fast-track the investigation and share the findings with MSF. MoD expresses willingness to discuss how to establish humanitarian identification, notification and security procedures with MSF.
20/05/22	<b>MSF follow-up with MoD</b>	MSF requests an update on when preliminary findings will be shared.
27/06/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and MoD</b>	MSF is informed that the MoD has submitted its official responses to the questions raised by the MoJ as part of the FDRE's official investigation into the case and had submitted these to the MFA. MSF is also informed that the MoD is not authorised to provide any updates on the case and that this will be managed by the MFA. MoD advises MSF to follow up directly with the MFA and says that the MoD will also pass on MSF's request for a briefing on the findings.

30/06/22	<b>Letter from MSF to MFA and MoJ</b>	Written request for a briefing on the findings of the FDRE investigation to date.
11/07/22	<b>Meeting between MSF and International Organisation Affairs Directorate and Legal Directorate, MFA</b>	MFA representatives present the preliminary findings of the FDRE's investigation. Key elements include that the FDRE has concluded that the ENDF was not present in the area of the incident, having already withdrawn by 24 June 2021, as well as the FDRE's presumption that the TPLF is responsible for the killing of the three MSF staff. MSF is informed that it will not be possible to receive these findings in writing as the case is not yet closed, but that MSF should accept the information as an official account to share with the bereaved families.
20/07/22	<b>Letter from MSF to MFA, MoJ and MoD</b>	Written request for an urgent high-level meeting to confirm whether the preliminary findings of the investigation shared by the MFA on 11 July 2022 represent the final official account from the FDRE.
03/08/22	<b>Letter from MSF to MFA</b>	Written notification of MSF Spain's intention to close its operations in Ethiopia.
25/07/23	<b>Phone call between MSF and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	MSF is reassured that the investigation into the killing of the three MSF staff in Tigray on 24 June 2021 is still ongoing. MSF takes note of a request to share any information gathered by MSF from its internal fact-finding review, which could support the investigation being conducted by the MoJ.
23/10/23	<b>Email from MSF to Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	In response to the request from the MoJ, MSF shares a copy of its internal fact-finding review into the killing of María Hernández Matas, Tedros Gebremariam Gebremichael and Yohannes Halefom Reda with a designated representative of the MoJ from the directorate responsible for the prosecution of transnational crimes. The report is shared via a secure electronic transfer link.
24/10/23	<b>Email from Law Enforcement Division, MoJ to MSF</b>	The MoJ representative confirms receipt of MSF's internal review into the killing of its three staff, thanks MSF for the valuable information, and shares his expectation that the investigation will be finalised in the near future.

08/12/23	<b>Email exchange between MSF and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	In response to MSF's request for confirmation, the MoJ representative confirms that the MoJ has deployed an investigation team composed of federal investigative authorities and Tigray interim government investigative bodies to Abi Adi. MoJ explains that the team has gathered evidence about the incident and is in the process of collecting more information to investigate the crime. MoJ also notes that further collaboration is expected from MSF, including gathering testimonies from its staff members.
15/12/23	<b>Letter from MSF to MoJ</b>	Written request for an in-person high-level briefing on the progress of the FDRE investigation to date, the foreseen next steps, and to discuss the potential implications for the bereaved families in Tigray region and former MSF Spain staff in Ethiopia. MSF reiterates its willingness to collaborate with the formal investigation process in Ethiopia and requests guidance and assurances from the MoJ on the modalities for gathering testimonies from family members of the deceased and from MSF staff members.
22/12/23	<b>Meeting between MSF and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	MoJ updates MSF on the status of the FDRE investigation into the killing of the three MSF staff. MoJ and MSF discuss the MoJ requests for further information to support the investigation. MSF confirms its willingness to cooperate, in line with the reassurances received from the MoJ.
18/01/24	<b>Email from MSF to Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	MSF confirms that it received the informed consent of two staff members and that it will make them available for interview, as requested by the MoJ. MSF requests clarifications on the proposed modalities for the staff interviews. No response is received.
30/01/24	<b>Email from MSF to Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	MSF follows up on its offer to make two staff members available for interview, as requested by the MoJ. MSF reiterates its offer to discuss the modalities to facilitate the staff interviews. No response is received.

22/05/24	<b>Email from MSF to Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	MSF requests an update on the status of the investigation and notes that the offer to make two MSF staff available for interview remains unanswered. No response is received.
24/06/24	<b>Letter from MSF to and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	Written request for a meeting to discuss the status and next steps of the investigation into the killing of the three MSF staff in Tigray on 24 June 2021.
26/06/24	<b>Meeting between MSF and Law Enforcement Division, MoJ</b>	The MoJ representative informs MSF that the investigation is “partially finalised” and is awaiting a decision by the minister of justice on whether the case will be referred to the Transitional Justice Process — yet to be established — or remain under the jurisdiction of the MoJ.
05/07/24	<b>Letter from MSF to MoJ</b>	Written request for a high-level meeting to discuss the investigation into the killing of the three MSF staff. MSF directly appeals to the Minister for the case to remain under the auspices of the MoJ.
24/12/24	<b>Letter from MSF to MFA and MoJ</b>	Written request for a meeting regarding the open case of the three MSF staff killed in Tigray on 24 June 2021. MSF notes the unverified public media reports about the status of the investigation and states that it would welcome an opportunity to follow up on the status of the case. No response is received.



