



## AS IT IS

# In Ethiopia's Tigray, Children Return to School but Trauma Remains

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The war in Tigray is over, but the **trauma** remains.

Tsega Fitsum is a volunteer teacher at the Mai Weyni school in the Tigray capital, Mekelle. She said, when school started soon after the November peace deal of last year, her students' minds were still on the conflict.

"They used to be **inclined** to draw guns instead of writing alphabets and numbers," she told VOA. "But now, we say 'The war has stopped. There is peace and there is no fear, and they should work freely.'"

The effects of the war are likely to continue for years. The Mai Weyni school is home to more than 8,500 people who were displaced by the war. About 5,100 are children under the age of 18. Most have been outside of the education system for more than two years. A 2022 report by the United Nations said that 1.39 million children in Tigray do not attend school.

The war between Ethiopia's federal government and Tigrayan forces left many children without parents or separated from families. The effect of those emotional wounds last a long time for children, experts say.

Etsedingel Hadera is a **psychiatrist** in Mekelle's Ayder Hospital. He said it is important for parents to help ease the hidden **scars** the children carry.

"When parents see behavioral changes, they should give their children hope and let them know it's okay and that it will all pass," he told VOA. "If they are not **comforted** that way, they listen to everything around them, even when we think they are not paying attention."

Fitsum said the top goal must be healing the children at the school and reuniting them with their families.

"Many children were hurt and some were forced to live parentless...But if there is peace, they want to go back to school and return to their families. We need to make an effort, especially for the children," she said.

Meresu Gebru is a mother who sought shelter on the school grounds after fleeing Mai-Kadra. She said: "Education is a solution for all. I want education, **stability**."

Gebru fled with one of her five children from the town where some of the war's worst violence took place. Her four other children, along with her husband, fled to Sudan.

People who live around the school said life is far from normal for the children. Mekelle was bombed by government warplanes several times.

"During the war, children were psychologically traumatized," said Gebregziabher Hadush, who lives Mekelle.

Now that there is a peace deal, experts say mental health services should be offered to children as they reenter the classrooms. Psychiatrist Etsedingel said the problems from the war will continue to effect the next generation.

"Some of my patients under 18 say they have lost hope," he said. "They are thinking about committing suicide. Some ask, 'What is our hope? School has stopped and we are suffering.' They need **psychosocial** support."

I'm Dan Novak.

*Mulugeta Atsbeha reported this story for Voice of America. Dan Novak adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**trauma** — *n.* a painful or difficult experience or a physical injury

**(to be) inclined** — *adj.* likely to do something or to behave in a certain way

**psychiatrist** — *n.* a medical doctor who treats people for mental or emotional disorders

**scar** — *n.* the mark that remains after a wound heals

**comfort** — *n.* the act of making someone who is suffering feel better

**stability** — *n.* the state of being in good emotional or mental health

**psychosocial** — *adj.* combining things that affect mental health with social considerations or efforts

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