

# Proceeding of the Workshop on the Role of CSOs in Advancing Transitional Justice – A Gendered Perspective

## INTRODUCTION

On November 04/2022 in the wake of the signing of the Pretoria Peace Agreement which, among others, included provisions on transitional justice, the Ethiopian Civil Society Organization Council in collaboration with Action Aid Ethiopia (AAE) held a half day workshop on the role of CSOs



in transitional Justice and women's role in the process. More than 40 Civil Society Participants took part in the dialogue and a number of issues on transitional issues.

## OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this workshop was to advance the role and contributions of Civil Society Organizations in processes of Transitional Justice in Ethiopia. Specific objectives that derive from the main objective included, clarification of the concept of transitional justice, its processes and mechanisms; expound the models and approaches of transitional justice and their relevance to the Ethiopian Context; understand Ethiopia's legal framework of transitional justice, and experiences, identify the activities/areas of engagement in which CSOs can play in; share experiences among CSOs regarding their activities in the area of transitional justice as well regional and global best practices; and finally collect inputs that inform the council regarding future projects and avenues for intervention.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

One of the major expected outcomes of this workshop is increased level of understanding on the concept of transitional justice, its relevance and importance to the contemporary context in Ethiopia. It was also assumed that at the end of the workshop CSOs will also have an enhanced awareness about their roles and potential activities on transitional justice, lessons learned from best practices and similar experiences. Besides, CSOs were also expected to be motivated and inspired to assume responsibilities and launch activities in transitional justice, especially in the post Pretoria peace arrangement.

## SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDING OF THE WORKSHOP



In his opening remarks, Henok Melese, the executive Director of ECSOC underscored the timely relevance of the dialogue. He emphasized justice as an important ingredient of sustainable peace. He said that durable peace can only be realized when abuses of the

past are addressed and justice is served to those victims affected by the conflict.

The presentation that followed was made by Dr. Tadesse Metekia, senior research at the institute of peace and security. Broadly, his presentation centered on the introduction of transitional justice, notably, elucidating what it is, why and when it becomes important, key



components of transitional justice, review of the national and continental legal frameworks of transitional justice, and discussion of the role Civil Society Organizations play in this process of transitional justice.

The issue of transitional justice has been relevant topic in various historical periods and epochs in Ethiopia. Transitional justice has been a theme of currency in the mid-1970s, and early 1990s. Despite of its recurrence, however, the concept has come and gone without any meaningful application and practical implementation. Many described this historical periods as missed and squandered opportunities to successfully implement transitional justice arrangements and put behind the violent and blood past of the country. During this period of transition, however, prosecutions and dominated.

The concept regained currency once again in the wake of the political reform in 2018 and the ascent of Prime Minister Abiy to Power. The new regime promised to a full implementation of transitional justice, heal wounds of the past and head into the future filled with peace, love and forgiveness. Toward this end, the regime established a reconciliation commission. However, progresses remained very limited and the commission was disbanded having accomplished really nothing concrete. The issues come to the fore and resurfaced again following the signing of the Pretoria agreement between the government and Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The agreement, among others, provides for a transitional justice framework to be implemented.

CSOs are key partners in processes of transitional justice. Ethiopia needs to actively enlist and involve Civil Society Organizations and actors for the successful implementation of transitional justice arrangements. Without the active involvements of civil society actors and organizations, making progress might prove elusive. The workshop was held in view of this growing focus on transitional justice and the key role CSOs could play.

Civil Society Organizations have a number of roles to play in processes of transitional justice. This role emanates from the nature of CSOs having their own constituencies and closely working with people at the grass root level. CSOs should be voices to vulnerable groups. Education Programs which reinforce



equality, dignity and common humanity shall be promoted by CSOs. Art, music and the Media often, often present the violence and hide the Transitional Justice efforts. CSOs should support the use of art, music and media to support transitional justice processes. CSOs could also champion the rights of certain sections of society. Transitional justice, for example, should also be seen from gender perspective and there is a need to invite vulnerable groups and others. There was not GBV prosecution during the 1991 civil war. No individual or collective rehabilitation of women. There was also the exclusion of the youth. CSOs can champion the rights of women and their inclusion in transitional justice arrangements. Other key roles which civil society organizational could play in the context of transitional justice include:

- Detoxify polarized divisions
- Provide alternative agendas and course of actions!
- Push for broader democratic space
- Assume broad mandates: CSOs should not only stick to narrow mandates only. We shall sensitize our work with requisites of peace and security
- Institutional capacity building, we need to work on the public buy in of the national dialogue commission

The workshop concluded with closing remarks by Mrs. Hana, Program and Development Director at ECSOC, who again emphasized the timely nature of the dialogue. She noted that

today's workshop would form the basis to other initiative which the council intends to undertake in the field of transitional justice of which the Pretoria peace agreement has identified the sector as key stakeholder.