



## The Foundation for Human Rights

A Submission from the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) Canada  
to the  
Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and  
International Development

November 1, 2022

ARPA Canada joins numerous individuals and organizations around the world in condemning the human rights atrocities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. We thank the members of this Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide a written brief.

### Human Dignity and the Image of God

The United Nations Universal [Declaration](#) of Human Rights states that “recognition of the inherent dignity ... of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” The Declaration is correct in stating that this inherent dignity is key, but it fails to define ‘dignity’ or to further explain where the concept comes from.

This concept of dignity as the basis for human rights ultimately comes from the biblical principle of the image of God (or *imago Dei*). In Genesis 1:26-27, God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” The repetition of the concept here is for emphasis. God is telling us something crucially important about humanity.

The *imago Dei*, argues legal philosopher Jeremy Waldron, “offers a powerful account of the sanctity of the human person, and it seems to give theological substance to a conviction that informs all foundational thinking about human rights – that there is something about our sheer humanity that commands respect and is to be treated as inviolable...”<sup>1</sup> Waldron further explains that since every human being, no matter their rank or status, is made like God, they are “by virtue of that likeness sacred and inviolable. We are not just clever animals, and the evil-doers among us are not just good animals gone bad: our dignity is associated with this specifically high rank in creation accorded to us by our Creator.”<sup>2</sup> When states embrace the principle of the *imago Dei*, they embrace a firm foundation for the universal right to be free from torture or degrading treatment. “Like the mutilation of a valued painting, our actions not only degrade the art object but mock the person whom it portrays.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Waldron, “The image of God: rights, reason, and order” in John Witte, Jr. and Frank S. Alexander, eds., *Christianity and Human Rights: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 216.

<sup>2</sup> Waldron, “The image of God,” 216.

<sup>3</sup> Waldron, “The image of God,” 227.

Every human being bears this image of God, independent of any external characteristics they might possess or any differences between them and another group of people. It is because they bear the image of God that human beings have inherent dignity and are distinct from other creatures.

### **Situation in Tigray**

In order to condemn the violence and human rights abuses in Ethiopia, the Canadian government needs an absolute and universal standard by which to measure human rights and human rights abuses. It is on the foundational idea of the image of God that the Federal government can seek to ensure that human rights are not abused or violated. One recent [estimate](#) explains that between 383,000 and 600,000 civilians have lost their lives in this conflict. This tragic situation is a violation of the image of God and human dignity.

### **Recommendation**

ARPA Canada recommends that this subcommittee unanimously condemn the human rights violations in Tigray, acknowledging the dignity and worth of every human being as made in the image of God.

On behalf of ARPA Canada,



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