

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 68 - 27 January 2021

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Reported war situation (as confirmed per 26 January)

- Eritrean Brigadier General Abraha Kassa, the Director of National Security for Eritrea, was in Addis Ababa today. *Unconfirmed* Information is reported of a new policy from Eritrea. All educated and “elite” Tigrayans should be ‘forced to flee’ or ‘squashed’ to remove all leadership from the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).
- Demands in Ethiopia are growing that Ethiopia should defend its territorial sovereignty. However, this position is undermined by increasing numbers of Eritrean troops entering Tigray or consolidating their positions.
- Yesterday a new trend was reported of clashes between the Eritrean and Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), who are allies in the fight against the TPLF. The fighting between Eritrean forces and Ethiopian National Defence Forces has continued today in Kwiha, a suburb of Mekelle town.
- Reported that 2 helicopters and six planes landed in Mekelle. Security at Mekelle airport is controlled by Eritrean troops. Reports of heavy gunshots around the city.
- It is reported that the ENDF has sent reinforcements to Mekelle.
- Telephone and telecom has been completely switched off again all over Tigray this afternoon.
- A video circulating on social media shows Eritrean troops in Wukro town with vehicles commonly seen in the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF). Also donkeys are carrying equipment.
- Reported that Eritrean troops who have amassed gold and wealth from looting in Tigray, are not planning to return to Eritrea, which is well known for its harsh conditions of indefinite national service and forced labour, extreme poverty, and lack of freedom.
- While the administration in Addis Abeba is providing strong pressure regarding what should and should not be said in public, the interim administration increasingly admits the catastrophic situation on the ground in public and asks for support, risking disagreement with the capital.
- Reported that an Eritrean gunship helicopter was shot down by Tigray regional forces at Hamedo, near Rama town at the border with Eritrea.
- Regina Lynch, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), reports on the massacre in Maryam Zion church in Aksum: “those who have been able to visit the area are reporting the possible murder of 750 people in an assault on the Orthodox Church of St Mary of Zion in Aksum last November.” She states that “ACN has received confirmation of a series of killings and attacks on innocent people in many parts of Tigray, including in the Aksum area, and she said the population is terrified.”

Reported regional situation (as confirmed per 26 January)

- Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Dina Mufti, states that: “Ethiopia will only have negotiations with neighboring Sudan after its forces withdraw from Ethiopia’s territory”.

- Egypt Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry, states that “Egypt will not allow any attempt to impose the policy of fait accompli and will not allow any party to control the Nile River”, in remarks to the Egyptian Parliament today. This is as reports circulate that Ethiopia is starting to fill the GERD dam.
- The foreign minister said Egypt attaches great importance to the issue of the GERD in order to maintain its water rights: “Egypt took part in a series of talks out of its belief in the importance of reaching a binding legal agreement on filling and operating the dam.”

Reported International situation (as confirmed per 26 January)

- Kenya’s former electoral commissioner, Roselyn Akombe, is taking up the key post at UNDP in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia as the UN Development Programme as the governance and peace building coordinator.
- EU Council meets and High Representative, Joseph Borell, reports that the EU Foreign Ministers agreed on the urgent need to prevent further destabilisation in the Horn. Foreign Ministers were briefed on the situation in Tigray, and the Sudanese-Ethiopian border. The Foreign Ministers agreed that there will be more political pressure in order to settle the dispute through diplomatic and peaceful means.
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Pekka Haavisto, will travel as an EU Envoy in order to visit the region in early February, together with Amb. Alexander Rondos, the EU Special Representative.
- The DG of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, calls for an inquiry into the killing of journalist Dawit Kebede. She condemned the killing and calls on the authorities to investigate this crime and bring its perpetrators to justice. The journalist was killed in Mekelle on 19 January.
- The EU Parliament joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee and Development Committee discusses the situation in Ethiopia and Tigray. The Ambassador of Ethiopia to the EU, Hirut Zemene, states that the humanitarian work to reach 2.5 people is on the way. The main problem is insufficient trucks, but, according to the Ambassador the food is in Tigray and the bottleneck is only a distribution problem.
- It is recalled that in December EEPA reported that all available trucks from Tigray, and trucks from Tigray in Djibouti port, were dispossessed and taken to Addis Ababa.
- Four retired US ambassadors to Ethiopia wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy, stating their concerns about recent political developments in the country.
- The letter states “We have watched the conflict in Tigray with grave unease as, according to the United Nations, nearly 60,000 refugees have fled to Sudan, 2.2 million people have been displaced, and 4.5 million people need emergency assistance, many of whom are without adequate food. We are also worried about the reported presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray, which could jeopardize Ethiopia’s territorial integrity”.
- “We are concerned about the worsening ethnic tensions throughout the country, reflected in the proliferation of hate speech and rising ethnic and religious violence. This growing violence seems to us to be contrary to Ethiopia’s long-standing tradition of tolerance for diverse religions and ethnicities”, the ambassadors added.

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Links of interest

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-01/acn-tigray-ethiopia-conflict-atrocities-alarm.html>
<https://walmartinfo.com/ethiopia-to-sit-for-negotiations-only-if-sudanese-army-evacuate-from-occupied-area-amb-dina-mufti/>
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<https://ethiopianembassy.be/ambassador-hirut-zemene-addresses-the-joint-committees-of-foreign-affairs-and-development-committee-of-the-european-parliament/>
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