Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 2 - 18 November 2020

Europe External Programme with Africa is a Belgium-based Centre of Expertise with in-depth knowledge, publications, and networks, specialised in issues of peace building, refugee protection and resilience in the Horn of Africa. EEPA has published extensively on issues related to movement and/or human trafficking of refugees in the Horn of Africa and on the Central Mediterranean Route. It cooperates with a wide network of Universities, research organisations, civil society and experts from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda and across Africa.

Key in-depth publications can be accessed on the website.

Key information (in addition to what is already widely published)

Damage from the war (as confirmed per 18 November 2020)

- Cities of Shire and Aksum have been attacked by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), Amhara Special Force, and the Eritrean army. Fighting takes place in close proximity to Eritrean refugee camps, which are under attack. This includes Hitsats camp with a population 25,248, many unaccompanied minors. UNHCR had earlier evacuated refugees and humanitarian staff from Shimelba camp to Hitsats. Also refugee camps Adu Harish and May Ayni under attack. The total population of the four camps is estimated at around 90,000 people. 5,000 Internally Displaced Persons are also in Shire.

- It is reported that Shire, Raya area, including (South Tigray) and Aksum are now under control of the ENDF. BBC reported Aksum under Ethiopian Federal control.

- Sources on the ground report that United Arab Emirates jets and drones were part of the attack on Mekelle, Shire and Aksum.

- Tigray regional forces have given up Humara Town and Alemata town. Evacuations from both towns, from Alemata to Mekoni.

- The Ethiopian government stated that Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) destroyed infrastructure (4 bridges) on the road from Shire towards Mekelle to delay the approach to the capital city. Tigray President Debretsion Gebremichael confirmed that the defence line had shifted and towns of South Tigray were under Federal control, but denied destroying bridges.

- ENDF expected to have dominance in the air. Reuters quotes Jane’s that ENDF has 15 Sukhoi Su-27SK and eight MiG-23ML fighter jets, around 20 Mi-24 and Mi-35 helicopter gunships and a range of air defence and missile systems, as well as scores of Russian T-55 and T-72 tanks.

- Sources on the ground report massive looting and destruction of property, houses, food, and cereal, taking place; especially by Eritrean forces.
Letter from Tigray President Debretsion Gebremichael (included in this sitrep below) stating that “non-African actors” had provided Unmanned Aerial Vehicles to Eritrean and Ethiopian forces.

Humanitarian situation, refugees and internal displacement (as confirmed per 18 November 2020)

- The Institute of Population Studies from Mekelle University issued a letter to the European Institutions (attached to this situation report) warning of a devastating regional and international humanitarian and refugee crisis if the conflict continues.
- Hundreds of thousands of people are reported displaced in Tigray by sources on the ground. Internally Displaced Persons are particularly mentioned to come from Shire, the four refugee camps in Tigray, Rama and Mereb and from Zalembesa (all Northern border towns).
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have launched emergency numbers for people looking for relatives in Ethiopia.
- 4,000 refugees are crossing into Sudan daily. There are now an estimated 30,000 refugees in Sudan who fled this conflict.

Regional dimension (as confirmed per 18 November 2020)

- Fighting has been reported between Tigray and Eritrea in Quala area (Adi Quala), Zalembesa, Taruna (i.e. Tsonora), Ali Tina (Alitena), Wadqomdi, and Bademe.
- Sudanese media report that Eritrean soldiers have fled to Sudan. Unverified reports are circulating that Eritrean opposition holds the Eritrean town of Senafe.
- Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen made a round past Ugandan President Museveni, Kenyan President Kenyatta, and Rwandan President Kagame, but no official mediation including TPLF has taken place yet.
- Djibouti issued a communique to the Federal Government of Ethiopia on 15 November calling for peaceful settlement, recognising PM Abiy as “sole guarantor of that Unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia”.
- Russia approved plans for a naval base in Sudan, Port Sudan, with room for 300 people and 4 nuclear-powered war ships.

Reported situation in Tigray (as confirmed per 18 November 2020)

- 34 bank accounts of businesses affiliated with the TPLF were suspended.
- Banks in Tigray are open, but have little money.

Press and media (as confirmed per 18 November 2020)

- Spokesperson Ethiopia Federal: Billene Seyoum (https://twitter.com/BilleneSeyoum)
- Spokesperson Tigray: Getachew Reda (https://twitter.com/reda_getachew)

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Links of interest

https://twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1328617639934124033?s=08
http://rfi.my/6qLpW
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Ethiopia%20Tigray%20Update%2018%20November%200.pdf

Excellency,

The government of Tigray National Regional State has, over the last couple of years made several attempts at resolving the crisis engulfing our country, Ethiopia, through an all-inclusive and comprehensive dialogue. However, the relationship with the federal government has degenerated to an active combat situation over the last two weeks, with Dr. Abiy Ahmed publicly, declaring that he would bomb dense urban areas of Tigray. He has followed up on the threat and for the last two weeks major Tigray towns have been under heavy air bombardment, with no regard to international law pertaining to protecting civilians under war situations.

Currently, the government of Dr. Abiy Ahmed has chosen to escalate its discriminatory and bellicose policy against Tigray. It has conspired and coordinated with a foreign state, Eritrea, and has since 3 November 2020 launched a full scale scorched earth military campaign against Tigray. Almost three quarter of the Ethiopian army and sixteen infantry and mechanized Eritrean divisions are mobilized and have occupied a big chunk of Tigray territory. Civilians have already started to suffer the consequences of this senseless war and thousands are displaced and killed. Many thousands have also fled to the Sudan.

Excellency,

Dr. Abiy Ahmed ignored all domestic and international attempts to resolve the constitutional and political crisis through dialogue and has rather chosen to resolve it through bloody military campaigns. He has first escalated the crisis into a regional level by inviting the Eritrean government to attack his own people. He has now escalated the conflict into an international scale by allowing non-African actors to
rally on his side and inflict more harm to his own people and in the process made peaceful resolution of the conflict even more difficult.

Excellency,

A new and worrying element is, since the 15th of November, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's) provided to the Eritrean and ENDF armies by non-African actors have joined the war theatre. These belligerent actions risk the destabilization of not just the horn of Africa but the already restive red sea area. The irresponsible behavior of Dr. Abiy Ahmed’s administration has also internationalized and complicated the crisis.

The consequences of ignoring the concerted military campaign against the people of Tigray will have grave consequences to regional and international peace and security. It is in this context that the Tigray National regional state calls upon your Excellency to condemn the war waged against the People of Tigray by the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments and their non-African partners and put all the necessary pressure on the aforementioned governments, both African and non-African, to immediately halt their indiscriminate atrocities against innocent people. It is our sincere hope that the international community will act at the earliest possible time before the situation deteriorates to a genocidal crime and avert the further internationalization of the conflict.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Debretsion G/Michael/PHD/President

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THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN REGIONAL STATE OF TIGRAY

Office of the President

Date

Ref No.
November 18, 2020
Addis Ababa

Distinguishing TPLF from the People of Tigray

The Federal Government of Ethiopia reaffirms its commitment to uphold the rule of law, its resolve to bring unlawful perpetrators to justice and denounces, in the strongest of terms, mischaracterizations that this operation has an ethnic or other bias.

Make no mistake the current law enforcement operations in Tigray target primarily the disgruntled, reactionary and rogue members of the TPLF clique that have been destabilizing Ethiopia. As such, the Federal government intends to put an end to the deadly crime spree of this group within TPLF, which has also affected the people of the Tigray region.

The people of Tigray will be the first to benefit from an operation that works towards a community based on the rule of law, freedom, unity and democracy. Our vision for Ethiopia is a that of a multinational society, where the many ties that bind us make it possible to cherish our diversity while upholding our unity.

Our common heritage and destiny is strong enough to overcome the threat posed by the divisive, sinister and toxic machinations of the TPLF clique.

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Communique from Djibouti on the Conflict 15 November 2020

Communique

The Republic of Djibouti is following with great concern the internal conflict situation that has been unfolding since the 4th of November 2020, in Ethiopia, an armed conflict between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the TPLF from Tigray region.

Djibouti fully supports the Unity and the Territorial Integrity of the Federal and Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The Djibouti government also recognises Prime Minister Abiy’s governmment as the sole guarantor of that unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia.

Furthermore, Djibouti calls for a peace full settlement of this Ethiopian internal crisis under the leadership of H.E. Mr. Abiy Ahmed Ali, the Prime minister of Ethiopia.

Besides, Djibouti expresses its readiness to support all efforts, aimed at the peaceful resolution of this crisis.

November 15th, 2020