

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 107 - 19 March 2021

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. The situation reports can be found [here](#).

Reported war situation in Tigray (as per 18 March)

- The UN Human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, has agreed to the Ethiopian request to conduct a joint investigation in Tigray. The UN and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission are establishing an investigation plan.
- A twitter campaign voiced opposition and strong reservations, stating that the international community should carry out independent investigations.
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) says famined children and pregnant women are among the 37,000 displaced people that have arrived in Sheraro, northwestern Tigray, over the last few weeks.
- “The situation in Sheraro is beyond dire. Despite families arriving every day, no aid has been delivered for weeks. Food, water and medicine are running out fast. People could die unless they get humanitarian aid now,” the NRC Chief, Jan Egeland, warned.
- He also said: “People have told us that they fled sexual violence, killings and widespread violence in Tigray, only to arrive in Sheraro and find a desperately helpless situation.”
- The NRC report has shared stories and evidence of elevated levels of malnutrition among displaced people. Egeland further elaborated that they have heard many accounts of refugees hiding in remote villages. These people, afraid to be found, are at risk of being cut off from any assistance.
- The report also says that pregnant women are forced to sleep on the ground in overcrowded classrooms with no sleeping mats, blankets or mosquito nets, putting them at serious risk of malaria. Many lactating mothers have also told the NRC that they are unable to produce milk for their babies.
- NRC teams were the first to visit destroyed Hitsats and Shimelba camps. Prior to the conflict, the camps hosted close to 33,000 Eritrean refugees. While the team did not find any refugees, there were 3,000 internally displaced people that fled from Western Tigray who had taken refuge in the shelters meant for refugees in Shimelba camp.
- “The situation in Sheraro is only the tip of the iceberg, as people in countless more hard-to-reach areas in Tigray are also in desperate need. We urge Ethiopian authorities to do all they can to ensure aid reaches everyone who needs it, regardless of where they are,” said Egeland.
- The SG of NRC stated that: “there cannot be any sustained response if the conflict rages on. Beyond meeting immediate needs. people need help to restore their livelihood, get their children back to school and return home when it is safe.”
- He also called on all warring parties to find solutions that will restore lasting peace and give people a chance to rebuild their lives.
- Three Tigray opposition parties have written an open letter to Moussa Faki Mahamat, stating that the AU does not have the capacity, nor the political independence to properly investigate the events that have unfolded in Tigray. They further argue that as the investigation will happen in collaboration with Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government will attempt to use the AU investigation to cover up crimes.
- They urge the AU to support a full international investigation.

Reported situation in Ethiopia (as per 18 March)

- OLF is advancing to Addis and the Prosperity Party concluded this week that this is dangerous and they may have to bring back some of their forces from Tigray.

- OLF now controls 13 woredas in Western Shoa zone and is now Muger, 70 kms west of Addis Ababa.

Reported situation in the Horn region (as per 18 March)

- The Egypt Foreign minister has said that Egypt rejected the recent Ethiopian decision which threatens Egyptian and Sudanese interests downstream of the GERD dam. He also accused Ethiopia of trying to impose a “fait accompli” on both downstream countries. He further warned that such unilateral measures could be destabilising for the region.
- Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of Sudan Sovereign Council, said the Ethiopian government must recognize the border treaty of 1902 with Sudan, before negotiations can start. He rejects Ethiopia's claim on the Al-Fashaga area, as the border has been demarcated since 1902.
- Al-Burhan stated that Ethiopia has deployed additional troops inside Sudan. "This escalation is an act of hostility against the country," he stressed before calling for the withdrawal of the Ethiopian troops.
- "Our relations with our neighbours are based on mutual respect, understanding and trust. Also, we seek to solve all our problems by peaceful and friendly means," he added.

Reported international situation (as per 18 March)

- The white house is sending US senator Christopher Coons to Addis Ababa. He will meet with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to convey President Biden's concern about the situation in Tigray.
- Cameron Hudson, senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Africa Center and a former US official said Mr Coon's trip will give more urgency to Mr Blinken's “serious messages” to Mr Abiy Ahmed.
- “Senator Coons can signal that time is running out for Ethiopia to change the course in Tigray before the US is forced into a more aggressive policy posturing punitive measures,” Mr Hudson added.
- US Sec. of State Blinken said in a press statement that the US is providing an additional nearly \$52 million in assistance to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray region. The US has provided a total of nearly \$153 million in humanitarian assistance since the crisis began.
- “We remain gravely concerned about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Tigray. The international community must follow-through on all commitments, including lifting restrictions on import and use of communication equipment and providing extended visas for humanitarian workers,” it stated.
- The press statement calls for immediate, full, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian organizations and workers to provide timely and needed assistance to those affected by the conflict.
- Gregory W. Meeks, Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Michael McCaul, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee said in a statement that: “We are deeply concerned about reports of war crimes against civilians, forced displacements, restricted access to food and healthcare, and the role of Eritrean forces in Ethiopia's Tigray region.
- The statement urged for an international, independent investigation of all reported atrocities, including ethnic cleansing. In the statement, the senators called for the US, in coordination with partners and allies to take action to hold perpetrators of human rights abuses accountable.
- “We strongly urge the Ethiopian government to make more progress on granting full access to humanitarian partners, independent media, diplomats and human rights monitors to aid civilians and to assess the impact of the conflict in Tigray,” said the statement.
- The statement recognizes Ethiopia's role in the Horn region, and warns the ongoing conflict in Tigray threatens the credibility of the upcoming elections in June and the stability of the entire region.

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Links of interest

<https://www.nrc.no/news/2021/march/ethiopia-hunger-and-disease-rife-among-displaced-as-aid-workers-gain-access-to-new-parts-of-tigray/>

<https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69312>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-un-idUSKBN2B934E>

<https://www.tghat.com/2021/03/18/three-tigray-opposition-parties-write-an-open-letter-to-moussa-faki-mahamat-asking-for-the-au-to-distance-itself-from-hr-violations-investigations-in-tigray/>