

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 111 - 25 March 2021

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Minors as soldiers in the War in Tigray (as per 24 March)

- An Eritrean witness states that he saw “many underaged soldiers from Eritrea in Shemelba camp, among the Eritrean troops.” He says: “most of them were from the 33rd Round of Sawa military training camp in Eritrea.”
- The 33rd Round is the latest round of National Service that is indefinite, and which takes the highschool students to military training camps, the main one called Sawa. The source says that the soldiers “were between 16 and 20, most of them filed for the matriculation exam.”
- Last year PM Abiy visited Sawa camp and participated in the graduation parade training rehearsals of the 33rd Round. Round 33 graduated shortly before the beginning of the war and was sent to Tigray.
- Many in the last round are minors and, according to the Eritrean sources, the 33rd Round was sent to Shemelba. The National Service has been qualified as crimes against humanity by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea and is associated with forced labour and modern slavery.
- The source says that he met one Eritrean minor, who was among the 33rd Round that occupied the Shimelba Refugee camp, where refugees that fled Eritrea were held under international protection.
- The source said: “I met with one of them and his name was Nahom, and he was 16 years old. He was a Tigrinya speaker.”
- The source further says he witnessed the Eritrean youth sent as military being trained while occupying Shimelba: “We saw some of them taking additional training in Shemelba. This was on 15 Dec 2020 and I was arrested on the top of the mountain with others. We were watching them from the mountain.”
- The training of the 33rd round soldiers in Shemelba was a “gunshot training”.
- The training also included some refugees that were brought over from Hitsats camp who were, reportedly, integrated in the Eritrean forces, deployed in Tigray. This was confirmed with refugees providing interviews in Addis Ababa, who were originally from Hitsats.
- Dimtsi Weyane (the TPLF news channel) and TMH reported that an Eritrean soldier aged 16 was captured by the Tigrayan in an ambush involving 17 buses on the way to the front in South-eastern Tigray. The convoy was ambushed by Tigray regional forces.

Reported War Situation in Tigray (as per 24 March)

- More than 20 civilians were dragged out of a public bus and executed by ENDF soldiers near Freweyni town (between Wukro and Adigrat), Eastern Tigray.
- According to MSF, ENDF soldiers carried out extrajudicial killings of at least 4 men in a place between Adigrat and Wukro who were dragged off public buses and executed in the presence of MSF staffs.
- MSF states the staff encountered what appeared to be the aftermath of an ambush of an Ethiopian military convoy, by another armed group, in which soldiers were injured and killed.
- ENDF soldiers at the scene stopped the MSF car and two public minibuses driving behind it. The soldiers forced the passengers to leave the mini buses and men were separated from the women, who were allowed to walk away. Shortly after, the men were shot and the MSF team saw the bodies of those killed on the side of the road.
- Reports of Tigrayan ethnic monks at Waldeba Monastery, Western Tigray were allegedly intimidated, beaten and forced to leave the monastery by their Amhara ethnic counterparts and forces.

- Three opposition parties of Tigray write against the proposal for a joint UN HRC - EHRC investigation of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, stating the EHRC lacks independence.

EHRC report on the Massacre in Axum

- The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has published a report about the Axum, the third report, after Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI). It is based on 45 witnesses and obtained video, photographic and audio evidence. They were also able to visit Axum.
- The timeline that they establish is roughly similar to what the other organisations have published. However some of the dates are different. The ECHR says that 6 people were killed by shelling on November 18th. AI & HRW put this event a day later.
- According to ECHR, Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers entered the city a day later, on the 19th of November (AI & HRW set this event on the 20th), and heavy fighting took place, forcing doctors to flee from the hospital. AI & HRW both say that TPLF soldiers left the city before shelling of the city started.
- EHRC says that Axum Referral hospital was looted 4 times by ENDF and Eritrean soldiers in the next days and soldiers “shot a man in bed in the emergency ward.”
- Doctors at the hospital say that due to the looting of medical equipment and supplies, 41 people died “for lack of adequate treatment”. One pregnant woman, brought in on November 20th died of loss of blood during delivery. Others with shelling wounds died for similar reasons.
- Doctors also say that many others might have died before reaching the hospital. One man was found “with bullet wounds” lying in the sewer.
- Further looting by soldiers took place over the subsequent days. However on the 25th, the ECHR says that ENDF soldiers vacated the city and that the city was reoccupied on the 27th by Eritrean troops.
- On the 28th witnesses say that shooting started all over the city. Witnesses give varying reasons: Some say that armed groups started attacking Eritrean soldiers (the same account as AI & HRW have put forward), others say that Eritrean soldiers “tried to loot Aksum Tsion Church and when residents tried to prevent it, the Eritrean soldiers began shooting at civilians”.
- On November 28th Eritrean soldiers started to indiscriminately kill people, carrying out house-to-house searches and executions, rounding up groups of people, killing men in particular.
- The ECHR confirms the report by AI & HRW that Eritreans soldiers stopped people from retrieving the bodies of people killed on November 29th. They shot at those that tried. They only allowed this on November 30th (Both AI & HWR) say that this changed on the evening of the 29th.
- It concludes that “these grave human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity or war crimes, it underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into the overall human rights situation in Tigray region.”
- The EHRC has also said that since the massacre, security forces have taken lethal action against people on the street after the curfew. Multiple people have been killed. One fled into a church, but was followed and killed by ENDF soldiers. The EHRC is very concerned about these incidents.

Reported international situation (as per 24 March)

- Norway PM, Erna Solberg, raised her concerns about the Tigray conflict in her conversation with Abiy and expressed deep concern about the consequences of the conflict. “
- Finland FM, Haavisto met with Sec. State Blinken at NATO and discussed the crisis in Tigray.
- US Senate Foreign Relations Committee has passed S. Res. 97, a bipartisan resolution on Ethiopia. The resolution calls on the government of Ethiopia, TPLF and other belligerents to cease all hostilities, protect human rights, allow unfettered humanitarian access, and cooperate with independent investigations of credible atrocity allegations pertaining to the conflict in the Tigray.

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Links of interest

<https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/ranking/release/ranking-member-risch-applauds-committee-passage-of-legislation-on-ethiopia-syria-and-the-western-hemisphere>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i20a7K4BNnJsoSE89q1Q7xEW5oGhatGX/view>

<https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/ethiopia-msf-staff-attacked-after-witnessing-killings-soldiers-tigray?>