

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 142 - 06 May 2021

Europe External Programme with Africa is a Belgium-based Centre of Expertise with in-depth knowledge, publications, and networks, specialised in issues of peacebuilding, refugee protection, and resilience in the Horn of Africa. EEPA has published extensively on issues related to the 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](#).

Situation in Eritrea (as per 05 May)

- PBS Frontline has released a documentary called "[Escaping Eritrea](#)", on Eritreans trying to escape the country. They have led an investigation since 2016 and gathered 10 hours of video footage of the situation in the country. They interviewed more than 30 people.
- They interview children that say that they fled the country out of fear of the National Service saying that they could be called up already at 16 or 17 years of age.
- They showed secret footage from inside the Abi Abeyto prison, an Eritrean prison just outside Asmara, where 2000 people are held in captivity without trial. They interviewed a refugee who was held for four years. It shows hundreds of people in cramped conditions, where they can be held for years.
- They also got video footage of someone who said he was a guard at Abi Abeyto prison. He provided PBS with footage from inside the prison four years after the first video. It shows many of the same cramped conditions, which did not change after the peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia.
- The guard said that new prisoners, people who tried to escape the National Service or move around the country, arrived every two or three weeks. The prison population is continuously increasing and is now severely overcrowded. He says that three guards were needed to push the door closed.
- They also interviewed a refugee that said that during National Service, instead of being trained, she was forced to work on farms belonging to government officials. National Service is mandatory, and has no set end. Many spend years or decades in it. The UN has described it as Slavery. People that try to escape National Service are imprisoned and tortured. It is qualified as a Crime against Humanity.
- Many women in the National Service are forced or coerced into providing sexual favours in return for basic necessities such as pads, food, or water.
- They also showed footage which shows a protest in Eritrea where government forces shot at the protesters and arrested anyone they could identify that was present, including children.
- PBS aired an audio interview with a refugee, who says that Eritrean soldiers swept through Hitsats camp, and killed, beat, raped and kidnapped refugees. Many people were taken, and those that tried to escape were shot.
- PBS covered the UN investigation into the network of Eritrean prisons, where thousands are held in poor conditions, often held in metal containers or underground holes. Many people are brutally beaten up and tortured in these prisons.
- It has been five years since the UN reports were published which found that the Eritrean government commits Crimes against Humanity. Little has been done since to bring it to the International Court of Justice.
- Dedebit Media said Eritrean defense forces are digging multiple trenches near Senafe, within Eritrea.
- Eritrean troops are digging trenches around Tserona, Golgol-Hazemo, Adi-Kuala and Barentu, or fortifying existing ones, including possibly with landmines, according to an informed source.

Reported Situation in Tigray (as per 05 May)

- The Associated Press (AP) says displaced Tigrayans in Mekelle are living in hunger and fear.

- Birhanu Haile, coordinator of an IDP camp with 7000 people based in a Mekelle secondary school, says that his Western Tigray house has been occupied by Amhara and two of his nephews have been killed.
- Student Wegahta Weldie recalled stepping on dead bodies in Western Tigray as her family hid in a maize field. "Many people had been killed and it was very dark," she said. "I could not tell whether they were my relatives or not."
- A Catholic nun with the Daughters of Charity who regularly visits camps for the displaced Tigrayans said she was saddened by the sight of people who once owned "rich" land but are now destitute.
- "Well-wishers in Mekele are contributing, but for how long will they manage?" asked the nun, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation from authorities. "Today they have food because it's been (Orthodox) Easter. The reality is another thing."
- Dedebit Media is stating that ethnic Oromo members are joining the Tigray defense forces.
- Abraham Belay has been appointed as chief executive administrator of Tigray Interim Administration replacing Mulu Nega.
- USAID is saying that the situation in Tigray is reaching a point where delays cannot be afforded to provide Humanitarian assistance to those in need in Tigray. Millions of people still need access to "food, shelter, and basic necessities to survive."

Reported Situation in the Horn region (as per 05 May)

- During the visit of Eritrean President Afwerki to Sudan, there was agreement on strengthening the relations and enhancing joint cooperation, as the Humera triangle was on the agenda.
- Sudanese PM Hamdok said that by strengthening economic ties, they could overcome political issues.
- Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi met with the US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Jeffrey Feltman, and asserted that Egypt will not accept any harm to its water interests.
- The Sudanese PM, Hamdok, told CNN that he wants a binding agreement on the GERD as otherwise "we would always be at the mercy of Ethiopia to give it today and close it tomorrow."

Reported International situation (as per 05 May)

- The G7 have released a statement saying that the "presence of foreign forces in Tigray is deeply disturbing and destabilizing" and is concerned that withdrawal of Eritrean troops has not commenced.
- The G7 said that they condemned "the killing of civilians, rape and sexual exploitation and other forms of gender-based violence, destruction and looting of religious and cultural heritage sites and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans and Eritrean refugees".
- The United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Nderitu, has said that she is "alarmed by the continued escalation of ethnic violence in Ethiopia and allegations of serious violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the Tigray region."
- In a statement Nderitu said that they had received many reports of "attacks against civilians based on their religion and ethnicity as well as serious allegations of human rights violations and abuses including arbitrary arrests, killings, rape, displacement of populations".
- Nderitu also reported acts of hate speech and stigmatization including, ethnic profiling against communities, including the Tigray, Amhara, Somali, and Oromo.
- Ms. Nderitu is calling on the Ethiopian authorities to "establish national mechanisms to address the root causes of ethnic violence, build national cohesion and promote reconciliation."

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Links of interest

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/ethiopia-camp-displaced-tigrayans-live-hunger-fear-77508055?fbclid=IwAR0djamzbrv>

<https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-africa-3b52f9f79c6d0f99d6e35901f126368b>

<https://www.channel4.com/news/ethiopia-fears-upcoming-election-could-fuel-ethnic-conflict>

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/escaping-eritrea/>