

## Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 147 - 14 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](#).

### Sexual and human rights violations (per 13 May)

- A doctor treating a woman at Axum Referral Hospital told CNN that the hospital had seen a spike in sexual assault cases over recent weeks, but that the rise was just “the tip of the iceberg,” as many were too scared to seek medical services.
- CNN report says an alarming number of women are being gang-raped, drugged and held hostage in the conflict, in which sexual violence is being used as a weapon of war and its use linked to genocide in Tigray.
- An autopsy photo of the young woman seen by CNN showed her internal organs spilling out from a wound in her lower abdomen.
- "She came to our emergency department and she had a sign of life initially. [But] if you find blood for a patient, it's only one or two units and one or two units could not save this woman. She bled [out] and she died," said the doctor.
- Irish's Foreign Affairs Minister, Simon Coveney said there is growing evidence of sexual violence being used as a tool of war in the conflict in the Tigray region.
- Mr. Coveney said Ireland is seen as “credible” because of its very strong relationship with Ethiopia and our insistence on shining a spotlight on what’s happening.
- “The Ethiopian government continues to advocate at all levels for a ceasefire and a full independent investigation is needed so we can hold people to account who have committed crimes against humanity,” he added.
- He also said: “There are multiple credible and harrowing reports of ongoing human rights violations including in particular sexual violence being used as a tool of war in Tigray.”

### Eritrean forces in Tigray (per 13 May)

- Fierce fighting between Tigray defense forces and Ethiopian and Eritrean forces has continued on various fronts of the Tigray region.
- CNN report says Eritrean troops are operating with total impunity in the Tigray region, killing, raping, and blocking humanitarian aid to starving populations more than a month after Prime Minister Abiy pledged to the international community that they would leave.
- A CNN team traveling through Tigray's central zone witnessed Eritrean soldiers, some disguising themselves in old Ethiopian military uniforms, manning checkpoints, obstructing and occupying critical aid routes, roaming the halls in one of the few operating hospitals, and threatening medical staff.
- The report said Ethiopia's government has severely restricted access to the media until recently, and a state-enforced communications blackout concealed events in the region, making it challenging to gauge the extent of the crisis or verify survivors' accounts.

- According to the report Eritrean troops aren't just working hand in glove with the Ethiopian government, assisting in a merciless campaign against the Tigrayan people, in some pockets they're fully in control and waging a reign of terror.
- The report added that Ethiopian security officials working with Tigray's interim administration said the Ethiopian government has no control over Eritrean soldiers and that Eritrean forces had blocked roads into central Tigray for over two weeks and in the northwestern part of the region for a month.
- CNN said its efforts to reach Axum were thwarted by both Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers multiple times over several days and the team was blocked by soldiers at three locations.
- The report further said even after being granted entry to Axum by the Ethiopian military, the CNN team was obstructed by Eritrean troops controlling a checkpoint near Adigrat town.
- CNN report added that Eritrean troops were wearing a mixture of their official light-colored Eritrean Defence Forces fatigues and a woodland camouflage with a green beret, which military experts verified as tallying with old Ethiopian army uniforms.
- Aid agencies also told CNN that they had also been turned back by Eritrean soldiers manning a checkpoint on a desolate mountain top overlooking Adigrat town.
- Ethiopian military sources confirmed to CNN that Eritrean soldiers were in control of key checkpoints along the route to Axum. The military sources said they had requested multiple times for the Eritreans to allow cars and convoys through, but had been refused.
- CNN also said Eritrean soldiers have been blocking and looting food relief in multiple parts of Tigray, including in Samre and Gijet, southwest of Mekele.

#### Reported situation in Tigray (per 13 May)

- According to the CNN report, many rural border towns in Tigray like Chila have been blocked off from receiving aid since the beginning of the conflict and humanitarian workers say famine could have already arrived there and they would have no way of knowing.
- "Based on guesswork there is a sense that in these areas that we are not able to access, out in the countryside, for instance, places are falling into pockets of famine. But we're not able to verify that and that's part of the problem," said Thomas Thompson, the UN World Food Programme's emergency coordinator.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the Ethiopian Attorney General's findings ignore "widespread pillaging that occurred the week Ethiopian forces captured the town and the horrific massacre by Eritrean forces that unfolded over 24-hours from the afternoon of November 28 -29, 2020."

#### Reported Situation in Ethiopia (per 13 May)

- The accreditation of a journalist of the New York Times has been revoked by Ethiopian authorities after conducting interviews on the victims of sexual violence in Tigray.
- The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said it is alarmed by the public parading and extrajudicial killing of a suspected criminal offender, Amanuel Wondimu, in Dembi Dollo, Kelem Wollega Zone of the Oromia regional state by security forces.
- The Human Rights Commission condemned all forms of extrajudicial killings in the strongest terms and reiterates its message on the use of only lawful means for all law enforcement operations.

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#### Links of interest

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/12/africa/tigray-axum-aid-blockade-cmd-intl/index.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/13/world/africa/ethiopia-tigray-journalists.html>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/12/ethiopia-axum-findings-ignore-massacre-civilians>

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/growing-evidence-of-harrowing-accounts-of-sexual-violence-used-as-tool-of-war-in-tigray-1.4562846?mode=amp>