

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 155 - 26 May 2021

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Webinar 'Voices From Tigray: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence against Women in Tigray' (25 May 2021)

- The webinar meeting was chaired by Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell, former Minister of Gender in Liberia. In her concluding remarks she asked all African women in leadership to step up their voice to stop the harrowing perpetration of rape as a weapon of war in Tigray.
- Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell told the Tigray women who gave their testimony in the webinar that African women were sharing their pain and asked Africa and the world to end the violence against women.
- Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell said President Sirleaf, AU Envoy to the Horn, was following the situation closely and closely working with US UN Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield to address it.
- Hon. Julia Duncan-Cassell closed the webinar by stating that "The perpetration of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence has not diminished and is spreading across the Horn. There must be concerted and coordinated international pressure and targeted sanctions. These atrocities must come to an end, and soldiers and their commanders must be prosecuted." She called on the following three points:
 - The withdrawal of all foreign troops from Tigray, particularly those from Eritrea;
 - The referral of the deployment by Eritrea of National Service in a foreign jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court;
 - All parties in Tigray to end with immediate effect the impunity of the use of Rape as a Weapon of War.
- [Keynote speaker, MEP Assita Kanko](#), asked the international community to respond: "Every voice matters in urging the international community to act. We cannot waste another moment in trying to stop this crime against humanity. There is more than one way to commit genocide. Indeed, the damage of rape as a weapon of war, is as powerful as any gun or bomb, as the armies and authorities seek to silence these women and their communities. We, therefore, must lend them our voices, and those voices must be determined and loud."
- Women from Tigray presented their harrowing ordeal, a third of rapes executed as gang rapes, over multiple days, in public, in front of family members including their children, their genitals burned or filled with foreign objects including burning sticks and relatives forced to perpetrate rape on Tigray women. The testimonies said that witnesses of the crimes committed and the children including babies of the rape-victims were killed in the violence.
- Selam Kidane, an Eritrean human rights advocate, told the conference that Eritrea is committing troops in Tigray that have suffered under the plight of National Service, a form of slavery, which has been qualified as a Crime against Humanity and she begged the international community to refer Eritrea to the ICC for the crimes committed by Eritrea on foreign soil in Tigray.
- Mariam Basajja presented the Africa Women for Peace in the Horn Initiative expressing that young women from the entire continent stood by the women in Tigray
- Tigray Human Rights advocate, Meaza Gidey, called the rape against women in Tigray a genocide: "Women are raped because they are Tigrayan, to cleanse the bloodline. The world has all the facts. I call on all relevant actors to listen to the cries of the innocent women of Tigray. They are not only being raped, they are also starved to death."

- Malgorzata Tarasiewicz, Director from East West Women Network based in Poland, said the international community had all the tools it needed to respond to the situation in Tigray where rape is used as a weapon of war and that it should respond without delay.

Conflict and Sanctions (as per 25 May)

- In an article on the Jamestown Foundation, a US think tank focused on military affairs and terrorism, Michael Horton has written that the conflict in Tigray has “metastasized into a grinding insurgency that could continue for years.” It has the potential to destabilise Ethiopia and the wider Horn region.
- He said that the TDF possesses the “two components most critical to conducting a guerrilla war: deep knowledge of the geographic and socio-political terrain and a sympathetic population.”
- He also said that the Ethiopian scorched earth strategy in Tigray has worsened the situation as it has ensured the “alienation of most ethnic Tigrayans” and provided more support to the TDF. The deliberate attacks on the local population by the ENDF, Eritrean Forces (EDF), and Amhara militias are further fuelling ethnic tensions.
- Eritrean forces are also unlikely to leave Tigray. There are few incentives for them to leave, and Ethiopian forces are not in a position to force the well entrenched forces out.
- Dr. Amani Al-Tawil, Director of the African Program at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said US sanctions on Addis Ababa cannot be isolated from the dispute over the Ethiopian dam.

Reported situation in Tigray (per 25 May)

- The Head of Ethiopia’s army asked officials in Eritrea to withdraw all of their troops from Ethiopia. Birhanu Jula, Chief of staff of ENDF sent the letter to his counterparts in Eritrea several days ago.
- According to Reuters, Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers forcibly detained more than 500 young men and women from four camps for displaced people in the town of Shire in the Tigray region.
- An aid worker told Reuters that: “The soldiers arrived at around 11 pm and loaded hundreds of people onto trucks, the humanitarians and the doctor said, citing witnesses’ accounts. Several men were beaten, their phones and money confiscated.”
- A man who lives in one of the camps, and hid during the incursion, said soldiers broke in and beat men with sticks. He said: “Soldiers surrounded our camp at night, broke the main gate, and started to beat every man using sticks, they hit a 70-year-old and kidnapped a blind one. Only from our camp, Tsehaye elementary school, 400 (people) were taken.”
- Tewodros Aregai, interim head of Shire’s northwestern zone, told Reuters he had few details but confirmed “hundreds” had been taken.
- The Patriarch of the Orthodox Tewahdo Church of Mekele, Abune Isaias said: “I have never seen this. The crimes follow one another. Churches are destroyed. And it’s a war against the Tigrayans. They are after our story and want to kill everyone. It is genocide.”
- Abune Isaias added: “They want to destroy the Tigrayans and the Tigray. It is the federal government that attacks us and gives the orders. As a result, we were attacked from all sides.”
- “I think Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy and Eritrean President Issayas Afewerki just want to eliminate whoever will prevent them from having power. They want to become kings,” said Abune Isaias.
- Streets were empty, shops and offices were also closed in major cities across the Tigray region following three-day fasting and prayer decree starting on 25 May 2021.

Reported Situation in Ethiopia (per 25 May)

- The European Union in Ethiopia calls for an urgent, impartial, and speedy investigation into the abduction of over 500 youth in Tigray by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers.
- The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) admitted that lower-level government officials are interfering in polling stations and called for restraint.

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Links of interest

Link to [Webinar Voices From Tigray: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence against Women in Tigray](#)

Link to Key Note Address by Assita Kanko: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ahLzRQGrxU>

<https://jamestown.org/program/tigray-defense-forces-resist-ethiopian-army-offensive-as-sudan-eritrea-and-ethnic-militias-enter-the-fray/>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/eritrean-ethiopian-soldiers-detain-hundreds-tigray-2021-05-25/>

<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210524-conflit-au-tigr%C3%A9-pour-le-patriarce-de-mekele-abiy-ahmed-marche-dans-les-traces-d-issayas-afewerki>