

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 159 - 01 June 2021

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Reported situation in Tigray (per 31 May)

- Fierce fighting between Tigray forces and ENDF and Eritrean allied troops was reported in Naeder Adet and Asgede Tsimbla districts of the Central and Northwestern zone of Tigray.
- AFP said an aid worker has died after being struck by a stray bullet in the Tigray region, the ninth death of a humanitarian worker in the conflict there. The aid worker, Negasi Kidane, based in the Tigray town of Adigrat, was a longtime employee of the International Committee for the Development of Peoples, known by its Italian acronym CISP.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW) says all warring parties in the Tigray region have been implicated in the attacking, pillaging, and occupying of schools since the conflict started.
- HRW said Ethiopian forces have used the historic Atse Yohannes preparatory school in the regional capital, Mekelle, as a barracks after taking control of the city in late November 2020, and continued to use the school through mid-April 2021.
- Laetitia Bader, Horn of Africa director at HRW said: “The fighting in Tigray is depriving many children of an education and the warring factions are only making matters worse. Occupying and damaging schools ends up affecting the lives of Tigray’s future generations, adding to the losses that communities in Tigray have faced for the last 6 months.”
- Several Mekelle residents told HRW that in early December, Ethiopian forces began using the Atse Yohannes school as a base. After occupying the school for several weeks, they left; trucking away computers, plasma screens, and food.
- The residents added the interim authorities soon began to repair the damage so that classes could resume, but soldiers returned in February and occupied the school for another three months.
- During this time, troops posted armed sentries at the school gate and built fortifications using stones around the school grounds.
- A Mekelle resident working near the school told HRW that women enter and leave the school’s guarded compound on several occasions. “I saw different women taken inside. Sometimes they would stay two, three, or five days, and we would see them go in and out of the school,” she said.
- “They (women) appeared beaten and were crying as they would leave...No one could ask the women what happened to them, and the atmosphere made it difficult to do so,” she added.
- HRW also said after Ethiopian forces left the school, Mekelle residents found widespread damage to classrooms and offices, and destruction of electrical installations, water pipes, and other property.
- “I have given my life and service to the school,” a teacher said. “There is now nothing left to try and begin again, to resume classes. The school won’t be functional even for next year, because of the damage. Everything was taken.”
- Ethiopian soldiers left behind walls covered with hateful and vulgar anti-Tigrayan messages. “On the walls were phrases insulting Tigrayan people,” said one parent. “It was painful to see and read, let alone repeat again.”
- Several Mekelle residents and officials also said that what was most striking and painful was the hateful slogans written in Amharic on the school walls.
- A person explained the graffiti said: It was insulting to Tigray and its people: “Tigray and snakes are the same”; “Tigray must be cleansed”; “Tigray must be cleansed for the development of the country”;

“insults about junta, Tigray are junta.” There were a lot of different things that were written about Tigray women that I cannot repeat. It is too painful.

- HRW further said more than 25 percent of schools in the Tigray region have been looted and damaged.
- A report by National Geographic (NG) says the only roads open in the Tigray region lead to endless tales of darkness and most roads north and south from Tigray’s capital of Mekelle have been closed to journalists and humanitarian aid.

Reported Situation in Ethiopia (per 31 May)

- Kello Media released a secretly recorded audio clip of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed speaking at a recent Executive Committee meeting of the Prosperity Party about Ethiopia’s upcoming general election. Abiy said: “We have won the election, whether you believe it or not, we have won the election easily.”
- Abiy added: “We are all prepared for this election. There is a task force organized only for this matter and will start its work. Believe me, no one can be a leader. We now have a great responsibility to prevent an election and make sure that our competitors also lose hope in it. Compared to the challenges we have come through thus far, it should not be difficult to succeed in this endeavor.”
- He also said: “There will be a lot of bloodshed and carnage in this country. No one will be able to form a government in the coming 10 years. I would rather die than hand over power to them.”
- There is a concerted effort to manipulate public opinion on social media regarding the conflict in Tigray and the international engagement with the situation. Through sites such as unityforethiopia, dozens of tweet templates are offered that can be tweeted on social media. The tweets attack international efforts and TPLF and call for the GERD dam to be filled. These are intended for an international audience, it appears, as many of the tweets are in English.
- This comes at a time when there are many pro-Ethiopian demonstrations being organised in Addis Ababa and Western capitals. Eritrea, an ally of Ethiopia in the conflict, uses similar disinformation, demonstrations, and propaganda tactics, to push back against any international concerns raised in relation to the situation in the country.
- Jan Nyssen, a Professor at Gent University, identified several similar tactics being used for this in the war in Tigray, in the following successive order:
 - Denial: “it’s a very crazy idea”, “you are on the TPLF payroll.”
 - “Admit a small crime, say that you are doing something about it, and the world can continue closing its eyes.”
 - “This is a dirty war, all are committing crimes.”
 - “Human rights concerns is Western imperialism; Ethiopia is not for sale.”
 - “Unfortunately, this is the price to pay.”

International situation (31 May)

- The Armenian Weekly, an English language newspaper belonging to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation political party, has published an open letter to President Biden calling on the US and the western world to officially categorize the conflict in Tigray as a genocide and “use all the leverage and the existing diplomatic, economic and military machineries at its disposal” to pressure the Ethiopian government.
- The letter goes on to compare the atrocities being committed in Tigray to those that occurred during the Arminian genocide: rapes, mass killings, and forced deportations being a hallmark of both.
- The letter also says that “The genocide in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, a genocide that I have witnessed with my own eyes, could even be at a scale worse than that of the Armenians and Rwandans.”
- EEPA is holding a Webinar on Voices From Tigray Brutalities against Religious leaders, Holy Places, and Heritage in Tigray on June 8th, 14:00-16:00 EAT, 13:00-15:00 CET, 07.00-09.00 U.S East. The registration link is: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_w_2_EZNvQqa0luRWLdBWeQ

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Links of interest

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/28/ethiopia-tigray-schools-occupied-looted>
<https://www.barrons.com/news/aid-worker-slain-in-fire-fight-in-ethiopia-s-tigray-01622463613>
<https://www.unityforethiopia.net/strength-security-peace-for-ethiopia/>
<https://armenianweekly.com/2021/05/26/tigray-the-armenian-genocide-and-an-open-letter-to-pres-biden/>