

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 172 - 22 June 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 organizations, civil society, and experts from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and across Africa. The situation reports can be found [here](#).

Reported situation in Tigray (per 21 June)

- Fierce fighting between Tigray defense forces and ENDF allied forces has continued in many parts of Tigray as part of the operation Alula Abanega.
- Reported that ENDF's 21st division has been defeated by Tigray Defense Forces.
- Tigray Defense Forces has controlled many key strategic roads and towns in recent days.
- Reported that ENDF soldiers had left a radar station in Ashegoda, 5km from Mekelle, the regional capital. The soldiers reportedly retreated to Mekelle.
- Reported that dozens of Eritrean troops have surrendered to Tigray Defense Forces near Axum, Central zone of Tigray.
- New York Times (NYT) says by early last November, word reached Washington that war was looming in Tigray.
- NYT said Chris Coons, who has a longstanding interest in Africa, phoned Mr Abiy to warn about the perils of resorting to military force.
- NYT added that :“Mr Coons, a democrat from Delaware, said he reminded the Ethiopian leader that the American Civil War and World War I had started with promises of swift military victory, only to drag on for years and cost millions of lives.”
- Further, NYT said Mr Abiy was undeterred. “He was confident it would be over in six weeks,” said Mr. Coons. Days later, on the evening of the American presidential election, fighting erupted in Tigray.
- In an interview with the BBC, the Ethiopian Prime Minister has said that “there is no hunger in Tigray”.
- He also said that “not only Eritreans are there, but also Sudanese are there”. He continued by saying that he is working with both of them to resolve the situation.
- He also said that he is not pushing the Eritreans out.
- He told the BBC that his government was working with Sudanese troops in Tigray - but did not explain in what capacity.
- According to the IOMs Displacement Matrix, there are 1.7 million displaced people in Tigray.
- IOM Mobile Health and Nutrition Teams have provided 14.4 thousand people with medical consultation since the start of the conflict. They have also screened 4 thousand children for malnutrition. 4,7% were found to be suffering from malnutrition.

Ethiopian Elections (per 21 June)

- Voting took place in Ethiopia on Monday. While the Prime Minister and some analysts have called the election the first free election in 18 years, others have said that the election only allows some people to vote.
- Over 37 Million of the 107 Million people living in Ethiopia are Registered to vote. 47 parties are taking part. PM Abiy's Prosperity Party is fielding the most candidates by a significant margin.
- In the previous election in 2015, the ruling coalition won all 547 seats of the Ethiopian lower House.
- A fifth of Ethiopian parliamentary constituencies are not voting. Voting has been delayed or cancelled due to logistical problems or violence
- A foreign election observer has reportedly been killed in Addis Ababa.

- In an opinion piece for the New York Times, the founder of the Addis Standard, Tsedale Lemma, wrote that while Prime Minister Abiy wants an Ethiopia “where every Ethiopian moves around relaxed, works and prospers” and ones whose “sovereignty is respected and feared, and whose territorial integrity is preserved” he has done terrible damage to the country. It is tearing the country apart.
- He argues that he has displaced two million Ethiopians and compromised Ethiopian territorial integrity by allowing Eritrean soldiers to remain in Tigray.
- He also argues that the conflict in Tigray is not an isolated incident, and that instead PM Abiy has been “ruthlessly centralize power.”
- Abiy wants to unite Ethiopia behind a strong unitary government. However, Tsedale Lemma argues that it is tearing the country apart. All out war has started in Tigray, Oromia is seeing a “brutal crackdown”, and thousands of opposition politicians have been imprisoned. The two main Oromo Political parties have decided to boycott the election in protest, leaving Abiy’s party uncontested.
- Lastly she argues that the election taking place in Ethiopia is underwhelming as entire regions (such as Tigray) have been excluded, logistical issues and security have stopped many people from voting, and half a million Internally Displaced People are unlikely to be able to vote.
- She argues that far from bringing the country together, it is likely to divide it further.

Reported Situation in Ethiopia (per 21 June)

- The UN Human Rights chief, Bachelet, said on Monday that she is “deeply disturbed” by reports of continued violations including executions in Tigray.
- She also said that there have been continued reports of sexual violence against children and forced displacement in Tigray.
- Bachelet also said that a joint investigation should be ready by August. The joint investigation is happening in conjunction with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.
- The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) & Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) have denounced the detention of Oromo refugees. They say they have received information that many refugees are being detained in centers and camps.

International situation (per 21 June)

- The U.S has condemned Eritrea’s continued troop presence in Ethiopia’s Tigray region and calls for the immediate and verifiable withdrawal of Eritrean forces from the Tigray region.
- “We remain gravely concerned that Eritrean government forces continue to commit human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, rape, and sexual violence, and by credible reports that they are forcibly returning Eritrean refugees to Eritrea,” said the U.S statement.
- The statement also said the U.S is gravely concerned about the role of Eritrean forces in preventing humanitarian access to populations in Tigray, directly contributing to conditions of famine.
- The Council of the EU has just appointed a new Special Representative to the Horn: Annette Weber, a German specialist on the Horn of Africa.
- Weber has previously been a researcher for Amnesty International in Sudan, and published reports on Sexual Violence in Darfur.
- EEPA is holding a Webinar on “The involvement of Eritreans in the war in Tigray” on June 29th, 14:00-16:00 EAT, 13:00-15:00 CET, 07.00-09.00 U.S East. The registration link is: <https://bit.ly/3qfQ335>

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Links of interest

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/21/world/africa/Ethiopia-election-Abiy-Ahmed.html>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/21/opinion/ethiopia-election-tigray-abiy.html?smid=fb-share>
<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-rights-chief-deplores-abuse-reports-ethiopias-tigray-2021-06-21/>
<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-57551057>
<https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/tigray-population-movement-complex-emergency-operation-update-n-mdrtigray>
<https://geneva.usmission.gov/2021/06/21/interactive-dialogue-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-eritrea/>