

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 40 - 29 December 2020

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Regional situation (as confirmed per 29 December)

- According to the New York Times (NYT), Eritrea “joined the war in northern Ethiopia” in November and its forces “rampaged through refugee camps” where Eritrean refugees were hosted under international protection. The soldiers committed “human rights violations”.
- PM of Ethiopia Abiy, and Pres Isayas, Eritrea, deny the presence of Eritrean troops. On 30 Nov. Ahmed told the Ethiopian parliament that Eritrea “had fed, clothed and armed retreating Ethiopian soldiers.”
- NYT conducted interviews with “two dozen aid workers, refugees, United Nations officials and diplomats, including a senior American official”. Satellite images, analyzed by the NYT, have corroborated the findings from the interviews.
- NYT reported that clashes took place in refugee camps for Eritreans in Tigray between Eritrean soldiers and TPLF aligned forces. The camp's main water tank was “riddled with gunfire”.
- According to the NYT: “Eritrean soldiers looted aid supplies, stole vehicles and set fire to fields filled with crops and a nearby forested area used by refugees to collect wood.”
- Following the fight, Eritrean soldiers singled out dozens of refugees and “forced (them) back across the border into Eritrea.” Refoulement (forced return) is prohibited under international law as a fundamental principle. The refugees had fled Eritrea, an autocratic and harsh regime.
- A hundred thousand Eritrean refugees were hosted prior to the start of the military operations in camps in Tigray, Ethiopia. The New York Times quotes witnesses stating that the soldiers “burst into the camp” on November 19, and that these were Eritrean. This resulted in “mayhem”, described as “days of plunder, punishment and bloodshed.”
- A highly credible source from Eritrea informed the Situation Report that an estimated 7.000 Eritrean refugees have been forcefully returned to Eritrea and are held in “a special camp” in Eritrea. The report comes from a reliable source from the ground in Asmara (Eritrea).
- A Report that an EU official stated that looted goods were “openly sold in the Eritrean capital, Asmara.”
- Reports obtained from Asmara confirm the arrival of looted goods, including from factories and industries, held in Ashogolgol (Asmara). Catholic church leaders and elders in Eritrea continue to guide Eritreans not to buy these goods, even if cheap. Many citizens are, reportedly, following this guidance.
- More reports are coming in of Eritrean soldiers looting. The BBC has interviewed an analyst who says that sources inside Tigray are detailing that Eritrean soldiers are involved in heavy looting.
- The New York Times has also reported that witnesses say that Eritrean soldiers were wearing ENDF uniforms. This is not the first time this has been reported.

- NYT reports of an “Eritrean attack on a church in Dinglet, in eastern Tigray, on Nov. 30. By one account, 35 people whose names were provided were killed.”
- *Unconfirmed* reports that senior Eritrean military officers, L. Colonel Fisahaye Gebreab and Birhane Haile (Head of radio communication) are killed in a fight with Tigrayan forces in Tigray.
- *Unconfirmed* reports that in Nebelet, a town near Adwa, Tigray, Eritrean troops killed 54 civilians.
- *Unconfirmed* report on social media that some Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) in Mekelle are disguised in Tigray TPLF military uniforms and that they are harassing residents.
- *Unconfirmed* report that on the border to Sudan, Eritrean forces and Ethiopian Amhara soldiers are wearing TPLF uniforms in order to mislead the warring parties.
- Refugees from Tigray in Sudan say they will not return to Ethiopia or Tigray - even if they are told to come back, because they do not feel safe.
- Fighting between Sudan and Ethiopia aligned forces continues. The West Gondar region of Ethiopia has accused Sudan of stealing and destroying property worth 1 billion Birr (25 million euro) to the area. More Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Sudanese troops are moving into the area.
- A written declaration by the Commissioner of Refugees in Sudan, dated 23 Dec 2020, of a ‘prima facie’ approach to the recognition of refugees arriving from Ethiopia after 5 Nov.

Reported situation in Ethiopia (as confirmed per 29 December)

- A Reuters cameraman was arrested in Addis Ababa - in the presence of his wife and 3 children, and will be held for a minimum of two weeks. No charges have been filed. Reuters has strongly condemned the arrest. The arrest follows the beating on 16th December of Reuters photographer Tiksa Negeri by two police officers.
- The Addis Standard reports renewed violence in the regions of Afar and Ethiopian Somaliland. Militias of both regions have carried out attacks in the other region. Several civilians have been killed.
- *Unconfirmed* report that 29 Ethiopian police officers were killed by the Oromia Liberation Front (OLF).

Situation in Tigray (as confirmed per 29 December)

- The mental toll on workers and other helpers is increasing, MSF said. It is taking steps to address it. Triage, and nursing wounded soldiers has especially caused traumatic stress.
- Banks have reopened in Mekelle. They were closed for over a month, stopping people from accessing money needed to buy the little food available. Customers were told today only to deposit and not to withdraw money. There were large queues today of people hoping to withdraw money.
- The ADP, a local Tigrayan party, has rejected a Federal offer to join the interim provisional government of Tigray. They cite the presence of Eritrean soldiers in Tigray, killings and other human rights violations, and the destruction of public and private infrastructure as reasons not to join.

Reported International dimension (as confirmed per 29 December)

- The EU calls for an investigation into the killing of a 100 people in Benishangul-Gumuz last week.
- The Minister of water in Egypt states that Egypt will prioritise cooperation with Nile Basin countries.

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Links of interest

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/28/world/africa/Ethiopia-Eritrea-Tigray.html?referringSource=articleShare>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55295650>

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-arrest/ethiopian-police-arrest-reuters-cameraman-idUSKBN2920AD>

https://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/ncna1252402?cid=sm_npd_nn_tw_ma&_twitter_impression=true

<https://addisstandard.com/news-local-official-in-amhara-region-accused-sudan-of-invading-large-swaths-of-land-stealing-destroying-more-than-25-million-worth-property/>