

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 55 - 14 January 2021

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Reported war situation (as confirmed per 13 January)

- The chief commander of one of the Eritrean divisions fighting in the Eastern front in Tigray has been captured alive by Tigray regional forces.
- ENDF states it has killed three members of the leadership of TPLF who held high office in Ethiopia: Seyoum Mesfin, foreign minister of Ethiopia from 1991 until 2010; Abay Tsehaye, former Federal Affairs Minister and Asmelash Woldesellassie, ex-parliamentary chief whip of the Ethiopian Parliament.
- The Ethiopian Government is arresting former retired Tigrayan officials and their spouses. Many of those are said to be arrested from their houses in Mekelle. Official reports make it appear as if they were captured in battle. It is reported that this is not true.
- It is reported from Eritrea that Sebhat Nega, the retired co-founder of TPLF, was arrested in his house in Mekelle, then taken to the Mai Idaga prison near Dekemhare in Eritrea.
- It is understood that Sebhat Nega was not captured in battle and was not captured in hiding, and that such reports are incorrect, but that he was arrested from his home, and brought to Eritrea where he was held until he was handed to the Ethiopian authorities.
- Eritrean refugees in Hitsats camp in Tigray are ordered to return to Eritrea and were forced to walk to Sheraro. From Sheraro buses and trucks take them to Eritrea.
- The ancient Monastery of Debre Damo in Tigray was bombarded by Eritrean soldiers using heavy artillery. Debre Damo, is the name of a flat-topped mountain, or *amba*, and a 6th-century monastery in Tigray, Ethiopia. The mountain is a steeply rising plateau about 1000 by 400 m in dimension.
- The monasteries' church artifacts and materials were looted by Eritrean forces.
- Middle East Eye (MEE) investigates reports of the destruction of the Al-Nejashi Mosque, possibly the oldest Mosque of Africa and casualties first reported on 18 December by EEPA. The attack on the mosque would have occurred on 26th of November. Recently, pictures of the damage emerged.
- According to MEE, a representative of the regional International Association of Muslims in Tigray, Ahmed Siraj, stated several civilians were killed by Eritrean soldiers as they protested the pillaging.
- It is believed that artefacts have been stolen from the Al-Nejashi Mosque, including religious manuscripts, books and letters dating as far back as the seventh century.
- A shrine holding the remains of followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the Mosque is also damaged.
- HRW releases reports that civilians living in western Tigray, especially Humera, were unexpectedly shelled, followed by an invasion of paramilitary troops known as "Liyu Hail" from the Amhara region and ENDF forces, and young members of Amhara youth militia groups "Fano."
- HRW reports that refugees from Humera said that "they witnessed extrajudicial executions by federal forces and their allies during the fighting or after they took over towns."

- HRW found that witnesses said that “some of the victims were suspected TPLF members, fighters, or supporters and retired soldiers. However, businesspeople and farmers were also targeted, as were others whom the soldiers happened to have stopped, including families and children trying to flee.”
- This confirms reports received that “Several large artillery bombardments were allegedly carried out in Humera between November 9-11 2020. Witnesses report that shells were launched from Eritrea, devastating residential areas and destroying a hospital. The Ethiopian army and regional Amhara forces also allegedly then took control of Humera, where they killed civilians and looted buildings.”
- Arte shows refugees speaking about their ordeal when they fled Mai Kadra, on 9 Nov 2020. The town of Mai Kadra had Tigray and Amhara residents (farmers). The civilians speak of horrific killings, roads covered with dead bodies and bodies shoved in mass graves by tractors, with over 600 people killed. The horrific attack was carried out by Amhara, according to the witnesses interviewed by Arte.
- HRW reports that in Mai-Kadra, “a number of refugees reported seeing hundreds of dead bodies which had been shot, stabbed, or hacked with knives, machetes, and axes, including those of ethnic Amharas but also of Tigrayans. Family members from several towns said they saw loved ones killed but could not offer them a proper and dignified burial.”
- HRW finds that “People who remained in their homes or went back to their towns after the heavy fighting had subsided said they saw Amhara “special forces” and Fanos, as well as unidentified gunmen, detain those who remained, and loot abandoned and inhabited homes, shops, and hospitals. People said gold, animals, recently harvested produce, as well as goods from electronics shops were stolen. Many expressed concerns and fears about what they may face if they returned home.”
- Arte speaks to a soldier of Tigray defense forces who fled from Western Tigray as troops were overwhelmed by the mechanized divisions who entered with tanks. According to Human Rights Watch “Some residents described being caught in the crossfire between federal government and allied and TPLF forces in the farmland on the outskirts of towns as they attempted to flee or hide.”
- UN Commissioner for Human Rights, Bachelet, has stated that such killings would be classified as war crimes if “civilians were deliberately killed by a party or parties to the conflict.” She has called for an “immediate, impartial, and thorough investigation into the killings.”

Reported situation in Ethiopia (as confirmed per 13 January)

- The war is causing an economic crisis in Ethiopia. The federal Ethiopian government has not paid salaries in many sub cities of Addis Ababa and southern regional states.
- Opposition leader Yilkal Getnet has requested the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops in Metekel.
- US Senators Chris Murphy, Patrick Leahy and Ben Cardin have sent a letter to Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed stating that “over the last few months, the Ethiopian government has increasingly engaged in a pattern of intimidation against journalists” and demanding for the immediate release of the journalists.

Reported International situation (as confirmed per 13 January)

- Eritrea has expelled the Ambassador of Egypt, end of December. He travelled to Egypt via an Ethiopian Airlines chartered flight. Eritrea accused the Ambassador of Egypt of working with the TPLF.
- Refugee Council USA expresses its concern over “ the conflict’s mounting humanitarian toll. There have been reports of civilians being targeted and killed, including aid workers, and refugees abducted.”

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Links of interest

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/13/ethiopia-says-former-foreign-minister-killed-by-military>
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict/ethiopia-says-ex-foreign-minister-killed-by-military-after-refusing-to-surrender-idUSKBN29I2GB>
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