

Situation Report EPPA HORN No. 57 - 16 January 2021

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Reported war situation (as confirmed per 15 January)

- During the last three days, there has been heavy fighting in Daero Hafash (East of Axum) where four battalions of Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and Eritrean Defense Forces (ErDF) were “totally destroyed” by Tigray forces. It is reported that Tigray forces captured “lots of weapons”.
- It is reported that in a place called Dairo Hafash, Tigray forces overtook 4.000 troops of the ENDF/ErDF.
- Fighting is going on in Tsigereda around Wukro between ENDF/ErDF and Tigray forces.
- Reported that one battalion of ENDF/ErDF was “eliminated” by Tigray forces in Ruwa Gered on the way from Adwa to Edaga Arbi two days ago.
- Reported fighting is ongoing in “various locations”.
- Video circulating with shooting and people running in Addis Ababa. No further information.
- In a meeting at Mekelle University staff with the appointed chief of the Tigray provisional government, Mulu Nega, a number of ‘difficult questions’ were raised during a hot debate. Mulu Nega told participants that he had called on the federal government to pull Eritrean troops out of Tigray. However, the country lacked the military power to force the troops to leave Tigray.
- In a nervous response to a question of what would happen to those dissenting, Mulu Nega answered: “if you don't listen to what we're telling you? You'd better go into the deserts and join the fight.”
- A UN team reports that it has encountered uniformed troops from neighbouring Eritrea.
- Message circulated of the relatives of a female Eritrean refugee, Yirgalem Eyasu Hagos, who was kidnapped from the Hitsats refugee camp in Tigray and has disappeared. When she was abducted her children Adyam Kesete, 12, and Merhawi Mebrahtom, 8 were left behind on their own.
- Reported that Hitsats camp was under Eritrean military control from end November/December. Eritrean soldiers killed people, including 2 priests that protested when soldiers tried to enter into the church. Tigray troops started shooting on 17 November in a fight with the Eritrean troops, and 9 Eritrean refugees were killed in the crossfire. Shimelba and Hitsats have not been accessible since.
- Wife and two children of Tsadkan Gebretinsae, former chief of staff of the army, have been detained.
- The Tigray regional government issued a statement today: "The government of Tigray has confirmed that Tegadalay Syoum Mesfin, Abay Tsehaye and Asmelash Weldeselassie were not in the war front due to their ages and health issues. Therefore, they are assassinated by Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean forces, very likely at the order of Isayas."

Reported situation in Ethiopia (as confirmed per 15 January)

- In a video circulating on social media of PM Abiy addressing a church group, the Ethiopian PM states that his mother predicted that he would be the 7th king of Ethiopia and that he had achieved this.

- Brigadier-General Tesfaye Ayalew, Head of the ENDF Deployment Department, states: “Even if there may be good people amongst them (Tigrayans) we can’t differentiate the good from the bad. To save the country we made it so that they (Tigrayans) were excluded from doing the work.”
- Reported that the chairman of Asimba Democratic Party (ADP) Dori Asegdom is arrested. Earlier, Dori had rejected an invitation from the Prosperity Party to be part of Tigray provisional Administration.

Reported regional situation (as confirmed per 15 January)

- The ambassador of Ethiopia in Khartoum has stated that Sudan took over disputed land as it was taking advantage of the war in the Tigray. Ethiopian military warplane crossed over the disputed border area.
- Sudan has accused Ethiopia of a “dangerous and unjustified escalation”.
- The Sudanese Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) imposed restrictions on air traffic over El-Gadarif province and the greater and lower areas of Al-Fashaga in the east of the country.
- Ambassador of Ethiopia to The UAE, Suleiman Dedefo, points out that the GERD dam is located in the areas of Matema and Benishangul and that Sudan, by implication of its claim to these areas, is claiming the GERD dam. The ambassador states Ethiopia is able to protect its sovereign claim to the area.
- Sudan’s head of the Sudanese military, Lieutenant General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, visited the disputed area, meeting Sudanese troops guarding the borders and stated that Ethiopia had started the war when militia killed civilians in the al-Fashaga area.

Reported International situation (as confirmed per 15 January)

- EU suspends 88 million€ in budget support to Ethiopia until it opens access to Tigray for humanitarian aid organisations.
- EU Diplomat Josep Borrell states: “We are ready to help, but unless there is access for humanitarian aid operators, the EU cannot disburse the planned budget support to the Ethiopian government.”
- Borrell says it is no longer credible to describe the Tigray conflict as an internal “law and order” operation and that the conflict threatens stability of the whole region. He stated: “We receive consistent reports of ethnic-targeted violence, killings, massive looting, rapes, forceful returns of refugees and possible war crimes.”
- Borrell also pointed to the impact of the Eritrean participation in the war: “there are regional spill-over effects of the conflict, with for instance Eritrean troops being involved in the military operations in Tigray and with Ethiopian troops being withdrawn from Somalia”.
- Referring to the refugee camps in Tigray for Eritrean refugees, Un High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi states: “These are concrete indications of major violations of international law.”
- Reported that Beijing is “extremely angry” at PM Abiy for the killing of Seyoum Mesfin, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia. Seyoum “was respected in policy circles. He was the architect of Ethiopia's strategic partnership with China that spawned a vast infrastructure renewal in Ethiopia.”

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Links of interest

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-eu/eu-suspends-ethiopian-budget-support-over-tigray-crisis-idUSKBN29K1SS>

<https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1350047323561324552?s=08>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/15/major-violations-of-international-law-at-tigray-refugee-camps-un>

https://martinplaut.com/2021/01/13/ethiopian-brigadier-general-justifies-ethnic-profiling-in-the-military-to-exclude-tigrayans/amp/?_twitter_impression=true