



Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 61 - 20 January 2021

[**Europe External Programme with Africa**](#) is a Belgium-based Centre of Expertise with in-depth knowledge, publications, and networks, specialised in issues of peace building, refugee protection and resilience in the Horn of Africa. EEPA has published extensively on issues related to 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 organisations, 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 war situation (as confirmed per 19 January)

- Reported that 9.2% or about 65,000 children under five years of age in Tigray are suffering from acute nutritional deficiency such as wasting.
- Reported that 5 families have been found dead of starvation in Erop, Eastern part of Tigray.
- A video and pictures have emerged showing the extent of the damage Eritrea and Ethiopian forces caused to Cherkos Church in Zalanbesa, Tigray. The church was carved during the 5th century. It appears bombed and looted and one side is completely destroyed.
- More pictures coming out from Wukro, 40 km from Mekelle showing buildings, hotels, shops, banks and cars heavily destroyed, allegedly by Eritrean and ENDF allied forces.
- Osman Abukar Dubbe, Minister of Information from Somalia, denies reports that Somali soldiers took part in the conflict in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. He states reports that hundreds of Somali soldiers were killed in the conflict is untrue.
- Other sources continue to stand by the story that Somali youth are fighting in Tigray. The reported number of soldiers that would have been sent to Tigray varies.

Reported situation in Ethiopia (as confirmed per 19 January)

- The Electoral Board of Ethiopia states that it canceled the license of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Elections are due on 5 June. The TPLF held an election in Tigray on 9 Sept which the TPLF won.

Reported International situation (as confirmed per 19 January)

- The European Union is sending the Finnish foreign minister Pekka Haavisto to negotiate with the Ethiopian government to open up a full access humanitarian corridor in Tigray. Pekka Haavisto intends to report back to the EU Council.
- The top priority of the EU is full humanitarian access: "International humanitarian law is not about giving access to government-controlled areas (...) International humanitarian law means giving access to all areas where people need us, and it's very clear that this is not the case with the current agreement. We have told the Ethiopians that we stand ready to negotiate something different, but what is now on the table is not working."
- UNHCR led the first humanitarian mission to the refugee camps Mai Aini and Adi Harush in Tigray and found thousands of Eritrean refugees in "desperate need" of supplies and services. Ethiopia granted UNHCR a one-time access to conduct a needs assessment, in the two camps. UNHCR did not receive authorisation to enter two other camps, believed to be under intense strain.

- A second EU official stated that the approach by the UN, based on the idea that some access was better than no access at all, had failed, and stated: “The government is still claiming that things are getting better, at least where they have control. It’s not true. It doesn’t work.”
- A spokesperson for the European Commission’s development department said Ethiopia will have to comply with the following conditions before the EU will disburse future budget support: “Granting full humanitarian access for relief actors to reach people in need in all affected areas, in line with International Humanitarian Law. Civilians must be able to seek refuge in neighboring countries. Ethnically targeted measures and hate speech must stop. Mechanisms to monitor human rights violations must be put in place to investigate allegations of breach of Human Rights. Communication lines and media access to Tigray should be fully re-established.”
- Reported that both the Ethiopian prime minister’s spokeswoman Billene Seyoum and Tigray’s interim Governor Mulu Nega are yet to respond to emailed queries seeking insight on the matter of humanitarian assistance reaching Tigray, Al Jazeera states.
- Mehari Taddele Maru, a professor at the European University Institute, alleged the refusal to allow unhindered access to the region was meant to keep news of starvation and abuses by state forces under the wraps. (AJ)
- Mehari Taddele Maru states that “Deliberate obstruction of humanitarian access is a classic method of systematic starvation of people (..) Ethiopian government and Eritrean troops continue to obstruct access to humanitarian aid. The blanket continues and thus first-hand information is almost impossible to get. The restriction of information is in itself a crime of the state to hide other crimes.”
- Murithi Mutiga, Horn of Africa project director for the International Crisis Group comments on the looming famine: “In past conflicts, mass starvation in parts of Tigray has stiffened local resistance and led to prolonged conflict” (AJ)
- Murithi Mutiga states that “If the government is to be taken at its word that its campaign is aimed only at ousting the TPLF and not at harming the Tigrayan people, they should swiftly accede to the demands of humanitarian agencies for access to Tigray and even to areas TPLF forces may still control to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.”
- Daniel Bekele, Ethiopia’s human rights commissioner, said greater access to media, human rights groups, and international organisations should be allowed and that civilian-military coordination was needed to smooth out hurdles in humanitarian access. (6/1, online briefing by the Geneva Press Club)
- The Sudanese government has launched an appeal to the international community to provide urgent aid and to increase support and contributions to help Ethiopian refugees who fled to eastern Sudan as a result of the fight in the Tigray region.
- Responding to the alleged attack on people at the Maryam Zion Church in Aksum, Michael Gervers, professor of history, University of Toronto, states: “The government and the Eritreans want to wipe out the Tigrayan culture. (..) The looting is about destroying and removing the cultural presence of Tigray.”
- Canada expresses concern of the humanitarian situation in Tigray, the situation of refugees and the “continued barriers to humanitarian access”. The Government of Canada states that the “protection of civilians must be upheld in accordance with international law & humanitarian principles”.
- Diaspora kids from Tigray publish “[A New Song](#)” to stop the war in Tigray.

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Links of interest

- <https://theconversation.com/food-and-healthcare-in-war-torn-tigray-preliminary-insights-on-whats-at-stake-153021>
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cr2pxn1173dt/tigray-crisis>
- <https://www.devex.com/news/eu-to-dispatch-humanitarian-negotiator-to-ethiopia-after-aid-suspension-98934>
- <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210119-grim-picture-emerges-from-glimpses-of-ethiopia-s-tigray-war>
- https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2021/1/19/ethiopia-hesitant-to-allow-aid-agencies-into-tigray?_twitter_impression=true