

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 70 - 29 January 2021

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Reported war situation (as confirmed per 28 January)

- Asmara is mobilising 200.000 fresh troops, assigned to travel from Eritrea to Tigray to fight, through both the Zalambesa & Rama border, for a “final offensive”. This ‘huge’ number “has been achieved by enlisting several categories of conscripts who might have previously been exempt. This includes women with very young children, retired soldiers and some children as young as 16.”
- It is reported that “the Eritrea plan is to finish off the Tigrayan resistance before international pressure forces the Ethiopian government to give access to Tigray for aid and reporters.”
- The Morning Star reports that a letter signed by a Prosperity Party representative, was leaked to them showing that Ethiopian government forces threatened to kill TPLF members if they refused to join the ruling Prosperity Party. Similar threats were made to journalist Dawit Kebede, just before he was shot.
- Human Rights Concern Eritrea (HRCE) received eye witness accounts of the killing of unarmed civilian refugees at the Eritrean refugee camp in Shimelba, Tigray. In Nov, two senior Eritrean military officers entered the camp and told refugees to return to Eritrea. The refugees refused, fearing for their lives.
- HRCE reports that subsequently eight Tigrayan civilians, suspected of supporting the TPLF, were brought into the camp and that they were executed in front of the refugees, to terrorise them. Four Eritrean refugees, from the Kunama tribe, were also killed by the Eritrean forces.
- As refugees were terrified by the executions, they were removed at gunpoint from the camp and marched to Sheraro, where they were loaded onto trucks and repatriated to Eritrea, states HRCE.
- HRCE reports that on the 23rd Nov armed militia started to shoot at refugees in the Hitsats Eritrean refugee camp in Tigray. Ten refugees died immediately; more than forty were wounded.
- On 5th Jan, Eritrean military forces ordered all refugees in the Hitsats camp to march on foot to Sheraro; pregnant women, children, elderly. There they were loaded on trucks and taken to Eritrea, states HRCE. The information was obtained from refugees who could escape and contacted HRCE.
- Shimelba and Hitsats camps are deserted and there have been fires, confirmed by satellite images.
- Eritrean troops allegedly killed more than 10 civilians in Idagahamus today.
- According to sources, Tigray forces killed more than 2000 ENDF allied forces at May Keyih area.
- Heavy fighting reported around Wukro and also in Tsigereda.
- A fourth video appears of civilians speaking about the atrocities and killing of civilians in Aksum on Nov 28-30th. In the video, some Eritrean soldiers deny the killing of civilians. One Eritrean soldier states that they were in Aksum and other towns and killed those suspected to be enemies.
- EriTV announced the death of senior Eritrean officer Colonel Girmay Gebreyesus.

Reported International situation (as confirmed per 28 January)

- The Stop Slavery in Eritrea Campaign issues a statement against forced conscription in Eritrea, demanding protection of Eritrean refugees in Tigray; demands that Eritrea suspends forced conscripts and suspends all war activity, withdraws Eritrean troops from foreign territory; and asks all Eritrean conscripts to “defy orders to attack innocent civilians.”

- Stop Slavery states that the UN Security Council must reinstate sanctions on President Isaias Afwerki and PFDJ officials, stating: “This is Isaias' war, the same Isaias Afwerki found guilty of crimes against humanity, using forced conscripts under the indefinite national slavery program to wage war on Tigray and commit horrendous crimes - gross human rights violations to which Eritreans have been subjected to for decades - and now he is also allegedly unleashing on civilians in Tigray with impunity.”
- Stop Slavery states: “that many of the forced Eritrean conscripts are underaged girls and boys.”
- Stop Slavery demands an independent investigation in war crimes committed and that Eritrean and Ethiopian forces found guilty of war crimes to be taken to the International Criminal Court.
- Stop Slavery expresses deep concern “about reports of Eritrean refugees forcibly returned to Eritrea by the brutal regime they fled from.” The campaign urges UNHCR “to protect Eritrean refugees.”
- Stop Slavery states that it is inspired by Somali mothers demanding the return of their children, secretly recruited for the war in Tigray: “We are inspired by the courageous Somali mothers demanding the return of their children that have joined the war in Tigray.”
- Reuters has reported that Eritrea has secretly been recruiting Somali men and sending them to fight in Tigray. According to people interviewed, young men were recruited by the Somali Federal Government to work in Qatar, but instead were sent to Eritrea to serve in the military against their will.
- The young men were not told. One called home in November and said: “We were all shocked to land in Eritrea.” and “I have not seen food save a lump or slice of bread since I left Somalia in 2019.”
- Human Rights Concern Eritrea (HRCE) states that Eritrean military forces “consists mostly of young conscripts who have been forced to fight in Tigray against their will.”
- HRCE states that the UN Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights in Eritrea found “evidence of Crimes against Humanity” being committed in Eritrea and that Crimes against Humanity have been committed in Tigray. HRCE calls on the International Criminal Court to investigate these crimes immediately.
- Protests by Somali mothers asking where their children are, in Mogadishu, Guriel, and Galkayo.
- Somalia has admitted that it sent young recruits for training to Eritrea, according to Garowe online.
- The United States demanded that Eritrea leave Tigray immediately. The US calls for an independent and transparent investigation into the abuses in the region. The US Senate Foreign Affairs committee discussed the conflict in the Horn and Sudan.
- In Washington protest held demanding Eritrea leaves Tigray by Tigray and Eritrean protesters.
- In a new statement, UNICEF has said that 10% of the children below five are showing signs of severe malnutrition. This is above the WHO 3% emergency threshold.
- The Washington Post published an opinion asking whether PM Abiy is committing war crimes. The Post points to the many atrocities committed by Eritrean troops in the region. No action has been taken by the Abiy government despite many reports coming out of the region of massacres, rapes and looting.
- The Washington Post states that PM Abiy has been accused of blocking food deliveries to the region, even as soldiers were burning crops and stealing cattle. International officials have warned that millions are at risk of starvation; the Tigray interim government stated that people had died of famine.
- U.N. officials say about 80 aid workers are waiting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, for permission to travel to Tigray.
- Joint NGO Letter calls for a Special Session on the deteriorating human rights situation in Ethiopia.

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Links of interest

<https://eritreahub.org/eritreas-mass-mobilisation-for-a-final-offensive-in-the-tigray-war>
<https://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/ethiopian-government-accused-threatening-kill-tigravans-refuse-join-ruling-party>
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-eritrea-security/anger-in-somalia-as-sons-secretly-sent-to-serve-in-eritrea-military-force-idUSKBN29X1E5?l=0>
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<https://setit.org/eritreas-anti-forced-conscription-campaigners-demand-accountability-in-the-war-in-tigray/>
<https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-admits-sending-cadets-to-eritrea-denies-involving-in-ethiopian-war>
https://hrc-eritrea.org/eritrea-refugees-from-two-camps-deported-at-gunpoint-by-eritrea-soldiers-to-the-country-they-fled-from-unarmed-civilians-and-refugees-shot-dead/?fbclid=IwAR2Za7CNmCda6keCxJWN6_6drzEzNQK9BB0HufwLHZleXcb165elphH3Kc