

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 71 - 30 January 2021

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Reported war situation (as confirmed per 29 January)

- A source from Mekelle, Tigray, speaks of the difficulty of speaking about what is happening: “Our problem is that the value of life has become meaningless. When a single person dies, we feel all the pain. For some, it has become a matter of statistics. But here, we don’t know how to mourn and how to speak to a family where they have lost eight relatives.”
- The source describes a very depressing situation in the town due to the complete information shut-down. He has realised that “information is as important as food and water.” He states: “we don’t know who is creating information and it adds to demoralisation and intimidation”.
- The source lives near the Mekelle Ayder referral hospital. He says: “I could see the pain in the eyes of the ENDF soldiers who used Ayder hospital as a camp. Most of them are 18-19 years old. They have no hope. They know they may die soon. It is devastating for all the families of these young people.”
- The source explains that the Ethiopian federal troops were in Ayder hospital in the first week after ENDF had captured Mekelle: “I went and saw around 500 ENDF soldiers with machine guns. I thought they came to protect us. But when Eritrean soldiers came they did nothing to protect the property.”
- The source states: “Eritrean soldiers came with vehicles to take goods. The soldiers were few. The source says that the elders asked the ENDF colonel at the hospital campus whether they would prohibit the looting and that they would follow orders from ENDF. The ENDF colonel said they had no mandate to tell Eritrean soldiers what to do. The elders then asked ENDF to give weapons to defend the hospital which is a public property of the Ethiopian government.”
- The source states ENDF could not help to protect the institution from the Ethiopian government. The information that the Eritrean soldiers were on their way to Ayder referral hospital went around very fast through the megaphone system. The elders instructed the community to block the road. “My house is ten minutes away from there and everything was blocked.” He concludes: “the community protected Ayder hospital from major looting. They did the same for the Telecom (TV and satellites).”
- “When I grew up, my mother never smiled”, says the source. “Now I have had the revelation to understand why. The experiences of war have made her afraid. A lot of pain may have taught her sadness. Now I have a young boy of three. I find that he can differentiate between a gunshot and a bomb and airstrike. We are passing this experience of war through the generations.”
- The source from Mekelle states: “The pain we must see is the bigger picture of all our Eritrean and Ethiopian brothers. The problem is a collective one of the whole region.”
- Eritrean I.D. cards have been distributed to citizens in Irob, Tigray, Ethiopia, confirms a source by phone from Sebe’a in Irob. He confirms that everything has been stolen. People only wear the clothes they wear. Many people have fled to the mountains and are hiding in caves. There is no food, no money. Two grandchildren of the source have been killed.
- Another source says that the Eritrean troops are looting blankets of farmers in rural areas around Tigray. When they do this they say: “you have taken us 20 years back in development. In return, we

will take you (Tigrayans) 50 yrs back. You will know in the future that you will never be richer than Eritrea.” The source was in a village near Rama. He left for Addis and spoke by phone from there.

Reported International situation (as confirmed per 29 January)

- A group of “Concerned Eritreans Regarding the Civil War in Ethiopia”, signed by Professor Emeritus Bereket Habte Selassie, issues a statement. Dr. Selassie has held high-profile positions within Ethiopia, serving as Attorney General, Associate Justice of Ethiopia’s Supreme Court, Vice Minister of Interior, and Mayor of Harar. He was the Chairman of the Constitutional Commission in Eritrea after its independence in 1993 and the principal author of Eritrea’s constitution, which never came into effect.
- The group of Concerned Eritreans express their “grief over the Ethiopian civil war that on Nov. 4th started” and condemns “in the strongest possible terms the wanton killings, displacement, famine and distress that the Ethiopian Federal Government and its partners have since inflicted upon the civilian population of Tigray.” The Group states that “The Eritrean military is actively involved in the war on orders of President Isaias Afwerki and his close circle.”
- The Group expresses its duty “as citizens and as human beings to take a firm stand against role of the Eritrean military in subjecting the people of Tigray and Eritrean refugees in Tigray to conditions that led to killings, pillaging, sexual violence, destruction of heritage sites displacement.”
- The Groups strongly condemns “President Isaias Afwerki and his close circle for coercing Eritreans into causing death and destruction for the sole purpose of exacting personal vengeance.”
- The Group notes: President Isaias aims “to sow generational feud and hatred between Eritreans and their Tigrayan neighbors. We can only overcome such seeds of hatred with love, compassion and remorse, and hence we express our respect for and solidarity with the people of Tigray.”
- The Group states that “Soldiers of the Eritrean Defense Forces (irrespective of their ethnic roots) who have been designated to waste in this debacle are themselves victims of the repressive regime, and their commanders and the regime in Asmara bear primary responsibility for the violations that they endure and that they inflict. The United States has said that it has communicated directly to senior Eritrean officials that Eritrean soldiers must withdraw immediately from Tigray.”
- The Group strongly condemns “the hypocrisy of enforcing the strictest lockdown since April 2020 while sending citizens to battle. While most governments are working hard to combat the spread of COVID-19, President Isaias Afwerki has created a conducive environment for large-scale deaths by exposing Eritrean soldiers to mass-spread of the virus and battlefield deaths.”
- The Group calls “for the immediate and unconditional withdrawals of the Eritrean military from Tigray and Ethiopian forces from Eritrean territories. We urge the world community and international and regional organizations to pressure the Ethiopian federal government and President Isaias and his associates to end the war.”
- The Group calls “upon the international community to pressure the Ethiopian federal government to grant humanitarian access to Tigrayans and Eritrean refugees in the region, who are in dire need due to war-caused hunger and shortage of other basic necessities.”
- The Group calls upon the United Nations, U.N. Security Council, the African Union, the European Union, President Joe Biden’s administration and other partner countries to appoint an impartial body to investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice. The atrocities that are being committed in Tigray amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity and violate many international treaties and conventions that Eritrea and Ethiopia have signed.”
- The US has ‘directly’ pressured Eritrea to withdraw forces from Tigray.

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Links of interest

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/us-directly-presses-eritrea-to-withdraw-forces-from-tigray/2021/01/28/4adbaba2-618d-11eb-a177-7765f29a9524_story.html