

Situation Report EPPA HORN No. 79 - 08 February 2021

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Reported war situation (as confirmed per 07 February)

- Ethiopian Airlines has stopped flying to Gondar, Bahir Dar and Lalibela, destinations in the Amhara region, due to bad weather. A counterclaim is that the flight interruption is due to security problems as Sudan now controls airspace of especially Western Amhara.
- Eritrea is expanding its presence in Tigray, despite international calls that it must withdraw. The expansion includes mechanised divisions. Videos appear of Eritrean troops entering Mekelle in trucks and buses. In Wukro the number of Ethiopian troops has been reduced and Eritrean troops increased.
- Fighting reported near Samre, Nekseged, and Korem. This is part of the attack of the 'final phase' and the Ethiopian Federal Defence forces and Eritrean forces have moved to many places in Tigray.
- Movement of Eritrean armored vehicles from North Tigray to South Tigray, near Maychew and Samre.
- Reported that Tigray regional forces continue fighting. Last week, ENDF senior officers were killed: Col Kedir Bekele, 25th div; Serg Zekaris Goshu, Transport, 25th div and Serg Hussien, 2nd brig of 25th div.
- There are 68.000 Internally Displaced People in Mekelle. Most of the IDPs are displaced from the western part of the Tigray region. Many of these are quartered in schools and colleges.
- There are many IDPs around Shire. The IDPs are sheltered in the Shire campus of Aksum university, sites in the town of Shire, the Shire Preparatory School and the Primary School. The majority of the IDPs come from the Western part of Tigray, fleeing occupation by Amhara regional forces and militia.
- In the Shire campus of Aksum, there are 40.000 IDPs, including 6.000 children under 5 years. Pictures have emerged of their living conditions, which show very poor facilities, including on construction sites. There are over 400 pregnant and lactating mothers and more than 800 people with chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, epilepsy, bronchial asthma and HIV. Seven of them have died.
- According to reports, 1.500 people have reported that their cars have been stolen or are missing. The head of the Tigray bureau of Road and Transport says the cars are with Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers.
- Following border clashes, Sudan controls new areas from Amhara militias in the disputed territory.
- Report by Eritrean refugees that at the start of the war, Eritrean forces entered the Hitsats refugee camp, where Eritrean refugees stayed under international protection. The Eritrean forces captured representatives of refugees from the Agency for Refugees and Returnees Administration (ARRA).
- Eritrean refugees report that Eritrean forces continued to loot the camp and destroyed shelters. Tigray regional forces organised a transport to Shire town. However, Eritrean refugees were petrified. Some fled to places around the area. The Eritrean government forces took refugees who were hiding and took them to the border town of Badme. Refugees are now sent back to Eritrea, from where they fled.

Reported situation in Ethiopia (as confirmed per 07 February)

- The World Food Programme and the Ethiopian government have come to an agreement about expanding aid to Tigray.

- Beasley, the WFP chief, said that there were between 2.6 and 3 million people that required immediate assistance. The nutrition situation is worse for children and pregnant/lactating mothers.
- The UN has agreed to provide relief for up to a million people. It will also launch a supplementary programme to help 875.000 nutritionally vulnerable children.
- Prime Minister Abiy has written an opinion column for the Project Syndicate magazine. He argues that the operations in Tigray were necessary to bring stability to the region.

Reported international situation (as confirmed per 07 February)

- Pekka Haavisto, Finnish foreign minister and European Special Envoy, has arrived in Khartoum for a two day visit. He is there to help ease the tension between Ethiopia and Sudan and see how the EU and the international community can help. He will meet with Prime Minister Hamdok, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council Al-Burham, the Deputy Chairman, and the minister of water and Irrigation.
- After the two day visit to Sudan, Haavisto will fly to Khartoum to meet with Ethiopian leaders.
- Following his meeting with Haavisto, Sudanese the Prime Minister Sudan Hamdok said he “looks forward to the continuation of the African Union mediation to reach a binding agreement on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.” The Sudanese minister for Irrigation called for the inclusion of the United Nations in the negotiation process.
- Sudan has also reiterated its warning that continuation of the filling of the GERD dam could endanger its own dams and the lives of millions of people living in the region.
- The region of Puntland in Somalia has announced that it will cease to recognise Farmajoo as President from midnight on Sunday. There are tensions surrounding the upcoming elections in Somalia.
- The Global Society of Tigray Scholars writes to UNESCO President, Audrey Azoulay, referring to the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the Convention of the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The scholars state that “there exist widespread and evidence-based reports of genocidal ethnic cleansing and killings, starvation through a deliberate isolation of the region, vandalization of public and private properties and destruction and looting of cultural and sacred sites.”
- The scholars state that “this is happening under total media blackout by a concerted effort of the Ethiopian Defense Forces, Eritrean Defense Forces and the Amhara Regional Special Forces and militia.”
- The scholars state that a unique part of humanity’s heritage is at risk, including UNESCO heritage old monolithic tomb markers that are 1,700 years old; the fragile rock churches and archeological sites that date to between 800-1000 AD.
- The Temple of Yeha dates back to ca. 5th - 8th BCE, near Axum, and is the oldest standing building in sub-Saharan Africa and is very fragile. It was the capital of the pre-Axumite Da-amt Kingdom. The temple needs protection.
- Michael Gervers, University of Toronto, states that “This is cultural cleansing. The (Ethiopian) government and Eritreans want to wipe out the Tigrayan culture.”
- The churches in Tigray contain some of the world’s rarest and oldest Christian manuscripts and evidence is mounting that many are taken by the occupying forces. The scholars conclude that the Ethiopian government, the Eritrean army and Amhara regional forces are engaged in heritage destruction and looting. The scholars state that the The Hague Convention mandates the international community to ensure the protection of cultural property during armed conflict.

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