

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 83 - 12 February 2021

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Reported war situation (as confirmed per 11 February)

- Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi from China speaks by phone to Ethiopia Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonen on humanitarian assistance to Tigray.
- Ambassador Teferi Meles sent a letter to thank for contributions to “strengthen defence forces” received from supporters in the UK and Ireland “on the direction of church representatives”.
- The letter states: “Based on the direction you set and in consultation with your representative, we (..) inform you that we have secretly transferred Birr 25 million to the bank account of the Ministry of Defence.”
- The LA Times has published an account of a rape survivor (27y) in Tigray. The victim was forced into a shed by 5 Eritrean soldiers. She recognised them due to their accent. The story was corroborated by a counselor at a local rehabilitation centre.
- Over the course of the next two weeks, in early January, she was gang raped by scores of soldiers. One day involved 15 men repeatedly raping her for eight hours, leading to fractures in her spine and pelvis.
- She escaped on January 23rd, and has not had any contact with her sister (24y), who was taken at the same time as she was.
- LA Times also published a story about Lucy Kassa, the journalist whose house was ransacked on Monday.
- She says that 3 armed men barged into her Addis Ababa home, looking for the story about the gang rape. They took her laptop, pictures from a source in Adigrat, and a flashdrive. The men also threatened to kill her before they left.
- A therapist who was treating the rape victim, which the journalist had interviewed, also called her saying to have been threatened.
- According to a Tigrayan student in Europe who has had contact with her family, Ethiopian soldiers have arrived in her village with food, but are withholding it from anyone who is suspected of being a TPLF sympathiser. According to AP who reported the story, other such accounts exist.
- Human Rights Watch has called for a UN inquiry on violations by the parties involved in the conflict.
- HRW has accused Ethiopia of shelling civilian areas indiscriminately at the beginning of the conflict. Laetitia Bader HRW Horn of Africa director has said “At the war’s start, Ethiopian federal forces fired artillery into Tigray’s urban areas in an apparently indiscriminate manner that was bound to cause civilian casualties and property damage.”
- HRW has interviewed 37 civilian witnesses and 9 journalists. Additionally they have used satellite images and pictures to corroborate the accounts: “witnesses described to HRW a pattern of artillery attacks by Ethiopian federal forces before they captured Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in November. In each of these attacks the Tigrayan special forces appeared to have withdrawn, while in Humera local militias lacked a significant presence to defend the town.”
- HRW found that: “many of the artillery attacks did not appear aimed at specific military targets but struck generalized populated areas. (..) These attacks caused civilian deaths and injuries; damaged

homes, businesses, and infrastructure; struck near schools; disrupted medical services; and prompted thousands of civilians to flee.”

- French Newspaper Liberation has published accounts of the massacre in Aksum. A witness states that he buried between 300 and 400 people killed at the massacre of 28/29 November.
- Sudan and Ethiopia have again clashed on their border, fighting for disputed territory. A Sudanese military official has said that they have taken (back) 50 thousand hectares from Ethiopia.

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

- The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) released a report on the human rights situation in Tigray.
- It noted that “Local structures such as police and health facilities where victims of sexual violence would normally turn to report such crimes are no longer in place. Hence, there is a possibility that the actual number of cases might be higher and more widespread than the reported cases.” A 108 cases of rape were reported in the last two months in Mekelle.
- The Commission noted that the legal status and “administrative authority” in West Tigray was causing insecurity for civilians living in those areas.
- The EHRC reported that abandoned mines and hand grenades were causing injuries to children and found that following the arrest of Nega on January 8th, security forces shot in the air in celebration, causing stray bullets to injure people and the death of a 4 year old child.
- It says it is still investigating the full extent of the casualties and will report on that in a future report.

Reported international situation (as confirmed per 11 February)

- The European Parliament debated the issue of Tigray during the plenary session on Thursday.
- Hungarian György Hölvényi (EPP) stated: “Peace is not a domestic issue, the Tigray conflict puts at risk the entire region's stability, (..) we must end the conflict as soon as possible, otherwise the conflict could spread to other countries and set off more migration to Europe.”
- German Green MEP Erik Marquardt asks: “What is the role of Eritrea? The Ethiopian PM gave Eritrea money to commit crimes, who is responsible for these crimes? How can people responsible be brought to justice? How can we ensure humanitarian aid is reaching those in need? That the press can get in? The important question is, if the EU is going to be successful, then we need to coordinate the approach with member states.”
- German Social Democrat Norbert Neuser states: “As the EU, we have expressed a clear position, we suspend budget support. We are calling for unlimited access for humanitarian aid and assistance to Tigray and the 20,000 Eritrean refugees who disappeared, we should understand what happened to them. Eritrea should withdraw its troops.”
- Dutch MP Martijn Van Helvert asks the Dutch Foreign Minister whether she will support unimpeded humanitarian access and the immediate unconditional withdrawal of Eritrea from Ethiopia.
- The EU is calling on “the prevention of refoulement or forced return targeting Eritrean refugees. It has underlined that all civilians in search of assistance, safety, and security in Tigray should be safe and free to move to other Ethiopian regions or towards neighbouring countries.”

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Links of interest

<https://addisstandard.com/news-ethiopian-rights-commissions-latest-report-on-tigray-sheds-light-on-sexual-violence-child-causalities/>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/11/ethiopia-unlawful-shelling-tigray-urban-areas>

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-02-11/troops-accused-of-mass-rape-in-ethiopia-tigray-conflict>

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-02-11/i-reported-on-ethiopia-secretive-war-then-came-a-knock-at-my-door>

https://www.liberation.fr/international/afrique/ethiopie-a-aksoum-jai-aide-a-transporter-plus-de-300-morts-20210211_AU67DACZ5NFALMJDVKPCSISYHM/

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oqUi-artYwDyAv4Z0I3Ox7C0jpk3RyG/view>

<https://www.cda.nl/vanhelvert/nieuws/schriftelijke-vragen-over-conflict-tigray>