

Situation Report EPPA HORN No. 85 - 16 February 2021

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Reported war situation in Tigray (as confirmed per 15 February)

- Elfinesh Nigussie, Interim head of communication affairs of Tigray, admitted to @VOATigray the presence of Eritrean and Amhara forces in Tigray and how both forces hinder the distribution of aid by looting during the transportation of aid.
- Elfinesh also urged that Eritrean and Amhara forces should leave the Tigray region immediately.
- Further confirmations that the 6th century Monastery of Debre Damo was bombarded by artillery. One monk was killed and twelve buildings destroyed.
- Following the bombardment of Debre Damo, six Eritrean soldiers climbed up the 80ft rift onto the plateau and searched the sacred monastery and its buildings.
- Alessandro Bausi, an expert in Ethiopic texts and manuscripts at Hamburg University, says that multiple sources were informing him that key sites were being targeted and “irreplaceable” artefacts were destroyed or pillaged. There are 120 Rock Hewn churches in Tigray, going back to the 3rd century.
- Weyni Abraha, from the Human rights group Yikono, says that rape is part of a strategy to break the people of Tigray. It is a weapon of war: "Many women were raped in Mekelle. This is being done purposely to break the morale of the people, threaten them and make them give up the fight."
- The head of the ENDF has denied the claims of rape to the BBC and the interim government has said that the numbers are grossly exaggerated.
- More incidences of rape are reported in Tigray. Some were perpetrated on underage children. According to a doctor, 4 cases involved 10 year olds.
- According to sources, there has been an increase in fighting recently. Fighting near Adigrat has been intensifying.
- In an internal meeting conducted by the ENDF 3 days ago, it was discussed that Tigray regional forces is deploying thousands of fighters in every front and simultaneous battles are increasing.
- The ENDF meeting reportedly discussed that, if it is to maintain its position in Tigray, ENDF needs additional troops from the Federal Ethiopian Government.
- Two Antonov planes have landed at Mekelle to bring reinforcements of ENDF.
- ENDF have started digging trenches around Mekelle to defend themselves from attacks by Tigray regional forces. Since the last three days, they are digging the trenches using dozers and excavators at night. It is observed that ENDF is changing from an offensive to a defensive strategy.
- Tensions are also running high in Mekelle with concerns that this may result in more fighting or violence.
- Fighting was also reported in Hawzen, North West of Wukro and ENDF forces retreated back to Feleg Daero and Agulia areas, North of Mekelle.

- After heavy fighting between ENDF allied and Tigray regional forces for the last days, Smare, Gijet and Maykinetal (40km from Adwa) have been taken back by Tigray forces. The battle lasted four days.
- According to locals in Zufan (Maykinetal), 2000 Eritreans were killed in the battle. This has been confirmed by other sources.
- The area of the Wer'i river between Tembien and Naidir Adet is taken over by the Tigray regional forces.
- Fighting has been taking place around Gijet, South East of Mekelle. According to sources, Tigrayan forces are in control of the town.
- Reported that in the Gijet front, female soldiers have been deployed by ENDF.
- Gebre Gebrestadik, spokesperson of Tigray regional forces, said to DW that in the fight against ENDF's 32 division on 14/02/2021 in a place between Yechila and Gijet, 1579 soldiers were killed, 500 injured and 104 captured.
- Many senior officers of ENDF, including L.Col. Ababu, senior commander of the division, has been killed and several military equipments were burnt and captured, said the spokesperson.
- Abraha Desta, Interim head of social and labor affairs of Tigray states on facebook that his support to the provisional administration in Mekelle is conditional.
- Abraha Desta said: "I am not part of the interim government by my political choice and I do not support the federal government or oppose the TPLF either. I am part of the interim government on a humanitarian basis."
- He added that if one square meter of land is taken from Tigray, I will voluntarily resign from my position. It is not just about resigning, I will publicly oppose the federal government and will fight to get my land back.
- New pictures, from the 21st of January, show destroyed vehicles, including tanks, outside of Guya.
- A video shows that the city administration office in Mekelle has been ransacked, with many valuable stolen and removed.
- According to a source, during a protest in Wukro, 18 people were killed by Eritrean soldiers. Another source provided the information that 20 more had been executed in Adwa and 10 in Shire.
- The Eritrean army has been increasing its presence in Wukro.

Reported situation in the Horn Region (as confirmed per 15 February)

- Ethiopia and Sudan are clashing on the border again.
- The Sudanese foreign ministry has condemned "Ethiopian aggression" and encroachment onto Sudanese territory. The Ministry also warned that continued aggression could have a dangerous impact on the security and stability of the region.

Reported international situation (as confirmed per 15 February)

- The Foreign minister of Egypt has said that the GERD dam negotiations did "not produce anything tangible, nor produce the desired results".

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Links of interest

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/monastery-bombed-and-looted-in-ethiopian-war-rzg2crrc3>
<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2021/2/11/Humanitarian-access-stalled-in-Ethiopia-Tigray>
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55832711>
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