

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 92 - 25 February 2021

Europe External Programme with Africa is a Belgium-based Centre of Expertise with in-depth knowledge, publications, and networks, specialised in issues of peace building, refugee protection and resilience in the Horn of Africa. EEPA has published extensively on issues related to movement and/or human trafficking of refugees in the Horn of Africa and on the Central Mediterranean Route. It cooperates with a wide network of Universities, research organisations, civil society and experts from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda and across Africa. The situation reports can be found [here](#).

Reported war situation in Tigray (as confirmed per 24 February)

- According to a witness, Debre Damo Monastery was bombed by Eritrean soldiers on January 11, 2021. The soldiers fired heavy artillery from Sero, Bazet and an intersection road towards Feresmay town.
- "The upper part of the monastery was hit by more than 18 artiliers and in total 28 artiliers landed in the monastery" says the eye witness. The shelling lasted from 7am till 4pm.
- The witness states more than 100 heavy artillery landed at the foot of the monastery without any casualties. "During the bombing, all monks were inside the church. The monks were on a weekly scheduled prayers program from Jan 09, 2021 till January 15, 2021," the witness added.
- The witness says there was no immediate damage to the Abuna Aregawi Church but 26 shelter houses of monks were completely destroyed and burnt. "Metal sheets and wood parts" of the houses were burnt to the ground.
- Historical and heritage houses which were built by Aste. Yohannes IV, Ras Alula, Ras Seyoum and Enda Raesi were among those completely destroyed and burned. "These houses were also heritages of the monastery," says the witness.
- According to the report of the eye witness, there are 150 houses which were built by Aste. Yohannes IV to be used as a shelter for monks.
- The witness says that a monk, aged 67, was killed by the bombing while praying inside his house: "His body was dispersed all over the area and it was very difficult to collect the body parts for burial."
- The report states on Jan 12, 2021, Eritrean soldiers approached the monastery and said they wanted to inspect the monastery. "They fired three bullets to the sky to scare us (the monks) and make their request accepted as the thick leather rope used to climb was already pulled up" says the witness.
- According to the witness, when the monks asked the Eritrean soldiers why they bombed the monastery; the soldiers said they were informed that Debrestion and his soldiers were hiding in the monastery and that is why we were shelling the monastery for the whole day.
- The witness says 6 Eritrean soldiers came back on January 14, 2021 and asked to search everything in the monastery: "All houses of the monks were searched one by one except the church and when they knew nothing was inside, the soldiers regretted their action" says the witness.
- "When we told them about the death of one of our monks from the bombing, the soldiers said you are lucky that you only lost one person; 8 (7 christian and 1 muslim) of our soldiers were killed by a snake" says the witness.
- The witness states 30 Eritreans soldiers came with a car and looted grains, television, generators and other goods of farmers from the surrounding community. Later the car overturned while travelling to a place called Gidera and 28 of them died and only 2 survived.
- According to the witness, Eritrean soldiers still operate in the area surrounding the monastery and sometimes they come to the foot of the monastery but never climb again.
- Ethiopian government has said that it is authorising 135 international organisations to access Tigray. This includes 7 media organisations including AFP News Agency; BBC News; Aljazeera Media Institute; FRANCE 24 English; Reuters; The New York Times and Financial Times.

- South Africa's Tutu Foundation joins the European Union, the United States and several humanitarian organisations in calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Tigray.
- "We call for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Tigray region of Ethiopia, unimpeded access for humanitarian organisations and an investigation into allegations of war crimes by an appropriate international agency such as the UN," says Kotecha, CEO of the Foundation.
- Reports of the Ethiopian government have decided to move more than 6,000 internally displaced people who were sheltered in Axum University to Shire without any prior preparations.
- The Ethiopian Electric Power said electric supply was restored today to some parts of Tigray, including Mekelle after it was disrupted for more than a week.
- According to sources, flights from Addis Ababa to Mekelle has been resumed today.
- Dutch aid workers in Mekelle have said that people are asking them to "tell the world what is going on (in Tigray)".
- The aid workers have visited villages where massacres took place, and spoken to survivors. One of the massacres, which killed 70 people, was perpetrated by soldiers who lost a battle in the area. They also say that Eritrean soldiers have been particularly brutal during the conflict.
- They also said that the situation in Mekelle, while more peaceful than the rest of Tigray, is tense. There are soldiers everywhere, and people are regularly told to stay inside. One also mentioned that several people were shot after the army intervened to take down barricades.
- They also mention being singled out as westerners as they do not want journalists in the area.
- In a Webinar with NGOs, EU envoy to the Horn and Finnish foreign minister, Haavisto, said that there were 4 factions in control of different parts of Tigray. The Federal ENDF, the Eritreans primarily in the North, Amhara militias, and Tigrayan forces.
- Humanitarian aid is allowed to federal controlled areas, but difficult to provide it to other areas.
- He also said that the future of Tigray is problematic. There currently is no trust between Tigrayans and the government, and little possible avenues for dialogue.
- He said that the EU has clearly communicated the importance of 3 points: unfettered access to Tigray, an immediate scale up of Humanitarian aid, and that Eritrean troops leave Tigray.
- Haavisto also said that he has communicated the issue of a humanitarian aid corridor up with Eritrean officials, through the use of the Assab and Massawa ports, and the need for all countries to help.

Situation in the Horn Region(as confirmed per 24 February)

- The ENDF has said that the 15 ENDF soldiers stationed in South Sudan, who have sought refuge with the UN after they refused to board a plane back to Addis Ababa, are "traitors backed by the UNHCR and Tigrayans in the UN ". He further accused them of being representatives of the TPLF.
- The UN undersecretary for peacekeeping missions, has said that all peacekeepers serve under the UN and are protected by "relevant international Law and norms". He added that the ministry of refugees for South Sudan are providing support.

Reported international situation (as confirmed per 24 February)

- UK government Minister for Africa, James Duddridge pressed the need with the Ethiopian Embassy in the UK for urgent action to allow full humanitarian access to Tigray. He also set out the UK's concerns about continued impunity. Human rights must be upheld, and abuses and violations investigated.

Disclaimer: All information in this situation report is presented as a fluid update report, as to the best knowledge and understanding of the authors at the moment of publication. EEPA does not claim that the information is correct but verifies to the best of ability within the circumstances. Publication is weighed on the basis of interest to understand potential impacts of events (or perceptions of these) on the situation. Check all information against updates and other media. EEPA does not take responsibility for the use of the information or impact thereof. All information reported originates from third parties and the content of all reported and linked information remains the sole responsibility of these third parties. Report to info@eepa.be any additional information and corrections.

Links of interest

<https://www.tutu.org.za/dont-let-covid-19-allow-us-to-overlook-genocide/>

<https://addisstandard.com/news-national-defense-forces-say-tigrayan-un-peacekeepers-who-refuse-to-come-home-traitors-demands-a-pology-form-unhcr/>

<https://www.tghat.com/2021/02/24/dutch-aid-workers-the-outside-world-needs-to-know-whats-going-on-in-tigray/>