

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 99 - 08 March 2021

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Sexual violence in the conflict (as confirmed per 07 March)

- In an article published in Deutsche Welle (DW), a witness at Adigrat Hospital said every day, Eritrean soldiers come to take medical equipment and patients and doctors are terrified.
- “They come here every day, even twice a day,” said a general practitioner at the hospital. “Yesterday, they stole a stretcher. When they come, not only the patients, but also the staff run away. The treatments get interrupted.”
- “These (cases) are only those who have access to this hospital, but we don’t know what happens in the 18 districts in the Eastern Tigray Zone - what happens to the mother, what happens to the other members of the community,” added the witness (doctor).
- The doctor said women are being gang-raped, drugged and gravely injured in the assaults. One woman was held captive for over ten days, raped by 23 Eritrean soldiers, then left on the side of the road. Surgeons had to remove stones and nails that had been inserted inside her genitals.
- According to the report, the hospital of Adigrat has received over 174 rape survivors. But, there are likely many more cases unaccounted for in rural villages.
- A woman was raped in Mekelle, then killed in front of her three sons. They were not allowed to remove the body for three days. Nuns of a monastery were raped by Eritrean troops in Wukro town.

Eritrean Involvement in the Conflict (as confirmed per 07 March)

- The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Ethiopia did not invite Eritrean troops to engage in the Tigray region during the government's law enforcement operation.
- The Spokesman said that “No official military agreement exists between the two countries. We have not made an official invitation for Eritrean troops to be involved in the Tigray region,”.
- He also said that following the rocket attack by the TPLF to Asmara, Eritrean troops positioned on the porous borders areas of the two neighboring countries could have possibly moved into the Ethiopian territory. However, he did not unequivocally comment on whether Eritrean troops have been involved.
- Previously, EEPA reported that Eritrean troops invaded Tigray on 3-4 November, prior to the start of the law and order operation and prior to the bombings of Asmara, which happened after Tigray had been attacked by drones from Assab.
- Speaking about Eritrean forces, Dina said they can participate in the operation if invited by the Ethiopian government. “As a sovereign nation, we can invite Somalia, Sudan or Eritrea,” said Dina, “but, what we are saying is there has not been any request from Ethiopia for military support.”
- Residents of Adigrat told Deutsche Welle (DW) that a battle was unfolding a few kilometers West of Adigrat, saying sounds of heavy fighting could be heard in the villages.
- According to two eyewitness accounts, Eritrean soldiers later entered the town of Azeba about 30 kilometers from Adigrat and opened fire on civilians on the market day.
- Deutsche Welle reports states civilians interviewed from Mekelle as well as Central and Northern Tigray said both Eritrean and Ethiopian defense forces were allegedly behind the killings and rapes.
- People in Mekelle want Eritrean troops to leave the region immediately.
- Pictures of captured Eritrean troops wearing ENDF uniforms and Eritrean ‘Congos’ (plastic shoes) have been circulating on social media. Many of them seem underage.
- Reports of Eritrean troops removing uniforms for civilian clothes.

Reported situation on the conflict (as confirmed per 07 March)

- Heavy fighting between ENDF allied forces and Tigray forces continues in Gijet, Samre, and South of Mekelle areas and rural areas are under control of Tigray forces.
- Hayalu Godefay, chairman of an opposition party in Tigray (Salsay Woyane), said that the mandate to oust the TPLF is for the people of Tigray: "The people of Tigray have elected their leaders, so we don't need a government that is controlled by Addis. It is imposed on the people of Tigray," added Hayalu.
- The chairman of the Salsay Woyane Party says: "I don't have the moral (authority) to convince the youth of Tigray that peaceful struggle will bring you the land that has been snatched away."
- The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) said it is alarmed by the "cultural cleansing", destruction of sites in Tigray, looting of manuscripts and artefacts and illicit trafficking.
- The Ethiopian government said Sudan and Egypt have been involved in the Metekel Zone and other (internal) conflicts in the country.

Human Rights situation (as confirmed per 07 March)

- Human Rights Watch has released a report on the massacre that occurred in Axum. They interviewed 28 witnesses and examined photographic evidence from the massacre, corroborating the AI report.
- It describes an indiscriminate shelling of the city on November 19th after Tigrayan troops had withdrawn from the city up to 8 pm. Eritrean and Ethiopian forces entered the city the next morning.
- Subsequently Eritrean (and according to some Ethiopian as well) troops pillaged the city for a week.
- The day of the massacre started with between 10 and 30 Tigrayan soldiers attacking an Eritrean "base". They were joined by many young people who were angry at the pillaging from the previous week.
- The indiscriminate killing started in the morning and continued until the evening of the next day.
- In the report witnesses describe "Ethiopian and Eritrean forces indiscriminately shot at civilians". Eritrean soldiers continued to pillage the city for a week after the massacre. Some witnesses describe Ethiopian soldiers participating, but most say that they "did nothing".
- Eritrean soldiers went from house to house, looking for, and then executing young men.
- HRW received names of people killed in Axum, corresponding with names given by interviewees

Reported international situation (as confirmed per 07 March)

- The Ethiopian government has instructed all embassies to engage in Twitter campaigns and demonstrations to protest unnecessary pressure on Ethiopia, including on March 11th in Brussels.
- In a leaked zoom video meeting, Ethiopian Ambassador to the UK, Teferi Melese, told local diaspora groups how to push back accusations of genocide, rape and weaponized hunger.
- A U.S. letter writing campaign is also launched urging Ethiopian diaspora and friends of Ethiopia to urge members of the U.S. Congress to work with the Biden Administration to support Ethiopia.
- In the US Senate, Risch (R-Idaho) and Cardin (D-Md.) reintroduced a bill calling for the peaceful resolution of the Tigray conflict and for belligerents to cooperate with independent investigations.
- Egyptian Pres Sisi said in a presser with Sudan's Al-Burhan that a second filling threatened Egyptian and Sudanese interests, supporting launching GERD negotiations with UN, AU, EU, and US participation.
- The UN Sec-Gen said that the UN was available to support and participate in GERD negotiations.
- A draft resolution was dropped after India, China, and Russia levelled further objections on the grounds of non interference in the internal affairs of Ethiopia and an additional objection to the Council's draft statement, which also called for the "need for all parties to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including those related to the protection of civilians and protection against sexual and gender-based violence."

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Links of interest

<https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/eritrean-troops-crossed-border-without-ethiopia-official-invitation-mofa>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/05/ethiopia-eritrean-forces-massacre-tigray-civilians>

<https://www.dw.com/en/anger-and-collective-trauma-scar-ethiopia-tigray-region/a-56794452>

<http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/405441.aspx>

<https://addisstandard.com/exclusive-how-the-un-drops-tigray-resolution-after-second-attempt-failed/>