

## Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 56 - 15 January 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. Key in-depth publications [can be accessed on the website](#).

### Reported war situation (as confirmed per 14 January)

- Asena TV shows images of four to six explosions outside the municipality offices in the centre of Addis Ababa, which were followed with a few shots.
- New Eritrean troops have entered Mekelle, roaming the city along with many intelligence agents.
- Tigray news reports that Al Shebaab fighters are entering eastern regions of Ethiopia and may even be controlling parts of the Somali region of Ethiopia.
- A video emerged of the massacre at the Aksum Church of Maryam Zion, where at least 750 civilians were allegedly killed by Eritrean troops. The video shows a body taken away by a priest and shows the I.D. cart found on the body. EEPA reported that the massacre took place on 15 Dec., that civilians were hiding in the church and had been ordered out onto the square, before being executed.
- A second video has emerged of the Maryam Zion Church in Aksum, which was filmed on 29th November. The commentator states that the square should have been full on the eve of the annual Maryam Zion celebration, but it is showing an empty square without any people.
- In this video it is explained that the square is empty because Eritrean soldiers had arrived on the 27th Nov. evening in vehicles with an Eritrean military number plate (with red slash). Regional Tigray troops and youth tried to defend the town but could not hold it.
- The video comments that subsequently, the soldiers were shooting anyone they found on the road including those who tried to open shops in the early morning of 28 Nov. ENDF had entered Aksum around the 22nd November, but they did not stop the shooting, and Eritrean soldiers were killing hundreds of people and looting properties.
- The Catholic Bishop of Adigrat (Tigray), Abune Tesfaselassie Medhin, sent an appeal (dated 5 Jan 2021) stating that the people, including Eritrean refugees, have “run out of food items, basic life-saving medicines, water, etc., and have no access to essential services.”
- The Bishop states “millions” of people have been displaced, most of them women and children without food and water to escape from “heavy artillery and air-strikes.” The Bishop calls on humanitarian assistance to respond to the “war-induced” humanitarian crisis in Tigray. Many of the areas have still not been reached by aid organisations.
- In the last days, there has been fighting again around the Hitsats camp for Eritrean refugees. Eritrean soldiers killed many Eritrean refugees and took some of them to Eritrea. Some refugees escaped to the Adi Harush camp. A woman testified that in the flight from Hitsats to Adi Harush, 3 persons died.
- Eritrean refugees in Tigray are taken to Shiraro, others to Badme. There are at least 10.000 refugees, and they are slowly taken to Eritrea. What happens with them in Eritrea, is not known.
- The refugees held in Shiraro and Badme are held by Eritrean soldiers. They have no food, and they are forced to contact their family to send money. However, the refugees are dependent on the Eritrean soldiers to be able to phone relatives.

- The refugees held by Eritrean troops are using mobile phones from the Eritrean soldiers to contact relatives. These are Eritrean mobile phones. The soldiers are making a business out of this, so that they get paid for this ‘service’. Soldiers take a part of this money, and in some cases all of it.
- Mulu Nega, the chief of the Interim government in Tigray has cancelled a meeting with Mekelle University staff due to emergency operations in the area today.
- It is reported that banks are the first target to be looted by Eritrean soldiers.
- The US embassy warns against ‘strong-armed’ robberies of hiking American citizens in Entoto and Yeka parks and Guellele Botanical gardens. The hikers were surrounded by multiple armed men.
- US embassy sets a negative travel advise to (i) Border area with Somalia due to potential for terrorism, kidnapping, and landmines; (ii) Border areas with Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, and Eritrea due to crime, armed conflict, and civil unrest; (iii) Somali Regional State due to potential for terrorism; (iv) Ethiopia’s Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region (SNNPR) due to civil unrest; (v) The East Hararge region and the Guji zone of Oromia State due to armed conflict and civil unrest; (vi) Benishangul Gumuz and the western part of Oromia State due to armed conflict and civil unrest.

#### Reported International situation (as confirmed per 14 January)

- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Filippo Grandi appeals to the Ethiopian government to give unimpeded access to Tigray “in whatever way possible” and that “all options should be explored” to safely provide desperately needed assistance.
- Grandi stated his teams were distressed by what they saw in Tigray: “Equally distressing to UNHCR teams on the ground has been our inability to assist thousands of Eritrean refugees who continue to flee the camps in search of safety and support. Refugees arriving on foot to Shire town in Tigray are emaciated, begging for aid that is not available. Refugees who reached Addis Ababa are being returned to Tigray, some against their will.” (Ep/013/Em)
- The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCRP) releases an atrocity alert delivering a sobering report on the situation in Tigray, Ethiopia, backed up with satellite imagery.
- GCRP Director, Simon Adams, said that, Ethiopia should “guarantee unfettered humanitarian access to all vulnerable populations in Tigray and ensure their full protection.”
- Simon Adams called on states with significant ties to Ethiopia to “withhold all military support to the government until independent investigations take place regarding the alleged destruction of refugee camps and other potential war crimes.”
- Adams states that “The international community has to increase the political cost of ongoing human rights violations in Tigray.”
- Ethiopian Chief of Staff, General Birhanu Jula, received the highest military medal from Djibouti Army Chief of Staff, General Zekaria Shiek, ordered by Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh for his “effective military leadership in the completed law enforcement operation in Tigray and his great contribution to peace and stability in the country and the region as well”.
- Alex Dewaal from the World Peace Foundation writes in an obituary of Seyoum Mesfin, Ethiopia’s longest-serving foreign minister who was killed in Tigray at the age of 71: “Under Seyoum’s guiding hand, Ethiopia became admired as Africa’s biggest contributor to peace and security, a reliable contributor of high-quality troops to peacekeeping operations, and a partner in conflict resolution.”

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](mailto:info@eepa.be) any additional information and corrections.

#### **Links of interest**

- <https://www.unhcr.org/admin/hcspeeches/600052064/statement-situation-eritrean-refugees-ethiopias-tigray-region.html>
- <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/atrocity-alert-no-235/>
- <https://www.fanahc.com/english/general-birhanu-jula-awarded-highest-military-medal-of-djibouti/>
- <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2021/01/14/in-memoriam-seyoum-mesfin-ethiopian-peacemaker-and-patriot/>