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## **Horn Highlights: Refugees flee fighting in Benishangul Gumuz, Italy ends military agreement, AU president calls for peace.**

In this week's Horn highlights: Tens of thousands flee fighting in the Benishangul Gumuz region; Tigrayan forces try to reach Djibouti-Ethiopian corridor, states BBC report; Ethiopian opposition parties say dialogue commission is unrepresentative; Italy suspends armaments agreement with Ethiopia; Tigray scholars call on AU to step up; ICRC plane lands in Mekelle, more to come; new clashes in Darfur, Sudan; military wants proportional system in Sudan; and African Union holds its annual assembly.

### **Greater Horn of Africa**

#### *Ethiopia: Over 20,000 refugees flee due to clashes in Benishangul Gumuz*

The *UN Refugee Agency* (UNHCR) said in a statement that after fighting broke out in the town of Tongo in the Benishangul Gumuz region of Ethiopia on 18 January, around 20,000 refugees fled the fighting and have moved closer to the region's capital. One camp hosting 10,500 refugees was sacked and looted during the fighting. The fighting is reportedly between government forces and "unidentified armed groups", according to the UNHCR. UNHCR said that "[a]ll humanitarian staff had to evacuate, and access to the area - including the two camps, Tongo and Gure-Shembola – remains impossible". Tensions have been building up over the last year, with the region already hosting over 70,000 Sudanese and South Sudanese refugees and more than half a million Ethiopian Internally Displaced Persons.

- [Ethiopia: UNHCR rushing aid to 20,000 refugees fleeing clashes](#)

#### *Ethiopia: Tigrayan forces near Djibouti-Ethiopian corridor*

The *BBC* is reporting that according to the Afar regional government, Tigrayan forces have captured the town of Sardo and are trying to reach the Ethiopian-Djibouti corridor. According to the *BBC* in a report published in Amharic, the Afar government released a statement in which they said that the Tigrayans captured several areas. They are reportedly carrying out a mechanised strike to reach the corridor. The Afari government also said that it had been fighting against the Tigrayan forces. Thousands of people are fleeing the fighting.

- [Fighting intensifies in Tigray and Afar regions](#)

*Ethiopia: Opposition parties call on government for fair National dialogue*

Several Oromo opposition groups, as well as the loose coalition of political figures, academics and activists *Congress for Somali Cause*, have called on the Ethiopian government to ensure that the announced Ethiopian national dialogue is impartial and transparent. The groups have accused the government of manipulating the national dialogue in an attempt to consolidate power. Oromo Opposition groups say that the commissions that have been appointed are not impartial, and lack representation. The Somali congress calls for de-escalation of the conflict in Ethiopia and a ceasefire, followed by a balanced national dialogue to create a conducive environment.

- [Three opposition parties say dialogue commission process not partial, unrepresentative and decline to join a parliament meeting](#)
- [Congress for Somali cause calls for transparency, impartiality, credible convener for planned national dialogue](#)

*Ethiopia: ICRC planes land in Tigray*

The *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* says that it has landed a 10<sup>th</sup> plane carrying supplies in Mekelle, Tigray. It transported mostly medical supplies, which are running critically low in Tigray. The ICRC says the flights will continue regularly, with 5 more planned in the coming week.

- [Ethiopia Update: 10th ICRC flight carrying vital medical supplies reaches Tigray](#)

*Ethiopia: Italy suspends military cooperation with Ethiopia*

The Italian defense minister announced that it has suspended the military deal with Ethiopia and ceased any activity foreseen in the cooperation agreement. The government further said that since the start of the conflict the ministry of foreign affairs has denied the permission for armament exports to Ethiopia, as they could not ensure that they would not be used offensively. Italy further called for a cessation of hostilities in Ethiopia

- [Italy suspends military cooperation with Ethiopia](#)

*Ethiopia: Tigray Universities Scholars Association (TUSA) requested the AU to play its part*

The recently established organisation named *Tigray Universities Scholars Association (TUSA)* has written a letter to the African Union (AU) asking to play its role in easing the humanitarian crisis in the Tigray region. The strongly worded letter accuses the AU of staying silent during the conflict, and urges the AU to now “make an all-inclusive peace dialogue a reality”.

- [Letter to AU - from TUSA](#)

*Sudan: Clashes take place at old UN peacekeeping headquarters*

Armed groups and the Sudanese military clashed over the weekend, leaving an unknown number of dead, according to a Sudanese military statement. The fighting took place in and around the old United Nations peacekeeping base. Violence has been increasing since UNAMID, the peacekeeping mission, exited Darfur. According to *Reuters*, the base has been looted and attacked several times.

- [Deadly clashes erupt at peace-keeping facilities in Sudan's Darfur](#)

*Sudan: Military component wants proportional system in Sudan's election*

The military has said that elections in Sudan have to be held in a proportional system before the military can end the transitional period. The head of the sovereignty Council, Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, reiterated his will to finish the transition. The military has put two conditions forward to allow for the end of transition, according to an IGAD report. These are a national reconciliation process, and inclusive proportional system elections. The military wants the constitution amended, claiming that it wants political groups - including those allied to the former regime, who are banned from taking part in the transition - also to be represented in the proportional system. The *Sudan Tribune* reports that IGAD is planning on mediating between the different parties in an attempt to form a government.

- [Military component wants proportional system in Sudan's election](#)

*Africa: Leaders address the African Union Assembly*

On Sunday, the annual African Union Assembly ended. The new AU Chairperson, Macky Sall, said that he would devote his one year term to the goal of "peace". Sall, who is president of Senegal, added that "[c]ommon sense commands us to silence guns and build, build a culture of dialogue and mediation through African mechanisms of conflict resolution." Ethiopia's Prime Minister also spoke to the assembly on Saturday, saying that Ethiopia has faced a difficult year. He blamed "external actors" for the complication of the conflict with Tigray. Conflict and insecurity in general is high on the African Union agenda, with several coups taking place in Western Africa, and new armed conflicts emerging in the last few years.

- [African Union assembly: "peace", a goal of Macky Sall's 1-year term](#)
- [Existence of Ethiopia as Nation Would Have Been at Great Risk Without Solidarity of Africans, Says PM](#)
- [Insecurity a top issue as African leaders meet in Ethiopia](#)

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