

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 89 - 22 February 2021

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Reported war situation in Tigray (as confirmed per 21 February)

- A witness has reported that on 4 November 2020 Eritrean soldiers already entered into the town of Gerhusernay, near the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, where it started killing civilians.
- The attack by Eritrean troops happened in the night. Therefore, it would appear to have been part of a pre-planned attack. The official reading by the Ethiopian Government is that it started a law and order Operation after Tigray regional troops attacked the Northern Command on 4 November 2020.
- A spokesperson close to the Tigray regional government, which is now in hiding, gave a different reading of what had transpired. In this version, the war in Tigray effectively started on November 3, 2020. That day, Addis Ababa sent a cargo plane with special forces to Mekelle, under the pretext of transporting bank notes.
- According to the Tigray regional government, they had intelligence that the special forces were instructed to arrest the Tigray state government leaders, meeting in the Planet hotel in Mekelle.
- The tensions reportedly occurred in the context of the federal government seeking to redeploy the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF), stationed in Tigray.
- The Tigray regional state government opposed redeployment of the Northern Command because the constitutional power of PM Abiy had ended on October 5 2020 and, as elections had been postponed, due to the Covid-19 crisis, the Prime Minister was heading a care-taker government.
- The attempted arrest of the members of the Tigray government was foiled and the regional government sought to gain control over the Northern Command of Ethiopian government forces.
- Eritrean Minister of Information, Yemane Meskel, gave his own version on the start of the war in a tweet on 18/2: "The nefarious intent & scope of the massive, "pre-emptive", military attacks that the TPLF clique unleashed on Ethiopia's Northern command in November is downplayed by international media outlets, "pundits" & apologists of the cabal."
- The government of Tigray has issued a roadmap to a peaceful resolution of the war in Tigray, reiterating that it was forced into a war and that it is still committed to a peaceful resolution to the war, the government put 8 preconditions to the resolution:
 1. Immediate withdrawal of invading Eritrean (PFDJ) forces from Tigray and confirming their withdrawal by nonpartisan international organizations.
 2. Respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Tigray with an immediate withdrawal of all invading forces from South, West, North and Eastern Tigray (Amhara and Eritrean forces).
 3. Removing the "interim Administration" and reinstating the elected government.
 4. Investigating the war crimes committed in Tigray by nonpartisan international organizations.
 5. Unhindered humanitarian access throughout Tigray and delivering aid to the needy 4.5 million Tigrayans and allowing and opening up Tigray to Journalists and human rights organizations.
 6. Inventory and auditing, returning and compensating of the looted, destroyed and dysfunctional Tigrayan assets (private, government and public assets).
 7. Releasing all political prisoners and other Tigrayans.
 8. Negotiations to be mediated by nonpartisan international organizations.

- The European Council will meet Monday 22/2 to hear the report of Pekka Haavisto. Ahead of the meeting the Eritrean government sent out a communication from its '03' propaganda division to target EU leaders and officials with a message that it should not be "scapegoated" for the situation in Tigray.
- The letter by the Eritrean PFDJ representative reads: "We all have heard the interview of our President Isayas Afwerki on 17/02/2021. And today we have an urgent task to campaign on social media."
- The social media war saw others respond to the campaign stating that the issue at hand is not one of "scapegoating" but rather seeking accountability for the actions of Eritrean troops in Tigray.
- Flights to Mekelle are still postponed. The city is surrounded and Ethiopian allied troops have been digging trenches South of the city.
- Former Fenkil leader Yemane Niguse has been reportedly killed in Hiwane, South of Mekelle today with his guards. Fenkil is a youth movement established against the TPLF.
- Announced on DW, Tigray regional forces spokesperson said that an Eritrean division along with ENDF soldiers are marching towards Tekeze hydropower dam with the intention to destroy it.
- Reported that 156 Eritreans were arrested in the last three months suspected of disturbing and displacing residents of various condominiums in Addis Ababa.
- Tigrai Media House shows a video of men and women in ENDF uniforms captured in a town near Samre. Captive soldiers were later released by Tigray regional forces and walked to Mekelle barefoot.
- A video footage shows a wallet of an Eritrean soldier killed at the fighting in Idagahamus. A letter was found in his wallet sent from Saron to Ibrahim. In the letter she is asking him to defect and hide somewhere as much as possible and to not participate in the war in a Tigray.
- Satellite pictures show regular fires in Mai Kaidra over the course of last month.

Reported situation in the Horn Region (as confirmed per 21 February)

- The Sudanese government has strongly rejected accusations that its military component is serving the interest of a third country and alluded to the involvement of the Eritrean troops in the ongoing border dispute with Ethiopia.

Reported international situation (as confirmed per 21 February)

- The United Nation says Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region faces a "very critical" malnutrition situation as vast rural areas where many people fled during three months of fighting remain out of reach of aid.
- The U.N. humanitarian agency also said that Ethiopian defense forces continue to occupy a hospital in the town of Abi Adi, "preventing up to 500,000 people from accessing health services" in a region where the health system has largely collapsed under looting and artillery fire.
- "The needs are tremendous, but we cannot pretend that we do not see or hear what is unfolding," Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde said in a statement after visiting the Tigray capital, Mekelle. She also noted that "significant delays that remain in reaching people in need".
- The Irish minister of Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, has said that they would keep on bringing the issue of Tigray, Ethiopia, and Eritrea up in the United Nations Security Council and in the EU.
- USCIRF, a US government created commission, has said that it is deeply concerned by the attacks on religious sites in Tigray. They call for a thorough investigation and the protection of religious sites.
- The ICRC director of operations has said that he was concerned about the food situation in Tigray and the lack of adequate healthcare facilities.

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Links of interest

<https://www.facebook.com/TigrayUpdate/posts/140234297950041/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/20/un-says-malnutrition-very-critical-in-ethiopia-tigray>

<https://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article70496>