

Testimonies

Webinar

Voices from Tigray

Eritrean Involvement in the War in Tigray

29 June 2021

Europe External Programme with Africa is a Belgium-based Centre of Expertise with in-depth knowledge, publications, and networks, specialised in issues of peacebuilding, refugee protection, and resilience in the Horn of Africa. EEPA has published extensively on issues related to the 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 organizations, civil society, and experts from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and across Africa. The situation reports can be found [here](#).

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. The publication is weighed on the basis of interest to understand the 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 the 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@eepea.be any additional information and corrections.

I. Preparations in Eritrea to fight in Tigray prior to the war

Report 1

Testimony of a former Eritrean conscript to the National Service who is in his mid- forties.

(audio-testimony in possession of EEPAn name withheld for security reasons)

I am in the army in Eritrea from 1997. I spent about 23 years in the army. In 2013, I am stationed at the border with Ethiopia with the army.

I was accused of participating in a coup, but I didn't know anything of this. It was my army leader that planned this, but I refused to participate. When the coup failed, they brought me to prison. I spent many years in that prison. When they released me, I was sent to the border of Ethiopia, to an area called Sheraro in Ethiopia, Tigray. It is not far from the Eritrean border.

There is war in that area. We stopped in Sheraro, but the other armies continued to move to other places. The big battles and fighting are in other areas, but also I participated in some fighting. We were fighting the Tigrayans. It's the army of Debretsion. I was there for three months.

We lived in the houses of the normal people of Tigray who escaped.

After three months, I was injured, so they sent me to a hospital. It was crowded in the hospital, because there was a big number of injured from Eritrea and Ethiopia. So they sent me to another hospital. From there, I escaped.

There were people who rejected to fight. They said "why should we die in another country"? Now all of them are in prison. Most of them are in Mai Serwa. They are in very bad condition, like in any prison. No-one knows exactly how they can live, they don't allow their families to visit them. Three of them were my colleagues that I know personally. Even some leaders rejected to fight, so President Isaias sent them to prison first, then put them on house arrest in a closed area.

Inside the towns in Tigray, there was the Ethiopian army. The Eritrean army was all *around* the towns. We wore the same uniform as the Ethiopians. Everything for us, it was like the Ethiopian army, and the Eritrean army was until Mekelle - from the Eritrean border until Mekelle. We have all the army equipment, all the army cars, and even the heavy equipment for bombing - 120 and 130.

I reached the Ethiopian border on 2 November 2020. It was a large army. Before that, I was in the prison. Directly from the prison to Ethiopia. I came with 160 other prisoners. Some of us spent 8, 9 or 10 years in prison. All of us were sent to Ethiopia. Some people spent 13 years in that prison; they arrested them when they tried to escape to Ethiopia. They sent the ones from prison that were in there for more than 8 years or so. The others stayed there.

No one gave us any information. We were on the cars and we didn't know where we were going. When I came out of the prison, the Eritrean army didn't give us time to think of anything. When we arrive in the border, the army split us prisoners into many different parts. We didn't understand anything until we reached the area of Badme. At that area, we just know what will happen.

It took six hours to get from Badme to Sheraro on foot. I don't remember the moment exactly, but I know, 2 November, we were in Sheraro. When I was in the prison, there were 640 prisoners, there was no space to sleep. But they allow us to bring a tv. We bought it from all the group. So I know the time well, because I saw Aljazeera, BBC... so I know the date well from that reason. They released us on 30 October from prison and at 2 November I was in Sheraro.

The first point they took us to was called 'Sambal' - all the area is a mountain area. It is called Sambal, very close to Badme. Then we go directly to Sheraro. It's not a big battle, we directly go inside Sheraro. But when we are inside Sheraro, there is fighting, much fighting, for three days.

We don't know anything until we reach Sambal. At that moment, we see a big number of army, we hear bombing, so we know we are in an area of war.

I am thinking: those people, the government, they hate us; most of us were people who came from the prison, some of us tried to escape from Eritrea, so the government hates us and wants to kill us in the war. They sent us to the war to kill us, it is a punishment. I think most of the army came to this area under pressure. All of us want to leave Eritrea or hate the regime.


There is a number - Some of us try to flee, to go to Sudan. If they found any of the ones trying to flee, they will send them directly to the prison, and no-one knows after that what happens.

The Eritrean government closed all the telephone and contact from the area of Tigray. They also took all the telephones of the army, except for the commanders, so there is no contact with anyone.

Report 2 Hate Speech ‘Game over’: ‘The End of the Shenanigans’

EEPA Webinar Voices of Tigray – Involvement of Eritrea in the War

‘GAME OVER’:
‘THE END OF TPLF SHENANIGANS’



- **CHRONOLOGY OF THE ETHIOPIA ERITREA PEACE PROCESS**
- **April 2018 Abiy Ahmed becomes PM of Ethiopia**
- **05 June 2018 - PM Abiy declaration:**
 - Of the unconditional acceptance of the Ethiopia Eritrea Boundary Commission border decision ;
 - Withdrawal from Badme (the flashpoint of the 1998-2000 border war)
- **20 June 2018 –President Isaias acceptance of PM Abiy peace offering**
- The June 2018 speech recognises that both the Eritrean and Ethiopian people have
 - “.....*last opportunities of two generations...*”
- **BUT there is no recognition of :**
 - Eritrean Government responsibilities in the deterioration of the Eritrea/ Ethiopia relationships (1998-2000);
 - The need for internal reform
- **The June 2018 speech is a continuation of an antagonistic policy towards the TPLF**

6/28/21 EEPA Webinar Voices of Tigray 29 June 2021 1

HATE SPEECH - ‘GAME OVER’ ‘THE END OF TPLF SHENANIGANS’

President Isaias Acceptance Speech – 20 June 2018 :

- *“Needless to stress, it is the Ethiopian people – forced as they were into adversarial ties.....were the primary victims, and who have borne the main brunt, of the destructive policies of the TPLF regime and its paymasters.”*
- *“The second , relatively bigger loss, stemmed from the TPLF’s ability to derail and frustrate positive bilateral and regional all-rounded growth.....”*
- *“Twenty seven years is a long interval. The losses incurred and time wasted are thus huge in terms of this yardstick..”*
- *“But as the damage inculcated on the Ethiopian people became increasingly unbearable, it spurred the wrath and rebellion in the people who said ‘enough is enough’. This in turn precipitated the end of the TPLF shenanigans; which was aptly described as ‘Game Over’.*
- *“But although it will require time and effort to remove the TPLF’s toxic and malignant legacy and to bring about a congenial climate, the positive direction has been set in motion is crystal clear”*

6/28/21 EEPA Webinar Voices of Tigray 29 June 2021 1

GAME OVER THE END OF TPLF SHENANIGANS

- June 2018 – September 2018 both countries undertook normalisation activities
- 08 July to 09 July 2018 – PM Abiy visit to Eritrea
- 09 July 2018 – PM Abiy and President Afewerki sign a Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship
- 14 July to 16 July 2018 – President Isaias Afewerki visit to Ethiopia
- 17 September 2018 – Signing of Peace Agreement (Jeddah Agreement)
- 14 November 2018 the UN Security Council lifts sanctions on Eritrea
- The period marked by:
 - Opening of borders;
 - Resumption of flights;
 - Telecommunication;
 - Exchange of Ambassadors
- But
 - 28 December 2018 Eritrea closes common border with Tigray without notice.
 - By May 2019 Eritrea unilaterally closes all land borders with Tigray.



6/28/21 EEPA Webinar Voices of Tigray 29 June 2021 3

GAME OVER THE END OF TPLF SHENANIGANS



- 2018 Redwan Hussein appointed Ambassador to Eritrea:
 - Eritrea did not accept his credentials
 - In 2020 he was State Minister of Foreign Affairs;
 - Presently he is the Spokesperson of the State of Emergency Taskforce
- Mehretab Mulugeta appointed as the new Ambassador to Eritrea in 2020.
 - As of 02 June 2021, Ambassador Mihretab credentials were not accepted
- The Eritrean Ambassador to Ethiopia is Semere Russom
 - Also, the current Eritrean Minister for Education
- **Conclusion: the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia is Highly personalised – between President Isaias and PM Abiy**

6/28/21

EEPA Webinar Voices of Tigray 29 June 2021

4

GAME OVER THE END OF TPLF SHENANIGANS

- February 2019 to March 2021
 - at least 7 high level diplomatic exchange visits between Eritrea and Ethiopia
- But
 - No progress in the Eritrea-Ethiopia peace process
- However
 - Mutual visits to military bases in the respective countries
 - July 2020 – PM Abiy SAWA
 - October 2020 – President Isaias visits
 - Ethio Engineering producer of vehicles for the defence force
 - Ethiopian Airforce



6/28/21

EEPA Webinar Voices of Tigray 29 June 2021

5

GAME OVER OF THE THE TPLF 'JUNTA'

- April 2018 Abiy Ahmed became PM with the support of :
 - Oromo Peoples Democratic Organisation(OPDO)
 - Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)
 - Part of the ruling Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)
- December 2019 – PM Abiy establishes the Progress Party (PP)
 - Ideological shift from multinational federalism to Centralised State
 - Effectively abolishing the EPRDF coalition
 - TPLF not part PP – TPLF portrayed as recalcitrant/difficult and as an obstacle to reform
- March 2020
 - Postponement of August 2020 elections – due to COVID -19
 - TPLF view that the postponement was unconstitutional



6/28/21

EEPA Webinar Voices of Tigray 29 June 2021

6

II. The timeline of the start of the War in Tigray

Report 3 on the assassination attempt of Tigray regional President Debretsion

Testimonial

In February 2020 I received information that the Tigray regional forces had prevented an attempt to assassinate the President of the regional government of Tigray.

I heard that farmers had seen that the Eritrean military had illegally entered Tigray and that the farmers had subsequently warned the Tigray regional defense forces. The Tigray regional forces were then able to arrest the invading military. I understood that the Eritrean military had exercised a mission to kill the leader of the regional government of Tigray, President Debretsion.

I understood that this made the regional government of Tigray apparently aware of the intentions of the Eritrean government to undermine the Tigray regional government and attack its leadership.

At the time, this was a surprising story to hear as Eritrea had entered into a peace agreement with Ethiopia. The story did not convey intentions of the Eritrean government to Tigray being peaceful. I understood that this situation put the Tigray regional government on alert to be prepared for hostile activities perpetrated from Eritrea on Tigray.

Report 4 on the blocking of foreign delegations to visit Tigray

Testimonial

I learned during a meeting in early 2020 that Tigray was concerned that it was actively undermined by the central government in Addis Abeba, which was allegedly blocking the visit of foreign delegations. A visit that was blocked was a delegation from China. I understood that the foreign delegation had not received the necessary permissions from Addis Abeba, and that, as a result, the visit could not take place. This seemed to be a move that could be construed as a hostile act by the central government on the regional government in Tigray. There was no explanation as to the reasons for the obstruction to the visit. I could not understand what the reason was for refusing the delegation entry. I had no means to clarify this issue further, but it raised concern about the quality of the relations between the central government in Addis Abeba and the regional government of Tigray, which appeared to be tense.

Report 5

Testimony. Obtained from Tigray on 4 November 2020

(Phone-call from Tigray received on 4th November, name withheld for security reasons)

Last night on the 3rd of November two planes landed in Mekelle to bring bank notes. However, with the planes came many commando troops of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). It was reported that they came to arrest the regional government of Tigray, which was meeting.

A shoot out started and we heard shooting from the city. They did not succeed in arresting the regional government.

The regional government of Tigray has now ordered the Tigray troops to defend the region.

The Tigray forces have attacked the ENDF positions in the Northern Command in Tigray. We hear that many have joined the Tigray Defense Forces.

Report 6

Testimonial

A witness has reported that on 4 November 2020 Eritrean soldiers had already entered into the town of Gerhusernay, near the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, where the troops started killing civilians.

The attack by Eritrean troops in Gerhusernay happened in the night of 3 to 4 November..

The attack did not follow the Law and Order operation declared by the Ethiopian government on 4th of November.

The attack in Tigray happened prior to the declaration of the Law and order operation.

The question is, why did Eritrean troops enter Tigray?

Report 7

Report received by EEPA on 26 June 2021, name withheld for security reasons

On the 3rd of November there were two cargo flights said to be transporting money from Addis Abeba to Mekelle.

The first flight was a cargo flight, B789, number ETAUR and it had flight number ET3102. This flight departed from Addis at 17:31 and arrived in Mekelle at 18:34 and it was waiting until 04:20 and departed for Addis at 04:21.

The second flight departed from Addis at 21:05 and arrived at Mekelle at 22:25 then waited until 04:06 and departed for Addis at 04:07. This was also a cargo flight, A350, number ETATY with flight-number ET3100.

The planes were sent with what could be construed as a pretext of delivering new money notes to Mekelle. That was normally done with a cargo flight. Therefore the airport authorities allowed it to land. That is why it was a pretext.

Cargo flights are not used regularly, but they are only used in special circumstances.

It is understood that the planes were carrying commandos and that these were sent with an intention to arrest and kill the Tigray government leadership.

When the airport workers wanted to unload the money, the commando's started shooting and everyone started running.

The shooting by the commando's which had been sent to Mekelle from Addis Abeba happened on the 3rd of November.

Military planes (antanoys) from Addis Abeba arrived later on the evening of the 3rd in Mekelle, sending reinforcements.

Only after these events, the following day, on the 4th of November, the Ethiopian Government declared a Law and Order Operation.

Report 8

Testimony 4 received on 26 June 2021

You want to understand the processing of international cargo in Ethiopia?

All international cargo needs to come through Addis Abeba for custom's check, that is what the Airport rules and regulations say. These do not permit the transport of international cargo flights directly to other places in Ethiopia, to other places than Addis Abeba.

However, cargo flights were going on international flights from Asmara to places in Ethiopia other than Addis Abeba. For instance they would go directly from Asmara to Gondar, which is normally illegal or not possible.

How it was possible? Well, there was a team established under the Ethiopian Prime Minister in the PM's office.

This was a team that was operating with higher military officials from Eritrea and Ethiopia.

So, cargo flights were allowed to go directly between Addis Abeba - Asmara - Bahadir and Gondar. Even if it is against the rules.

The cargo could be sent for instance to bring food, and to transport weapons and mechanised weapons between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In my estimation, there could be as close as ten cargo flights sent across Ethiopia and Eritrea. The weapons would then be transported in domestic smaller planes to places like Semera.

Semera is the capital of the Afar Region which borders with Tigray and is a very strategic place.

My understanding is that they were transporting weapons and soldiers on domestic Ethiopian Airline flights to the town of Semera for military deployment.

These were not military airplanes. These were flights from Ethiopian Airways.

That is what I understood the situation to be.

Report 9

The findings of the African Commission on Human and People' Rights (ACHPR)

(Report from EEPA Situation Report 171, 21 June 2021)

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the ACHPR) says that on 4 November 2020 the government of Ethiopia launched a military offensive against the TPLF, which was followed by attacks on the Northern Command of the ENDF by the TPLF on the same day.

The finding of the Commission contradicts the Federal government claim that law enforcement operation in Tigray was taken due to TPLF's attack on the Northern Command.

The Commission also said: "In accordance with its mandate of promotion and protection of human rights in Africa under Article 45 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Charter)," a Commission of Inquiry on Tigray was formed and "will officially commence its work on 17 June 2021."

According to the ACHPR, the Commission of Inquiry will begin its work from its headquarters in Banjul, Republic of The Gambia.

"The Commission of Inquiry has a mandate to, inter alia, investigate allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and to gather all relevant information so as to determine whether the allegations constitute serious and massive violations of human rights," said the ACHPR

On 27th of June the report by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) was no longer available or reachable on-line.

These are the screenshots regarding the report that is no longer online available.

The Commission has since retracted the conclusion referring to factual errors with an unreserved apology.



[Download File](#)

Commission has been following the developments in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, with concern. On 4 November 2020 the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia launched a military offensive against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), this was followed by attacks on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces by the TPLF on the same day.



[Download File](#)

Commission has been following the developments in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, with concern. On 4 November 2020 the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia launched a military offensive against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), this was followed by attacks on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces by the TPLF on the same day.



Joanne M Hodges
@hodgesjoanne



BREAKING: AU finds Ethiopia attacked Tigray first. "...the Gov't of the FDRE launched a military offensive against the TPLF, this was followed by attacks on the Northern Command of the ENDF by the TPLF on the same day." [#TigrayGenocide](#)
[#StopStarvingTigray](#)
inquiry.achpr.org/elementor-536/



2:08 PM · Jun 18, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone



Launch of the Commissi...



Retraction and Public Apology

Please note that the following video was published on the 17th June 2021. Following its publication, the attention of the Commission was drawn to a factual error relating to the background and context to the conflict in the Tigray region, the video has since been edited to remove the factual inaccuracy. The Commission extends its unreserved apologies to concerned persons



III. Participation of Eritrea in the war in Tigray



Eritrea and its involvement in the war in Tigray

EEPA Webinar
Voices of Tigray – Involvement of Eritrea in the War
- 29 June 2021

Military preparations from March – July

- March 2020 to July 2020, the Eritrean leadership travelled to Ethiopia to visit key military installations
- During the same period the Eritrean Government received delegations from Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia
- July 2020 – SAWA
 - PM Abiyi and President Isaias with their families visit Sawa Military Training School.
 - PM Abiyi is the only head of state to visit Sawa, the training camp for National Service, characterised as a Crime against Humanity by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea
 - PM Abiy reviewed the preparations for the graduation of the 33rd round of Sawa
 - The 33rd round of Sawa is now deployed in Tigray, and was notably deployed in the Eritrean refugee camp Shemelba from where refugees were abducted to Eritrea and forcibly deployed in the Eritrean Defense Forces to fight against Tigray.



graduation-parade rehearsals of the 33rd Round of the National Service
Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and his delegation departed home in the later afternoon hours today after a two-day fruitful working visit



2



- Covid restrictions in Eritrea used to restrict all civil movement except for military movements:
 - Suspension of all commercial flights to and from Eritrea
 - Closure of all institutions of learning (except the Sawa military training camp)
 - Banning the circulation of public and private transport
 - Severe restriction of civil movement between towns and cities
 - Only mobility allowed is military

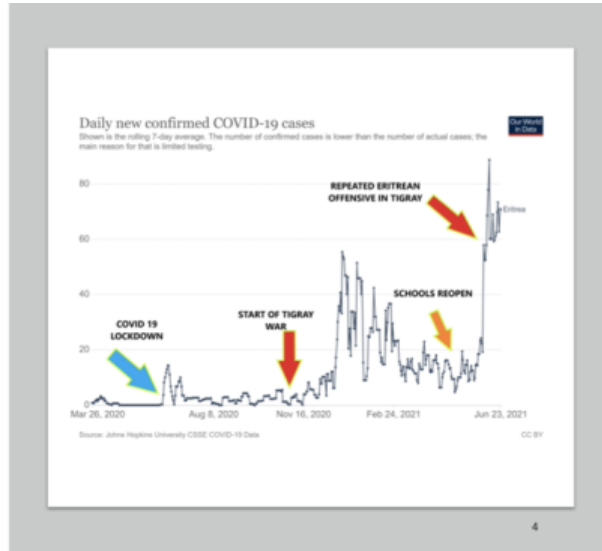
* The picture depicts the departure of new conscripts from Asmara to Sawa in September 2020 (34th round), during which no social distancing is observed.

6/28/21

**ERITREA DAILY NEW
CONFIRMED COVID – 19
CASES
26 MARCH 2020 – 23 JUNE
2021**

- There is a total lock-down by the Eritrean Government on all civil movements during this entire period – with the exception of the military operations.
- The military operations coincide with a large increase in number of covid infections in Eritrea.

6/28/21



The war on 'Misinformation'

- An article investigating “disinformation” (June 23, 2021) is published by the Atlantic Council, the spin doctors of the Eritrean regime
- The Atlantic Council is an outlet that Eritrea has used for many years to spread misinformation on the situation in Eritrea and which is linked to interests of the Mining Industry – such as Nevsum

DFRLab

@AtlanticCouncil's Digital Forensic Research Lab.

Eritrean report uses fact-checking tropes to dismiss evidence as “disinformation”

Eritrean officials promoted a report undermining evidence of violence in Tigray, claiming an international disinfo campaign



Report 11

Testimony Interview 19 June 2021 with a 25-year old former conscript in the Eritrean National Service

(audio-testimony available)

I worked with the army in Eritrea under the National Service.

I was in the army for six years. I was 19 years when I entered the army.

When Corona came, they closed all the roads in Eritrea. There are no jobs, and as a soldier we are suffering because we are depending on another job. Normally also, I work on my bicycle. I have many goods; I sell it to people outside of Teseney. It's about 20 kilometres.

When Corona came, they are banning me to continue on this work and they want me to work with them all the time to protect people from Corona. We work on closing all the roads everywhere.

Then one of our leaders heard I'm working in selling goods and travelling and he stole my bicycle and said "maybe you have the corona and you will send it to other people or something like that, so you can give us your bicycle". My bicycle is with them about one month.

And after that, all my colleagues, the soldiers, are in a very bad situation because there is nothing... no food, no anything.

Then after that, when they saw this situation, they allow us to continue our work. They give me my bicycle and I continue my work and also my colleagues. But still they continue, if they found me with my bicycle and I have some goods, they don't allow me and they stole it also. But still I continue because we need that, although for example if they stole your goods one day, you lost the work for all the week, but still I continue because I need to live.

Four months ago, in February 2021, they want to send us to the area of Omhajer. They want to send us to training. They told us, you will be sent to that area just for two weeks, just for training, but we do not trust that because we know it is not the area of the training. The area of the training is in the west, or another area. I know that they will send me to Tigray area for fighting, and I know it is a very dangerous area. Some people they have died, some are arrested... I'm thinking, if I die at that place, the government will not continue to see how my family will live and they will not give them anything. They will not care for my family. So I decided to leave Eritrea and I told my family about that.

I know that my colleagues who I trained with, most of them they were send to Humera area for fighting. Fortunately, at that time, it is better, no fighting. They spent two months in Humera. Then they come back to my area, after they spent two months. This was from February until April 2021.

We still have some contacts in the army. Sometimes they call me. What I hear, my colleagues are going to Tigray and before them there was a big group going to Tigray also. They are living in the houses of Tigray people. When the Tigray people leave, they are living in their houses. There is a big number of the Eritrean army in Tigray.

The first group from the army from our area left in November or December in 2020. It is a big number. There is about 140 from the people I know and also from many other areas. Especially the first army they sent, was a big number of soldiers. There are two groups that went from my area. From one group, all of them come back, but from the other, they are still in Tigray. Many died, even from even from my own division. I know because I

am in contact with some of my friends. But the law of the army is that you must keep silent all information especially like this. So until now, the families do not know what happened. Even one of my leaders died.

When the war started, our leaders said to us: be ready at all times. We did many movements, we were ready, the whole time. We walked a lot on foot. But it is impossible to view any information about the area of war. There are lies many times. For example when they said to us “we will send you to Omhajer” but they want to send us to Tigray, to the area of war, so no one will tell you the reality.

They didn't tell us anything. From the first, they were not saying we were going to Tigray. All of the soldiers, they just told us we will go to the border of Ethiopia, also the first group.

The Eritrean soldiers army, they are wearing clothes like the Ethiopian army. They said that they didn't have any Eritrean soldiers in Ethiopia. One thing that helped was the clothes, and it is difficult to distinguish, to know the difference between the Eritreans and the Ethiopians.

The strategy of the Eritrean army is to just be in the area inside of Tigray. And they are successful in this.

The Eritrean army kidnapped many Eritreans from Tigray and brought them back to Eritrea. Some people came back to Eritrea and left again to Sudan.

Report 12

Testimony 6 Excerpt of Testimony on the involvement of Eritrea in the war in Tigray

(audio interview available)

What is the relationship the Eritrean army has with the Ethiopian army?

It is a very good relation.

You also spend time together, eating?

Yes, we are dealing with them normally. We eat with them. I think all the things came from Ethiopia. The food, for example, and the houses - all the things are owned by the Ethiopians and also I know that if the Eritrean army caught any group of Tigray or of civilian people, we would send them all to the Ethiopians. Especially the opposition. The Eritreans send them to the Ethiopian government.

So the Ethiopian opposition, that would be the Tigray people?

Yes, Tigray.

If people got wounded, also Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers would be sent to Eritrea?

Yes, they send them to the Eritrean hospital, called Glas. There are helicopters. Glas hospital, the area is closed. No-one goes inside Glas. Even if you are a brother and you have your son, you will not see him. For example, one woman knows her son is injured in this hospital. When she came to this hospital to visit him, the army said: who told you - who gave you this information? In the end, she told them about the one, and they bring the one, and then they send him to prison. Also, they send her to prison. For this story, three people went to prison, because someone gave information.

If people die, if Eritreans die in Tigray, what happens to their bodies?

They put the people who die in cars. The cars are travelling. We don't know what happens after that, whether they send them to Eritrea or Ethiopia after that. No one asks, we are an army. About the injured people, the Eritrean injured people, the people who are far from Eritrea, they send them to Addis. But the injured here on the border of Eritrea, they send them to Eritrea - to Glas.

IV. Testimony of Kidnapping of Eritreans from Refugee camps for deployment in the war in Tigray in Eritrean Defense Forces

Report 13

Testimony Eritrean Refugee from Hitsats camp who was forcibly returned to Eritrea and escaped being enlisted in the war

(audio-testimony available with EEPA, name withheld for security reasons)

I left Eritrea in January 2015. I hate the Eritrean government. I came from prison. I escaped from the army and then they catch me. I spent 1 year and 2 months in prison. I fled to Hitsats, in Ethiopia.

When the war started, all the area is unsafe, so we decided to leave the camp. There was a lot of fighting in Hitsats. You couldn't even find a way to go through it. It started around November 2020. It was the army of Eritrea against Tigray leader Debretsion.

When the Eritreans came, I had already left the camp. We heard about many people that died.

I left my family in Hitsats and since then, I have no news from them. They didn't come with me because it is very difficult for a woman and children to make the long journey.

I wanted to go to Sudan and I started my journey to the border, but in one area, the Eritrean army caught me and sent me again to Eritrea, to Barentu. I don't remember well when this was. We were in a campaign of about 15 big army cars. A lot of people fit in there.

When we came to Eritrea, they divided us in two groups. The group that came from the Hitsats camp, they kept them in the prison for two weeks. Then they released them and allowed them to go to their families for a holiday. [in another interview, it was said that they were enlisted in the army after that]. But the other group, they send them to the prison.

I spent four months in Barentu prison. The group that spent long in prison were the ones that escaped from the army.

When they allowed me to go to the toilet, I escaped. From Barentu I spent about a month working. Then after that, the government was looking for people to take to the National Service, so I escaped to Sudan.

Testimony 14 of Rozina in Tigray

Published by Fritz Schaap and Daniel Etter in DER SPIEGEL /26/26/6/2021, translated and adapted by EEPA

A donkey is screaming in front of the window. In front children stand in line, they are thin. All residents of the camp complain of hunger in Shire. You eat the breadcrumbs given to them. You preserve them in small plastic bags. Sometimes they are moldy. They complain of indiscriminate arrests of young men. They often sleep on the raw concrete floor. Or outside. In the dust.

They took us to a police station says Rozina. Tortured us with electric shocks, hit us with cable. The men forced them. Undressing naked, they stuck their hands in my vagina. Allegedly to look for papers.

Then they brought us along with other prisoners on a truck heading east.

They wanted to execute us, says Rozina. Luckily, when she came across employees of the of the Ethiopian Red Cross, the militia left them behind.

She says she ran until she reached a small village. There the Eritreans found her. They saw me. And raped me.

After that, the women of the village hid her in a house. You heard the Eritreans coming back. They asked: where is that girl?

Then they took the sheep of the villagers. And shortly afterwards looted the whole village. They took everything: animals, grain, furniture.

When Rozina left her hiding place after two weeks she was raped again by the soldiers.

They said: 'We should turn Tigray into a desert and rape so many of you guys as we can.'

Before, before the war, Rozina operated a small restaurant.

She wanted to go to vocational school and study accounting to enable her daughter to have a better life.

That was her dream. Now she says: I don't know what the future will bring. I have seen too many dead and seen too much destruction.

The Eritreans and Amhara are stealing everything. In the future I only see hunger and death.

Report 15 Testimony by a nurse in Mekelle

Published by Fritz Schaap and Daniel Etter in DER SPIEGEL /26/26/6/2021, translated and adapted by EEPA

Mulu Mesfin is a nurse and has been looking after patients since the beginning of the war in Mekelle.

Mulu says: The number of victims is growing. You hardly sleep any more. You eat rarely. The suffering of the women of Tigray, it eats you away. I do no longer care about my children, I care no longer about myself. Everyone here is losing weight.

But we have to help, she says. And she cries.

Mulu says: 10 to 15 women come every day to the center where she works. They're getting more and more women, she says. Mulu knows hundreds of stories like the one of Rozina. More than 500 are registered in their center. So far there have been 1500 in all centers together. But the real number, so Mulu estimates, is definitely 20 times higher.

Often women come to us who are talking about 20 or 30 other cases in their villages. Women who never make it to us, says Mulu.

The women that are raped are between 4 and 80 years old old. Around half is underage. Lots come with broken bones, some with organ failure.

Many were infected with HIV, so says Mulu. They keep hearing stories here about soldiers telling their victims they have been selected and sent to Tigray because they are infected with HIV.

That is difficult to verify. Mulu says: All victims of mass rape, those who arrive here are HIV positive. Most rapes, she says, are mass rapes.

There are stories of 30 soldiers attacking the women. There are cases when the perpetrators are so numerous that women can no longer count them.

Once there was a group of 15 girls loaded into a minibus and into a military camp. There they were raped, Mulu says with a lower voice. for over a week. The killers, according to Mulu, paid attention to hold the victim long enough to make sure they were infected with HIV/AIDS. This is how it happened to one of the nuns in a nearby convent. For ten days, so says Mulu, the sisters were raped by soldiers. Now the sister is also HIV positive.

Often they force the families to watch, says Mulu. Mothers, fathers, brothers. Partially if they break up the families.

The physical injuries of women, that she treats, says Mulu, are shocking. The perpetrators regularly hurt the women by putting rubbish or dirty cloths and sometimes also acid in their vaginas.

Almost half of the women who come to the clinic, says sister Mulu, are pregnant. The beds in the hospital are full of women having an abortion.

Pregnant women are also raped. Then the soldiers beat them with rifles on their stomach. So they bleed and lose the child.

Sister Mulu says: We need peace. We need the world to help us.

Report 16 on Disinformation

A 72-page report accuses Western media of “being complicit in spreading disinformation about the crisis in Tigray, Ethiopia, and Eritrea’s involvement in the ongoing conflict”. Reportedly Eritrean and Ethiopian ministers and diplomats have helped spread and publicize the report which accuses Western media and governments of scapegoating Eritrea for the conflict in Tigray. The report entitled “Disinformation in Tigray: Manufacturing Consent For a Secessionist War”, was written by an organisation (New Africa Institute) that does not have a registered NPO address, and only has one employee. This employee is reportedly a vocal Eritrean government supporter.

The report uses fact checking tropes and other forms of manipulation to dismiss evidence of atrocities committed in Tigray as disinformation. Among the facts that are being denied is the large scale sexual violence being committed by Eritrean soldiers in Tigray, including gang rape, claiming such rape does not happen in Eritrea.

The author of the report said that “officials in various countries are reviewing what was said in that report, and it is potentially being used in diplomatic circles.” The Atlantic Council, publishing on the report, is a well-known spin doctor for the Eritrean regime and was previously linked to interests of the mining industry.

Testimony 17: Young woman in early 20s from Eritrea and who fled to Sudan

I am from Eritrea. I was 18 years old when I went to the army. I worked to sell coffee. From my coffee shop, the army came to collect me. Someone targeted me, because they came just for me. I had some customers. Those soldiers came, and they told me "come with us." I said: "why?" They haven't got any answer, but they just said, come with us - we are the government. So I go with them, and I saw other people just like me from other areas.

They sent me to an area called Hander Teseney. I spent about three weeks there. Then they sent me to the place of the training, it's called Kormana. It looks like all Eritrea is at that place - people from all over Eritrea. Also a big number of women and girls. I spent one year in Kormana.

We did army training - weapons, everything. We spent all the time crying. They punished us the whole time. We had to crawl on our knees on the ground. They beat us. There were many kinds of punishment, they will kill you if you try to escape - they will gun you directly.

There was no difference between women and men. We did the same things - we work like the men. There are people from all ages, from around 16 years old.

There is a lot of sexual harassment. They rape girls. They have their houses near us. They send people to the group and they say to a girl "come, the leader wants you in his place."

All we ever think about is to escape this area. Many girls try to escape. For girls who want to go to Keren or Asmara, maybe they are successful, but for us [from the lowlands], it is difficult because they closed the border. If they catch you, they beat you, ban you from food - although there is no food at all, just two breads, but they take even that.

Many women get pregnant. They bring them to the hospital first, and then back to the camp. They don't have to do any training, but they say "you can have your child here."

I am suffering there - I am sick, but they forced me to go to the training with the others. After the training, I was deployed to an area near Keren. I work there as a soldier to catch people, or when someone makes a mistake. It's not my choice, I did it under pressure.

The harassment is very bad. There is just a few girls with a large number of men. We sleep in one place. In one point, I was the only girl. Harassment from the men is expected, and we are constantly suffering from this. I tried to ask for another girl to join me, and I asked many many times for a holiday, many times they rejected this. The peace agreement changed nothing. One day, the leader saw me crying and asked "why is this girl crying?" - they told him "perhaps she is tired." Still I spent one month there. After that, they gave me one month holiday to go to my family. After the month, I escaped to Sudan.

Now I am working to earn some money to try and go to Libya, because I haven't got my family to help me. I hear about many people, youth, that go to Libya. I want to change my life, so I will do this difficult thing. Still here, I feel danger from the Eritrean government. I feel there's people collaborating with the Eritrean government here. I worked with the government as a soldier, and I know - If I look into your eyes, I know if you work with the government or not.

Europe External Programme with Africa is a Belgium-based Centre of Expertise with in-depth knowledge, publications, and networks, specialised in issues of peacebuilding, refugee protection, and resilience in the Horn of Africa. EEPA has published extensively on issues related to the 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 organizations, civil society, and experts from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, and across Africa. The situation reports can be found [here](#).

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. The publication is weighed on the basis of interest to understand the 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 the 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.