

Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 23 - 12 December

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Key information (in addition to what is already widely published)

International dimension (as confirmed per 12 Dec)

- The US State Department states it has credible reports on the presence of Eritrean troops in Tigray. Eritrea's involvement would confirm that the conflict is regional. "This is a grave development," a US State Department spokesperson said in an emailed statement. "We urge that any such troops be withdrawn immediately." Both Eritrea and Ethiopia deny the presence.
- Humanitarian workers killed. EU Commissioner Lenarčič condemns "the killing of four humanitarian workers in a refugee camp in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, including three staff members from the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and one from International Rescue Committee (IRC)."
- US House Foreign Affairs Committee McCaul, Engel, Bass & Smith respond to reports that a UN convoy came under fire: "...the situation on the ground is getting worse. Lack of security protections and opaque approval processes are blocking critical humanitarian assessment teams and preventing desperately needed food and supplies from reaching displaced populations. We call on the Government of Ethiopia to ensure safe and unfettered humanitarian access without delay. Humanitarian aid cannot be politicized."
- The UK and Denmark state they are deeply concerned about the death of the DRC and IRC staff that has been killed in Tigray. They call on aid workers to be protected at all times.
- Ethiopia's government states it is returning Eritrean refugees to camps they have fled in the northern region of Tigray, a move that alarms the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR.
- Eritrean organisation Arbi Harnet (Freedom Friday) states 300 Eritrean refugees who fled the fighting in Tigray, including from the refugee camps under international protection, were detained at the offices of IOM in the area of Bole in Addis and have been threatened with forced return to Eritrea. The process is presented as voluntary return and they are being held in the voluntary return registration centre of IOM. In a message smuggled out the refugees have asked for help to stop this.
- Reported that the Ethiopian government has seized control of one of the IOM refugee offices. This is reportedly being used to return Eritrean refugees back to the camps in Tigray.
- According to online sources, some refugees tried to run from the IOM center, and were caught and badly beaten and forced to return to the center by the security personnel.
- IOM confirms that "one of three IOM centres in Addis Ababa was taken over by the Ethiopian Government's Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) on 3 December. IOM has had no management authority, oversight or involvement in any activities undertaken by the authorities in the centre since that time."

- UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi states he has received an “overwhelming number of disturbing reports of Eritrean refugees in Tigray being killed, abducted and forcibly returned to Eritrea.” He adds “If confirmed, these actions would constitute a major violation of international law.”
- Babar Baloch, UNHCR Spokesman, repeated the joint UN call for all parties to “allow freedom of movement to affected civilians seeking assistance, safety and security within the Tigray region or outside the affected areas”. “This includes the right to cross international borders to seek asylum”, he told journalists in Geneva.
- UN OCHA states that food rations for displaced people in Tigray have run out and reiterates an urgent call for unconditional and safe humanitarian access to the affected regions.
- Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check states that Eritrean refugees in the camps in Tigray face “no direct threats.”
- President of the International Federation of the Red Cross states he is deeply concerned about the situation in Tigray: lack of access to civilians, hospitals without water and electricity, lack of medicines.
- Amnesty International states aid must be allowed into refugee camps: “we are on the brink of a humanitarian crisis and federal authorities are making it worse”.

Military situation (as confirmed per 12 Dec)

- Alert from generally reliable Twitter source: bombardments in Tembien, Tigray, most probably to destroy heavy artillery, which is known to be present there; Diplomats in Addis Ababa have no confirmation, there are multiple reliable sources but no confirmation from the ground in Tigray as due to shut down sources in the region are mostly unavailable.
- The Federal Police Commission in Ethiopia has issued arrest warrants for 40 former and defected senior members of the Ethiopia Air Force, Defense Forces and police officers. The list includes Lt. Gen. Tsadikan G/Tinsay, former, retired army chief of staff. They are suspected of coordinating the kidnapping of ENDF members and members of the federal police on November 04 by taking mission from "Tigray-based anti-peace elements".
- The TPLF has said that it is continuing to fight on multiple fronts (Reuters).

Human Rights (as confirmed per 12 Dec)

- Online messages of threats against relatives as punishment by association in Ethiopia, a practice well documented from within Eritrea, according to experts.

Situation in Tigray (as confirmed per 12 Dec)

- The Ethiopian government has announced that on December 8th, 44 trucks arrived in Shire carrying food. Similarly 30 trucks arrived in Mekelle; more trucks are being dispatched with medical supplies.
- The Federal Ethiopian Ministry of Peace announcement that 1.2 million tonnes of food aid, including wheat, had arrived in Mekelle is unrealistic, state experts.
- The Ethiopian Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) claims that the TPLF has looted and destroyed the coordination office of the refugee camps in Shire. Files and materials were reportedly destroyed.

Situation in Ethiopia (as confirmed per 12 Dec)

- The Addis Standard has said that Lidetu Ayalew has been released from police custody. The Ethiopian politician had been held since July 24th.

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