



The situation in Northern Ethiopia

General Assembly 1 (GA1)
Disarmament and international security



From a separated world to global peace: the need
for a new look on institutions.



Forum: General Assembly 1 (GA1) - disarmament and international security

Issue: The situation in Northern Ethiopia.

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Introduction

In 1936, Italy colonised the former Ethiopian Empire, but in 1941 the Italians were defeated by the British and Allied forces. On May 5th, 1941, the old emperor Haile Selassie returned to the throne. He made numerous efforts to promote the modernisation of the country such as a new constitution, which expanded the powers of the parliament. By the 1970s, the emperor had become older, and his age became more apparent. The Ethiopian people were in dispute about the nature of succession and the desirability of the Imperial monarchy in general.

Around this time, the communist movement in Ethiopia grew, receiving the support of the Soviet Union. The previous government's failure had created a climate of unrest. That, combined with rising inflation and corruption, meant the country was ready for a revolution. This led to the 1974 coup of Mengistu, who became the new leader of the country. Mengistu's years were marked by a totalitarian-style government and a massive militarization, financed by the Soviet Union.

In 1989 the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) merged with other opposition movements to form the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In May 1991, the EPRDF and others established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and radical Islamism arose, Ethiopia turned to the Western powers for alliance and assistance. In 2006, a radical Islamic organisation spread rapidly in Somalia and Ethiopia sent support to the country. In December 2006, active fighting broke out and the Islamist forces quickly retreated. Following this, Human Rights Watch accused Ethiopia of various war crimes.

Protests broke out across the country in 2016, demanding an end to human right abuses. Violence between various ethnic groups arose which led to many deaths. In 2020, relations between the federal government and the Tigray regional government deteriorated. On November 4, 2020, the former president, Abiy Ahmet, began a military offensive in the Tigray Region in response to attacks on army units stationed there.



Definition of Key Terms

Totalitarian

“(of a country or system of government) in which there is only one political party, which has complete power and control over the people” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.)

Communism

“a theory or system of social organisation in which all property is owned by the community and each person contributes and receives according to their ability and needs” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.)

Islamic radicalisation

“the action or process of making somebody more extreme or radical in their opinions on political, social or religious issues” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.) In this case it would be the religious issues regarding the Islam.

War crimes

“a cruel act that is committed during a war and is against the international rules of war” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.)

Human rights abuses

“A state commits human rights violations either directly or indirectly. Violations can either be intentionally performed by the state and or come as a result of the state failing to prevent the violation. When a state engages in human rights violations, various actors can be involved such as police, judges, prosecutors, government officials, and more. The violation can be physically violent in nature, such as police brutality, while rights such as the right to a fair trial can also be violated, where no physical violence is involved. The second type of violation – failure by the state to protect – occurs when there’s a conflict between individuals or groups within a society. If the state does nothing to intervene and protect vulnerable people and groups, it’s participating in the violations. In the United States, the state failed to protect black Americans when lynchings frequently occurred around the country. Since many of those responsible for the lynchings were also state actors (like the police), this is an example of both types of violations occurring at the same time.” (Soken-Huberty, Emmaline., 2022)

Ethnic cleansing

“(used especially in news reports) the policy of forcing the people of a particular ethnic group (= a group of people that share a cultural tradition, religion, etc.) to leave an area or a country” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.)

Technocratic caretaker government

“a technocratic government, technical government or government of technicians, is the term used to refer to a cabinet made up of experts not officially affiliated to any political party or political coalition.” (Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 2022)



Massacre

“the killing of a large number of people especially in a cruel way” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.)

Guerrilla warfare

“Guerrilla warfare is a form of irregular warfare in which small groups of combatants, such as paramilitary personnel, armed civilians, or irregulars, use military tactics including ambushes, sabotage, raids, petty warfare, hit-and-run tactics, and mobility, to fight a larger and less-mobile traditional military.” (Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 2023)



General Overview

Rising tensions

Throughout 2020, tensions between the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) escalated. The Ethiopian government has accused the TPLF of trying to re-establish their rule over the country through violence and force. The TPLF has, in return, accused the federal government of holding too much power for itself, and that the government was engaging in ethnic discrimination of Tigrayans.

In March 2020, the National Election Board of Ethiopia delayed the general elections to an undetermined date, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The TPLF rejected these measures, arguing that they were unconstitutional, and held its own regional election in September. Several journalists were barred by the Ethiopian government from travelling to cover Tigray's regional election. The government considered the election to be illegal and responded by slashing federal funding to the region.

In late September 2020, the TPLF stated that the constitutional term limit of the government was 5 October 2020, and that for this reason, it would consider the government illegitimate after that date. They proposed replacing the government with a technocratic caretaker government. As tension continued to grow, a brigadier general appointed by the Ethiopian government was prevented by the Tigray government from taking up his military post. The same day the federal parliament of Ethiopia had suggested designating the TPLF as a terrorist organisation.

Initial fighting

Just before midnight on 3 November 2020, Tigray Special Forces attacked the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) Northern Command headquarters, along with other Northern Command bases. Several people were killed and the TPLF claimed the attack was carried out in self-defence. An Ethiopian offensive was launched on 4 November, which was accompanied by the shutdown of government services in the Tigray Region.

On the night of 9 to 10 November 2020, 600 civilians were killed in a massacre in the town of Mai Kadra with machetes and knives used by the local militias and the police loyal to the TPLF, according to investigations by Amnesty International and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Refugees, interviewed by the Financial Times and Reuters, said Tigrayans were the victims. Two days later refugees, interviewed by the Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, and The New York Times, stated that the ENDF carried out beatings and massacres of 92 Tigrayans in Humera. The ENDF gained control of the town on 12 November.

As fighting went on, Ethiopian forces captured more and more of the Tigray region. On 23 November, Ethiopian forces reached the regional capital of Mekelle and encircled it. They announced that Mekelle would be shelled and told Tigray civilians to flee the city because Ethiopian forces would show no mercy. Though TPLF leaders and special forces had already left the city, Ethiopian forces continued their assault on Mekelle on the morning of 28 November and started heavily shelling the city. By the evening, the Prime Minister declared



Ethiopian forces had taken full control of the city. 27 civilians were killed, and 100 others were injured.

Guerrilla warfare

After Ethiopian federal forces and their allies captured Mekelle and other major cities, forces loyal to the Tigray government began to regroup into mountainous areas and reorganised under the banner of the Tigray Defence Forces (TDF). The TDF began to dig into their positions in rural Tigray, marking the start of a guerrilla campaign against Ethiopian-allied forces from the mountains.

On the 28th and 29th of November, witnesses and survivors reported that the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) carried out the Axum massacre of about 720 to 800 civilians. The Eritrean government stated that it was angered by Amnesty International's report on the massacre and accused Amnesty of fabricating evidence.

On 9 January 2021, Ethiopian TV reported that 300 refugees in the Hitsats camp were executed by the TPLF. According to refugees, pro-TPLF forces used Hitsats as a base for several weeks in November 2020, killing several refugees who wanted to leave the camp to get food. Ultimately, the early gains made by the ENDF and EDF against Tigrayan forces did not lead to a decisive defeat. In late January, the TDF had rallied and were intensifying their insurgency against Ethiopian forces.

According to a report by Ghent University, massacres of civilians continued into March.

Fighting intensified in early April. By this point the TDF was in control of the rural areas of central and southern Tigray along with parts of eastern and south-eastern Tigray while the ENDF was in control of the main roads and urban areas. Eritrean forces also controlled parts of Tigray in the west and north. All sides wished to secure a military victory, but they lacked the ability to do so in near term, so they began to prepare for a prolonged conflict. The TDF had the popular support from the people of Tigray, who were infuriated by war crimes committed by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers and worried about a potential decrease in the region's autonomy. This resulted in the TDF growing in strength and the concept of secession from Ethiopia gaining popularity in Tigray.

On 6 May, Ethiopia's House of People's Representatives declared the TPLF as a terrorist organisation.

Ceasefire

On 24 March 2022, the Ethiopian government declared an indefinite humanitarian truce, in order to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid into Tigray. During the ceasefire, both Ethiopia and the TPLF agreed to have talks about an official end to the war. By August the talks already started to break down, with both the Ethiopian government and the TPLF accusing each other of refusing to make peace.



Resuming the fight

In late August 2022, fighting resumed. Both sides blamed each other for initiating the fighting. Allegations emerged that the Tigray were smuggling in weapons, leading to the Ethiopian Air Force shooting down a plane; meanwhile, the government was accused of indiscriminate air bombardments on civilian targets.

On 27 August, the TDF captured the town of Kobo, following the ENDF's withdrawal. Ethiopia and Eritrea announced an offensive in North Tigray on 1 September. By mid-September, reports emerged of Eritrea engaging in mass mobilisation of the country's reservists to be sent to Tigray. On 20 September, the government of Tigray said Eritrea had invaded the region and that heavy fighting was taking place across northern Tigray. On 2 October, the TPLF announced it had withdrawn troops from the North Wollo Zone, including Kobo.

On 10 October, the TPLF claimed that Eritrea was escalating its offensive. Tigray mobilised its citizens, calling on every able-bodied person to join the fight. On 17 October, Ethiopia said it would seize every airport and other key infrastructure in the region.

Second ceasefire

On 25 October 2022, AU Commission Chairperson, Maussa Faki, announced that peace talks involving the Ethiopian government and the TPLF had commenced in South Africa. Hopes that these talks could definitely stop the war, however, remained low, as fighting did not appear to slow down, and Ethiopia vocalised their distrust about the peace process. Still, negotiations continued onward, and on 2 November, Ethiopia and the TPLF announced that they had signed an agreement for a cessation of hostilities. However, Eritrea and other warring parties were not involved in the agreement, leaving their status ambiguous. On 12 November, both parties signed a deal to allow humanitarian aid into Tigray. By 29 December, federal police were reported to have returned to Tigray, while flights and internet access had also been restored.

Despite important steps towards peace being made between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, other forces continued to launch attacks on Tigrayans throughout November and December.



Major Parties Involved

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Ethiopia)

Ethiopia is a country in Northern Africa. It is the host country of the current conflicts described in the general overview between the ENDF, the national military force of Ethiopia and the TPLF, the nationalist group also referred to as the Tigrayans.

Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)

The ENDF is the military force of Ethiopia. They have served in various UN and African Union peacekeeping missions. Members of the ENDF have reportedly been committing war crimes during the conflict between them and the TPLF. These accusations include gender-based violence, violence, and killings of minority groups in the Tigray region.

Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

The TPLF is a left-wing ethnic nationalist paramilitary group, a banned political party, and the former ruling party of the country. The Tigrayans are a minority ethnic group, who mostly live in the Tigray Region of northern Ethiopia. In the ongoing conflict the TPLF is fighting against the federal government of Ethiopia.

Tigray Defence Forces (TDF)

The TDF is a paramilitary rebel group established in 2020 by former defected generals of Ethiopia. The group was formed to fight the Ethiopian federal government and their mandates in the Tigray region. Both Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch have reported that the TDF have been involved in rapes and killings.

State of Eritrea (Eritrea)

Eritrea is a country on the east of Africa. Eritrea and Ethiopia were not always on good terms, as they have fought in wars previously in the Eritrean-Ethiopian War, also known as the Badme War. However, in this case, the Eritreans and Ethiopians are fighting together against the Tigrayan forces. Eritrean forces have also been reported for committing war crimes, as have all other participating groups of the conflict.



Timeline of Events

1936-1941	Italian occupation in Ethiopia
1974	Military Junta, the Derg, disposed emperor Selassie
1974	Establishment of the Socialist State
1991	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) toppled the Derg
1994	New constitution adopted
1995	First multiparty elections held
Dec 2000	Peace treaty with Eritrea
2007	Eritrea Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC)
2018	New peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea
2018	Reopening of the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia
2019	EPRDF merged to become the prosperity party
Mar 2020	General elections delayed
Sep 2020	Regional elections Tigray
Oct 5 2020	Constitutional term limit of the government
Nov 2020-present	Ethnic violence and military conflict between the Tigrayan people's liberation front and their alliances and Ethiopian national defence force.
Nov 2020 - Jun 2021	Tigrayan guerrilla warfare
Jun - Nov 2022	Tigrayan counter-offensive
Nov 2021 - Mar 2022	Government-allied counter-offensive
Mar - Aug 2022	Ceasefire period
Aug - Nov 2022	Resurgence of fighting
Nov 2022 – present	Second ceasefire



Previous attempts to solve the issue

Besides declarations by the UN and various countries in the world stating their concern for the vastly escalating conflict in Ethiopia, multiple resolutions have been written by the European Parliament on the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Tigray people, with the most recent one being: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2022-0429_EN.html

26 November 2020: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020IP0330>

7 October 2021: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021IP0421>



Possible solutions

At the moment there is a ceasefire between the conflicting parties. It is recommended that the member states take advantage of the situation at hand to enforce mediation through diplomatic methods and attempt to come to an agreement before conflict resurges once more. In some scenarios it may be necessary to apply pressure by threatening to enforce sanctions. However, this is a very delicate conflict that many before us have attempted to solve before us. Either way all parties should allow humanitarian aid into the country and region of conflict.



Useful documents

The resolutions presented in 'previous attempts to solve the issue' are very useful to see what has been done already in response to the conflict at hand.

The international crisis group explains the conflict at hand very well and detailed on their website: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/167-finding-path-peace-ethiopias-tigray-region>

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/avoiding-abyss-war-resumes-northern-ethiopia>



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