

01.12.2020

## **Update - Re: Protection of Eritrean Refugees in Tigray Region**

Since Amb. Andebrhan's letter to the UNHCR of 10.11.2020 (below), the escalation of hostilities between the forces of the Regional State of Tigray and those of the Federal Government of Ethiopia has caused tens of thousands of people to be internally displaced, and tens of thousands of others to seek refuge in the Sudan.

Eritrean refugees caught in the alarming situation are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and services. Amid reports of attacks, abductions and forced recruitment in the camps, made hard to corroborate due to the total media and communications blackout, Eritrean refugees are running out of food supplies and basic necessities. This exacerbates the suffering of an already vulnerable and devastated people.

Eri-Platform supports the call to grant urgent access for humanitarian assistance and services desperately needed by the refugee camps to prevent a further deterioration of the situation.

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*[Letter sent on 10.11.2020]*

10 November 2020

## **Re: Protection of Eritrean Refugees in Tigray Region**

H.E. Mr. Filippo Grandi  
UN High Commissioner for Refugees

I trust all is well with you, your family and colleagues during these unsettling and disruptive times of Covid-19.

The recent outbreak of hostilities between the Regional State of Tigray and the Federal Government of Ethiopia threatens to destabilise Ethiopia and aggravate an already precarious human condition in the region. Its escalation represents a grave and dangerous development that has created an alarming humanitarian situation in the warzone. The intensifying violence of the conflict and its worsening humanitarian consequences in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic has already claimed hundreds or, perhaps, thousands of casualties, created even more internally displaced populations (IDPs), and forced tens of thousands of others to flee their homes and seek refuge in eastern Sudan.

It is evident that the current circumstances of systemic disruption entailing, among other things, closure of banks, blockage of humanitarian access to refugee camps, and dwindling supplies of fuel and food present a daunting challenge to the provision of essential services and basic needs of sustenance. The situation is made much worse by the shutdown of telephone, internet and transport facilities that have effectively cut off the Tigray region from the rest of Ethiopia and the world. The combination of these factors can create a dire humanitarian crisis that could exasperate the suffering of already vulnerable populations in the region.

On the other hand, it is an established fact that Eritreans have been fleeing their home country to escape from *gross, widespread and systematic violations of human rights that amount to crimes against humanity* (2016 UN Commission of Inquiry). The situation in Eritrea today is increasingly untenable, with the reality of ever-deteriorating political, economic and social conditions afflicting Eritreans with no prospects of improvement in sight. This makes the possible opening and crossing of Eritrea's borders for the Eritrean refugees similarly untenable.

I am keenly aware that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is closely following the situation on the ground of the war in northern Ethiopia, has declared it a *Level 2 Emergency*, is revising its contingency response to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis, and trying to secure humanitarian access and strict observance of international humanitarian law under the Geneva Convention. In commending these efforts, I wish to bring to your attention the high risk and special vulnerability of Eritrean refugees in the Tigray region, estimated at around 94,000 (May 2020), and the need to provide them with all possible assistance and support. As such, I strongly urge the UNHCR and its field offices in the region to ensure the safety, protection and legitimate refugee status of the Eritrean refugees in accordance with international humanitarian law under the Geneva Convention as well as an adequate provision of essential necessities.

Please accept, Sir, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Andebrhan Welde Giorgis  
President  
**Eri-Platform**