

Ethiopia: Vigil Insight Information Alert

Report 4: 16 July 2021

The Ethiopian government's threatened offensive against TDF advances means their cease fire is in name only while a new statement claiming some aid groups are "arming" opposition forces further threatens the safety of aid operations.

This document provides an analysis of the current situation within Ethiopia and the implications for aid agencies working there.

SUMMARY

- The Ethiopian government declared the launch of a new offensive against the TDF on 14 July in response to their advances and accused aid organisations of "arming" opposition forces
- The cease fire is now in name only by both sides – though international pressure to try and ensure it holds until its planned demise in September will continue. It is however looking increasingly fragile – with conflict likely to increase within the next month.
- Aid deliveries will remain piecemeal, with only international organisations such as the WFP/ UN having the diplomatic hard power to ensure supplies are delivered.



MITIGATION FOR AID ORGANISATIONS

Security force activity will remain significant, and the consequent high rate of incidents means the risk to aid organisations is currently rated as **HIGH** throughout the country, with Tigray region being rated as **VERY HIGH**. Aid agencies will need to continue their own assessments of how to adjust their security strategies, but there are options available:

- **STRONGLY** advise that communications with either HQ or a coordinating body such as OCHA, are maintained. Ensure alternative means of communications in case of being stopped and drawn into an incident that may deteriorate.
- **STRONGLY** advise that aid organisations link up with larger international organisations – such as the UN (such as OCHA) because smaller INGOs do not have the advantage of the international political pressure on both sides, or the ability for potential collaboration on the ground.
- Those traveling to the field need to understand local complexities and ensure their team is composed in a manner that signals neutrality and are able to negotiate in tense situations.
- Programmes should be as open and transparent, and apolitical with all parties, especially at checkpoints and with equipment held in vehicles.
- Programmes will need to ensure local security staff understand they do not have the same rights as international bodies if offices / equipment/ staff are searched.
- Consider the safety and security implications for national staff working or traveling out of their home areas of Ethiopia in the context of ethnic violence in regions beyond Tigray.

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CONTEXT

On 14 July, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and General Bacha Debele of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (EDF) cautioned the Tigrayan Defence Force (TDF) that they were ready to launch a new offensive against it following the TDF's claim that they had taken control of Alamata, and were now approaching Mai-Tsebri, north of Adi Arkay. The same day the Ethiopian Government spokesman for the Tigray emergency task force Redwan Hussein issued a [statement](#) in which he claimed that "some humanitarian organisations were trying to arm the other side". Hussein alleged that aid organisations were not invested in coordinating aid but instead focusing on coordinating "campaigns of propaganda to harass and defame the Ethiopian government".



ANALYSIS

Abiy and General Debele's warnings mean that the government's 28 June declaration of a cease fire is now in name only. Indeed, the TDF's 04 July acceptance of it, in principle, was negated by their 13 July declaration that the conflict had entered a new phase following their capture of Alamata. A TDF spokesperson has since declared that they would "liberate every square inch of Tigray." The TDF's latest reported advances in the Tigray region put pressure on the Ethiopian government to respond, especially as the province most affected by the move – Amhara – said on 15 July that they were transiting from a "defensive to an offensive" stance against the TDF.

With Amhara, and the Ethiopian government now threatening a new phase in the war, other regions that have so far not engaged in the conflict (Oromia along with Sidama and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP)) have confirmed that they will deploy troops to support the EDF and Amhara forces. The Ethiopian government will realise that this will be seen as a negative move, directly effecting humanitarian supplies. Indeed, the UNHRC had already issued an official statement on 13 July calling for an immediate end to all violations in Tigray and for Eritrean troops to withdraw quickly. The government's declaration claiming that some aid organisations were "arming" the opposition forces, is likely a defensive mechanism intended to negate further criticism of its efforts to contain the TDF, and to pressure aid organisations to act through the Ethiopian Government rather than liaise directly with the Tigray opposition government on the ground.



PREDICTION

- We stated in the most [recent report](#) that the ceasefire will remain “highly fragile” but hold – unless one of three “red lines” was met. One of those red lines was met with reports that the TDF had taken Alamata. Although it is still **UNLIKELY** that the Ethiopian government will renege on the ceasefire in name – as it has specific timeline (see report [No 2](#)) – they will look to deploy troops to reinforce defences surrounding Tigray and support Amhara. They will come under increasing international pressure to maintain the ceasefire, as will the TDF, but it will increasingly be in name only.
- Conflict in the area around the borders of Tigray will significantly increase in the next month – as the TDF are likely to push west towards Humera to secure access to the Sudan – Ethiopia border crossing and south to take control major roads towards Gondar. The EDF and Amhara/provincial forces are **LIKELY** to defend these strategic points more vigorously than they did their positions in Tigray itself.
- The EDF will **LIKELY** use air strikes to retaliate against any major advances, though the current weather (rainy season) will affect both sides’ movement of heavy weapons. Both will need these to support and secure any major advances, though the TDF have the advantage of remaining a small and agile guerrilla force with years of experience in this type of warfare, particularly in more rural areas.
- The Ethiopian Government will undoubtedly continue to try to control movement and goods into Tigray, as well as communications, in order to pressure the TDF and also the majority of civilians in the region who appear to support them. If these controls continue and aid supplies become yet more sporadic, public anger could rise against TDF, leading to pressure on it to engage politically with Ethiopian Government, as well as internationally.
- Aid deliveries will remain piecemeal, with only international organisations such as the WFP/ UN having the diplomatic hard power to ensure supplies are delivered. The risk of further government raids and arrests targeting INGO offices and workers is **EXTREMELY HIGH** following the removal of satellite communications equipment from the UNICEF offices in Mekelle at on 28 June.

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- Ethiopia: [Social Media Monitoring](#): 25 June 2021.
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