

### HIGHLIGHTS

- The land dispute between Afar and Issa tribes lies behind the recurrent clashes between the two groups in the Afar region.
- The three contested *kebeles* along the Afar/Somali regional border (yellow on map) are predominately inhabited by ethnic Somali Issa while being located within the Afar regional boundary.
- The longstanding tension is rooted in the Issa inhabitants' desire to be part of the Somali Region while the Afar authorities consider the area as an integral part of the Afar Region.
- The 2014 agreement between the two regional Governments that recognized a 'special *kebele* status' for these areas has not been able to resolve the issue, given the opposition of the Ugaz (leader) of the Issa tribe.
- Continued violent clashes have led to a dire humanitarian situation, with over 29,000 people displaced. At least 30 Afar police and security forces have been killed in the recent clash on 23 January 2021, while casualties on the Issa side remains unknown. Insecurity severely undermines access in the area, with partners not being able to adequately reach the people-in-need.



The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

### SITUATION OVERVIEW

The land dispute concerns the following three *kebeles* along with border areas between Afar's zones 1 and 3 and Somali's Sitti Zone: Adaytu of Mille *woreda*, Undufo of Gewane *woreda*, and Gedamaytu of Amibara *woreda*. These *kebeles* are predominately inhabited by the ethnic Somali Issa clan and hold strategic importance due to their locations along the highway between Addis Ababa, Djibouti, and the Assab port in Eritrea.

The tension between Afar and Issa tribes over the contested area dates back at least decades, with the Issa inhabitants, backed by Somali authorities, desiring to be part of the Sitti Zone (Somali Region), while the Afar considered the area to be an integral part of the Afar Region. In 2014, the then regional presidents of the Afar and Somali Regions met in Awash to address the longstanding dispute and signed the document recognizing the three *kebeles* as special *kebeles* within the Afar regional boundary. The agreement was also signed by the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs, in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The agreement, however, was disputed by the Ugaz (leader) of the Issa, which eventually led to the resumption of violence. The conflict has been ongoing for the past three years, particularly since 2018 when the people in the designated special *kebeles* rejected their integration into Afar Region and demanded to be part of the Sitti Zone in the Somali Region.

Approximately 29,000 households were displaced between July and October 2020, with 11,000 currently living in Afdem, 5,200 in Erer, 6,200 in Maeyso, and 5,500 in Gablalu, according to the zonal Disaster Risk Management Office (DRMO) of Sitti Zone. Afar authorities also report that more than 30,000 people have been displaced from Gewane, Amibara, and Gelalo *woredas* of zone 3 and Mille *woreda* of Zone 1 and are living with the host community in Afar. Clashes have so far been concentrated along the main highway between Addis Ababa and Djibouti as well as the new railway line connecting Ethiopia to Djibouti

On 23 January 2021, different sources reported violent clashes between the Federal Police and Afar security forces, and the Issa militia in Adaytu village. While initial reports indicated that up to 70 police officers were killed and some 64 wounded, authorities later confirmed 30 deaths and 40 injuries. Casualties on the Issa militia side remains unknown.

The continued conflict between Afar and Issa presents significant access challenges and will likely affect the movement of humanitarian supplies between the ports of Djibouti and Assab. Partners have also expressed that they have been unable to carry out needs assessments and assist the affected community as a result of insecurity.

## HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

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The NDRMC, with regional DPFSPCO, has mobilized limited emergency food assistance and NFI kits for the IDPs. Regional authorities, supported by the federal Government, have been able to provide limited humanitarian assistance to the affected population. This includes one truck that is used for water trucking for IDPs in Undufo and Gedamaytu specially *kebeles*.

Further support from the humanitarian community is urgently required to ensure that adequate assistance is provided to people-in-need.