

# Ethiopia

## Flash Analysis and Prediction

28 January 2022



### **Ethiopian military threaten new offensive despite ceasefire broadly holding. Rising death toll from airstrikes against civilian targets.**

#### **Summary**

- On 20 January, the ENDF's Deputy Chief of Staff, Gen Abebaw Tadesse, said that troops were preparing for a new offensive against Tigray adding that "Tigray is Ethiopia's territory".
- The current ceasefire broadly continues to hold despite limited clashes on the borders of Tigray, shelling by the Eritrean army and a rising death toll from airstrikes against civilian targets.
- The Director General of the World Health Organisation described the situation in Tigray as "hell" noting that all attempts to deliver lifesaving medicines had been blocked by the Ethiopian government.
- The Ethiopian government has made some overt moves towards peace talks, announcing the release of 39 high profile political prisoners at Orthodox Christmas.



#### **Analysis**

The current ceasefire has broadly held since the Ethiopian government's 23 December declaration that the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) would not move into Tigray. Nonetheless, on 20 January, the ENDF's Deputy Chief of Staff, Gen Abebaw Tadesse, said that troops were preparing for a new offensive against Tigray adding that "Tigray is Ethiopia's territory". This follows limited clashes on the borders of Tigray and Afar (where the TDF made limited gains on 11 January, taking Almata, Wag, Waja, and Addi Arkay, and shelling the Afar town of Abala) and on the borders of Tigray and Amhara (where Amhara militias continue to make small gains). There are also unverified – but plausible – claims from the TDF that the Eritrean army has been shelling its positions and building up troop numbers along the Tigray border.

Despite this relative calm, however, the scale of airstrikes against civilian targets within Tigray causing civilian harm has increased significantly. The UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said on 14 January that more than 100 civilians have been killed and 75 more injured in airstrikes in Tigray since the beginning of the year. These attacks included a 05 January airstrike on the Mai Aini refugee camp near Mai Tsebri, that reportedly killed three Eritreans, two of them children. Another, on a camp for internally displaced people in Dedebit killed at least 56 people and wounded well over a hundred on 7 January. Seventeen more people, mostly women, died in a strike on a flour mill, also in Mai Tsebri, on 10 January. Witnesses there reported drones circling for a considerable time before the bombing began. Another two died and dozens were injured the following day in Hiwane, south of Tigray's capital Mekelle whilst other air attacks were reported in Korem, Alamata, Chercher, Adet and Abala. On 28 December 2021 it was reported that an UNHCR staff member was also killed by an armed drone strike.

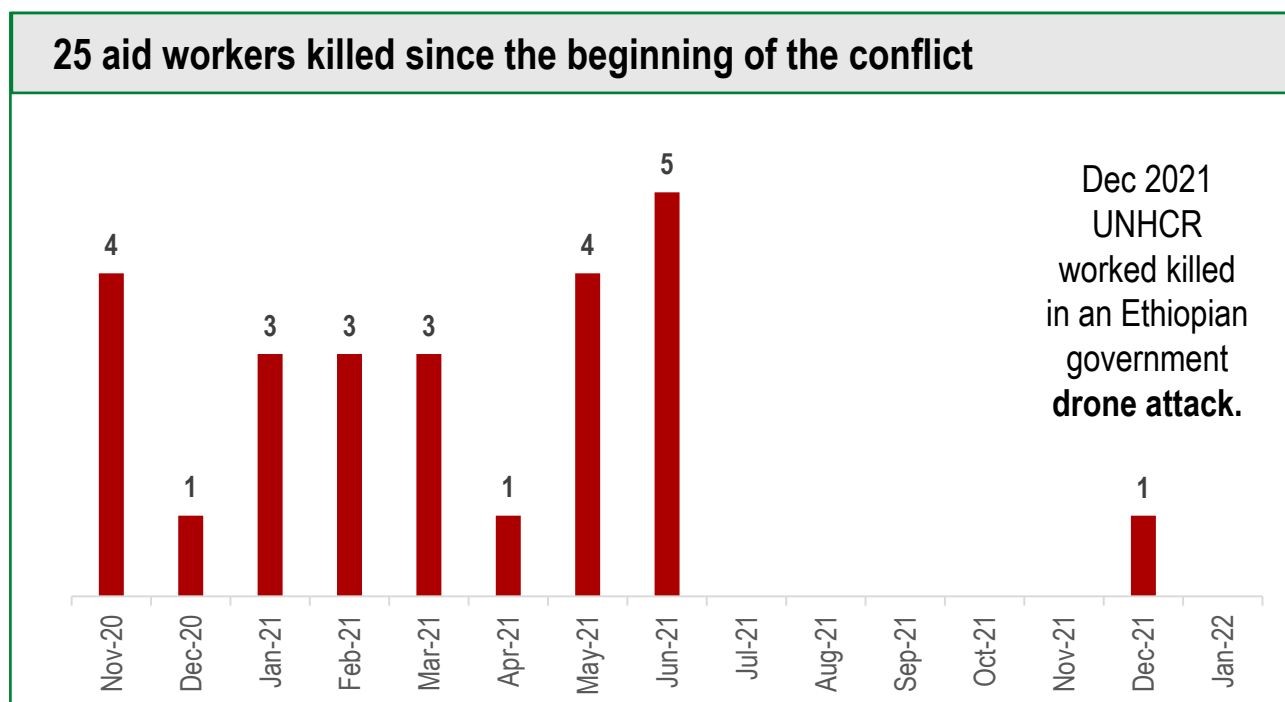
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## Aid Data Analysis: Killings

- At least 25 aid workers have been killed since the beginning of the conflict in November 2020 to 27 January 2022.
- Between November 2020 and June 2021, aid workers were killed by indirect fire, in road ambushes, during military operations against refugee and IDP camps. During the period of TPLF advances outside of Tigray, no aid workers were killed as aid agencies scaled down operations in affected areas. In December 2021, the first aid worker was killed in an armed drone strike inside Tigray.
- In one particularly heinous killing in May 2021, an LNGO aid worker was killed by Eritrean and Ethiopian soldiers after identifying himself as an aid worker and pleading for his life before being executed.
- The vast majority of those killed were males employed by local NGOs. Known female aid workers killed include a female MSF worker who went missing with two colleagues while travelling in June 2021. The next day their bodies were found a few metres from their empty vehicle. Each suffered multiple close-range gunshot wounds. The full circumstances of, and responsibility for, their killing remains unclear.
- Two drivers employed by a LNGO were killed after being kidnapped in June 2021. The aid workers were part of a team of ten who had their vehicles commandeered by armed forces. Five drivers were released soon after, while three are still reportedly missing.
- A UNHCR worker was killed in an Ethiopian government drone attack in late December 2021. He was killed whilst he was travelling in a car with his daughter between Alamata town and Mekelle city, Tigray region.

Download this data on [HDX](#).



[DOWNLOAD AID WORKER KILLED DATA](#)



## Analysis

Speaking on 12 January, World Health Organisation (WHO) Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described the situation there as “hell” and an “insult to humanity”. He added that all attempts by WHO to gain access to deliver lifesaving medicines had been blocked by the Ethiopian government. This led the Ethiopian government to complain formally about his comments but there is little evidence of their claimed bias even though Dr Tedros is himself from Tigray. UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, meanwhile, renewed the agency’s call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, accusing both sides of continued human rights abuses as World Food Programme (WFP) spokesperson for Ethiopia Claire Nevill, noted that “food and fuel stocks are running perilously low” with the WFP unable to get humanitarian supplies into Tigray since mid-December. The Ethiopian government has, however, made some overt moves towards peace talks. It marked Orthodox Christmas (07 January) by announcing the release of 39 high profile political prisoners including six senior members of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) as well as members of opposition groups from Oromia and Amhara in order to “create a favourable political environment” for dialogue with opposition groups. This came as African Union (AU) Special Envoy Olusegun Obasanjo had “good discussions” with the TPLF leaders in Mekelle on 11 January. Meanwhile, newly appointed US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa David Satterfield travelled to Addis on 20 January at the end of a tour of regional capitals. His aim was to “follow up on President Biden’s constructive phone call” with Abiy of 10 January and “encourage” the Ethiopian to end airstrikes and other hostilities.

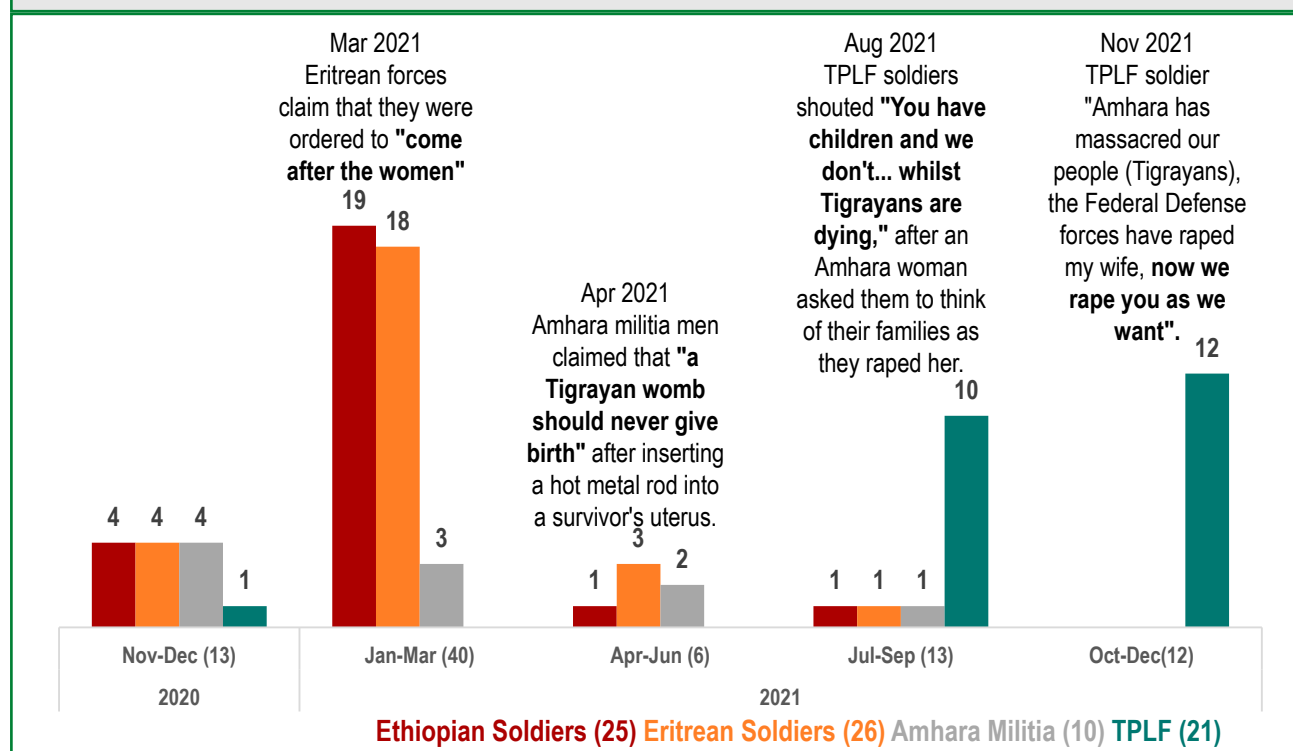


## Sexual Violence

Since the start of the conflict in Ethiopia in November 2020, sexual violence has been a continuous feature of the conflict by occupying armed forces. The majority of reported incidents describe gang rapes, where members of armed forces perpetrated sexual violence as a group. Various reported perpetrator statements suggests that sexual violence has been used as a deliberate tactic in an ethnic conflict and as a form of revenge. Read our latest report on Sexual Violence in Ethiopia [here](#).

### Reported incidents of sexual violence since the start of the conflict

November 2020 - December 2021: 84 analysed incidents





## Predictions

- TPLF leaders have, with some justification, accused Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali of pursuing further battlefield gains while feigning support for a negotiated settlement. The ENDF statement would appear to reinforce that view, although as yet there is no sign of any offensive beginning so the statement may well be intended to increase the pressure on the TPLF administration to stand aside and allow others to engage in peace talks. Furthermore, the continued air attacks also suggest that Abiy is intent on targeting the Tigrayan population in the hope that they will respond by removing the TPLF administration.
- It is therefore **LIKELY** that Abiy's de facto blockade on the region to deprive it of basic resources including food, fuel and medical supplies will continue. Both the WHO and local doctors are reporting increasingly high levels of malnutrition and the fact that the Ethiopian government openly claims that this is the result of the TPLF starving its own population means that this situation is only **LIKELY** to get worse. Regardless, the TDF will undoubtedly fight should the ENDF try to move into Tigray in force.
- While Abiy's prisoner releases are undoubtedly a positive move towards more meaningful dialogue, he used his Christmas address to reiterate his intent to thwart the "evil schemes of the terrorist groups, the TPLF and OLA-Shene" (the Oromo Liberation Army – Shene, which is fighting for greater autonomy in several parts of Oromia and which agreed a loose military alliance with the TPLF last year) and warned that there would be "no negotiations" with those groups. Meanwhile, Obasanjo's shuttle diplomacy between Addis Ababa and Mekelle has so far seen little in the way of concrete outcomes but this, combined with continued pressure from the US, should at least keep the Ethiopian government and TPLF talking via intermediaries.
- Although the Ethiopian government's limited prisoner releases have been broadly welcomed by the international community, the Amhara Governor Dr Yilkal Kefale claimed that people there were "outraged" by the federal government's decision. Furthermore, Amhara and Tigray both claim the area around Humera that was formerly part of Gondar region as their own which has led to heavy fighting there and, in recent weeks, the ethnic cleansing of the Tigrayan population. Violence between the two factions is therefore all but certain and Amhara's leaders will maintain significant pressure on Abiy not to make any further concessions towards peace.
- Conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by members of armed forces has usually been reported following territorial gains by Ethiopian and Eritrean and Amhara forces within Tigray and TPLF gains within Amhara and Afar. The more restricted movement of armed forces at present, may also limit the tactical use of sexual violence for the duration of the ceasefire. However, the situation in Almata, Wag, Waja, recently taken by the TPLF, should be closely monitored. Reported perpetrator statements suggests that sexual violence has been used as a tactic intended to cause civilian harm and suffering within an ethnic conflict.

## Longer Term Predictions (One To Two Years)

- Abiy and the Ethiopian government will continue to control aid flow into Tigray, despite the current war rhetoric allowing the bare minimum of aid in ensuring that mass starvation does not occur as seen in other conflict areas, for example Aleppo in 2016. Instead, by controlling the flow of aid into the area, they will ensure that aid delivered is seen to come from the Ethiopian government - rather than outside organisations, developing the perception that the Ethiopian government is supplying aid to stall famine, aiming to sway those opposed to the TPLF in Tigray in order to support the Ethiopian government, whilst also maintaining control of the levels of efforts seen from agencies such as the UN/ OCHA and INGOs.
- The conflict and intense clashes between both sides will continue as will the rhetoric for the next year to two years - though neither side will look to gain large tracts of land, especially as Tigray is so hard to capture geographically. Indeed, the pro-government website FANA on 24 January reported that the TDF gained ground in the Afar region including launching a new attack in the northerly Kilbeti Resu Zone. However diplomacy will also continue, though any breakthrough will not be seen for a year. That being said, moves such as the approval to lift the state of Emergency on 26 January by the Ethiopian cabinet, will also further diplomatic engagement between the two sides. Meanwhile, the AU will continue to arbitrate between the two sides, and negotiations will also continue behind the scenes between the TPLF and Ethiopian government. Indeed, the diaspora group, the [American Ethiopian Public Affairs committee](#) has stated that at a meeting between Abiy, and members of the group on 22 January, Abiy confirmed that there would be ongoing negotiations between the Ethiopian Government and the TPLF. However, due to the level of distrust from the Amhara, and Afar tribes towards Tigray (both from the actions in the last two years and historically) as well as some mistrust from the Oromia towards Abiy, it will take time to negotiate a settlement. Abiy meanwhile will continue to release further political prisoners, whilst also mending diplomatic bridges with the US in the hope of reinstating the AGOA treaty, thus also aiding the [fragile Ethiopian economy](#). The US - with tensions building with both Russia and China - will want to engage with Abiy (who wants to be seen as a major international player alongside Egypt) and therefore will seek to ensure smoother diplomatic relations within the year.
- The ENDF will continue to use drone strikes for now. Drones from Turkey, Iran and China, are **LIKELY** either given at cost price or for free (to demonstrate capability). In the longer term (next one to two years) it is **UNLIKELY** that the ENDF will be able to afford sustained use of drones. It is **LIKELY** that we will see an increase in air strikes in populated areas within the next six months to target TPLF senior leadership and vital civilian infrastructure with the aim to wear down the Tigrayans. The indiscriminate nature of drone air strikes will also increase the risk for aid agencies and aid workers operating within Tigray.
- The ENDF will rebuild, albeit slowly, as the Ethiopian economy recovers, especially with the GERD coming online and any monies it makes from the production and sales of electricity regionally. It is **HIGHLY UNLIKELY** any hostile attempt would be made to destroy the GERD - as it is now built and would be a catastrophic disaster if it failed regionally. However, attempts could be made to sabotage the turbines, thus stalling production. This however, is **UNLIKELY** for now.

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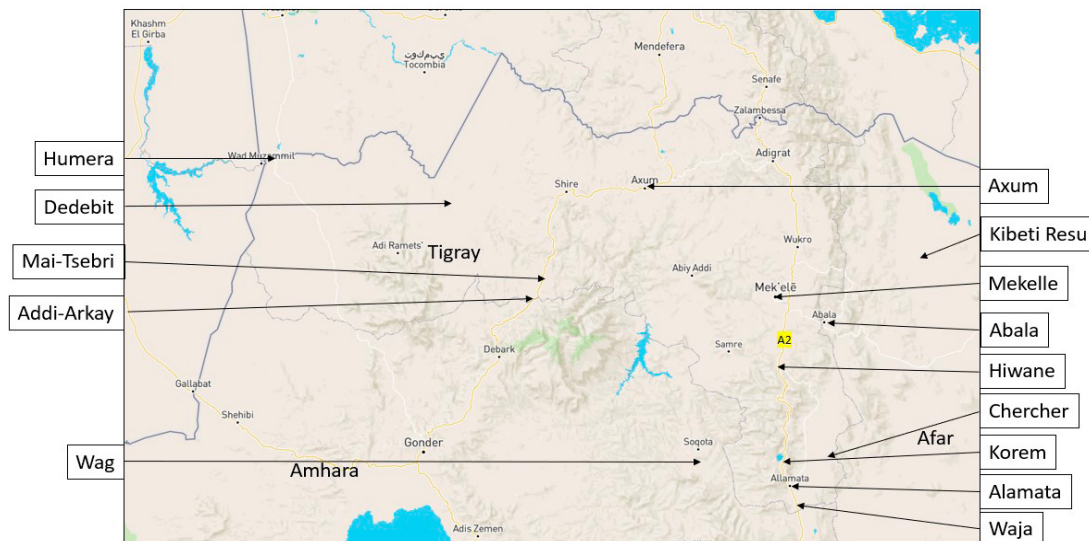
## Mitigations For Aid Agencies

- Use an acceptance strategy to gain access for areas of operations. However, ensure that local staff work where they feel culturally comfortable.
- Ensure adequate communication and medical support – including enhanced first aid training for those in Afar, or in Tigray at risk from drone and air strikes.
- Train staff in drone awareness including mitigating risks to staff from air and drone strikes by ensuring staff, where possible, work away from main infrastructure such as power stations.

## Protection Of Civilians

- Documentation of the civilian harm caused by the use of drone strikes in populated areas within Tigray needs to be strengthened to better understand the extent to which these weapons have a wide area effect. Such documentation will also aid mitigation methods to protect the civilian population especially as we are **LIKELY** to see an increase in drone use over the coming months.
- Safer reporting mechanisms on conflict-related sexual violence needs to be developed. Survivors, health workers and journalists have been threatened by perpetrators against reporting these attacks, therefore it is critical that safe, anonymous and independent reporting mechanisms are in place so survivors can safely report these incidents and the tactical use of sexual violence is fully recognised with perpetrators held accountable for their actions.

## Map showing the areas discussed in this report



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