



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

James Duddridge MP

Minister for Africa

King Charles Street

London

SW1A 2AH

Tel: 0207 008 5000

Email:

FCDO.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/fcdo

Habte Hagos
Eritrea Focus
2 Thorpe Close
Ladbroke Grove
London
W11 5XL

Our ref: MC2020/26566

18 January 2021

Dear Habte Hagos,

Thank you for your letter of 9 December about Eritrea and conflict in Tigray.

We are concerned about the continuing violence in the Tigray region and are deeply worried about the risks the conflict poses to civilian lives, including Eritrean refugees in the four UNHCR refugee camps.

We are also concerned about the risk these events pose to Ethiopia's overall stability, its democratic transition and the implementation of a democratising political reform programme - of which the UK has been supportive. The risk that the conflict becomes regionalised, drawing neighbouring countries into the fighting and forcing movements of refugees across borders, is also of grave concern.

The Foreign Secretary, in his conversations with Prime Minister Abiy and Deputy Prime Minister Demeke, has called for the immediate de-escalation of violence, for the protection of civilians and for unfettered humanitarian access. I have reiterated these points with the Ethiopian Ambassador and most recently with Ethiopian Finance Minister Ahmed Shide. I have also welcomed the Africa Union Chair's decision to appoint three eminent AU Special Envoys to engage in the situation. We will continue to support AU-led efforts towards a peaceful resolution. Our Ambassador in Addis Ababa continues to engage across the Ethiopian leadership in support of these objectives.

We are also concerned about the mounting evidence of Eritrean involvement in the conflict in Tigray and reports that Eritrean troops have entered Ethiopian refugee camps forcing a number of refugees to return to Eritrea. The British Ambassador in Eritrea raised the question of Eritrean involvement in the conflict with the Eritrean Foreign Minister on 2 December, who denied that Eritrea is involved militarily in the conflict and categorically denied that Eritrean forces had forcibly returned Eritrean refugees to Eritrea. We are seeking further information to corroborate these reports and if proven,

this would be a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law, which must be investigated.

We are extremely concerned that humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), do not have access to the refugee camps in Tigray. UNHCR has, as a result, been unable to corroborate reports of abduction and forced return of Eritrean refugees, meaning our understanding of the humanitarian and protection context in camps and refugee hosting areas is limited. The UK continues to call for immediate, free and unfettered humanitarian access across Tigray in line with the guiding principles laid down by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), so that UNHCR can uphold its mandate towards refugees. It is the responsibility of the host state to ensure refugees are protected and are not subjected to forcible return.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Duddridge', written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above the printed name and title.

James Duddridge MP
Minister for Africa