



2 Thorpe Close  
Ladbroke Grove  
London  
W10 5XL  
E: [info@eritrea-focus.org](mailto:info@eritrea-focus.org)

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**Confidential**

James Duddridge MP  
Minister for Africa  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

Dear Mr Duddridge,

**Re: War in Tigray - Ethiopia**

I am writing to you confidentially concerning the war in the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray. I am aware that you have been actively engaged with this crisis and that the Foreign Secretary has written to and spoken with Prime Minister Abiy, as well as meeting Deputy Prime Minister Demeke. We appreciate the time, energy and resources that HMG is devoting to the humanitarian situation.

At the same time, it appears to me that the situation has taken a serious turn for the worse and requires a re-assessment. In the last 24 hours, as Reuters has reported, there is a growing international acceptance that this war is not a brief, "police operation" which the Ethiopian Government can end in a matter of days. Senior United States officials acknowledge, unofficially, that the war involves Eritrean troops. This was reportedly confirmed by satellite and other intelligence. As the former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, acknowledged in a Tweet, "U.S. government reports of Eritrean soldiers in Tigray supporting Ethiopian government efforts to defeat the TPLF army are plausible."

This confirms the unofficial information Eritrea Focus has been collating since the 4<sup>th</sup> of November. We have first-hand accounts of the roundup of Eritreans, young and old, who have been sent to the frontline. Trucks have been requisitioned for this purpose and villagers have been required to feed Ethiopian troops who crossed into Eritrea from Tigray. It is our understanding that the Eritrean army (some in Ethiopian uniforms) are participating in the conflict alongside the Ethiopian federal forces. We are also aware that the 96,000 Eritrean refugees who were housed in four UNHCR camps in Tigray, and others who were living in the community, have come under attack from the advancing Eritrean/Ethiopian

forces. Some of the Eritrean refugees fled to Addis Ababa and other Ethiopian cities, where they have reportedly been detained. We understand that others have been forcibly conscripted into the Eritrean military (despite being UNHCR registered refugees) or else refouled to Eritrea itself. An Eritrean mother saw her son on one of three buses inside Eritrea; he had previously been in a UNHCR refugee camp, and a number of the refugees forcibly returned to Eritrea are imprisoned in Adi Quala.

This is an international conflict in which Eritrean forces are directly involved, with consequences for the whole of the Horn of Africa. The flight of almost 50,000 refugees to Sudan and the withdrawal of some 3,000 Ethiopian troops serving with the AMISOM in Somalia underlines the regional implications of this war. This is a very dangerous development. We believe it suggests that HMG should reconsider its policy towards Eritrea.

In recent years some have argued that engagement with the Eritrean government would pay dividends: that human rights would improve and the exodus of refugees would be staunched. It is clear that this has not been borne out by the evidence. President Isaias Afwerki has now engaged in this dangerous conflict. This is a development which not only threatens the lives of Eritreans and Ethiopians, but the stability of the region. I am sure you are aware of the concern expressed by senior American Africanists associated with the US Institute of Peace on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November when they warned that the war in Tigray could have dire consequences, including the potential collapse of the Ethiopian state.

Bearing these issues in mind, we would ask HMG to urgently re-assess its relations with the Eritrean government. There should be an end to the policy of engagement and a move towards a more robust policy to increase pressure on President Isaias. We were encouraged by HMG's decision to press for a debate in the UN Security Council, and urge that this policy be continued, mobilising our Commonwealth allies and members of the African Union to insist that the war be halted. The African Union's appointment of former presidents to mediate in this regard was a step in the right direction, and it is a matter of regret that Prime Minister Abiy refused to allow them to undertake this task. Sanctions exercised through the City of London (which raises funds for investments in Eritrea) need to be considered as well as use of the "Magnitsky" legislation. We would also call for measures to be taken to end the collection of taxation by the Eritrean authorities from the Eritrean diaspora in the UK. This is often undertaken illicitly and with menaces. We would urge HMG to follow the Dutch example of actively engaging with the Eritrean community and collecting information about these activities.

Taken together, and in association with the rest of the international community, we believe that these measures would help to restrain the Eritrean government and halt the regionalisation of this war. Together with the humanitarian aid the UK is already providing it could save lives and help stabilise the situation before it escalates out of control.

Yours sincerely,

Habte Hagos, Chair, Eritrea Focus