

Friday 26 November 2020

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Situation in Ethiopia

European Parliament resolution of 26 November 2020 on the situation in Ethiopia (2020/2881(RSP))

(2021/C 425/14)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Ethiopia,
 - having regard to the statement of 9 November 2020 by High Representative / Vice-President Josep Borrell on the latest developments in Ethiopia,
 - having regard to the joint statement of 12 November 2020 by High Representative / Vice-President Josep Borrell and Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič on Ethiopia,
 - having regard to the statement of 19 November 2020 by Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič entitled ‘Tigray conflict: EU humanitarian support to Ethiopian refugees reaching Sudan’,
 - having regard to the statement of 4 November 2020 by the UN Secretary-General,
 - having regard to the statements of 6 and 13 November 2020 by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Tigray,
 - having regard to the informal talks of 24 November 2020 in the UN Security Council on the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia’s Tigray region,
 - having regard to the situation report of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on Ethiopia, released on 11 November 2020,
 - having regard to the statement of 9 November 2020 by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, on the situation in Ethiopia,
 - having regard to the statement of 9 November 2020 by the Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,
 - having regard to the statement of 19 November 2020 by the EU Member States’ foreign affairs ministers,
 - having regard to the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia adopted on 8 December 1994, and in particular the provisions of Chapter III on fundamental rights and freedoms, human rights and democratic rights,
 - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
 - having regard to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights,
 - having regard to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance,
 - having regard to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
 - having regard to the second revision of the Cotonou Agreement,
 - having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the current armed conflict between the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the regional administration of Tigray, led by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), has caused hundreds of civilian deaths and the mass displacement of people;

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- B. whereas on 4 November 2020 the Ethiopian Government declared a state of emergency and launched military operations in the northern Tigray region the day after a reported attack by the TPLF against the federal government military base in the Tigray region; whereas since then there have been armed confrontations between federal forces (Federal Army, Amhara Region's Special Police Force and Amhara local militia) on the one side and regional forces (Tigray Special Police Force and militia) loyal to the TPLF on the other;
- C. whereas the political divergence between the PP and the TPLF was further accentuated when the federal government postponed national elections, scheduled for May 2020, due to the COVID-19 crisis;
- D. whereas in September 2020 the TPLF-led Tigray regional administration held its own election, which was declared illegal by the Ethiopian Government since its term was supposed to end in September 2020; whereas the federal parliament deemed the electoral process in the Tigray region to be illegal; whereas Tigray's leadership announced that it no longer recognised the federal administration or its laws; whereas on 3 November 2020 the federal parliament declared the TPLF a 'terrorist group';
- E. whereas on 8 November 2020 the TPLF approached the African Union to suggest talks, but the federal government ruled out any possibility of negotiations with the TPLF and rejected international calls for dialogue and mediation, arguing that the Tigray conflict is an internal matter that should not be internationalised; whereas the EU has offered its support in order to help de-escalate tensions, return to dialogue and secure the rule of law throughout Ethiopia;
- F. whereas in 2018 Abiy Ahmed achieved a historic peace deal with Eritrea, ending more than a decade-long suspension of diplomatic and commercial ties between the two countries; whereas the Abiy government took significant steps to free journalists and political prisoners, allow previously banned opposition groups to operate, and adopt new laws on civil society organisations and on countering terrorism; whereas the government has recently come under criticism due to the detention of opposition politicians; whereas concerns remain at the adoption of a new law aimed at curbing hate speech and disinformation, which may adversely affect freedom of expression;
- G. whereas some political groups linked to ethnic groups in Ethiopia that feel marginalised by Ethiopia's federalist system of government allege that this system has resulted in ethnic favouritism and discrimination;
- H. whereas in June 2020 widespread violence broke out following the death of Hachalu Hundessa, a singer and activist from the Oromo region, with hundreds being killed and arrested; whereas on 1 November 2020 more than 50 Amhara people were killed in attacks on three villages which are being widely viewed as ethnically motivated and possibly carried out by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), a breakaway militia from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF);
- I. whereas, according to the National Amhara Movement, the Ethiopian authorities banned peaceful protests — against ethnically motivated killings — which were due to take place on 28 October 2020;
- J. whereas, according to international human rights organisations, there have been several incidents of indiscriminate killings of civilians in different parts of Tigray since the beginning of the conflict, including a massacre that took place on the night of 9 November 2020 in Mai-Kadra in the Tigray region, where the killing of hundreds of civilians could amount to war crimes;
- K. whereas, according to international human rights organisations, Tigrayan residents elsewhere in the country have been suspended from their jobs and prevented from flying externally; whereas there are reports of physical and digital surveillance, mass arbitrary arrests and detentions;
- L. whereas Tigray's President confirmed that his forces had fired rockets targeting Eritrea's Asmara airport;

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- M. whereas the deadly fighting between the Ethiopian federal forces and the TPLF has raised international concern about the risks involved in intensifying existing security situations or sparking new ones in Ethiopia, which could have repercussions on neighbouring countries and potentially destabilise the entire Horn of Africa region; whereas Ethiopia has withdrawn troops from Somalia who were fighting Islamist insurgents; whereas the Kenyan authorities have scaled up security at the border with Ethiopia amid fears of escalating tensions;
- N. whereas the EU's development cooperation with Ethiopia is one of the largest in the world amounting to EUR 815 million for the 2014-2020 period; whereas Ethiopia is also one of the major beneficiaries of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, with over EUR 271,5 million for 2015-2019; whereas in 2020 the EU is providing EUR 44,29 million to humanitarian projects in Ethiopia by supporting the provision of live-saving assistance to internally displaced people uprooted by violence or natural hazards;
- O. whereas the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has demanded access to the Tigray region, which remains totally isolated (internet and telephone access have been cut off) since the beginning of the fighting; whereas, according to the UNHCR, the lack of electricity, telecommunications, access to fuel and cash limit any humanitarian aid response in Tigray and in the rest of Ethiopia, including tending to those wounded and killed in the fighting;
- P. whereas even before the fighting began there were 15,2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia, 2 million of them in Tigray region; whereas the Tigray region is the fifth most populated region in Ethiopia with over 6 million people, and is home to 100 000 internally displaced people and 96 000 Eritrean refugees; whereas it has several important refugee camps in which, according to NGOs, 44 % of those living there are children;
- Q. whereas Ethiopia is a signatory to the Cotonou Agreement, Article 96 of which stipulates that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential element of ACP-EU cooperation;
- R. whereas the fighting has caused thousands of deaths and injuries on both sides and has resulted in grave human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law; whereas, according to the UNHCR, as of 22 November 2020 over 38 500 refugees had fled the conflict and crossed the border into Sudan; whereas the UN has warned of a 'large-scale humanitarian crisis' and its agencies are planning for the possible arrival of 200 000 refugees over a six-month period; whereas the fighting is also causing the internal displacement of the population; whereas the UNHCR has already asked the two parties to the conflict to open corridors to allow people to leave and supplies to arrive at the same time; whereas international humanitarian organisations on the ground are ill-equipped and face shortages of supplies needed to treat newly arriving refugees and victims of violence; whereas the UN agencies are seeking USD 50 million in immediate funding which will go towards providing food and setting up new camps; whereas the European Commission is mobilising an initial EUR 4 million in emergency assistance to help support the displaced people arriving in Sudan;
1. Is deeply concerned about recent developments in Ethiopia, including the ongoing violence and allegations of serious breaches of fundamental human rights; deplores the current armed conflict between the federal government of Ethiopia and the regional administration of Tigray led by the TPLF; calls on both parties to commit to an immediate ceasefire and to solve political divergences by democratic means within the framework of the country's constitution in order to find a lasting peaceful solution, establish a ceasefire monitoring mechanism, and work towards building national consensus through an inclusive dialogue;
 2. Expresses its solidarity with the victims and the families of those affected; deplores the loss of life and killings of innocent civilians and the extrajudicial killings, regardless of their perpetrators;
 3. Calls on Ethiopia's central government and the TPLF to take immediate action to de-escalate the conflict; insists that all actors strictly follow a human-centred security approach;

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4. Deplores the fact that access for humanitarian workers is currently severely restricted; calls on the Ethiopian Government to give humanitarian organisations immediate and unrestricted access to the areas where there is conflict in order to ensure humanitarian aid; warns of the danger of a major humanitarian crisis in the country, as well as in neighbouring states and the wider region;
5. Notes with concern the ultimatum issued by Prime Minister Abiy to Tigray forces urging them to surrender and stating that, otherwise a military assault on the regional capital Mekelle would be pursued;
6. Recalls that deliberate attacks against civilians constitute war crimes; calls on forces on both sides to respect international human rights and international humanitarian law and to ensure the protection of people in affected areas; urges all sides to the conflict, and regional authorities, to minimise harm to the civilian population and to ensure and allow access to basic services for civilians at all times;
7. Notes with grave concern that inter-ethnic tensions and violence are rising in Ethiopia; considers it of the utmost importance that the Ethiopian and Tigrayan authorities exercise responsible leadership by fostering an inclusive political environment for all actors and ethnic groups;
8. Urges the federal authorities to end the practice of arbitrary arrests and surveillance or otherwise targeting ethnic groups; calls on the Ethiopian authorities to take strong measures against any ethnic profiling and to ensure the protection of ethnic minorities across the country; calls on the Ethiopian Government to implement reforms that protect human rights and guarantee equal access to government services and resources for all ethnic groups;
9. Is deeply concerned about the growing spread of misinformation and the use of hate speech, pitting ethnic groups against one another to stoke the current conflict in Tigray; calls on all parties involved in the conflict to refrain from using inflammatory language and hate speech both off- and online; urges national and local authorities, media organisations and the public to refrain from engaging in incitement to violence towards, discrimination of, or hostility against populations at risk;
10. Calls on Ethiopia's neighbouring states, including Eritrea, as well as other states in the wider region, such as the countries of the Nile basin, to refrain from all political and military interventions that could fuel the conflict; emphasises that failure to do so risks destabilising the wider region with disastrous consequences for international peace and security; emphasises the crucial role Ethiopia's neighbouring states can play in providing diplomatic support towards de-escalation of the conflict;
11. Expresses its full support for African Union-led mediation and de-escalation efforts initiated by the South African presidency of the AU, notably the nomination of three AU Special Envoys, and calls on all parties involved to actively cooperate and engage with the AU's mediation efforts; calls on the Ethiopian authorities to cooperate with efforts by international organisations, such as the African Union, the IGAD and the European Union, to enter into an inclusive dialogue in an effort to achieve peace, security and stability in the country and in the region;
12. Is deeply concerned about the de facto communications blackout in the northern Tigray region; urges the Ethiopian Government to restore all forms of communication to Tigray as an act of accountability and transparency for its military operations in the region and to allow free communication among the people of Tigray; stresses the importance of, and the need for, access to information both online and offline, as the right of all people to be informed and to access information is particularly vital in a crisis situation; urges that independent reporting on the situation be allowed; insists on the importance of immediately granting independent media access to Tigray; urges the Ethiopian Government to fully respect the freedoms of expression, association and of the press, as provided for in the Ethiopian Constitution, and to release unjustly detained journalists and bloggers; firmly believes that peaceful protest is part of a democratic process and that responding with excessive force should be avoided under all circumstances;
13. Calls on all parties to the conflict to guarantee the safe and free movement of civilians and to ensure that the right of freedom of assembly is upheld;
14. Calls on all parties involved in the conflict in the northern Tigray region to guarantee unrestrained access to independent human rights monitors to ensure that international human rights standards are being upheld; calls on all sides in the conflict to work closely with relevant actors to conduct a transparent investigation into the Mai-Kadra massacre, and calls for the perpetrators of this crime to be held to account and prosecuted without delay;

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15. Calls on the Ethiopian federal authorities to conduct a thorough, independent, effective and impartial investigation into any and all killings and human rights violations, including use of excessive force, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, and calls on the Tigrayan authorities to cooperate in these investigations; calls on all Ethiopian authorities to actively combat impunity; reminds the Ethiopian Government of its obligations to guarantee fundamental rights, including access to justice and the right to a fair and independent trial, as provided for in the African Charter and other international and regional human rights instruments, including the Cotonou Agreement; insists that the Ethiopian authorities ensure that the fair and impartial rule of law is respected and upheld throughout Ethiopia;
 16. Calls for close cooperation between EU humanitarian aid entities and the UNHCR, and for the UNHCR to continue to provide support to the refugees who have fled from this crisis, including near the areas they fled from; recalls that the Ethiopian Government is responsible for the safety and security of refugees and internally displaced persons on its territory; recalls that over 96 000 Eritrean refugees are mostly sheltered in refugee camps in the Tigray region; supports the appeals of the international community and humanitarian organisations for increased assistance to refugees and displaced persons;
 17. Calls for the EU and its partners to support the Sudanese Government and local authorities in responding urgently to calls to host the Ethiopian refugees fleeing the fighting in the Tigray region; expresses its appreciation for Sudan's readiness to welcome refugees fleeing the conflict; highlights the urgent need for preparations for the arrival of up to 200 000 refugees in Sudan; notes that Ethiopia is an important country of destination, transit and origin for migrants; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that all funded projects initiated within the framework of the EU Trust Fund for Africa respect human rights, in particular the rights of migrants and IDPs;
 18. Calls for the urgent mobilisation, as well as the structured and concerted deployment, of additional resources by the EU and its Member States to address all-encompassing needs triggered by the conflict;
 19. Welcomes the Ethiopian Government's commitment to holding general elections in 2021; urges all political actors across the country to engage in a political dialogue involving citizens from across the political, ideological, regional and ethnic spectrum ahead of the elections; firmly underlines that free, fair, inclusive and credible elections can only take place in an atmosphere free from intimidation, violence and harassment, with guaranteed freedom of speech and association, in line with international norms; regrets that the commitment to free elections has been undermined by the detention of several opposition politicians from across the political spectrum since June 2020 and by serious due process violations that undermine detainees' rights to a fair trial; calls on the authorities to release all those detained unless they are charged with legally recognisable offenses and can be prosecuted in accordance with international fair trial standards;
 20. Expresses its commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia and calls on all actors inside Ethiopia to work towards the peaceful solution of any conflict inside the country;
 21. Calls for the EU to continue to use all necessary diplomatic means to engage with the federal and regional authorities, as well as with regional partners and multilateral institutions, in order to resolve the conflict in a peaceful manner;
 22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the European External Action Service, the Federal Government and House of Federation of Ethiopia, the Tigrayan authorities, the Government of the Republic of Sudan, the governments of the IGAD, the African Union and its Member States, the Pan-African Parliament, and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.
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