

April 2021 Newsletter

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea was established with the following Officers and Members following an AGM held online on 25 March 2021.

Officers:

Co-Chair Fiona Bruce MP, Member of Human Rights Joint Committee and Co-Chair of APPG on North Korea

Co-Chair Lord Alton of Liverpool, Member of the International Relations Committee

Vice Chair Baroness Goudie, Advisor to the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security

Vice Chair Tim Farron MP, Liberal Democrats Leader 2015-2017

Vice Chair Fleur Anderson MP, Co-Chair of APPG for Prevention of Genocide

Vice Chair Thangam Debonnaire MP

Vice Chair Lord Chidgey

Vice Chair Lord St John of Bletso

Vice Chair Baroness Stroud

Vice Chair Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb

Vice Chair Lord Cormack

Vice Chair Brendan O'Hara MP

Vice Chair Patrick Grady MP, Former SNP International Development Spokesperson

Members:

Stephen Doughty MP, Shadow Africa Minister

Baroness Anelay, Chair of the International Relations and Defence Committee (Former Foreign Office Minister and Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Sexual Violence in Conflict 2014-2017)

Philip Hollobone MP

Baroness Thornton

Future events

'The War Waged Against Tigrayan Women', Monday 17 May, 16:00-17:00 BST, held online and hosted by the Coalition for Genocide Response. Register [here](#).

Parliamentary Questions, debates and business from 25 March 2021

Early Day Motion 1723 for signature

That this House condemns the massacre at Axum in Ethiopia, documented by both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity; further condemns the reported wider pattern of violence throughout the Tigray region, including the use of rape and sexual violence, and the alleged involvement of Eritrean forces; notes that there is a risk of a regional conflict in the Horn of Africa, with an escalation of tensions with Sudan and Egypt; requests that the UK Government places that issue formally on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council, as well as on that of the African Union; supports calls for a full, prompt, impartial and effective investigation into the massacre and unfettered humanitarian access to Tigray, as well as immediate access for human rights and media organisations; considers that the starvation and conflict-induced food insecurity in

that region is man-made, is a violation of international humanitarian law, and is a test case for the UK Special Envoy with that brief; and expresses concern for the fate of Eritrean refugees in that country alleged to be at risk of refoulement.

Written Question 29 April

Tim Farron MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to support Eritrean refugees with acute mental distress.

Kevin Foster MP

A: Refugees can access the same NHS health services as UK citizens, including mental health services.

Written Question 28 April

Tim Farron MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment she has made of the reasons for the increase in asylum applications from Eritrean nationals in 2020.

Kevin Foster MP

A: The Home Office publishes data on the number of applications for asylum in the UK, broken down by nationality, in its quarterly Immigration Statistics release. The number of applications made by Eritreans in each year are available in the Immigration Statistics, Asy_01c:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/961749/asylum-summary-dec-2020-tables.xlsx(opens in a new tab)

All asylum and human rights applications from Eritrean nationals are carefully considered and assessed on their individual merits in accordance with our international obligations.

Each individual assessment is made against the background of the latest available country of origin information and any relevant caselaw. The Eritrean Country Policy and Information Notes (available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)) outlines our position.

Written Question 26 April

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the influence and role of the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (1) in the

Horn of Africa, and (2) in brokering a peace agreement between the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea; and what discussions they have with the government of (a) Saudi Arabia, and (b) the United Arab Emirates, about the conflict in Tigray.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: The Governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have a clear interest in the security and prosperity of the Horn of Africa, and were prominent in brokering the 2018 peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. We have regular discussions, with both the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, on our shared interests in stability in Ethiopia and ending the conflict in Tigray. Most recently my Rt Hon. Friend the Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa discussed the situation in Ethiopia, including efforts to resolve the border dispute with Sudan, with Emirati counterparts on his visit to the region of 28-29 March. Last month I also spoke with the UAE Minister of State Sheikh Shakhbout bin Nahyan Al Nahyan about stability in the Horn of Africa, an issue we will discuss again in the coming weeks.

Written Question 26 April

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to monitor the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from the Tigray region following the announcement by the prime minister of Ethiopia in March.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: Eritrea's role in the conflict is particularly concerning; there are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, in line with the commitment made by Prime Minister Abiy in his announcement on 26 March of their withdrawal. We are clear that their withdrawal must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. We have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray.

Written Question 26 April

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the (1) dispute between the governments of Sudan and Ethiopia over the al-Fashaga territory, and (2) involvement of the government of (a) Eritrea, and (b) Egypt, in that dispute.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: We are concerned about the increase of tensions on the Sudanese Ethiopian border in the al-Fashaga territory and have stressed the need for de-escalation on both sides.

We are also concerned by the numbers of people displaced and the impact this will have in the region.

We have been in discussions with Eritrea and Sudan regarding their shared border, along with a range of partners who also have shared interests in stability in Ethiopia and the wider Horn of Africa. We are encouraging all parties to de-escalate and engage in a political process. Neither party to the dispute has raised concerns with us about the involvement of third countries.

Written Question 26 April

Lord Suri

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of (1) Eritrea, and (2) Ethiopia, about attacks in the town of Axum in which hundreds of civilians are reported to have been killed.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: We are deeply concerned at the mounting evidence of human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Since the conflict started, the UK has consistently called for an end to fighting, and for all parties to the conflict to prioritise the protection of civilians - we have done this both in public statements and in engagements with the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Foreign Secretary raised with Prime Minister Abiy during his visit to the region earlier this year. The Minister for Africa spoke to the Eritrean Ambassador to the in March, and the British Ambassador in Asmara continues to raise concerns - most recently on 15 April with the Eritrean Foreign Minister. The Minister for Africa made specific reference to the reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on the human rights violations of civilians in Axum, Ethiopia in his tweet of 26 February.

Eritrea's role in the conflict is particularly concerning; there are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, in line with the commitment made by Prime Minister Abiy on 26 March. We also note PM Abiy's statement on 23 March that the perpetrators of human rights atrocities should face justice - whoever they are. We need to see action now to stop further atrocities and to allow for the independent investigation of those that have occurred. In a joint statement on Ethiopia with 41 other countries at the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) of 26 February we condemned in the strongest terms the reported killings of civilians. The G7 Statement of 2 April made clear that independent, transparent and impartial investigation is essential and that those responsible for human rights atrocities must be held to account.

Written Question 26 April

Hilary Benn MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of (a) whether Eritrean troops have withdrawn from Tigray and (b) the humanitarian situation in Tigray.

James Duddridge MP

A: Eritrea's role in the Ethiopian conflict, including the continued presence of its armed forces, is particularly concerning. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, as I [Minister Duddridge] made clear to the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March, and we also set out in our joint statement with the G7 on 2 April. There are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. We are closely monitoring the situation and are clear that their withdrawal must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. We have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray in line with the commitment made by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy in his announcement on 26 March and will continue pressing for this commitment to be delivered.

The humanitarian situation in Tigray is poor. Basic services have collapsed and the humanitarian response is hampered by poor security and access. The UK has been consistent in calling for the protection of civilians in Ethiopia, unfettered humanitarian access, and respect for human rights. UK-funded aid agencies in Tigray are delivering support in challenging circumstances, including food, shelter, water and healthcare. A joint humanitarian and political team from the British Embassy in Addis Ababa visited Tigray 4-5 March and 4-7 April. They met with the provisional administration of Tigray, the Mayor of Mekelle, the Interim Head of Administration in Shire and with humanitarian agencies working in the region. They spoke directly to people displaced by violence and heard harrowing accounts of human rights violations. The team also saw UK Aid work in action and learned of the challenges across Tigray.

Written Question 23 April

Stephen Morgan MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, pursuant to his Answer of 9 March 2021 to Question 161799 on Ethiopia: Violence, if he will make further representations to his counterpart in the Government of Ethiopia on the need for independent, international, investigations into allegations of human right abuses and violations in the Tigray region of that country.

James Duddridge MP

A: We are deeply concerned at the mounting evidence of human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Since the conflict started, the UK alongside

international partners, have consistently called for an end to fighting, and for all parties to the conflict to prioritise the protection of civilians. We will hold Prime Minister Abiy to his statement on 23 March that the perpetrators of human rights atrocities should face justice - whoever they are. Further atrocities including sexual and gender-based violence must stop and an independent investigation of those that have occurred must take place. The UK will support the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights' planned investigations.

In a joint statement on Ethiopia with 41 other countries at the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, we condemned in the strongest terms the reported killings of civilians. Eritrea's role in the conflict is particularly concerning; there are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fueling insecurity. We welcome the announcement, on 26 March by Prime Minister Abiy that Eritrean forces will withdraw and call for this to be swift, unconditional and verifiable - we have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray and will continue pressing for this commitment to be delivered.

Written Question 22 April

Layla Moran MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of Eritrea's reported military actions in Tigray on the stability of the Horn of Africa.

James Duddridge MP

A: We remain concerned about the impact of the continued fighting in Tigray on the wider stability in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. As I made clear to the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March, and through joint statements at the Human Rights Council and by the G7 on 2 April, Eritrea's role in the Ethiopian conflict is particularly concerning. There are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. We have also received reports of Eritrean troops wearing Ethiopian National Defence Force uniforms, as well of new Eritrean forces deploying, both of which are deeply concerning. Eritrean forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, in line with the commitment made by Prime Minister Abiy in his announcement on 26 March. We are closely monitoring the situation and are clear that their withdrawal must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. We have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray and will continue pressing for this commitment to be delivered.

Written Question 22 April

Stephen Doughty MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the (a) presence and (b) reported actions of (i) regular and (ii) irregular Eritrean troops in Ethiopia.

James Duddridge MP

A: We remain concerned about the impact of the continued fighting in Tigray on the wider stability in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. As I made clear to the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March, and through joint statements at the Human Rights Council and by the G7 on 2 April, Eritrea's role in the Ethiopian conflict is particularly concerning. There are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, in line with the commitment made by Prime Minister Abiy in his announcement on 26 March. We are closely monitoring the situation and are clear that their withdrawal must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. We have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray and will continue pressing for this commitment to be delivered.

Oral Questions 20 April

Hansard transcript available [here](#).

Written Question 19 April

Alexander Stafford MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent representations he has made to the (a) Eritrean and (b) Ethiopian authorities on attacks in the town of Axum.

James Duddridge MP

A: We are deeply concerned at the mounting evidence of human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Since the conflict started, the UK has consistently called for an end to fighting, and for all parties to the conflict to prioritise the protection of civilians. On 26 February I [Minister Duddridge] stated that we are deeply saddened and concerned by the reports from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on the human rights violations of civilians in Axum, Ethiopia. These require a serious and urgent response from the Government of Ethiopia.

Eritrea's role in the conflict is particularly concerning; there are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, in line with the commitment made by Prime Minister Abiy. We also note his statement on 23 March that the

perpetrators of human rights atrocities should face justice - whoever they are. We need to see action now to stop further atrocities and to allow for the independent investigation of those that have occurred. In a joint statement on Ethiopia with 41 other countries at the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), we condemned in the strongest terms the reported killings of civilians.

Written Question 19 April

Dr Rupa Huq

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that (a) arms exports from the UK are not used for attacks on civilian settlements in Tigray and (b) people responsible for human rights abuses are held to account.

James Duddridge MP

A: We are deeply concerned at the mounting evidence of human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Since the conflict started, the UK alongside international partners, have consistently called for an end to fighting, and for all parties to the conflict to prioritise the protection of civilians. We will hold Prime Minister Abiy to his statement on 23 March that the perpetrators of human rights atrocities should face justice - whoever they are. Further atrocities including sexual and gender-based violence must stop and an independent investigation of those that have occurred must take place. The UK will support the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights' planned investigations.

In a joint statement on Ethiopia with 41 other countries at the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), we condemned in the strongest terms the reported killings of civilians. Eritrea's role in the conflict is particularly concerning; there are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. We welcome the announcement, on 26 March by Prime Minister Abiy that Eritrean forces will withdraw and call for this to be swift, unconditional and verifiable. We have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray.

The UK Government takes its export control responsibilities seriously and continues to monitor developments in Ethiopia very closely. We examine every licence application on a case-by-case basis against strict criteria, drawing on a range of sources in making assessments, including Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and international organisations in addition to our diplomatic posts. All licences are kept under careful and continual review.

Written Question 19 April

Helen Hayes MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to monitor the withdrawal of Eritrean forces from the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

James Duddridge MP

A: As we have made clear in Ministerial engagements with Eritrea and the international community, Eritrea's role in the Ethiopian conflict is particularly concerning. There are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, in line with the commitment made by Prime Minister Abiy in his announcement on 26 March. We are closely monitoring the situation and are clear that their withdrawal must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. We have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray.

Written Question 15 April

Sir Jeffrey M Donaldson MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what plans he has to introduce sanctions against human rights violators in (a) Eritrea, (b) North Korea and (c) Myanmar.

Nigel Adams MP

A: The UK remains deeply concerned about the appalling human rights situation in the DPRK. Its Government must address the many reports of continued and widespread human rights violations in the country, including the arbitrary detention of its citizens. That is why, in July 2020, the UK designated two DPRK entities through the Global Human Rights sanctions regime, including the Ministry of State Security Bureau 7 and Ministry of People's Security Correctional Bureau.

The UK, in conjunction with partners including the US and Canada, have announced targeted sanctions against nine high-ranking military officials and two military conglomerates for their role in serious human rights violations in Myanmar. We are consulting with partners on further measures, including additional sanctions. There will be a cost on the Myanmar military, and we will consider all tools at our disposal to do so. These sanctions follow the 16 individuals from the Myanmar military who were previously listed by the UK for human rights violations.

We are deeply concerned by Eritrean involvement in the conflict in Tigray. The Minister for Africa has made clear to the Eritrean Ambassador the UK's concern about reports of human rights violations by all parties to the conflict, the dire humanitarian conditions in Tigray, and the need for the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray. Perpetrators of human rights abuses and violations must be held to account, whoever they are.

Written Question 13 April

Stephen Doughty MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on allegations of serious human rights abuses and atrocities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

James Duddridge MP

A: We are deeply concerned at the mounting evidence of human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Since the conflict started, the UK alongside international partners, have consistently called for an end to fighting, and for all parties to the conflict to prioritise the protection of civilians. We welcome Prime Minister Abiy's statement on 23 March that the perpetrators of human rights atrocities should face justice - whoever they are. We need to see action now to stop further atrocities and to allow for the independent investigation of those that have occurred.

In a joint statement on Ethiopia with 41 other countries at the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), we condemned in the strongest terms the reported killings of civilians. Eritrea's role in the conflict is particularly concerning; there are numerous reports of atrocities involving Eritrean forces, and the presence of Eritrean forces is fuelling insecurity. We welcome the announcement, on 26 March, of their withdrawal and call for this to be immediate and unconditional. We continue to call for independent, international investigations into atrocities reported in Tigray in the multilateral fora, including at the UNHRC, and for the Government of Ethiopia to ensure full access for human rights organisations.

Written Question 1 April

Imran Ahmad Khan MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent steps his Department has taken to support freedom of religion in Eritrea.

James Duddridge MP

A: The UK Government takes every opportunity to voice our concern about arbitrary arrests and detentions in Eritrea on the basis of religion or belief, and have called for release of such worshippers. We have done so directly with the Government of Eritrea and publicly - through our annual reporting on human rights and at the UN Human Rights Council. Most recently the UK raised Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) in Eritrea in a statement by the UK's International Ambassador for Human Rights, Rita French, at the Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea during the 46th Session of the Human Rights Council on 24 February. We welcomed the release of Muslim, Christian and Jehovah's Witness detainees in 2020 and continue to push for further releases. We also encouraged

Eritrea to make progress on their commitment to the Universal Periodic Review process including the promotion of FoRB.

Written Question 29 March

Viscount Waverley

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 9 March (HL13631), which countries participated in the diplomatic visit to Indian-administered Kashmir organised by the government of India in the week commencing 15 February.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: This is a matter for the Government of India. According to information on the Government of India's Ministry of External Affairs website ([https://mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/33544/Official Spokespersons response to media queries on the Visit of Foreign Heads of Missions to Jammu amp Kashmir](https://mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/33544/Official_Speakers_response_to_media_queries_on_the_Visit_of_Foreign_Heads_of_Missions_to_Jammu_amp_Kashmir)), Heads of Mission attended from Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Estonia, Finland, European Union, Eritrea, France, Ghana, Italy, Ireland, Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Malawi, Netherlands, Portugal, Senegal, Spain, Sweden and Tajikistan.

Written Question 26 March

The Lord Bishop of Coventry

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the governments of (1) Ethiopia, and (2) Eritrea, about the need (a) to take immediate steps to prevent any further damage to the cultural sites of Tigray, (b) to safeguard and respect all cultural property in Tigray, and (c) to ensure that looted objects are restored to their communities.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: We are deeply concerned by reports of violations of international law and international human rights law from Tigray, and have raised our concerns with Ministers in the governments of both Ethiopia and Eritrea, making clear the overriding need to protect civilians and adhere to international law and international human rights law. We are concerned by reports from Tigray of attacks on places of worship as well as damage to cultural monuments and artefacts. Our Embassy in Addis Ababa has been in contact with the UNESCO offices in Addis, and is monitoring matters carefully. We are concerned by the growing weight of credible evidence of atrocities in Tigray, including looting. The Minister for Africa has called for the withdrawal of Eritrean forces. We welcome the announcement, on 26 March, of their withdrawal and call for this to be immediate and unconditional. We have clearly set out the need for independent, international, investigations into allegations of human right abuses and violations. We have also stressed the need for Ethiopia to safeguard its incredible diversity of faith and

identity. Respect for cultural heritage is part of this, alongside freedom of expression and freedom of religion and belief.