

# July 2021 Newsletter

## Upcoming opportunities

On 8 September, Sarah Champion MP has secured a Westminster Hall debate from 09:30-11:00 on the '[Humanitarian situation in Tigray](#)'. Briefings can be circulated to those interested.

That same day, 8 September 15:45, the International Relations and Defence Committee will [launch its report](#), 'The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa: prosperity, peace and development co-operation', in Grand Committee.

## Past events & publications

On 26 July the APPG's co-chair Lord Alton of Liverpool marked the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of poet, songwriter, critic and editor-in-chief of the leading newspaper ሰጦን (Zemen, The Times) Amanuel Asrat, who has been detained in Eritrea for nearly 20 years. He wrote,

*"I write as the co-chair of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea to offer my solidarity and support to Amanuel's family, and of course to Amanuel himself. I cannot imagine how painful it must be to not know of the wellbeing or even whereabouts of a loved one, let alone what that 'not knowing' feels like after almost 20 years. I hope to give a tiny measure of solace when I say that there are voices in the UK Parliament who will continue to press for the safety and return of Eritrea's prisoners of conscience, and to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eritrea's September 2001 crackdown."*

You too can write to Amanuel and his loved ones via [the #PENWrites campaign](#) run by English PEN. Read a moving tribute to Amanuel by poet Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrahtu via the link below.

In July, the International Development Committee received Her Majesty's Government response to their April 2021 report, 'The humanitarian situation in Tigray', in which they repeated that "an end to fighting [...] remains our primary ask of the parties to the conflict." The government response in full is [here](#).

## News and updates

The wellbeing of Eritrean refugees in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is in question, as fears mount for those trapped in the remaining camps of Mai Aini and Adi Harush who are facing attacks and harassment and remain trapped by insecurity. Two refugee camps in Tigray, Hitsats and Shimelba, were destroyed by Eritrean soldiers earlier in the conflict. On 29 July, hundreds of Eritrean protestors picketed outside the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Addis Ababa demanding the active protection and evacuation of Eritrean refugees trapped in Mai Aini and Adi Harush. [Read more](#).

*46 organisations dealing with issues related to asylum, children and mental health, including the Da'aro Youth Project, Children's Society, Mind, and the Refugee Council, have written to Nadine Dorries, Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, asking for cross-government action in response to an alarming number of suicides among teenagers who arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Da'aro Youth Project identified 11 teenagers who arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and who have died by suicide in the last 5 years. Of this number, 8 are known to have been Eritrean, 1 from Ethiopia, and 2 from Afghanistan. In addition to the 11 teenagers identified, another unaccompanied asylum seeking young person receiving support from Hull City Council has [also died by suicide](#) recently. The organisations are calling for an urgent inquiry into these deaths, a proper assessment of the scale of this issue (considering there are currently no statistics available to know how many young people in similar circumstances have died), an assessment of the factors driving this mental health crisis, and action to prevent further deaths. Read more: [Charities raise alarm over suicides of young asylum seekers in UK](#). The Da'aro Youth Project is offering meetings on this if you would like further updates and to support. Please [contact APPG secretariat](#) for more details.*

### **We've been watching/reading**

This moving tribute to Eritrean writer Amanuel Asrat by poet (and his mentee) Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrahtu in PEN Transmissions, '[To Dearest, Cherished and Longed Amanuel](#)'.

We have been following the fortunes of Eritrea's Tachlowini Gabriyesos, running for a medal in the Tokyo Olympics alongside the Refugee Olympic Team. Read his story and how he became a refugee in Haaretz's reporting, '[Tokyo Olympics: They Consider Themselves Israelis – but They're Representing the Refugee Olympic Team](#)'.

### **Parliamentary Questions, debates and business**

#### **Written Question 16 July**

##### **Neil Coyle MP**

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, with reference to paragraph 6.11 of Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2019 Human Rights and Democracy report on the use of national service in Eritrea, what assessment her Department has made of the reasons for Eritreans seeking asylum in the UK since 2019; and what assessment her Department has made of the change in the level of asylum applications from Eritreans between 2019 and 2021.

##### **Kevin Foster MP**

A: All asylum and human rights applications from Eritrean nationals are carefully considered 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.

We cannot comment on individual cases however our assessment states the vast majority of Eritreans base their asylum claim on their desertion from, or evasion of, compulsory national service as well as the potential consequences of such (for example: leaving the country illegally).

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 table Asy\_01C (Main Applicants; Asylum, volume 1).

Latest edition available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-march-2021/list-of-tables#asylum-and-resettlement>

### **Written Question 15 July**

#### **Neil Coyle MP**

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to support (a) journalists, (b) political figures, (c) students and (d) other human rights defenders in Eritrea who have been detained since the September 2001 Government crackdown.

#### **James Duddridge MP**

A: We remain concerned about the human rights situation in Eritrea. The UK Government takes every opportunity to voice our concern about arbitrary arrests and detentions in Eritrea and has called for the release of those arrested and detained in this way. 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 in a statement by the UK's Ambassador for Human Rights on 21 June during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur at the 47th session. Eritrea remains a priority country under our annual human rights reporting, and we will continue to monitor the situation there.

### **Written Question 12 July**

#### **Andrew Mitchell MP**

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what discussions his Department has had with the Eritrean Government on using their ports for humanitarian supplies to be transported to Tigray in Ethiopia.

## **James Duddridge MP**

A: The UK Government is deeply concerned about the grave humanitarian situation in Ethiopia and shares the concerns outlined in the report on 24 June by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Ensuring assistance gets to those who need it most remains our priority in Tigray. We continue to explore all options with partners to expand humanitarian access by both air and land. We have not discussed access for humanitarian supplies with the Government of Eritrea given the destabilising role their forces continue to play in the conflict. We are focussed on securing the complete, immediate and verifiable withdrawal of all Eritrean troops from Tigray in order to help humanitarian relief efforts.

On 14 June I [Minister Duddridge] announced that the UK will allocate a further £16.7 million to the crisis in Tigray. This will support civil-military coordination to help aid get to those in need and address famine risk through the provision of healthcare, sanitation, and nutritional support. This allocation is on top of the existing £27 million in 2020-21 already directed to the response, and an additional £4 million allocated to support nutrition and vaccinations in Tigray. This brings UK total funding to support response to the crisis to £47.7 million. We continue to urge all parties to the conflict to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law.

### **Written Question 8 July**

#### **Lord Alton of Liverpool**

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) media reports detailing the arrest of Tigrayans in parts of Ethiopia, (2) the conditions in which arrested Tigrayans are being held, and (3) reports that thousands of Tigrayans have been sent to Eritrea where they are subject to atrocity crimes; and what representations they have made to the government of Ethiopia on the situation.

#### **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

A: Recent arrests of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and elsewhere in Ethiopia are extremely worrying, and discrimination against or targeting of any group is unacceptable. The UK is following the situation closely. We have consistently raised the importance of respect for human rights throughout this conflict, and will raise these concerns directly with the Government of Ethiopia.

### **Written Question 8 July**

#### **Alyn Smith MP**

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether the UK provided police or military training to (a) Afghanistan, (b) Bahrain, (c) Bangladesh, (d) Belarus, (e) Central African Republic, (f) China, (g) Colombia, (h) Democratic People's Republic of Korea, (i) Democratic Republic of Congo, (j) Egypt, (k) Eritrea and (l) Iran in 2020.

## **James Heappey MP**

A: The Ministry of Defence records information on International Defence Training (IDT) by financial year (FY), rather than by calendar year. During FY 2020/21, personnel from the following countries have received some form of UK defence education or training:

Afghanistan; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Belarus; Colombia; Egypt

No training was provided to the other countries listed.

## **Written Question 8 July**

### **Alyn Smith MP**

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what the value was of exports of arms and military equipment to (a) Afghanistan, (b) Bahrain, (c) Bangladesh, (d) Belarus, (e) Central African Republic, (f) China, (g) Colombia, (h) Democratic People's Republic of Korea, (i) Democratic Republic of Congo, (j) Egypt, (k) Eritrea, (l) Iran in 2020.

### **Mr Ranil Jayawardena MP**

A: Such exports require an export licence, which are assessed against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria (the "Consolidated Criteria").

HM Government publishes Official Statistics (on a quarterly and annual basis) on export licences granted, refused and revoked to all destinations on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) containing detailed information including the overall value, type (e.g. Military, Other) and a summary of the items covered by these licences. The most recent publication was on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

## **Written Question 30 June**

### **Lord Alton of Liverpool**

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the relevance of (1) the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, (2) the UK Approach to Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, and (3) the duty to prevent atrocity crimes, in the context of the war in Tigray.

### **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

A: The UK Government has been at the forefront of the international response throughout the conflict in Tigray. We have engaged directly with the Government of Ethiopia, and that of Eritrea, to press for protection of civilians, unfettered humanitarian access and an end to the conflict. This is in line with our approach to protection of civilians, commitment to Responsibility to Protect and atrocity prevention policy. We have also worked through international fora including the G7 leaders' communique of 13 June.

**Written Question 30 June**

**Lord Alton of Liverpool**

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that (1) the perpetrators of sexual violence in Eritrea are brought to justice, (2) evidence of sexual violence in that country is collected and preserved, and (3) UN investigators have the necessary access to conduct an assessment of reported atrocities; and what steps they are taking to deploy UK experts in preventing sexual violence in conflict to Eritrea.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

A: We have deployed from the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative UK Team of Experts. Recommendations from an initial scoping mission by them will outline options for supporting the Government of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and other key stakeholders to safely collect and preserve evidence, and bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice. The UK fully supports the joint investigation involving the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights.

**Written Question 30 June**

**Lord Alton of Liverpool**

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to broker talks between the government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front; and what discussions they have had with the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea about withdrawing armed forces from the Tigray region.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

A: Dialogue and reconciliation is required for an inclusive political process to be initiated. The UK endorses African Union Commission Chairperson Faki's views that a comprehensive and all-encompassing permanent ceasefire is necessary to pave the way for sustainable peace in Tigray. We will continue to urge all parties to the conflict to end violence and seek a political resolution.

**Written Question 30 June**

**Lord Alton of Liverpool**

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to avert a famine in Tigray; and in particular, what discussions they have had with the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea (1) to remove roadblocks, and (2) to open the ports of Assab and Massawa.

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

A: The UK has allocated £47.7m to respond to the Tigray crisis, to help aid get to those in need and address famine risk through the provision of healthcare, sanitation, and nutrition. We have consistently called for unfettered humanitarian access.

### **Written Question 29 June**

#### **Lord Bishop of Worcester**

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that soldiers from Eritrea are using food as a weapon of war in Tigray.

#### **Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

A: The Government is deeply concerned about the grave humanitarian situation in Ethiopia and combatants, including Eritrean armed forces, denying access to humanitarian agencies. Over 350,000 people are assessed to be in famine-like conditions - more than anywhere else in the world. The UK's Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, Nick Dyer visited Tigray in May and concluded that region-wide famine in Tigray is now likely if conflict intensifies and impediments to the delivery of humanitarian aid continue. The head of the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, has said that the humanitarian disaster is due in part to the presence of Eritrean forces. He says they are using hunger as a weapon of war and their continued presence is fuelling insecurity. Intentional use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is a war crime.

We need to see the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean forces. The Government of Ethiopia has said this will happen, but it has not. We continue to press hard for this commitment to be delivered. The Minister for Africa made this clear when he met with the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March.