

May 2021 Newsletter

News and updates

Eritrean troops are alleged to remain in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. Reporting by the Associated Press and others show that they continue to deploy tactics including gang-raping women, killing civilians, looting hospitals and blocking food and aid. [Read more.](#)

On 13 May the Eritrean regime announced that they had elected a 5th Patriarch of Eritrea's Orthodox Tewahdo Church. This is despite the fact that the canonical head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Patriarch Abune Antonios, is still alive. The move violates church statutes which do not authorise the election of a new Patriarch while the existing one is alive. Patriarch Abune Antonios has been under house arrest for 15 years, and he has never been charged or tried with any offence. [Read more.](#)

The latest quarterly immigration statistics released by the Home Office show that the number of applications decreased for 7 out of top 10 nationalities applying for asylum in the UK. Of the top 10 nationalities, 3 experienced an increase, including Eritrean applications which were up 29%. [Read more.](#)

We've been watching/reading

A PBS Frontline documentary 5 years in the making titled '[Escaping Eritrea](#)' (viewable with VPN). The documentary features unique secret footage from inside Eritrea's network of prisons, which the documentary alleges are used to arbitrarily detain those seeking to escape the country's indefinite national service.

Parliamentary Questions, debates and business

[Early Day Motion 112, tabled by Helen Hayes, for signature](#)

That this House notes the high level of sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray, resulting in an estimated 10,000 women being raped in the four months to March: further notes the leadership role the UK government has played in global efforts to eliminate sexual violence in conflict; notes that the UN Day for the Elimination of sexual violence in conflict is on 19 June; and calls on the UK government to table a resolution at the UN Security Council setting up a tribunal to investigate sexual violence in the conflict in Tigray as a war crime, a crime against humanity or a constitutive act of genocide.

[House of Lords Debate, Genocide: Bringing Perpetrators to Justice, 27 May](#)
[Hansard transcript.](#)

Written Question 17 May

Dame Diana Johnson 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 and Amhara forces from Tigray.

James Duddridge MP

A: We are closely monitoring the situation and are clear that the withdrawal of Eritrean forces must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. However, despite Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy's commitment that Eritrean troops would withdraw from Tigray we are yet to see any evidence that this is happening. There are numerous shocking reports of atrocities committed by Eritrean forces in Tigray, and their continued presence is fueling insecurity. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately. We continue to press hard for this commitment to be delivered. I made this clear on my call to the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March.

Written Question 17 May

Helen Hayes MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of adequacy of steps taken against Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers in response to crimes of sexual violence committed in the conflict in Tigray; and if he will make a statement.

James Duddridge MP

A: The UK is appalled by reports of atrocities including widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by different armed groups in Tigray. This is unacceptable. Both the Governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea have committed to hold perpetrators of human rights violations to account, but we have yet to see any indication of how they propose to do this. The UK will support the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that their joint investigations into atrocities in Tigray with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission are independent, transparent and impartial and that those responsible for these human rights violations and abuses are held to account.

We are working to promote justice for survivors of sexual violence, to provide support to survivors and children born of conflict related sexual violence and to prevent sexual violence from occurring. Preparations are underway to deploy expertise from the UK Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative Team of Experts to the region. British Embassy staff conducted a mission to assess the protection of civilians and humanitarian access in Shire, Tigray, on 4-7 April. It included the assessment of the current Gender-Based Violence response, specific emergency services provided in camps and the gaps that need to be filled. They interviewed staff and volunteers supporting survivors of sexual violence to identify essential activities required to address

the immediate needs of the survivors as well as the accountability needs to ensure well-informed and effective assistance.

Written Question 12 May

Lord Alton of Liverpool

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of (1) reports of soldiers systematically killing men in Ethiopia, as reported in The Times on 8 May, and (2) whether such soldiers are operating on behalf of the Eritrean military.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: We are deeply concerned at human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region, including of Eritrea's significant role in them. We condemn violations as consistent with an apparent policy of collective punishment of Tigrayans. There are numerous shocking reports of atrocities committed by Eritrean forces in Tigray, and their continued presence is fueling insecurity. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately. The Minister for Africa made this clear to the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March, and we set this out in our joint statement with the G7 on 2 April and a G7 Communiqué on 5 May. Our Ambassador in Addis Ababa met with the Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian National Defence Force in the week of 26 April and pressed this point.

We are closely monitoring the situation and are clear that their withdrawal must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. However, despite Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy's commitment that Eritrean troops would withdraw from Tigray we are yet to see any evidence that this is happening. We continue to press hard for this commitment to be delivered.

Written Question 11 May

Patrick Grady MP

Q: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will list the occasions on which UK (a) Ministers and (b) officials have met with the Ambassador of Eritrea to the Court of St James's in each year since 2010.

James Duddridge MP

A: FCDO Ministers have met the Eritrean Ambassador three times in the last three years. These were: a virtual meeting with Minister Duddridge in March 2021, a virtual meeting with Africa Union Heads of Mission, also March, which the Eritrean Ambassador chaired as Dean, and a bilateral meeting of the then Minister for Africa in 2019. Senior officials have also met the Eritrean Ambassador four times in the last three years. Information for the period 2010 - 2017 is not readily available, but we estimate that Ministerial and senior official contact was very limited during this period.

Written Question 11 May

Patrick Grady MP

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

James Duddridge MP

A: Eritrea's role in the conflict in Tigray, including the continued presence of its armed forces, is deeply concerning. There are numerous shocking reports of atrocities committed by Eritrean forces in Tigray, and their continued presence is fueling insecurity. However, seven weeks on from Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy's commitment that Eritrean troops would withdraw from Tigray we are yet to see any evidence that this is happening - in fact, we have received reports of Eritrean troops wearing Ethiopian National Defence Force uniforms. These forces must leave Ethiopia immediately. I made this clear to the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March, and we set this out in our joint statement with the G7 on 2 April and a G7 Communiqué on 5 May. Our Ambassador in Addis Ababa met with the Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian National Defence Force in the week of 26 April to press this point. We are closely monitoring the situation and are clear that their withdrawal must be swift, unconditional and verifiable. We continue to press hard for this commitment to be delivered.

Written Question 29 April

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb

Q: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the attack by Eritrean troops in Adwa in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

A: We are deeply concerned at the mounting evidence of human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia's Tigray region, including of Eritrea's significant role in them. We condemn the attack in Adwa, on which Amnesty have issued a detailed and credible report, specifying heinous crimes and Eritrea's apparent role in them. The events described are horrific, and consistent with an apparent policy of collective punishment of Tigrayans.

As the Minister for Africa made clear to the Eritrean Ambassador on 16 March, and through our joint statements at the Human Rights Council on 26 February and by the G7 on 2 April, Eritrean troops (as well as other parties to the conflict) stand accused of atrocities. Their continued presence in the sovereign territory of another country, Ethiopia, is fuelling significant insecurity and preventing desperately needed humanitarian access. We also support the UN's call for a "zero tolerance" policy and welcome the UN Security Council's 22 April Press Statement expressing their deep concern about allegations of human rights violations and abuses in the Tigray region. There must be an end to the fighting and all Eritrean forces must leave Ethiopia immediately, in line with the commitment made by Prime Minister Abiy in his

announcement on 26 March. We have yet to see any evidence that Eritrean forces are leaving Tigray - in fact, we have received reports of Eritrean troops wearing Ethiopian National Defence Force uniforms, as well of new Eritrean forces deploying. We will continue pressing for this commitment to be delivered.