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Ethiopia: After Patchy Tigray Truce, WHO Still Lacks Full Aid Access



@SarjohBah3 @AU_PAPS / Twitter (https://twitter.com/SarjohBah3)

Redwan Hussien and Getachew K Reda (seated), representing the Ethiopian government and the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front, signing the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Pretoria, South Africa.

Deutsche Welle (Bonn) (http://www.dw.com/en/top-stories/africa/s-12756?maca=en-VAF-Banner-allafrica)

2 DECEMBER 2022

The UN's health body says there are still "significant parts of the country" it cannot reach to provide vital medical aid. This was one of the terms of a peace deal that appears not to have halted the fighting entirely.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) emergencies director on Friday said the UN body still does not have the unfettered access to Ethiopia's northern Tigray region that was a condition of a truce signed last month.

The Ethiopian government and Tigrayan regional forces agreed to cease hostilities on November 2, two years into a war that had killed thousands, displaced more than 2 million and led to a widespread famine.

Some aid has started to flow to the region, but not all of it, Ryan said.

"That peace process has not yet resulted in the kinds of full access, unfettered access and in the massive scale of medical and health assistance that the people of Tigray need," the WHO's Mike Ryan told a press conference in Geneva. "I remain cynical on that front because we've been a long time waiting to get access to these desperate people."

Why can't aid workers access the whole region?

Two other parties to the conflict were not a part of the peace deal, meaning there were always doubts about how well it would work.

Troops from Ethiopia and Tigray's northern neighbor Eritrea and from the neighboring Ethiopian region of Amhara, south of Tigray, had fought alongside Ethiopia's military.

Ryan said aid workers could not reach areas in the west of Tigray controlled by militias, along with other areas controlled by Eritrean forces.

"There are still significant parts of the country that are occupied by Eritrean forces, for which there is no access, and very disturbing reports emerging around the experiences of the people there," Ryan said.

Reports from Tigray of looting, arrests, killings

Also on Friday, Reuters news agency carried reports from multiple witnesses and aid workers in Tigray alleging that these Ethiopian allied forces were still terrorizing parts of the region.

Eritrean troops had seized food, vehicles and gold in at least a dozen towns in northern and northwestern Tigray since the ceasefire, according to the report. They allegedly also carried out extrajudicial killings and mass arrests in northern Tigray.

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Reuters said that its sources had asked not to be named citing fear of reprisals.

The Eritrean and Ethiopian governments did not respond to the latest comments from the WHO's Ryan on Friday.

However, Eritrean Information Minister had responded to Reuters' earlier report only by accusing Tigrayan forces of "endless lies," without commenting on the specific allegations.

Why is Eritrea involved?

Eritrea became a state in 1993 following its war of independence with Ethiopia.

For years, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) had dominated the central government of Ethiopia.

Eritrea then fought a border war against Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000, and a 20-year territorial stalemate with the two countries having no formal ties followed.

The current Ethiopian government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ended Tigray's domination of the national political landscape when he took control of a ruling coalition in 2018, and then swiftly sidelined TPLF elements at home while opening up talks with Eritrea.

Abiy was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize [for](#) his contribution to reestablishing diplomatic relations with Eritrea in July 2018.

Clashes between Tigrayan, Ethiopian and Eritrean forces in the border region had already started to simmer.

In November 2020, Ethiopian and Eritrean troops responded in force to TPLF attacks on Ethiopian military outposts in Tigray, triggering a full-blown two-year war. Six months later, Abiy outlawed the TPLF and designated it a terrorist organization.

WHO says region needs food and medicine 'now'

All sides in the conflict have faced accusations of war crimes, albeit with the lion's share directed against Tigrayan people by Ethiopian or Eritrean forces. But TPLF forces have also been accused of violent raids and reprisals in border areas and of mistreatment of opposing fighters.

The fragile and partial truce, brokered in South Africa, with AU assistance [for](#), was reached on the second anniversary of the war's outbreak.



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But Eritrea and the independent forces from the Ethiopian region of Amhara who have seized and were planning to annex parts of Tigray were never party to the agreement. The truce makes no mention of Eritrean forces on Ethiopian and/or Tigrayan soil or their withdrawal.

The WHO's director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who is Tigrayan, welcomed the truce but said it must be implemented in full.

The WHO is not the only UN body to sound the alarm. Last week the UN's World Food Programme said aid deliveries into Tigray were "not matching the needs" of the stricken region.

The WFP said an estimated 13.6 million people across Tigray and its neighboring regions of Amhara and Afar were dependent on humanitarian aid as a result of the war.

The WHO's Ryan on Friday said that the entire UN network was "anxious to scale up our operations."

"We welcome any cessation of violence, any access that's given," he said. "But the people in Tigray are desperate. They've been years now without access to proper healthcare and nutrition and they need our help now. Not next week. Not next month. Now."

msh/jcg (AFP, Reuters)

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