

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	521
Land:	Etiopien
Kilde:	Alarabiya
Titel:	WHO says still doesn't have full access to Ethiopias's Tigray despite truce
Udgivet:	2. december 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. december 2022

WHO says still doesn't have full access to Ethiopia's Tigray despite truce



A file photo shows Ethiopian refugees who fled Tigray region, wait to board courtesy buses at the Fashaga camp as they are transferred to Um-Rakoba camp on the Sudan-Ethiopia border, in Kassala state, Sudan December 13, 2020. (Reuters)

The World Health Organization said on Friday it still does not have the unfettered access to Ethiopia's northern Tigray region stipulated in a truce signed a month ago.

The Ethiopian government and regional forces from Tigray agreed on Nov. 2 to cease hostilities, a dramatic diplomatic breakthrough two years into a war that has killed thousands, displaced millions and left hundreds of thousands facing famine.

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Troops from Eritrea, to the north, and forces from the neighboring Ethiopian region of Amhara, to the south, fought alongside Ethiopia's military in Tigray but were not party to the ceasefire.

"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," WHO's emergencies director Mike Ryan said.

He said there were issues in the west of Tigray in areas under the control of militias, and other areas controlled by Eritrean troops.

"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.

Ethiopia's Minister of Health Lia Tadesse, State Minister Redwan Hussien, and government spokesperson Legesse Tulu did not respond to requests for comment. Eritrea's government spokesman Yemane Ghebremeskel did not respond to a request for comment.

It was not possible for Reuters to seek comment from the Amhara militia because it does not have a formal leadership structure.

Ethiopia's allies are looting towns, arresting and killing civilians and relocating thousands of people from a disputed part of Tigray despite a truce between the government and local forces, witnesses and aid workers in the northern region say.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in October accused Ethiopia's government of using the denial of food and healthcare as weapons of war in Tigray. The government has repeatedly denied blocking humanitarian supplies to the region.

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