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International Development
Committee

**The humanitarian
situation in Tigray**

Tenth Report of Session 2019–21

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to the report*

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The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

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Conclusions and recommendations

Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region

1. Conflict is a key cause of the current humanitarian crisis in Tigray. Continued fighting is hampering efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need. (Paragraph 9)
2. We welcome the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary's wholehearted acceptance that the situation in Tigray is an early test of the UK's commitment to the principles and approach of the UK as a 'force for good' as set out in the Government's Integrated Review. The Tigray crisis will be a test of the FCDO's desire to combine 'diplomacy and development' and to establish an integrated approach to conflict and instability. Failing this early test could damage the credibility of the UK's new strategy. (Paragraph 10)
3. *We urge the UK Government to redouble its efforts to seek an end to the conflict, using all the diplomatic means at its disposal. It should work multilaterally through organisations such as the UN and the African Union, and bilaterally with its partners, the Ethiopian Government, neighbouring states, and representatives of the parties to the conflict, to foster peace through an inclusive political settlement.* (Paragraph 11)
4. We are appalled by the distressing reports of human rights abuses, gender-based violence and sexual violence in Tigray. The horrors that have been inflicted on people and their suffering during this conflict are unimaginable, and we are particularly saddened that, once again, women and girls are being targeted. It is essential that the fighting ends as soon as possible. The services needed to support those who have suffered so terribly must be restored and expanded to meet present and future needs without further delay. It is crucial that these crimes are investigated and that those responsible face justice. We are particularly saddened by the targeting and killing of aid workers. (Paragraph 20)
5. We welcome the statement by the G7 group condemning the killing of civilians, sexual and gender-based violence, indiscriminate shelling and forced displacement of civilian populations. *We recommend that the UK Government uses its long-standing diplomatic and development relationship with Ethiopia to ensure the Ethiopian Government acts on its responsibility to protect its population from violence, and works to ensure the immediate protection of communities in the region from human rights abuses, including sexual violence. The UK Government must use all diplomatic means possible to remind the Government of Ethiopia that, under the principle of the responsibility to protect, it is responsible for protecting its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The UK Government should bear in mind its obligations to take appropriate action in line with the UN Genocide Convention should the Ethiopian Government fail to take the actions it needs to take to protect its people.* (Paragraph 21)
6. *In line with the recent G7 statement on the importance of an independent, transparent and impartial investigation into crimes reported in Tigray, the UK Government should work with the appropriate authorities to enable access for independent monitors to*

Tigray to ensure that evidence of the crimes that have been committed is secured and to bring those who are responsible to justice. The Government should continue to press for clarity on how the joint investigations by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will work. (Paragraph 22)

7. *Drawing upon lessons learned from other atrocities, we recommend that FCDO arranges atrocity prevention training for staff at the British Embassy in Addis Ababa and neighbouring posts as a matter of urgency and designates a named atrocity prevention lead. Staff in these posts should have clear lines of communication to colleagues in Whitehall so they can quickly raise and respond to concerns about human rights abuses. Furthermore, the FCDO should embed an atrocity prevention strategy in its updated country strategy for Ethiopia and neighbouring states. (Paragraph 23)*

Humanitarian needs

8. *Without adequate access, any humanitarian response to the crisis in Tigray will be severely constrained. We recommend that the UK Government work with the Ethiopian Government and the relevant regional authorities to ensure humanitarian agencies have unimpeded access to communities in need in Tigray and neighbouring regions. These efforts should be undertaken in concert with diplomatic efforts to end the fighting and find a peaceful, inclusive political solution to the crisis. (Paragraph 41)*
9. *We commend the work of aid agencies in their provision of lifesaving assistance to communities in Tigray, despite the extraordinarily difficult circumstances in which they are delivering this help. It is likely that the number of people whose basic needs are not met will grow as the conflict continues. In addition, as humanitarian agencies reach parts of Tigray that have so far been inaccessible, they will discover many more cases of unmet need, creating a widening gap between the level of need and the provision that has been made. (Paragraph 47)*
10. *We recommend that the FCDO monitors OCHA's situation reports carefully to rapidly identify any areas where needs are unmet or are growing faster than expected so that it can respond rapidly and flexibly to provide the support needed. We also recommend that, as the situation on the ground becomes clearer, the FCDO assesses whether its current humanitarian contribution is adequate to ensure that the basic needs of communities are met. (Paragraph 48)*
11. *Food security is a crucial component of the emergency response and we are deeply concerned by reports that hunger is being used in the conflict to achieve political ends. With the FCDO having appointed a Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, the UK is well-placed to lead international efforts in not only condemning these actions, but coordinating action against them. We recommend that, in accordance with UN resolution 2417 (2018), the UK Government should explore whether to use the mechanisms of the UN Security Council to press for penalties such as sanctions against actors found to be obstructing the delivery of essential humanitarian supplies and using starvation as a weapon of war. (Paragraph 49)*
12. *The provision and distribution of lifesaving humanitarian assistance, such as shelter, food and medicine, is a vital first stage in the response to the situation in Tigray.*

Following this, the restoration of basic services such as schools and hospitals will be key in both responding to current needs and starting the path towards post-conflict reconstruction. Health and social services are critical. Many of those who have suffered trauma and violence will need specialist support, and health services are essential if communities in Tigray are to cope with the ongoing pandemic and avoid the worst of its secondary impacts. Without access to education, children will grow up without the skills and knowledge needed to ensure the ongoing development of their communities. The restoration of services such as banking and markets will help to alleviate some of the pressure on the people in Tigray. After such severe and sustained disruption, local governance structures will require significant support if they are to restore these services for affected communities. (Paragraph 57)

13. *We recommend that the FCDO applies its learnings from other crises and works with other donors to create a plan of action that is properly funded for the restoration of basic services to Tigray. In creating this plan, it should engage with local communities and work closely with regional authorities and other donors to identify a hierarchy of needs. It should also identify long-term development challenges likely to be created by this conflict (such as food security) and take proactive action to prevent future problems and to have contingency plans in place should these challenges arise.* (Paragraph 58)
14. *As the conflict continues, there is a risk the violence in Tigray could destabilise the broader region, spreading instability to already fragile neighbouring states such as Sudan. There is a significant risk that the conflict could become protracted or escalate, creating a devastating long-term impact for communities in Tigray and hindering broader regional development. Using existing expertise from the Stabilisation Unit, the FCDO should create a clear road map for inclusive post-conflict reconstruction in Tigray that proactively addresses development needs and embeds peacebuilding within the FCDO's work in the region.* (Paragraph 62)
15. *A failure to adequately resource the response to this crisis increases the risk of a ripple effect of instability throughout the region. The failure to support the communities of Tigray, combined with the lack of an inclusive political settlement, compromises hard-won development gains in Ethiopia, and has the potential to jeopardise the broader development and stability gains funded through UK aid programmes throughout the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region.* (Paragraph 68)
16. *With Ethiopia currently the UK's largest bilateral recipient of ODA, we are surprised that the UK Government has not allocated more financial assistance to the humanitarian response to the crisis in Tigray.* (Paragraph 69)
17. *To pre-empt and avoid further humanitarian crises, the UK Government should ensure its package of humanitarian assistance to the conflict in Tigray provides sufficient financial and technical resources to support communities in urgent need. We recommend that the FCDO builds a comprehensive picture of the sources of conflict and instability in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region using the reports and analysis from Posts in the region to synthesise a broader picture, drawing on and applying the expertise of the new Conflict Prevention Hub. The Government should use this analysis to adjust the allocation of the UK's resources in the region to help prevent conflicts from spreading and destabilising more of the region.* (Paragraph 70)

Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region

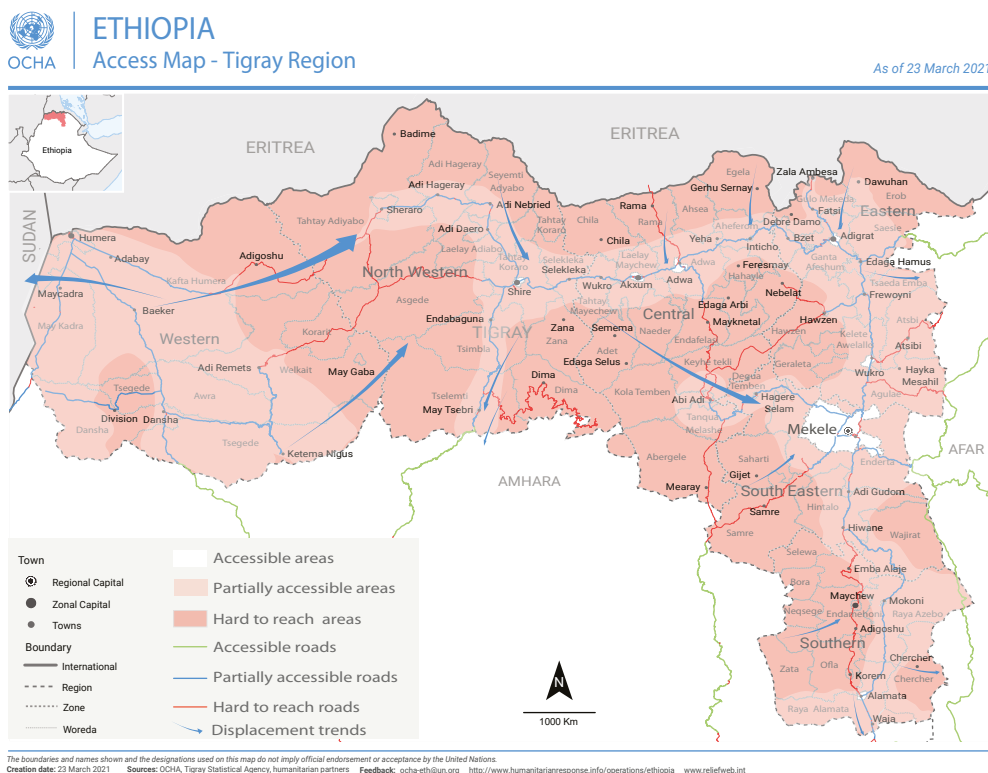


Figure 1: Access map of the Tigray region

Source: UN OCHA, [Ethiopia: Access Map–Tigray Region \(as of 23 March 2021\)](#), 5 April 2021

The present conflict

1. Tigray has endured months of conflict. Tensions between Ethiopia's Federal Government and the Tigray Regional Government, led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has intensified since the Federal Government postponed the election due to take place in August 2020. The Ethiopian Parliament voted to extend officials' mandates, which would otherwise have expired in October 2020. The TPLF rejected this decision and in September held regional elections, which were subsequently deemed illegal by the Ethiopian Parliament.¹ On 29 October a senior officer, appointed by Prime Minister Abiy, was prevented from taking up his new position in Tigray because the TPLF believed that the Prime Minister no longer had a mandate to make such appointments.² Ethiopia's Parliament has voted to dissolve the government of the Tigray region.³ Both sides regard the other as illegitimate.⁴

2. On 4 November 2020 the Ethiopian Government began an offensive against regional forces in Tigray,⁵ after the Prime Minister accused the TPLF of attacking a military

1 BBC News, [Ethiopia parliament dissolves Tigray leadership](#), 7 November 2020

2 Aljazeera, [Ethiopia's Tigray blocks general's appointment in blow to Abiy](#), 30 October 2020

3 BBC News, [Ethiopia parliament dissolves Tigray leadership](#), 7 November 2020 and BBC News, [Ethiopia Tigray crisis: Abiy issues 'ultimatum' as civilians flee fighting](#), 18 November 2020

4 The Guardian, [Fighting reported in Ethiopia after PM responds to 'attack' by regional ruling party](#), 4 November 2021

5 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.12

camp in the region and attempting to loot military assets.⁶ The first military clashes took place along the border with Sudan and between Amhara Region and Western and North-Western Tigray, but quickly moved towards other parts of Tigray as the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF) security operations in Tigray tried to dislodge the TPLF-led Regional Government.⁷ There have been reports of airstrikes by the ENDF and rocket attacks by Tigray Regional Security Forces (TRSF) as well as the involvement of unidentified troops and regional militias.⁸ Western Tigray is now controlled by the Amhara regional authorities and there have been reports of ethnically motivated violence and forced displacement.⁹ At the end of a visit to Ethiopia in early February, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi described the situation in Tigray as “extremely grave” and said that “without further action it will get worse”.¹⁰

3. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also corroborated information about some of the incidents that occurred in November last year, of indiscriminate shelling in Mekelle, Humera and Adigrat in Tigray, and of grave human rights violations and abuses including mass killings in Axum, and in Dengelat in central Tigray, including some allegedly carried out by Eritrean forces.¹¹ Eritrea’s Government has denied any involvement.¹² Despite this denial, there have been many reports of Eritrean forces on the ground in Tigray acting in support of the Ethiopian Government and of infiltrations of refugee camps by armed actors and Eritrean forces.¹³ The UK Government said it was,

... concerned by [the] involvement of Eritrean forces in hostilities throughout the Tigray region ... and the growing weight of credible evidence of their involvement in human rights violations.¹⁴

The US and EU went further and called on Eritrea to withdraw its forces.¹⁵ On 23 March the Ethiopian Government confirmed that Eritrean troops had entered Tigray during the recent conflict.¹⁶ On 26 March, the Ethiopian Prime Minister said Eritrea had agreed to withdraw troops from the border area. The Eritrean Government has not confirmed its troops are in Tigray.¹⁷

4. The conflict has created a humanitarian crisis in Tigray. Edward Brown, National Director, World Vision Ethiopia, told us:

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- 6 The Guardian, [Fighting reported in Ethiopia after PM responds to ‘attack’ by regional ruling party](#), 4 November 2021
 - 7 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 8 March 2021, p.2
 - 8 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.16
 - 9 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 22 March 2021
 - 10 UNHCR, [Remarks by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at the press conference in Addis Ababa.](#), 1 February 2021
 - 11 OHCHR, [Ethiopia Persistent credible reports of grave violations in Tigray underscore urgent need for human rights access](#) Bachelet, 4 March 2021
 - 12 AP, [Eritrea disputes AP story detailing massacre in Tigray](#), 19 February 2021
 - 13 *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number 09147, House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021, p.5; UNHCR, [Remarks by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at the press conference in Addis Ababa.](#), 1 February 2021
 - 14 [HL 12852](#), 12 February 2021
 - 15 EEAS, [Ethiopia: Joint-Statement by High-Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell, Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen and Commissioner Janez Lenarčič](#), 8 February 2021; see also AP, [US says Eritrean forces should leave Tigray immediately](#), 27 January 2021
 - 16 Reuters, [Ethiopian PM confirms Eritrean troops entered Tigray during recent conflict](#), 23 March 2021
 - 17 Reuters, [Eritrea agrees to withdraw troops from border area, Ethiopia’s PM says](#), 26 March 2021

Throughout Tigray region—west, north, east and south—there has been widespread violence and conflict, and civilians are suffering every day. That has not stopped. It is very fluid and unpredictable ...¹⁸

5. The fighting has limited humanitarian operations across parts of Tigray.¹⁹ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) 8 March situation update said:

The humanitarian situation in Tigray remains extremely concerning, while reports of intensified fighting and lack of assistance in rural areas continue to drive displacements of people across the Region. Aid workers received reports of children hungry and weak particularly from those fleeing areas that are currently hard to reach, as many faced four months without assistance after their harvests were burnt, livestock slaughtered, and property looted. The security situation remains fluid, and access to some previously reachable locations around Mekelle and in southern Tigray have not been possible for the past three weeks. The presence of various armed forces on the ground and shifting line of control pose serious challenges to partners' operations.²⁰

6. Although the Ethiopian Government declared an end to operations on 28 November, conflict in the region between forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and Government forces and other regional militias has continued.²¹ James Duddridge MP told us:

The TPLF has not put down its arms, so it is about stabilising the region, getting access, getting an understanding of what the needs are and then providing, in a sensible order of priority, against needs. ... critical to that is the Eritreans leaving, and getting that access and stability.²²

7. International efforts to seek a resolution to the crisis have had limited impact to date. The US has announced that it is creating the post of a Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa to strengthen its response to the Tigray crisis, building on the existing work of Senator Chris Coons.²³ Pekka Haavisto, Finnish Foreign Minister, recently travelled to Ethiopia for a visit mandated by the EU High Representative Josep Borrell to discuss the crisis in Tigray and implications for the region.²⁴ The UK formed part of the G7's statement calling for "a clear inclusive political process" as a means to ending the conflict.²⁵

8. The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary, said:

We believe that it is vital that any conflict resolution mechanism is as inclusive as possible—to ensure that the views of all groups are represented

18 Q6 [Edward Brown]

19 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 22 March 2021

20 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 8 March 2021, p.2

21 *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number [09147](#), House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021

22 Q31 [James Duddridge]

23 Bloomberg, [US creates special envoy post](#), 25 March 2021

24 EU External Action Service, [Ethiopia: Minister for Foreign Affairs Haavisto on a second mission](#), 3 April 2021

25 GOV.UK, [Ethiopia: G7 Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on Tigray](#), 2 April 2021

and to give it the greatest chance of success. We are committed to pushing all stakeholders to ensure an inclusive dialogue process, including exploring where FCDO programme support could help achieve this.²⁶

He went on to wholeheartedly agree that the situation in Tigray was the sort of crisis that the FCDO's combined diplomatic and development capability is designed to respond to.²⁷

9. Conflict is a key cause of the current humanitarian crisis in Tigray. Continued fighting is hampering efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need.

10. We welcome the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary's wholehearted acceptance that the situation in Tigray is an early test of the UK's commitment to the principles and approach of the UK as a 'force for good' as set out in the Government's Integrated Review. The Tigray crisis will be a test of the FCDO's desire to combine 'diplomacy and development' and to establish an integrated approach to conflict and instability. Failing this early test could damage the credibility of the UK's new strategy.

11. *We urge the UK Government to redouble its efforts to seek an end to the conflict, using all the diplomatic means at its disposal. It should work multilaterally through organisations such as the UN and the African Union, and bilaterally with its partners, the Ethiopian Government, neighbouring states, and representatives of the parties to the conflict, to foster peace through an inclusive political settlement.*

Killings and sexual violence

12. Reports of fighting are accompanied by distressing reports, some from people displaced by the conflict, of gender-based and sexual violence.²⁸ Situation updates and media reports implicating various armed actors, including the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Eritrean armed forces, and Amhara Regional Forces and affiliated militia, have documented:

- serious violations of international law, possibly amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity
- an alleged massacre in late November at the Church of St Mary of Zion in Axum by Eritrean troops
- extrajudicial killing
- forced displacement and returns, killings, abductions, and sexual violence including against children
- rapes and other forms of gender-based violence;
- random house searches; and

26 Letter from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary dated 12 April 2021

27 Letter from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary dated 12 April 2021

28 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.1

- widespread looting of private and public property.²⁹

13. The UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, said she was alarmed at the "continued escalation of ethnic violence" following reports of civilians being targeted based on their ethnicity and region.³⁰ The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has repeatedly called for independent investigations that follow high standards when investigating cases of human rights violations. On 24 March 2021 the EHRC released preliminary findings of its investigation of the events in Axum at the end of November 2020. They found that over 100 civilians were killed, allegedly by Eritrean soldiers.³¹ On 25 March 2021, the EHRC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) announced that they would conduct a joint, independent investigation, initially for three months, into human rights violations and abuses in relation to the conflict in Tigray to enhance accountability.³² In his letter of 12 April the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary welcomed the joint investigation but noted the arrangements for it were "not yet clear".³³

14. Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, said she was greatly concerned about the high number of reported rapes in Mekelle and the disturbing allegations of "individuals allegedly forced to rape members of their own family".³⁴ Along with Alice Nderitu she has called for an independent and impartial investigation.³⁵ By early March there were at least 417 self-reported cases of gender-based violence (GBV) from Mekelle, Wukro and Adigrat alone.³⁶ Survivors of GBV have not been able to access local community support due to the collapse of social services.³⁷ Between December 2020 and January 2021 more than 136 cases of rape were reported in the east of Tigray region, with indications that many more cases were unreported³⁸ (rapes are often underreported due to stigma and fear of retaliation, the actual number of cases is likely to be significantly higher than those reported).³⁹ Edward Brown, World Vision Ethiopia, told us that:

... there is definitely gender-based violence and rape as a weapon of war. We do dignity kits and we have child-friendly spaces, but, again, it is primarily in urban areas, where the lucky have managed to escape. We have a lot of concern for areas where there is not that access.⁴⁰

29 For example see OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 19 February 2021; OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 8 March 2021, p.2; OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.13; AP, 'Horrible': Witnesses recall massacre in Ethiopian holy city, 18 February 2021; The Telegraph ['You should have finished off the survivors': Ethiopian army implicated in brutal war crime video](#), 19 February 2021

30 *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number [09147](#), House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021, p.5

31 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 30 March 2021, p.2

32 UN Human Rights Council, [Ethiopia: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to conduct a joint investigation with a view to a credible accountability process](#), 25 March 2021 [accessed 9 April 2021]

33 [Letter from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary](#) dated 12 April 2021

34 *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number [09147](#), House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021, p.5

35 *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number [09147](#), House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021, p.5

36 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.13

37 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.13

38 OHCHR, [Ethiopia Persistent credible reports of grave violations in Tigray underscore urgent need for human rights access](#) Bachelet, 4 March 2021

39 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 19 February 2021

40 Q19 [Edward Brown]

15. On 4 March the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said an objective, independent assessment of the facts on the ground in the Tigray region of Ethiopia was needed, as credible information emerged about serious violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. She said,

Deeply distressing reports of sexual and gender-based violence, extrajudicial killings, widespread destruction and looting of public and private property by all parties continue to be shared with us, as well as reports of continued fighting ... victims and survivors of these violations must not be denied their rights to the truth and to justice. We urge the Government of Ethiopia to grant my Office and other independent monitors access to the Tigray region, with a view to establishing the facts and contributing to accountability, regardless of the affiliation of perpetrators.⁴¹

On 21 April, Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, said:

I have been extremely concerned by the numerous and horrific reports received from multiple and credible sources, about the extent and cruelty of acts of sexual violence being committed against women and girls. Images of the brutality of the violence and terror being inflicted on women and girls has sent shock waves around the world. Testimonies of some brave survivors revealed the brutal and hideous war being waged on the bodies of women and girls.⁴²

16. James Duddridge MP, Minister for Africa, told us:

... there have been egregious reports of really awful humanitarian rights violations. It is clear that there has been widespread murder, rape and looting, pillaging and destruction of property. Her Majesty's Government are clear that there needs to be an end to this impunity in the region.⁴³

17. The UK Government has raised its concerns with Ministers in both the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments and made clear "the overriding need to protect civilians and adhere to international law and international human rights law".⁴⁴ During our evidence session on 18 March, Dr Alastair McPhail CMG OBE, British Ambassador to Ethiopia, told us that any solution to the conflict would have to stem from regional and Ethiopian institutions, with the FCDO playing a supportive role. He said

We have made it clear from the very first day that there is no military solution to the difficulties between the central Government and the TPLF. ... We are not short of ideas or, indeed, of energy. We are co-ordinating with those who also bring the same sort of experience, but, primarily, this will be solved and resolved on the continent.⁴⁵

41 OHCHR, [Ethiopia Persistent credible reports of grave violations in Tigray underscore urgent need for human rights access Bachelet](#), 4 March 2021

42 United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, [Remarks from SRSG Pramila Patten: Georgetown University virtual event, "The Crisis in Tigray: Women and Girls Under Violent Assault"](#), 21 April 2021

43 Q21

44 [HL12328](#), 3 February 2021

45 [Q41](#) [Dr Alastair McPhail]

18. On 2 April, the G7 Foreign Ministers and the High Representative of the European Union issued a joint statement on the situation in Tigray, condemning human rights abuses and calling on all parties to the conflict to,

... exercise utmost restraint, ensure the protection of civilians and respect human rights and international law.⁴⁶

Noting their deep concern about allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including reports of sexual violence against women and girls in the Tigray region, on 22 April members of the UN Security Council called for investigations to find those responsible and bring them to justice.⁴⁷

19. OCHA's 8 March situation update reported the looting of humanitarian supplies and the destruction and vandalism of humanitarian infrastructure.⁴⁸ James Duddridge MP, Minister for Africa, told us that five Ethiopians working for international organisations that received UK funding were killed "while putting their lives at risk trying to help others".⁴⁹

20. **We are appalled by the distressing reports of human rights abuses, gender-based violence and sexual violence in Tigray. The horrors that have been inflicted on people and their suffering during this conflict are unimaginable, and we are particularly saddened that, once again, women and girls are being targeted. It is essential that the fighting ends as soon as possible. The services needed to support those who have suffered so terribly must be restored and expanded to meet present and future needs without further delay. It is crucial that these crimes are investigated and that those responsible face justice. We are particularly saddened by the targeting and killing of aid workers.**

21. **We welcome the statement by the G7 group condemning the killing of civilians, sexual and gender-based violence, indiscriminate shelling and forced displacement of civilian populations. *We recommend that the UK Government uses its long-standing diplomatic and development relationship with Ethiopia to ensure the Ethiopian Government acts on its responsibility to protect its population from violence, and works to ensure the immediate protection of communities in the region from human rights abuses, including sexual violence. The UK Government must use all diplomatic means possible to remind the Government of Ethiopia that, under the principle of the responsibility to protect, it is responsible for protecting its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The UK Government should bear in mind its obligations to take appropriate action in line with the UN Genocide Convention should the Ethiopian Government fail to take the actions it needs to take to protect its people.***

22. ***In line with the recent G7 statement on the importance of an independent, transparent and impartial investigation into crimes reported in Tigray, the UK Government should work with the appropriate authorities to enable access for independent monitors to Tigray to ensure that evidence of the crimes that have been committed is secured and***

46 GOV.UK, [Ethiopia: G7 Foreign Ministers' Joint Statement on Tigray](#), 2 April 2021

47 United Nations Security Council, [Security Council Press Statement on Ethiopia, SC/14501](#), 22 April 2021

48 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 8 March 2021, p.2

49 Q21

to bring those who are responsible to justice. The Government should continue to press for clarity on how the joint investigations by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will work.

23. Drawing upon lessons learned from other atrocities, we recommend that FCDO arranges atrocity prevention training for staff at the British Embassy in Addis Ababa and neighbouring posts as a matter of urgency and designates a named atrocity prevention lead. Staff in these posts should have clear lines of communication to colleagues in Whitehall so they can quickly raise and respond to concerns about human rights abuses. Furthermore, the FCDO should embed an atrocity prevention strategy in its updated country strategy for Ethiopia and neighbouring states.

Humanitarian needs

Pre-conflict humanitarian needs

24. Ethiopia had significant humanitarian needs before the conflict started in Tigray. The desert locust invasion,⁵⁰ recurrent floods and droughts, and the socioeconomic impact of covid-19 were driving humanitarian needs in Ethiopia.⁵¹ The pandemic and the measures to contain it have worsened a dire humanitarian situation, and an estimated 2.4 million jobs have been lost in the country.⁵² Over half of Ethiopia's population of nearly 104 million people are children.⁵³ Ethiopia is home to 177,996 Eritrean refugees, around 22% of its total refugee population of 801,349.⁵⁴

The humanitarian situation in Tigray

25. The situation in Tigray is dire and far from improving, despite the significant efforts of humanitarian agencies to provide assistance.⁵⁵ Many thousands of people have been displaced by fighting and there are reports of some villages being completely emptied.⁵⁶ Thousands more are trapped by fighting or lack transport to escape it.⁵⁷ Basic services, such as communications and electricity, have been disrupted and social services have collapsed.⁵⁸ Universities and health centres have been vandalised, looted or destroyed and armed actors have threatened health workers.⁵⁹ The police and judicial systems have ceased to function.⁶⁰ The Minister for Africa, told us:

The conflict has caused a collapse in all essential services: health; water; sanitation; basic, life-saving, maternal healthcare and vaccination. The core of development work is not deliverable.⁶¹

26. Paul Turnbull, Deputy Country Director and Representative of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Ethiopia, said:

The situation in November and December was really terrible. It was not until about the middle of December that ICRC, and then WFP, could deliver anything from outside of Tigray. There was no movement from the stocks that were already in Mekelle, because there was no fuel. There was just no way to move things from Mekelle to the other areas.⁶²

50 The current desert locust outbreak is the worst in 25 years.

51 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.6

52 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.6

53 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.10

54 UNHCR, [Situation Update: Ethiopia, Tigray](#), 3 March 2021, p.2

55 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 30 March 2021, p.1

56 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.1

57 International Medical Corps, [Ethiopia–Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report #6](#), 18 March 2021, p.1

58 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.8; See also Q10 and Q17

59 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.2

60 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.8

61 Q21

62 Q8 [Paul Turnbull]

UNICEF have said that humanitarian aid alone is not enough, and that,

Monitoring, reporting and protection services for those affected must be urgently expanded to meet the growing needs of survivors.⁶³

27. James Duddridge MP said:

Sadly, some of the needs will be very basic—and even more basic than the right to education and a health service. Just getting clean water and food to people, and stopping the rape and the forced removal of people from areas, will be critical.⁶⁴

28. The population of Tigray is about 6 million.⁶⁵ The Humanitarian Needs Overview, published in February 2021, estimated that about 4.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Tigray, of whom 3.5 million people are in accessible and partially accessible areas.⁶⁶ Estimates of the number of people in need, made by the WFP, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and the Emergency Coordination Centre which meets weekly in Mekelle, range from 2.5 million to 4.5 million.⁶⁷ In an answer to a Parliamentary Question, James Duddridge MP said the UN estimated that 1.3 million people affected by the conflict need humanitarian assistance. This is in addition to an existing caseload of 1 million people in the region, but a lack of access to the area makes it extremely challenging to determine the actual numbers.⁶⁸

Refugees and displaced people

29. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are amongst the hardest hit by the crisis.⁶⁹ In March the UN's initial estimate was that there were 521,200 newly internally displaced people, of whom 493,300 were in Tigray, 23,680 in Afar, and 3,850 in Amhara region. In addition, over 61,000 people from Ethiopia had sought safety in Eastern Sudan.⁷⁰ Table 1 shows a breakdown of where the 417,152 people (from 108,116 households), newly displaced as a result of the conflict, were living when the IOM carried out its assessments in February 2021 across 96 sites; these figures do not reflect the total displacement, just the number of IDPs identified at the 96 sites that were accessible.⁷¹ In November 2020, UNHCR had registered 96,223 Eritrean refugees in Tigray.⁷²

63 UNICEF, [Continuing crisis for children in Tigray Ethiopia amid reports of atrocities Ethiopia](#), Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, 19 March 2021

64 Q31 [James Duddridge]

65 European Commission, [Tigray conflict: EU increases humanitarian support by €23.7 million in Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya](#), 19 December 2020

66 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021

67 *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number [09147](#), House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021, p.5

68 [PQ154570](#), 24 February 2021

69 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.8

70 UNHCR, [Situation Update: Ethiopia, Tigray](#), 3 March 2021, p.2

71 UNHCR, [Regional Update 14: Ethiopia Situation \(Tigray Region\), 16 March – 7 April](#), 12 April 2021

72 UNHCR, [Situation Update: Ethiopia, Tigray](#), 3 March 2021, p.2; These refugees are sheltered mainly in four refugee camps in the western part of the region: 21,682 in Mai-Aini, 32,167 in Adi-Harush, 8,702 in Shimelba and 25,248 in Hitsats. On 23 January, Ethiopia's Government closed Shimelba and Hitsats refugee camps and started relocating refugees to Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps.

Table 1: IDPs according to IOM's displacement tracking report based on assessments carried out in February and published on 20 March

Number of IDPs	Households	Region
360,268	92,856	Tigray
14,933	7,560	Amhara
41,951	7,700	Afar

Source: UNHCR, [Regional Update 14: Ethiopia Situation \(Tigray Region\), 16 March–7 April](#), 12 April 2021

30. The International Medical Corps has reported large displacements in Western Tigray heading towards the town of Shire, where approximately 1,500 people were arriving each day. Edward Brown, World Vision Ethiopia, gave us a broadly similar figure but he drew our attention to the fact that this included hundreds of unaccompanied children.⁷³ The OCHA situation update for 22 March gives a lower figure of 1,000 people arriving per day.⁷⁴ There are 82,000 IDPs in Mekelle, most of whom are hosted by the community but with 30,000 people living in collective centres. There are 352,000 IDPs in Shire.⁷⁵

31. As the crisis continues, IDPs in the region are unlikely to be able to return home and the fragile security situation makes further displacements likely. The Humanitarian Needs Overview said:

The situation in Tigray will continue to impact the overall living conditions of the resident population in all the zones with high likelihood of increased levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, disease outbreak and economic hardship. Displaced people in particular will be at greater risk.⁷⁶

32. There is an urgent need to scale up the response to meet the existing critical needs of displaced people.⁷⁷ Paul Turnbull, UN WFP Ethiopia, told us that coordination was difficult, especially in a covid19 environment where the number of people able to meet face-to-face is limited and where other forms of communication are unreliable.⁷⁸

Access

33. As insecurity continues in Tigray, humanitarian access to the region remains constrained, particularly in and around the city of Shire.⁷⁹ Fighting, clashes, and ambushes have affected not only the safety and wellbeing of millions of people but also constrained humanitarian agencies' operations.⁸⁰ The delivery of humanitarian assistance is further complicated by bureaucratic obstacles and the presence of various armed actors, particularly in rural areas.⁸¹ Paul Turnbull explained that many of the ministries in Tigray had become dysfunctional.⁸²

73 Q13 [Edward Brown]

74 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 22 March 2021

75 UNHCR, [Regional Update 14: Ethiopia Situation \(Tigray Region\), 16 March – 7 April](#), 12 April 2021

76 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.53

77 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.8

78 Q5 [Paul Turnbull]

79 International Organization for Migration, [Northern Ethiopia Crisis Situation Report 4, 11–18 January 2021](#), 19 March 2021, p.1

80 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 30 March 2021, p.1

81 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 19 February 2021

82 Q10 [Paul Turnbull]

34. When the offensive began in November, the Ethiopian Government imposed a communications blackout.⁸³ Access to the internet and communications were and continue to be cut off or limited.⁸⁴ Road and air access to the Tigray, Afar and Amhara Regions were closed.⁸⁵ The Ethiopian Government placed severe restrictions on humanitarian workers and journalists trying to get into Tigray. This not only makes it difficult for aid agencies to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance but it restricts access to verifiable information.⁸⁶

35. On 3 March, the Ethiopian Prime Minister announced that aid agencies could operate in the region by providing a notification to the Ministry of Peace.⁸⁷ Access has improved slightly as the Ethiopian Government has eased some of the initial restriction. However, humanitarian aid staff face considerable deliberate obstructions to their work. Paul Turnbull, UN WFP Ethiopia, told us the scale of fighting, and the associated security issues, was limiting effective access which meant it was not possible to get a full picture of what it was like everywhere in the region.⁸⁸

36. Alex de Waal, Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation, Tufts University, has described the provision of permits and access to Tigray as a “process of death by bureaucracy” through “drip, drip arbitrary individual permits” with permits issued in a manner that only allows piecemeal, ad hoc access.⁸⁹ These access permits are not recognised by all combatants.⁹⁰

37. High-level diplomatic efforts have led to some progress in improving access. Edward Brown explained:

The head of WFP, David Beasley, came recently, and that was a real watershed. That high-level diplomacy has really borne fruit, in that, within a week of that visit, some of these things opened up in terms of logistics, bureaucratic impediments and the communications issue.⁹¹

38. Improved access has allowed agencies to scale up their response. World Vision had 82 staff in Tigray before and during the conflict but are in the process of hiring hundreds more. Their total spend in Tigray last year was about \$3.9 million and is expected to be over \$25 million this year.⁹² On 7 April, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi recognised that humanitarian operations were scaling up as access widened but he stressed efforts needed to be accelerated to cope with the large numbers of displaced people arriving in urban areas.⁹³

83 *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number [09147](#), House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021, p.4

84 UNHCR, [Remarks by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at the press conference in Addis Ababa](#), 1 February 2021; *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number [09147](#), House of Commons Library, 25 February 2021, p.4

85 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.17

86 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.2

87 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 8 March 2021, p.1

88 Q6 [Paul Turnbull]

89 International Crisis Group, [Podcast: Risks of Starvation Rise in Ethiopia's Tigray War](#), 23 February 2021

90 International Crisis Group, [Podcast: Risks of Starvation Rise in Ethiopia's Tigray War](#), 23 February 2021

91 Q8 [Edward Brown]

92 Q6 [Edward Brown]

93 UNHCR, [Regional Update 14: Ethiopia Situation \(Tigray Region\), 16 March – 7 April](#), 12 April 2021

39. James Duddridge MP, Minister for Africa, told us:

One of the problems is that there is just no access, so we do not even understand the nature of the problem. Another is trying to gain consistent access and not being blocked by Eritrean soldiers, and the complexity around the provisional government and perhaps outlining what the regional authorities ... are doing. Some of the territory that we would describe as Tigray is under the control of the Amharans or is inaccessible.⁹⁴

The UK Government has also expressed concern about limited access for humanitarian agencies to refugee camps in northern Tigray and has called for “sustained, free and unfettered access to enable the delivery of much needed humanitarian assistance”.⁹⁵ It has also said that,

The UK continues to press, at the highest levels, for sustained, free and unfettered humanitarian access across Tigray, so that the UNHCR can uphold its mandate towards refugees.⁹⁶

40. On 12 April the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary said:

I heard first hand, from humanitarian workers in Gondar, about the access challenges ... the Ethiopian government have announced changes in the process for humanitarian agency personnel to enter and move around in Tigray. Unfortunately, the changes have not yet resulted in a major scaling-up of the relief effort and many people in Tigray remain beyond the reach of aid agencies. The ongoing violence, the presence of Eritrean troops and the lack of access humanitarians have to communications equipment are proving a massive impediment to the delivery of essential aid and services.⁹⁷

On 22 April, the UN Security Council noted that insecurity in the region continued to impede ongoing humanitarian operations and called for a restoration of normalcy.⁹⁸ In evidence to the Committee on 22 April 2021, the Foreign Secretary told us that securing greater humanitarian access was a priority. He added that:

They have gone from a consent basis to a notification basis, which is progress, but we need to make sure we secure unfettered access.⁹⁹

41. Without adequate access, any humanitarian response to the crisis in Tigray will be severely constrained. We recommend that the UK Government work with the Ethiopian Government and the relevant regional authorities to ensure humanitarian agencies have unimpeded access to communities in need in Tigray and neighbouring regions. These efforts should be undertaken in concert with diplomatic efforts to end the fighting and find a peaceful, inclusive political solution to the crisis.

94 Q29 [James Duddridge]

95 [HL12399](#), 4 February 2021

96 [HL12328](#), 3 February 2021

97 Letter from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary dated 12 April 2021

98 United Nations Security Council, [Security Council Press Statement on Ethiopia, SC/14501](#), 22 April 2021

99 Oral evidence taken on 22 April 2021, [HC \(2019–21\) 1141](#), Q159

Basic needs

42. The basic needs of many people in Tigray are not being met. These include:

Food and food security:

- Agricultural systems have been devastated by months of fighting and extensive looting and destruction. Crops and animals have been looted or burned, notably in the Eastern and Central zones. Farmers are becoming increasingly desperate, with their food security status described as catastrophic¹⁰⁰
- Children, particularly those whose nutrition status has been compromised, are particularly at risk¹⁰¹
- With the electricity supply affected by conflict, grinding mills are not functioning¹⁰²
- Shortages of fuel, food, and other key goods continue. Limited supply and slow resupply has led to inflated market prices, exacerbating the situation¹⁰³

• Water:

- Access to water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) services is largely disrupted across Tigray, increasing the likelihood of disease outbreaks, including covid-19¹⁰⁴
- Water pumping systems in towns are out of order due to a lack of fuel and electricity, damage, looting, and vandalism. Affected communities may have to use unprotected water sources without any treatment, in some cases traveling long distances to fetch water (a burden that falls disproportionately on girls and women)¹⁰⁵

• Shelter:

- While most displaced people are seeking shelter with relatives and friends, thousands are also living in overcrowded collective centres¹⁰⁶
- The crisis has left people in urgent need of emergency shelter and basic household items, including kitchen utensils, blankets, and mats

100 OCHA, [Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 8 March 2021, p.2 and p.5

101 CARE, Oxfam, ActionAid, [Multiagency and Multisectoral Rapid Need Assessment in Raya Kobo, Raya Alamata, Raya Azebo, Chercher, Wajirat and Ofla Woredas of North Wollo and South Tigray Zones](#), 30 January 2021, page 13

102 CARE, Oxfam, ActionAid, [Multiagency and Multisectoral Rapid Need Assessment in Raya Kobo, Raya Alamata, Raya Azebo, Chercher, Wajirat and Ofla Woredas of North Wollo and South Tigray Zones](#), 30 January 2021, page 6

103 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.8 and International Organization for Migration, [Northern Ethiopia Crisis Situation Report 4, 11–18 January 2021](#), 19 March 2021, p.1

104 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021

105 CARE, Oxfam, ActionAid, [Multiagency and Multisectoral Rapid Need Assessment in Raya Kobo, Raya Alamata, Raya Azebo, Chercher, Wajirat and Ofla Woredas of North Wollo and South Tigray Zones](#), 30 January 2021, page 6

106 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.7

43. For some people these basic needs are being met. Edward Brown, World Vision Ethiopia, told us:

We have already been able to reach over 1.2 million people with food, predominantly through the NGO pipeline, and well over a million other beneficiaries have benefited from health, water, shelter, non-food items, multipurpose cash, protection and nutrition services. The need is still far greater than the current response, but we are scaling up as fast as we can ...¹⁰⁷

44. In mid-March, 900,000 people had been given complete food baskets, almost 700,000 had been provided with water, and 136,000 with shelter.¹⁰⁸ Water trucking had exceeded the initial targeted population of approximately 455,300 people. But OCHA warned that the number of people targeted, was based on information gathered between late December 2020 and January 2021 and that the number of people in need would continue to rise because of the ongoing fighting.¹⁰⁹

45. The response to the need for shelter was alarmingly low compared to the response to other needs.¹¹⁰ Paul Turnbull said IDP camps could probably be avoided if enough support could be provided to IDPs and their hosts. He noted the problems that flow from having established camps and told us that “We would definitely like to avoid setting up camps like we have in Somali region”.¹¹¹ He said:

If we are able to get enough food and other assistance in, it might stop people crowding into the urban centres. There really is pressure on us to get assistance out into the rural areas, so that people can stay on their farms. If we are able to do it quickly enough, some people at least would be able to stay on their farms, plant their crops and even harvest something at the end of this year; otherwise, we will just have this cycle of displaced people who will get into a camp and, after years and years, will still be there. It is really important that we intervene now.¹¹²

46. Hunger in Tigray is an acute problem, with the World Peace Foundation detailing how the situation goes beyond immediate destruction and includes “dismembering the components of an elaborate food security system built up over decades”.¹¹³ Considering how the international community should best respond to the situation, it says,

United Nations Security Council resolution 2417 (armed conflict and hunger) also provides a mechanism for responding to the situation in Tigray. The resolution was passed unanimously in May 2018. Ireland brought the humanitarian crisis in Tigray to the Security Council agenda in March but no resolution was agreed. Essential to progress on this is the active support of the three African members of the UNSC, but they have not stepped forward.¹¹⁴

107 Q5 [Edward Brown]

108 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.1

109 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.16

110 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.8

111 Q14 [Paul Turnbull]

112 Q14 [Paul Turnbull]

113 World Peace Foundation, [Starving Tigray](#), 6 April 2021 Page, page II

114 World Peace Foundation, [Starving Tigray](#), 6 April 2021 Page, page 53

47. We commend the work of aid agencies in their provision of lifesaving assistance to communities in Tigray, despite the extraordinarily difficult circumstances in which they are delivering this help. It is likely that the number of people whose basic needs are not met will grow as the conflict continues. In addition, as humanitarian agencies reach parts of Tigray that have so far been inaccessible, they will discover many more cases of unmet need, creating a widening gap between the level of need and the provision that has been made.

48. *We recommend that the FCDO monitors OCHA's situation reports carefully to rapidly identify any areas where needs are unmet or are growing faster than expected so that it can respond rapidly and flexibly to provide the support needed. We also recommend that, as the situation on the ground becomes clearer, the FCDO assesses whether its current humanitarian contribution is adequate to ensure that the basic needs of communities are met.*

49. Food security is a crucial component of the emergency response and we are deeply concerned by reports that hunger is being used in the conflict to achieve political ends. With the FCDO having appointed a Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, the UK is well-placed to lead international efforts in not only condemning these actions, but coordinating action against them. *We recommend that, in accordance with UN resolution 2417 (2018), the UK Government should explore whether to use the mechanisms of the UN Security Council to press for penalties such as sanctions against actors found to be obstructing the delivery of essential humanitarian supplies and using starvation as a weapon of war.*

Restoration of basic services

50. People in Tigray have very little access to healthcare.¹¹⁵ Hospitals, health facilities, medical supplies and ambulances have been looted. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) estimated that barely 1 in 10 health facilities were functioning; of the 106 health facilities MSF teams visited, one in five was or had been occupied by armed soldiers and one facility was being used as an army base.¹¹⁶ Health facilities appear to have been deliberately targeted.

51. The multiagency rapid needs assessment published in January 2021 noted there were no health services in the areas of Southern Tigray affected by the conflict, meaning that regular health service activities such as Maternal and Child Health, treatment of endemic diseases, and the supply of essential drugs for chronic illnesses had stopped.¹¹⁷ Many health facilities have few or no remaining staff. Some have fled in fear having been threatened by soldiers and militias; while others no longer come to work because they have not been paid in months.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, ongoing looting of health facilities

115 Médecins Sans Frontières, [People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted destroyed](#), 15 March 2021

116 Médecins Sans Frontières, [People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted destroyed](#), 15 March 2021

117 CARE, Oxfam, ActionAid, [Multiagency and Multisectoral Rapid Need Assessment in Raya Kobo, Raya Alamata, Raya Azebo, Chercher, Wajirat and Ofra Woredas of North Wollo and South Tigray Zones](#), 30 January 2021, page 26

118 Médecins Sans Frontières, [People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted destroyed](#), 15 March 2021

discourages aid organisations from providing medical supplies.¹¹⁹ Women with no access to reproductive health services are concerned that they are at risk of getting pregnant and having additional children to care for because of lack of family planning services. CARE International found there was no pre- and post-natal treatment for the pregnant women or access to reproductive health services. Some women were reported to have given birth in the bush, others at home without professional support. Women who were raped or attacked have no access to trauma and rape services.¹²⁰

52. Dr Christian Rogg, the FCDO's Development Director for Ethiopia, echoed CARE International's findings, telling us that most healthcare facilities were not functioning. He said restoring services would be challenging because facilities had been looted and personnel had left leading to a "combination of missing equipment or damaged facilities and lack of personnel".¹²¹ Paul Turnbull, UN WFP Ethiopia, said,

The health system has collapsed at a time when we have Covid surging in Ethiopia ... we have noticed a huge increase in cases among our own staff.¹²²

53. Around 1.3 million children have not been able to access education.¹²³ UNICEF reported that schools had been looted, vandalised and occupied by armed forces and groups.¹²⁴ About a quarter of the schools in Tigray have been damaged¹²⁵ and cases of vandalism and looting are still surfacing.¹²⁶ Many teachers have abandoned their posts due to insecurity or the fact that they had not been paid. About a quarter of the schools in Tigray have been damaged.¹²⁷ With schools housing IDPs or serving as temporary bases for militias,¹²⁸ the disruption to children's education due to the conflict is likely to be protracted.

54. Basic services were cut off at the start of the conflict and more than 4.5 million people have been without adequate power or communications for more than four months.¹²⁹ Filippo Grandi pointed out that the closure of the banking and telecommunications systems had "added to the hardship of thousands of people".¹³⁰ Some critical infrastructure, including roads and bridges, will have been damaged during the fighting.¹³¹

55. Since the Government of Ethiopia declared the end of military operations on 28 November 2020 some services—like telecommunications, electricity, and airspace—have

119 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.2

120 CARE, [Multiagency and Multisectoral Rapid Need Assessment in Raya Kobo, Raya Alamata, Raya Azebo, Chercher, Wajirat and Ofla Woredas of North Wollo and South Tigray Zones](#), 30 January 2021, page 27

121 Q29 [Dr Rogg]

122 Q17 [Paul Turnbull]

123 UNICEF, [Ethiopia Country Office Humanitarian Situation Report January – December 2020](#), 31 December 2021

124 UNICEF, [Continuing crisis for children in Tigray Ethiopia amid reports of atrocities Ethiopia, Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore](#), 19 March 2021

125 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 13 March 2021, p.6

126 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 30 March 2021, p.2

127 UNICEF, [Continuing crisis for children in Tigray, Ethiopia, amid reports of atrocities: Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore](#), 19 March 2021

128 OCHA, [Ethiopia – Tigray Region Humanitarian Update: Situation Report](#), 8 March 2021, p.6

129 International Medical Corps, [Ethiopia–Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report #6](#), 18 March 2021, p.1

130 UNHCR, [Remarks by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi at the press conference in Addis Ababa.](#), 1 February 2021

131 OCHA, [Humanitarian Needs Overview Ethiopia](#), February 2021, p.17

gradually restarted. In Mekelle, electricity and telephone services have been partially restored. This has allowed banks to reopen, although with long queues and restrictions on withdrawals.

56. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary said the looting of health centres and destruction of vital infrastructure by Eritrean forces and other belligerents had led to “the disintegration of essential basic services and is exacerbating the parlous humanitarian context.”¹³² He noted that there were reports that looting of health centres was ongoing and would complicate efforts to restore key services.

57. **The provision and distribution of lifesaving humanitarian assistance, such as shelter, food and medicine, is a vital first stage in the response to the situation in Tigray. Following this, the restoration of basic services such as schools and hospitals will be key in both responding to current needs and starting the path towards post-conflict reconstruction. Health and social services are critical. Many of those who have suffered trauma and violence will need specialist support, and health services are essential if communities in Tigray are to cope with the ongoing pandemic and avoid the worst of its secondary impacts. Without access to education, children will grow up without the skills and knowledge needed to ensure the ongoing development of their communities. The restoration of services such as banking and markets will help to alleviate some of the pressure on the people in Tigray. After such severe and sustained disruption, local governance structures will require significant support if they are to restore these services for affected communities.**

58. *We recommend that the FCDO applies its learnings from other crises and works with other donors to create a plan of action that is properly funded for the restoration of basic services to Tigray. In creating this plan, it should engage with local communities and work closely with regional authorities and other donors to identify a hierarchy of needs. It should also identify long-term development challenges likely to be created by this conflict (such as food security) and take proactive action to prevent future problems and to have contingency plans in place should these challenges arise.*

The Ethiopian Government response

59. On 12 March the Ethiopian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations reiterated Ethiopia’s readiness to engage constructively on the situation in Tigray and urged the international community to support Ethiopia’s “... ongoing relief and reconstruction efforts to restore lasting peace and normalcy”¹³³

60. On 16 March the Ethiopian Government reported it had reached 4.2 million citizens through the relief and the rehabilitation process that was underway. It said it was providing 70% of the food assistance, with 30% coming from development partners and NGOs.¹³⁴

132 Letter from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary dated 12 April 2021

133 ENA, [Ethiopia Urges Int'l Community to Increase Support in Tigray](#), 12 March 2021

134 ENA, [Gov't Reaches 4.2 million Relief Beneficiaries in Tigray](#), 16 Mar 2021

The UK Government response: funding and regional strategy

61. The UK Government has said that “Ethiopia is a strategically important partner for the UK in tackling poverty, regional instability and irregular migration”¹³⁵ and that it “relies on a stable Ethiopia that is supportive of our foreign policy priorities in the Horn of Africa.”^{136, 137} The former DFID’s vision of Ethiopia was that “by 2020 Ethiopia is transforming into a stable, industrialised, resilient, more inclusive country, able to self-finance its way out of poverty and harness the potential of its youth.”¹³⁸ The Integrated Review, published in March 2021, names Ethiopia as a partner in furthering shared prosperity goals, democratic values and security interests.¹³⁹ In November 2020, the FCDO said,

All parties to this conflict need to want to find a political solution and accept regional offers of mediation, to avoid a looming humanitarian crisis and the spread of fighting and suffering to other countries in the region. The UK has been a longstanding supporter of Ethiopia, which has established itself as a beacon of reform in Africa. This conflict is putting all of those reform efforts at risk.¹⁴⁰

There is already unrest in other parts of Ethiopia ahead of the expected elections in June. There is violence and unrest in Amhara region and a part of Benishangul-Gumuz Region, home to the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (itself a source of tension with Egypt and Sudan) was taken over by an armed group in April.¹⁴¹

62. **As the conflict continues, there is a risk the violence in Tigray could destabilise the broader region, spreading instability to already fragile neighbouring states such as Sudan. There is a significant risk that the conflict could become protracted or escalate, creating a devastating long-term impact for communities in Tigray and hindering broader regional development. Using existing expertise from the Stabilisation Unit, the FCDO should create a clear road map for inclusive post-conflict reconstruction in Tigray that proactively addresses development needs and embeds peacebuilding within the FCDO’s work in the region.**

Funding

63. The UN regularly publishes and updates information on the funding needed and provided for the crisis in Tigray. In February it published a breakdown that showed that while the overall response was 71% funded, some sectors were a long way from being fully funded. For example, dedicated funding for refugees, WASH and health are, according to figure 2 below, falls short of the net requirement. The multisectoral funding is useful in covering these gaps.

135 FCDO, [Ethiopia Profile](#), 2 September 2020, p.2

136 FCDO, [Ethiopia Profile](#), 2 September 2020, p.2

137 The FCDO has also appointed a Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa and Red Sea, Julian Reilly

138 FCDO, [Ethiopia Profile](#), 2 September 2020, p.2

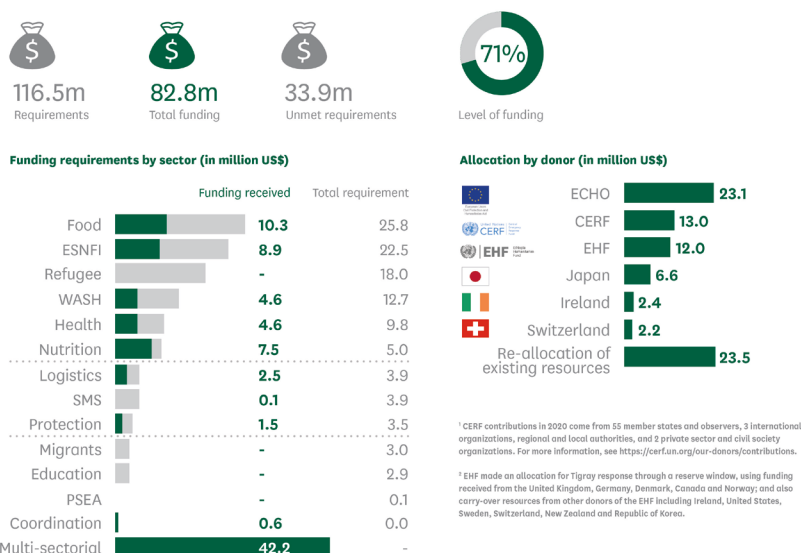
139 HM Government, [Global Britain in a competitive age: the Integrated Review of ...](#), March 2021, p. 63

140 FCDO, [Foreign Secretary statement following a meeting with the Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister](#), 25 November 2020

141 Reuters, [Armed group takes control of county in western Ethiopia - rights commission](#), 22 April 2021

ETHIOPIA**Northern Ethiopia – Humanitarian Response Plan Funding Update.**

As of 16 February 2020

**Figure 2: Humanitarian response funding update**

Source: UN OCHA, [Northern Ethiopia–Humanitarian Response Plan Funding Update, As of 16 February 2021](#), 22 February 2021

64. Paul Turnbull, UN WFP Ethiopia, told us that:

The funding has not really been that great, considering the needs on the ground. We know that many donor countries we have relied on in the past are having a very difficult time in terms of their own economies, so the timing in terms of the response for Tigray is rather difficult. A lot of Governments do not have the same sorts of funding levels for overseas assistance as they used to have. That is causing us all a problem.¹⁴²

65. On 8 April US AID announced it was “providing more than \$152 million in additional humanitarian assistance” to address “life-threatening hunger and acute malnutrition, as well as provide safe drinking water, urgently needed medical and health support, and shelter for some of the estimated one million people who have fled their homes.” US AID went on to say:

The United States remains deeply concerned about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Tigray and the lack of sufficient humanitarian funding to address it. Large-scale assistance is urgently needed to prevent conditions in Tigray from worsening. The United States urges other donors to immediately increase their contributions to address Ethiopia’s critical humanitarian needs, and to help the most vulnerable people in the Tigray region.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Q10 [Paul Turnbull]

¹⁴³ US AID, [United States announces more than \\$152 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the people affected by Tigray crisis](#), 8 April 2021

66. Ethiopia was the top bilateral recipient of UK aid for the 2020/21 financial year (£324.9m)¹⁴⁴ and was the second-largest recipient of UK bilateral aid in 2019 after Pakistan.¹⁴⁵ The UK Government has resisted calls to suspend aid, arguing “withholding finance is not an effective lever”, but has said it continually reviews its support.¹⁴⁶ In mid-January the EU suspended budget support for Ethiopia until humanitarian agencies are granted access to Tigray.¹⁴⁷

67. Dr Rogg, FCDO, told us £15.4 million had been announced and disbursed specifically for the crisis to date.¹⁴⁸ Paul Turnbull called for additional funding for the crisis, telling us that:

We have been a beneficiary of DfID and FCDO. If we look at the last decade, DfID contributed over \$400 million to WFP Ethiopia. In fact, even last year, the funding increased slightly from what it was in the previous year. We would urge that funding be provided to curtail this humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in Tigray and that an eye be kept on Ethiopia as a whole, given the huge humanitarian needs here. That may not be as specific an ask as you would like, but, if I am talking to a donor at the moment, funding really is a serious issue for us. We expect fair burden-sharing among donors, but we can testify to a very serious situation that has unfolded in Tigray.¹⁴⁹

68. **A failure to adequately resource the response to this crisis increases the risk of a ripple effect of instability throughout the region. The failure to support the communities of Tigray, combined with the lack of an inclusive political settlement, compromises hard-won development gains in Ethiopia, and has the potential to jeopardise the broader development and stability gains funded through UK aid programmes throughout the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region.**

69. **With Ethiopia currently the UK’s largest bilateral recipient of ODA, we are surprised that the UK Government has not allocated more financial assistance to the humanitarian response to the crisis in Tigray.**

70. *To pre-empt and avoid further humanitarian crises, the UK Government should ensure its package of humanitarian assistance to the conflict in Tigray provides sufficient financial and technical resources to support communities in urgent need. We recommend that the FCDO builds a comprehensive picture of the sources of conflict and instability in East Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region using the reports and analysis from Posts in the region to synthesise a broader picture, drawing on and applying the expertise of the new Conflict Prevention Hub. The Government should use this analysis to adjust the allocation of the UK’s resources in the region to help prevent conflicts from spreading and destabilising more of the region.*

144 GOV.UK, [Development Tracker](#) [accessed 11 March 2021]

145 GOV.UK, [Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2019](#) [accessed 11 March 2021]

146 [HL11061](#), 21 December 2021

147 Reuters, [EU suspends Ethiopian budget support over Tigray crisis](#), 15 January 2021

148 Q23 [Dr Rogg]

149 Q20 [Paul Turnbull]

Conclusion

71. The humanitarian crisis in Tigray—and the international response to it—matters on three levels. First, it matters because of the scale and harrowing nature of the suffering, with lives lost and devastated because of the conflict. The international community has a narrowing window of opportunity to stop this suffering and manage the risk of conflict spreading or becoming protracted. Secondly, through its aid programme in Ethiopia and the broader region, the UK has made a considerable investment in the region's ongoing development. This conflict has potential to undermine that investment and to set back development in Tigray, Ethiopia and the wider-region. Ethiopia is a country with great potential, but one where much of that potential will be at risk if an inclusive peace cannot be found and a process of long-term reconciliation started in Tigray, as well as in other parts of Ethiopia where the potential for conflict is high.

72. Finally, it matters because the conditions—a conflict that could become protracted or could destabilise the region and spread, allegations of human rights abuses, gender-based violence, sexual violence, the allegations of genocide and the use of hunger as a weapon of war—represent an early test of the Government's new approach to integrated diplomacy and development and its commitment to establish the UK as a 'force for good' in the world.

73. We believe that the UK Government should be working to:

- help bring about an end to the conflict and prevent it from spreading;
- ensure that the humanitarian needs of those affected by the conflict are met, that people can safely return to their homes and that essential services are restored as quickly as possible;
- help find an inclusive political settlement that delivers a sustainable peace;
- establish a process for reconciliation—drawing on the UK's previous experience in supporting reconciliation processes (e.g. in Colombia)—that starts with investigating the alleged crimes that have been committed and bringing those responsible to justice;

To achieve this, the FCDO will need to work with the Government of Ethiopia, regional authorities, its bilateral partners and multilateral organisations, including the UN Security Council, in a coordinated effort that will be a true test of the approach it has set out in the Integrated Review.

Formal minutes

Tuesday 27 April 2021

Members present:

Sarah Champion, in the Chair

Theo Clarke

Chris Law

Mrs Pauline Latham

Mr Virendra Sharma

Draft Report (*The humanitarian situation in Tigray*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 73 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Tenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 18 May at 1.45 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Thursday 18 March 2021

Edward Brown, National Director – Ethiopia, World Vision; **Paul Turnbull**, Deputy Country Director and Representative in Ethiopia, UN World Food Programme Ethiopia

[Q1–20](#)

James Duddridge MP, Minister for Africa, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; **Christian Rogg**, Development Director, Ethiopia, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; **Dr Alastair McPhail CMG OBE**, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Ethiopia

[Q21–48](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya	HC 259
2nd	Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings	HC 215
3rd	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI	HC 260
4th	Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger	HC 596
5th	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings)	HC 292
6th	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 535
7th	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries	HC 605
8th	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts	HC 1186
1st Special Report	Follow-up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government response to the First Report of the Committee, Session 2019	HC 127
2nd Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 658
3rd Special Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 742
4th Special Report	Effectiveness of UK Aid: Interim Report & Effectiveness of UK Aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger: Government Response to the Second & Fourth Reports of the Committee	HC 820
5th Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings): Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1160
6th Special Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Sixth Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 1198
7th Special Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries: Government Response to the Seventh Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 1332
8th Special Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts: Government Response to the Eighth Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 1351