



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**The humanitarian
situation in Tigray:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Tenth Report of Session
2019–21**

**First Special Report of
Session 2021–22**

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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.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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First Special Report

The International Development Committee published its Tenth Report of Session 2019–21, [*The humanitarian situation in Tigray*](#) (HC 1289) on 30 April 2021. The Government response was received on 1 July 2021 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

The Government welcomes the International Development Committee's (IDC) report "*The humanitarian situation in Tigray*" and is grateful to all those who contributed written and oral evidence.

We remain concerned by the impact of the continued fighting in the Tigray region of Ethiopia on the people of Tigray. Since November 2020, they have had to endure egregious human rights violations and abuses, including extra-judicial killings, rape and sexual and gender based violence and displacement on ethnic grounds that has seen tens of thousands flee their homes. The humanitarian situation has become increasingly dire, with the UN assessing that only around 1 million people have received basic food assistance out of up to 5.2 million people in desperate need. Much of the region remains inaccessible to humanitarian agencies due to ongoing insecurity and denial of access by forces on the ground.

HMG has been at the forefront of the international response throughout the conflict, engaging directly with the Government of Ethiopia, and that of Eritrea, to press for an end to the conflict, protection of civilians and unfettered humanitarian access. We have also continued to engage core international partners and raise concerns in international fora, most recently through the G7 leaders' communique of 13 June.

UK Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, Nick Dyer, visited Ethiopia from 19–25 May, where he travelled to Tigray and engaged the Government of Ethiopia. He saw a hospital that had been bombed and government offices and stores of education and medical equipment that had been ransacked. His call for a humanitarian ceasefire has been joined by 17 other countries, the EU and the Pope at the time of writing. In 2020/21 the UK provided over £100m of humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia and to date has provided £47.7m specifically to the Tigray crisis response. Sexual violence is of particular concern, and we have deployed a UK expert to the region. Recommendations from this initial scoping mission will outline options for supporting the Government of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and other key stakeholders to safely collect evidence and bring the perpetrators of sexual violence to justice. The scoping mission report will also assist the UK in understanding next steps for addressing the immediate needs of the survivors, preventing further sexual violence and delivering justice and accountability. The UK is also supporting the International Committee of the Red Cross, UN agencies, specialised NGOs and civil society partners to provide adequate essential services to survivors as well as supporting refugee survivors through the UN High Commission for Refugees.

The IDC's report calls for future action to focus on four areas: 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; and 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. We agree. All four core recommendations have been considered as part of our response to the conflict, but are all, to a greater or lesser extent, predicated on an end to fighting. This remains our primary ask of the parties to the conflict.

On 28 June the Government of Ethiopia announced a humanitarian ceasefire. We are urging all parties to the conflict to allow the urgent delivery of life-saving humanitarian aid and to stop the fighting. All parties must respect international humanitarian law and prevent their forces from doing anything to hinder the critical work of the UN and NGOs.

Our responses to the IDC's fuller recommendations are as follows.

Conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region

1. 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)

The UK Government has been at the forefront of the international response throughout the conflict. The Foreign Secretary met Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy in Addis Ababa on 22 January, urging an end to violence, unfettered humanitarian access and justice for victims of human right atrocities. Nick Dyer, Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs, and Moazzam Malik, FCDO's Director General for Africa have also visited Africa, highlighting the real risk of famine and the need for a ceasefire. The UK has remained in close contact with allies, such as the US, EU and Gulf states in pursuing these aims. We have raised the issue in UN Security Council open discussions on conflict and famine, and in five 'AOB' items on the UNSC agenda; joined a statement of concern at the last Human Rights Council; and issued a statement, under the UK Presidency, from G7 Foreign Ministers on 2 April and communiqués following the meeting of G7 Foreign and Development Ministers in London on 5 May, and the meeting of G7 Leaders in Carbis Bay on 13 June.

2. 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)

The Foreign Secretary, Minister for Africa and our Ambassador in Addis continue to raise human rights issues in their discussions with the Ethiopian government. We have been clear that civilians must be protected and the violence must stop.

The UK's longstanding position is that any determination of genocide is an issue for competent courts, rather than governments. Our focus is on securing an end to violence and protecting civilians.

The UK will support the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that their joint investigations with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission into atrocities in Tigray are independent, transparent and impartial and that those responsible for human rights violations and abuses are held to account.

The UK voiced its concerns on the situation in Tigray at the 25 May UNSC discussion on the Protection of Civilians in Conflict, and will again raise Tigray at the forthcoming 47th session of the Human Rights Council.

3. 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)

We have and continue to press hard for unfettered access for independent international human rights organisations. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously shown its willingness to act independently and must continue to do so through the joint investigation, which we judge is the most credible prospect available for holding the perpetrators of atrocities in Tigray to account. The UK will therefore support the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that their joint investigations into atrocities in Tigray with the EHRC are independent, transparent and impartial. The Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights' participation in the joint investigation must in no way compromise their mandate to independently investigate and report on atrocities in Tigray.

The UK further welcomes the proposed AU Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights, calls for the Government of Ethiopia to allow access to this inquiry and is in touch with the African Union on how we might support this effort.

4. 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)

The FCDO will continue to look for opportunities to enhance the existing atrocity prevention training we provide our staff through the International Academy to identify the risks of atrocities and conflict, and the continued development and use of early warning mechanisms. Details of a new online module on responding to atrocities was circulated to staff earlier this year. It is relevant to all staff, but particularly to those working in countries with a history of atrocities.

UK officials at post including those working on conflict, security and humanitarian issues, including HMA, take very seriously the risks that Ethiopian citizens face through armed violence. Issues such as human rights violations and abuses, extra-judicial killings are reported to Whitehall through existing channels which we assess are fit-for-purpose. We do not assess that a separate atrocity prevention strategy is necessary as this work is already incorporated into existing work streams.

Humanitarian Needs

5. 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.’ (Paragraph 37)

We do not share this assessment. There remain pressing issues regarding the importation of communications equipment and travel approvals, for example, that Mr Beasley’s visit did not address. Whilst there have been some, more recent, small improvements in access to telecommunications equipment by UN agencies, NGOs still have very little access. Weapons bearers also continue to routinely deny access to humanitarian agencies and loot humanitarian aid that has been delivered. There remains a need to continue to press the Government of Ethiopia, the Government of Eritrea, TPLF and other forces controlling territory to ensure widespread and sustained access for humanitarian actors in the region. We also continue to call for the immediate withdrawal of Eritrean forces.

6. 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)

Ensuring access and safety for humanitarian actors remains a key priority of the FCDO response. This issue has been raised bilaterally by FCDO officials, and the Foreign Secretary, on multiple occasions, with the Ethiopian authorities. We continue to work closely with likeminded partners to improve access alongside efforts to reduce levels of conflict and find a political solution to the crisis.

7. 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)

We work with a variety of partners including OCHA to understand the extent of needs and identify critical gaps, and have undertaken an assessment of humanitarian needs and funding gaps across Ethiopia. Due to the urgent needs in the region, we have redirected some of our aid for Ethiopia to the Tigray response. We will continue to review our aid programme in light of the situation. We also work closely with other donors to avoid overlap and to promote complimentary in our programming. We are also working closely with other donor partners to raise awareness of the situation in Tigray to support further resource mobilisation.

8. 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)

The UK will use all necessary political levers to address the crisis in Tigray. We are currently supporting initiatives for increased dialogue on the situation in Tigray at the Security Council under UNSCR 2417 as well as considering further bilateral and multilateral opportunities to improve humanitarian access and reduce levels of intensity of conflict in Tigray.

9. 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)

The UK will work through the multilateral system, in partnership with other donors, to address the restoration of basic services drawing on experience from other crises. At present the level of insecurity means that basic services, in certain locations, cannot be resumed. Our partners on the ground report repeated looting and targeting of restocked health centres, for example, meaning the violence must stop before services can be fully restarted. We continue to support the humanitarian response to provide access to essential services and assistance for the population of Tigray where access is possible. We remain extremely concerned about the food security situation in Tigray and have raised this with Ethiopian authorities. We are providing support to improve access for key humanitarian partners to vulnerable populations.

10. 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)

Focusing on addressing critical humanitarian needs, bringing about an end to hostilities and supporting a sustainable political settlement should remain the priority. The humanitarian response should take into consideration longer term implications of its actions. Given the dynamic situation it is too early for detailed reconstruction planning but some initial consideration, both internally and with external partners, of reconstruction and recovery planning will commence at an early stage.

11. 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)

Total UK support to the crisis is £47.7m since November 2020 and we keep our level of support under review. In addition to financial support the UK has been, and will remain, actively engaged in addressing the conflict through diplomatic and political channels.

12. 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)

The FCDO has well established methods of identifying, analysing and responding to sources of regional conflict and instability, and the department continues to push for improvements. The newly established conflict centre will bolster existing capabilities and bring additional skills to increase the impact and effectiveness of the UK's conflict stabilisation and resolution efforts.

Reporting from embassies provides local insights into conflict and political dynamics and this is combined to inform policy making with research and regional analysis from conflict experts in London who specialise in a specific region or country. The FCDO also seeks views of external analysts to inform this process, most recently on Ethiopia and East African regional conflict dynamics.

There are formal, senior-level policy strategy groups in place to ensure that collaboration between post and HQ, and across Government is standard practise (e.g. the regional National Security Strategy Implementation Groups), and it is these groups who are responsible for directing resourcing and effort to match priorities.

The newly established conflict centre is already contributing to this effort. Its advisers work alongside embassies and policy teams on a daily basis applying lessons from past interventions and providing conflict and security expertise to inform longer term planning, e.g. through regional analysis of how serious and organised crime intersects with conflict in East Africa.

30 June 2021