

In the news this past week (12-19 November 2020):

CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA THREATENS REGIONAL STABILITY



Tigray President Debretsion Gebremichael has confirmed his forces' bombing of the Eritrean city of Asmara, as the conflict in the northern region of Ethiopia continues to escalate. While he did not say how many missiles were fired, he did say his troops were fighting both Eritrean and Ethiopian forces on "several fronts" along the Ethiopian border. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed launched a military offensive in Tigray on 4 November, in response to a reported attack on a military base in the region, where

political dissent over postponed elections has been growing. Mr Gebremichel, quoted by Ethiopian news agencies, said: "As long as troops are here fighting, we will take any legitimate military target and we will fire," opening the possibility of attacking the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. Mr Ahmed's actions in Tigray come as a result of deteriorating relations between the Tigray People's Liberation Front – which has seen its political influence greatly reduced since Mr Abiy came to power – and the federal government. The recent expansion of the conflict to include neighbouring Eritrea has increased international concern over the deteriorating situation. It comes at a time when there had been a glimmer of promise for the Horn of Africa with the peace deal signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea (2018), and recent positive developments in neighbouring Sudan and South Sudan. According to *Al Jazeera*, the current conflict has killed hundreds and caused close to 20,000 people to flee into neighbouring Sudan. Fighters in Tigray are being investigated by both Ethiopia's Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International for human rights abuses, however, the accusations have not yet been independently verified. A lockdown on telecommunications has made it difficult to gather accurate information on what is going on within Tigray.

From a Christian perspective, the way Ethiopia responds to this conflict has the potential to influence the stability of the region, and since it is located on the strategic line dividing the 'Islamic north' and 'Christian south', it is also of spiritual significance. Mr Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in bringing an end to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, however, the current violence in Tigray is threatening that peace. The unrest has already forced an estimated 20,000 people to leave Ethiopia, putting pressure on already under-resourced Sudan. Sudan is currently hosting 1.4 million refugees and may see many more come if a solution to the conflict is not found. Ethiopia's current political struggles are compounded by an on-going locust plague, COVID-19 related economic struggles, and international disputes surrounding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Churches in Ethiopia have organised days of prayer and fasting for those displaced and for the warring sides to find a peaceful resolution.

Pray with us for the following:

- For the leaders of all governments involved to pursue lasting peace both within Ethiopia and the region
- For an end to the violence, and that those who have been displaced can return to their homes
- For the Ethiopian Church to continue to pursue peace and to be a tool in the Lord's hand for reconciliation in the nation, that it may be a testimony of the Lord's love and power, to the region and beyond

Image: REUTERS/El Tayeb Siddig