



Ethiopian Prime Minister States That Government Forces Have Taken Control of the Tigray Region's Capital City

In one of the latest developments in the ongoing Tigray conflict, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated that the military has gained control over Mekelle – the capital city of the Tigray region. Federal government forces have been engaged in weeks-long fighting with the local Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The conflict is rooted in disagreement between the two entities regarding each other's legitimacy, and has come to the fore particularly since 2018 when Ahmed ascended to power and the TPLF lost much of its influence over national politics. The recent wave of violence has created a major humanitarian crisis in the country with thousands of civilians requiring aid and others also fleeing to neighboring countries like Sudan. Just this week, international aid groups announced that they had finally obtained sustained and secure access to the Tigray region in order to be able to provide their services to civilians in need. The positive news comes at a critical time as the region has been hampered by shortages of food, medicine, and other supplies in the aftermath of the fighting breaking out back in early November.

The humanitarian aid agreement reached between Ethiopia and U.N. officials will allow relief to flow into federal government-controlled areas of the Tigray region. Even prior to the recent outbreak of hostilities, an estimated 600,000 people in the state were already dependent upon food aid, and this number has only grown and worsened as thousands have become displaced as a result of the violence. In addition to those that have left their homes for safety purposes but remained in the region, there are also over 45,000 people who have crossed the border into neighboring Sudan, creating a refugee crisis in the area on top of the existing humanitarian concerns. Furthermore, Eritrean refugees who fled their country and have been living in camps in Tigray now find themselves entangled in the midst of the ongoing conflict as well, putting further strain on aid groups attempting to provide relief services in the area.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared victory last weekend after federal troops captured the Tigrayan capital city of Mekelle, however this has been rejected by TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael who stated that "the fighting will continue...as long as they are on our land, we'll fight to the last." Gebremichael expressed that the TPLF would not surrender and called on local citizens to resist the national army. Issue experts have warned that even if the federal government maintains control over Mekelle, they could still be subjected to a grueling guerilla war with the TPLF.

The feud between federal forces and the TPLF escalated back in September when the state of Tigray decided to hold parliamentary elections, despite the fact that they had been postponed by the central government due to the coronavirus pandemic. As a result, the following month in October, Ethiopian lawmakers cut off federal funding to the state as punishment. This fueled the existing animosity between the Ahmed regime and the TPLF, which had already been heightened since the prime minister came to power in 2018 at the expense of much of the regional group's previous influence over the country's politics. Ultimately, it is all of these tensions which paved the way for the recent outbreak of violence that began almost one month ago and has devastated the civilian population in the region.