

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 9 (Infosplusgabon) - A leader of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), whose forces have been defeated by the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (NDF), has surrendered to government forces, the State of Emergency task force announced on Tuesday.

The state-owned Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) reported that "one of the nine central committee leaders of the TPLF, Keria Ibrahim, has surrendered to Federal forces".

ENA said Keria held one of the key federal government posts as former Speaker of the House of Federation "until her resignation to join the clique in Mekelle". She had disagreed with the government to postpone elections planned for August due to the coronavirus pandemic and resigned in June.

The Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced on Saturday that the army had seized control of Mekelle, the capital of the Tigray region in the north of the country, and freed some of its officers held hostage during the three-week-long military assault.

The NDF Chief of Staff, General Birhanu Jula, said government soldiers freed more than 7,000 members of the Northern Command who were taken as hostages by the TPLF.

It has also taken control of the Northern Command Centre in Mekelle, Birhanu added.

Violence erupted at the start of November in Tigray involving federal and local forces, following the reported takeover of an army base in Mekelle, which prompted the prime minister to order a military offensive.

Prior to the Tigray escalation, dozens of people in western Oromia region had been killed and injured in attacks.

The Ethiopian Federal Government has also declared a six-month state of emergency in the Tigray Region which is controlled by the TPLF.

The TPLF has accused Prime Minister Abiy, who is from Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the

Oromo, of forcing them out of the government and security posts since taking office in 2018.

Meanwhile, the Ethiopian News Agency has reported that Prime Minister Abiy is on Wednesday holding discussions with political parties and civil society organizations on the upcoming elections scheduled for mid-2021.

It quoted a statement from Office of the Prime Minister as saying the the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) is also present at the discussions.

"The discussions are preceded by a presentation on the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders and an overview of electoral systems," the statement said.

The election is being held following the reform of critical democratic institutions.

The 6th General Elections were to have been held in Ethiopia on 29 August 2020 to elect officials to the House of Peoples' Representatives, but were delayed due to the threat posed by

COVID-19 pandemic.

In another development, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is appealing to the federal authorities in Ethiopia for urgent access in order to reach Eritrean refugees in the Tigray region who are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance and services.

In a statement, it said concerns are growing by the hour.

"The camps will have now run out of food supplies – making hunger and malnutrition a real danger, a warning we have been issuing since the conflict began nearly a month ago. We are also alarmed at unconfirmed reports of attacks, abductions and forced recruitment at the refugee camps," UNHCR said.

It reiterated its call for safety and security of refugees saying with the current difficulties in communication and security hampering access it is not possible to verify current conditions in the camps.

"No civilian should become a target, and all possible measures must be taken by all parties to ensure that – be they refugees, the internally displaced, host communities or humanitarian workers – they are all kept out of harm's way," UNHCR said.

In Sudan, Ethiopian refugees continue to arrive in the hundreds with nearly 46,000 arriving since the start of November. More than 2,500 were registered since Friday alone.

Over the weekend, UNHCR with its partners launched a humanitarian response plan to assist the growing number of refugees in eastern Sudan.

The plan brings together 30 humanitarian partners working together with the government to provide urgent life-saving assistance including shelter, water and food at a cost of US\$147 million which will meet the needs of up to 100,000 refugees for the next six months.

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