

à propos

The KOFF
Peacebuilding
Magazine



Ethiopia: Political Momentum for Peace and Human Rights?

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Since 2018, Ethiopia has opened up to democracy and human rights, partly thanks to the appointment of Abiy Ahmed (a young politician with a promising reform agenda) as Prime Minister. This has resulted in the release of journalists and political prisoners, an unexpected peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and, according to some, an increased space for civil society. The upcoming elections, described by the Ethiopian government as the first free and fair ones in the country's history, could be an important step in the pursuit of this democratic transition. Scheduled for August 2020, they therefore raise opportunities and hope for peace in Ethiopia. However, in view of the current security situation in the country, there is no guarantee of an increased prosperity after the elections.

This edition of à propos takes you through various impressions, opinions and perspectives on the Ethiopia of today and tomorrow.

Wishing you a pleasant reading,

Sanjally Jobarteh, Editor of [KOFF](#) magazine

focus

Peace for Whom? The Situation of Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia



Tigray route to Hitsats Camp (2020). Picture: Andrea Grossenbacher

Since the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed as Ethiopia's Prime Minister in April 2018, the country has undergone significant political and economic changes. The promises of a unified and democratic Ethiopia have created high hopes for more peaceful times. At the same time, uncertainty arises as people ask themselves how peace might look like, at what cost it will come and for whom.

The Peace Deal between Eritrea and Ethiopia

One of the achievements of PM Abiy Ahmed's on-going political reform was to put an end to two decades of 'frozen war' between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The signing of the peace agreement in July 2018 won PM Abiy Ahmed international and national recognition and the "2019 Peace Nobel Prize". In September 2018, following the peace deal, the borders between Ethiopia and Eritrea were opened. Media outlets all around the world documented the joyous moment as families reunified after decades of separation. For many, the images of this historic moment highlighted the personal costs of conflict and the immediate possibilities of peace.

The peace deal with Eritrea had, and continues to have, an impact on the lives of Eritreans and Ethiopians living in the border area in northern Ethiopia. However, the immediate

possibilities of peace seem to have faded as the deal has failed to translate into tangible and sustainable improvements for the people. On the contrary, for some, it has created more insecurity and new vulnerabilities. Despite Ethiopia's history of hosting and maintaining good relationships with Eritrean refugees, a closer look at the current situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia suggests a gradual deterioration of their protection and safety following the peace agreement. In order to understand the implications of this situation for overall peace, we must look more closely into how the peace agreement directly or indirectly affects Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia.

Refugee Policy in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has a long history of hosting refugees. According to UNHCR, Ethiopia is currently sheltering 748,448 registered refugees and asylum seekers (as of 29 February 2020). The regions Tigray and Afar host 139,281 registered Eritrean refugees (as of 31 December 2019). The country acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and has ratified the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Moreover, Ethiopia has maintained an open door policy for people seeking asylum in the country, allowing humanitarian access and protection to refugees. In recent years, the country has seen its refugee policy move from basic service provision to a more progressive and rights-based model. The development towards more progressive refugee policies ended in the adoption of a landmark framework on refugees in 2017: the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (This paves the way for the implementation of the nine pledges Ethiopia made at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in September 2016 in New York and provides a solid political basis and direction for enhanced protection and provision of rights. Ethiopia has also been a key driver of the regional CRRF process. In January 2019, the national refugee proclamation was revised which is expected to enable refugees to become more independent, better protected and have greater access to local solutions, making it one of the most progressive in Africa.

Counter to this trend, policies that were in place to protect Eritrean refugees are currently undergoing changes, most likely because of the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea. There have been shifts in practice to no longer recognize Eritreans as *prima facie* refugees. Consequently, Eritreans have to undergo individual refugee status determination. Further, there seems to be a faster process in place for Eritrean refugees to make use of the 'Out of Camp Policy', which allows Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia to live outside of camps, if they have the financial means. Once they are living outside of a camp, they are no longer eligible for refugee assistance. While some refugees might welcome this as an opportunity to move on to other areas of Ethiopia soon after arrival, it must be understood within the broader context of the peace deal with Eritrea. Given Eritrea's interest in reducing the number of Eritrean refugees to Ethiopia, the timing of the change in policy raises questions about the motivations behind it and whether it is part of a political move to please the Eritrean regime by reducing the numbers of Eritrean refugees in the border area. Finally, this month several Ethiopian newspapers announced the shutdown of the Hitsats camp, one of the four Eritrean refugee camps in northern Ethiopia, leaving about 18'000 Eritrean refugees with an uncertain future. These recent developments have created insecurity and challenges for refugee protection. Yet, given the peace declaration between Eritrea and Ethiopia it does not come as a surprise that some measures, such as the refugee status determination, are being introduced. However, a cause for concern is that measures might be put in place to actively reduce the attractiveness of the Tigray/Afar

region for Eritrean refugees, impacting on their ability to get protection.

Peace & Displacement

The peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia had a direct impact on movement as it resulted in the border opening in 2018, which lasted about two months. During this time, many people benefitted from the freedom of movement across the border, for personal and business purposes. However, not everyone was happy with this situation.

First, the uncontrolled movement across borders increased insecurity among Eritrean refugees in the camps in northern Ethiopia, as the end of the conflict with Ethiopia does not guarantee political change in Eritrea. Therefore, people in the camps who fled because of the Eritrean government feared that an opening of the border would allow Eritrean officials to enter the camps and that they would be forced to return to Eritrea. This insecurity has persisted until now and could have a negative impact on the relationships between and among refugees, national and international refugee protection agencies and the national government of Ethiopia, as it increases mistrust, a sense of helplessness and fear

Second, the opening of the border actually led to a subsequent complete closure of the border from the Eritrean side. Legal border crossing is no longer possible. In addition, today there are fewer entry points for Eritrean refugees to register themselves in Ethiopia than before. This, together with the change in prima facie refugee status recognition, has made it more difficult for Eritreans to seek refuge in Ethiopia.

Finally, the peace agreement has led to a change in approach towards Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, which is counter to the overall trend towards more progressive refugee policies in the country. This has created a lot of frustration among refugees, particularly young Eritreans who are well informed and have high expectations regarding the pledges that Ethiopia made to allocate more rights to refugees. Thus, unmet expectations of refugees regarding implementation of the pledges combined with more restrictive policies for Eritrean refugees that are perceived to be aimed at preventing Eritreans from entering Ethiopia and/or from staying in the border area could potentially increase frustration, mistrust and drive tensions between refugees, refugee agencies and the national government. Moreover, Tigrayans in northern Ethiopia have historically welcomed Eritrean refugees warmly, mainly due to the fact that they share the same ethnicity, culture and language. In many cases, host and refugee communities have developed peaceful and mutually benefitting relationships. Therefore – and keeping in mind the already tense relationship between the region's main political party, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and both the Eritrean and Ethiopian government – it is worth thinking about the potential impact tensions between Eritrean refugees and the Ethiopian government would have on the relationship between the Tigrayans and the national government.

The negative consequences of the peace deal for some Eritrean refugees in northern Ethiopia, and the potential impact they could have in terms of exacerbating pre-existing tensions or creating new conflict dynamics, shows the importance and relevance of a systematic integration of migration and displacement issues in peace processes and policies. This is a strong argument for an increased engagement on the peace and migration nexus as a means to prevent conflicts and sustain peace.

[swisspeace](#)

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links

- [Ethiopia-Eritrea border reopens after 20 years](#)
- [A Year After the Ethiopia-Eritrea Peace Deal, What Is the Impact?](#)
- [UNHCR - Ethiopia Factsheet February 2020](#)
- [Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia](#)
- [UNHCR - Ethiopia](#)
- [UNHCR - CRRF Ethiopia](#)
- [shutdown of the Hitsats camp](#)
- [Fear Dampens Hope Among Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia](#)
- [“We can’t go home”: What does peace mean for Eritrea’s refugees?](#)
- [EASO - Eritrea national service, exit, and return](#)
- [KOFF Joint Learning Process on Peacebuilding & Migration](#)

reports

Persisting with Peace in the Somali Regional State



Signing of the peace deal between the Ogaden National Liberation Front and the Government of Ethiopia.
Picture: Conciliation Resources

In October 2018, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Government of Ethiopia signed an historic peace deal, ending nearly a quarter of a century of armed conflict in the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia. Conciliation Resources was there, as we have been for the past seven years of negotiations, helping these two parties to reach a peace deal by providing technical support to the negotiations, as well as feeding the views of wider society into the peace process. Now, we are working with the Somali Regional State government and the ONLF to implement the peace deal and to support the transition to peace in the region.

Since the signing of the peace deal, the ONLF leaders have returned to the region after more than 20 years of exile and have been focusing on the group's transition from an armed group to a political party. The group has demobilised its fighters, adopted a peaceful emblem and elected new leadership headed by the former chief peace negotiator. The group has also taken inspiration from learning visits organised by Conciliation Resources to Northern Ireland and Mindanao in the Philippines in the design and implementation of their transition to peace strategies. This includes restructuring the organisation, preparing their leaders and cadres for the transition and creating a political roadmap. Their official registration as a political party has now been confirmed, and they will run in elections which were planned for August 2020, but have been postponed due to the COVID19 pandemic.

Conducting credible and peaceful elections is the biggest litmus test for the peace deal. This would pave the way for a new government with the necessary legitimacy and confidence to embark on major institutional and governance reforms needed in the region. An elected government would restore the confidence of the local population in their state institutions, which could help the government put in place measures to deal with the historical legacies of conflict and marginalisation. However, the new government would also have to manage the expectations and demands of the people as it requires time, resources and goodwill to deliver on its mandate.

In July, representatives from the Somali Regional State government and the ONLF, with the support of Conciliation Resources, held a confidence building retreat to take stock of progress in the implementation of the peace deal and agree mechanisms for better collaboration. Shortly after, regional President Mustafa Omer officially launched a new Joint Committee of the Somali Regional Government and the ONLF. The committee, which was one of the key commitments in the peace agreement, provides an official avenue for the two sides to discuss fundamental issues concerning the root causes of the conflict, and to promote long term peace and stability.

We're now working with the federal reconciliation commission, Somali regional government and victim's groups to connect federal and regional reconciliation initiatives, help document the needs and priorities of victims and ensure these are fed into a wider reconciliation process in Ethiopia. This will help meet the urgent need to ensure that civilian victims and survivors of the conflict, as well as ex-combatants, see the benefits of the peace deal, in part to avoid a potential return to armed conflict.

[Conciliation Resources](#)

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links

- [Film "Ethiopia: persisting with peace"](#)

reports

For Effective and Inclusive Peace Agreements



Road From Axum To Yeha, near the Eritrean border. Picture: Creative Commons

The peace treaty between Ethiopia and Eritrea still bears hope.

However, nothing much changed in Eritrea, or so little. The war with Ethiopia is over and one war less, until we finish them all, is a huge step forward. Lifting the state of war between the two countries, as it was used to justify the appalling conditions imposed on the Eritrean population, should have changed the situation in the country. It has not.

Thorough analysis of the peace treaty shows that if it had potential, it was not detailed or elaborated enough to make a difference. Though it provides for several implementation mechanisms – economic zones, investment projects and a supervisory commission – it does not contain deadlines or coercive measures. Could this be a lack of goodwill after the

initial thrush? Economic zones were not created and the border closed again. The commission, to our knowledge, has never worked. The original good impetus eroded.

Will the upcoming elections in Ethiopia make a difference? It is desirable, but is Ethiopia able and willing to impose on Eritrea the respect of the conditions, of the promises of the treaty? It is a valid treaty under international law, so its compliance is due.

The peace treaty between Eritrea and Ethiopia demonstrates how a peace process is a mechanism which requires solid and coherent follow-up measures, but also ideally measures bringing the support, the participation of the populations concerned; measures which were definitely lacking here.

APRED, in collaboration with the Center for Global Nonkilling and the Diaspora, supports a peaceful, differentiated and constructive, human approach of the difficulties present in Eritrea. The right to peace, for the authorities as well as for the people, cannot be achieved without an equivalent respect for the rights to well-being and development of all those concerned.

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links

- [The Peace Agreement](#)
- [The Center for Global Nonkilling on Eritrea](#)
- [Rethinking the Ethio-Eritrean peace deal](#)
- [Eritrea and Ethiopia: A year of peace, a year of dashed hopes](#)

reports

A Volatile Atmosphere Amid First Credible Democratic Elections



Mural in Addis Abbaba (2020). Picture: Andrea Grossenbacher

Over the past two years, Ethiopia has experienced severe inter-ethnic conflict. Factors playing a key role in this conflict include a weakening central government, old ethnic rivalries ignited by political elites, high levels of hate speech towards different groups spread on social media, high youth unemployment rates and a general steep rise in crime. As a result of this conflict, Ethiopia was home to the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) for much of 2018 and 2019. Although there have been strong efforts to re-integrate these displaced persons and to tackle this issue at large, tensions between different groups remain very high.

One very serious outcome of this instability is an anarchic situation in many regions. A lack of central authority and lawlessness along with inter-ethnic competition has meant that many regions have their own form of (ethnic) armed groups. Also fuelled by a rampant armed trade, many regions have their own regional army or some form of 'special forces'. Some powerful regions such as Oromia and Amhara have standing armies of at least 50,000 strong. Within regional states, many zones are extremely unstable. For example, following a reported failed coup attempt in August 2019 which led to the killing of the Amhara regional state's leader and other key officials, much of the Amhara region has remained unstable

since. Much of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) and southern zones of Oromia, which have experienced some of the highest rates of inter-ethnic conflict and IDPs are a source of instability. Much of Western Oromia has been under complete network and internet shutdown since the middle of January with much anti-government sentiments and support for radical opposition groups being widespread in this region.

With these factors in mind, the Ethiopian government has also been accused by agencies such as Human Rights Watch of reverting back to authoritarian methods in silencing certain opposition parties and other dissidents. Practices such as cutting off phone or internet networks, threats, violence and torture, which have been used against dissidents in many cases of social unrest have been reported.

Given these circumstances, there seems to general speculative view that the coming elections will not really be free. However, the current regime has at large made more efforts in pathing the way for credible elections more than any previous ones. There are more than 150 registered political parties taking part in these elections. Regardless of the results, there are going to be winners and losers either way, and some form of social unrest is bound to occur as not all parties cannot be pleased. If the government is to oppress dissidents and abuse other forms of human rights, if it does not aim to restore some form of security throughout the country and fail to hold elections in the most free and fair way possible, then there will almost be no chances of peace in the near future for Ethiopia.

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reports

Interview with Paulos Asfaha - Abiy Ahmed's Popularity Declines as Elections Approach



Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (2020). Picture: Creative Commons

This text summarizes an interview with Paulos Asfaha, Assistant Professor at the Global Studies Institute, University of Geneva and Specialist on Contemporary Ethiopia.

Mistrusted and unknown on the international stage two years ago, Abiy Ahmed rapidly inspired enthusiasm and hope following the announcement of the progressive reforms he planned to introduce in Ethiopia. What is the situation today and what is the likelihood of him winning the elections?

Shortly after Abiy Ahmed came to office in 2018, a once State-controlled television program filmed an interview with former prisoners who were victims of torture – something inconceivable under the previous regime. This was only one democratic symbol of many that encouraged the national and international press to heap praise on the young Prime Minister, sometimes compared to Gorbachev or Deng Xiaoping.

However, his popularity has gradually declined, as in many respects the situation in Ethiopia has not improved. Its people are still worn down by socioeconomic problems: rampant inflation, very low pay, inadequate social protection, disastrous social services and a broken education system. Moreover, the security situation is threatening the country's prosperity. For all that, interethnic violence is mainly verbal, with social networks used as the conduit for expressing hate, so the country is fortunately still a long way from the type of conflict that involves ethnic cleansing, genocide or pogroms. This violence is often linked in error to Abiy Ahmed's rise to power. In reality, Ethiopia's political ethnicization is not recent, but dates back more than 50 years.

On top of that, Abiy Ahmed is accused of introducing reforms in an authoritarian way, and of building a cult of personality around himself. He is also accused of silencing some of his opponents. There was indeed a change in his political strategy following an attack three months after he was elected. A series of arrests for no good reason followed and the press once again felt threatened. Although the regime is on the path of democratization, it remains authoritarian, with the security forces and political elite at the heart of this

despotic system.

Nonetheless, all the signals are that the elections will be run democratically. The electoral board is independent of the State and has been placed in the hands of opposition members based in Europe and the United States. This is unprecedented in Ethiopia, hence the immense expectations on the part of the population. The government's recent attempt to postpone the elections until August proved that this political concern was well founded. Anti-establishment figures immediately accused the government of wanting to hold the election during the rainy season to stop people from going to vote. Like the choice of election date, the results of these elections will be closely watched. If they look suspiciously high, a resurgence of violence can be expected.

[Interview with](#)

Paulos Asfaha

Assistant Professor at the Global Studies Institute from the University of Geneva

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in depth

Film "Ethiopia: persisting with peace" - Conciliation Resources

This film was produced by Conciliation Resources. It deals with the ongoing peace process between the Ogaden National Liberation Front and the Government of Ethiopia. It explains how more than 20 years of fighting came to an end and how one armed group went from war to peace.

Emily Deeming

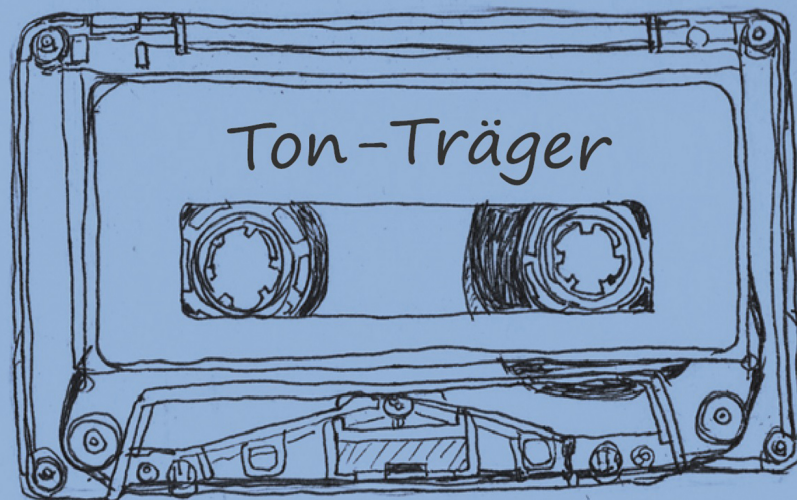
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[links](#)

- [Article "Persisting with Peace in the Somali Regional State"](#)

news

The KOFF podcast series continues!



The next episode “Climate and Peace: Opportunities for entry into climate-relevant peacebuilding” will soon be released on our SoundCloud page!

It will focus on the relationship between climate and peace and the importance of climate justice. How climate justice is to be understood and why peace and environmental protection are so essential to each other are questions that this episode seeks to answer. Although climate can become an obstacle to peace, it also opens the door for new cooperation opportunities between the most diverse actors. There are many ways of linking natural resources, renewable energies or climate change with peacebuilding, and both UNEP and Fastenopfer support projects that do so. In addition to challenges, this podcast also sheds light on completely new approaches, focusing on participatory peacebuilding.

Jonas Hinck of KOFF will talk to Silja Halle of UNEP, the United Nations Environment Programme, and Stefan Salzmann of Fastenopfer about the tension between climate, peace and social justice and how these issues arise in practice. The podcast will be facilitated by Hannah-Milena Elias. Our previous episode on Women, Peace & Security is still available [here](#).

links

- [KOFF podcast series](#)

calendar

Events & News

KOFF NEWS

Upcoming events organised by KOFF and its member organizations can be found on our [KOFF NEWS WEBPAGE](#).

The Rotary Foundation is now accepting applications for the fully-funded 2021 Rotary Peace Fellowship. Up to 130 peace and development leaders are selected globally every year to earn either a master's degree or a professional development certificate in peace and conflict studies at one of seven Rotary Peace Centers at leading universities around the world. Application deadline 31 May. [Learn more](#)



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and apply by 30 June 2020!

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KOFF is a dialogue and exchange platform facilitated by swisspeace. It is jointly supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the following Swiss NGOs which are members of the platform:

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