

Eritrean Soldiers Leaving Major Towns in Northern Ethiopia - Witnesses

By [Reuters](#)

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FILE PHOTO: Field Marshal of the Ethiopian National Defence Force and Chief of General Staff of Ethiopia Birhanu Jula, and Tadesse Werede Tesfay, the Commander-in-Chief of the Tigray forces, sign the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement between the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan forces, laying out the roadmap for implementation of a peace deal, in Nairobi, Kenya November 12, 2022. REUTERS/Thomas Mukoya/File PhotoREUTERS

By Dawit Endeshaw

ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) -Eritrean soldiers, who fought in support of Ethiopia's federal government during its two-year civil war in the northern Tigray region, are pulling out of two major towns and headed toward the border, witnesses and an Ethiopian official told Reuters.

The withdrawals from Shire and Axum follow a Nov. 2 ceasefire signed by Ethiopia's government and Tigray regional forces that requires the removal of foreign troops from Tigray.

Eritrea, however, was not a party to the deal, and its troops' ongoing presence in major Tigrayan population centres has raised questions about the durability of the accord.

It was not immediately clear if the Eritrean troops were leaving Tigray entirely or just pulling back from certain towns.

Eritrea's Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel told Reuters he could neither confirm nor deny the information, while an Ethiopian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed Eritrean troops were withdrawing from Axum and Shire.

Getachew Reda, a spokesperson for the Tigrayan forces, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Three aid workers in Axum and Shire said they saw several trucks and dozens of cars packed with Eritrean soldiers on Thursday leaving toward the border town of Sheraro. One of the aid workers said the soldiers were waving goodbye.

One of the aid workers said all of the Eritrean soldiers had left Shire, but another said that a significant number had remained behind. It was not immediately clear what explained the discrepancy.

Tigray residents have accused the Eritrean soldiers of continuing to loot and arrest and kill civilians after the ceasefire.

Eritrean authorities have not directly responded to the allegations.

During the war, Eritrean troops were accused by residents and human rights groups of various abuses, including the killing of hundreds of civilians in Axum during a 24-hour period in November 2020. Eritrea rejected the accusations.

Eritrea considers the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which leads Tigrayan forces, its enemy. Eritrea and Ethiopia fought a border war between 1998 and 2000, when the TPLF dominated the federal government.

After a slow start, Ethiopia's government and Tigrayan authorities have taken several steps in the past week to implement the peace deal.

On Thursday, representatives from both sides met in Tigray's capital Mekelle to set up a monitoring team to assess enforcement of the agreement.

Federal police also entered Mekelle in accordance with the truce, state-owned Ethiopian Airlines resumed flights and Ethio Telecom reconnected its services to the capital and 27 other towns.

(Reporting by Dawit Endeshaw; Editing by Aaron Ross and Tomasz Janowski)

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