

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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In a development that will increase political and security tensions in the Tigray Region, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) withdraws the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) official federal recognition as a political party. Further complicating the situation, the former Tigray Interim Administration leader, Getachew Reda, reveals plans to launch a new political party called the Tigray Liberal Democratic Party (TLDP). Federal government secures investment agreements for the minerals and energy sectors totalling more than \$1.7 billion. Police raid an Addis Ababa-based newspaper, highlighting Ethiopia's worsening press freedom environment, which is marked by the intimidation and repression of independent media. Suspected Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) members attack and kill civilians in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

Electoral authority withdraws recognition for the TPLF

The **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)** announced on 14 May that it had stripped the **Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)** of its official federal recognition as a political party following a year-long dispute between the NEBE and the TPLF over TPLF's refusal to reregister as a political party and contention around its elective conference.¹ The NEBE refused to recognise the TPLF's disputed 14th party congress, which was held in **Mekelle (Tigray Region)** on 13 August.² This conference resulted in the re-election of **Debretsion Gebremichael** as TPLF chairperson and sidelined the faction backing former **Tigray Interim Administration** president **Getachew Reda**.

The TPLF has refused to organise a second assembly and has also rejected the NEBE's insistence that it must register as a new party in accordance with Ethiopia's **Party Registration and Ethics Reform Act**.³ NEBE claims that the TPLF's actions ahead of and during the **2020-2022 Tigray War** meant that the party was removed as a political party in Ethiopia and that it needs to hold a full party assembly and re-register as a political party to contest elections. The TPLF, for its part, has refused this on symbolic grounds and demanded that NEBE restore its pre-war legal standing.

On 13 February, the NEBE suspended the TPLF for three months and ordered it to comply with its requirements and regulations. The TPLF has continued to refuse to comply, which led NEBE to withdraw the party's recognition when the suspension ended. This withdrawal will prohibit the party from participating in Ethiopia's upcoming 2026 national general election.

This development poses the most significant threat to peace in Tigray since the end of the war in November 2022. Indicative of this, the TPLF issued a statement on 16 May warning that the NEBE's actions have endangered the **Pretoria Peace Accords**, which ended the conflict.⁴ The party further accused the government of unspecified "*provocations*" and called on the **African Union (AU)** to intervene and mediate with the Ethiopian government to reverse this action.⁵ Notably, the TPLF has also been accused of undermining the peace accords by its refusal to comply with the NEBE's mandates.

¹ The Reporter, 14 May 2025

² Borkena, 12 Aug 2024

³ Addis Standard, 10 Aug 2024

⁴ BBC, 16 May 2025

⁵ BBC, 16 May 2025

The TPLF's efforts to portray itself as the 'victim' in this scenario are undermined by the party's refusal to adhere to any of the NEBE's requests. However, the party is unlikely to be able to hold an uncontentious conference given its deep internal factional divides.

Regardless, Debretsion's faction is rapidly consolidating control over the TPLF, and the party remains the dominant political force in Tigray and is widely expected to win control of the region in next year's election. Excluding the party from the 2026 election will risk destabilising Tigray as the TPLF will not surrender power and may be willing to back up their political power with armed force. It should be noted that the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme has progressed very slowly since the end of the war, and the TPLF still retains thousands of armed fighters.⁶

Further complicating the situation, it was revealed on 29 April that Getachew is forming a new party - the **Tigray Liberal Democratic Party (TLDP)** - to challenge the TPLF's political dominance in Tigray.⁷ This new formation will provide a new political home for Getachew's faction within the TPLF and could potentially emerge as the second most influential party in Tigray. If the TPLF is prevented from contesting the 2026 general election, the TLDP could win control of the Tigray region.

Given Debretsion's ongoing drive to purge the TPLF of Getachew's supporters, it is likely that the TLDP could witness a significant surge in membership when it is officially launched later this year. This party is expected to draw its largest numbers of support in southern Tigray, where Getachew remains popular.⁸

However, there will be significant political tensions between the TPLF and the TLDP, which could potentially lead to increased political violence in Tigray in the coming months. Ethiopia is ill-equipped to handle a renewed conflict in Tigray, especially given the deteriorating security situation and conflict in the **Amhara Region**.

Ethiopia reaches major minerals and energy agreements

The finance ministry confirmed on 13 May that the federal government has secured investment agreements in Ethiopia's minerals and energy sectors totalling more than \$1.7 billion.⁹ Most of these agreements are with **Chinese** firms, among which is a \$500m minerals exploration and processing agreement with China's **Hua Ye Mining Processing Company**.¹⁰ This will include the development of a special economic zone (SEZ) focused on mineral development. Ethiopia also signed a \$600m agreement with **Sequoia Mining & Processing Plc** to develop coal mining projects and a \$360m agreement with **Hainan Drinda New Energy Technology** to construct a solar cell manufacturing plant. These agreements were reached during a two-day conference in **Addis Ababa** between Ethiopia and Chinese investors.

Ethiopia is in dire need of increased foreign direct investment (FDI) to help drive economic growth and bring much-needed foreign exchange into the country. This is particularly significant given that Ethiopia floated the birr in July last year. As such, the currency is reliant on foreign exchange and incoming investment and export revenue to maintain its value. These projects should also create numerous jobs in the country over the long term. In the short-to-medium term, these investment agreements will be held up as a vote of confidence by the Ethiopian government as it engages with its international financial partners.

Ethiopia's minerals and energy sector remains underdeveloped and offers lucrative opportunities. However, many of the country's resource-rich areas are located in Ethiopia's insecure rural areas, where nationalist militant groups are known to operate. As such, the country's ongoing security challenges pose a threat to this new investment and future investment in these key sectors.

⁶ The Reporter, 1 Feb 2025

⁷ BBC Amharic, 29 Apr 2025

⁸ Borkena, 11 May 2025

⁹ Bloomberg 14 May 2025

¹⁰ Mining Mx, 14 May 2025

Officials raid local newspaper

Amid Ethiopia's deteriorating political and security environment, the government has intensified its efforts to suppress the media in the country. Indicative of this, on 17 April, Ethiopian police raided the offices of the privately-owned **Addis Standard** newspaper in Addis Ababa and arrested three managers, including the newsroom manager.¹¹ This prompted the international media freedom organisation, the **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**, to release a statement condemning this raid.

This is the latest in a series of incidents over the past five years marking the federal government's growing antipathy to the free press. The local nongovernmental organisation (NGO), **Ethiopia Press Freedom Defenders**, estimates that at least 200 journalists have been arrested since 2019 while scores of others have been subjected to harassment and intimidation.¹²

Ethiopia's growing hostility towards the press has been reflected in the **Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF)** (reporters without borders) annual **World Press Freedom Index**, released on 3 May. In the latest index, Ethiopia ranked 145th out of 180 countries, down from Ethiopia's 141st ranking in the 2024 index and a significant 46 places lower than the country's 2020 ranking of 99th.¹³ The fundamental drivers of this deterioration in press freedom have been increased government oppression and threats related to Ethiopia's wider security concerns - journalists were repeatedly targeted during the Tigray War and remain endangered by Ethiopia's other ongoing conflicts and insurgencies, such as those in the Amhara and Oromia regions.

Militant attack in Benishangul-Gumuz region

Illustrative of Ethiopia's deteriorating security environment, at least 16 people were killed and 14 others injured in a militant attack in the **Kamashi** zone of the **Benishangul-Gumuz Region** on 21 May.¹⁴ The **Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)** is suspected to have orchestrated the attack. The OLA is an Oromo nationalist militant group that is fighting for greater autonomy or even independence for Oromia.

The motivation for this attack, which almost exclusively targeted civilians, remains unclear but the OLA has targeted civilians in the past. These previous attacks have been motivated by the group's efforts to destabilise the federal government, kidnap residents, and have even been fuelled by ethnic resentment. However, this attack does appear to confirm that the OLA remains active in Benishangul-Gumuz, and that the government has failed to confine the group to the mountainous areas of Oromia.

The OLA has not received significant levels of attention in recent months as the federal government and local media are preoccupied by the more significant threats posed by the TPLF in Tigray and the various **Fano** nationalist militia groups in Amhara. However, the OLA remains a serious security concern, especially given its willingness to both kidnap and kill civilians. The OLA's continued insurgency is also symbolically noteworthy as prime minister **Abiy Ahmed** (2018-present), an ethnic Oromo, was brought to power in 2018, in part, out of a desire to calm Oromo nationalist sentiment. It is clear that Abiy's ascension and his subsequent overtures to Oromo nationalist groups have failed to convince the OLA to end its insurgency.

Planner

2026 (**Ethiopia**) general election;

Chronology

20 May 2025, **Beijing (China)** *Addis Standard*. The Chinese government dispatches an army medical team to **Ethiopia** on a year-long assistance mission;

¹¹ CPJ, 22 Apr 2025

¹² The Guardian, 5 May 2025

¹³ RSF, 1 May 2025

¹⁴ Borkena, 22 May 2025

19 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Ethiopia's health sector unions embark on an indefinite countrywide strike after negotiations with the government failed;

19 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. Ethiopia and **Japan** reach an agreement under which Japan will provide \$17.4m worth of support towards infectious disease control projects in Ethiopia;

18 May 2025 **Giligil Beles (Ethiopia)** *Borkena*. At least 19 people are killed in a traffic accident in Giligil Beles (**Benishangul Gumuz Region**);

18 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Ethiopian Herald*. The **China Communications Construction Company (CCCC)** launches the first phase of the **Addis Tomorrow Special Economic Zone** mixed-use urban development;

17 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. **National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE)** (central bank) governor **Mamo Mihretu** indicates that foreign banks will soon be permitted to operate in Ethiopia's financial sector;

17 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP)**, **Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP)**, **Enat Party**, and the **Amhara Ghionians Movement (AGM)** opposition parties release a joint statement expressing concern about the apparent lack of preparations ahead of next year's general election;

14 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. Foreign minister **Gedion Timothewos** meets with his **Djiboutian** counterpart, **Abdoulkader Houssein Omar**, in Addis Ababa to discuss enhancing bilateral relations;

14 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. The **African Union (AU) African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)** begins hearings into alleged human rights violations by Ethiopia during the **2020-2022 Tigray War**;

14 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. The **Ethiopian Securities Exchange** launches the **Ethiopia Money Market Capacity Building Project** in partnership with the **International Finance Corporation (IFC)** to enhance Ethiopia's money market infrastructure;

10 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. Mines ministry release a report revealing that the **National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE)** (central bank) received over 26 tonnes of gold in the first nine months of the financial year, largely due to artisanal miners in the **Tigray Region**;

8 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Addis Standard*. Trade and regional integration ministry increases fuel prices to ETB 122.53 (\$0.91) per litre of petrol and ETB 116.49 (\$0.86) per litre of diesel and kerosene;

8 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *AfDB*. The **African Development Bank (AfDB)** and Ethiopia's **Dashen Bank** sign a \$40m trade finance facility agreement to support Ethiopia's import and export operators;

5 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *ENA*. Foreign minister **Gedion Timothewos** meets with **Israeli** foreign minister **Gideon Sa'ar**, during which they pledge to enhance bilateral relations;

3 May 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *The Reporter*. Peace minister **Mohamed Idris** accuses unnamed organisations of inflating the reported numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ethiopia;

28 April 2025 **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)** *Reuters*. State finance minister **Eyob Tekalign** claims that the government expects to soon reach a preliminary agreement with the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** on the latest review of the **Extended Credit Facility (ECF)** arrangement.

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