News

Food aid is prepped for distribution near Mekele in Ethiopia's Tigray region Jan. 28, 2021. Ami

Food aid is prepped for distribution near Mekele in Ethiopia's Tigray region Jan. 28, 2021. Amid increased international calls for unrestricted access, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali announced Feb. 24 that 135 personnel from bilateral and multilateral organizations had been cleared to travel and undertake aid work in the region. (CNS photo/Brian Gleeson, CRS)

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The Catholic church in Ethiopia says its operations in the northern state of Tigray have been severely affected, as the war between regional and federal forces disrupts money flow, banking services, fuel and telecommunication.

An official at the bishops' social communication department clarified that an earlier statement suggesting the suspension of emergency interventions in the region was misleading.

"The earlier statement was wrongly prepared," Habtamu Abrdew, social communications and public relations adviser at the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat, told Catholic News Service.

Abrdew said Father Gabriel Woldehanna, deputy general secretary of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ethiopia, had told a delegation of visiting bishops that as a consequence, the church could not communicate with offices and the community in the Eparchy of Adigrat.

"The church is trying hard to use various possible alternatives like the U.N. logistic clusters to send food items and use the U.N. flights to send cash to Adigrat," Father Woldehanna told the delegation from the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa.

Catholic agencies have been some of the biggest movers of aid in the region, where fighting started in November.

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Ethiopian Prime Minister Aby Ahmed Ali launched an attack on the Tigray People's Liberation Front — former rulers of the semi-autonomous region — accusing them of seizing the national army base in Mekele, the regional capital. Fighting spread to the neighboring states.

The United Nations said more than 2 million people have been displaced.
Some aid officials fear famine as humanitarian agency trucks loaded with food failed to reach the people due to fighting.

With the conflict and tensions escalating, the bishops in AMECEA had dispatched a delegation to deliver a message of solidarity to Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, president of the Ethiopian bishops' conference. The East African bishops are concerned that the conflict will affect countries in the region.

At same time, Cardinal Souraphiel wants the AMECEA bishops to play a leading role in the country's peace building, reconciliation and post-disaster trauma healing. He urged the bishops to convince their respective heads of states to exert a constructive influence on Ethiopia.