

## **FAA Background Information Regarding U.S. Civil Aviation – Addis Ababa Flight Information Region**

The ongoing conflict between opposition groups and military forces poses potential risks to U.S. civil aviation in the Addis Ababa Flight Information Region (FIR) (HAAA), particularly for aircraft on the ground and aircraft operating at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight. For this reason, on 17 NOV 2021, the FAA published Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) KICZ A0035/21, advising U.S. civil aviation to exercise caution when operating into, out of, within, or through the Addis Ababa FIR (HAAA) at altitudes below Flight Level (FL) 290.

Conflict activity in Ethiopia began in November 2020, when the opposition Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), located in the northern Tigray Region along Ethiopia's border with Eritrea, claimed autonomy from the Ethiopian central government over political differences. The Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) conducted an offensive to attempt to regain territorial control of the Tigray Region, which included airstrikes against strategic targets in Tigray Defense Forces-held areas in the north and the closure of airspace over the conflict area in the Tigray Region. In late July 2021, the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) retook Mekele, the capital of the Tigray Region, and initiated a counteroffensive, capturing other urban centers in adjacent regions of Ethiopia. Since October 2021, the area affected by fighting has expanded to the south and east out of the Tigray Region, as the TDF and other TDF-aligned opposition elements announced an intent to threaten the central government in Addis Ababa, the national capital. The TDF has formed alliances with other opposition groups, including the militant Oromo Liberation Front-Shane (OLA-S) group, expanding the opposition forces' reach and control in the Amhara Region, north of the capital.

Clashes between the TDF and its aligned opposition elements and the ENDF have affected flight operations at various locations in northern Ethiopia. On 12 November 2021, the TDF claimed its forces located near Mile, in the northwest Afar Region of Ethiopia, had shot down an ENDF attack helicopter with an anti-aircraft weapon system. Although the TDF counteroffensive and movements of aligned opposition elements have been mostly limited to ground operations, these clashes, and the alleged 12 November helicopter shoot down, extend the area of potential risk for U.S. civil aviation beyond the geographic scope of the flight restriction Ethiopia has established for flights below FL 290 in the Tigray Region. Refer to the relevant Ethiopian Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) supplement for more specific information. Flight operations have been suspended at airports in the Tigray Region and in contested areas outside the Tigray Region. There are no reports of disruptions at Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport (ICAO: HAAB).

Although there has been no indication of an intent to threaten civil aviation, U.S. civil aviation operating in or near contested areas in the Addis Ababa FIR (HAAA) at altitudes below FL 290 could be exposed, directly or indirectly, to tactical air operations, ground weapons fire, and/or surface-to-air fire. The TDF likely possess a variety of anti-aircraft capable weapons, including rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), anti-tank weapons, low-caliber anti-aircraft artillery, and man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS). MANPADS may be capable of reaching up to 25,000 feet above ground level. Additionally, civil aviation operations during low altitude phases of flight could also be affected by unmanned aircraft system (UAS) operations in contested areas and by any potential counter-UAS

activity. Lastly, former ENDF SA-3 and SA-2 tactical surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites located in the Tigray Region, which are now under TDF control, remain a potential risk to civil aviation operating in the airspace over the Tigray Region within which Ethiopia has restricted flight operations.

The security situation remains fluid due to ongoing clashes. The TDF and aligned opposition elements may continue to advance, further expanding the area in which military operations (including ENDF air strikes and TDF defensive anti-aircraft weapons fire) could occur. If the TDF succeed in approaching and/or encircling Addis Ababa, the risk to civil aircraft operations at low altitudes, including during the arrival and departure phases of flight, and for aircraft on the ground at Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport (ICAO: HAAB) could increase. Although there are no indications that either the ENDF or the TDF intend to attack U.S. interests or threaten civil aviation operations, there is potential risk to civil aviation due to misidentification and/or miscalculation, particularly for aircraft operating below FL 290 in or near contested areas. The FAA continues to monitor the evolving security situation for any changes in the risk to U.S. civil aviation operations in the Addis Ababa Flight Information Region (FIR) (HAAA).

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