

Memorandum

On

The war on Tigray: Setting the record
straight



3 September 2021.

Mekelle

Introduction

The much-celebrated election of Mr. Abiy Ahmed, by the EPRDF in 2018, to lead a political transition was from the start pregnant with seeds of failure. Rather than initiating a constitutional and an all-inclusive process, Dr. Abiy chose to

indulge in a personal power consolidation and started to reorganize the country's political system and trajectory in a way that suits his political ambitions.

He abolished the party in power that elected him for a transitional period and replaced it by his own makeshift party. Furthermore, he imprisoned opposition party leaders and many prominent personalities who were considered a threat to his political ambitions, and some were mysteriously assassinated.

Dr. Abiy considered the TPLF, the most principled and organized member in the EPRDF coalition, as the major threat to his political project of establishing a one man rule autocratic system. For this reason, the TPLF was the main target of blackmailing, attacks and isolation and was eventually forced to not join the new and hastily organized party i.e., the Prosperity Party. It is, therefore, part of a process of establishing a one-man rule on the part of Mr. Abiy that the TPLF and the Tigray people became the objects of attack and isolation.

Mr. Abiy cleansed all members of the Federal Government Cabinet representing Tigray and the majority of Tigrayans who served in the bureaucracy. He, unwarrantedly, charged Tigrayan political and military leaders and systematically criminalized them and other leaders of political opposition groups and government officials. Mr. Abiy and government affiliated media undertook extensive and systematic media campaign, not to mention the hate speeches, to vilify Tigray, Tigrayans and its political leaders, cut off the road connecting Tigray with the rest of the country through the Amhara region, started to conspire with Eritrea to encircle, isolate and eventually wage war on Tigray.

Mr. Abiy, under the pretext of the COVID 19 pandemic, postponed the constitutionally set timeline for the national election until such time when there was no serious challenge by imprisoning prominent opposition political leaders and their supporters and until the National Regional State of Tigray was weakened by his conspiratorial machinations.

Tigray opposed his unconstitutional decision and held its regional elections as per the provisions of the national and regional constitutions. The federal government penalized Tigray for holding regional elections by not only refusing to release Tigray's annual budget but also by halting all forms of domestic and international humanitarian and developmental assistance. The government's unorthodox response to Tigray's decision to elect its leaders through a

democratic process culminated in the genocidal war declared by the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments in November 2020. It was a war meant to punish the Tigray people for voting but also to abort what otherwise could be a 'bad' precedent for the rest of Ethiopia.

The genocidal war

The war has been an act of treason on the part of Abiy's government because it invited foreign governments to attack its own people and used mercenary foreign forces to suppress a legitimate domestic political and constitutional right. In this war, Eritrean forces have violated and still do Ethiopia's territorial integrity at Mr. Abiy's invitation, which renders the Ethiopian government's argument about sovereignty irrelevant. Moreover, forces from the Amhara region are in control of Western Tigray violating the Ethiopian constitution.

The war is also genocidal. The Ethiopian, Eritrean and Amhara forces, as is widely reported and documented, are engaged in war crimes and crimes against humanity. They have collectively committed crimes at a scale rarely seen in recent history. Siege, starvation, sexual violence and looting of public and private property have been used as instrument of war since the war broke out. Mass displacement and large-scale civilian massacres have characterized this war. Moreover, intentional destruction and looting of heritage sites and museums as well as desecration of worshiping places have been widely perpetrated by these force as they strive to efface the identity and undermine the pride of the people of Tigray.

Cease-fire, inclusive dialogue and the way forward

The government of Tigray has from the start, long before the war on Tigray was declared, has called for the resolution of all political and constitutional impasses through dialogue. In this regard, it has also repeatedly appealed to and warned the international community on the likelihood that the political crisis could potentially degenerate into a threat to the country's unity and peace and security of the Horn of Africa.

The government of Mr. Abiy, however, closed all avenues for political settlement on unwarranted grounds by arguing that the federal government and the Tigray government were not co-equals and that there was no moral equivalence between the two parties to sit at a negotiation table. For that reason, there was

no interest nor a meaningful attempt to resolve the crisis through dialogue on Mr. Abiy's part.

After the war was launched, Mr. Abiy's government trivialized the crisis by declaring that the genocidal war was a "law enforcement operation" to apprehend few criminals. This glib but intentional characterization of a deep and complex political crisis and equating it to a simple legal matter made any political dialogue impossible. Moreover, it made any negotiated political solution unthinkable when the Ethiopian parliament designated the TPLF as a 'terrorist Organization' exacerbating the already multifaceted political crisis.

On the part of the Tigray government, we have called for a negotiated ceasefire on more than one occasion by outlining meaningful and workable conditions that take the facts on the ground into consideration. The government of Tigray firmly believes that only a negotiated ceasefire can lead to a lasting solution to the multifaceted crisis even as its forces continue to advance to strategic positions in the Afar and Amhara regions. We are still calling on peace loving countries, institutions and the broader international community to pressure Mr. Abiy's government to heed our call.

"The unilateral ceasefire"

After suffering a heavy military defeat at the hands of the Tigray forces, Mr. Abiy's forces retreated from Mekelle and declared a unilateral cease fire. This, however, did not emanate from the Ethiopian government's readiness to reach a negotiated settlement nor was it driven by its concern for the wellbeing of Tigray farmers as claimed by Mr. Abiy. It was simply because it was decimated militarily and needed time to reorganize itself for future counter offensive and return to Tigray to perpetuate further atrocities. Accordingly, today and despite the so-called unilateral ceasefire, the entire Western Tigray remains under the control of Eritrean, Amhara and Ethiopian forces while Mr. Abiy has publicly called on all able civilian Ethiopians to mobilize and join the Ethiopian army and other regional forces. Recently, the federal government affiliated medias are busy agitating the people to go against the 'enemy' with any available killing material. Machetes are leisurely distributed in Amhara region, a reminiscent of the 1994 Rwanda genocide.

Thus, after declaring the "unilateral ceasefire", what we have witnessed of the behavior of the Ethiopian government, does not indicate a desire to resolve the crisis peacefully. Instead, its actions reveal that the so-called unilateral ceasefire was simply a coverup for misleading the Ethiopian people and the international community into believing that it was not militarily defeated while also buying time to prepare for the reinvasion of Tigray. Furthermore, it aimed at triggering international pressure on Tigray to reciprocate the "unilateral ceasefire" it declared as it prepares for its counter offensive. It must, however, be emphasized that despite its much talked about declarations, at no time has the government stopped fighting. In the aftermath of its ouster from Tigray, it mobilized and deployed all its commands / North, South, East and North Easter commands/ along the Tigray border and was preparing to launch counter offensive.

The siege and humanitarian crisis

The government of Tigray requested, as a matter of confidence building measures and based on international humanitarian principles, for the lifting of the siege imposed on the Tigray people before any agreement on ceasefire and dialogue could take place.

The blockade is a complete and total siege encompassing humanitarian, financial, communication, transport and economic blockade. The government has made it impossible for the international community to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to those most in need. Most of the donor agencies and organizations have announced that their stock is completely depleted and the lives of the more than 6.8 million aid recipients is in danger.

There are currently up to 6.8 million people in need of emergency assistance in Tigray out of which 2.2 million are Internally displaced people; mainly victims of ethnic cleansing in western Tigray. The federal government from the start focused on obstructing delivery of humanitarian aid and has played almost no role in the provision of humanitarian aid. The largest donor, USAID, covers 66% and WFP provides 25% of the total amount of humanitarian aid and the remaining 9% is covered by other members of the humanitarian community.

The humanitarian community requires hundred trucks load of humanitarian aid daily to feed the 6.8 people in need. In the last two months three hundred

twenty trucks out of the required six thousand trucks are allowed into Tigray by the federal government. It amounts to 5% of the total amount humanitarian aid required. Since 20 August 2021, the government has further tightened the siege and no truck carrying humanitarian aid has been allowed into Tigray.

Currently, nearly a million people are on the verge of famine and the number is expected to quadruple in the coming weeks. The absence of telephone services has also made it impossible for aid workers and government to collect timely information on the deteriorating humanitarian situation on the ground. It has also made the job of local and international media unimaginably difficult to report the evolving humanitarian condition in Tigray.

The impact of the siege on emergency food aid and the activity of the humanitarian community is simply a tip of the humanitarian crisis engendered by the blockade. The siege coupled with the wanton destruction and robbery of public and private property of the eight months long genocidal war will have a long-term debilitating impact on Tigray's future.

It is, therefore, in this context that the presence of our forces in the Afar and Amhara regions should be viewed. Our forces were left with no option but to break the suffocating siege before it strangled the people of Tigray to death. We believe that the federal government could have prevented the Ethiopian people from further bloodshed by simply lifting the blockade and then engaging in a dialogue. The Tigray government has also legitimate security concerns justifying the presence of its forces out of Tigray given the federal government's declaration of a general mobilization and its unabated amassing of federal and regional troops as it prepares for another round of genocidal war on Tigray.

As our forces moved to the Afar and Amhara regions, utmost attention is given to the protection of civilians. It is in this spirit that all local civilian administrations are left intact and public services and institutions are protected by our forces. Moreover, consistent with our forces' track record and in accordance with international law, including the Geneva convention, thousands of POWs are treated humanely. These POWs have been accessible to all who would like to visit and assess their current situation.

This being the case, the government of Dr. Abiy Ahmed is engaged in fabricating countless allegations and lies against our forces. The government of Tigray would like to reiterate its long-standing position that any allegations of human rights abuse should be investigated by an independent international body and those responsible should face the full force of domestic and international justice and be held accountable.

Ethiopia at crossroads

The government of Tigray is as always ready to play a positive and constructive role in any international effort to resolve the overwhelming crisis that is currently engulfing the country. In this regard, we call upon the international community to consider the following actions and put the required pressure on Mr. Abiy's government to refrain from continuing its belligerent policy:

- We call for the immediate and unconditional lifting of the siege on Tigray and demand for unfettered access for all humanitarian agencies to Tigray,
- We call for an immediate, unconditional and verified withdrawal of Eritrean army and all forces from Amhara region including militia and vigilantes from Tigray to their prewar positions in order to return to status quo ante,
- We call for an internationally sponsored and all-inclusive negotiation for cessation of hostility and ceasefire.


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