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TIGRAY EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

BRIEFING NO. 20

FEBRUARY 04, 2022

BRINGING TIGRAY CLOSER TO THE WORLD

1. A CHRONICLE OF GENOCIDE FORETOLD

1.1. Suffering Without an End in Sight

It has been about 15 months since the commencement of the genocidal war on Tigray. During this period, the Ethiopian, and Eritrean militaries as well as forces belonging to expansionist Amhara elites have committed unimaginable atrocities against the people of Tigray. These genocidal forces set out to decimate Tigray's socioeconomic institutions, plunder private and public wealth, and force the people of Tigray into subjugation and/or out of existence, succeeding in all but the last.

At the end of June, these marauding forces were chased out of most parts of Tigray following a series of historic battlefield defeats. In the areas they still occupy—Western Tigray and parts of North-Western and Eastern Tigray—these genocidal forces continue to commit unconscionable brutalities against Tigrayans. Furthermore, rather than accept the fact that the people of Tigray had rejected its violent occupation, as evidenced by their overwhelming resistance to its futile attempt to subjugate them, the criminal Abiy regime went on to impose an inhumane blockade on Tigray, aggressively obstructing humanitarian aid, among other cruel things.

Humanitarian agencies estimate that about 100 trucks carrying food, non-food items and fuel are required to meet the needs of over 5 million people. However, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), only less than 10 percent of the required supplies have entered Tigray since July. From July through February 3, about 18,700 trucks should have arrived in Tigray. However, only 1338 trucks have entered Tigray. Put differently, on average, only 7 trucks have trickled into Tigray daily since the beginning of the blockade—a shocking display of cruelty on the part of the criminal Abiy regime. Moreover, since mid-December, no aid trucks have entered Tigray.

1.2. Hunger as an Instrument of War

The international community has explicitly accused the Abiy regime of imposing a "de facto humanitarian blockade." Having imposed a deadly chokehold on the people of Tigray, the genocidal regime is now busy manufacturing fictitious narratives to evade accountability for engineering the siege starvation of Tigrayans—a heinous crime under international law.

At present, the humanitarian situation in Tigray is indescribably bleak. Most aid agencies have run out of food stock. There is no therapeutic nutrition in Tigray for treating children suffering from acute severe malnutrition (SAM). As of January 25, humanitarian partners

have only around 1000 MT of food commodities, out of which there is enough stock to feed around 20,000 people "with a complete three-commodity common food basket for one round."

Since mid-October, 537,000 Tigrayans have been assisted. However, at least 887,000 people need to be assisted on average per week so as to reach the over 5 million people in dire need of emergency assistance within a five-week distribution cycle. In contrast, over the same period, 3.2 million people in Amhara have been reached. According to the UN, 523,000 people in Amhara were reached with food assistance over the week that OCHA's most recent report covered (January 18-24).

Due to the depletion of food stock, the paucity of operational cash and fuel, humanitarian partners are voicing concern over having to suspend operations by the end of February.

1.3. Harrowing Statistics

A recent report based on data collected by non-governmental organizations in collaboration with the regional health bureau captures the unfolding humaniatrian tragedy in Tigray. The report established that 5421 people perished as a result of the lack of medicines and food. These figures, while alarming in their own right, underestimate the true magnitude of the crisis. To begin with, the report was based on data collected from only 40 percent of subdistricts over a limited timeframe. Second, there are a number of hard-to-reach areas where people are dying out of sight, as the genocidal siege has brought routine governmental operations to a grinding halt.

The siege has made it virtually impossible for health professionals to travel to remote areas and assess conditions on the ground, given the severe shortage of fuel continues to hamper ground transortation. Total communications blackout also means that health professionals cannot send and receive updates in a timely manner. At any rate, since the report covered a short period of time, extrapolating these figures to a longer timeframe is bound to indicate staggering fatality figures.

Out of the more than 5.2 million people in Tigray that need some form of humanitarian assistance, 3.9 million need health assistance. The deliberate obstruction of humanitarian assistance has created a dire situation due to an acute shortage of medical equipment, supplies, medicines and vaccines, resulting in a large number of easily preventable deaths. According to a report by the Tigray branch of the Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Supply Agency and partners, all immunization antigens, health program medicines for TB/HIV, Malaria, family planning supplies and other essential health commodities have been out of stock for the past 6 motnhs.

Although some much-needed medical supplies have arrived in Mekelle over the past week or so via the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) on behalf of the Red Cross, the quantity brought in is so vanishingly small that it won't make a dent in Tigray's catastrophic medical emergency. Had the regime been genuinely committed to easing

the pain of the people of Tigray, it would of ocurse have allowed aid agencies to operate large cargo flights. But since the regime views virtually every decision through the prisim of image management, and not actual provision of aid, it continues to hamper humanitarian operations while still claiming credit for the limited aid trickling into Tigray.

1.4. Devastating Impact on Children

Due to the persistent obstruction of humanitarian aid, partners have run out of food stock. Therapeutic nutrition for malnourished children and pregnant and nursing women have been depleted. Consequently, the nutrition landscape in Tigray is extremely bleak. Out of the 4300 children screened for malnutrition, 1000 (23.7 percent) were identified with a proxy global acute malnutrition (GAM), which is alarmingly higher than the global threshold of 15 percent. 182 children (4.2 percent) were diagnosed with SAM, which is alarmingly higher than the global threshold of 2 percent.

While these figures by themselves represent a humanitarian catastrophe of staggering proportions, they severely underestimate the true extent of the crisis. A key explanation lies in the number of children screened. To put it in context, between October 5 and 11, 105,000 children, including 54,000 young girls were screened for malnutrition. Between January 18 and 24, only 4300 children were screened, as partners' capacity for large-scale operations has been curtailed by resource scarcity. With expanded sample size, the true magnitude of the crisis would be evident. Since the underlying cause of the crisis is the cruel and immoral blockade on Tigray, in the absence of the blockade being lifted or, at a minimum, meaningful improvements in the delivery of humanitarian supplies, this genocidal calamity will continue to claim the lives of thousands of Tigrayans.

1.5. The Persistent Denial of Fuel and its Deleterious Impact on Humanitarian Operations

Since August 2, no fuel tanker has been allowed to enter Tigray, except for two tankers belonging to the World Food Program (WFP). Currently, there are 4 tankers in Semera awaiting approval from the authorities in Addis. Consequently, aid agencies have been forced to downscale, suspend or postpone critical operations, such as food, medicine, and malnutrition interventions. As of January 24, all international NGOs have reported having depleted their fuel stock, forcing them to deliver what little remaining supplies and services they have on foot.

Among other things, the severe shortage of fuel has affected water trucking services, which, in turn, has had a devastating impact on internally displace persons (IDPs). 418,000 IDPs in 131 sites require 295 trips of water trucking every day, consuming 1,990 liters of fuel. However, owing to the severe shortage of fuel, partners are able to meet less than 19 percent of water needs in IDP sites. Since October, partners have been distributing, on average, 2.8 liters of water per day per person, whereas 15 liters are needed to meet the needs of a person. This acute problem is exacerbated by the fact that across Tigray, 54% of water points are not functional, affecting water access to 3.5 million people.

1.6. The Abiy Regime's Institutionalization of Mendacity

The Abiy regime, bereft of the capacity for critical self-reflection and having institutionalized lying, falsely attributes the suspension of aid delivery to Tigray since mid-December to conflict in Abala—the only viable route for humanitarian cargo movements into Tigray—allegedly instigated by Tigray forces. The truth of the matter is that the criminal regime, through its local agents within the Afar regional government, has come up with a different way to rationalize the willful obstruction of humanitarian aid. The regime, with the direct participation of Eritrean and Afar regional forces, would instigate confrontations along the Afar-Tigray border. It would then suspend humanitarian cargo movements on the grounds that the roads were not safe. What the regime does not want the international community to dwell on is that the reason we have a single viable corridor (Semera-Abala-Mekelle) is that it has been adamantly opposed to opening multiple humanitarian corridors, including allowing unlimited humanitarian air bridge.

On January 23, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) issued a statement replete with the usual lies, half-truths and distortions. Among other things, the MFA claimed that the criminal regime had agreed to allow additional humanitarian flights to Mekelle to deliver much-needed aid and medical supplies. On the same day this self-congratulatory statement was issued, a 27-truck convoy belonging to the WFP that had departed Semera on its way to Mekelle was forcibly turned back by the Afar regional government, which takes it cues from the genocidal Abiy regime.

Even accepting the false claim that fighting in and around Abala was responsible for the obstruction of humanitarian aid, what then explains prior obstructive acts? What explains the fact that no aid trucks have entered Tigray since mid-December? The regime's deceptive 'explanations' do not hold water when it has done nothing but deliberately impede humanitarian cargo movements for the last six months. In fact, no fuel for humanitarian operations has been allowed into Tigray since the end of July. According to OCHA, no humanitarian workers have also been cleared to travel by road from Semera to Mekelle since October 28, 2021.

In short, the criminal Abiy regime's record on humanitarian aid is littered with half-truths, distortions, and outright lies. At no point during this period has the UN or other partners accused the Government of Tigray of obstructing humanitarian aid delivery. The Government of Tigray has always extended a cooperative hand. The international community should not fall for the regime's manufactured fables as it seeks to evade accountability for engineering the siege starvation of Tigrayans—an abominable crime under international law. A regime that starves its own citizens as a matter of policy cannot be dissuaded by statements of concern alone. The international community should insist on unrestricted humanitarian access and deploy a robust package of punitive actions or the credible threat of such actions.

2. OTHER NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

2.1. Recurrent Provocations along the Afar-Tigray Border

Despite numerous claims by the federal government that its forces were ordered to stay put and not pursue Tigrayan forces into Tigray, our forces have been on the receiving end of numerous provocative attacks by federal forces and their regional allies, as well as Eritrean forces.

On January 23, the so-called Red Sea Afar Force—created, organized and led by the Eritrean government—along with Afar special police forces had launched a coordinated offensive against our forces holding a defensive position. For over six weeks, our forces had not taken any robust actions beyond defending our positions, even as these forces were threatening mayhem only 30 kilometers from Mekelle. However, since January 24, our forces have been compelled to take actions to neutralize the threat posed by Afar forces with the direct participation of Eritrean mercenaries.

Tigray forces have no desire to occupy areas currently under their control. Our principal objective is to remove invading forces from our territories, and adjacent areas in Afar that may serve as a springboard to launch attacks inside Tigray, and in the process degrade our enemies' capabilities. During our successful operation, we were able to free hundreds of Tigrayans and Afars unlawfully imprisoned on account of their identity and political beliefs in Abala town.

While the immediate instigators of this latest round of fighting are the Afar regional government and the Eritrean government, ultimate responsibility must be laid at the feet of the criminal Abiy regime. Since the withdrawal of Tigrayan forces from Afar and Amhara regions, senior federal officials, including the Chief of Staff and Deputy of Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) have telegraphed their intention to reinvade Tigray after finalizing their preparations. This latest attack by the Eritrean government and its local agents within the Afar regional administration is designed to pave the way for the ENDF's intervention while still allowing the Abiy regime to continue making insincere claims about its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

The international community should see through this transparent subterfuge and dissuade these genocidal forces from their destructive course. We further call on the international community to prevail on federal and regional authorities to allow unrestricted humanitarian access so that critical supplies can reach those in desperate need of aid. The Government of Tigray assures the international community of its commitment to extending all necessary cooperation to facilitate humanitarian operations. As always, the Government and people of Tigray remain steadfastly committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.