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Tigray Development Association (UK)

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16 March 2021

International Development Committee

House of Commons

London

SW1A 0AA

Dear Honourable Members of the International Development Committee,

Re: Worsening humanitarian situation in Tigray- evidence session, 18 March 2021

We, at Tigray Development Association in the United Kingdom (TDA-UK), are extremely concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Tigray and we see an opportunity to share our concern with the UK government to find a solution to the humanitarian crisis in Tigray and help the people of Tigray at this difficult time. As always, we would be grateful if the Honourable members of the Select Committee could hear our concern and share it with all relevant government bodies.

TDA-UK is an indigenous Tigrayan charitable organisation that has been operational for the last thirty years and is registered in England and Wales. Its beneficiary is the people of Tigray. TDA-UK has been engaged in the building of primary and secondary schools, hospitals, dams, universities, and digging wells and supplying medical equipment, educational materials and relief funds. Currently TDA is not active in Tigray due to the crisis.

Like every public and private institutions TDA's assets in Tigray are looted and destroyed and its staff are not paid since the war has started. For us it is heart breaking that we are not operating in Tigray because when the people of Tigray most need us we are not there to help them at this critical time and still we do not know when we will start operating in Tigray to help our people. It is also true that other major indigenous humanitarian organisation called Relief Society of Tigray (REST) has for the same reason ceased to operate in Tigray and its assets are looted and destroyed and its staff are not paid since the war started.

Leaving aside the politics, the war has destroyed almost every public and private institutions that has been functioning in Tigray prior to the war and now the people of Tigray have now no institution, except in limited area, that can provide them with the basic services that they need to survive and as the result the people of Tigray are in a dire situation which unless the war is swiftly brought to an end and foreign forces are made to leave Tigray and aid is delivered to every corner of Tigray the international community will see the worst man made human catastrophe in the 21st century.



Hence, we would like to bring to your attention the following particular situations to shed light on the humanitarian crisis in Tigray.

Security Situation

- In Tigray, it has been reported that 80% of Tigray is outside the control of government of Aby Ahmed and fighting is going on in the rural are of Tigray. Eritrean military forces are firmly in control of almost all the main towns and surrounding villages and movement of civilian people is extremely restricted and dangerous. In the North West and South of Tigray, Amhara and Federal forces are in control and movement of civilian people is extremely restricted and remains dangerous. Curfew is imposed all over Tigray. It has been reported that members of aid workers were killed and on different occasion shot at. As a result of civilian people are unable to move around seek help or support themselves.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-16/ethiopia-s-amhara-seize-disputed-territory-amid-tigray-conflict?sref=KLEAnfc7>
- Reports are also coming out frequently that massacres and extrajudicial killings are taking place frequently all over Tigray.

Health Care Provisions

- Very recently it has been reported that almost 87% of the health care system in Tigray is not functioning at all. This due to looting and destruction of hospitals and clinics by the Eritrean forces. Some hospitals are now being used by Eritrean army as barracks and some are used by the Ethiopian army to treat its wounded soldiers.
- Ayder Hospital in Mekelle is almost the only functioning hospital and this hospital is far away for people to travel. Some hospitals are partially offering medical care but they lack the drugs and health professionals they need to offer care. Health professionals have not been paid their wages since the war started and are not returned to work. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-56399882>
- People who live far from the functioning health centres cannot get access to these limited health centres due to the insecurity, travel restrictions, lack of means of transport and money. The most vulnerable people are children, women who have been raped, people with chronic illnesses and the wounded. At a time where the world is rushing to save its citizens from Covid-19 the people of Tigray have seen their health system disappear. In the villages of Tigray Women in labour and those who have been raped have no were to go to medical car stay where they are and endure the consequence.



Education

- School education has been interrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic before the war but now schools are closed, looted, destroyed and some school buildings in the big towns are used as shelter by the internally displaced people. It seems now that the children of Tigray will not have access to school for years to come.
- Universities are also looted and destroyed. They are now used as army barracks and home for the internally displaced people.

Food Security

- People who have been employed in public and private institutions have now have no job and are dependent on aid. In Tigray factories that employed tens of thousands are looted and destroyed. These include a pharmaceutical factory and textile factories. People who were in small business are out of business and they too are dependent on aid. Access to whatever saving in bank they had is almost non-existent.
- Almost 80% of 6 million Tigrayans live in the countryside and are totally dependent on agriculture. Prior to the war, crops in Tigray have been ravaged by locust swarms. However, during the war more crops have been burnt and destroyed and in some areas were not harvested or looted. There have been reports that grains of farmers were looted by Eritreans and we still are getting reports that this is still happening. We are also getting reports that the Eritrean army is preventing farmers in some area from preparing their fields for the coming planting season.

Internally Displaced People

- Since the start of the war over 60 thousand people fled Tigray to the Sudan and these people are mainly from West Tigray. They left everything behind and lost whatever they had. But the bulk of the displaced people are internally displaced. The internally displaced people are in their millions and some are still in the countryside and hundreds of thousands are in towns staying in the open and are exposed to every element. People from West Tigray are still now being forcefully being evicted by the Amhara forces and this is described by the United States America as credible ethnic cleansing.



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- The same is also happening in South Tigray

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/10/politics/blinden-tigray-ethnic-cleansing/index.html>

Access to Humanitarian Assurances

- Access to humanitarian assurances is the major challenge at the moment. This is because of the ongoing war and the presence of Eritrean and Amhara forces. Although now there is a limited access to the towns but almost 80% of Tigray is out of humanitarian aid reach and we are getting reports that people are already dying of hunger. People in some part of the countryside, especially in the North West and Central Tigray, are surviving on eating leaves. A lot of internally displaced people are still not getting assistance at all and in some towns, they are not getting enough assistance. Also, we are getting reports that some aid assurances are being diverted to the Amhara region and some taken by the Eritreans. We also are getting reports that people were asked to sign papers as if they were given 15 kilos of aid assistance per head when actually they were given 7 kilos. Some people are also denied aid assurances on the assumption that they support the Tigray People Liberation Front.
- People far from the main towns have not received aid assistance yet as they are in areas controlled by Tigrayan forces as well as Eritrean and Amhara forces. In some areas the livestock and grains of farmers have been taken and still continue to be taken by Eritrean forces. Unless aid assistance reach people in the countryside people will soon start to do in their Thousands

<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/01/23/ethiopias-government-appears-to-be-wielding-hunger-as-a-weapon>

Rainy Season Fast Approaching

- As almost 80% of Tigrayans depend on agriculture, Tigrayans need to prepare their piece of land for the planting season. If they fail to do so within the next couple of months, then they will not produce enough food for next year and as the result millions will starve to death. But without peace in Tigray, it is very difficult how farmers will prepare for the planting season when, there is no fertilisers provided, when war is going on and people are displaced, movement is restricted, seeds and livestock are looted. Therefore, as peace is a precondition for the farmers to conduct their day-to-day life and their lives depend on farming and securing peace in Tigray before the rainy season is life and death situation for Tigray farmers.



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Way forward to bring an end to the war in Tigray

- To end the war and deliver aid assistance to Tigray it is important that three things need to be done. First Eritrean and Amara force need to leave Tigray immediately. These forces are accused of untold atrocities, looting, destruction, and cause of displacement. They are also now waging war in Tigray. Second, aid assistance needs to reach every corner of Tigray and this needs unhindered access to remote area and the delivery and distribution of aids assistances need strict control to avoid aid diversions and discriminations. Finally, the political crisis Ethiopia and Tigray in particular can only be solved by inclusive dialogue and this needs to start now.

The role of the United Kingdom in bringing peace to Ethiopia

- The United Kingdom is a very old friend of Ethiopia and in the past the United Kingdom has helped Ethiopia in many ways for which Ethiopian are grateful. Once again, the United Kingdom as a permanent member of the UN Security Council can use its influence to galvanise the international community to help Ethiopia to bring the war to an end and solve its political crisis peacefully. Hence, we call on all Honourable members of the Select Committee to understand the magnitude of the worsening humanitarian crisis in Tigray and implore the UK government to use the United Kingdom's position at the international level to help Ethiopia solve its political crisis peacefully.

We, at TDA-UK, are grateful for the actions the United Kingdom has taken so far to solve the war in Tigray and are hopeful that the United Kingdom will do everything possible to help Ethiopia to bring the crisis to an end and support the war victims of Tigray to mend their broken lives and hearts.

We wish the Committee to have a successful session and we will be eagerly waiting for the report of the session.

Yours sincerely,

Teklit H Berhe

Teklit H Berhe (Chairman)

TDA-UK