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TIGRAY EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICE



WEEKLY BRIEFING NO. 15

NOVEMBER 10, 2021

BRINGING TIGRAY CLOSER TO THE WORLD



1. OVERVIEW OF THE HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE

1.1. Tigray's Reality: Tomorrow Will Be Worse than Today

The genocidal war on Tigray has been characterized by its shocking brutality. The deliberate victimization of civilians, the wanton destruction of socioeconomic institutions, the vandalization of infrastructure, the mass displacement of Tigrayans from their homes, and the ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans are some of the most glaring features of the Abiy's regime war on Tigray.

These crimes have rightly shocked the collective conscience of the international community, though not to the degree necessary to have compelled meaningful remedial actions. But the Ethiopian government's horrific record on Tigray is now being eclipsed by a different form of brutality: the deliberate weaponization of starvation. The goal of this genocidal government has been clear for a while now: to engineer starvation-induced subjugation of the people of Tigray. Indeed, it has been a little over a year since the commencement of this genocidal war, and over four and half months since the imposition of a comprehensive blockade that has slowly but surely been asphyxiating the people of Tigray.

The criminal regime's inhumane policy is nowhere clearer than in its deliberate obstruction of humanitarian supplies into Tigray. Aid agencies estimate that 100 trucks carrying food, non-food items, and fuel must enter Tigray in order to meet burgeoning needs and avert widespread famine. Thus far, there has been only one viable route for the movement of humanitarian convoys (Semera-Abala-Mekelle). Yet, the Abiy's regime has created a litany of nightmarish bureaucratic obstacles, making humanitarian operations nearly impossible. Consequently, the initial estimate of 100 trucks a day has been revised upwards to 282 trucks a day.

On account of persistent obstruction, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) notes that, since July 12, only 15 percent of the trucks needed have entered Tigray. The criminal regime has recently taken its obstruction to whole new levels. Since October 18, no humanitarian aid trucks have entered Tigray. Between October 26 and November 1, the period covering OCHA's report, 369 trucks were still stranded in Semera, ostensibly awaiting authorization from the authorities. The number is likely to have ballooned since then. Only a government whose favorite hobby is cruelty would let thousands of its own citizens perish due to hunger as a direct result of its vicious blockade.



The criminal regime also routinely blocks the movement of UN humanitarian workers. According to OCHA, between October 29 and 31, 14 humanitarian workers traveling to Tigray were denied transit at a checkpoint in Serdo, Afar, ostensibly because they needed to carry with them additional documentation. In reality, this action is further evidence of the government cloaking its inhumane conduct as a perfectly legitimate bureaucratic procedure.

1.2 Persistent Denial of Fuel and Medical Supplies

To implement its genocidal blueprint, the Abiy's regime has placed a deadly chokehold on the people of Tigray. Turning starvation into a tool of war requires not only obstructing the delivery of food supplies, but also hampering related humanitarian operations. The meager food aid that arrives in Mekelle must be transported to various areas where those in desperate need reside. However, acute fuel shortage makes this task virtually impossible. Since July 12, only 12 trucks of fuel have entered Tigray.

Consequently, humanitarian agencies have been forced to scale down or suspend their humanitarian responses across the board. Among other things, the severe shortage of fuel has affected water trucking services, which, in turn, has had a devastating impact on internally displaced people (IDPs). While 1,683 trips of water trucking are needed to serve about 2.2 million IDPs, requiring 8,935 liters of fuel daily, "there are only 19 trucks partially operational." The impact on family reunification has also been particularly harrowing. Humanitarian partners managed to reunify 232 unaccompanied and separated children, including 105 girls, with their parents and primary caregivers, compared to the planned target of 7000 children.

The genocidal regime in Addis also continues to deny the entry of life-saving medical supplies into Tigray. Aside from preventing the gradual rehabilitation of Tigray's health system—over 80 percent of health facilities were looted, vandalized, and totally destroyed in many cases—the federal government's denial of the entry of medical supplies has created a full-blown healthcare emergency, in which thousands of Tigrayans are exposed to otherwise preventable deaths. As a result, medical professionals have been forced to administer expired medications. In Shire, for instance, the outbreak of scabies in the face of acute shortage of basic medications forced health partners to administer 60,000 doses of expired drugs after conducting chemical analysis.

2. DIPLOMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

2.1. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Visits Tigray

On November 7, 2021, UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, arrived in Mekelle for a one-day visit of Tigray. Mr. Griffiths saw firsthand the devastating impact of the criminal regime's comprehensive blockade on Tigray.



Mr. Griffiths made a one-day visit to Mekelle, Tigray Region, where he met with humanitarian partners and engaged with government officials on the need for humanitarian access and protection of civilians through all areas under their control, and respect for humanitarian principles. He also met with women affected by the conflict, including survivors of sexual violence receiving help from UNFPA-supported programme.

The humanitarian chief said “the women I met with were desperately focused on daily survival, repeating their need for the most basic support.: food and medicine. The world must help them imagine a brighter future for themselves and their children”

Unfortunately for the people of Tigray, the international response to the Abiy government’s genocidal blockade of humanitarian aid has been incomprehensibly inadequate. The criminal regime continues to poke the international community in the eye with impunity. A few weeks ago, the Abiy government expelled seven high-level UN officials for “meddling” in its internal affairs. No evidence was provided for such a sensational accusation, because there was none. After mounting a half-hearted resistance, the UN Secretary General ultimately gave in and let the regime get away with it. Consequently, the criminal regime of Abiy Ahmed has interpreted this deafening silence as approbation of its conduct, encouraging it persist in its brazen disregard for the rules and norms governing legitimate conduct.

Indeed, last week, the regime issued a sweeping state of emergency proclamation, designed to rationalize the mass arrest of Tigrayans with a fig leaf of legality. Of those it has rounded up thus far, 16 are UN staff members and their dependents. If the international community lets this regime get away with yet another flagrant transgression of common norms and internationally recognized human rights, it will continue to do what it knows best: intensify its criminal conduct. It is high time the international community stopped coddling this criminal regime. Only a robust package of punitive actions can compel it to consider changing course.

2.1. AU Envoy for the Horn of Africa Visits Mekelle

On November 7, 2021, the AU Envoy for the Horn of Africa, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, arrived in Mekelle. During his brief stay, Mr. Obasanjo met with Tigray President Debretsion Gebremichael, and presidential adviser, Getachew Reda.





Given Abiy's pattern of belligerence and dishonesty, the Ethiopian government's acquiescence to Mr. Obasanjo's visit may be a calculated ploy to hoodwink the international community into thinking that the criminal regime is serious about finding a peaceful resolution to the current crisis, while still ramping up its offensives on the propaganda and military fronts. The Abiy government has exhibited schizophrenia over how to end its genocidal war on Tigray. On the one hand, it continues to mobilize thousands of poorly-armed, untrained, and poorly-trained citizens to the frontlines. It also maligns and engineers the mass arrest of Tigrayans. Both actions are hardly the traits of a government committed to peace. On the other hand, it acquiesced to Obasanjo's trip to Tigray, which suggests that it may be seeking a non-military way out of the crisis.



Nonetheless, sincerity and concern for the general welfare of citizens are rare commodities within the Abiy government. That the AU and the broader international community had not made serious attempts to use the right mix of threats and rewards to get the criminal regime to lift its genocidal blockade on Tigray and bring it to the negotiating table has not gone unnoticed by the Government of Tigray. Still, since the Government and people of Tigray have always been committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, they are ready and willing to entertain all serious peace overtures, irrespective of where it comes from.