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# Weekly Brief - August 7, 2021

## *Tigray External Affairs Office*

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The Tigray External Affairs Office (TEA) was established by the National Government of Tigray to further cooperate with international partners and bring Tigray closer to the world. The office is available to facilitate communication with all organs of government and avail timely information to interested parties.

TEA will be providing weekly briefings as part of wider efforts to bridge information and other gaps created by the communication, power, and transport blockade imposed by the Ahmed regime. It's important to recall today marks 43 days of the siege.

The maiden briefing will cover an overview of the Humanitarian situation as well as an update on weaponized public service, partner meetings, health care services, genocidal rhetoric and mass detention of Tigrayans, and related matters.

### **Overview of Humanitarian Situation**

- There are currently six million people in need of emergency assistance, over half a million people living on the verge of famine, and a hundred thousand children at risk of starvation. The emergency Coordination office was able to confirm the death of five persons due to hunger in Yaqer, Kola Tembien district of central Tigray in early July. Larger scale assessments by the government and partner organizations have been hindered by the communications blackout and fuel shortages.
- Invading forces have destroyed almost all agricultural produces that contributed up to 80% of the Tigrayan economy. Harvests were deliberately and systematically destroyed, livestock slaughtered, agricultural implements and water irrigation schemes looted or damaged. Farmers were prevented from plowing their land, while emergency seeds and fertilizers were prevented from reaching them.
- The deliberate and systematic attack on Tigrayan smallholder farmers is perhaps the most telling example of Abiy Ahmed, Isaias Afworki, and the Right-wing Amhara force's intentions of genocide on the people of Tigray.
- USAID and the World Food Program (WFP) are currently the major funding partners; reaching nearly 4.5 million and 1.6 million persons in need, respectively.
- The federal government's official claim is only 222,825 persons; much of these beneficiaries are supposedly in western Tigray where Amhara regional forces have displaced much of its Tigrayan population and resettled non-Tigrayans to attempt a change in demography. The government's outrageous claim that it covers the biggest chunk of humanitarian aid in Tigray is both groundless and thankless to donor countries/organizations.

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- Only 57 aid trucks had entered Tigray between June 29 - July 29, 2021. Over 50,000 metric tons of aid were expected to enter Tigray in this time span while only 1,000 metric tons have entered so far.
  - The government of Tigray would like to reiterate its call for the opening of all possible humanitarian corridors and the delivery of aid through all means for the safe and fast delivery of aid to those in need of emergency aid.

## **1. Weaponized Public Service**

- The federal government's blanket suspension of banking services and budget for the public sector including essential services such as health has effectively halted all commercial activity throughout Tigray; it is impossible for humanitarian organizations to undertake even rudimentary transactions such as the loading and unloading of aid trucks. The federal government has gone as far as capping the amount of monies aid workers can carry into Tigray at 10,000 Birr / \$227.
- While the federal government - in cooperation with Amhara regional state and Fano vigilante group - have worked to limit access into the regional state for over three years, the blockade has intensified in the past eight months and has included an attack on aid workers attempting to deliver essentials items into Tigray.
- Meanwhile, the Tigray government was able to repair some of the damage on the Mai Tsebri bridge that was demolished by Amhara regional forces and ENDF. The bridge was deliberately destroyed by the forces in an attempt to block the distribution of aid into different parts of Tigray.
- An Aid convoy was attacked in Serdo, Afar Regional state by ENDF and allied forces. While Abiy Ahmed and right-wing Amhara forces had made a claim that a convoy was attacked by TDF artillery, the claim is baseless as fighting at that time was ongoing in Kalwan and Avera, well outside the range of artillery.
- The Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) has no record of obstructing aid and would like to assure partners of its commitment to the security and well-being of aid workers.
- The blockade of essential services has included banking and salary of federal and regional government employees. The federal government is blocking Tigrayans from accessing their hard-earned income - exacerbating a humanitarian crisis that already has over half a million persons on the verge of famine.
- The closing of bank services has meant that donations by international partners to the millions in need of urgent humanitarian aid will not be able to reach them.
- It is to be recalled that ENDF soldiers had also attempted to confiscate cash from banks in Mekelle in the last hours of June 28, 2021.
- It is to be recalled that ENDF had confiscated UN communication equipment while retreating from Mekelle on June 28, 2021.
- ENDF has also destroyed satellite equipment and cameras belonging to the Tigray Mass Media organization. The Ethiopian government has since arrested journalists and closed media organizations reporting on the Tigray crisis and is currently intimidating international media organizations.

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- Tigray has also been under an 8-month internet blockade to limit Tigrayans from telling their story as ENDF, EDF, and Amhara militia kill, rape, loot, and vandalize with impunity.
  - Abiy Ahmed's thirst to exercise absolute narrative control in the hopes it can change actual facts on the ground is deranged. Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afworki are setting new standards for genocidal maniacs and dictators around the world that could not have dreamed much of this could be done as the world sits and watches idly.
  - The discontinuation of public services to Tigray should be understood by all partners as a protraction of the genocidal war on Tigray by Abiy Ahmed's regime.
  - The government of Tigray would like to assure its partners of its commitment to reinstating all public service to Tigray by any means necessary and has stated this as one of seven preconditions for a negotiated ceasefire.

## **2. Partner Meeting**

- Vice President of Tigray Fetlework Gebregizabhair attended Emergency Coordination Committee meeting with partner organization on July 9, 2021
- The Vice President thanked partner organizations for their advocacy on behalf of the people of Tigray which has moved and mobilized the international community against the genocidal crime perpetrated on Tigray and the delivery of much-needed aid.
- The Vice president also recognized the risk associated with the important work of aid workers and passed on her condolences to the colleges whose lives had been lost while serving the people of Tigray. She also emphasized her government's commitment to ensuring an independent international investigation is conducted on the circumstance of their death.
- During the meeting, partner organizations stated that much of the impediments for the delivery of aid had been removed upon the return of the Tigray's elected government to the capital. While the closing of banks by Abiy Ahmed's government, lack of fuel and communication equipment have made the work of aid organizations difficult.
- The Vice President promised to work in coordination with partners to address the problems and emphasized that the fast delivery of emergency assistance to those in need is the priority for her government.

## **3. Health Care Services**

- The invading forces have completely destroyed Tigray's health system which was previously ranked as being one of the best in developing countries.
- The collapse of Tigray's health system - that mainly depended on primary health units - was deliberately targeted by invading forces that vandalized and looted much of its equipment and prevented health workers from providing mobile service.
- Attempts by the Bureau of Health and other partners to assess the damage on the health system have been stalled due to the siege - the prospect for reestablishing Tigray's health system remains dim for as long as the federal government perceives collective punishment as a legitimate form of warfare.
- Tigray is currently running out of medication for chronic illness, routine immunization, vaccinations essential during a crisis (cholera, measles, etc..), and other epidemics that show a

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spike during the rainy seasons. The people of Tigray are also being denied access to coronavirus vaccinations donated to the people of Tigray by international partners.

- Over 80% of the medication is either produced or purchased through a centralized system and made available to regions by the federal government. This includes vaccinations and medical equipment essential for the maintenance of the health sector.
- The unavailability of communication lines has made it impossible for skilled maternal and child care services to reach those in need. It is impossible to call ambulances which in return increases the number of home deliveries and maternal death. Lack of access to blood, looting, and vandalizing has also made it challenging to assist those that have actually reached the health facility. While children that are safely delivered suffer from a lack of nutrition and routine immunization and are vulnerable to long-term illnesses.
- Young girls that have been a target of gender-based violence lack adequate support (postpartum, psychosocial support).
- The failure of the health system will also make it impossible to trace and respond to pandemics, making Tigray not only a risk to itself but to the world.
- Over 90% of water pumps that provided clean drinking water in rural areas have been destroyed by invading forces. This leaves water trucks as the only source of clean water for remote areas that are currently defunct due to lack of fuel.
- The federal government has discontinued the budget for the 2 Universities hospitals based in Tigray; Ayder and Axum referral hospitals. The destruction of over 80% of the health system in Tigray had left Tigrayans dependent on referral hospitals.
- Tigray is currently categorized as a level 3 crisis by the World Health Organization - there is no level 4.
- Health services were the first to be affected when the federal government discontinued Coronavirus test kits and other essential medicines and vaccines to Tigray in October of 2020 - ahead of the start of the conflict on November 4.

#### **4. Genocidal rhetoric and Mass detention of Tigreans**

- The federal government is undertaking mass detention and abuse of Tigrayan civilians at a massive scale. Tigrayan members of ENDF, civil servants, and ordinary civilians have been held in concentration camps across Ethiopia for months.
- This comes in light of Abiy Ahmed, extreme right-wing Amhara forces, and Ethiopian media's intensifying hate speech against civilian Tigrayans following major military defeats. The Prime minister and ENDF officials have time and again used public media to frame Tigrayans as traitors.
- In an effort to stall humanitarian efforts in Tigray - Abiy Ahmed has continuously framed aid workers and their operation as being at odds with the national interest. This has served as the backdrop for instating endless bureaucratic red tape to prevent the people of Tigray from receiving urgently needed aid.
- The federal government has repeatedly made outrageous claims that it has invested 100 billion birrs for aid and reconstruction efforts in Tigray. This is not only an absurd lie but is being done purposefully by the federal government to increase tension and animosity between the people of Tigray and other members of the Ethiopian federation.

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- Tigrayan civilians in Humera - an area yet to be liberated by Tigrayan forces - are being killed and dumped into the Tekeze River.
  - While the Ethiopian government denies its military defeat and has its military capacities intact - it is currently mobilizing thousands of ethnic militias to partake in a senseless war that is sure to drive Ethiopia to the brink.

## **5. Current situation of Internally Displace Persons (IDP)**

- Current assessments indicate there are currently over 2.2 million IDP's in Tigray of which many have been displaced by Amhara regional forces from western Tigray.
- IDP's are currently housed in schools and other public facilities that accommodate an average of 50 people in one room.
- IDP's, like the other 6.3 million Tigrayans in need of emergency assistance, have received an average of three rounds of aid in eight months; this includes 15 kilograms of Teff and half a liter of cooking oil which has so far had to last them an average of three months.
- Essentials like food, cloth, and medicine are scarce, host community that has been supporting IDPs out of pocket are now themselves in danger of urban starvation as the siege on Tigray has started to affect households.
- Tigray Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development is currently developing a resettlement and rehabilitation package for IDPs.

## **6. Other Humanitarian Concerns**

- The government of Tigray - while fully aware that soldiers of invading forces are perpetrators of genocidal crimes against civilian Tigrayans - would like to reiterate its commitment to the dignified treatment of the over 7,000 Prisoners of war currently under its custody, this number is excluding recent military campaigns.
- The government released 1,000 PoW on Sunday, June 18, 2021. The PoW was escorted to Amhara regional state and released at the borders.
- The government reiterates the need for support in providing essentials like food, drinking water, and clothing to POW.
- Ethiopian aid workers of non-Tigrayans descent have chosen to evacuate Tigray upon the liberation of Mekelle on June 28, 2021. Although the Tigray government held a meeting with the aid workers and assured them of the government's commitment to their safety and well-being. Unfortunately, the aid workers have chosen to evacuate Tigray and have left a major gap in the operational capacity of aid organizations.
- Due to the discontinuation of Internet connection in Tigray, capable Tigrayans have not been able to apply for job opportunities in these aid organizations. While we trust in international partners' commitment to addressing the humanitarian crisis; we are disappointed that more was not done to employ Tigrayans. This goes against aid organizations' responsibility to develop local capacity and leaves a major gap in terms of these aid groups properly communicate and address the need of beneficiaries.
- The Ethiopian National Defense Forces conducted an airstrike in Kalwan and Gugubdo, Afar regional state - in a none conflict zone - on a Muslim holiday.
- Mekelle University was forced to release all its students following the discontinuation of the universities budget last month. The University, in coordination with the Ministry of Education

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and United Nations, had developed a plan to deliver 4,000 Mekelle University students back to their families. Unfortunately, MOE coordinators were not able to arrive at the stated time and place, and students had to be returned to the university campus upon the advice of UN coordinators.

- Later, Mekelle University informed MOE that University vehicles had run out of fuel due to the siege and would not be able to make a second trip to Afar. MOE has agreed to send vehicles to Mekelle and take students directly from the campus. Unfortunately, the evacuation is happening at a rate that is sure to frustrate families waiting to see their children with only 300 students being evacuated on a daily basis.
- The government of Tigray would like to reiterate its commitment to the safety and security of all civilians in Tigray and finds it unfortunate that students were not able to complete their education ahead of their return.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Tigray government expects the Abiy regime to take the preconditions for ceasefire seriously. In the absence of a political solution to the crisis, the government of Tigray would, unfortunately, be forced to resolve matters militarily.