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Tigray External Affairs Office

Briefing From The National Government of Tigray October 05, 2021

Ref- WB009

I. Humanitarian Aid Delivery

Status on the Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies

The humanitarian landscape in Tigray remains bleak. It has been 335 days since the commencement of the genocidal war on Tigray, and 107 days since the Abiy Ahmed administration enacted a siege on the region. The multifaceted humanitarian crisis associated with violent conflict has been exacerbated in the case of Tigray by the willful, cruel, and immoral imposition of a “de facto blockade.”

According to the United Nations, 100 trucks carrying food, non-food items, and fuel must enter Tigray daily to meet needs on the ground. For over 3 months now, the Ethiopian authorities have deliberately obstructed the movement of humanitarian supplies into Tigray, thereby restricting aid delivery to a vanishingly smaller amount than what is needed. Since September 5, only a total of 244 trucks have arrived in Tigray.

The “de facto blockade” on Tigray has created a nightmare scenario for the vast majority of Tigrayans in desperate need of emergency assistance. Humanitarian partners are out of food stock. According to the World Food Program (WFP), the prevalence of insufficient food consumption in Tigray is one of the highest in the country, having increased from 5 percent in June to 21 percent in September 2021.

The effects are pronounced with women, children, and the elderly. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), the pervasive malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women in Tigray is “unprecedented.” Out of 15,000



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pregnant and lactating women screened, about 12,000 or a staggering 79 percent were found to have suffered from acute malnutrition. Furthermore, the level of moderate malnutrition among children under five years of age, which stands at 18 percent, is above what is considered a global emergency threshold of 15 percent. Cases of children with malnutrition stand at 3.4 percent, which is also above the global emergency threshold of 2 percent. To provide a snapshot from this past week, at Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Referral Hospital in Mekelle, 38 children were diagnosed with acute severe malnutrition, while 6 were diagnosed with moderate acute malnutrition. These figures underreport the actual incidence of starvation, given the presence of numerous hard-to-reach areas.

The Continued Suspension of Essential Services

Banking, telecommunications, and air transport have been suspended for over 3 months. Even when humanitarian aid, no matter how meager, is available, the lack of fuel, cash, communications blackout, and intermittent electricity stand in the way of timely aid delivery. Communications blackout hampers the ability to obtain and present accurate pictures as to the humanitarian situation, leading to underreporting. Severe fuel shortage prevents the timely distribution of humanitarian supplies to the various administrative *Weredas* (districts). Since July 29, no fuel tanker has been allowed to enter Tigray. Additionally, 8 fuel tankers are still stranded in Semera, ostensibly pending government approval. Since Mekelle is the sole entry point for trucks carrying aid, humanitarian supplies would have to be distributed to various areas throughout Tigray, but the lack of fuel prevents timely distribution by hampering ground transport.



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Shortage of Medical Supplies

The Abiy Ahmed administration is also impeding the delivery of life-saving medicines. Medical supplies are routinely denied entry into Tigray. No medical supplies have been allowed entry into Tigray since the end of July. Recently, 12 trucks carrying much-needed medical supplies had been stranded for days in Semera, Afar. On September 23, nine of those trucks attempted to leave for Mekelle, yet the Abiy Ahmed administration forced them to return back from Serdo, thereby worsening the already dire healthcare crisis in Tigray. The lack of medical supplies has made it exceedingly difficult to rehabilitate health facilities looted and vandalized by the Ethiopian and Eritrean armies as well as their allied Amhara forces. Not surprisingly, the demand for medical care has overwhelmed the barely functioning healthcare system.

The resulting healthcare crisis has exposed many Tigrayans to an elevated risk of otherwise preventable deaths. Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Referral Hospital in Mekelle, for instance, has run out of, among other things, anti-HIV, anti-TB, and chemotherapy drugs. It is also running fatally low on almost every category of life-saving drugs. Just recently, about 47 people died because they did not have the medications they needed. Of these, 20 had required dialysis but none was available, while 10 people who needed dialysis are missing, and presumed dead at home, as the communications blackout has made it impossible for medical professionals to check on patients. Many patients cannot also make it to a hospital due to transportation problems caused by a severe fuel shortage.



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II. Other Developments

The Expulsion of High-level UN Officials

On September 30, the Ethiopian government declared 7 high-level UN officials engaged in humanitarian works persona non grata. As usual, the Ethiopian government made outlandish allegations against these senior UN officials without an iota of evidence. In reality, this latest outrageous action is a continuation of the Ethiopian government's scorched-earth policy to undermine humanitarian operations in Tigray. That the decision to expel these officials came at a time of maximum need once again confirmed the Abiy government's commitment to weaponizing starvation to achieve that which has eluded it on the battlefield: bringing the people of Tigray to their knees. It also demonstrated the Abiy government is more concerned with tightening its tenuous grip on power and soothing its fragile ego than tending to its needy citizens.

The international community has by and large condemned the Ethiopian government for this latest assault on established humanitarian norms. The UN Secretary-General has indicated that Ethiopia did not have the right to expel those officials, though the world body seems to have accepted the expulsion to ensure the safety of the officials. The U.S. government has threatened to levy sanctions in response to this decision. Naturally, the Government of Tigray condemns this outrageous decision for it is in line with the Abiy government's determination to inflict collective punishment on the people of Tigray by hampering timely and smooth humanitarian operations.

Absent the restoration of essential services, such as banking, telecommunications, and air and ground transportation, as well as the unobstructed delivery of humanitarian supplies, the conditions in Tigray will no doubt go from bad to worse. Thus far, the international community's responses to the Abiy government's various transgressions have not calibrated means and ends. It is high time that the international community's response went beyond rhetorical condemnation and take meaningful actions to compel it to change course.