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Tigray External Affairs Office

Ref: TEAO- 014/2021

Date: 23 Oct 2021

Press statement on the Air Strikes on the people of Tigray & UNHAS Flight

For immediate release:

For the fourth day since Monday October 18, 2021, the genocidal government of Abiy Ahmed has conducted several rounds of airstrikes on civilian targets in Mekelle, killing 4 people and wounding about 30 others. The 4th person, a young engineer, wounded from an earlier strike on 20 Oct, died yesterday in the hospital due to lack of medicine that led to surgery complications. The latest airstrike in Mekelle on October 22, 2021 is particularly distressing and dangerous as it encapsulates the Abiy government's gross irresponsibility and disdain for international law. The Ethiopian government officially cleared a UNHAS humanitarian flight from Addis Ababa to Mekelle knowing well that it was going to conduct airstrikes in Mekelle around the same time as the flight's expected time of arrival. In so doing, it endangered the lives of those aboard. Shortly after the Ethiopian air force jet dropped bombs near the main campus of Mekelle University, wounding a dozen or so people, the UNHAS flight was forced to abort its landing and return to Addis Ababa. The bombed area is not far from the Alula Abanega International Airport where the UNHAS plane was supposed to land. By deliberately putting a plane full of civilians at risk, the Ethiopian government has violated international law. It must be held accountable.

The Abiy Ahmed government has perfected the art of committing despicable atrocities during its genocidal war on Tigray, and, with straight face, denying responsibility for doing so. As always, this government will likely blame Tigrayan forces, the international community and other faceless entities for its latest transgression of international law, human decency, and established norms. The international community should not allow itself to be snookered by the genocidal regime.

By sending its bomber to Mekelle at the same time as the UNHAS flight, the Abiy government clearly intended to force our air defense units to fire in all directions. If the UNHAS humanitarian plane is accidentally downed, the Abiy government will then shamelessly paint our forces as the villain deserving of international condemnation and much more. If our air defense units refrained from firing, then the genocidal air force would slaughter civilians without resistance, as intended. In both cases, the outcome is the same: civilians are intentionally put at risk.

By compromising the safety of UNHAS humanitarian flights, the Abiy government has clearly telegraphed its intention to continue obstructing humanitarian operations. Its total siege on Tigray has created a humanitarian catastrophe of staggering magnitude. By targeting humanitarian flights, the regime appears to be dead set on tightening its chokehold on the people of Tigray. Since this latest maneuver by the Abiy government is going to create a climate of uncertainty around the safety of humanitarian flights to Mekelle, the genocidal government will have de facto veto over these flights, thereby realizing its goal of perpetuating the siege on Tigray.

Unfortunately, the criminal regime has not faced a robust international response that could compel to change course. The international failure to take punitive actions against the Abiy government has emboldened it to continue committing atrocities against the people of Tigray so much so that committing war crimes has become second nature to this government. Abiy's cruel, inhumane, and morally repugnant blockade of Tigray has been met by nothing more than incessant exhortations to lift the siege. But a regime that has deliberately placed a deadly chokehold on its own citizens cannot be swayed by strongly-worded statements of concern alone. The latest aerial bombardment of Mekelle along with its deliberate endangering of a UNHAS humanitarian flight exemplifies the Ethiopian government's pathological contempt for basic rules and norms. Allowing such governments to flaunt international law with impunity would set a dangerous precedent that would incrementally but surely lead to the unraveling of the architecture of global governance.

