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TIGRAY EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

**WEEKLY BRIEFING NO. 11**

**OCTOBER 19, 2021**

**BRINGING TIGRAY CLOSER TO THE WORLD**



## 1. OVERVIEW OF THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN TIGRAY

### 1.1. Suffering Without an End in Sight: Dwindling Delivery of Humanitarian Supplies

Imagine a world where millions of people are condemned to live without electricity, telecommunications, banking services, ground and air transport, and dwindling supplies of basic commodities. Now imagine a family in emergency desperately trying to take their loved ones to the hospital but cannot because ambulance services have been cut as ambulances were looted and destroyed and because severe fuel shortage has forced emergency service providers to scale back their services, and, in some cases, discontinued services altogether. Imagine also the same family not being able to make an emergency phone call due to a total telecommunications blackout.

To many people around the world, these horrific conditions may represent life in a fictitious dystopia. To millions of Tigrayans, there is nothing imagined about this wretched, dehumanized existence for it's their daily life under the total blockade erected by the genocidal government of Abiy Ahmed. Indeed, it has been 348 days since the start of the genocidal war on Tigray, and 121 days since the Abiy Ahmed government imposed a brutal siege on the region. Millions are at risk of man-made famine. Thousands of Tigrayans have been exposed to otherwise preventable deaths due to the scarcity of critical medical supplies. Hundreds have died of hunger, while thousands are likely dying of hunger without the world and even their own government being aware of it, since the consequences of Abiy's siege—telecommunications blackout, lack of cash, and severe fuel shortage—have made it virtually impossible to accomplish such simple tasks as providing and receiving timely reports.





In the face of a genocidal regime continuing to weaponized starvation, the international response has been woefully inadequate. As innocent Tigrayans perish due to hunger and easily treatable diseases, and as the regime’s genocidal project comes into sharper focus—exemplified by its latest aerial bombardment of Mekelle—the international community continues to deploy euphemistic language, such as “famine-like” conditions to refer to the presence of widespread, man-made famine across Tigray, even as high-level UN officials refer to the crisis as “a stain on our conscience.” What is the threshold of mayhem, destruction, and deaths caused by the federal government’s policy that would compel the international community to call a spade a spade and condemn Abiy Ahmed’s genocidal project? How many Tigrayans must perish for the world to let go of its reflexive diplomatic tendency to coddle the masterminds of Tigray’s genocide? It is high time the international community issued a formal declaration about the presence of widespread famine in Tigray and follow such a declaration with robust actions to compel the federal government to desist from unleashing a silent killer on the people of Tigray.

According to humanitarian partners, 100 trucks carrying food, non-food items, and fuel must enter Tigray to meet needs on the ground. A government minimally committed to the welfare of its citizens would, even in the midst of hostilities, be expected to open multiple humanitarian corridors to serve its citizens. By contrast, the Abiy Ahmed government continues to obstruct humanitarian operations by imposing severe constraints on the delivery of humanitarian supplies via the only route into Tigray (Semera-Abala-Mekelle). Intrusive and thorough inspections, harassment of drivers, looting of aid, and ethnic-profiling, beating, and jailing of Tigrayan drivers on account of their identity are impede the movement of humanitarian trucks.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), between October 6 and 12, a total of 211 trucks arrived in Tigray, considerably less aid than what is needed to cover needs on the ground. While this figure may appear like prima facie evidence of improving aid delivery, it is still a tiny fraction of the aid needed. The reality is that humanitarian partners now need 282 trucks to arrive in Tigray daily to meet increasing needs while still making up for lost ground due to the Ethiopian government’s obstruction. Since July 12, only 14 percent of the trucks carrying humanitarian supplies have arrived in Tigray. The blame for this “de facto humanitarian aid blockade” must be laid at the feet of Abiy Ahmed’s genocidal government.





Not surprisingly, the impact on Tigrayans is nothing short of devastating. According to OCHA, 105,000 children, including 54,000 young girls were screened for malnutrition between October 5 and 11. Of these, 2459 children (2.3 percent) were diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition (SAM), a figure higher than the global emergency threshold of 2 percent. At over 63 percent, malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women continues to be high.

While these figures capture the devastation visited upon Tigrayans by the federal government's deliberate and comprehensive blockade, the reality is far worse than often reported. For instance, a team of researchers from the Medical University of South Carolina, and Mekelle University conducted a rapid nutrition assessment for malnutrition using international standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Out of 3269 children screened for malnutrition in 48 of the 52 districts in Tigray, a staggering 6.1 percent were diagnosed with SAM, considerably higher than OCHA's findings of 2.3 percent. 21.8 percent were also diagnosed with moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). To put it in context, the prewar figure for SAM was 1.3. Furthermore, food security, measured in terms of the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) is at a staggering 14.7 percent, compared to 58.7 percent in 2019.

Since the federal government actively denies the entry of fuel tankers into Tigray, there is severe shortage of fuel across the region. Humanitarian partners need about 272,000 liters per month to undertake humanitarian operations. However, since July 29, no fuel tanker has been allowed to enter Tigray. 10 fuel tankers remain stranded in Semera, ostensibly awaiting government clearance but in reality actively prevented from departing as part of the government's policy of tightening its deadly chokehold on Tigray. Consequently, humanitarian partners have scaled back their responses across the board, while ceasing operations altogether, in some cases. According to OCHA, humanitarian agencies have reduced water trucking services in Central and Northwestern zones from 67 to 45, affecting thousands of Tigrayans. Severe fuel shortage does also affect UN humanitarian flights to Mekelle, as the airport in Mekelle does not have fuel for generators, and vehicles. Transporting staff to and from the airport is also extremely difficult due to fuel shortage.

## 1.2 Denial of Critical Medical Supplies

As part of its overall strategy of bringing the people of Tigray to their knees, the federal government denies the entry of medical supplies into Tigray. In our previous briefing (October 5), we had noted that 12 trucks carrying critical medical supplies were stranded in Semera, Afar, and that the government forced 9 of the trucks that attempted to leave for Mekelle to turn back from Serdo. Nothing has changed since then, except for the fact that the government has become even more adamant about denying medical supplies into Tigray. Indeed, 9 trucks are still stranded in Semera, ostensibly waiting for government approval. In reality, the trucks are stranded because the Ethiopian government does not want any life-saving medical supplies to enter Tigray, which is in line with its policy of unleashing deadly diseases and starvation to force Tigrayans into submission—an outcome that has eluded it on the battlefield.







The impact of this cruel policy cannot be overstated. Aside from preventing the gradual rehabilitation of Tigray’s health system—health facilities were looted, vandalized, and totally destroyed in many cases—the federal government’s obstruction of medical supplies has created a full-blown healthcare emergency, in which thousands of Tigrayans are exposed to otherwise preventable deaths. At Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Referral Hospital, patients die from septic shock due to the shortage of antibiotics. If patients die of septic shock at the region’s flagship hospital, it is not difficult to imagine what is happening in other health facilities across Tigray. The impact on those suffering from chronic illness is also staggering. 130 patients needing chemotherapy are admitted into Ayder every month (110 adults and 20 children). But the hospital cannot accommodate such patients as it has run out of chemo medications.

Lack of vaccines is also putting at risk the lives of thousands of children. According to OCHA, unless polio vaccines are allowed into Tigray, 887,639 children will go without being immunized. In addition, more than 790,363 children across Tigray are at risk of missing out on vaccination against Measles. By intentionally obstructing the delivery of medical supplies, the Abiy Ahmed government is condemning hundreds of thousands of Tigrayan children to the risk of easily preventable deaths.

## 2. OTHER NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

### 2.1 Aerial Bombing of Mekelle

On October 18, 2021, the genocidal regime in Addis Ababa conducted two air strikes in two locations in and around Mekelle—a city neither with any strategic significance for the Abiy government’s ongoing war of aggression nor in close proximity to the actual battlefield where Abiy’s ill-trained forces are being routed by Tigrayan Armed Forces. On October 18, around 9 AM local time, an Ethiopian government air force jet dropped a bomb around Harena (Messebo area) on the outskirts of Mekelle, killing three innocent children (two brothers). In addition to burning farmers’ harvest, the aerial bombardment also killed a number of oxen and cows. Then around 12:20 PM local time, a second jet dropped bombs in the middle of the city around the busy Adi Haki market, wounding at least 7 people, including a 4-year old child, and shattering the glass windows of the 10 story Planet Hotel, surrounding office complexes, and residential areas.





That the second airstrike targeted a neighborhood in Mekelle on a busy market day when thousands of people gather together strongly suggests that the criminal regime had intended to wipe out a large number of people in one fell swoop—an act beyond the bounds of military necessity, decency, humanity and civilized conduct.

That the airstrikes came on the heels of backbreaking battlefield losses for the genocidal army and its affiliated regional militias does not extenuate the regime’s criminality. While this violent act is indicative of a dying regime’s death spasm, it nonetheless must be condemned by everyone with a modicum of regard for the rules and norms governing warfare. Indeed, this genocidal regime had bombarded Mekelle multiple times during the first few weeks of the genocidal war, with the Prime Minister openly threatening to bombard it. The international failure to penalize the criminal regime has emboldened it to continue committing despicable atrocities against the people of Tigray so much so that committing war crimes has become second nature to the Abiy Ahmed government.



The latest aerial bombardment of Mekelle shows the Ethiopian government’s pathological contempt for the rules governing the conduct of warfare. Allowing such genocidal governments to flaunt the rules and norms governing conduct among the civilized community of nations with impunity would set a dangerous precedent that would incrementally but surely lead to the unraveling of the architecture of global governance.