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TIGRAY EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICE



**BRIEFING NO. 18**

**DECEMBER 30, 2021**

**BRINGING TIGRAY CLOSER TO THE WORLD**



## 1. NOTABLE DIPLOMATIC DEVELOPMENTS

### 1.1. President Debretsion Writes a Letter to the UN Secretary-General

On December 19, 2021, the President of Tigray, Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael, wrote a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the current conflict in Ethiopia and the decision to withdraw our forces from Afar and Amhara regions.

The Government of Tigray, as a gesture of goodwill and demonstration of its commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, has withdrawn those units of the Tigray Army that were outside the borders of Tigray.

And yet, rather than responding positively to our peace overtures, the authoritarian duo—Abiy Ahmed and Isaias Afewerki—along with the expansionist Amhara elite appear determined to reinvade Tigray. The criminal Abiy regime says one thing for international consumption, such as it has decided to not enter Tigray, and does another thing. In fact, federal and Amhara forces have already entered the borders of Tigray, attacking our forces that are holding defensive positions in the southern, southwestern and western parts of Tigray. The Eritrean military, which provides the muscle for the illegal annexation of Western Tigray, and occupies parts of North-Western and Eastern Tigray is itching to reprise its genocidal role from last year. It has recently begun firing artilleries towards Tigray and often engages in other provocative maneuvers.

The criminal Abiy regime along with its international defenders has often used the principle of national sovereignty to deflect any external scrutiny of its actions. However, the international community has failed to implement the principle of responsibility to protect (R2P)—a principle enunciated by the UN over two decades ago. When a state is unable or unwilling, or, worse, when the state itself is involved in the violations of internationally recognized human rights, the international community has a duty to intervene and take remedial actions. For the criminal Abiy regime, sovereignty has no substantive meaning beyond its value as a shield against any external scrutiny of its genocidal actions.

It is ironic that a regime that has made the country a playground for foreign powers as it seeks to perpetuate its reign through violence incessantly cries about foreign intrusions into its affairs. In fact, the regime uses foreign-supplied drones to massacre Tigrayans. Inebriated with the power of its new exotic toys, it uses drones without the ethical, moral, and legal guardrails that govern their use among civilized nations.



The regime's dishonestly selective outrage about the violation of sovereignty is, at heart, a self-serving scheme to escape accountability. For the criminal regime, sovereignty is the right to starve and bomb one's citizens into submission and/or out of existence with impunity. Such an antiquated interpretation of sovereignty must not be allowed to stand.

President Debretsion further called on the UN Security Council to take concrete actions to protect the people of Tigray by, among other things:

- i. Establishing a no-fly zone for hostile flights of aircraft and drones over Tigray; such a restriction is not applicable to humanitarian and civil aviation.
- ii. Imposing arms embargo on the Government of Ethiopia.

Absent a clear message to the Abiy and Isaias regimes by the international community to give peace a chance, the people and Government of Tigray will not be liable for what happens next. After all, the people of Tigray have a legitimate right of self-defense. Given our defensive capabilities are intact; insistence by the genocidal partners to reinvade Tigray and brutalize our people will be met with overwhelming resistance. If and when that happens, the result will be even more devastating than ever before.

## 1.2 The UN Human Rights Council Creates an Independent Commission to Investigate Atrocities

On December 17, 2021, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) voted to establish a commission of international human rights experts on Ethiopia to undertake an independent investigation into all atrocities committed since the start of the genocidal war on Tigray.

It is to be recalled that the Government of Tigray has persistently called for the international community to take its responsibility seriously and punish those that have unleashed devastating cruelties on the people of Tigray, violating the core tenets of International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). This momentous decision, which represents a critical milestone in the year-long quest for justice and accountability, is consistent with calls by some members of the international community and the Government of Tigray for an independent investigation into any and all atrocities committed since the start of the genocidal war on Tigray, to be conducted by an impartial international entity. It is, thus, no surprise that the Government of Tigray has formally accepted the resolution.

Tigrayans are grateful to member states, which voted "yes" on the resolution and even those that abstained for not impeding the passage of the resolution. At the same time, it is notable that a disturbing number of countries appear to have been outright opposed to the quest for justice for the people of Tigray and other victims and holding perpetrators accountable, as evidenced by their emphatic "no" vote on the resolution. All the same, the resolution garnered a critical mass of support from nations that take their moral and legal obligations seriously.



The Commission will go a long way towards securing a measure of justice for the countless Tigrayans that have been victimized by the criminal Abiy and Isaias regimes and their junior partners within the Amhara regional government. In this regard, the people and Government of Tigray are grateful to the European Union for its principled, humane and morally informed position on the genocidal war on Tigray. In particular, we are grateful for the EU's consistent calls for an independent investigation into all atrocities and following up on that by asking for the convening of a special session of the UN Human Rights Council on Ethiopia.

Predictably, the criminal Abiy regime objects not only to the resolution establishing an independent panel of experts itself but also to the very idea that the international community can scrutinize a state's actions so long as those actions are justified in terms of a state's sovereign prerogatives. The Abiy regime had, of course, agreed to an "independent" investigation conducted jointly by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The involvement of the EHRC enabled the regime to steer the investigation in its preferred direction by limiting its temporal and spatial scope.

The criminal regime's opposition to the latest resolution by the UN Human Rights Council can be explained in terms of its assumption that it won't be able to influence the investigation and, if need be, tamper with the final report, as it did with the joint report of the EHRC/OHCHR.

By contrast, the Government of Tigray will extend its full cooperation to the Commission as it undertakes its investigations.

The Abiy regime's brazen rejection of the establishment of the Commission and threats to prevent it from fulfilling its mandate must be met with a united and determined international response. Rogue states such as Abiy's Ethiopia and Isaias's Eritrea must not be allowed to make a mockery of international laws and norms, thereby undermining the architecture of global governance.

## **2. PERSISTENT ASSAULTS ON CIVILIANS**

### **2.1. Drone Strikes against Civilians**

Since October 18, the genocidal regime has been raining aerial bombs on civilians and civilian installations in cities, towns, and villages across Tigray far from the frontlines. These indiscriminate aerial assaults have killed hundreds of people, and wounded hundreds. On December 16, the criminal regime once again used its fleet of drones and jets to bombard an open-air marketplace in Alamata town in the Southern Zone of Tigray, immediately killing 28 people and wounding 78 others. On December 17 and 18, the criminal regime was back again murdering civilians in the same town. The number of fatalities stands at more than 50. On December 20, 2021 drone strikes in Korem and





Maichew, in the Southern Zone of Tigray, killing a total of 18 people and wounding 11. Fatality figures are expected to rise owing to the lack of life-saving medications. The regime, as part of its devastating siege on Tigray, has denied the entry of medical supplies into Tigray, among a number of other cruel things. A predictable outcome of this cruelty is that even those that sustain normally non-life-threatening injuries are at an elevated risk of dying.

## 2.2 The Bombing of Mekelle City Power Substation

It is to be recalled that on November 30, 2021, the criminal regime of Abiy Ahmed bombed the Tekeze Hydroelectric Dam, plunging the entire region into darkness. Then on December 20, 2021 the regime used its fleet of drones to bomb the Mekelle City power substation, plunging the city into darkness for days.



The regime's flagrant disregard for the laws of armed conflict has become abundantly clear as it continues to target civilians and civilian installations.

As drones and jets supplied by external actors continue to unleash terror on civilians far from the frontlines, the international response to the Abiy regime's flagrant violations of the laws of armed conflict has been woefully inadequate. The genocidal regime has interpreted this muted response as a license to ratchet up the intensity of its assaults on civilians and civilian institutions.

The international community must make it clear that bombing one's citizens into submission is not an acceptable state conduct in the 21st century. But such a message must go beyond exhortations or strongly-worded statements of concern. Only a robust package of punitive actions can compel this criminal regime to deviate from its destructive path and refrain from massacring civilians at will.

## 3. DIRE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN TIGRAY

The humanitarian situation in Tigray is getting worse by the day. For the vast majority of Tigrayans, tomorrow is definitely worse than today. Ever since the criminal Abiy regime imposed a deadly blockade on Tigray six months ago, thousands of Tigrayans have perished due to hunger and lack of medical supplies. Having sealed off Tigray from the



rest of the country and of the world, the Abiy regime has engineered a humanitarian catastrophe of herculean proportions. Civil servants, including tens of thousands of university employees have not been paid salary since June. Basic commodities are denied entry into Tigray, resulting in skyrocketing prices.

While aid agencies estimate that at least 282 trucks per day are needed to meet increasing needs while making up for lost ground, the criminal regime continues to obstruct humanitarian cargo movements with cruel determination. Indeed, since July 12, less than 12 percent of humanitarian supplies have been allowed into Tigray. A predictable consequence is that Tigray is in the midst of a full-blown humanitarian tragedy.

In the face of the Abiy regime's weaponization of starvation, the international community's woefully inadequate response has been baffling. How many Tigrayans must perish before the international community wakes up from its collective stupor and take meaningful actions against the criminal regime? How many emaciated bodies of children must the international community watch on its television screen before it says "enough" to the criminal regime? How many pregnant and lactating women must perish before the world takes concrete actions in response to a humanitarian catastrophe that the UN humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths, calls "a stain on our conscience?" At what point does the mass murder of Tigrayans with manmade famine and aerial assaults constitute a war crime under international law?

It is high time the international community called what is happening in Tigray by its rightful name: genocide. The international community must take its moral and legal obligations seriously and hold the genocidal regime of Abiy Ahmed accountable. In previous cases of genocide, the international community could point to its failure to see the warning signs of an impending genocide as a reason for inaction. In the case of Tigray, no such excuses can be deployed for the wailing of genocide sirens are there for all to hear.