



ቤት ፅሕፈት ዘምድናት ትግራይ
Tigray External Affairs Office

Ref: TEAO - 80/2022

Date: 28 February 2022

Statement on the Continuing Suspension of Humanitarian Aid Delivery into Tigray

The international community has repeatedly noted that Tigray is experiencing a humanitarian catastrophe the likes of which have not been seen in decades. Indeed, the UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, had as far back as late September noted that a “de facto humanitarian blockade” on Tigray was hampering humanitarian operations, strongly demanding to “get those trucks moving.” What is more, Mr. Griffiths had characterized the international response to the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe as woefully inadequate, describing the failure to act as “a stain on our conscience.” Unfortunately, the international community’s outrage at the Abiy regime’s deliberate engineering of a humanitarian calamity has not been matched by actions to compel the regime to change course.

Principally on account of the failure to exert sufficient pressure on the Abiy regime to desist from obstructing humanitarian operations, the humanitarian landscape in Tigray has gotten catastrophically worse since Mr. Griffiths made the above claims in mid-September. To put the extent of the crisis in perspective, about 100 trucks carrying food, non-food items and fuel must enter Tigray daily to meet the needs of over 5 million people. Accordingly, from July 12 to February 27 of this year, at least 23,000 trucks should have entered Tigray. However, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), only 1339 trucks have entered Tigray, representing a measly 6 percent of the total trucks required to address the vast scale of humanitarian needs in Tigray. Put differently, on average, only 6 trucks out of the 100 expected on a daily basis have trickled into Tigray since July—a shocking display of inhumanity in the face of a devastating humanitarian crisis.

Even the occasional trickling of aid trucks via the only route for humanitarian cargo movements into Tigray (Semera-Abala-Mekelle) has been suspended since mid-December, as the Abiy regime comes up with a carousel of “reasons” for the suspension, each one more preposterous and less convincing than the previous one. Among other things, the Abiy regime has baselessly accused the Government of Tigray of preventing the delivery of humanitarian supplies into Tigray, a claim that would be comical but for its devastatingly tragic consequences for the people of Tigray. The Government of Tigray is fighting for the very survival of its people. It would, thus, be an abdication

of this solemn duty for it to obstruct humanitarian aid meant for its own people. The Government of Tigray has always extended a cooperative hand to aid agencies; but the same cannot be said of the Abiy regime. In fact, the reason we have the Semera-Abala-Mekelle corridor as the only viable route into Tigray is that the Abiy regime continues to be adamantly opposed to opening multiple humanitarian corridors, including allowing unlimited humanitarian air bridge.

Just recently, the UN had announced that, apparently with the cooperation of the Abiy regime and Afar authorities, it was going to resume humanitarian aid delivery into Tigray. A 20-truck convoy belonging to the World Food Program (WFP) was expected to hit the road any time soon. However, despite having a written clearance letter from the relevant federal agency, the aid trucks remain stranded in Afar region, ostensibly because the regional authorities in Afar have prevented the trucks from leaving for Mekelle.

Since humanitarian aid trucks coming to Tigray must pass through the Afar region, there is a tendency to present the obstruction of humanitarian cargo movements as an Afar-Tigray issue. It is not. While Afar regional authorities have been aggressively complicit in the obstruction of humanitarian aid delivery into Tigray, ultimate responsibility for hampering humanitarian operations should be laid at the feet of the Abiy regime. It has deliberately erected nightmarish bureaucratic and security requirements that hamper humanitarian operations. The body of evidence that has piled up over the past 8 months strongly establishes the Abiy regime's hostility towards aid agencies operating in Tigray, reflected in the trickling of aid into Tigray as well as the expulsion of high-level UN officials engaged in humanitarian work. UN OCHA itself has repeatedly stated that no humanitarian workers have been cleared to travel by road from Semera to Mekelle since October 28, 2021, clearly establishing the Abiy regime's obstructive intent.

Aid agencies have also insinuated that Ethiopian authorities seem to be intent on linking the delivery of humanitarian supplies into Tigray to the provision of humanitarian aid in Afar and Amhara regions. The people and Government of Tigray are, of course, supportive of those in need of aid outside Tigray receiving the necessary assistance. In fact, in areas outside of Tigray that Tigray's Army had brought under its control, the Government of Tigray had done its best to fulfil its humanitarian obligations to local residents. For instance, the Government of Tigray and high-level UN officials had an understanding on the need to distribute aid stored in the city of Kombolcha to local residents as well as to the people of Tigray. That this plan did not come to fruition is largely attributable to foot-dragging by certain UN agencies.

Nevertheless, the people of Tigray should never be held hostage to humanitarian operations elsewhere. Tigray has been under an all-encompassing siege since the end of June 2021. While the Abiy regime and its regional allies in Afar and Amhara regions continue to aggressively obstruct humanitarian aid delivery into Tigray, there is no entity preventing the delivery of humanitarian supplies into Afar and Amhara regions. We support residents in Afar and Amhara regions receiving aid, but humanitarian aid delivery into Tigray should never be conditional on what happens in Amhara and Afar regions. There simply is not a valid causal link between humanitarian

aid delivery in Tigray and other regions, for, unlike the Abiy regime’s obstructive role in Tigray, there is no external entity actively obstructing humanitarian operations outside Tigray.

In recent weeks, the Abiy regime had shown some encouraging signs vis-à-vis humanitarian operations in Tigray, allowing additional United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights to Mekelle. The WHO, ICRC and other partners have delivered vital medical supplies as well as food via UNHAS flights. However, while this is a welcome development, the quantity brought in is so vanishingly small that it won’t make a dent in Tigray’s catastrophic medical and humanitarian emergency. As the UN notes, the supplies “are very limited and are far from meeting the health and nutrition requirements in the region.” Compounding this supply crisis is the fact that, at present, no more than 5 tons of supplies can be transported via UNHAS flights due to limited cargo capacity. What is more, partners are not able to dispatch and distribute the limited medical and food items available due to a severe shortage of fuel, as no fuel has entered Tigray since early August.

In spite of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Tigray, the Government of Tigray appreciates the valuable work of aid agencies as they strive to meet the needs of the over 5 million Tigrayans in desperate need of emergency aid. All the same, we call on the international community to reject the litany of false narratives coming from the Abiy regime and use the right mix of carrots and sticks to compel it to allow unrestricted humanitarian access to Tigray so that critical supplies can reach those in desperate need of aid. Failing that, the Government of Tigray would like to emphasize the fact that it does not have unlimited patience, as the Abiy regime’s persistent obstruction of humanitarian operations condemns millions of Tigrayans to the risk of death by starvation.

For its part, the Government of Tigray assures the international community of its commitment to extending all necessary cooperation to facilitate humanitarian operations.

