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TIGRAY EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICE



WEEKLY BRIEFING NO. 13

OCTOBER 26, 2021

BRINGING TIGRAY CLOSER TO THE WORLD



1. OVERVIEW OF THE HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE

1.1 Deteriorating Humanitarian Situation:

It has been almost a year since the Abiy Ahmed government launched a genocidal war cloaked in the language of “law enforcement” operations, and 128 days since it imposed a deadly blockade on Tigray. Hundreds of Tigrayans continue to perish from hunger, with potentially thousands perishing across Tigray without the world and even their own government noticing as the comprehensive blockade on the region—telecommunications blackout, lack of cash, and severe fuel shortage—continues to place severe constraints on humanitarian operations and makes simple tasks such as sending and receiving timely updates exceedingly difficult.

Aid agencies estimate that 100 trucks carrying food, non-food items, and fuel must enter Tigray in order to meet burgeoning needs and avert humanitarian calamity. Spurning repeated calls to establish secure humanitarian corridors, the Abiy Ahmed government remains stubbornly wedded to its policy of obstructing the delivery of humanitarian supplies to Tigray via the only route into Tigray (Semera-Abala-Mekelle). As a result, the number of trucks arriving daily is far from sufficient to meet needs. Humanitarian partners now estimate a minimum of 282 trucks must enter Tigray daily to meet needs while still making up for lost ground. Ye, between October 13 and 19, only 215 trucks arrived in Tigray. No trucks have come ever since. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), since July 12, only 15 percent of the trucks needed for humanitarian operations have arrived in Tigray.

This willful obstruction of aid by the Abiy government has created a humanitarian tragedy the likes of which have not been seen in decades. The impact on children, and pregnant and lactating women is particularly harrowing. According to OCHA, Of the 63,000 children screened for malnutrition, including 32,000 girls, 1600 (2.5 %) were diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition (SAM), well above the 2 % global emergency threshold. To put this worsening crisis in perspective, the proportion of children diagnosed with SAM a week prior to the current survey was 2.3%. Furthermore, 6,748 children (10.7 %), including 3509 girls, were diagnosed with moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). Malnutrition among pregnant and lactating women remains alarmingly high. Of the 13,511 pregnant and lactating women screened for malnutrition, 8318 (61.5%) were diagnosed with acute malnutrition.



While these figures by themselves represent a humanitarian catastrophe of staggering proportions, they likely underestimate the true extent of the crisis. Evidence for this claim can be found in the fact that the number of children surveyed for malnutrition precipitously declined from 105,000 a week earlier to 63,000, principally due to shortage of cash and fuel, as most partners scale down, and in some cases downright suspend, humanitarian operations. Similarly, only 13,511 pregnant and lactating women were screened for malnutrition, compared to 18,835 a week earlier. With expanded sample size, the true magnitude of the crisis would be evident. Since the underlying cause of the crisis is the cruel and immoral blockade on Tigray, in the absence of the blockade being lifted or, at a minimum, meaningful improvements in the delivery of humanitarian supplies, this genocidal calamity will continue to claim the lives of thousands of Tigrayans.

1.2. Persistent and Unprecedented Denial of Fuel and Medical Supplies

The Ethiopian government continues to deny the entry of fuel and life-saving medical supplies into Tigray. Since July 29, no fuel tanker has been allowed to enter Tigray. Recently, 14 fuel tankers that had been stranded in Semera as part of the Abiy government's strict enforcement of its deadly siege on Tigray had received the necessary clearance from the government. However, the tankers were denied transit to Tigray at a checkpoint manned by security forces, who demanded an additional documentation: a letter of authorization from the Federal Police Commissioner. Since the Federal Police Commission is part of the same government that gave the clearance for the tankers in the first place, this additional requirement is a fig leaf, with the principal goal being the enforcement of the government's deadly policy of blockading Tigray into submission.

The consequences have been devastating across the board. According to OCHA, since October 11, out of the seven partners engaged in food distribution, 3 have ceased operations. The other 4 are expected to cease food distribution outside of Mekelle within a week if fuel is not received. Fuel shortage has forced nutrition partners to operate at less than 20 % capacity, severely constraining their ability to engage in malnutrition screening and treatment activities for children, and pregnant and lactating women. Health partners are also operating at 20 % capacity due to lack of fuel and cash, jeopardizing their ability to undertake malnutrition screening.

More ominously, fuel shortage has had the greatest impact on emergency food distribution. Between October 7 and 13, only 52 thousand people in need were reached, representing 1 % of the total population in need. To reach the 5.2 million people in need of emergency assistance, aid agencies need to serve 870 thousand people per week, which appears unlikely given the federal government's all-out assault on humanitarian operations.

The Abiy government also continues to deny the entry of medical supplies into Tigray, overtaxing what is left of Tigray's healthcare system, as 90 percent of health facilities in Tigray have been looted, destroyed, and vandalized.





Aside from making it difficult to rehabilitate the healthcare system, the denial of life-saving medicines has had deadly impacts on those with chronic diseases. For instance, Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Referral Hospital in Mekelle has run out of most life-saving medications. On a daily basis, 95 (7 children; 87 adults) patients seek treatment for cancer at Ayder. But since the Hospital has run out of chemotherapy medications, those patients are condemned to death. The Hospital is also no longer able to treat the 640 patients who seek treatment for Tuberculosis (TB) annually as TB medications have run out.

2. OTHER NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 Aerial Bombing of Mekelle and other Cities

Since October 18, 2021, the criminal regime in Addis Ababa has expressed its dissatisfaction with the slow-motion strangulation of Tigrayans by continuously raining bombs on civilian targets. There is no clearer evidence of the regime's targeting of civilian installations than its bombing of what had remained of Almeda Textile Factory located in Adwa, Central Tigray. The factory had been thoroughly looted and destroyed by the combined criminal armies of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Thus far, the regime has killed 5 innocent people, wounded over 30 others, and destroyed cattle and crops. Harrowingly, the body of the fifth victim was discovered 6 days after the air strike, as his body had been buried underneath the rubble, adding to his family's anguish and heartbreak.



The criminal regime's airstrike in Mekelle on October 22, 2021 is particularly distressing and dangerous as it encapsulates the Abiy government's gross irresponsibility and lawlessness. The Ethiopian government officially cleared a UNHAS 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 a bomb 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 Alula Abanega International Airport, where the UNHAS plane was supposed to land. By deliberately endangering a plane full of civilians, the Ethiopian government has violated international law.



By compromising the safety of UN 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. Indeed, as predicted, the UN has suspended UNHAS flights to Mekelle, further hampering humanitarian operations. .

2.2 Attention to the international community

The international response to the Abiy government's deliberate scheme to starve Tigrayans to death has been incomprehensibly negligible. 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 aerial bombardments of Mekelle and other areas in Tigray along with its deliberate endangering of a UNHAS flight exemplifies the Ethiopian government's pathological contempt for basic rules and norms. Only a robust package of punitive measures could deter this criminal regime from further acts of lawlessness.