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TIGRAY EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICE



WEEKLY BRIEFING NO. 16

NOVEMBER 23, 2021

BRINGING TIGRAY CLOSER TO THE WORLD



1. OVERVIEW OF THE HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE

1.1. The Suspension of Humanitarian Aid Delivery

It has been a little over a year since the commencement of the genocidal war on Tigray. The criminal Abiy regime's standard narrative about how and why it withdrew from most parts of Tigray, including Mekelle, consists of the following fiction: concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Tigray and aware of the need for farmers to plant crops, it declared a unilateral ceasefire. However, this self-serving narrative is a mere fable manufactured to conceal its backbreaking losses on the battlefield, and persuade its gullible supporters not to waver in their support of the regime's bankrupt strategy of using tens of thousands of poor Ethiopians as cannon fodder so Abiy Ahmed could live out his fantasy as Ethiopia's uncontested king.

Indeed, it has been almost five months since the imposition of a blockade that has placed a deadly chokehold on the people of Tigray. By completely sealing off Tigray from the outside world and obstructing humanitarian operations, the Abiy regime's objective has been to starve the people of Tigray into subjugation and/or out of existence.

To that end, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), since July 12, only 15 percent of the trucks needed have been allowed to enter Tigray. Since October 18, no aid trucks have entered Tigray. Over 360 trucks are still stranded in Semera, ostensibly awaiting authorization, since creating nightmarish roadblocks is part of the criminal regime's genocidal blueprint. To put it all in perspective, 282 trucks must enter Tigray daily to meet increasing humanitarian needs on the ground.

1.2 Devastating Impact on Children and Pregnant and Lactating Women

The impact of the criminal regime's endless obstruction has been especially hard on children and pregnant and lactating women. The prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) among children (6-59 months old) stands at a staggering 32 % (240,345 of the children screened). 3.8 % of the children (28,541) have been diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition (SAM), which is alarmingly higher than the global emergency threshold of 2 %. The malnutrition rate among pregnant and lactating women stands at 85 %, a shocking proportion certain to compound the humanitarian catastrophe in the weeks and months to come.

Malnutrition-caused fatalities have increased dramatically. The Tigray Bureau of Health has documented that over the last 3 months, at least 186 children under the age of five have died of malnutrition, as health facilities across Tigray have run out of therapeutic nutrition for children.



This fatality figure is the tip of the iceberg, based as it is on an investigation of only 14 barely-functioning hospitals across Tigray. The true magnitude of the crisis is much greater than reported since the comprehensive chokehold on Tigray has made it virtually impossible to send and receive timely updates from remote areas. To provide a snapshot of this tragic picture, just recently 15 children died of malnutrition at St. Mary's Hospital in the city of Axum. In Adigrat, which is located a mere 110 KM from Mekelle, a total of 24 children under the age of 5 died of malnutrition between October 26 and November 2, 2021.

1.3 Denial of Medical Supplies

No essential life-saving item has been spared from the genocidal regime's devastating blockade. The criminal regime in Addis also continues to deny the entry of life-saving medical supplies into Tigray. Against the backdrop of the plundering and destruction of health facilities across Tigray, the persistent denial of medical supplies has created a full-blown healthcare emergency, in which thousands of Tigrayans are exposed to otherwise preventable deaths. Since over 80 percent of Tigray's health facilities have been looted and destroyed, the denial of medical supplies has made it virtually impossible to begin rehabilitating Tigray's healthcare system.

Indeed, these days, only 14 % of Tigrayans visit health facilities and mobile clinics. In contrast, before the war, every Tigrayan had the opportunity to visit health facilities at least twice a year. The destruction of Tigray's healthcare system has had a tremendously adverse impact on patients with chronic illnesses. For instance, there are 40,000 diabetics and 37,000 hypertensive patients across Tigray, who can no longer get the medical care they need on account of the necessary medications for treating them having run out.

The region's flagship hospital, Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Referral Hospital has not been immune to the devastating impact of the siege, as it has run out of most essential medications. 48 people have died due to the lack of dialysis equipment. About 32 people with chronic kidney disease receive treatment twice a week, compared to the standard 3 times. The Hospital has run out of chemotherapy drugs, leading to the closure of its cancer ward. As a result, an estimated 500 people diagnosed with cancer will receive no treatment going forward. Additionally, about 50 people that sustained injuries from the criminal regime's air strikes cannot undergo the major surgeries they need on account of the lack of essential medications.

The Impact of the siege on reproductive health is remarkably shocking. At present, only 7% of women across Tigray have access to family planning services; 31 % have access to antenatal care first visit (ANC 1), and 8 % have access to a skilled birth attendant. The prewar figures were 60 %, 94 %, and 73 % respectively.

Over 43,000 HIV patients' treatment has also been interrupted on account of HIV drugs having run out, exposing these patients to the risk of otherwise preventable deaths, and leading to the death of many patients. Furthermore, over 70 percent of the people of Tigray live in areas prone to malaria infection.



Over 180,000 people are treated for malaria annually. However, given no malaria drugs have entered Tigray over the past five months, the capacity of Tigray’s health system to address the spread of this seasonal disease is close to zero.

2. OTHER NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

2.1. Drone Strike on Mekelle

The criminal regime of Abiy Ahmed, teetering on the brink of collapse and still dissatisfied with the slow-motion asphyxiation of Tigray, conducted a drone strike on Mekelle around 1 AM local time on November 21, 2021. The Drone fired at least two missiles onto a densely populated residential neighborhood, destroying a house, and shattering the glass windows of adjacent buildings.



At least one individual was injured. Any peace initiative predicated on the premise that Abiy and the criminal clique around him are good-faith actors is bound to fail. While this latest violence against civilians is once again indicative of a dying regime’s death spasm, it must be condemned by everyone with a modicum of regard for the rules and norms governing warfare.

2.2. AU Envoy for the Horn of Africa Visits Mekelle for the Third Time

On November 19, 2021, the AU Envoy for the Horn of Africa, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, arrived in Mekelle. Obasanjo had an extensive discussion with Tigray President Debretsion Gebremichael. During the discussion, President Debretsion reiterated the Government of Tigray’s commitment to finding a peaceful resolution to the current crisis by outlining at least three broad principles.





First, any peace initiative whose principal objective is to save Abiy Ahmed from imminent demise is dead on arrival. Second, no meaningful talks can be held so long as Amhara and Eritrean forces continue to occupy large swaths of Tigray and commit unimaginable atrocities. Finally, extreme care must be taken to decouple humanitarian issues from substantive political matters. President Debretsion reaffirmed the people and Government of Tigray's readiness to entertain all serious efforts at finding a peaceful resolution to the current crisis.

2.3 Ethnic Cleansing underway in Western Tigray

Months ago, the US State Department unequivocally called what an assortment of Amhara forces with the implicit and explicit support of the Ethiopian and Eritrean militaries were doing in the western part of Tigray an act of ethnic cleansing. This horrific act has gotten worse since then. The Amhara authorities' drive to complete their ethnic cleansing of Western Tigray has the following elements:

1. Mass Arrest of Tigrayans. Amhara forces have recently been conducting house to house searches and arresting Tigrayans above the age of 10 residing in the lowlands of Western Tigray, such as Humera, Adebay, Baeker, Maigaba, Qorarit, Adi Goshu etc. Those that have been arrested are being held in concentration camps. In Humera alone, there are 8000 Tigrayans being held under inhumane and degrading conditions. Tigrayan youth from the highlands, such as Adi Remets, Tsegedie, Adi Hidri, Ketema Nigus etc. are forced to join Amhara forces. Those who refuse to join are arrested and often killed.
2. Mass Killing of Tigrayans. Previously, CNN and other international media organizations had reported about the discovery of mangled bodies floating offshore after being thrown into the Tekeze River. All of the victims bore the marks of a brutal execution. From the end of August through early October, 105 such bodies were discovered and buried in the Sudan. The actual number is likely to be in the thousands. Between November 6 and 11, 2021, Amhara forces engaged in a widespread massacre of innocent Tigrayans in a campaign they dubbed "revenge for MayKadra." During this killing rampage, more than 735 innocent Tigrayans were brutally murdered, with their bodies mutilated with machetes and burned to eliminate any traces of forensic evidence, solely on account of their identity.
3. Mass Displacement of Tigrayans. In meetings held with residents in various areas, Amhara authorities warned Tigrayans of severe consequences for any whiff of contact or sympathy with TPLF. In meetings held with Amhara residents, the authorities revealed their blueprint for their ethnic cleansing campaign against Tigrayans.



Accordingly, women, the elderly, and children were to be forcibly removed from their homes, while young Tigrayans were to be murdered. They began to implement this ghastly plan few days ago. On November 20, 2021, 2000 people were forcibly evicted from their homes, leaving behind their hard-earned properties, loaded onto 30 trucks and transported to Adi Goshu.

Along with the government-sponsored campaign to exterminate the people of Tigray in other parts of Tigray, the current drive to rid Western Tigray of Tigrayans has the telltale signs of genocide. Unfortunately for the people of Tigray, the international community's response to this slow-moving genocidal campaign has been incomprehensibly inadequate. It is high time the international community went beyond strongly-worded statements of concern or condemnation and called what is happening in Tigray by its proper name: genocide.

2.4 The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Embarrasses the Nation

On November 13, 2021, the MFA issued a strangely combative statement, stating its objection to the U.S. Government's imposition of punitive sanctions on Eritrean officials and entities for their role in massive human rights violations in Tigray and prolonging the conflict. This statement represents an embarrassing milestone in the Ethiopian government's habitual prostration before a foreign government at the expense of national sovereignty. Ironically, the Abiy regime continues to shamelessly frame Ethiopia's current conflict in terms of the need to preserve internal sovereignty. In fact, despite persistent claims to the contrary, Eritrean troops have not withdrawn from Tigray, as they continue to occupy Western Tigray, parts of Northwestern Tigray, and Irob in Eastern Tigray.

By telling the world that the Eritrean military committing atrocities against Ethiopians did not mean anything and going so far as to rationalize this foreign military's dastardly brutalization of civilians, the Abiy regime remains wedded to an antiquated view of sovereignty defined as the right to act without external scrutiny. However, the criminal regime in Addis will never free itself of the infamy of masterminding the extermination of its own citizens with the help of a vicious foreign military. The international community should continue to turn up the heat on these genocidal partners until they deviate from their destructive path.