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Tigray External Affairs Office

## Extraordinary Briefing From The National Government of Tigray August 25, 2021

### I. Humanitarian Concerns

Today marks fifty-eight days since the National Government of Tigray's resumption of regular duties while the federal government imposes a total siege encompassing humanitarian, financial, communication, transport, and economic blockades.

The federal government has played a negligible role in the provision of aid, instead focusing on obstructing its delivery from the outset; the largest donor, USAID, covers 66%, and WFP 25% of the total amount of humanitarian aid and the remaining 9% is covered by other non-governmental organizations.

100 truck loads of humanitarian aid is required daily to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable communities. However, over the previous two months, only 320 trucks out of the required 6,000 trucks were permitted entry by the federal government; this amounts to 5% of the total amount of humanitarian aid required. Not a single truck has been allowed into Tigray since Friday, August 20, 2021, as the federal government further tightens its siege on Tigray.

A majority of the aid organizations operating in Tigray have announced complete depletion of their stock placing the lives of the more than 6.8 million aid recipients in perilous danger. Nearly a million people are currently on the verge of famine with the number expected to quadruple in the coming weeks and 2.2 million of those in need of emergency assistance are internally displaced, predominantly victims of ethnic cleansing in western Tigray.



The absence of telecom services has made it impossible for aid workers and the national government of Tigray to collect timely information on the deteriorating situation on the ground. Additionally, the lack of telecommunications has created barriers and difficulties for local and international media to report on the rapidly declining humanitarian conditions. Lack of fuel and electric power compounds the difficulties of reaching those in identified need.

The impact of the siege on emergency food aid and the activity of the humanitarian community is simply the tip of the humanitarian crisis engendered by the blockade, as multifaceted insecurities of all kinds impact every demographic in Tigray.

The cumulative wanton destruction and robbery of public and private property, coupled with a siege extending the eight-month-long genocidal war, will have a long-term debilitating impact on Tigray's future. The reluctance of the international community to take firm and meaningful measures countering the Federal government's systematic design to starve the people of Tigray into submission has encouraged not just the maintenance but the consolidation of the siege.

Though the full impact of the siege on the lives and prospects of the people of Tigray people will take years to be thoroughly investigated and fully uncovered, the following facts may sketch a partial picture of its damaging effects and conditions under the siege.

## **II. Public Health**

The number of children facing malnutrition is increasing alarmingly; close to 20,000 children are facing severe acute malnutrition with the rate in those between 6 to 59 months reaching 2.6%. Previously, children received vaccinations to prevent eleven disease types, however, due to cold chain challenges and access blockages around 194, 033 children are yet to be vaccinated, many preventable diseases outbreaks are anticipated as a result.



The share of pregnant and lactating women with moderate acute malnutrition has reached 70% approximately 135,823 women. Before the war, of the million people who used public visited health facilities, 194,033 were women coming for reproductive related services.

What remains of the devastated health system is running out of rudimentary pharmaceuticals. The number of deaths attributable to shortage and absence of medical supplies has risen exponentially. Power outages have rendered medicines in stock that require cold chains useless. The obliteration of Tigray's health system comes under the backdrop of the global coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 prevention and control activities are nonexistent due to lack of access to personal protective equipment, vaccines and other supplies necessary for intervention. Testing and identifying of cases ceased due to lack of reagent supply and looting of lab equipment.

### **III. Economic Concerns**

Due to power, internet, and telecommunication blackouts imposed by the federal government business with its attendant economic and social activity has come to a complete halt in Tigray.

11,000 local manufacturers employing about 102, 000 people have shut down their business, directly and indirectly affecting nearly a million people. Nine foreign investors employing 9,882 people have also been forced to discontinue their operations. Many of the 130,500 registered small and medium-sized businesses dependent on electric power, banking services, cross regional trade, internet and telephone services have withered away.

Federal institutions like Ethio-telecom, Ethiopia Electric Power and Utility, banks, Human Rights Commission, Office of Ombudsman, Ethiopia Revenue and Customs Authority and four federally administered universities employ around 29,000 people in Tigray. Mekelle University alone has more than ten thousand federal employees, including essential service providers at critical institutions such as Ayder Comprehensive Specialized Referral Hospital who have not been paid since June 2021. More than 130,000 civil servants in Tigray have not

been paid for the months of June, July, and will go on three months without salaries if they are not paid their August wage. Civil servants sustain the livelihoods of more than half a million people. More than 27,516 civil servants from western and southern Tigray were displaced at the start of the conflict and have not been paid their salaries for the duration of the genocidal war.

450,000 private sector employees, including those working for non-governmental organizations, have also been denied their earnings and access to their savings since June 2021. The same is true with the nearly a 100,000 retirees, mostly old, sick and desperately poor, whose pensions are being withheld.

The total suspension of banking services is being used as a punitive political tool in violation of the rules and regulations of the National Bank of Ethiopia. Both government and private banks in Tigray have been denied access to data of their customers and forced to desist services. The state owned Commercial Bank of Ethiopia (CBE) alone has more than 1.7 million customers in Tigray while private banks served around half a million. There are around 750,000 state and private sector employees who are paid their monthly salary through banks. Microfinance institutions with a total membership of more than a million, predominantly from low-income households, have been closed. Farmers too are unable to withdraw money to buy farm seeds during this vitally important season.

From the 2.2 million state and private bank customers, 30% are beneficiaries of local and international remittance. Tigray people are denied support from family members and relatives at this very difficult time.

Discontinuation of banking services has even prevented UN agencies along with other humanitarian organizations from purchasing necessities like fuel (from the little remaining in Tigray) and compensating local staff. Aid workers traveling from Addis Ababa to Mekelle are not allowed to carry more than 10,000 Ethiopian birr which is equivalent to around 200 USD. This is primarily motivated by a pedantic desire to interrupt the circulation of monies within the Tigrayan economy.



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It is now common to witness middle income families with sufficient savings struggling to feed their children and cover medical and other expenses. Stock of merchandise is depleted, quadrupling the price of basic items and sentencing the absolute majority of Tigrayan's to await humanitarian aid.