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Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
**OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

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## Press Briefing Transcript of June 3, 2021

### Tigray Region Updates

The Government of Ethiopia’s law enforcement mission in the Tigray Region which commenced in November 2020 has notably garnered global attention. The suffering of Ethiopians who are victims of a situation that is not of their choosing is a source of pain for all Ethiopians and for the Government. Over the course of the past months, there have been various efforts on the part of the government to assuage the pain and suffering of its citizens in the region. While these efforts may have been marred by various challenges given the complexity of any armed engagement, these efforts never the less have been underway and centered on enabling the return of normalcy for our people in Tigray.

The aspirations of this administration to enable a life of dignity for its citizens over the course of the past three years has often been hijacked by agents of instability and their accomplices. The situation in Tigray is no different. A conflict provoked by a belligerent and now outlawed criminal enterprise has initiated endless suffering for the people of the region in whose name it continues to trade.

While revisiting the incidents of November 4, 2020 that precipitated a Federal Government intervention may be viewed as a repetition, the global community has failed to come to terms with a number of glaringly apparent facts which I would like to draw your attention to again:

- 1) the criminal enterprise’s three-decade abuse of power, state capture, bottomless corruption, and gross human rights violations committed against the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia like ethnic Somalis, Amharas, Oromos, Anuaks and many other groups without any external intervention;
- 2) the disdain shown by the criminal enterprise towards numerous attempts to dialogue initiated by the Federal Government and many other independent actors which were all thwarted over the past three years;
- 3) the war mongering narrative and overt belligerence exhibited by the criminal enterprise for several months preceding their attack on the North Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Force; “war is our traditional dance” had been a commonly stated theme of the terrorist group.
- 4) the public confession of a pre-emptive attack on the North Command of the National Defense Force by a regional irregular force which constitutes an act of war on the State and people of Ethiopia - which warranted a response
- 5) the continued belligerence of fragments of the criminal enterprise despite several calls by the Federal Government over the past months for them to surrender and lay down weapons with a guarantee of amnesty and support to return to life;
- 6) the continued attacks on humanitarian convoys by fragments of the criminal enterprise that are blocking assistance meant for the very people in whose name they are trading;

- 7) the misguided, well financed and lobby firm supported disinformation campaigns and false narratives lodged by sympathizers of the criminal enterprise outside of Ethiopia;
- 8) the utilization of looted national wealth illegally siphoned off into offshore accounts being used to finance disinformation campaigns and destabilizing activities while the people of Tigray in whose name they trade have yet to receive a drop of financial and humanitarian support from these communities abroad;
- 9) the establishment and active operation of a Constitutionally mandated Provisional Administration whose members continue to be assassinated by the criminal enterprise for merely serving the people of Tigray under a new mandate;
- 10) The recent designation of the TPLF as a terrorist organization by the House of People's Representatives in a process adhering to the country's constitutional processes.

These ten facts are often deliberately overlooked, omitted and disregarded by various entities who may have another agenda that has less to do with the wellbeing of our people in the Tigray Region but rather with other vested interests. The concoction of figures and stories to push a particular global narrative does not serve the people of Tigray in whose name fabrications are spun for fundraising, relevance and other interests. Ethiopia is witnessing an orchestrated attack that is condescending in nature; often patronising in tone; belligerent in approach and destructive in outcome. It is disingenuous to hijack the suffering of ordinary citizens for other goals.

Compassion, upholding human rights, maintaining rule of law are values and principles entrenched in our cultural fabric and heritage as Ethiopians. While perceptions of a people in siloed ethnic identities of Amhara, Tigre, Oromo, Somali, etc is prevalent – Ethiopians know and understand that their roots run deep and are intertwined long before identity was institutionalized. Therefore, save for a few conflict entrepreneurs that continuously press on lines of divisions, Ethiopians have and know how-to live-in harmony with each other.

The need to support our people in the Tigray region recover from the current suffering is a primary responsibility of the Government of Ethiopia which it takes very seriously and is undertaking within the means available to it. Ethiopia has also shown readiness and open will to positively and constructively engage with partners.

However, demonizing a sitting Prime Minister and chastising the Government for reversing state collapse triggered by a criminal enterprise, instead of extending further support and reinforcement to rehabilitate the Tigray region is unproductive and not constructive. The Government of Ethiopia led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed knows its duties and commitment to its own people, to international norms and continues to take measures in addressing the multifaceted needs of its more than 100million people throughout the country.

The government categorically rejects accusations of decimation of a people as a policy. Such is not the heartbeat of this administration.

The following figures and data compiled from key government stakeholders provide an insight into the breadth of work being undertaken by the Government in the Tigray Region:

### **On Rule of Operations**

- Counter insurgency operations by the ENDF are now concentrated only in two areas where the outlawed operatives are active and this phase shall soon be finalized as well
- The outlawed group is occasionally undertaking attacks outside of these areas to give the impression of control and that the region is completely unstable

## On Humanitarian Assistance

- Delivery of food and non-food items for 4.5 million beneficiaries in the first round with a reported reach of 4.3 million beneficiaries in the second and third rounds;
- 93 woredas are currently being aided out of which Federal Government provides to 14;
- 166,264 Metric Ton (MT) of food which costs 5.2 billion birr or 131 million USD has been distributed so far. The food distributed in the region for the first and second round was covered by both the Government (70%) and partners (30%). Currently 6 operators namely World Food Program, World Vision, CARE, Relief Society of Tigray (REST), Food for the Hungry (FH) and the Government of Ethiopia are providing food assistance in the region. Out of the 93 districts in the region WFP, World Vision, CARE, REST and FH (food for the hungry) cover 79 districts (86%) and the Government of Ethiopia covers 14 districts (14%). This shows how the Government of Ethiopia has been working closely with partners and creates conducive environment for humanitarian partners.
- With this continued provision of food assistance, the global claims of hunger as a weapon of war are baseless and politically motivated.
- More than 79,053 Emergency Shelter & non-food item kits, including 41 Rub halls which is estimated to be more than 638.74 million birr or 16 million USD has been supplied to cover more than 392,265 IDPs. However, there is significant gap in non-food items with partners covering only 33% of the total requirement.
- Emergency medicines which are estimated to be 72.9 million birr and 12 ambulances and Birr 129.8 million have been supplied to the region by Ministry of Health to strengthen the basic health services and facilities. The Ministry of Health has been working to operationalize the health facilities in the region and availing emergency supplies for the hospitals and other health institutions in the region. In addition, more than 60 mobile health teams have been established to deliver health services in areas where health facilities are not functional. Two UN Agencies and nine International NGO's in collaboration with the region's Health Bureau are providing mobile Health Services in different Woredas.
- 120 water trucks (In birr more than 75.6 million) have been deployed to supply safe water to the IDPs and communities which cover more than 621, 000 people in the region. More than 300, 000 peoples are supplied with hygiene and sanitation facilities to protect potential sanitation and hygiene related risks in the areas where the people are the most vulnerable.
- The Ministry of Agriculture has allocated 10 million birr to strengthen the regional agriculture and natural resource bureau. A total of 537,728 quintal of fertilizers have been made available thus far. 73,440 quintals of seeds have also been purchased and transported to the region. With partners allocating Birr 71.9 million birr for livestock restocking.
- The Ministry of Education has allocated 95 million birr to reopening the schools. Ministry of education has dispatched 1 million face masks to the region and installing a hand washing facility in 58 schools to promote Covid-19 protocols with the coordination of the education cluster in the region. 72 teachers are trained on education in emergency to save IDPs and Host community.
- Refugees in the region are one of the priority areas of the Government to maintain the safety and security and for the continuous food and non-food supplies. In refugee camps where access and issues related with safety and security are a concern, the Government has taken immediate action by relocating and maintaining basic humanitarian services.

## On Coordination Mechanism

- Currently, the Government and its partners are working closely based on the agreement which was signed on November 29/2020 between government and partners on issues that are related to access, coordination and humanitarian assistance.
- To boost safe, efficient and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, Emergency Coordination Center (ECC) has been established in Mekele for some months now, comprised of relevant line ministries, regional bureaus, UN-Agencies, bi-laterals and international NGO's.

- This ECC is mandated to address immediate food and non-food needs in best organized and coordinated manner.
- A four-layer Emergency Coordination system (Regional, Zonal, Woreda and Food Distribution points (FDPs)) have also been put in place in order to address additional needs and supplies within short period of time.
- This morning a very useful dialogue platform was convened by the Deputy Prime Minister in which higher federal and regional government heads met with representatives of the international community and humanitarian actors to come to an understanding on facts on the ground where many partners and humanitarian actors including the UN, EU have acknowledged the progress being made.

### **On Access for Humanitarian Agencies**

- Currently, the case-by-case access clearance procedures for humanitarian aid providers has been replaced by a blanket approval process in order to better coordinate food and non-food items provision across the region.
- More than 202 staff members of UN-Agencies, international NGO's including over 80 journalists have been provided access to Tigray to support and coordinate the emergency responses in the region.
- Now, most parts of the region are accessible and creates conducive environment to speed up the delivery of food and non- food supplies to the needy people in the region.
- **In the areas where safe movement of humanitarian cargos are strained, military escort has been taken as a right measures and last resort to get access and reach those in need. In some cases, we have credible evidence indicating that some actors under the guise of humanitarian assistance have attempted to smuggle weapons beyond checkpoints.**
- Visa extension has been put in place for partners who are stationed in the region. The extension is based on the work volume and duration in the region. Currently visas are being granted for a period of three months.
- Communication materials are one of the issues which has frequently been raised by partners. Currently the Ministry of Peace has developed a guideline and circulated it to all partners to follow the direction that is indicated in the guideline. But the import and utilization of communication equipment has to be within the laws of the land; demands to import military like gadgets and equipment that go beyond the needs of humanitarian assistance cannot be accepted. No developed country would permit the entry of equipment that are not for the stated purposes. Hence Ethiopia need not be expected to go beyond what is legally set at a national level.

### **On Recovery & Rehabilitation**

- Regarding recovery and peace building intervention, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Peace are closely working with EU, World Bank and UNDP in order to build back better damaged and destroyed economic and social infrastructures in the region.
- A ministerial committee oversees all supports and has developed a plan to support regional bureaus on a regular basis by assigning experts. Currently, the Government is working on mobilizing resources for recovery and rehabilitation of damaged and destroyed economic and social infrastructures as well as humanitarian assistances.

### **On Peacebuilding**

- The region's police force has taken over from the federal police. About 4,000 regional police officers participated in refresher training and are now on duty. Community police and independent observers are organized in Mekelle city and vicinity and are working beside the police to enhance peace and security.

- Public service dialogue: As part of the national dialogue going on throughout the country, more than 2,000 civil servants have participated in peace dialogue organized by Ministry of Peace.
- National Youth Voluntary Community Service Program (NYVCSP): As part of the ongoing NYVCSP program throughout the country, 1,300 youth have participated in a one-month training. The courses include life skill and leadership, digital media smart use, civil right and social virtue, consensus building in diversity and peace building. The volunteers will be deployed to serve the community in different parts of the region.

While sharing these milestones, it is not to insinuate that challenges do not exist. Leave alone in a situation where armed terrorists are active and external interests dominate, bringing stability to communities affected by natural disasters in of itself is challenging. Challenges include:

- Security concerns
- Financial and material resource constraints
- Capacity constraints
- Misinformation and disinformation

But we should not make these challenges a phenomenon unique to Ethiopia. Rather the call to action is a concerted and honest effort to rebuild lives and livelihoods. There is no official of this administration that does not want what the international community wants for the people of Tigray. The people in the region are our people – our brothers and sisters – our daily concern. Not our twitter concern.

#### **MEDIA SPACE + MISINFORMATION + DISINFORMATION**

Related to the situation in Tigray is the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation we have witnessed being perpetuated by the criminal enterprise’s supporters abroad. Fabricated narratives and data are then re-shared by credible institutions without foresight and examination of authenticity of claims and allegations.

Some examples include:

- Utilization of images from destruction in the Yemeni war by a director at Human Rights Watch claiming it’s happening in Tigray Region
- Claims of use of chemical weapons by TPLF chief dis-informants abroad which found its way into an international publication without any due measures taken for veracity of the claims
- Images of TPLF’s crimes during the 2016 Ireecha massacre being used to fundraise online for an organization
- Very recent doctoring of audio - stitching words and sentences to portray the Prime Minister saying things he did not say. This itself making it as news on reputable international publications
- The Ethiopian Government has for a while raised a red flag about some media entities being infiltrated by TPLF operatives that have been working to skew information about the country through reputable media outlets. Just last week we witnessed one such senior journalist has left his post at BBC and joined the terrorist cell in Tigray which has been outlawed.

This is particularly important because such materials are publicly being pushed by TPLF sympathizers that the Global Community and international media are calling upon to provide context and analysis on the situation on the ground. However, context doesn’t come easy sitting thousands of miles away behind screens where fabricating is at one’s fingertips.

There are also allegations of the media space regressing which is unfounded. Ethiopia has never experienced a more media friendly and enabling environment than the past three years.

I don't think much needs to be said in terms of the number of local media that have flourished and now with the new law which recognizes online media as well, claims of a stifled media space are unfounded.

## ELECTIONS

- Ethiopia's 6th National Elections are scheduled to take place on June 21 2021. The highly anticipated elections will arguably be the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's first attempt at free and fair elections.
- Following the failure of the previous regime to build a democratic culture, Ethiopia is now confronted with the twin challenges of building the necessary institutions and mindsets to enable a robust democratic culture and practice. Ethiopians are also presented with an opportunity to transition the country into a new era of governance and prosperity befitting its long history and aspirations of its proud people and the ample growth potential our country possesses. To this end, the Federal government's commitment to hold the first free, fair and peaceful elections have been founded on ongoing preparations to meet this goal.
- A National Election Security Committee comprising members of the Federal Police, the Attorney General, the National Intelligence and Security Service, and the Ministry of Defence and regional representatives has been established by the government to ensure a peaceful and legitimate election.
- Discussions have been underway on the role the government must play in ensuring citizens exercise their Constitutional rights to vote freely. Special measures are being taken by the committee to identify areas where there is a risk of conflict. To deal with any election related grievances, the Federal Supreme Court the supreme court has set up dedicated electoral dispute adjudication benches.
- Political parties are aggressively campaigning across the country.
- To help voters make informed choices, election debates among contesting parties have begun with active participation of independent media and civil society on topics of national importance.
- The Prime Minister has continued to convene Regional Presidents and the Head of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia with the objective of identifying and resolving bottlenecks or challenges in the pre-election phase.

As a nascent democracy that is rebuilding and reorienting institutions towards a democratic path; that is working on strengthening political, economic and social stability, setting the foundations for multidimensional prosperity of its people, Ethiopia working closely with its partners and neighbours is a stabilizing force for the region. The Government's principle of 'Medemer' remains an anchoring point in all endeavours.

As Ethiopia addresses the challenges of terrorism, the Government welcomes the constructive support of partners and its citizens throughout the world. Our clear call to action is:

- **For the Diaspora community to unite** – your country and your people need you beyond lines of divisions; wasting resources and energy digitally fighting one another does not serve the women and girls; men and boys in Tigray. Channelling efforts for their revival is a priority.
- **For Friends of Ethiopia** to stand with Ethiopia
- **For Partners** to rethink ill informed decisions

## Attorney General Updates on Criminal Investigation and Prosecutions

My briefing would focus on criminal investigation and prosecutions relating to what has transpired in the Tigray regional states over the past few months. Particularly, the briefing would focus on;

1. Investigation and prosecution of the crimes which senior leaders and affiliates of the TPLF are suspected of committing (crimes for which the organization has been duly designated as a terrorist organization);
2. Investigations and prosecutions of allegations of sexual assault and the killing of civilians in the Tigray Regional State;

### **The first phase/ round of investigation in to the acts of the TPLF leadership has ascertained the following facts:**

1. The TPLF leadership, through a decision of its executive committee, has established what it called the Tigray Military Command.
2. This illegal military outfit was organized, staffed and commanded by retired generals.
3. This illegal force had eight divisions and one mechanized unit and 23 regiments and its own logistic structure and command.
4. The leadership of the TPLF, which is now a designated terrorist organization, played an active role in organizing, arming and financing this force.
5. The TPLF, had armed, financed and supported different armed cells in various parts of the country including in Afar, Amhara and Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz regional regional states. The TPLF had used these entities as agents in its effort to destabilize the country and undermine the Federal Government.
6. On November 4, 2020 the military force that was organized by the TPLF attacked several bases and facilities of the northern command. These were coordinated attacks that were meant to wipe out and neutralize the northern command. In addition to the attacks on the ENDF, there were also attacks against Federal Police units in Mekelle, Shire and Axum airports.
7. There were also attacks among others on the Ashegoda Windmill, the Mekelle and Adigrat Petroleum Depots, the Tekeze Dam/ electric plant, Alamata electric substation.
8. The facilities and network of Ethio Telecom were disrupted under the direct order of the chairperson of the TPLF.

The first phase of the investigation has now been completed.

Several suspects have also been apprehended.

To preserve some of the key evidence and testimonies gathered in the investigation, federal prosecutors are currently in the process of having such evidence recorded by the Federal First Instance Court.

The above set of facts, which have been ascertained through our investigation constitute serious crimes. Several suspects who we believe had a direct and major role in the commission of these crimes will now face charges including for outages against the constitutional order; armed uprising and instigating civil war, impairment of the defensive power of the state and terrorism.

The investigation into the crimes perpetrated by the TPLF over the years will continue in subsequent phases.



**The other focus of investigation and prosecution relates to the killing of civilians and cases of sexual assault or rape.**

Investigation into these allegations are being carried out by four different entities;

1. The Military Court and Prosecutors
2. Regional Police and Prosecutors
3. Federal Police and investigators
4. In addition to these criminal investigations; the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission are conducting a joint investigation.

#### **Military Police and Prosecutors**

- The military police and prosecutors have focused their efforts particularly on cases of killing civilians and cases of rape/sexual assaults perpetrated by members of the ENDF.
- Though the ENDF had issued clear and written rules of engagement in the form of a pocketbook to be carried by all its personnel, unfortunately there have been some bad apples who have violated these rules of engagement.
- Military prosecutors have pressed charges against **28 soldiers** who are suspected of killing civilians in a situation where there was no military necessity. The trials of these suspects are underway and the verdicts are expected to be handed down shortly.
- Military prosecutors have pressed charges against **25 soldiers** who are suspected of committing acts of sexual violence and rape. The trials of these suspects are underway and the verdicts in these cases are expected to be handed down shortly.
- In addition to the trials underway, **three soldiers have already been convicted and sentenced** for rape; **one** soldier has been convicted and sentenced for killing a civilian.
- The military police are also investigating several other cases in which credible allegations of similar crimes have been reported.

**The regional authorities have also received and are investigating several complaints and allegations of sexual assault and rape reported in various parts of the region.**

#### **Federal Police and Prosecutors**

The Federal Police and Federal Prosecutors have focused on allegations of major atrocities that have been reported since the onset of the conflict in the Tigray Regional State.

- The first report of major crimes and atrocities to emerge in the Tigray Regional State concerned the killing of several hundreds of civilians in the town of Maikadra. A team of federal police investigators and prosecutors were deployed to the area and after extensive investigation in which the testimony of **256 witnesses** has been taken, exhuming and conducting forensic investigation on the remains of victims (conducted by a medical team of forensic experts), the investigation team has ascertained that **229 individuals** have been killed and several victims have sustained serious injuries. The investigation team has identified **202 individuals** who are believed to have taken part in the commission of this crime. While most of the suspects are believed to have fled to Sudan, **23 have been apprehended** and charges have been pressed against the suspects at the Federal High Court and the trial is already underway.



The other report of major crimes and atrocities concerned incidents in the city of Axum. The investigation team consisting of federal police and prosecutors is investigating the incidents that have taken place primarily from the 19th to the 28th of November. This is still an ongoing investigation which we hope to finalize in the coming few days;

1. **Death of civilians and damage to civilian installations, infrastructure and property caused by artillery fire** in situations not warranted by military necessity.
2. **Killing of Civilians [from November 27-28]:** In this investigation, that is still underway, the testimony of 119 witnesses has been recorded, medical records and evidences concerning those who have been injured and received medical treatment has been obtained, video and photographic record of the damage to civilian property and installations has been taken, samples/pieces of shrapnel from the shelling have been secured. We have received testimony that seems to indicate that close to a hundred (110 civilians) have been killed on these dates. The investigation shows that 70 civilians have been killed in the city while they were outdoors. There are indications that some of these individuals might have been irregular combatants who have received a two-day training and armed by the TPLF. On the other hand, close to 40 civilians seem to have been killed in situations where there was no active fighting and where they did not pose a threat to the troops in the area.

We will continue these efforts to investigate and ensure accountability by coordinating the efforts of the military, federal and regional justice system.

The Federal Government is committed to ensure accountability for all violations of pertinent local and international legal norms and standards.

We believe that our efforts so far demonstrate our commitment to ensure accountability and preclude impunity.

We condemn all acts that put the life and dignity of civilians in danger and we will continue to strive to bring to justice those responsible for heinous crimes against civilians.

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