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የጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር ጽሕፈት ቤት
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

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Statement on the Tigray Region Rule of Law Operations

I. Context

On November 4, 2020 the Federal Government of Ethiopia initiated a rule of law operation in the northern part of the country – the Tigray Region. The objectives of the rule of law operations have been clearly articulated on several occasions, as has the genesis and history of Constitutional transgressions by the criminal TPLF clique that necessitated a Federal government intervention. **The deliberate and heinous attack on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, which brutally killed the ultimate guardians of the Constitution, is a crime of high treason under the laws of the land.** No individual or entity, nationally or internationally, is above the laws of the land. The Government of Ethiopia realizes its duties of upholding the law and protecting the country.

The objective of the intervention by the Federal government in the current phase of the rule of law operations in Tigray remains two-fold:

- 1) To **rebuild the region by ensuring that humanitarian needs are addressed**; damaged infrastructure are repaired and administrative and governance functions are restored to effectively provide public services to citizens, and
- 2) To **complete the process of bringing to justice the perpetrators of crime** still actively operating in the region

The Federal Government of Ethiopia is committed to deliver on its Constitutionally mandated primary responsibilities of enforcing law and order and will pursue the two objectives to their completion.

II. Situation Update

Humanitarian Situation

Further to the February 24th 2021 update on the Tigray region, **current humanitarian assistance has increased to 780,534.6 quintals of food items distributed by the Federal Government to 3.8mil beneficiaries.**

The Federal Government has thus far spent Birr 1.87 billion in humanitarian assistance to the Tigray region by reallocating spending other priorities within its budget. **Non-food items estimated at more than Birr 80 million have also been distributed in the region by the Federal government.**

Considering damages to water lines, around Birr 31million has been allocated to fulfil the requisite spare parts are available for **maintenance of water lines, as well as provision of water trucks to areas where service is disrupted.** Similarly, extensive work has been undertaken and is ongoing in the health sector, with **20 hospitals and 71 health facilities that have now become operational again.** Medical supplies worth close to Birr 199 million have been made available in addition to other materials like emergency vehicles and computers. In the education sector, **preparations have been finalized to resume normal school activities at the cost of more than Birr 96million** for repair work and procuring the necessary teaching materials.

On humanitarian access, it is to be recalled that Ethiopia announced unfettered access for humanitarian agencies last week. Per consultations held today with UN agencies and other international organizations, further amendments have been made based on consensus on the modality of operations. **Humanitarian agencies can operate in the region with unfettered access unhindered mobility, by simply providing a notification of operations to the Ministry of Peace, and at their own risk in region wide movement.**

All entities are expected to abide by the laws of the land and any entity or individual abetting criminality under the guise of provision of aid, will be held accountable.

Human Rights Situation

The Government of Ethiopia has also taken concrete steps to address human rights abuses that have occurred within the context of the conflict triggered by the TPLF. The first major human rights abuse and atrocity to be reported in this regard has been the atrocity committed in Maikadra, resulting in the death of hundreds of civilians by youth organized, enabled and assisted by the TPLF militia. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission has conducted a thorough investigation of the matter and has released its preliminary findings in a report.

Furthermore, **the Federal Police and federal prosecutors have also conducted a criminal investigation relating to the atrocities that have been committed in Humera and Maikadra. Based on this criminal investigation in which more than 250 witnesses have given their testimony, investigators have identified around 200 suspects.** Although most of the suspects have fled to Sudan, **21 suspects have been apprehended and criminal charges will be pressed against them in the coming weeks.**

In line with the government’s commitment to uphold rule of law and bring to account anyone who is responsible for committing such heinous crimes, **federal investigators are conducting investigations in relation to other credible allegations of atrocities and serious human rights abuses in other parts of the region, including in Axum.** The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is also conducting its own independent investigation in relation to such incidents and allegations in other parts of the Tigray Region including in Axum. The Commission has also signalled its willingness to collaborate with relevant UN agencies for the purpose of these investigations.

The Attorney General Office is also committed to conduct its own independent investigations. Based on thorough, on the ground investigations, the Government of Ethiopia is committed to discharge its obligation of ensuring accountability for any serious human rights violations.

Media Access

The Federal Government has recently granted full access for international and local media to travel to and report from the Tigray region. As such so far eight international media are already active.

Media operating in the region are to be bound by operating protocols that ensures understanding of the context, legal operations and mobility as established by the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority. The Government of Ethiopia believes the allegiance of journalists must always be to the facts, the nuances of history, and to a sober analysis of facts. We caution the media from simply confirming the considerable misinformation and disinformation campaign of TPLF operatives that is conducted by influencing witness testimonies.

The Ethiopian National Defence Force will ensure the security of media personnel in areas that the ENDF are stationed in within the Tigray region. **Any media wishing to venture out of ENDF stationed areas will not be hindered from mobility, but will do so at their own risk. The Federal Government will not be responsible for risks endured by media personnel that function outside of the established operating protocols.**

The Federal Government welcomes the work of international and local media to cover events and activities in the Tigray region. Nevertheless, any media entity or personnel that breach national laws, including by aiding and abetting criminal entities and perpetrators, will be held accountable per the laws of the land.

Law Enforcement

The government is also supporting the strengthening and operationalization of law enforcement bodies within the region. Having completed training, **the regional police force is now operational in six zones of the region.** Correctional facilities in Mekelle and Adigrat have become operational again to deal with criminal offenders. And courts in Mekelle have begun to attend to cases with efforts underway to operationalize the judicial system region wide.

Infrastructure Repairs

The region has sustained heavy infrastructure damage by TPLF forces in the past few months, resulting in telecom line, electricity and transportation access disruptions. Since then, the Federal government has been making a concerted effort to undertake repairs.

Telecommunications

Video footage retrieved from Ethio Telecom Mekelle site shows perpetrators tampering with the data centre equipment which led to telecom service interruption in early November 2020. Transmission lines and fibre optic cables were also damaged by TPLF militia retreating into the mountains, further cutting off from communication the entire region. **Efforts by Ethio Telecom and other stakeholders to repair damaged infrastructure have enabled 363 mobile sites have been restored with mobile voice and fixed services actively running in more than 26 areas in the region.** Some areas have been reconnected with temporary transmission lines and therefore some service interruptions are possible.

Electricity

Electricity transmission lines and conductors have also been tampered with and damaged by TPLF militia which resulted in an electricity blackout in the region. Ethiopian Electric Power undertook extensive technical audit of damages to 18 transmission as well as 17 power distribution centres lines in the North. **Damages sustained are estimated at more than Birr 240 million with repair efforts underway.**

Roads

Based on initial damage assessments undertaken by the Ethiopian Roads Authority in the Tigray region, specific places along 195kms of roads have been damaged by retreating TPLF militia since November 2020. **Efforts to repair the damage has been initiated with an estimated budget of Birr 11million required to maintain damages caused by TPLF on public roads in the region.**

Banking Services

Banking services have also become operational in many parts of the region, following a disruption of services due to damages to telecom infrastructure. With the resumption of fixed broadband service by Ethio Telecom, most banks in the region have already resumed services, with the exception of a few that have sustained damages.

III. State of Emergency Leadership

It is to be recalled that following the enactment of the State of Emergency in Tigray Region on November 4, 2020 by the Council of Ministers in their 21st Extraordinary Session, the State of Emergency Task Force was being led by the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. **As of March 3, 2021, the State of Emergency Task Force will be led by General Yohannes Gebremeskel Tesfariam.**

IV. Conclusion

The Federal Government of Ethiopia encourages international partners interested in supporting our efforts of rebuilding the Tigray region to engage constructively. Engagements need to be based on ensuring that the people of the region receive the assistance they need for life to fully return to normalcy.

Ethiopia rejects any partisan interventions and politically motivated campaigns against the country and government, aimed at undermining the rule of law measures it has taken and will continue to take in bringing the criminal clique and other perpetrators to justice. The Ethiopian people, in all corners of the country, have paid sacrifices over a span of three decades due to the criminality of the TPLF and are now intent on forging ahead on to the path of democratization, enduring peace and development.

The Federal Government of Ethiopia welcomes partnerships that will support it to deliver on these aspirations and those embodied in the reforms journey undertaken since 2018.

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