Humanitarian Situation Update on Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) War on Amhara People: July 24, 2021

Background

The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) initiated a conflict in Ethiopia’s northernmost region of Tigray when it attacked the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) Northern Command and neighboring Amhara Region on November 3, 2021. In the following days, weeks and months, a coalition of forces including the ENDF, Amhara Special Forces, and Eritrean Defense Forces launched a counteroffensive against TPLF from various fronts and controlled most parts of Tigray until the Ethiopian government announced a unilateral ceasefire on June 28, 2021, to comply with incessant demands from the international community and ameliorate the worsening humanitarian situation in Tigray. The federal government’s unilateral decision was accompanied by a full withdrawal of federal troops from the regional capital of Mekelle as well as other parts of the Tigray region to let farmers in the region can engage in agricultural activities peacefully.

However, TPLF rejected the ceasefire and utilized the federal government’s sudden decision
to leave Tigray as an opportunity to bring the war to the neighboring Amhara and Afar regions, a plan they attempted early in the conflict but failed to implement. Over the last two weeks, TPLF mounted an attack to reoccupy the areas of Raya and Welkait (also spelled Wolkait) areas where ethnic Amhara civilians were prosecuted for decades by TPLF for their resistance to imposition of Tigrayan identity and annexation to Tigray region in defiance of these territories being formerly administered by historic majority Amhara provinces of Gondar and Wollo. While often inaccurately presented by various media outlets as a mere “territorial dispute”, the administrative dispute over Welkait and Raya is about the rights and protection of its ethnic Amhara inhabitants. Following the Mai-Kadra Massacre where pro-TPLF forces killed more than 1500 ethnic Amhara civilians on November 11, 2020, most Amharas believe that letting TPLF reoccupy these areas again is tantamount to forsaking millions of Amharas to TPLF’s genocidal acts. Thus, the Amhara regional government, security forces, and the common people are prepared to mobilize in preparation for self-defence, making Raya and Welkait centers of the fight and potentially turning the war into an inter-regional and inter-ethnic war.

Meanwhile, external observers have struggled to condemn atrocities committed by the TPLF forces leading many to believe there is a double standard in reporting war crimes including TPLF’s deployment of child soldiers. Lack of nuanced perspectives on the situation in Ethiopia have led many actors to fall into partisan stands that exacerbate inter-communal tensions and the conflict at large. For instance, some governments and institutions have been accused of advancing a pro-TPLF agenda masked under ostensible principles of respect for the current constitution of Ethiopia (e.g. administrative land boundaries), a constitution that many believe formalized ethnic apartheid in Ethiopia and that was imposed onto Ethiopians by TPLF and its allies without a representative process.
Highlights on the Humanitarian Situation by Area

Raya Front

- The TPLF rebel group advanced its invasion beyond its prewar borders into Raya Kobo (also known as Kobo) Woreda (district), Semien (North) Wollo Zone, Amhara region. TPLF forces invaded into Amhara region from three directions: Tekulesh and Kokomeri, Rama, and north of Kobo, Semien Wollo Zone of Amhara region.

- According to AAA sources, Kobo town located in the Semien Wollo Zone and inhabited by nearly 100,000, people has been under attack by TPLF forces since July 23, 2021.

- TPLF deployed large numbers of armed civilians including women, children and the elderly in the Rama side, east of Kobo city. An officer in Raya Kobo Woreda Communication Office remarks that:

  "we do not know what to do, we are fighting with a flood of people that we cannot kill."

- On July 24th, fighting around Kobo city remained ongoing. A source who fled from Kobo to Woldia (also spelled Weldiya) in Semien Wollo Zone, says on July 23rd, TPLF bombarded the city with heavy artillery and killed a number of civilians although the exact number deceased has yet to be determined. A father and son (names withheld) were killed while inside their residence due to cannon fire from the TPLF militias fighting from the Rama side.

- The fighting is expanding to areas near Kobo city such as Aradum, 30 km away from Woldia city. TPLF is also attempting to march on the Tekulesh side, west of Kobo, between the Gidan and Raya Kobo Woredas of the North Wollo Zone.

- TPLF forces who were in Kobo city on July 23rd and 24th were looting public and private property including breaking into houses. TPLF took all private vehicles they
found parked in Kobo and managed to drive them away.

- The ongoing fighting has led to massive displacement of civilians in Raya Kobo Woreda. Sources told AAA that children, women and the elderly are fleeing to Woldia while adult men are either guarding their immediate vicinity or fighting directly against the TPLF. On July 23rd, 800 families (estimated total of 3,500 people) were registered in temporary shelters in Woldia city. However, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is expected to be much larger as many more IDPs are believed to be staying with relatives, at least temporarily. Meanwhile, Woldia General Secondary and Preparatory School compound is being turned into a temporary shelter for more IDPs enroute to Woldia.

- IDPs in Woldia also told AAA that they have witnessed TPLF forces destroy private property and belongings of fleeing civilians. Civil properties targeted and destroyed by heavy artilleries fired from the TPLF rebel group include Kobo Primary Hospital, Kobo St. George church, Tsehaye Garage, and Gomoji gas station.

- IDPs in Woldia such as Samrawit told AAA crying that they are concerned about the fate of people who were not able flee from Kobo city such as Samrawit’s father. Others such as Aster Ayalew, from Kobo town, Kebele 04, displaced to Woldia with 6 children, decried the situation saying:

  "How and what can I feed my children while I left millions worth of my property and my business to be looted and destroyed by the Junta [TPLF] in Kobo. Who will help me since my husband is a member of ENDF and is at the battlefield fighting the Junta?"

**Mai Tebri/ Telemt Front**

- There has been active fighting for the last 10 days supported by heavy artilleries since TPLF declared an all-out war against the Amhara people on the Mai Tebri Front.
• Due to ongoing fighting, over the last three days, civilians from Addi Arkay and surrounding areas have been displaced to Debark and Gondar towns. Estimates of IDPs on this front vary but are believed to be in the tens of thousands.

• TPLF hit Adarkay town with heavy artilleries on July 23rd which caused fear and panic among local residents and renewed massive displacement.

**Qimant (Kemant) extremists attempt to bring the conflict to Central Gondar**

In attempt to put Amhara region forces in disarray and bring the fight to Gondar, the Qimant militia, an armed wing of the pro-TPLF Qimant identity committee, have killed at least five Amharas on July 18, 2021, in Minibaks village, (Adagn Ager Chako Woreda [district], West Gondar Zone, Amhara region) and Tikil Dingay town, (Central Gondar Zone, Amhara region). One of the victims was a driver traveling from Genedewu to Gondar via the Sanja-Tikil Dingay main road. All five of the victims were shot dead by the Qimant militias. Following the killings, tensions have risen in the two Zones. Names of the five victims are as follows:

1. Mekuriyaw Mekonnen
2. Golem Amare
3. Teshome Yehuala
4. Andebet Getu
5. Ibirahim Mehammed
Figure 1: Photographs showing IDPs hosted in a school in Woldia as well as a partial list of IDPs.
About Amhara Association of America (AAA)

The Amhara Association of America (AAA) is a non-profit civic organization located in Charlotte, North Carolina that investigates and documents human rights atrocities and repression against Amharas in Ethiopia. AAA seeks to inform U.S. policymakers, international human rights organizations, media, and all Ethiopian stakeholders to pressure Ethiopian leaders to change laws, policies, and practices in Ethiopia so perpetrators are held accountable and victims receive justice. AAA also collaborates with Amhara organizations in the U.S., supports independent Amhara organizations in Ethiopia, and provides humanitarian aid for Amharas impacted due to targeted ethnic attacks. AAA’s funding comes directly from members and supporters; the organization is not affiliated with any Ethiopian or American political or governmental entities.

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