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OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

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Press Briefing Transcript of August 5, 2021

Key Highlights of the week include:

1. Latest on Humanitarian Activities in Northern part of the country

- As of yesterday August 4, 2021 - 157 trucks of humanitarian assistance have entered the Tigray Region and reached Mekelle. These trucks contain food and nonfood items with the assistance of humanitarian actors like the WFP, other UN agencies and international NGO's working on humanitarian issues.
- The work on the part of the Government side to enable a secure passage for humanitarian assistance continues.
- Nevertheless, there are deliberate efforts to manipulate the international community into thinking that the support provisions put in place by the government to support the delivery of aid are ineffective and that other less accountable and less controlled means of delivering aid are required.
- That however cannot be as there are clear guidelines and protocols put in place as part of security measures that every stakeholder needs to adhere to.

2. Nature of the TPLF

- The noise being amplified by TPLF is an aim to bypass these protocols and in the nature of the terrorist organization
- In the past week we have seen the continued bravado of the terrorist TPLF's leadership on some media outlets attempting to discredit the leadership of this government and the efforts being made.
- Aided by their digital foot soldiers and operatives, they have continually skewed the narrative posturing as righteous defenders of the people of Tigray in whose name they continue to trade.
- Dilly dallying between victor and victim has been their 'go to' strategy in attempts to accuse this administration of everything under the sun. But history does not forget and in time the truth will continue to unveil itself to those that are momentarily taken by TPLF's propaganda
- Between 2015-2018 the people of Ethiopia made it clear that enough was enough following TPLF's 27 years of:

- atrocious human rights violations
 - disappearances, killings, forced displacements,
 - violent crackdown on opposition
 - chocking of democratic prospects for the country
 - embezzlement out of proportions
 - divide and rule approach and “institutionalization of ethnic profiling”
- This heavy handed and bloody approach characterized the way this organization ruled Ethiopia before it was ousted - giving a fake semblance of stability and peace.
 - It has laid down deep networks domestically and internationally which it continues to play like a ventriloquist in its own destructive ambitions;
 - playing “**unconquerable victor**” when it suits their international audience and then playing “**downtrodden victim**” again playing into international sentiments, values and principles
 - I hope the international community will wake up and see this organization for what it is – A terrorist organization that has hijacked the well-being of the people of Tigray as a means to its vicious goals. If truly TPLF was for the people of Tigray, then the millions of Tigrayans it kept suspended for 27 years in food handouts while it overfed itself would not have continued being safety net recipients!
 - Even though there are some who refuse to acknowledge the Ethiopian people’s designation of TPLF as a terrorist organization, it has continued to show its nature and actions commensurate with such a designation.
 - It has **assassinated, abducted, wounded** members of the Tigray Provisional Administration and looted their properties. Their family members were out last week in Addis to share their pain as it’s not an issue most pay attention to. But these are civil servants who took the risk to serve the people of Tigray.
 - It continues to aggressively terrorize people in the Amhara and Afar regions, entering through obscure routes. They have displaced more than 300,000 people in both regions as a result of their belligerent encroachment
 - They have orchestrated economic sabotage through their operatives in the capital, hoarding iron estimated by the Federal Police to be worth Birr 5billion
 - They continue using their operatives abroad to disseminate false propaganda online attempting to incite fear about the country while influencing ill-informed policy makers with a distorted narrative.
 - If these are not some manifestations of terrorism, we would be hard pressed for other ones.
 - The US Department of Homeland Security in its own Policy Memorandum dated June 15, 2014 stated, “The TPLF qualifies as a Tier III terrorist organization under INA section 212 on the basis of its violent activities before it became part of the ruling coalition and the government of Ethiopia in May 1991.
 - Today, this same organization has continued in its inherent behaviour of terrorism.

3. Lengths gone by the Government to support its people in the Tigray region

- We’ve shared before the efforts made by this administration to address the needs within the region after the TPLF treasonously attacked the Ethiopian National Defence Forces in November 2020. Why the international media and community still question TPLF’s attack is bewildering given a video testimony from among TPLF’s own members.

- In any case, following the TPLF drawing the Government into its rule of law operations in the North, the government has spent almost 8-10 times the region's budget in relief and repair work
- This includes humanitarian assistance delivery in three rounds before the unilateral humanitarian ceasefire; health care expenditures, expenses related to agricultural activities; water and sanitation service provision, etc.
- The Government of Ethiopia still stands by its humanitarian ceasefire.

4. Problematic Framing of Issues

- Nevertheless, there continues a problematic framing of many issues and wrongful accusations directed at the Government.
- Some of these include a bewildering statement made a day ago referring to situation in the North as *"the government's brutal campaign against the people of Tigray."*
- For those that know and aspire to understand Ethiopia, that understand the people-centered policy of this administration and that are open to moving away from pre-conceived notions of what African leaders and countries are like, such statements would not have been made matter of fact.
- It is regrettable that an African nation with more than 3,000 years of rich history, culture and diverse people that has stood the test of time and with a democratically elected government is portrayed in such simplistic terms.
- However, if twitter hashtags continue to be the source of intelligence that key policy makers globally defer to in order to understand a people and a nation, then one ends up taking as truthful for example - the fake Humera massacre that has been trending by TPLF operatives for two weeks now.
- Our media monitoring flagged this trend on July 22 and an alert was issued that this was going to be made an issue at the global and sure enough a week later deplorable images were being disseminated online, twitter concerns being shared by officials; botched testimonies by TPLF operatives given to international media to pepper the reporting.
- The other problematic framing which is being concocted is that the Tigray region **is under a siege or blockade by the Government**. Hence why TPLF waged a confrontation on the Afar entry point to give the impression that the government is blocking humanitarian assistance through that route and hence make demands for other routes.
- Fortunately, as a sovereign nation, the Ethiopian government determines which route is more suitable to deliver in its responsibility of assistance.
- Those who want corridors for weapons and non-humanitarian goods to be routed to them continue to try and manipulate the realities on the ground in attempts to convince the world that unfettered access is not happening. Nevertheless, this is TPLF's modus operandi and those who are aware of it know to differentiate the "wheat from the chaffe" in its relentless propaganda.
- Lastly on this issue, many have misconstrued statements made by the leadership as directed towards our people of Tigray. Words used by the leadership are being pulled out of context to fit an agenda that rings the sirens of dehumanizing rhetoric. It is very clear to those that read these statements and to those push the alarm that such statements are directed at the TPLF organization which has been designated a terrorist organization in a national Constitutional process. Let's not forget that both former President Obama and Vice President John Kerry have used similar terminology and phrases in the threat posed by ISIL.

- Again, such fears emanate from not knowing Ethiopia well and from falling into the traps of TPLF propogandists.

5. On Engagements:

- The Government of Ethiopia welcomes engagements with all our international partners.
- These engagements will need to continue not on the path of foregone conclusions and veiled threats but honouring the tradition, culture and respect that an ancient country of more than 3000-year history warrants.
- If one is looking through the lens of privilege, then one may risk a myopic view of events unfolding in Ethiopia. Underhanded efforts to support a terrorist group’s insurgency tactics and efforts to discredit this government will not be tolerated!
- There are calls for a negotiated ceasefire – however, even the Government’s unilateral humanitarian ceasefire has not been respected by the TPLF. So weaponizing humanitarian assistance by putting our people in Tigray at risk for the narrow goals of a belligerent group needs to be called out. This is not an engagement of equals where a terrorist organization calls the shots against a legitimate Government.
- Partners who wish to work constructively, positively, in support of a legitimate, democratic and sovereign government and importantly, in support of the Ethiopian people, will be very welcome.

6. The Government of Ethiopia remains Committed:

- To the territorial sovereignty of the country and the integrity of the country’s borders;
- To upholding the rule of law together with its international obligations
- The observation and practice of the rule of law is vital to the nation, to statehood and to progress we are making particularly after the new mandate bestowed upon the Government by the people of Ethiopia in the 6th National Elections.
- It is committed to the security and safety of its population in all regions from Tigray to the South Region.

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