

## **Status Update: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

Twenty-three months have passed since the war in Tigray broke out; bringing with it unimaginable suffering, death and destruction into the region. Disturbing reports of extrajudicial killings of civilians; torture, rape, sexual slavery and mutilation of women and girls; looting and destruction of properties; and a strategically widespread destruction of public infrastructure; had decimated the coping capacity to the vast majority of the region's population. The blockade that followed shortly after the overt clashes ebbed and that had been imposed since June of 2021, has now been in place for more than 14 months exposing the vast majority of the population to extreme hardships causing them to suffer in silence in dire circumstances with severely limited supplies and means of survival.

For more than 14 months the people of Tigray have been surviving with the meagre food supplies, as looting and destruction of farming equipment by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers had rendered them unable to produce enough food to sustain them. The small pockets of movement to revitalize communities and cultivate means of survival had been thwarted by the overbearing hunger and scarcity of basic supplies like seeds and fertilizer. The few farms that managed to produce food supplies had faced and experienced the harrowing fact that, in the absence of fuel, perishable food items would spoil and without farm implements like pesticides and fertilizers yields would be inadequate to keep the farms going. Now all the remaining food and other basic resources had been depleted and the entire population is starving with heart-breaking casualties recorded from the most vulnerable groups. On the streets of Tigray, it has become commonplace to see children folded over in hunger begging for bread and mothers desolately looking for anything to do to make sure that their children don't perish. Hundreds and thousands of desperate people knock on the doors of the Daughters of Charity seeking critical support. There are scores more starving in their homes forgoing food for days on end to make sure that the meagre supplies they have remaining help them last for as long as possible.

Healthcare had been severely impacted leaving the population vulnerable to various communicable and noncommunicable diseases. Ever since the war broke out it had been prohibitively difficult to get vaccinations to the majority of children under 5 who are now prone to some of the deadliest diseases known to man. Vaccination schedules had been stalled and disrupted due to lack of fuel and appropriate cold chain system for the vaccines to reach children in remote areas. With more than 80 percent of the healthcare facilities looted and made inoperative, only a few hospitals had been left to give service to almost 7 million people which even with their valiant efforts to distribute essential medications, supplies have long since run out. Centers that catered to hundreds of thousands are closing their doors. And medical professionals are adopting shocking coping strategies like washing hand gloves and prescribing drugs that had been expired in the best-case scenarios in the few centers that remain. The rest are helpless to give any

kind of support that could surpass a sympathetic gesture. What is worse is that the highly educated and dedicated medical professionals who provided such a vital service in the face of titanic hardships are themselves falling over during duty as they had nothing to eat. And as a consequence, scores of mothers are dying during child birth while others who came to medical centres to treat their ailments are being lost since there are no medications and medical supplies available on most cases.

The population at large are currently suffering from the complications of ailments that have gone too long without treatments. The burden will be massive on the healthcare system to treat all the disabilities and long-term effects that are becoming more obvious each day. And communicable diseases will be harder to contain as they are spreading rampantly as preventative measures are harder to employ with lack of supplies and fuel, not to mention, with fears of air strikes. Children who are growing with malnutrition will be suffering the long-term consequences including physical and cognitive underdevelopment making them ill-suited for the world of tomorrow.

Amid fears of bombardments and aerial strikes the already weakened economic activities had been stalled and, in most cases, have ceased. With banks closed, businesses under strain, cash being in very limited supply, and the scarcity that was brought upon by the blockade; prices of basic supplies and commodities have flared making life incredibly difficult. An unregulated market with fluctuating prices that changed with the merest whims of circumstances that surround the war and blockade. For most the prices of critically essential supplies like food and medicines have become unaffordable, and many are making do without, so that they can utilise the limited resources at their disposal to ensure their survival and the survival of their loved ones. Government workers had not received their salaries since the blockade has been in effect and are forced to make impossible decisions just to make it through the day. Many are on the brink of starvation while they have funds sitting in their bank accounts that they cannot access. Elderly people and people with disabilities who had been on safety net programs are now being sustained by the kindness of strangers who are themselves unsure where their next meals will be coming from. Young people are engaging in extremely risky activities as they have no avenues left to turn. And families are disintegrating as the brunt of the hardships are too difficult to endure.

Without access to communication humanitarian and public services have become very difficult to organize and implement. And since the situation is changing rapidly, safety has become a serious issue which as a lack of communication adding to the risk. Facts are now very hard to come by and even harder to verify with news of emergency humanitarian needs getting lost in transit. And without fuel, a wide scale implementation of basic supply provisions like food and medications has become unattainable. Simple operations that require coordination are now very difficult to arrange limiting the effectivity of the little support that is being given.

Recent UN reports show that out of the 5.2 million people in need only 1.5 million people had been reached due to low funding, lack of electricity and telecommunications, insufficient amounts of cash, insufficient amount of fuel, lack of access to areas that require humanitarian aid, insufficient humanitarian supplies, limited presence of partners, lack of commercial commodities and insufficient storage capacity and transportation. About 454,000 Children in Tigray are malnourished with 120,000 being severely malnourished and requiring treatment. According to the ***Tigray Emergency Food Security Assessment: Tigray Crisis response*** that was published by the WHO in August of 2022 89% of the surveyed households were found to be food insecure with 47% suffering from severe food insecurity. Unsustainable activities like selling livestock at severely discounted prices are among the sad coping strategies that farmers are using to cover critical expenses. Out of the surveyed children 65% had not received food support in over a year.

Areas that saw some of the more prolonged fights have been left in such a state of destruction, it is difficult to even contemplate recovery. Houses had been wrecked, roads destroyed, farms burnt, animals slaughtered, forests burnt down...

Families have been separated with some still unaccounted for. There are several women and young girls from communities all over the region who have yet to be found, and considering the horror stories that are heard by those who were left behind, it is all too easy to imagine that they are either dead or bearing fates too tormenting to even think about. And all this loss has taken a huge toll on the psychosocial statuses of the entire population making the already calamitous situation that much harder to endure. Highly educated people and people who had much wealth are now forced to beg for alms as food has become very dear. And considering the aspirations they had and how committed they were to live better by their toils, it is heart breaking to see them lowered to this level through no fault of their own. It will take years if not decades to fix the minds that were broken in the span of a few months, and all this suffering has been for naught.

There had been 2.2 million IDPs settled in temporary IDP shelters throughout the region at the peak of the conflict. Now, most have been resettled in mostly remotely located IDP settlements in extremely difficult conditions with insufficient basic necessities like food, sanitation facilities, WaSH implements, electricity and basic medical services. Some have returned home because the conditions in their respective areas have stabilized somewhat, but with the wide scale hunger and famine that is plaguing the region and recent escalations in conflict they are making it back to seek aid by begging in the streets.

UNHAS flights have stopped cash transport with the current escalations in hostilities effectively limiting and/ or stopping all humanitarian actors from responding to the overwhelming crises. And without those trickling supplies that were slowly making it into the region, major public service providing institutions like hospitals and clinics have been forced to close officially.

And even after a ceasefire had been initiated, the opening of humanitarian corridors that had initially inspired hope in the starving masses, had thus far yielded very little fruit. Trucks and flights that were due to bring basic supplies had been stalled by security threats and endless bureaucratic proceedings making the ceasefire moot. And humanitarian workers had been sequestered in safe locations for fear of aerial strikes and random shillings that target civilians. After the strike that hit a UN automobile, it is even more certain that there is no way to guarantee safety. As war has been ignited once more, fear is high that it will be necessary to tread uncharted waters and face a new wave of unthinkable horrors. The population has faced and is still enduring catastrophic losses and mass death is projected to ensue shortly if conditions remain unchanged. Already several deaths are being reported on a daily basis due to air strikes, hunger, preventable illnesses and violence.

The long-term effects of such traumatic conditions are hard to predict at this point, but, some glaring effects are already becoming apparent. Young children had been separated from a steady and formal education for the last three years, instead they are faced with a daily rhetoric of violence and war while they struggle to find daily sustenance by roaming the streets and pleading to strangers for alms to buy bread. They had seen and heard of acts of sheer cruelty enacted by people, and influenced by the world they are experiencing they are showing alarming signs of aggression, and resorting to violence to resolve even minor disputes. They are forced to miss their childhood and are assuming burdensome knowledge that the world could be so cavalier about such dreadful conditions befalling innocents.

Life in general is hard as there are massive hurdles to overcome and considering the monumental losses that had been sustained. But amidst all the hardship it is heart-warming to see the beauty of communities trying to make even the smallest positive changes. There is still hope for the society to be build back its ties and overcome the effects of the overbearing rhetoric of hate that had been used to alienate and divide people that worked in tandem to break free of poverty and hand over a better world to their children. It is heart-warming to see that the values that define our community like maintaining peace, caring for our elders, looking after the safety and well being of children, fostering good community relations and cooperating during lean times are still holding true after being tested to this extent.

The biggest lesson that we learned in the wake of the destruction that the war wrought is that the most coveted resource is not food, not water, not gold and not time but peace. Without peace all other resources are wasted and abused. Progress is impossible unless we are willing to be more accepting and understanding of the differences that make us all unique, allowing us to contribute to the betterment of our circumstances and the circumstances of those around us. We also learned of the burden that rests on the shoulders of those in the position to be the voice of reason and to make a change, as it is an awesome responsibility that touches the lives of so many, and has the potential to

bring about much change be it good or otherwise. It is worthwhile to expend all effort to stand up for those who are unable, and to safeguard the lives of people as it allows one to make the world better for all.

And it is with much gratitude that we thank God for blessing us with people in the world who embody the ideals of humanity and decency, those who are indignant by the suffering of others and those who make waves towards easing those sufferings. We are blessed to be in the position to offer a doorway to channel support to the poorest of the poor among us who are going through monumental hardships and allow them reprieve from the near constant dread that their lives will be filled with nothing but loss and sorrow. It is a blessing to see them fed, if even for a while, warm from the chill that seeps into your bones, clean and with their thirst quenched allowing them to enjoy the few pleasures at their disposal with their dignities intact. It is the mission we wake up to every morning to make it possible for them to have opportunities at empowerment so that they can find tools needed to break free from the vice like grips of poverty, in a way that adds to the betterment of their communities and allows them to set good examples to their children by laying the ground work for them to have a shot at a life they had only dreamt about. A life where it is not a daily struggle to remain alive, a life not plagued with darkness looming close by just waiting for an opening to lay waste to what took everything to build.

While celebrating the Cross ("*Mes'kel*"), we have hope that the end to the war is near so that the air strike, the blockade, the hunger, the strife, the uncertainty and confusion, the violence and the senseless loss of human lives that had become the norm these last three years ends and a new chapter for healing, peace and prosperity could be opened. We are humbled to have this opportunity to share the plights of people in need and hope that it reaches those who are in a position to help. We welcome all who are moved to offer us support in giving our community a chance to survive, and all who can amplify our voice so that the suffering of innocents and the madness that has spread widely ends soon. We will continue to pray for deliverance and our efforts to support those in need during their times of need.

With Sincerest Regards,  
Sr. Medhin Tesfay