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Postwar recovery of the Tigray education system: challenges and support needed

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## **Postwar recovery of the Tigray education system: Challenges and support needed**

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As the head of the Tigray Bureau of Education, I am appealing to the international community to help our campaign to bring the children of Tigray back to school after 7 consecutive semesters (4 years) of interruption.

Schools in Tigray were first shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic and then continued because of the devastating war, which has caused widespread and extensive damage, destruction, loss, and long-lasting negative impacts on the education system.

Moreover, the children of Tigray have themselves been victims of terrible atrocities

during the deadly war. They were exposed to widespread and systemic sexual violence and rape, mass displacement, and a humanitarian siege and blockade leading to manmade famine.

Before the war, the education system in Tigray was making significant progress in terms of access and equity. Education was a priority for the regional government, and, thanks to those clear direction and hardworking educators, and support from our national and international reliable partners, access to primary education was enhanced.

At the time, the average distance children had to walk to primary and secondary school was 2.5 and 7.1 km respectively. The class-to-student ratio in primary and secondary education was 1:39 and 1:43 respectively. Tigray was one of the regional bureaus in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia that

achieved great success towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education.

As a result of the war, not only was instruction disrupted leading to significant learning losses and gaps in learning time, but school buildings have also deliberately been destroyed. School infrastructure and educational materials have been completely looted and burned. The human resources (teachers, assistants, school leaders, librarians, and administrative staff) have been severely affected, including denial of their salary for 2-3 years.

As a result of all of these issues, currently, the education system has almost completely collapsed and everything we had gained as a result of a lot of hard work in the last three decades has been completely ruined. There are now 2.4 million children out of school..

Following the signed Pretoria Peace Agreement, we are now working to bring them back to school.

We are, however, facing enormous challenges:

- Many schools are occupied by internally displaced people.
  - In addition, 552 schools are still not accessible because they are occupied by Amhara and Eritrean military forces though they should have withdrawn from Tigray as per the Pretoria Peace Agreement
- The presence of unexploded ordnances and other weapons around schools poses a significant threat to the safety of students and teachers.
- A significant difficulty is the loss of teachers as a result of displacement and war casualties.
- The lack of salary payment has also understandably eroded confidence,

leading many teachers to seek other means of income and employment.

Before the war, Tigray had: about 40,000 classrooms across almost 2,500 schools; two teacher training colleges; 30,000 different electronic devices, including computers, printers, plasma TVs, and heavy-duty photocopying machines; and 300,000 pieces of laboratory equipment and teaching aids.

Unfortunately, much of this has been destroyed or looted, leaving the difficult task of rehabilitation, maintenance, and reconstruction. The resources needed will be significant, but can be found if there are committed partners in the international community, for example through school twinning. The items we urgently need include desks, blackboards, chairs, tables, electronic materials such as computers, and printers,

materials for special need students, including braille paper and slate and styles, books, pens pencils and menstrual pads for girls.

Families are struggling to provide teaching and learning materials for their children. The economy of Tigray has collapsed leaving the entire population dependent on food aid to make ends meet, making it difficult for them to afford basic school supplies, posing serious challenges for their children's learning.

School communities are traumatized, with many students having witnessed violence at a very young age.

A study by the Luminos Fund examined the levels of learning loss, trauma, and resilience in children, parents, and teachers in Tigray.

The study surveyed 600 internally displaced children enrolled in grades 2-4 at the time of

school closures in 2020, as well as 450 parents and 400 teachers.

The study indicated significant learning loss and evidence of substantial psychological trauma.

As we work towards reopening schools in Tigray, it is important to address this trauma, which will require significant resources to ensure that students and teachers, and their extended families, feel safe and supported as they return to school.

The number of students and teachers with special needs caused by the war has significantly increased.

Tigray has been facing severe famine and famine-like conditions, reported to affect 90% of the population as a result of the war and blockade to humanitarian aid. A recent decision to halt humanitarian assistance that had started to flow following the Pretoria



Agreement has further compounded this problem. School feeding programs will be an essential component for many students in Tigray who do not have access to regular meals at home.

The program would ensure that students receive at least one nutritious meal a day to help them concentrate on their studies and improve their overall health.

The program would also encourage parents to send their children to school, especially in areas where education is not prioritised due to the dire situation as a result of the war.

The support of the international community in efforts to bring children back to school will go a long way toward restoring and revitalizing Tigray's educational system.

We need your assistance in:

<sup>1</sup>School rehabilitation, maintenance, and construction

<sup>2</sup>Mental health and psychosocial support programs for students and teachers

<sup>3</sup>Curriculum development, in the form of Accelerated Learning Programs to catch up, including through technology support  
School feeding programs

Finally, I would like to reiterate that we fully appreciate all of your previous support and appeal for your further assistance at this dire time that will enable us to give Tigrayan children new hope for the future.

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