Ethiopia
INSIGHT: Ethiopian government news agency accuses humanitarian NGOs of collaborating with TPFL rebels.

Following recent United Nations (UN) claims earlier in June that food is being used as a “weapon of war” in the Tigray region amid warnings of famine, Ethiopian state-controlled outlet Ethiopian Press Agency or The Ethiopian Herald published a report on 10 June - also posted of social media - accusing “NGOs associated with the TPFL terrorit clique” of being behind these ‘false’ and ‘fabricated’ UN reports about the ensuing humanitarian situation in Tigray.

These damaging accusations followed another report on 4 June by the Ethiopian state media in which unsubstantiated claims were advanced that “some relief agencies [were] caught red handed smuggling weapons to outlaw groups”, a thinly-veiled reference to the rebel group Tigrayan People's Liberation Front.

On 15 June, these claims were repeated in another unsubstantiated report, purporting that “credible evidence have been found indicating that some actors have attempted to smuggle weapons to arm the terrorist TPFL cell under the guise of humanitarian assistance”, before going on to specify that these actors in question are international humanitarian agencies.

The report also suggests that some within the international community are using humanitarian aid to undermine the Ethiopian government: “some within the international community have embarked on a mission to undermine the unity, territorial integrity and the cohesion of the Ethiopian state, under the guise of humanitarian concern.”

The report goes on to refute UN claims that food is being used as a weapon of war in the Tigray region: “accusations labeled against Ethiopia of using hunger as a weapon of war on its own citizens, is an egregious falsehood.”
In another report on 13 June, the state news agency indirectly refers to the UN and other international actors such as the European Union (EU) as “special interests”, claiming that the “misconceptions of special interest groups” which “accused the Government of Ethiopia [of] using hunger as a weapon of war” have been ‘exposed’ by the Ethiopian embassy in London.

The report, titled “Embassy exposes special interest group’s lies against Ethiopia”, is accompanied by a cartoon featuring what appears to be a number of non-Ethiopians taking money from a TPFL graveyard while EU money is scurried away. This seems to suggest that international organisations, including the UN, are making money from their alleged collusion with the TPFL rebel group.

These claims and designations represent a systematic and dangerous attempt to discredit those international aid organisations campaigning for better access to beneficiaries and for more international attention of the worsening local humanitarian situation in the Tigray region.

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