

News: As killings of civilians continue in Metekel, authorities in Benishagul Gumuz, Amhara regional states step up blames

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Getahun Abdisa, vice president of Benishangul Gumuz regional state. Pictures: regional communication bureau

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Addis Abeba, December 17/2020 – Fresh attacks mounted by armed men on December 15, left yet another round of unknown numbers of civilians killed in Dangur and Dibate Weredas of Metekel Zone, in Benishangul Gumuz regional state. Officials from Amhara regional state said the victims were members of the Amhara community who were targeted for their identity while collecting their harvests in the field.

The latest attack came shortly after authorities in Amhara regional state have issued a stern warning against neighboring Benishangul Gumuz officials to take responsibility for previous attacks. As all the attacks in the past, there has been no detail of the latest attack released by officials on either side while *Addis Standard's* attempts to obtain clarifications were unanswered. However, *Addis Standard* has received several graphic images of the victims, which included women and children.

In response to the accusations from officials of the Amhara regional state, the office of the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) in Benishangul Gumuz has issued a statement on the same day as the attacks dismissing calls from Amhara regional state and affiliated parties demanding measures to be taken in the Metekel zone of Benishangul Gumuz regional state. "To announce a military action in a constitutionally demarcated region without a recognition by the federal state is tantamount to declaring a civil war," the statement read, denouncing what it called "repeated threats and intimidation."

Healthy relations between the states are an important part of the federal system, the ruling party in Benishangul Gumuz said, and the main purpose of the federal system is "for regions to have autonomy over their own territories." It also expressed its displeasure on what is says were efforts by some who are working "to dismantle the multinational federalism and overthrow the constitutional order, and to destabilize the centuries-old unity among people" and condemned the promotion of hatred and conflict by calling out the name of a certain ethnic groups.

In an apparent reference to officials of the Amhara regional state, the statement by ruling party in Benishangul Gumuz also blames the presence of conflict instigators "hiding in government and party structures" who it said were creating divisions between regions based on nationalism, racism and bigotry. Without mentioning specifics, it blamed "these forces" as creating an obstacle to the reform by labeling problems as communal violence between various nations and exaggerating them. "These forces aggravate conflicts as an agenda of communal violence between nations and issue threats of military actions in a sovereign regional state without the knowledge of the federal government. "

Measures against criminals

In a related development, the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Communication Affairs Office announced that the regional state will continue to take measures on those who are directly or indirectly affiliated with the "criminal group".

Vice President of the regional state Getahun Abdisa admitted that steps taken by the regional government to solve the security problems in the area over the past two years have not been thorough but were successful in preventing the problem from worsening. He also admitted that the attacks on civilians have continued to happen despite crackdowns on these "criminal groups". A number of anti-peace forces have been dismantled by a coordinated effort between the regional government, the federal government, the regional police, anti-insurgency and security forces at all levels which led to some being captured while others have surrendered. "Those who perpetuate the narrative that there are groups that are economically, politically and socially marginalized should bring their issues to the table instead of misleading the public," Getahun said and expressed the regional states' willingness to engage in a negotiation.

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Furthermore, Getahun spoke of a one-month implementation plan that has been put in place to further strengthen the zone's efforts to rehabilitate displaced people, provide humanitarian assistance, separate the community from the enemy, bring the perpetrators to justice and restore peace in the zone. He condemned those who spread misinformation on social media as counterproductive to the measures that are being undertaken to restore stability in the region; and strongly urged those doing so to refrain from their activities.

He further aid that the region's landscape had made it difficult to carry out military operations but efforts were underway to dismantle the criminal group "once and for all" and thanked the National Defense Forces, the Federal Police, and members of the regional anti-insurgency and security structures at all levels for the sacrifices they paid to solve the security crisis in the zone. AS

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