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Education on the Brink: ***Why Tigray Cannot Survive Another War***

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The political and military tensions currently unfolding in Tigray are sending an alarming message: the fragile peace that followed the devastating war in northern Ethiopia is dangerously close to collapse. Reports of troop mobilization by federal forces, the military preparation of Tigrayan forces, and the movement of troops from neighbouring Eritrea have revived fears that the region may once again descend into armed conflict. Analysts and observers warn that renewed clashes could escalate quickly into another large-scale war if urgent political action is not taken.

But beyond the military calculations and political rivalries lies a deeper and often overlooked reality: the catastrophic consequences that another war would have on society, particularly on the education sector. If war erupts again, the most devastating and long-lasting damage will not be measured only in military casualties or territorial changes. It will be measured in the lost future of an entire generation.

The first war in Tigray between 2020 and 2022 was already one of the most destructive conflicts in Africa in recent decades. Hundreds of thousands of people are estimated to have died, while the region's infrastructure and economy collapsed. Even today, years after the peace agreement, Tigray remains economically fragile. Civil servants struggle with unpaid salaries, the banking system is severely restricted, and economic activity is barely functioning. These economic hardships are not merely financial statistics; they represent a society still struggling to recover from the devastation of war.

Education is among the sectors most severely affected by this crisis. Before the war, Tigray had made notable progress in expanding access to education, achieving high primary school enrollment and relatively strong literacy rates. However, the conflict reversed decades of educational progress almost overnight. Schools were destroyed, looted, or used as military bases, teachers were displaced, and millions of students were forced out of the classroom.

The scale of destruction was staggering. Estimates suggest that more than 1.2 million students were pushed out of school during the conflict, while thousands of teachers disappeared, were displaced, or lost their lives. The education sector alone suffered damages estimated at more than \$5 billion.

Even more alarming, approximately 85–90 percent of schools in the region were damaged, looted, or destroyed during the war. Many classrooms lost basic materials such as desks, textbooks, computers, and laboratory equipment. For many children, schools simply ceased to exist.

Although schools gradually began reopening after the 2022 peace agreement, the recovery has been slow and incomplete. Large numbers of children remain out of school, and those who have returned often study in overcrowded classrooms with inadequate materials. Reconstruction efforts have been limited, and teachers continue to face economic uncertainty. In many areas, the education system is operating at a fraction of its previous capacity.

This fragile recovery is now at risk of being shattered.

The renewed military tensions in Tigray threaten to undo the limited progress made in rebuilding the education system. If armed conflict resumes, schools will once again become casualties of war, either directly destroyed or forced to close due to insecurity. Students who have already lost three or more years of education will face further disruptions that may permanently derail their academic and professional futures.

War does not only destroy buildings; it destroys the social foundations necessary for education. When teachers are unpaid and families are struggling to survive, education becomes a luxury rather than a priority. Parents facing economic hardship may be forced to withdraw their children from school to support household survival. Young people who should be preparing for universities or technical careers may instead be drawn into cycles of poverty, displacement, or violence.

The psychological impact of conflict further compounds these challenges. Children in Tigray have already endured years of trauma, bombardment, displacement, hunger, and insecurity. Schools should serve as spaces of healing and stability, yet renewed conflict would once again expose young people to fear and uncertainty. A generation already scarred by war could face deeper psychological wounds that affect not only their education but their ability to rebuild society.

Another war would therefore represent more than a humanitarian tragedy; it would constitute a profound setback for the future development of the region. Education is the backbone of social reconstruction. Without educated youth, societies cannot rebuild institutions, restore economic productivity, or sustain democratic governance.

This is why the current crisis in Tigray must be understood not only as a military confrontation but as a critical test of political responsibility. Leaders on all sides must recognize that the cost of renewed war will extend far beyond the battlefield. Political calculations that prioritize short-term strategic advantage over long-term societal stability risk condemning millions of young people to a future without education.

The responsibility to prevent such an outcome does not lie with one actor alone. Federal authorities, regional leaders, political movements, and international partners must all recognize the urgency of de-escalation. Dialogue and diplomacy are not signs of weakness; they are essential tools for preventing another humanitarian catastrophe.

In the end, the question confronting Tigray, and Ethiopia as a whole, is simple but profound: will political leaders choose confrontation or responsibility?

Another war may serve the interests of political actors seeking power or leverage. But it will devastate the education sector, undermine economic recovery, and destroy the fragile hopes of millions of young people who simply want the opportunity to learn, rebuild their lives, and contribute to the future of their society.

The children of Tigray have already lost too much.

If guns speak again, it will not only be peace that dies, it will be the future of a generation.