COMITE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME DE L'OGADEN CDHO

OGADEN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE OHRC

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PRESS RELEASE

OGADEN: ETHIOPIA EXPELS THE ICRC A POTENTIAL CREDIBLE EYEWITNESS

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee (OHRC) is shocked and distressed by the Ethiopian Government's unjustifiable decision of expelling International Committee of the Red Cross's delegates in the Ogaden.

To the best of OHRC's knowledge the ICRC has two offices in the region (Jigjiga office and Godey office).

Since its arrival in the region in1990s, the ICRC has contributed to the development of the region and demonstrated its commitment to the well being of the local population. The ICRC and its staff have won the minds and the hearts of all Somali people in the Ogaden. **It has been responsible for building dispensaries, digging and rehabilitating water wells as well as visiting prisoners, distributing basic drugs to the hospitals. It was also active in food security, food aid and conflict resolution projects in the area.**

The presence of the ICRC in the Ogaden has encouraged other NGOs to come the region to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population such as Action Against Hunger and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF)-Doctors Without Borders.

In an interview with BBC Somali Service On July 24th 2007, the Ethiopian Government regional president, Mr. Abdullahi Hassan accused the ICRC of collaborating with the enemy and spreading baseless accusations against the regional government as well as giving money, material and information to the Ogaden National Liberation Front and others allied with Eritrea.

Sous-Bellevue 33
2900 Porrentruy
Switzerland
Tel : 41 79 4682 342
E-Mail : ohrc@ogadenrights.org
www.ogadenrights.org

P.O. Box 2159
5001 CD Tilburg
The Netherlands
Tel : 31 61 348 1507

2660 Southvale Crs
Unit 338 Ottawa, ON
K1B 4W5, Canada
Tel : 613 736 7647

2912 E Lake St
Suite 8
Minneapolis, MN, 55407
Tel : 612 721 6470
Fax : 612 721 6442

Over the last twelve years, the OHRC has monitored closely the work of ICRC and the other international Humanitarian Organizations in the Ogaden, and **it attests that the work of the ICRC is professional, transparent, neutral and in conformity with its statute and international obligations.**

Recently, the ICRC and other International Humanitarian Organizations, which operate in some parts of the Ogaden, expressed timidly their concern and apprehension at the Ethiopian government's depopulation and starvation campaign in the region.

Hence, the Ethiopian Government's wild accusations are baseless fabricated lies aimed at getting rid of a potential and credible eyewitness in the Ogaden in order to carry out its mass killing, mass starvation and scorched earth policy in the region without the knowledge of the international community.

For the last twelve years, aid workers in the Ogaden were abducted, harassed, intimidated and looted at gunpoint and each of the warring sides accused them of helping the other side.

Since its foundation in 1995, The Ogaden Human Rights Committee has succeeded in mediating many abduction cases in the Ogaden. Most of the captives were expatriate or local aid workers who were aiding the vulnerable segment of the society in the region.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee deplores the Ethiopian government's decision to expel ICRC's staff in the Ogaden and demands its reversal as well as allowing more humanitarian and relief organisations to operate in the Ogaden without restrictions, regardless of nationality or religion.

To: the International Community, Donor Countries, United Nations, and Ethiopian Government:

- The international community intervene to stop human sufferings and senseless carnage in the Ogaden. The sooner the better.

- The international community exert more pressure on the Ethiopian government to reverse its decision and respect ICRC's mandate and Geneva Conventions regarding to the civilian population.

- The Ethiopian government allow all humanitarian and relief organizations to operate in the Ogaden without restrictions as well as national and international human rights organizations and international press.

- The international donor community help the Somali people in the Ogaden generously and directly through international NGOs in order to assure the reach of the food and medical aid to the victims of the famine.

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- United Nations Security Council designate a safe heaven for the civilian population fleeing from Ethiopian armed forces' onslaught and atrocities.

- The international community publicly censure Ethiopia over its human rights record in the Ogaden.

- United Nations Security Council form an independent inquiry commission to investigate recent massacres and atrocities in the Ogaden.

- The United Nations appoint a Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Ogaden.

- The Ethiopian government should be held responsible for infamous mass killings; disappearances, rape, arbitrary arrests, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and perpetrators of those atrocities should be brought before an international tribunal.

- The international community refrain from aiding and supporting the Ethiopian government as long as it violates human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Somali people in the Ogaden.

For more information, see Human Rights violations in the Ogaden by Ethiopia, 1991 to 1996 ref: OHRC/01/96, Deterioration of Human Rights Situation in the Ogaden unabated ref: OHRC/07/96, Mass Killings, Torture and Disappearances in the Ogaden ref: OHRC/08/96, Ogaden: NO Rights, No Democracy ref: OHRC/08/97, Ogaden: An Endless Human Tragedy ref: OHRC/12/98, Ogaden: Graveyard of Rights ref: OHRC/10/99 and Ogaden: Downtrodden and Disenfranchised People ref: OHRC/D15/04, Mass Killings in the Ogaden: Daily Atrocities against Civilians by the Ethiopian Armed Forces ref:OHRC/AR/06 and other OHRC Reports and Press Releases.

Visit www.ogadenrights.org.

Ogaden Human Rights Committee

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