

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



**OGADEN
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMITTEE
OHRC**

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PRESS RELEASE

OGADEN: DOZENS OF PEOPLE AND THOUSANDS OF ANIMALS STARVE TO DEATH ON A DAILY BASIS AMID INTERNATIONAL LACK OF ATTENTION.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For the last five years the Ogaden was a country ravaged by war and haunted by drought. The Ogaden Human Rights Committee, has warned the massive looming famine in the Ogaden many times, in its reports and press releases

(See Ogaden: No Rights, No Democracy ref: OHRC/08/97, Ogaden: Graveyard of Rights, Press Release ref: OHRC/15/97 and Press Release ref: OHRC/02/00).

The Ogaden has been a virtually closed military zone for the last eight years, where bloody battles were being fought between Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) forces and combatants of The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The latest battles took place in Grump area, Aware district, in last week of March 2000.

Today, the situation in the Ogaden is very tense and alarming. The ongoing struggle for self-determination and independence in the Ogaden continues to cause more human suffering and threatens peace and stability in the volatile region of the Horn of Africa.

In 1996, Ogaden camels were dying in thousands for an unknown fatal disease, which gripped the whole territory. The number of dead camels was estimated at the time about 60,000 head.

The Ethiopian government has not intervened to save the lives of the animals, which are the main source of the livelihood for millions of the Ogaden people.

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In 1996, in the fertile valley of the Shabeele River in the Godey area, the Ethiopian government has prevented the people from cultivating their farms unless they pay 500 Ethiopian birr for each farm, which is too much for them to pay. The peasants were threatened with eviction from their lands if they do not pay the new tax. Now Godey is one of the worst drought-stricken areas.

In the Ogaden, the poor and the fragile ecological balance has been devastated by widespread exploitation and depletion of forest for military purposes, fire-wood and charcoal by EPRDF/TPLF forces and Tirana dealers, who have been give concessions and game-licences by the Ethiopian government, which dominated by ethnic Tigreans. The rich wildlife, including big game, game-birds, forests and water resources have all suffered irreparable damage in the Ogaden under the current Ethiopian government.

INTERNATIONAL AID MISUSED AND DIVERTED

OGADENIA A DISASTER AREA BY ALL ACCOUNTS

FIGHTING ESCALSTES

APPEALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES UNABATED

The Ogaden has been hit by a severe drought accompanied by lack of food and medical care, which caused a mass starvation and breakout of epidemics related to malnutrition and bad sanitation. In the worst drought-stricken areas, dozens of people and thousands of animals starved to death.

For the last four years, the rainy season failed or there was not enough rainfall in the Ogaden. Water is scarce and dear. Whenever there is scarcity of water, the people move with their animals beside water holes, ponds and reservoirs. Many water reservoirs and tankers owned by individuals were confiscated by the armed forces. The owners of these reservoirs and tankers were denied the use of their water and property for their families and thirsty animals, which are the main source of their livelihood.

In August 1999, the Ethiopian government, which spends more than a million dollars a day on the war with Eritrea, internal wars in the Ogaden and Oromia and its invasions into Southern Somalia, asked the international community for an urgent humanitarian aid to feed five million Ethiopians facing starvation mainly in Northern Ethiopia (in Tigray the homeland of the ruling party in Ethiopia).

On 30 March 2000, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Melez Zenawi, asked the international community for an urgent humanitarian aid and a long term aid to feed and rehabilitate eight million Ethiopians facing starvation in different parts of the empire-state of Ethiopia.

DID THE INTERNATIONAL AID REACH ITS INTENDED BENEFICIARIES IN THE OGADEN ?

WHERE DID INTERNATIONAL RELIEF GO?

As is usual with Ethiopian government, the aid donated by the international community to the victims of the drought through the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (ERRC), which is in effect run by the Tigray Relief Society (TRS), never reached its intended beneficiaries in the Ogaden, because the Ethiopian government has misused it by diverting it to the army. (See Recommendations and Appeals in this press release).

According to the eyewitness account and reports from the Ogaden Human Rights Committee's researchers, the Ogaden is considered now a disaster area by all accounts.

Under these tense, deteriorating and catastrophic situation, the fighting escalated in the Ogaden. And that makes traveling by land a great risk without the consent of the Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National liberation Front, the two chief protagonists in the Ogaden scene. (See Recommendations and Appeals).

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee is alarmed at the rise of attacks against aid workers, humanitarian organisations' property and the civilian population as well.

On 07 February 2000, an unidentified well-armed gunmen attacked an unidentified gunmen attacked Medecins Sans Frontieres(MSF) – Doctors Without Borders|Belgium – vehicle traveling between Jigjiga and Dhagaxbuur, killing the driver and wounding two other persons, who were traveling in the vehicle. (See Press Release ref: OHRC|02|00).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPEALS:

1. The Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front, declare immediate, comprehensive and unconditional cease-fire in the Ogaden in order to aid famine and war victims in the Ogaden.
2. The international community exert more pressure on all the parties to the conflict in the Ogaden in order to reach a peaceful negotiated settlement, which guarantees the Ogaden people's inalienable right to self-determination through a fair and free referendum.
3. *The international donor community helps the Ogaden people generously and directly through international NGOs in order to assure the reach of the food aid to the victims of the famine; otherwise the relief will end up in military barracks as usual.*

4. The Ogaden Human Rights Committee reiterates its condemnation and disapproval of imposing restrictions on humanitarian organisations' movements as well as intimidation and abduction of aid workers in the Ogaden.
5. ***The Ogaden Human Rights Committee urges the Ethiopian government, the Ogaden National Liberation Front and other parties to the conflict to allow all humanitarian and relief organisations to operate freely in the Ogaden as well as international and local human rights organisations and the international press.***
6. The international community publicly censures Ethiopia over its human rights record.
7. The Ethiopian government should be held responsible for infamous mass killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.
8. The international community refrain from aiding and supporting the Ethiopian government as long as it violates human rights and fundamental freedoms in the empire-state of Ethiopia.

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES:

In The Ogaden, arbitrary detentions without charge or trial, torture of detainees to death, summary executions, gang raping of women, child molestation, looting and illegal confiscation of property are commonplace, and are daily practiced by the Ethiopian army and security forces with impunity. (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 and Ogaden: Graveyard of Rights ref: OHRC/10/99).