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

OGADEN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE OHRC

Date: 19th September 2007 Ref: OHRC/PRO6/0907

PRESS RELEASE

ETHIOPIA: ATTEMPTS TO RENDER MEANINGLESS THE UN MISSION'S WORK IN THE OGADEN

On September 06th 2007, U.N. aid officials and human rights investigators ended a week-long mission to the Ogaden. United Nations mission, which visited some parts of the Ogaden, was not given unfettered access to many places and was accompanied and guided by Ethiopian officials as Mr. **Abdi Mohamoud Omar** the head of the Somali Regional State Security and Justice Bureau told BBC Somali Service in an interview during the visit of the UN mission.

Before the arrival of the UN mission Ethiopian government took the following steps in order to confuse and render meaningless the UN mission:

1. Ethiopian security forces rounded up and detained some outspoken critics of the Ethiopian government's policies in the Ogaden. They are being held in harsh conditions without charges or trial in military underground detention in Jigjiga.

2. Ethiopian government emptied crowded jails and police stations in **Jigjiga**, **Dhagaxbuur**, **Qabridaharre** and **Godey** taking the inmates to secret detention centres until the UN team leaves the area.

3. Victims of human rights abuses and their relatives have been warned not to speak of their experiences to the UN mission, or else they would be severely punished.

4. Many important crime scenes were not included in the itinerary of the UN mission.

5. Ethiopian government has coached its officials, members of security forces and collaborators and presented them to the UN mission as clan elders and victims of ONLF alleged wrongdoing.

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

Prior the arrival of the UN team in Qabridaharre the Ethiopian chief officer declared his government's intention to punish severely anyone who tells anything bad about the government. He ordered army units to put on civilian clothes during the visit of the UN team and keep an eye on those who may disobey his orders.

Among outspoken critics of the Ethiopian government who were arrested before the arrival of the UN fact-finding mission were the following clan elders and businessmen: **Suldan Fowsi Mohamed Ali, Ahmednur Mohamed Tarah**, **Muhumed Ahmed Nur, Sheikh Nur Jama, Hussien Isse, Mohamed Burale, Faseh Abdi Ali, Abdullahi Nur Shukri, Abdullahi Ahmed Nur** and **Abdullahi Sheikh Ibrahim**.

On August 28th 2007, in **Jigjiga**, Ethiopian security forces and the local police collected **Suldan Fowsi Mohamed Ali** from his residence in the dead of night. And then he was transferred to underground military detention in Jigjiga. He is being held incommunicado. **Suldan Fowsi** is in a poor state of health, and was denied adequate medical treatment.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee believes that he and other detainees are detained for their political views, and are prisoners of conscience.(For other detainees' background see Ogaden: Ethiopian government forces: massacre, displace and starve out the civilian population with impunity ref: OHRC/AR/07).

To the best of the Ogaden Human Rights Committee's knowledge, **Suldan Fowsi** and **other detainees** were not involved in any illegal activity. The Ogaden Human Rights Committee calls for them to be either charged with recognizable criminal offences and be given fair trials or immediately and unconditionally released. The OHRC is also concerned about their safety and well being, particularly in view of constant reports about confessions made under duress.

As has been repeatedly documented by the Ogaden Human Rights Committee and international human rights organizations, the state of human rights in the Ogaden has gone from bad to worse in the recent past. The abysmal track record of the EPRDF/TPLF regime has been recently aggravated by natural calamities-mostly man made- and senseless wars, which had primarily been caused by the ill-devised policies of the current Ethiopian government.

The Ethiopian government's policy in the Ogaden is based on; deliberate economic strangulation, political marginalization and use of brutal military force to suppress all legitimate demands from the population including the right to self-determination.

As a part of the Ethiopian government's policy of starving out the civilian population in the Ogaden to submission, its army has imposed an economic blockade on many towns and villages in the region. This blockade has caused an enormous human suffering. The most affected areas by the military siege are: the regions of **Dhagaxbuur, Fiiq, Qabridaharre, Wardheer, Godey, Afdheer** and some parts of **Jigjiga**, where many villages were depopulated and razed to the ground by the government troops.

Sous-Bellevue 33
2900 Porrentruy
Switzerland
Tel : 41 79 4682 342

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

E-Mail : ohrc@ogadenrights.org
www.ogadenrights.org

The Ethiopian government's scorched earth policy in the Ogaden was in place since early 1992 when the ONLF has called for referendum on self-determination and independence for the Ogaden. But both the New York Times' article of June 18th and Human Rights Watch's statement on the human rights violation in the Ogaden, on July 04th 2007, put the spotlight on the **slow genocide**, which is going on in the Ogaden without the knowledge of the international community.

United Nation's fact-finding mission did not visit **Fiiq** region and **Wardheer** region where sites of mass graves and many torched towns, villages and hamlets are located. For unknown reason to the OHRC the UN mission did not visit the following crime scenes: **Toon-Ceeley, Xodayo, Lan-Jaleelo**, **Xero-Bilcir**, **Garwaan**, **Lix-Irdood, Samo, Masaarre, Fooljeex, Galadiid, Farmadow, Geerigo'an, Gabagabo, Dalaad , Jiica, Farmadow, Shilaabo, Madax-Maroodi, Karin-Bilcille, Gurdumi, Maraacaato**, **Daratoole, Laasoole, Higlalay, Labiga, Bulaale, Dawacaale, Dharkeenley, Ceelxaar, Qamuuda, Wacdi, Jinoole, Caado, Balli-Garabey Arraweelo, Xodayo, Taaloole, Dundumo-Cad, Qoriile, Babaase** and many others**.**

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee, which has requested repeatedly the UN to send a fact-finding mission to the Ogaden welcomes wholeheartedly, the visit of the UN mission to some parts of the region and deplores its inability to visit real crime scenes where gross human rights violations took place. The OHRC requests the UN mission to meet and interview survivors of Ethiopian government's atrocities who are in neighbouring countries such as, Ridwaan Hassan Rage who survived Babaase massacre, which took place, on July 24th 2007

In order to improve the human rights situation and to resolve the protracted conflict in the region, the Ogaden Human Rights Committee recommends and requests the following:

To: the International Community, Donor Countries, United Nations, Ethiopian Government and Ogaden National Liberation Front:

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

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

- 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.

Sous-Bellevue 33	P.O. Box 2159	2660 Southvale Crs	2912 E Lake St
2900 Porrentruy	5001 CD Tilburg	Unit 338 Ottawa, ON	Suite 8
Switzerland	The Netherlands	K1B 4W5, Canada	Minneapolis, MN, 55407
Tel : 41 79 4682 342	Tel : 31 61 348 1507	Tel : 613 736 7647	Tel : 612 721 6470
E-Mail : ohrc@ogadenrights.org			Fax : 612 721 6442
www.ogadenrights.org			

- 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.

- The Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front, declare immediate, comprehensive and unconditional cease-fire in the Ogaden.

- The international community exert more pressure on all the parties to the conflict in the Ogaden in order to reach a peacefully negotiated and just settlement.

- Since there is no confidence between the warring sides the Ogaden Human Rights Committee urges the United States and European Union to act as mediators and facilitators in order to put an end to the human suffering in the Ogaden.

- The international donor community help 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.

- The Ogaden Human Rights Committee urges the Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front 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.

- The Ogaden Human Rights Committee deplores the Ethiopian government's decision to expel ICRC and MSF from 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.

Ogaden Human Rights Committee
www.ogadenrights.org
E-mail: ohrc@ogadenrights.org