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

OGADEN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE OHRC

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PRESS RELEASE

OGADEN: OVERSEAS OIL COMPANIES EXACERBATE AN ALREADY PRECARIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

Historically, Somali people in the Ogaden have never accepted the Ethiopian occupation of their country. Therefore, the national resistance against the foreign occupation has never ceased for more than a century. But its intensity varied from time to time, according to local, regional and international circumstances. And the situation became tenser when the present regime entirely destroyed the traditional local structures and clan systems and disrupted all the sources of income of the local people of which more than 75% are rural people who herd only livestock.

Successive Ethiopian governments' military campaigns to quell the insurgence in the Ogaden had caused enormous human suffering in the region.

Haile Selassie and Dergue governments as well as current EPRDF government considered the Ogaden as a rebellious region, which must be pacified by military means. The region has been turned into a military garrison with no infrastructure whatsoever.

Razing entire towns to the ground, extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, disappearances, rape of women, confiscating private property, dusk to dawn curfew and martial law were and are the order of the day.

For the last fifteen years the Ogaden was a country ravaged by war, haunted by drought and widespread human rights violations and in the meantime the regime gives the world a different picture of Ogaden.

The ONLF has called since early 1992 for referendum on self-determination and independence for the Ogaden.

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The Ogaden has been a virtually closed military zone for the last fifteen years, where bloody battles were being fought between Ethiopian armed forces and combatants of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The latest battles took place in Cobolle area, Dhagaxbuur district, on 24th April 2007.

According to a communiqué issued by the ONLF, on 24th April 2007, “The 'Dufaan' commando unit of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) conducted a military operation in the vicinity of Obala (Cobolle), 30km North-West of Degah-Bur (Dhagaxbuur) in Northern Ogaden. The operation targeted 3 military units of the EPRDF (TPLF) regime who were guarding an oil exploration field.”

The Ethiopian government has confirmed the ONLF military operation, which resulted in the killing of 65 Ethiopian soldiers, 9 Chinese workers and the abduction of 7 Chinese workers.

Ogaden Human Rights Committee condemns any act of attacking and killing defenceless civilians anywhere. Hence, the Ogaden Human Rights Committee, requests the political leadership of the ONLF and its military commanders in the field the immediate and unconditional release of the 7 Chinese workers and other Ethiopian civilians on humanitarian grounds.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee (OHRC) extends its sincere condolences to the families and relatives who lost their loved ones in Cobolle oil field military operation.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee urges the Chinese government to seek the speedy release of its citizens as well as evacuating all its nationals from the Ogaden for their safety and well being.

ONLF officials denied abducting Chinese oil workers. In a statement they said, “They have been removed from the battlefield for their own safety and are being treated well.”

According to reliable reports received by the Ogaden Human Rights Committee, the Chinese oil workers and other Ethiopian prisoners are alive and in good health, and are being well treated.

ONLF officials expressed their willingness to release all civilians including the Chinese as soon as possible and asked Ogaden Human Rights Committee and the International Committee of the Red Cross to play a positive role in their releasing.

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.

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Ogaden Natural Resources and Foreign Companies

In the Ogaden, the poor and the fragile ecological balance has been devastated by widespread exploitation and depletion of forests for military purposes, fire-wood and charcoal by the Ethiopian government forces and Tigrean dealers, who have been given concessions and game-licences by the Ethiopian government. This exploitation exacerbated an already precarious ecological situation that was under severe pressure from overpopulation and overgrazing. Due to this misuse and the absence of any sound range management policies on the part of the government, the rich flora and fauna of the region, including big game, game birds, forests and water resources have all suffered irreparable damage under the current Ethiopian government.

Ethiopia treats the Somalis in the Ogaden as second class citizens in their own country, exploits the country for its gains, and deprives the Ogaden people of their fundamental human rights, including their inalienable right to independence and self-determination.

Somalis in the Ogaden are the poorest, least educated, most unemployed, most persecuted and most jailed of Ethiopians. They are disenfranchised, downtrodden minority in the empire-state of Ethiopia.

Without their knowledge and consent, the Ethiopian government signed agreements and gave concessions to foreign oil companies to explore oil, natural gas and other minerals in the Ogaden.

As a result of the illegal and shady deals between the Ethiopian government and overseas companies such as; Chinese Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau, Malaysian state-owned Petronas, Indian owned Gail India Limited and Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation Limited and Swedish Lundin Petroleum, the Ethiopian government forces evicted a large number of nomads from their ancestral grazing lands. Around the exploration sites the poor vegetation, which is essential for the nomads and their livestock was burned or removed.

While drought, war and the Ethiopian government's poor human rights record are primary causes of human sufferings in the Ogaden, the foreign oil companies' presence has exacerbated an already unstable situation socially, economically and politically.

Somalis in the Ogaden are rich in livestock and natural resources. Never have they experienced; in the history of the Ogaden such inhuman treatment whereby thousands of children die of starvation as a result of the intentional denial of the right of the people to exploit their natural resources.

Until the protracted struggle for self-determination in this region is resolved and lasting peace is negotiated, the Ogaden Human Rights Committee calls for the immediate cessation of all oil and other mineral exploration activities in the Ogaden, and urges the

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governments of Sweden, Malaysia, India and china to stop collaborating with the current Ethiopian government, which violates the basic human rights of its very people, including the duly elected Members of the parliament.

Since its foundation, on 13 June 1995, the Ogaden Human Rights Committee, has carried out extensive investigation of the human rights situation throughout the Ogaden, and has documented gross violations, including illegal imprisonments, mass arrests without charges or trials, enforced disappearances, torture, rape, extrajudicial killings, abduction, forced labour, hostage-taking, systematic religious and racial persecution, dispossession and widespread looting by the current EPRDF government in Ethiopia.

RECOMMEENDATIONS AND APPEALS:

To: international community, United Nations, Ehiopian Government and Ogaden National Liberation Front:

- 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 peaceful negotiated settlement, which guarantees the Ogaden people's inalienable right to self-determination through a fair and free referendum.

- 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 the senseless carnage in the Ogaden.

- The Ogaden Human Rights Committee reiterates its condemnation and disapproval of imposing restrictions on humanitarian organisations' movements, intimidation and abduction of aid workers as well as targeting civilian population in the Ogaden.

- 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.

- The international community publicly censure Ethiopia over its human rights record in the Ogaden, its illegal occupation of Somalia and massacring many defenceless civilians in Mogadishu and elsewhere.

- Perpetrators of war crimes and other atrocities in the Ogaden and in Somalia should be brought before an international tribunal.

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- The Ethiopian government should be held responsible for infamous mass killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

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

- The Ethiopian government and Ogaden National Liberation Front give ICRC free access to all detainees in their custodies.

- The Ogaden Human Rights Committee asks for all political prisoners in Ethiopia immediately and unconditionally released or charged with recognized criminal offences, and given fair trials; and be given unrestricted and regular access to their family members and to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

- The international community refrain from aiding and supporting the Ethiopian government as long as it violates human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Ogaden as well as other parts of the empire-state of Ethiopia.

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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