

**COMITE DES
DROITS DE L'HOMME
DE L'OGADEN
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**OGADEN
HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMITTEE
OHRC**

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PRESS RELEASE

PUNTLAND: PERSECUTES AND REPATRIATES REFUGEES FROM THE OGADEN

In 1991, after the collapse of Mohamed Siyad Barre's regime, in Somalia, some Somali warlords formed clan based autonomous regional entities under the auspices of the EPRDF/TPLF government in Ethiopia. These regional entities such as Puntland and Somaliland are not independent from Ethiopian interference.

Ethiopia established an intelligence-gathering bureau called "Ethiopian Interest Protection Office" to pursue members of its opposition through its numerous agents in Hargeisa and Garowe who have been given free license to detain, rape, torture and kill any Somali from the Ogaden suspected of being an ONLF supporter.

Due to the magnitude and scale of the oppression and violations of the basic human rights in the Ogaden, a large number of Somalis from the Ogaden region flee from their homeland to neighbouring countries, including Puntland, seeking asylum, shelter and safety.

Refugees from the Ogaden who escape from the Ethiopian government's unceasing infringement on their basic human rights are being persecuted in Puntland as well as Somaliland and TFG areas, where they are constantly imprisoned, tortured and then handed over to the Ethiopian government in exchange for ammunition, materials or simply to prove loyalty, cooperation and friendship to Ethiopia.

Human rights instruments provide protection against refoulement. The UN Convention against Torture, in Sub-article (1 and 2) of Article 3 states that:

"1. No State Party shall expel, return (refouler) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.

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

2. For the purpose of determining whether there are such grounds, the competent authorities shall take into account all relevant considerations including, where applicable, the existence in the State concerned of a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights.”

Article 14 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that:
“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution”

Nevertheless, in different parts of Somalia, in the past 12 years, many Somalis from the Ogaden were detained, tortured, their private properties confiscated and then handed over to the Ethiopian government against their will, in exchange for ammunition and other materials. Most of them were traders, residents and visitors, who were not involved in any illegal activities and have no any political affiliation whatsoever.

Many refugees from the Ogaden who were forcibly returned to Ethiopia have since disappeared in the notorious military detention camps throughout Ethiopia and were never seen again by their loved ones while others were tortured to death.

The latest group of refugees from the Ogaden were handed over to Ethiopia by Puntland Authorities, on the 2nd of May 2008.

In Gaalkacyo, Puntland, on May 1st 2008, a large number of Somalis from the Ogaden were rounded up and detained without charges by Puntland and Ethiopian security forces. They were subjected to constant interrogation under torture in the form of extensive and indiscriminate beating. On May 2nd 2008, some of them were handed over officially to the Ethiopian security forces and then transferred to Wardheer Military barracks. Among them were: **Abdinur Siyad Ismail, Abdiyare Haybe Omar, Omar Sheikh Mohamoud and Farah Good**. They are being held incommunicado, in Wardheer, Tankgne military barracks. No charges have been laid formally against them and no trial date has been set.

To the best of the Ogaden Human Rights Committee’s knowledge, they were not involved in any illegal activity. They were construction workers with no political affiliation whatsoever. 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 torture.

On the 22nd of April 2008, **Abdinur Mohamed Soyana**, an ONLF Executive Committee Member and **Dire Afi Elmi**, an ONLF Central Committee Member, were handed over to the Ethiopian Government by Puntland Authorities, in Garowe. The repatriation of the ONLF members has been confirmed by Ethiopian media outlet and the ONLF leadership.

On the 11th of April 2008, **Abdullahi Ali Mohamed**, businessman, who is **Abdinur Mohamed Soyana’s** cousin, was tortured to death by Ethiopian and Puntland security

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
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forces. **Abdinur** was asked to come to Puntland to collect his deceased cousin's wife and children from Bosaaso.

Dire Afi and his family were living in Puntland where his wife hails from.

Abdinur and **Dire** were transferred to Wardheer military barracks, then Jigjiga military barracks and then subsequently to Harar. Their families and relatives have no idea about their fate and whereabouts.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee is concerned about the safety and well-being of the two high-ranking ONLF political leaders and the other civilians who have been arbitrarily detained in Puntland and have been since unlawfully handed over to the Ethiopian security forces. The OHRC condemns Puntland's unlawful act which breaches all International Human Rights Instruments and norms.

The OHRC calls for all political prisoners in Ethiopia be either 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.

Puntland Authorities denied the handover of Somalis from the Ogaden to Ethiopia for fear of being publicly shamed. But on the 4th of May 2008, the Puntland Administration which tolerates no dissent detained **Abdalla Jama Jibril**, a Somali elder from Gaalkacyo after he confirmed the repatriation of the Somalis from the Ogaden in an interview with the BBC Somali Service, and the elder condemned these acts of persecution.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee is concerned about the safety and well-being of this elder, Abdalla Jama Jibril, and urges Puntland's Administration his unconditional and immediate release.

Scores of civilians from the Ogaden who fled from Ethiopian atrocities are also being held in harsh conditions without charges or trial, in prisons, in Puntland and Somaliland.

According to reliable reports received by OHRC, persecution and other acts of aggression against Somalis from the Ogaden are unabated, and are going on in Puntland and Somaliland on daily basis.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee condemns these acts of killing, torture, arbitrary arrests and forcible repatriation of refugees from the Ogaden from the neighbouring countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPEALS

To: the United Nations, International Community, Ethiopia, Puntland and Somaliland:

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
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- United Nations Security Council designates a safe heaven for the civilian population fleeing from Ethiopian armed forces' onslaught and atrocities.
- United Nations High Commission for Refugees provides necessary shelter protection and maintenance to the Somali refugees from the Ogaden in neighboring countries.
- The international community publicly censure Ethiopia, Somaliland and Puntland over their human rights record.
- The United Nations appoint a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Ogaden.
- The Ethiopian government should be held responsible for infamous mass killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.
- The international community intervene to stop the forcible repatriation of Somalis to Ethiopia.
- The Ethiopian government, Somaliland and Puntland Administrations give ICRC and UNHCR free access to all detainees in Hargeisa, Bosaso and elsewhere.
- The international community refrain from aiding and supporting the Ethiopian government, Somaliland and Puntland Administrations as long as they violate human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Somali people in the Ogaden and in their respective regions.

TO: INDIVIDUALS, LOCAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee requests individuals, local human rights and humanitarian organizations to support its efforts to promote and improve the human rights cause in the Ogaden, and recommends the following:

Please write to your Foreign Ministry:

- Asking that your government exerts pressure on Ethiopia, Somaliland and Puntland Administrations to improve their human rights record.
- Urging that all political prisoners be either 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 (name some or all from those in this document or in other OHRC's reports, which you can get in OHRC's web site www.ogadenrights.org).
- Expressing concern at the disappearance of a large number of suspected government opponents in the notorious military detention camps throughout the Ogaden and jails in Somaliland and asking their whereabouts (name some or all

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from those in this document or in other OHRC's reports, which you can get in OHRC's web site www.ogadenrights.org).

- Asking your government to support the Ogaden Human Rights Committee's efforts to appoint a UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights as well as sending an independent fact-finding mission to the Ogaden in order to stop and prevent more human rights violations in that country.

Please copy your letter to diplomatic representatives of Ethiopia accredited to your country as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia. The address is:

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10

Ogaden Human Rights Committee

www.ogadenrights.org

E-mail: ohrc@ogadenrights.org

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