Ogaden Human Rights Committee

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Press Release

Self-declared Republic of Somaliland:

Seeks recognition and favour through detentions, torture, confiscation of property and forced repatriation of Somalis

In 1991, after the collapse of Mohamed Siyad Barre's despotic rule, some tribes of the Northwest Region of Somalia declared the formation of a new state called "Somaliland".

Since its proclamation in May 1991, the self-declared Republic of Somaliland has got no recognition from the international community, and accordingly is part and parcel of the Somali Republic, which came to existence after the reunification of British and Italian Somalilands in 1960.

When Eritrea gained its independence in 1993, Ethiopia lost its sea outlet and became a landlocked country. In 1998, after the breakout of Ethio-Ertrean border war the then Somaliland President Mohamed Ibrahim Egal offered the Ethiopian government the use of Berbera seaport freely. The two sides forged an alliance against their respective opposition, namely ONLF, OLF and the late Abdirahaman Ahmed Ali's group, which rejected the notion of secession from Somali Republic.

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

On July 31st 1996, three ONLF central committee members were detained in Hargeisa, northwest Somalia by militias loyal to Mr. Mohamed Egal, while they were visiting their relatives in the area. (See 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). On 20 October 1996, they were handed over to the Ethiopian government against their will, in exchange for ammunition.

On April 10th 2002, a large number of Somalis from the Ogaden were rounded up and detained without charges, in Hargeisa, by Somaliland and Ethiopian security forces.

This repressive and indiscriminate act followed Egal's visit to Addis Ababa at the time.

To the best of OHRC's knowledge, the detainees were traders, residents and visitors, who were not involved in any illegal activities.

Many of them were transferred to Baligubadle – a border village between the Ogaden and northwest Somalia – and were hand over to the Ethiopian government against their will, in exchange for ammunition and other materials. Among them were: **Mukhtar Moalin Yusuf, Khadar Abdi Haji, Mustaf Sheikh, Hussein Moalin, Abdiaziz Ahmed, Badel Aw Ahmed, and Dahir Abdi Haji, all traders**. After repatriation they were transferred to prison in Jigjiga, and then to Harar, where they subsequently disappeared. Their families and relatives have no idea about their fate and whereabouts.

In November 2003, Dahir Riyaale Kahin, who is former head of the much feared and notorious secret service, known as National Security Service (NSS) in the port city of Berbera, declared all Somalis, who are not from Somaliland as persona non grata and ordered their expulsion within 45 days.

In 1990s, colonel Dahir Reyaale Kaahin was responsible for detaining and torturing to death many innocent Somalis, who were accused falsely of being members of Somali National Movement (SNM). Survivors and relatives of Dahir Riyaale's past atrocities are seeking justice, and would like to see him indicted as war criminal.

On November 30th, 2003, 75 Somalis from the Ogaden were arrested after confiscating their property, in Hargeisa, Northwest Somalia, following raids conducted by Somaliland militia and Ethiopian Security Forces. The detainees were humiliated and beaten up, and are being held in incommunicado detention in overcrowded location. No charges have yet been laid formally against them and no trial date has been set.

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To the best of OHRC's knowledge, the detainees were elders, traders, labourers, residents and visitors, who were not involved in any illegal activities, and have no any political affiliation.

On December 04th 2003, two trucks carrying Ethiopian security agents and officers arrived Hargeisa to prepare the ground for their hand over to the Ethiopian government against their will.

According to reliable reports received by OHRC, today (05.12.03) the repressive and indiscriminate measures against Somalis from the Ogaden are unabated, and are going on as of this writing. Names of the detainees and other details will appear in OHRC's upcoming report **" Ogaden: Downtrodden and Disenfranchised People".**

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee fears the safety and well-being of the detainees in Hargeisa and in the Ogaden proper.

The OHRC's fear is heightened by constant reports of executions, disappearances, rape, torture or ill-treatment of the detainees to extract confessions from them. And the poor human rights record of Riyaale and his administration.

Reports of Ethiopian government officials visiting frequently Hargeisa to solicit Riyaale's administration the immediate hand over of the detainees to Ethiopia have heightened fears about the grave consequences which may result their hand over to the Ethiopian government where they would face certain death.

Hence, the Ogaden Human Rights Committee is concerned about the safety and well-being of the detainees, and urges Riyaale's administration their unconditional and immediate release.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPEALS

1. The international community publicly censure Ethiopia and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland over their human rights record.
2. The United Nations appoint a Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Ogaden.

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3. The Ethiopian government should be held responsible for infamous mass killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.
4. Perpetrators of extrajudicial executions and other atrocities should be brought before an international tribunal.
5. The international community intervene to stop the forcible repatriation of Somalis to Ethiopia.
6. The Ethiopian government and Somaliland Administration give ICRC and UNHCR free access to all detainees in Hargeisa and elsewhere.
7. The international community refrain from aiding and supporting the Ethiopian government and Somaliland Administration as long as they violate human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Ogaden and in Somaliland.

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).

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