

October 15, 2020

From Human Rights Organizations and Civic Institute

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To:

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We, the undersigned Human Rights Organizations and civic institutes, write this letter to you out of grave concern with the current political and constitutional crises in Ethiopia and the foreseen human catastrophe. International human rights organizations like Amnesty International and various National and International media outlets have reported that the Ethiopian government has continuously engaged in massive human rights violations¹ some of which may, in fact, amount to genocide. The rule of law has never shone in Ethiopia both in its literary meaning as well as the politico-legal context. Arbitrarily arresting citizens and dictatorial rule have remained the hallmarks of the Ethiopian rulers for more than one hundred and fifty years. The people of Ethiopia, particularly the Oromo people and people of the Southern Nations and Nationalities, however, continue to yearn for democratic governance.

The fall of the barbaric feudal system in 1974 that was in place since the 1940s gave way to the military junta that ruled Ethiopia with a brute force for 17 long years. The death of the military regime in 1991 paved a chance for a multi-ethnic coalition transitional government and a new federal structure meant to ease a century-long conflict and hegemony of a single ethnic culture. However, the bright light quickly dimmed when the TPLF acted to purge the OLF (a major Political Organization representing the Oromo people) out of the transitional government, paving a way for a protracted war and continued marginalization of the Oromo people. The resistance waged by the OLF against the TPLF via armed struggle, clandestine resistance, and mass uprising eventually forced the EPRDF to kneel down, ending the hegemony of the TPLF in 2018. It also gave a golden opportunity for the emergence of individuals like the current Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, to usurp the movement from within under the guise of reform.

In the beginning, the PM presented himself as someone who has the will to chart a new path for the country. Internally, however, he was making pacts with those who adore old Ethiopia and vowing to restore the glory of the imperial system known for its racist and hegemonic strata - the single source of all evils stirring Ethiopia to this date. Given his public gesture and the desire of the mass in Ethiopia for change, many opposition political parties including the OLF consented to work with the regime on building a new path for the country and they showed their commitments by taking bold steps: declaring unilateral ceasefire, agreeing to demobilize their armed forces, and relocating their leadership from exile back to Ethiopia.

However, it did not take the Abiy government more than a few months to abrogate on these concessions and embark on the usual culture of intimidation of the leaders of the OLF, rounding up of their supporters, and subsequently, declaring a war of annihilation on the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) that were in the process of demobilizing. Ever since, the supporters of the OLF and the Oromo people have been living under a constant threat of military command, abductions from their homes and workplaces, and being hoarded into premises with little or no facilities to house human beings. Numerous representatives of the OLF, prominent elders, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs have, therefore, fallen prey to Abiy Ahmed's police state inherited from his time working for the TPLF.

The official tenure of Abiy Ahmed's regime has also ended on October 5, 2020. Given the precarious state of affairs facing the country, the OLF has called for the establishment of a transitional government in Oromia. And this OLF call has gained popular support from the Oromo people both within and outside of the country. However, it appears that the call has served as a de facto reason for the ire of the Abiy Ahmed government to be directed against the OLF and the Oromo people. The October 12, 2020, blatant attack by the Armed forces dispatched with the direct order of Abiy Ahmed on the OLF chairman, Mr. Dawud Ibsa is one such example and an alarming recipe for disaster in the country. When Mr. Ibsa's home was raided, renowned Oromo elders, political figures, and community leaders along with some non-government affiliated media Journalists were also rounded up by Ethiopia's federal police and security personnel with no court order.

¹ Ethiopia: "Beyond law enforcement" human rights violations by Ethiopian security forces in Amhara and Oromia (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/2358/2020/en/>)

Besides interrupting Mr. Ibsa's media briefing related to the current political and constitutional crises in the country, particularly in Oromia, the Federal Police has arrested several of the participants including the Oromo elders and journalists and more than dozens of the Audiences of the media briefing were ordered to remain in house arrest. The same day, the Federal Police have also rounded up a fundraising event organized by the Oromo Relief Association (ORA) for humanitarian aid in Sebeta, a city located on the South West of Finfinne. There too, the Federal Police has arrested several people, including Mr. Dechasa Nuguse, chairman of the Association, Mrs. Yerosan Takele, and Mr. Jaleta Abdissa, who were facilitators of the event. Three Journalists who were reporting the event have also been arrested.

We feel that the October 12, 2020 incidence on a peaceful gathering of people at a private residence of a major leader of a political organization constitutes state terrorism and is the making of a fascist act targeted at the Oromo people. We note that the attack on Mr. Dawud Ibsaa, a symbol of the Oromo political capital and an icon of endurance, resilience, principle, and resistance, is the last bell to ring before the canon goes loose in the country. Putting the very fact that Ethiopia (a country of over 110 million out of which the Oromo alone roughly constitute 50 million) cannot afford armed civil strife, therefore, we call upon;

- 1) all peace-loving countries, representatives, and the international community to help avert the looming crisis in Ethiopia by intervening as outlined in OLF's press statement of September 13, 2020, that called for international arbitration of Ethiopia's complex constellation of conflicts;
- 2) the UN, AU, EU, and major donor governments to the regime in Ethiopia to exert maximum pressure as they have the leverage to stop Abiy Ahmed's killing spree and a mass crackdown from going awry;
- 3) the International community that has the leverage to help the call for a peaceful transition to succeed by providing the necessary material, financial, diplomatic, and security assistance to the national stakeholders as needed;
- 4) the international community to understand that inaction to this call may lead to the repeat of the carnage in the Balkans and the tragedy in Rwanda that occurred during the first half of the 1990s in both instances.
- 5) the international Human Rights Organizations to diligently follow the situation in Ethiopia, particularly in Oromia, and expose the human rights violations perpetrated by the Abiy government's military and security forces.

Sincerely

1. Advocacy for Oromia
2. Global Oromo Advocacy Group
3. Horn of Africa Genocide Watch
4. International Oromo Women's Organization
5. International Qeerroo Support Group
6. Oromo Parliamentarians Council
7. Oromo Political Prisoners Association
8. Oromia Support Group – Australia
9. United Oromo Christian Church of Australia