

Ogaden People's Rights Organisation
United Nations Indigenous Forum 16th Session
Agenda Item #10
By Abdirahman Mahdi
UN Headquarters, New York

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates of Indigenous Peoples, Member states, UN agencies and NGO's,

I am speaking on behalf of the Ogaden People's Rights Organisation.

Despite having one of the most liberal constitutions in the world, the Ethiopian government has closed the door to all civil society members who engage in defending the human rights of its people. Ethiopia uses punitive terrorism legislation to criminalise any individual or organisation who raises the issue of human or democratic rights. Journalists, human rights defenders and even international NGOs and Journalists have been detained for attempting to raise issues of human rights violations concerning the peoples in Ethiopia.

International human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Brookings Institute and humanitarian relief NGOs have documented the rampant abuse meted against indigenous peoples in Ethiopia. The UN sent a fact-finding mission to the Ogaden and found grave human rights violations, and recommended a further investigation. However, it was never followed up, and this has emboldened the Ethiopian government to commit further violations with impunity. What further complicates the matter is the fact that Ethiopia is the HQ of the AU and positions itself as the champion of peace and stability by always offering its services to the UN and the international community. This makes it easy and convenient to ignore Ethiopia's obvious transgressions against its indigenous people.

Under such circumstances the status of indigenous peoples is absolutely terrible. The Omo people have lost their land to the GIBE I and two dams, The Benishangul are under threat from the Grand Millennium Dam, The Sidama people have lost valuable land to coffee plantations. All over Ethiopia, indigenous peoples are being evicted from their lands due to large scale projects such as dams, oil explorations or large agri-businesses. In Ogaden, the situation is further complicated by the imposition of the embargo on aid and trade due to an ongoing conflict which is further exacerbated by droughts and the Cholera epidemic. Pastoralists have been denied access to their important pasture land in the regions of Korahe, Doolo and Shabelle. The Ethiopian government has divided the whole of Ogaden into 23 blocks and is auctioning off the land to international corporations. When a company decides to explore oil, the army cordons off large tracts of land and prevents pastoralists access to the grasslands and watering points. This is all occurring at a time of ongoing droughts and extreme climatic changes.

What is even more worrying is the plan to put a 800 km pipeline from Southern Ogaden to Djibouti. No adequate study has been conducted about the effect of this pipeline on the precarious ecology of Ogaden and no free, prior and informed consent of the people happened. The government sees indigenous peoples as a nuisance and forcefully denies them access to their own traditional lands.

We recommend that the UN agencies, including EMRIP, UNHRC and the Rapporteur of Indigenous Peoples and the international community look into the situation of indigenous peoples in Ethiopia and help find a viable solution to address the worsening crises. If Ethiopia implodes, it will be catastrophic to all countries in the region and the world at large.