

**Sub Commission on the Promotion
and Protection of Human Rights
Working Group on Indigenous populations**

**Tarekegn Chimdi
Oromian National Academy**

42th Session, July 31-Aug 4, 2006

Thank you distinguished chairperson for giving me an opportunity to express the agony of the Oromo people in Ethiopia.

My name is Tarekegn Chimdi and I represent the Oromian National Academy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Oromo people represents the largest national group, accounting about 35 million of the 75 million population in Ethiopia. They are one of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Horn of Africa. Although, the Oromo people comprise the majority of the population, their Political, economical social and cultural life in the Ethiopian empire was marked by subjugation, discrimination and marginalization that followed their colonization by the Abyssinians at the end of 19th century. The colonizers decimated millions of Oromos who resisted their brutal rule. The egalitarian and democratic institution of governance of the Oromo people (the Gada system), their belief in one God -Waaga- , their culture and language were banned; their means of subsistence, land was confiscated and the people were reduced to serfs.

From that time on, successive regimes; the Haile Sellasie regime, the military junta and more the worse the present TPLF dominated EPRDF continued their subversive autocratic rule of Oromia in the name of the territorial integrity of the Empire. The current TPLF regime musters total control of all government machineries, the judiciary, the army, the press and above all the security force to perpetuate its reign of terror in Oromia and other Southern Parts of Ethiopia.

Rampant human rights abuses, like detention, arbitrary killings, evictions, forced resettlements, epidemic disease, abject poverty, skewed educational programmes are the order of the day for the Oromo people and other nations and nationalities in the southern belt of the Empire.

Since the TPLF/EPRDF regime came to power in 1991, systematic repression and pervasive subjugation directed against the Oromo people resulted in untold sufferings in the whole of Oromia, particularly in the countryside far from the sight of the international community.

The government routinely subjects its critics to harassment, extrajudicial killings, imprisonment and torture. As a result countless Oromos languish in detention camps and prisons in the country. In 2005, over 25, 000 people were in prison on Oromo related charges throughout Oromia and Finfinne (Addis Ababa). This number, if anything, has grown ever since as a result of the repeated unrest following peaceful demonstrations.

Such crackdown on Oromo citizens from all walks of life is a day-to-day Oromia, including children as young as 11. The intellectuals, students, teachers, journalists, aid agencies workers, artists, human rights activists and peasant farmers are particularly

targeted solely on the basis, of their origin. Accordingly renowned international Human Rights Organisations believe that the Ethiopian authorities are guilty of racism.

Just to sight a few examples, Macca and Tuiama self-help Association (MTA), Oromo high school and university students, civic organisations, farmers and journalists peacefully protested against deforestation, skewed taxes, exorbitant rise in the price of fertilizers, educational policies, change of the capital city of Oromia from Finfinne (Addis Ababa) to Adama etc were met with heavy handed forces of the security and Police who acted with impunity. Until this report is presented all those detained in connection with the protests are still languishing in different prisons. Some died of torture; some were denied of medical treatment and were left to die. And still more are suffering from diseases related to poor conditions in the prison. Those who managed to run away are suffering as refugees in the neighbouring countries. Related to these incidents over 350 University students were dismissed from classes and some were thrown into to the jails in 2004, Two of these Gaddissa Hirpassa and Alemayehu Gerba were killed from torture and live bullet in the Kallitti prison.

The leaders of MTA Dirribi Demissie, Gemechu Feyera, Sintayehu Workneh and Ayelu Ittisa and more than a dozen of Oromo university students and journalists Shiferaw Insarmu and Dhabasa Wakjira are still in custody even though different benches of court ordered their release on several occasions. Amnesty International and other human rights organisations consider them as prisoners of conscience and appealed for their release since 2004.

These peaceful demands of students and farmers continued even as recent as May 2006 in the high schools and universities across Oromia. Following the incident, 22 farmers were massacred in Horro Guduru in February of this year, dozens of students were killed and wounded from live bullet from security forces, several thousands of Oromo nationals were kidnapped and detained in different prisons in Oromia state and Finfinne (Addis Ababa). Students like Jagama Badhane and Kabada Badhasse were killed just in front of their school in town of Ambo. Events coming from different Universities, report that graduates of Oromo origin, in particular from Makalle University, are denied of their certificates after completion of their studies.

The Government is reported to contrive the conflicts in neighbouring Borana and Gujji Oromos led to the internally displaced persons of over 100, 000 people and over 135 deaths. Similarly, in August 2005, 73 people were killed and more than 85,000 flee their homes from villages in Mieso in West Hararge region of Oromia. Most of them remain displaced without proper attention and support.

Uncompensated evictions of Oromo farmers from their ancestral land in Oromia, particularly around Finfine (Addis Ababa) and other cities in Oromia has reached untold proportions. In the name of investment, the Government has systematically uprooted farmers from their ancestral lands without due compensation and turned thousands of farmers landless and victims of ecological degradation and hazardous health problems emanating from the new agglomerations. The expansion of flower farms has aggravated the situation around Finfinne (Addis Ababa.)

Control over fertilizer and agricultural inputs and credits in particular have given the government an effective tool for quashing dissent in rural parts of Oromia. A TPLF owned company in charge of importing fertilizers systematically regulates distribution and price of fertilizer and other agricultural inputs. Farmers are forced to pay exorbitant prices that do not often compare their income. Those who as a consequence fail to pay are thrown into the prison and finally were forced to auction off livestock or household goods to get out of prison. This is in a stark contrast to the hypocritic claim that the government of Ethiopia boast to achieve food security.

Recommendations

- , Macca and Tulama association leaders, journalists, teachers, students, farmers and other thousands of Oromo citizens arrested should be released immediately and unconditionally,
- Those responsible for the extra judicial killings, torture and severe beatings in different schools around Oromia should be brought to justice,
- The right to association, freedom of expression, education and the right of the Oromo to Waqeffanna as a religion should be respected and the investigation through concerned special rapporteurs should be conducted,
- The right to self-determination of the Oromo people should be implemented and respected,
- Indigenous and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms should be put into practice to resolve clashes and misunderstandings
- The Ethiopian government should be condemned for its instigation of conflict between various ethnic groups within the Ethiopian empire state and cross border incursions into the neighbouring countries.

Thank you for your attention