



## **Agenda Item 8. Special Theme: “Indigenous peoples’ collective rights to lands, territories and natural resources”**

**Tuesday 17 April**

Madame Chair, distinguished member state representatives, UN agencies, NGOs and my fellow Distinguished Indigenous Delegates,

I am pleased to take the floor today to speak about the plight of the Agro-pastoralist indigenous population living in the Ogaden region- who have faced displacement, dispossession, heavy taxation, land grabbing and forceful evictions from their ancestral lands as the Ethiopian government strives to auction off large areas of land for the purposes of the exploitation of natural resources.

Nomadic people have been denied the use of important pasture land in the regions of Korahe, Doolo and Shabelle. The Ethiopian government has divided the whole of the Ogaden into 23 blocks to auction the land to international corporations. When a company decides to explore oil, the army cordons large tracts of land and prevents pastoralist access to the grassing land and watering points. This is still the case during times of drought and extreme climatic changes. Most recently, numerous communities and villages are set to be evicted and dispossessed from their ancestral land based on the plan to put a 800 km pipeline from Southern Ogaden to Djibouti- this is despite the fact that no adequate study has been done on the effect that this pipeline will have on the precarious ecology of Ogaden. And most importantly, there has been no free, prior and informed consent of the people. The government sees indigenous people as a nuisance and forcefully denies them access to their own traditional lands.

In addition, from 2010 until today, agro- pastoralists living in the the areas of Shilaabo and Dhobawayn have been forcibly removed because of the gas reserves that were found in the Calub area. This area was a focal point for water and grazing land for the livestock of agro-pastoralists livestock who were forcibly relocated to an arid area causing famine, disease, and death of thousands of civilians. From the village of Laba bar near the Somali border to Bargun near Goday; to Ceel Ogaden and Fooljeex near Qabridahare all pasture land is blocked. Currently there are three oil companies finalising exploration in the area: Africa Oil (Canada), South Western Energy (Hong Kong) and GCL Poly Petroleum Investment (China). This is testament of a wider trend of giving primacy to economic development over the right of indigenous people to territory and land, and indicative of the problematic conception of indigenous lands as inherently ‘empty’ and in need of being developed. This is further highlighted by the Ethiopian Government’s constitution wherein Article 40 declares the right of the government to co-own any piece of land or territory and as such evict indigenous populations as they please. This is in direct contradiction to Article 10 of the United Nations declaration on the right of indigenous people which states that indigenous people cannot be abruptly removed from their lands without due compensation.

Ogaden Peoples Rights Organisation stresses the significance of the loss of livelihoods for indigenous people in the Ogaden because of forceful land-grabbing which has already cost countless lives. We reiterate the importance of ownership and control of territories and the resources within - to bring powerful governments, multinational corporations and international institutions to better respect the rights of indigenous peoples as it is our right to have complete autonomy and access over our resources and territories.

Thank You