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The Right Honorable Philip Hammond MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
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Open letter

Systematic repression: Torture, Killing, and Harassment of unarmed School Children in the Oromia regional state of Ethiopia

Dear Minister,

It is with sadness and anger that we report the renewed crackdown on peaceful Oromo protesters by government security forces in Ethiopia. More than 70 students were killed, many made to disappear, others jailed simply for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in April 2014. Amnesty international compiled a detailed report giving a clear account of this crackdown in its report of “because I am Oromo- a sweeping repression in Oromia.” Over the past week the same tragedy was taking place in Oromia high schools and universities as they were protesting against the continued eviction of the Oromo people from their livelihood without compensation and by driving them down to extreme poverty.

While more than 15 million peasants are reported to have been starving (BBC report, 9 Nov, 2015) the oppressive regime in Ethiopia continues to push its policy of evicting the Oromo people from their livelihood on a wider scale. This policy, coupled with the burning of a vast area of natural forests and continued eviction of indigenous people has been opposed in peaceful protest yet met at all times with brutal suppression in the forms of mass arrest, torture and killings.

The government security forces have killed already Twenty four students since the protest began in different parts of Oromia. Among those first casualties,

1. Gezaheny Oliqa, Haromya University Student, killed on 1 Dec, 2015
2. Gutu Abarra, High school student, West Wolega, Killed on 2 Dec, 2015
3. Karraasa Chala, student West Wolega, Killed on 2 Dec, 2015
4. Dajane Sarbessa, 10th grade student, Bantu School, South West Shoa, Killed on 3 Dec, 2015
5. Dabala Tafa, North Showa, Fiche, Killed on 2 December 2015
6. Miftah Juneydi, East Harargee, Bedeno town, killed on 5 Dec, 2015
7. Murata Abdi, 11th grade H/school student, killed on 7 Dec, 2015
8. Bekele Soboka, H/school student, Ada’a Barga, Western Shoa, Killed on 8 Dec, 2015
9. Ebbisa Bucho, activist, Fincha, Horro Guduru, Killed on 8 Dec, 2015
10. Fekadau Girma, 9th grade Student, Gedo high school, West shoa, killed on 10 Dec, 2015,
11. Gudeta Bay’isa Gobana, 9th grade student, Babich high school school, killed on 10 Dec, 2015,

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12. Dereje Gaddisa, Babich town, killed on 10, Dec 2015,
13. Bayisa Bedhasa, 1st yr Bako agricultural college student, West Shoa, killed on 10 Dec, 2015,
14. Benti Dhuguma, High school student at Lalo Asabi, West Wolega, killed On 10 Dec, 2015,
15. Lucha Gemechu, High school student at Lalo Asabi, West Wolega, killed On 10 Dec. 2015,
16. Al'azar Qalbeessa, High school student, Inangoo town, West Wolega, killed on 10 Dec, 2015,
17. We received credible reports about the killing of 9 Oromo students today in Babich town, West Shoa zone whose name has yet to be confirmed.

In a country where the free press and independent human rights reporters are crippled by repressive laws, and the security apparatus are spying on every aspect of the people's lives getting the true figure of the casualties is difficult. All we know at this level is that this tragedy unfolds as we speak. As we hear from our sources the protest is set to continue, so we are worried that many students will face kidnapping, disappearances and torture in the process, while many more continue to be persecuted by the same force.

This is not the only way or the first time that Oromo youth have been killed. Arbitrary killing and persecution continued for many years, even on those Oromos were in prison. Student Alemayehu Garba, partially paralysed with polio, was shot dead with 18 others in Kaliti prison in November 2005, UNHCR recognised Tesfahun Chemedha with his friend Mesfin Abebe who were kidnapped from Kenya in April 2007, made to disappear in detention in Ethiopia until 2008 was eventually killed in prison.

Reports are coming out as we speak showing the deployment of Ethiopia's security forces to Kenya to hunt down selected Oromo refugees and smuggle them back to Ethiopia where they could face disappearance in secret prisons, torture and death (see, HRLHA's Urgent Action and Appeal of October 25, 2015)

The Regime in Ethiopia has been getting financial and political support over the past 25 years in the face of this tragedy from the government of the United Kingdom. The Oromo Community alongside other oppressed people in Ethiopia has also been informing Her Majesty's government and asking to understand this reality and stop providing material and political support for a clearly repressive government in Ethiopia. We waited very long for Her Majesty's government to stop maintaining the EPRDF in power in this way. After waiting for so long, we began to wonder as to whether the UK government is concerned about our worries at all, and the traumas of oppressed people in Oromia and Ethiopia generally.

Over one third of Ethiopia's budget is in foreign aid. Ethiopia receives more aid from the UK than any other country in the world and that includes training and armed EPRDF Federal police which are ruthless and kill anyone they would like to lill without any accountability to even the fake Ethiopian legal system. By sidelining and ruthlessly dismantling legal oppositions, the free press and the civic society, the ruling party has remained in power for 25 years. Over the past two successive elections it claimed 99.6% and 100% seats respectively in the Federal parliament.

In Ethiopia the current government sponsored and developed a constitution in 1995, which among other things guarantees "The Right of Assembly, Demonstration and Petition," and "Freedom of association", of course alongside other democratic, political and economic rights. Yet, this same government remained in power for 25 years against the will of the people by breaking every element of this constitution, among others by rigging election.

The use of courts and law enforcement institutions as a tool of repression in much the same way as security forces continues and has been scaled up from time to time in Ethiopia. The judiciary, an institution that is hoped



to enforce the rights and freedoms of the people under the constitution, remains weak and a mere instrument of the ruling party. In fact the ruling party's obsession with power was backed up by its clear unconstitutional act of institutionalizing repression through legislating repressive laws. The "Anti-Terrorism proclamation" (Pro. 652/2009) and "Charities and Societies Proclamation" (Pro.621/2009) both came out in the face of widespread national and international opposition. Ever since they came to effect, thousands of students and even journalists were charged with numerous trumped up charges simply for exercising their rights.

More worryingly, in the absence of any meaningful courts and political will to allow the creation of institutional framework to deal with constitutionality of government acts or legislations, there seems to be no hope that such unconstitutional acts of the government or its agencies or laws could be challenged and shelved anytime soon during the reign of this repressive regime.


The Ethiopian government continues to claim a double-digit figure on the one hand and makes aggressive campaign to convince the world of its narrative that democracy is a luxury it can't afford to provide to the people in Ethiopia. That its development strategy would be hindered if it focuses to entrench democracy in the county, implying and convincing the west that Ethiopians are not civilized enough to handle democracy and allow the government to pursue its development policy.

Yet over tens of millions Ethiopians are starving every year while the families and friends of the ruling elites continue to enrich family and friends of the ruling elites through corruption and by embezzling public funds and resources. Indeed the narrative the regime is trying to entrench are not only morally degrading and abhorrent but it is based on false premises created out of thin air to advance a myth created by the ruling party to justify repression and govern with impunity.

It is an awful state of affairs and disrespectful to spend UK taxpayers' money to fund repression. We were and are still very eager to see an effective response by those who control Ethiopia's purse strings. If the United Kingdom is so wedded to providing aid to Ethiopia, then we have no choice except insisting that this government use the money it is providing as a leverage to ask the regime to respect human rights and end repression, without being satisfied with the desk-based studies of government-controlled data which support the status quo in Ethiopia.

We seek that this should be backed by effective sanctions so that members of the Ethiopian government are prevented from travelling to the UK and America and investing in property as well as businesses outside of Ethiopia.

We understand that the regime in Ethiopia is considered a friend on the effort of the West to combat terrorism. Yet, funding a terrorist, be it a government or political movement, serves to breed terrorism and more hatred than anything.

Yours sincerely

Amin Abdella (chairman)

Oromo Community in the United Kingdom

cc: Mr James Duddridge MP, under-secretary of State foreign& Commonwealth (Africa)
Hilary Benn, Shadow Secretary of foreign& Commonwealth
Justine Greening, Secretary of State International Development
Claire Short, Shadow Secretary of State International Development
Alex Salmond, Shadow SNP Westminster Group Leader (International Affairs and Europe)