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Human Rights in Ethiopia

—————< **Report** >—————

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The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization.

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Summary

Ethiopia is generally hailed as an African democratic role model and a beacon of stability and hope in an otherwise troubled region. The country is a darling of the developmental community and has become one of the West's key allies in the region. World leaders remain lenient with the regime of Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn due to conflicts of interest between investment opportunities and respect for human rights. Western powers also fear an anticipated mass exodus of impoverished population groups from the wider region towards the West, which only a strong and stable partner in the region could prevent.

The dire human rights situation in Ethiopia is strongly connected to the havoc wreaked by damaging large-scale business operations. These notably take place in areas inhabited by ethnic groups who are already systematically marginalised by the central government. In regions such as Oromia and Ogaden, Addis Ababa has awarded millions of hectares of land to multinational oil companies, mining conglomerates and agribusinesses. The concomitant destruction of local ecosystems deposes the livelihoods of millions of people. Worse still, indigenous populations are brutally evicted from their ancestral homelands, often due to targeted killings, rape, and confiscation of livestock.

Meanwhile, the European Union's (EU) approach to Ethiopia has been lacking a clear direction and orientation. It is caught between the moral obligation to address severe human rights violations perpetrated on Ethiopian soil and more compelling or immediate concerns, such as economic and security interests in the region. Lately there have been signs, however, which seem to indicate that this dilemma is swaying in favour of human rights protection. European diplomacy has stopped turning a blind eye to the Ethiopian government's disregard for its people's basic rights. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, as well as the Commission and Parliament, now concordantly vow to ensure that no money from the Union's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa flows to the Ethiopian Government. They also denounce the recently imposed state of emergency in Ethiopia as a slippery slope towards neglecting the rule of law, and openly urged the Ethiopian Prime Minister to fulfil his promise to remain within the boundaries of the constitution.

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1 • Introduction

With a population of over 100 million, Ethiopia is the second most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa. At first glance and particularly in comparison to its regional counterparts, it performs rather well. Ethiopia's economy has been growing steadily in recent years, boasting a small emerging middle class, and receiving continuously-increasing foreign investment. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, for instance, forecast an impressive annual GDP growth of up to 7.5 percent over the next three years. However, while in terms of



economy and development Ethiopia presents itself as a land of progress and plenty, the reality of most Ethiopians proves to be quite different. This is exemplified inter alia by the country's rather poor Human Development Index (HDI) ranking: 178 out of 188. The country remains one of the world's poorest, with a third of the population living in abject poverty. Between five and seven million people require emergency food aid each year. To make things worse, the country's regime is one of the continent's most authoritarian in character, and cracks down mercilessly on anyone who dares voice dissent.

Ethiopia prioritises strong economic growth, development and a high degree of enforced political stability at the price of human rights and civil liberties. The government seeks to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of its people and the so-called "developed world" based on persistent economic growth, large infrastructural investments, improvements to education institutions and better health and job prospects. Yet, despite some improvements, most of it is sheer window-dressing and the situation of the bulk of the population remains dismal.

However, the international community gladly buys into this ruse and supports the country with few questions asked. Ethiopia is a key ally to the West, generally hailed as an African democratic role model and a beacon of stability in an otherwise troubled region – despite its appalling human rights record. Occasional outcries on the part of the international community criticising Addis Ababa's repressive and non-democratic policies have repeatedly been undermined by presumably more immediate or compelling

concerns, in particular counter-terrorism and curbing migration, but also economic interests. This sometimes leads to controversial statements about the country's positive role, with former US President Obama praising the country as an "outstanding partner" during a joint press conference held with Ethiopia's Prime Minister in July 2015, for instance. The steady stream of readily-available aid money distorts the political system by making the governing elite independent from public approval, instead being held accountable by donor countries.

2 - Political Background to the Current Situation in Ethiopia

Ethiopia's modern history is part and parcel of its capacity to commit heinous human rights violations on a mass scale while simultaneously preserving a good international reputation. Being the only African country which, for the most part, successfully fended off colonial subjugation and retained sovereignty, from the outset the Federal Republic of Ethiopia has played a special, exemplary role on the continent and beyond. Coming into being by way of conquest and forced unification during the reign of Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), the multi-ethnic and multilingual construct that was the Ethiopian State was set to be plagued by issues along the rocky path of nation-building. After some timid progress on this path was made during the Haile Selassie I era, most of it was lost under the infamous Marxist-Leninist Derg regime and the military dictatorship of Mengistu Hailemariam, which began in 1974. When his regime fell in 1991, hopes were high that the succeeding government would find a way to guarantee peaceful coexistence between all of Ethiopia's ethnic groups and an inclusive form of governance. However, just like during the previous decades, central power remained firmly in the hands of the Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups (both Orthodox Christians), while other ethnic groups – such as the Oromo and Ogaden Somalis – were excluded from State power.

Since 1991, the political landscape of the country is dominated by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four political parties whose forces ousted the Mengistu regime. When it came to power, the EPRDF made tentative attempts to transform the previously-centralized State into an ethnic federal republic composed of nine member-states. In its endeavour to find a sustainable governance solution and secure the peaceful coexistence of majority and minority groups, a new constitution was promulgated in 1994. It envisaged the creation of nine ethnically-based regional states and two federally-administered city-states, and theoretically guaranteed every ethnic group in the country the right to self-determination, including secession. The result was an asymmetrical federation, which failed to solve ethnic antagonisms and tensions due to the lack of national dialogue and reconciliation. While some ethnic groups were empowered, others were left behind; a development that is only logical

given the fact that even the ruling EPRDF is largely dominated by one of the four ethno-nationalist parties it is composed of, namely the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). For ethno-national groups such as the Oromo and the Ogadenis, for instance, ethnic federalism, to this day, remains artificial as it lacks consistent implementation, especially with regards to equal access to power and representation at the central level of the country's administration. Political movements striving for regional autonomy or a referendum on secession for their regions (e.g. Ogaden, Oromia), in particular, are excluded from access to the regular party system as the government brands them as "terrorists".

Today, Ethiopia has an authoritarian government headed by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, the successor to strongman Meles Zenwai, who died in 2012. Ethiopia is a federal parliamentary republic whose Prime Minister is the head of government. The country's bicameral legislature is represented by the upper, 112-seat House of Federation and the lower, 547-seat House of Peoples' Representatives. While the latter is elected through popular elections, those who serve in the former are appointed by the state legislatures. The lower house selects the Prime Minister, who holds executive power, and the President, a largely ceremonial figure who serves up to two six-year terms.

Even though general elections are held, unfortunately, serious irregularities during the voting process are the norm. The rights to vote, run for office and campaign are severely restricted, and the electorate only has marginal influence over who governs, to a large extent because there is no alternative to the ruling EPRDF coalition. During the 2005 general elections, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Ana Gomes, who was heading the EP's Election Observation Mission, reported blatant irregularities and was besides banned from returning to Ethiopia. In May 2016 the result was no different, with – according to Human Rights Watch - elections taking place in a "general atmosphere of intimidation", and triggering "concerns over the National Electoral Board's lack of independence". Opposition parties reported that State security forces and ruling party executives harassed and detained their members, while onerous registration requirements effectively put opposition candidates at a disadvantage. As the EPRDF tightly controlled the campaigns and the electoral process, it won all 547 parliamentary seats, putting an end to the Ethiopian multi-party system.



MEP Ana Gomes was blacklisted by Ethiopia after speaking out for the rights of its oppressed peoples

Major Ethnic Stakeholders

Given that the so-called “highlanders”, notably Amhara and Tigray, were able to cling to power for most of Ethiopia’s modern history and, up to this day, fill the ranks of the majority of Ethiopia’s political elite, not surprisingly, the systematically suppressed ethnic groups needed to organise themselves in order to defend their right to self-determination along with their peoples’ individual human rights.

The Gambella People’s Liberation Movement (GPLM), for one, mostly consisting of members of the Anuak ethnicity, has since 1985 struggled against the domination of national and regional politics by the highland peoples. The Gambella region suffered its bloodiest trauma in December 2003 when within four days (13-15 December), 424 unarmed Anuak civilians were brutally slaughtered by Ethiopian army forces and highland civilians alike, while attacks of this kind have continued at least until January of 2016, when over 50 Anuak civilians fell victim to special police forces in indiscriminate attacks on several Gambellan towns.

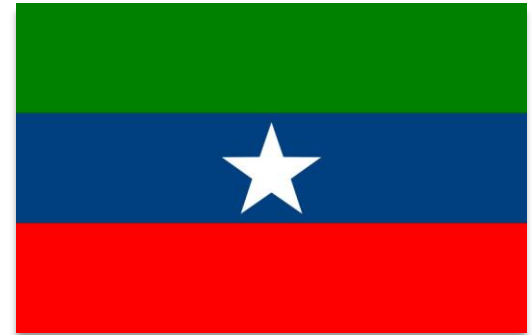
The Sidama National Liberation Front (SNLF) – another organization representing an oppressed ethnic minority – primarily pursues peaceful approaches to reach its goals of greater ethnically-diverse democratic participation, genuine self-determination and equal access to political, economic, social and cultural opportunities among the different ethnic and religious groups of Ethiopia. The Sidamas’

persecution at the hands of the present regime culminated on 24 May 2002 in the killing of over a hundred peaceful Sidama protesters by special government forces in Awassa.

The Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM), on the other hand, is most worried that the people it represents will fall victim to forced resettlement caused by government projects aimed at exploiting their homeland's natural resources, such as farmland or precious metals.

Ogaden

The Ogaden (officially known as "Somali Regional State") is a region that constitutes the majority of Eastern Ethiopia. Historically, the Ogaden were a distinct, independent people, but after the "Scramble for Africa", the Ethiopian Empire (then Abyssinia) took control over much of the region. During post-war decolonisation, Ogaden was then fully incorporated into Ethiopia and has remained a part of the state ever since. The Ogaden is intrinsically linked with the country of Somalia to the East. Links with Somalia are both ethnic, linguistic and religious in nature, with approximately 95 percent of the Ogaden population being of Somali ethnicity and 98 percent being Muslim. There is systemic belief in the area that the Ogaden region should be a part of Somalia rather than Ethiopia, as the current Ethiopian rule is regarded as an occupation by Ogaden inhabitants. Since the forced incorporation of the Ogaden into the Ethiopian state, the Ogaden people were systematically marginalized and their struggle for self-determination violently suppressed by the successive governments in Addis Ababa.



Since 1984, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) has been the most widely supported group leading self-determination initiatives of the Ogaden people. After the end of the Ethiopian Civil War and the fall of the infamous Derg regime in 1991, the ONLF entered the regional elections in Ogaden. In the 1992 regional parliamentary elections it won 87 percent of the votes and thereby gained 80 percent of the seats in the regional parliament, with members of the ONLF taking on leading roles in the local government. At the time, EPRDF promised democratic reform, including the legal right for minorities in Ethiopia to secede if they were convinced their rights were reduced or repealed; a promise which became part of the Ethiopian constitution. However, when representatives of the ONLF requested to exercise this right, Ethiopia launched a systematic and brutal wave of repression against political opponents, banning the ONLF and effectively erasing any distinction between political activism and criminality. In the aftermath of the events of 9/11, the Ethiopian Government jumped on the "War on Terror"-bandwagon and labelled the ONLF as a terrorist organisation, thereby securing economic and military aid from

Western countries. Since the introduction of Ethiopia's *Anti-Terrorism Proclamation* in 2009, the government has been able to further legitimise the derogation of various human rights, particularly civil and political rights. Addis Ababa conflates the issue of self-determination with terrorism, often bringing the acts of ONLF under the scope of harsh laws and using the threat of terrorism as an excuse to suppress the people of Ogaden. Several rounds of peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF to solve this imbroglio have been unsuccessful, largely due to the former apparently showing only lukewarm commitment to the process. The failure of the most recent round of peace talks in 2014 is a case in point: they came to a halt after the abduction of two members of the ONLF delegation in Kenya and their deportation to Ethiopia.

Oromia

Covering more than 30 percent of the country's landmass, Oromia is Ethiopia's largest region. Representing about one third of the population, the Oromo also are the country's most populous ethnic group.

In 1973, Oromo nationalists established a political organization aiming at leading the liberation struggle of the Oromo people against the Abyssinian colonial rule: the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF was notably one of many groups that fought against the government of Mengistu Hailemariam, who led Ethiopia from 1977 to 1991. When he was overthrown, for a short period, the OLF was part of the transitional government led by the EPRDF coalition. However, the relationship with the dominating TPLF was strained from the start. In 1992, the simmering tensions led to the OLF leaving the transitional government. Almost immediately after that decision, thousands of OLF sympathizers and suspected supporters were arrested.

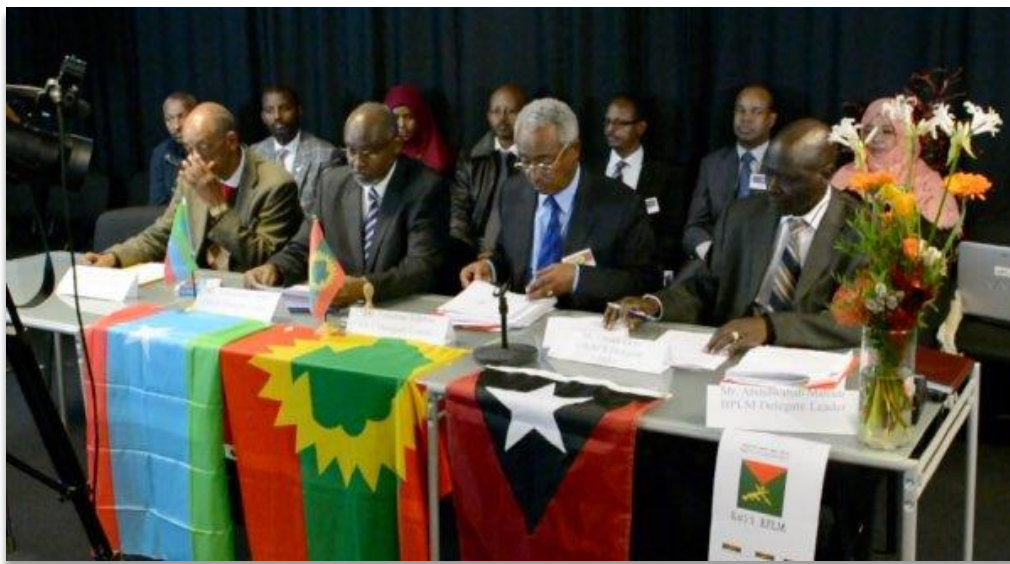
The emergence of the OLF was a culmination of the century-old yearning of the Oromo people to have a strong and unified national organisation to lead the struggle. The fundamental objective of the front is to exercise the Oromo people's inalienable right to national self-determination, to put an end to State-sponsored oppression and exploitation, and to form, where possible, a political union with other nations on the basis of equality, respect for mutual interests and the principle of voluntary association. The OLF's commitment to self-determination is based on a democratic principle, that the Oromo people are endowed with the right to decide the type of sovereignty they want to live under and the type of political union they want to form with other peoples. The change made by the Tigrayan regime, which seized power from the Amhara rulers in 1991, is far from enabling the Oromo people and others to realise this



fundamental right. It is merely a cosmetic change intended to affect the momentum of their struggle. The OLF reiterates that the struggle of the Oromo people is not directed against any one group but against the system of oppression. In fact, the OLF and the Oromo people are committed to the cause of laying a foundation for the union of free peoples on the basis of their freely expressed will.

People's Alliance for Freedom and Democracy

On 23 October 2015, a political alliance between the marginalised peoples of Ethiopia, namely the Ogaden through ONLF, the Oromo through the OLF, the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM), the Gambella People's Liberation Movement (GPLM) and the Sidama National Liberation Front (SNLF), was established: the People's Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (PAFD). Acknowledging the need for a united effort to put an end to the enduring repression perpetrated by past and present Ethiopian regimes, the PAFD's goal is to bring a new just political order to the country, based on the consent of all peoples. It seeks to act as a platform to unify the voices of the oppressed peoples of the country, and to engage representatives of all nationalities and other stakeholders committed to genuine democracy through diplomacy, advocacy and awareness campaigns.



Founding Ceremony of PAFD (October 2015)

The PAFD focuses its struggle on reclaiming the constitutionally-guaranteed right to self-determination for all of Ethiopia's oppressed peoples, and on establishing a heterogeneous and inclusive federal power structure. It further aims at effectively implementing individual rights as well as at strengthening genuine democracy. Since its inception, the PAFD has been supporting Ethiopia's

democratic process by advocacy actions, such as raising awareness – including at the European Parliament – for the persisting government-sponsored violence and oppression directed against many ethnic groups. At its first general congress in March 2016, the PAFD reasserted the unity of its members in their fight against the dictatorial regime. It also condemned the government's security forces for repeatedly killing unarmed civilians, as well as for forcibly displacing rural populations in Ogaden and other regions to enable the exploitation of natural resources by the government, in concert with foreign investors.

The Alliance's strong commitment to an inclusive and peaceful dialogue between all ethnic groups and the fact that several of the most underrepresented portions of the Ethiopian people have a stake in it, makes it the best hope for a process of national reconciliation that could empower all stakeholders.

3 ▪ Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT). However, it has not signed the Optional Protocols of the ICCPR or the CAT, meaning that the judicial and quasi-judicial organs of these instruments do not have jurisdiction in Ethiopia. In concrete terms, Ethiopia is for example not legally obligated to accept visits by independent international and national bodies to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in the country or in certain areas such as Ogaden, such as provided by the CAT's optional protocol.

Ethiopia notoriously breaches the obligations it has by virtue of being party to these international treaties. In 2016, Freedom House has ranked Ethiopia as a nation that is “not free” with regards to its population's civil and political rights (CPRs)¹, and in 2015, the country was ranked 123rd out of 167 in *The Economist's* Democracy Index. Among the major issues of governance and CPRs is the dominance of the EPRDF at all levels of government and its restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and free media. Suppression of these rights is often achieved through arbitrary arrests and detention, harassment and intimidation of opposition supporters, and politically motivated show trials. Mechanisms and institutions to prosecute, punish and redress violations of basic human rights are virtually non-existent. Harsh punishments for those who try to raise awareness about their grievances with the outside world deter many who could provide further information on a wide variety of human rights abuses from doing

¹ Freedom House. Freedom in the World 2016: Ethiopia. Available online at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/ethiopia> [last accessed: 7 February 2017].

so. In 2016, the Ethiopian government continued systematically harassing and imprisoning political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists and other members of civil society. Additionally, on 26 February 2016, the government informally removed Oromia's civilian administrators from office, replacing them with intelligence and military officers. Thus the government introduced de facto martial law to Oromia, which reached its culmination on 8 October 2016 when, following the Irrecha Massacre of over 600 Oromo², an official state of emergency was established in the country.



Oromo protesters chanting at a demonstration in Addis Ababa

Marginalised groups in particular fall victim to state-sponsored violence and oppression. Some of it is due to the detrimental impacts of big businesses and Addis Ababa auctioning off large swathes of these groups' lands to outside private investors. For the Ethiopian government, the populations of Ogaden or Oromia, for instance, are an obstacle to quick cash from agribusinesses, transnational mining

² People's Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (PAFD). 5 October 2016. "PAFD Statement on Oromo Civilian Massacre of Irrecha Day, on October 2, 2016". Available online at: <http://www.ayyaantuu.net/pafd-statement-on-oromo-civilians-massacre-of-irrecha-day-on-october-02-2016/> [last accessed: 10 October 2016]; Ayaantuu News. 4 October 2016. "Irrecha Massacre Was Not a Stampede: Planned and Mechanized Massacre of Hundreds of Oromo Civilians in Minutes". Available online at: <http://www.ayyaantuu.net/irrecha-massacre-was-not-a-stampede-planned-and-mechanized-massacre-of-hundreds-oromo-civilians-in-minutes/> [last accessed: 10 October 2016].

conglomerates and the like. Gross human rights violations, such as extrajudicial executions, torture and sexual violence, are used to terrorise local populations and drive them away from their lands, leaving them traumatised and without the means to sustain their livelihoods.

Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Press

Article 29 of the Ethiopian constitution protects the freedom of expression. It states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.” Yet, freedom of expression is subject to large-scale government interference and restrictions, and the Ethiopian state engages in systematic censorship. In recent years, political liberties and freedoms were significantly eroded, with opposition leaders being overtly attacked and many journalists imprisoned. Through the passing of restrictive laws governing the media, political funding and civil society, over the years, the government has severely constricted the available political space. On Reporters Without Borders’ 2016 Press Freedom Index, reflecting journalists’ freedom and efforts made by the authorities to ensure and respect it, Ethiopia ranks a rather poor 142nd position out of 180.

The media remains under government stranglehold and are dominated by state-owned broadcasters and government-oriented newspapers. Independent media have been dismantled through a combination of harassment and repressive legislation. Many journalists have to choose between self-censorship, harassment and arrest, or exile. At least 60 journalists have fled into exile since 2010. Tactics used to restrict independent media included targeting publishers, printing presses, and distributors. Both foreign and native journalists have fallen victim to arrests by the Ethiopian government. The Ethiopian state-owned media dominates the country’s media landscape with a few independent media outlets coming under fierce scrutiny. In 2009, one of the few remaining independent newspapers in the capital, *Addis Neger*, ceased operations, citing significant and sustained harassment as the cause. Significantly, the 2008 media laws made defamation illegal and allowed the State to censor materials before publication, a much more serious violation of freedom of expression than resolving an issue after publication. The punishment of imprisonment for defamation of the State is harsh by international standards and the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) reports that Ethiopia has the second highest number of imprisoned journalists in Africa after Eritrea.

In June 2015, journalist Reeyot Alemu and five other journalists and bloggers from the ‘Zone 9’ blogging collective were released from prison ahead of President Obama’s visit to Ethiopia. On 16 October, the remaining four imprisoned Zone 9 bloggers were acquitted of terrorism charges after they had spent over 500 days in pre-trial detention. A fifth charged in absentia was also acquitted. Many other journalists,

protesters, and other political opponents continued to be prosecuted under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, and many journalists including Eskinder Nega and Woubshet Taye remain in prison. Scores of journalists fled the country due to intimidation, harassment and politically-motivated criminal charges.

Also, with regards to dissent from political groups, the Ethiopian government has begun to employ a broad definition of “terrorist” groups that encompasses even non-violent political oppositions, such as Ginbot 7. Founded by US-based, former Addis Ababa mayor Berhanu Nega, Ginbot 7 has emerged as a significant political opposition group to EPRDF. The group advocates strictly non-violent, democratic methods of selecting a governing authority that is more representative of the Ethiopian people than the current regime. Notwithstanding this, in June 2011, the Ethiopian government labelled Ginbot 7, together with the ONLF and OLF, as terrorist groups under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. This inevitably led to the suppression of Ginbot 7’s activities and has also severely restricted the media coverage of the party. On 24 June 2014, Andargachew Tsige, Secretary General of Ginbot 7, was arrested while travelling through Yemen. Tsige, a British citizen, had been condemned to death in absentia by the Ethiopian government in 2009, for allegedly planning the assassination of government officials. Since his kidnapping, Tsige is being held incommunicado and has not been seen except for a brief appearance on Ethiopian television in July 2014, where he confessed to “crimes”.

Freedoms of Assembly and Association

Article 30 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia’s constitution provides that “everyone has the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed, and to petition.” This right has not been respected in the case of Ethiopia’s marginalised groups, who are severely punished and arbitrarily arrested during peaceful protests. Even though freedom of assembly is a constitutional right, it is often covertly hindered by the Ethiopian State or, in some instances, simply denied. Indirect interference is common and is achieved through other regulations. One example is the regulation that all municipal halls are controlled by local officials who are almost all members of the EPRDF. These officials are in charge of access to the municipal halls, and there have been many complaints from opposition parties that officials denied or obstructed the scheduling of opposition parties’ use of halls for political rallies. In practise, there are thus severe restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly, affecting, most of all, the political opposition and Muslim minority groups.

In 2009 – together with the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation – the Ethiopian Parliament enacted the Charities and Societies Law (CSO Law), which requires all civil society organizations to be registered with the simultaneously established Charities and Societies Agency. Following the creation of this mechanism, which was put under the overall control of the Ministry of Federal Affairs, the number of legally operating

civil society organizations decreased by more than half, or by almost 2,000 associations.³ Besides the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, this oppressive legislation is additionally being used by the state apparatus to curb civil and political activism by thusly illegalising any opposition to its hold on power. The CSO Law further stipulates that Ethiopian civil society organisations are not allowed to draw more than ten percent of their financial resources from foreign sponsors, affecting particularly the operations of those ethnic organizations with a large foreign diaspora, such as the ONLF and OLF.



Oromo Protesters (May 2014)

Oromia

In April 2014, protests broke out across Oromia against the “Integrated Master Plan”, the planned expansion of Addis Ababa’s municipal boundary into Oromia regional territory. The protests were led by students, but people from all walks of life participated. As the central government was not willing to tolerate this dissent, its security forces brutally suppressed the protests by using excessive and, at times, lethal force, including live ammunition. At least several dozen protesters and bystanders were killed, and thousands were arrested⁴. An unknown number of ethnic Oromo students continue to be detained, many of them without charge. On 27 January 2016, police used excessive force to disperse a peaceful

³ U.S. Department of State. 2010. 2010 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia. Available online at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154346.htm> [last accessed: 7 October 2016].

⁴ Human Rights Watch. 2016. Ethiopia: Events of 2015. Available online at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/ethiopia> [last accessed 5 October 2016].

demonstration in Addis Ababa that was organized by the Unity for Democracy and Justice opposition party. Police beat demonstrators with batons, sticks and iron rods on the head, face, hands and legs, injuring more than 20 of them.

This incident is being dwarfed, however, by the 2 October 2016 mass killing of over 600 Oromo at Bishoftu, who had gathered to celebrate their thanksgiving Irreecha holiday⁵. According to the OLF, the government initially attempted to deter people from attending the annual festival by erecting road blocks. The PAFD further reported that after the festival was in full swing, the Agazi killing squad opened fire with rubber bullets and live ammunition on a large crowd of Oromo, who were also protesting the governing party's abuse of their sacred festival for their own political agenda. Eventually, a combat helicopter and several armoured vehicles were deployed, causing a stampede which resulted in the unprecedented death toll. The following weekend, and after continuing protests, the federal government officially declared a state of emergency for Oromia, thereby cementing the already-existing military hold on the Oromian administration, initiated on 26 February 2016, the day when the central government removed Oromia's civil government and declared martial law for the region.

Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions

Arbitrary detention is the method most often used to silence dissenting voices, particularly from opposition supporters among ethnic groups such as the Ogaden or Oromo. Despite a number of articles in the constitution which should legally protect Ethiopian individuals from arbitrary detention, it is still a widespread practice. People from all walks of life are regularly arrested based on their actual or suspected political opinion. The systematic use of arbitrary arrests and detentions by Ethiopian security forces is apparently intended to warn, punish or silence anyone who dares voicing dissenting opinions. For instance, over 500 members of Medrek, an important political coalition in the opposition, were arrested at various polling stations in Oromia during the 2015 general elections⁶. Due to the lack of transparency within Ethiopian security forces and the atrocious conditions of detention facilities, individuals who are subject

⁵ People's Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (PAFD). 5 October 2016. "PAFD Statement on Oromo Civilian Massacre of Irreecha Day, on October 2, 2016". Available online at: <http://www.ayyaantuu.net/pafd-statement-on-oromo-civilians-massacre-of-irreecha-day-on-october-02-2016/> [last accessed: 10 October 2016]; Ayaantuu News. 4 October 2016. "Irreecha Massacre Was Not a Stampede: Planned and Mechanized Massacre of Hundreds of Oromo Civilians in Minutes". Available online at: <http://www.ayyaantuu.net/irreecha-massacre-was-not-a-stampede-planned-and-mechanized-massacre-of-hundreds-oromo-civilians-in-minutes/> [last accessed: 10 October 2016].

⁶ Amnesty International. 2016. Annual Report: Ethiopia. Available online at www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/ethiopia/report-ethiopia/ [last accessed: 3 June 2016].

to arrest are particularly vulnerable to mistreatment and torture. In most cases, conditions in Ethiopian prisons and detention centres violate international law and both domestic and international standards. Most of those arrested are being detained without charge or trial for some or all of their detention, for periods ranging from days to several years. The majority of those arrested for actual or suspected dissent are held incommunicado, i.e. they are denied access to legal representation, family members and/or the outside world in general. Because of the lack of access to legal counsel and the families not having any information on the detainees' fate or whereabouts, detainees find themselves outside the protection of the law – a practice amounting to enforced disappearance.

“Jail Ogaden” in particular, thusly dubbed due to its high number of Ogaden prisoners, located in Jigjiga, Ogaden and holding thousands of inmates, many of which prisoners of conscience, is notorious for overcrowding conditions and unhygienic facilities. These lead to regular outbreaks of contagious diseases such as cholera, undernutrition among inmates, and torture and abuse by prison officials. Methods of torture range from forcing the prisoners to stay in painful postures for long periods of time over electrocution to forced body modifications and sexually-motivated violence such as rape. These prison conditions further deteriorated after the enactment of the anti-terrorism and CSO laws from 2009 on.

The government rarely publicly discloses the results of investigations into abuses by local security forces, such as arbitrary detention. This means that victims often have little opportunity for recourse, even after having been released and suffered grave injustices.

Although Ethiopian laws require that detainees be brought promptly before a court and have access to a lawyer, the 2009 *Anti-Terrorism Proclamation* gives police forces the power to detain individuals for up to 28 days without charge. In practice, however, this stipulation is rarely complied with, and people accused of terrorism can find themselves being held indefinitely and incommunicado on trumped up charges.



Security forces patrolling the streets during the state of emergency

Extrajudicial Executions and Torture

Article 15 of the Ethiopian constitution protects the right to life and states that “no person may be deprived of his life except as a punishment for a serious criminal offence determined by law.” As a signatory to the CAT, Ethiopia has also embraced the concept of “absolute freedom from torture”. However, despite this domestic protection, there have been numerous incidents of torture and indiscriminate and extra-judicial killings against Ethiopia’s non-Tigrayan population.

The Ethiopian security forces, dominated by members of the Tigrayan ethnic group, are notorious for using systematic violence in order to repress members of the other ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Much of this violence is directed at Oromo and Ogaden Somalis. The Ogaden Human Rights Committee claims that the Ethiopian military is engaged in daily atrocities against civilian members of the Ogaden in an attempt to crackdown on dissent in the region. For instance, on 5 June 2016, the Ethiopian army swept through the village of Jama’ Dubad, indiscriminately opened fire on unarmed civilians and, in the ensuing bloodbath, killed more than fifty. Sadly, this incident is but part of a seemingly wider strategy of the Ethiopian central government to terrorise and instil fear among marginalised and/or minority populations.

After the general elections in 2016, several members and leaders of opposition parties were killed. On 15 June 2016, Samuel Aweke, founder of the Semayawi Party, was found dead after publishing a critical article in his party's newspaper. Representatives of his party testified that Samuel Aweke had received threats from security officials after the release of said article. Even though his death was investigated, observers called the trial, conviction and sentencing of Aweke's alleged killer a "sham". Other cases of politically-motivated murders were not investigated at all, among them those of Medrek members Taddesse Abreha, Berhanu Erbu and Asrat Haile.

Sexual Violence

Women and children are the most vulnerable to abuse and violence in the Ogaden. Many women were detained, tortured, raped, and mistreated for being members of the Ogaden Women's Democratic Association or relatives of ONLF members. Additionally, a number of children were detained, tortured or molested by Ethiopian security forces.

Ethiopian government forces have also been accused of systematic rape and sexual violence in their continued suppression of the Ogaden people. The scale and pattern of the cases of rape have led the Ogaden Women Relief Association to label sexual violence as "a weapon of war"⁷. The targeting of various groups of women, for example those involved in trading, has led to a situation in which women are significantly deterred from fully participating in society and are constantly constrained by fear. In July 2013, news source Ogaden Online reported that "the rape of young girls has now reached epidemic proportions in Ogaden and is becoming the most potent weapon used by the Ethiopian military against the Ogaden civilians"⁸.

In the wake of extra-judicial killings and rape cases, local authorities loyal to the Ethiopian government also employ strategies of fear mongering among the local population in order to prevent news spreading to the outside world. An example of this was reported in October 2014 when the rotting bones of two women, suspected of being kidnapped and held by the authorities, were found near Gari-Go'an. The two women had been repeatedly raped by militia loyal to the Ethiopian State. The militia then threatened the women's community with severe punishment if the news of the rape and killing reached the outside world.

⁷ Oromia Times. 2014. "Ethiopia: Shocking Sexual Violence Against Women in Ogaden". Available online at: <https://oromiatimes.org/2014/06/16/%EF%BB%BFethiopia-shocking-sexual-violence-against-women-in-ogaden/> [last accessed 7 February 2017].

⁸ Ogaden Online. 2013. Available online at: <http://unpo.org/article/16193> [last accessed 8 February 2017. Please note that the initial article and Ogaden Online are not accessible anymore]

The systematic use of rape as a weapon is often combined with other forms of torture. The use of bayonets and other tools has been described in interviews with refugees, leading to permanent physical damage and often death, in addition to severe psychological trauma. There are also a number of cases of the Ethiopian military either raping women in front of their families and neighbours or forcing men at gunpoint to rape their own family members. In some cases, women who have been subjected to rape become pregnant and cannot remain in their society due to social stigma.

Restrictions imposed by the Ethiopian government on humanitarian aid to the Ogaden region – both by misusing funds allocated to the central government for humanitarian purposes and by impeding international and national agencies' access to the region – significantly impact the survivors of rape and sexual violence. The lack of health services and support networks that could be supplied by humanitarian groups means that victims often have to travel through war-torn areas in the Horn of Africa in order to reach Kenyan refugee camps and receive aid.

It is incredibly difficult to estimate the amount of women who have been subjected to rape. There are allegations of new rapes being committed on a daily basis by government forces and militias as few are willing to talk about it. The fear of reprisals as well as the cultural taboo that is connected to rape prevents the vast majority from acknowledging it ever happened. Estimations vary, with some going as far as saying that, including unreported cases, almost one third of all Ogaden women have been subject to sexual violence by the armed forces.

Impacts of Business Activities

The dire human rights situation in Ethiopia is strongly connected to the havoc wreaked by damaging large-scale business operations, notably in areas inhabited by ethnic groups who are already being systematically marginalised and suppressed by the central government. The Ogaden region in particular hosts substantial reserves of oil and gas, which represent an enormous, yet largely untapped, potential for the future of Ethiopia's economy. However, for local populations resource abundance appears to be more of a bane than a boon. In regions such as Oromia, Ogaden and Benishangul-Gumuz, Addis Ababa has awarded millions of hectares of land to multinational oil companies, mining conglomerates and agro-businesses. Large infrastructure projects, such as the Grand Renaissance Dam and the Gibe-3 Dam, have also caused forced resettlement without adequate compensation. This systematic land grabbing – the lease of land previously used by pastoralists and smallholders to foreign investment – has prompted heavy unrest in the Ogaden, Oromo, Afar, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz regions. In these areas, this practice is known as “villagisation”, moving indigenous people from their resource-rich ancestral lands to artificially-created villages where the affected groups are no longer able to subsist. The concomitant

destruction of local ecosystems additionally deposes the livelihoods of millions of people. Worse still, indigenous populations are brutally evicted from their ancestral homelands, often due to targeted killings, rape, and confiscation of livestock.



In September 2016, locals of the town of Gizan in Benishangul-Gumuz refused to leave their land after it had been sold for gold prospecting to government and army officials from Tigray, resulting in the arrest of more than 300 Benishangul protesters, of which over a dozen are claimed to have died in detention⁹. What's more, in Gambella, since 2010, whole communities of ethnic Anuak – adding up to 45,000 households in total – have been displaced without compensation under the government's villagisation programme¹⁰.

⁹ Ethiopian Satellite Television Service (ESAT). 19 September 2016. "Locals protest against TPLF army commanders turn gold prospectors". Available online at <http://ethsat.com/locals-protest-tplf-army-commanders-turn-gold-prospectors/> [last accessed: 7 October 2016].

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch. 2012. "Waiting Here for Death": Forced Displacement and "Villagization" in Ethiopia's Gambella Region. Available online at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/01/16/waiting-here-death/forced-displacement-and-villagization-ethiopias-gambella-region> [last accessed: 7 October 2016].

Ogaden

For the Ogaden region, the auctioning of large swathes of land to multinational oil and natural gas companies is the severest problem related to detrimental business activities. Whole communities are being forced to move away from their traditional lands, without their consent or previous knowledge. Multinational companies are clearing thousands of square kilometres of pristine vegetation, making hundreds of crisscrossing roads in a precarious environment that is already prone to cyclical droughts. Around 70 percent of the Ogaden Somali people are agro-pastoralists and their livelihoods depend on the grasslands and forests that are now being recklessly destroyed. In addition, the Ethiopian army and proxy forces, such as the infamous Liyu police, cordon off large tracts of pastureland, watering wells and migratory routes of rural populations, and forcefully depopulate large areas, using targeted killings, rape and confiscation of livestock.



The Ogaden depend on pasturage for their livestock

Since 1945, more than a hundred transnational oil exploration corporations were given concessions to do geological surveys in Ogaden, particularly in the provinces of Korahe, Jarar, Shabelle and Afdheer. Currently, there are more than ten companies prospecting for oil in the Ogaden. The biggest one is the Chinese company Poly GCL Limited, which has bought concession rights for large swathes of land. Poly

CGL is owned by the Chinese People's Liberation Army and is funding the Ethiopian army and the Liyu militias. Most recently, in March 2016, the PAFD criticized the government's "development strategy", which foresees the construction of a natural gas pipeline from Ogaden to the Djiboutian port city of Damerjog, fearing that local Ogadenis will come out on the short end of the deal with Chinese investors.

Despite its rich biodiversity, the Ogaden ecosystem is very fragile and highly susceptible to any changes. If they do not address the issue of ecological sustainability and protect the livelihoods of the Ogaden people, further exploration activities will contribute to continued environmental degradation, social impoverishment and food insecurity. The ongoing oil and gas exploration and the construction of a planned pipeline, combined with the vagaries of climate change, will inevitably lead to irreversible social and environmental consequences. These range from a local to a global scale, and include habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity, restriction of access to land, air pollution, water contamination, loss of paleontological resources, and an increase in global warming.

Oromia

The Oromo region faces similar challenges regarding the detrimental practices of large businesses, ranging from environmental problems to the destruction of people's livelihood systems and land grabbing. The gold mining sector, for instance, is a hotbed of corruption and the simultaneous pollution of surrounding areas and groundwater reservoirs with acids and toxic waste, as well as deforestation and erosion, all have devastating impacts on the already fragile ecosystem. International leather processing companies recklessly dispose of their toxic waste on Oromian territory, thereby destroying vulnerable ecosystems such as Lake Koka and the Awash River. Just like in the Ogaden, widespread land grabbing by multinational companies is another problem. Practices of transnational agro-businesses in particular lead to thousands of people being evicted from their lands without receiving any compensation.

4 ▪ Ethiopia-EU Relations

EU Aid and Cooperation Policies

The European External Action Service (EEAS) states that "the EU is seeking to develop a relationship with Ethiopia that is based on the principles of peace, prosperity and partnership, and that supports Ethiopia's

economic and political reforms¹¹". The EU seeks to improve the political and social situation in Ethiopia and usually seeks certain reforms in conjunction with the provision of the Cotonou Agreement. Signed by the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), this agreement is aimed at the elimination of poverty through sustainable development and cooperation between all ACP nations and the EU.

By showcasing itself as a presumably credible and reliable partner, Addis Ababa makes considerable use of international assistance. Ethiopia is the fourth largest recipient of EU aid finance in the world, reaching a total of 161 million dollars between 2011 and 2013, and almost 2.8 billion dollars in the last 20 years. The EU also represents approximately 40 percent of Ethiopian global exports, making up the single most important trade partner that Ethiopia has with imports reaching almost 550 million dollars in 2013¹². In return for the aid and extensive trade, the EU is attempting to encourage the Ethiopian government to be more accountable, promote freedom of speech, develop democratic institutions and a vibrant civil society, and improve respect for human rights and the rule of law. The EU believes these are not only desirable characteristics of modern governance structures, but are also crucial for stability and security in Ethiopia and the region as a whole. Since the emergence of China as an alternative provider of funds to Ethiopia – a partner that does not attach political or social provisions to its investments – the conditional aid policy employed by the EU has increasingly been challenged.

Continuing Grievances

Despite the attempts to streamline aid channels to Ethiopia through the adoption of the EU-Africa joint strategic partnership, aid policy from the EU remains fragmented. Foreign and security policy, trade, and development policy still constitute separate policy fields with different actors, interests and decision-making structures. After the suppression of political opposition that occurred after the 2016 general election, EU members were compelled to change the methods of their aid supply to the Ethiopian State. The "protection of essential services" approach was adopted and aimed at having stricter monitoring structures and provide aid that was targeted at specific objectives. However, many European NGOs have noticed that this approach has done little to curb political suppression and human rights violations, and in some instances has even allowed the Ethiopian State to increase its efforts of political domination and marginalisation of opposition groups.

11 EEAS, "EU Relations with Ethiopia". Available online at: http://eeas.europa.eu/ethiopia/index_en.htm [last accessed 2 June 2016].

12 Eurostat, "European Union, Trade in Goods with Ethiopia". Available online at: <https://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp46.pdf> [last accessed 2 June 2016].

Initiatives proposed in order to curb the detrimental effects of the current aid policy towards the Ogaden have called for giving aid directly to the Ogaden people and pressuring Ethiopia to allow independent agencies to manage aid in Ogaden. There have also been calls made by members of the Ogaden community for aid funding to be completely withheld from Ethiopia as long as the central government continues to use it to fund ethnic oppression. The ONLF recently published a press release in order to highlight the escalating humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden region. This press release also appealed to countries contributing aid to Ethiopia “to take practical steps to ensure aid reaches the intended recipients”.¹³

Moreover, despite its commitment to freezing resources allocated to the Ethiopian government from its Emergency Trust Fund for Africa in September 2016 due to the ongoing violence against many ethnic groups¹⁴, the EEAS did not immediately condemn atrocities like the 2 October 2016 Oromo massacre¹⁵. This was until Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, in a frank telephone call with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn on 14 October 2016, openly expressed the EU’s worries about the recently-imposed state of emergency. The European Parliament also took a clear stand on the severe human rights violations occurring in the country in the framework of [a hearing addressing this issue on 12 October 2016](#).

¹³ Ogaden News Agency. 2014. “Deteriorating Humanitarian Situation in the Ogaden” [ONLF Press Release]. Available online at: <http://www.ogadennet.com/?p=34774> [last accessed: 7 February 2017].

¹⁴ UNPO, “Oromo: EU Commission Insists No ETF Money Goes to the Ethiopian Government”. Available online at: <http://unpo.org/article/19447> [last accessed: 5 October 2016].

¹⁵ UNPO, “UNPO Expresses Disappointment Following EEAS Statement on Oromo Tragedy”. Available online at: <http://unpo.org/article/19530> [last accessed: 5 October 2016].

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