



OROMO COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

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From: Oromo community and civic groups in United States

December 13/14, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

RE: American-Oromo Communities Express Horror at Gruesome Violence and Growing Crisis in Oromia

We, the below signed Oromo Communities of the United States, write to express our horror at the escalating human rights violations, aerial bombardment and devastating loss of civilian life at the hands of government and armed forces in the Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia. In the month since the Pretoria peace agreement was signed by the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the conflict in Oromia has greatly intensified, with numerous ongoing attacks resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians and the mass displacement of thousands more.¹ In the wake of such gross human rights abuses by the current regime, which is compounded by the extreme drought conditions currently affecting the region, we express our deep concern at the failure of the US to condemn current attacks in Oromia. It is our fear that such silence risks further legitimizing the regime and emboldening it to continue engaging in such grave actions against its own civilians. As such, we join our voices to urge the United States to use all diplomatic tools at its disposal to condemn human rights abuses in Oromia and pressure the Ethiopian government to seek peaceful means to address conflicts throughout Ethiopia, as it has done with the TPLF in northern Ethiopia. Indeed, it is our firm belief that if holistic approaches are not taken to address country-wide political conflicts, it will lead to the further destabilization of not only Ethiopia, but the entire Horn of Africa.

Over the past month, indiscriminate attacks across Oromia have drastically increased, with multiple drone strikes taking place in heavily-populated areas - killing dozens of civilians.² As noted by the Ethiopian Peace Observatory (EPO), "recorded events due to organized political

violence reached an all-time high” in the Oromia region over November.³ The EPO continues that this conflict has the potential to “become a major crisis” in the rest of the country, even surpassing the conflict in the north, as, unlike Tigray, Oromia is centrally located and home to almost half the entire population.⁴ Despite this, the Ethiopian government’s intensified attacks in the Oromia region immediately following the Tigray peace agreement suggest a lack of real commitment to genuine nationwide peace. Instead, in the south, the Abiy administration continues to choose conflict over inclusive dialogue, seemingly replicating the tactics used by the administration in the Tigray conflict.

In addition to violence committed by state actors, since the end of November, attacks by Amhara militias (*Fano*) against Oromo civilians have also ramped up, with the violence reaching unprecedented and gruesome levels throughout western and central Oromia, including in Hanger Gutin and Kiremu, in the East Wollega zone, the East Shewa zone, and in Horo Guduru Wollega zone.⁵ For example, on December 6, 2022, the Addis Standard reported that dozens of civilians were killed and 350,000 had been displaced from the Kiremu district following a series of attacks on November 25th and 29th.⁶ On December 4, it was reported that “allied forces”, including Fano, extrajudicially executed 20 civilians in Hanger Gutin, East Wollega zone. In recent days, a video showing several members of Fano speaking in front of the decapitated heads of individuals from Jardega Jarte, in Horo Guduru Wollega zone has been circulating online.⁷ The Ethiopian federal government has applauded Fano numerous times, with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stating that over the past two months, over 1000 “Shane” (a term frequently used by the Ethiopian government to refer to the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)) had been killed by Fano, and calling Fano a source of pride for the Amhara and Ethiopia as a whole.⁸

By participating in and encouraging tactics of polarization and inhumane violence, the Ethiopian government appears to be inflaming rather than attempting to resolve the conflict - and, in doing so - effectively betraying its sacred duty to protect the human rights of its citizens. As a report released on December 7, 2022, by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has confirmed, grave human rights violations occurring in the Oromia region are attributable to both the government security forces and non-state armed groups operating in the region.⁹ The EHRC report indicates that the Ethiopian government has conducted indiscriminate airstrikes, extra-judicially killed civilians and engaged in mass arrests of civilians due to purported—and often tenuous—connections to the OLA. Following these outbreaks of violence, the Addis Standard has reported that mass protests are erupting across Oromia, including in schools and universities, with civilians protesting the indiscriminate attacks resulting in mass killings and displacement.¹⁰ With the situation already so volatile, we await in terror the prospect of what further escalations may bring.

On top of the devastating conflict, according to a recent report released by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) and World Food Program (WFP), Ethiopians are

experiencing some of the worst levels of food security in the world,¹¹ and drought conditions throughout eastern and southern Ethiopia, which includes the Oromia region, are causing “elevated levels of acute malnutrition and hunger-related mortality.”¹² As of November 17, 2022, over 5 million people were in acute need of food assistance in Oromia,¹³ while a cholera outbreak has continued to worsen in the Bale zone of Oromia.¹⁴ UNICEF has recently reported that the drought has “caused the complete destruction of the livelihoods of more than 24.1 million people.”¹⁵ This situation is further worsened by the fact the Ethiopian government is obstructing the delivery of vitally important humanitarian aid to affected regions. Recently, UN OCHA reported that humanitarian access throughout many parts of Oromia has been “significantly constrained by the ongoing insecurity,”¹⁶ and that, by mid-year, their humanitarian partners were only able to provide assistance to 59% of the population targeted in Oromia, the lowest of any region.¹⁷

We, the Oromo communities of the United States, write to you, Mr Secretary, to share our pain and horror at what has befallen our families, neighbors, and fellow countrymen across Oromia and the entire country. Violence is reaching new heights, yet the appalling and ongoing atrocities are occurring with impunity, as the United States appears to be intentionally ignoring the situation in Oromia and southern Ethiopia. We urge the US to act now to pressure the Ethiopian government to uphold its sacred duty to its people - ceasing all hostilities and engaging in a genuine process towards peace and the resolution of conflicts. As the Pretoria peace agreement in Tigray recognizes, conflict can *only* be truly resolved through a commitment to dialogue and peace. However, as the truly horrifying situation in Oromia makes clear, this can only occur if such a commitment extends across the entire country and includes all parties to the conflict.

In recognition of the important role the United States has played in resolving the conflict in the north of Ethiopia, as well as its global position as a defender of democracy and human rights, we urgently call on the US to be a voice for all those experiencing appalling human rights violations across Oromia and Ethiopia. As US citizens, we also express the deep pain this situation is causing our communities - many of whom have been directly impacted by the conflict - especially as the United States has so far remained silent instead of condemning these atrocities.

In light of the above, we, the Oromo communities of the United States, call for the US government to:

- Use all diplomatic tools at its disposal to pressure the Ethiopian government to immediately cease all hostilities and engage in a genuine, countrywide peace process. This included engaging with all parties to the hostilities, including armed actors such as the OLA, as well as Oromo opposition parties, in order to resolve political differences through peaceful means - as was done during the Pretoria peace dialogue.

- Advocate and call for a peace process that will comprehensively address the concerns of all nations and nationalities in Ethiopia, in particular, those of the Oromo who represent the largest segment of the population.
- Engage with the Oromo diaspora community, as well as Oromo civic, professional, and religious organizations and leaders, in order to ensure a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the situation in the Oromia region to inform policy decisions.
- Call for unhindered medical and humanitarian aid across the entirety of Ethiopia, in particular as extreme drought conditions, disease outbreaks and severe food insecurity devastate Oromia and southern Ethiopia.

The American-Oromo community has a proud and vibrant history in the United States, and we have long been active participants in civil society. In this difficult moment, as we watch our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia endure horrific atrocities no one should ever experience, we call on the US government to do everything within its power to condemn the indiscriminate attacks and human rights atrocities occurring in Oromia and across southern Ethiopia. We recognize the US government's deep and abiding commitment to the values of human rights and democracy, which they have afforded us in this nation, and we urge the US government to stand by those values by utilizing its global influence to push for a genuine resolution of all conflicts across the country and holding all perpetrators to account. Without this, we fear the devastating violence will only continue to spread, destabilizing the entire country and region.

We thank you for your attention to this letter, and would welcome the opportunity for our communities to meet with you to discuss these issues in detail.

With regards,

Oromo Community Organization - DMV
 Oromo Community of Minnesota
 Oromo community of Georgia
 The Oromo Community Organization of Pennsylvania
 Northern California Oromo Community
 Oromo Youth Association of the Bay Area
 Los Angeles Oromo Community
 International Oromo Women's Organization
 MachaTulama Association USA (MT USA)
 Oromo Legacy Leadership & Advocacy Association
 Oromo Alliance of Civic & Community Organizations
 Oromia Global Forum
 Global Oromo Inter-Faith Council
 Qubee Minnesota
 Jabdu: Oromo-American Women's Council
 Finfinne News Network

Horn of Africa Genocide Watch
Oromo Community Association in Chicago
Oromo Scholars and Professionals Group
Global Oromo Communities Association
Gurmuu Baha Oromiyaa
Gurmuu Kura Galaan
Oromo Community of Memphis, TN
Portland Oromo Community Association
Oromo Community of Arizona
Oromo Community of Las Vegas
Oromo Community of DFW
Oromo Community of Colorado
Florida Oromo Community Association
Oromo Community Association of Ohio
Oromo Community Association of Greater Houston Area
Oromo Community of Seattle

Reference:

¹ *Gruesome Attacks Throughout Western and Central Oromia*, OLLAA (Dec, 5, 2022), <https://ollaa.org/gruesome-attacks-throughout-western-and-central-romia/>

² *Witnesses: Drone strikes in Ethiopia's Oromia kill civilians*, ABC News (Oct 26, 2022) <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/witnesses-drone-strikes-ethiopias-romia-kill-civilians-92112886>

³ *EPO Monthly: November 2022*, Ethiopian Peace Observatory (Dec 7, 2022), <https://epo.acleddata.com/2022/12/07/epo-monthly-november-2022/>

⁴ See above.

⁵ *EPO Monthly: October 2022*, Ethiopian Peace Observatory (Nov. 9, 2022), <https://epo.acleddata.com/2022/11/09/epo-monthly-october-2022/>; *Ethiopian government accused of deadly air strikes on Oromiya region*, Reuters (Oct. 27, 2022),

https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopian-government-accused-deadly-air-strikes-romiya-region-2022-10-27/?fbclid=IwAR3L_ibaLcvBaSg-k9Z5zIMD2vpYtOBzGlrIzZb1fjmS285gfkgeddnCFEM.

⁶ *News: Protests erupt across Oromia after latest violence in East Wollega, OLF calls on Oromos to “defend” themselves*, Addis Standard (DEc 6, 2022),

<https://addisstandard.com/news-protests-erupt-across-romia-after-latest-violence-in-east-wollega-olf-calls-on-romos-to-defend-themselves/?mibextid=Zxz2cZ>

⁷ *Gruesome Attacks Throughout Western and Central Oromia*, OLLAA (Dec. 5, 2022), <https://ollaa.org/gruesome-attacks-throughout-western-and-central-romia/>.

⁸ See Facebook video here:

https://www.facebook.com/alivywi.awwol/videos/717652733256350/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=2Rb1fB

⁹ በኦሮሚያ ክልል የተለያዩ አካባቢዎች በየጊዜው በሲቪል ሰዎች ላይ በሚፈጸሙ ጥቃቶች ምክንያት የተከሰቱ መጠነ ስፊ ሰብአዊ ቀውሶችን በተመለከተ, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (DEc 7, 2022)

<https://ehrc.org/%e1%89%a0%e1%8a%a6%e1%88%ae%e1%88%9a%e1%8b%ab-%e1%8a%ad%e1%88%8d%e1%88%8d-%e1%8b%a8%e1%89%b0%e1%88%88%e1%8b%ab%e1%8b%a9-%e1%8a%a0%e1%8a%ab%e1%89%a3%e1%89%a2%e1%8b%8e%e1%89%bd-%e1%89%a0%e1%8b%a8/>

¹⁰ *News: Protests erupt across Oromia after latest violence in East Wollega, OLF calls on Oromos to “defend” themselves*, Addis Standard (DEc 6, 2022),

<https://addisstandard.com/news-protests-erupt-across-romia-after-latest-violence-in-east-wollega-olf-calls-on-romos-to-defend-themselves/?mibextid=Zxz2cZ>

¹¹ ETHIOPIA Food Security Outlook, Famine Early Warning Systems Network, June 2022,

<https://fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/Ethiopia-Food%20Security%20Outlook-June%202022-Final.pdf>

¹² There is the potential for extreme food insecurity in conflict and drought-affected areas of Ethiopia, Famine Early Warning Systems Network (Jul. 2022), <https://fews.net/east-africa/ethiopia/key-message-update/july-2022>.

¹³ Ethiopia - Situation Report, 17 Nov 2022, UN OCHA (Nov 17, 2022) <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-situation-report-17-nov-2022>

¹⁴ Ethiopia - Situation Report, 6 Dec 2022, UN OCHA (Dec 6, 2022) , <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-situation-report-6-dec-2022>

¹⁵ Humanitarian Action for Children 2023 - Ethiopia, UNICEF (Dec. 5, 2022).

Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/humanitarian-action-children-2023-ethiopia>.

¹⁶ Ethiopia: Situation Report, UN OCHA (Jul. 22, 2022). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-situation-report-22-jul-2022>.

¹⁷ Humanitarian Response Plan: Ethiopia Mid Year Review, UN OCHA (Nov. 2022). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-humanitarian-response-plan-mid-year-review-november-2022>.