

Open letter to the UN Human Rights Council

A call for an independent investigation of targeted killings of innocent people across Oromia, Ethiopia

December 16, 2021

Member States,
United Nations Human Rights Council

We, the undersigned members of Oromo Scholars and Professional (OSP) and of Oromia Global Forum (OGF), a global alliance of Oromo Civic, Professional and Faith-Based Organizations residing in North America, Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa, are deeply saddened and angered over the reported cold-blooded murder of Oromo elders, civilians, and leaders of the Gada Council in their own homesteads throughout Oromia. The Gada system is an indigenous democratic socio-political structure of the Oromo people, inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Oromo constitute 40% of the population of Ethiopia.

During the 27 years (1991-2018) of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front rule, the Oromo people endured horrific torture, extrajudicial killings, and disappearances in the hands of the government security forces, as reportedly admitted_ by the current Prime Minister who was also a senior member of the ruling EPRDF at the time. The heavy price collectively paid by the Oromo youth eventually brought an end to the TPLF-dominated EPRDF rule in 2018, only to be hijacked by the current Prime Minister-led advocates of the imperial system from within the EPRDF. Ironically, since the ascension to power of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the brutality against the Oromo people has been intensified, both in scale and cruelty. A significant part of Oromia has been under military rule for the last three years. Tens of thousands of Oromos including senior leaders of Oromo political parties and civic organizations were rounded up and incarcerated, and they are languishing in concentration camps. Thousands of innocent farmers and pastoralists, including the elderly and children are slaughtered regularly in their backyards. Many were and are dragged out of prison cells and summarily executed.

With armed conflicts escalating and large swathes of Oromia becoming militarized, the scale of the abuse and rampant killings of innocent civilians has intensified in recent weeks. Defenseless citizens have become targets, seemingly venting, or releasing anger induced by battlefield losses and frustration by the government forces. At present, Oromia is completely sealed off to all forms of communication; the recently declared state of emergency has formally scrapped the rule of law, leaving regular citizens at the mercy of their murderers. As a result, ordinary civilians, farmers, students, and public servants going about their daily business are routinely arrested, tortured, and killed.

In the face of these tragedies, we felt duty-bound to appeal to the UN Human Rights Council to demand an end to this tragedy and recommend that the perpetrators are held accountable. The following are highlights of the most recent inhumane acts, the cold-blooded murder of elders and local Gada leadership in Karrayyuu – Oromia that confirms the inhumane and purely genocidal nature of the actions by the Ethiopian government forces.

On December 1, the Karrayyuu Gada Council members, and elders (senior leaders of the traditional governance system) presided by Kadir Hawas were conducting discussion on matters of their local community. Suddenly, the Police and Ethiopian National Defense Forces invaded their village, advanced to the meeting place, and violently attacked and massacred them. This horrifying incident left 14 people dead, including the Gada Council leader Kadir Hawas, and 40 others were abducted by the soldiers and their whereabouts still unknown. The next day, the Ethiopian military opened fire on local mourners and protesters, killing about 60 more. Details of this heartbreaking story are still emerging as the government has sealed the area making it impossible to receive information.

Similar killings and destruction of property are going on in several regions of Oromia, notably the east Wallagga zone, where commando units trained and armed by the Amhara regional government are deployed and committing unspeakable crimes against innocent Oromos in localities such as Ayana, Kiramu, Guttin, Ebantu and Limmu. Ethnic Amharas, whom the local Oromos welcomed, and provided refuge for, during the devastating famine of 1985 are now trained and armed by the regime to murder Oromos. They conspire and coordinate with the commando units from the Amhara region to cause pain and destruction to the Oromos. Because of total communication blackout, it has been difficult to determine the number of casualties. However, according to the scanty information coming from these areas, the human toll of the recent round of violence was overwhelming.

Likewise, Oromos in Wallo (Oromia special zone in Amhara region) and Matakkaal (Benishangul - Gumuz region) have been constantly targeted by the Amhara Region Special Force and the Ethiopian Defense Forces. In utter disregard of its responsibility to protect and safeguard civilians, the Ethiopian government is using all resources at its disposal, including military drones to bomb villages and punish local communities in areas where the government believes that opposition to its brutality is precipitating.

We, the members of Oromo Scholars and Professionals, and The Oromia Global Forum strongly condemn these barbaric actions of the regime and call upon the United Nations Human Rights Council and the governments of its member states to demand an urgent independent investigation of all atrocities committed against civilians in Ethiopia at large, and in Oromia in particular. We also demand that the perpetrators of these crimes are brought to justice. We appeal to the UN and the governments of member states to exert diplomatic pressure on the Ethiopian government and facilitate the immediate and independent investigation of all claims of atrocities and bring an end to the sufferings of defenseless people in Ethiopia. Any delay in doing so will only complicate the matter and lead to a wider genocidal civil war that can transcend boundaries and destabilize the region.

Finally, we call on all member-states to demand that the Ethiopian government:

1. Ceases violence and abuse against the civilian population and respect international laws and covenants to which it is a signatory,
2. Allows investigation by neutral bodies of all perpetrated crimes many of which have been documented by international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International,

3. Release all political prisoners, the tens of thousands of Oromos including senior leaders of Oromo political parties and civic organizations,
4. Sits with all parties in conflict and opposition political parties, in the presence of a credible mediator group, to resolve political differences through civil discourse.

We call on the member states to heed our appeal, and we look forward to your prompt actions on this matter.

C.C.

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