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International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia
c/o: ohchr-ichreethiopia@un.org

RE: Information to Further Your Independent Investigation of Human Rights Abuses in Oromia

Dear Members of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia,

We, the undersigned members of Oromo Scholars and Professionals Group (OSPG), based in North America, the US, Europe, and Australia, wholeheartedly welcome the UN HRC's decision to establish an International Commission of Human Rights experts on Ethiopia and the appointment of the three Eminent Human Rights Experts by the President of the Human Rights Council to investigate the alleged grave human rights violations in Ethiopia.

We also welcome the extension of the Expert team's mandate to include Human Rights violations committed against civilians inside Oromia. Oromia has been the center of rights violations for the last 30 years, but it took the worst turn following Abiy Ahmed's ascent to power in 2018. The gross mass murders, burning of properties and displacements in Oromia started [4,3] before the Tigray war was launched, and escalated to a level of cruelty beyond human imagination; all under a total communication blackout. The violations are planned by the federal and regional states and perpetrated by agents trained and deployed by the same entity. They often occur following massive media disinformation campaigns blaming the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in what appears to be a retaliation for losses on the battlefield.

The most recent smearing of OLA and the Oromo people started on June 19, 2022 alleging that OLA forces have committed mass killings of Amhara settlers in western Oromia. The news began with a radio interview involving an AP journalist and supposedly an eyewitness in Tole, West Wollega claiming that "about 200+ Amhara residents in the area have been murdered" allegedly by OLA forces. The claim was not corroborated with evidence, video/audio, picture or otherwise. By July 25, the AP news had been recycled by several other media outlets with the

number of victims quoted varying from 200 to 3,000, according to some government-affiliated Amhara media. According to our information [1, 2], the victims include Amharas and Muslim Oromos who settled in the area from Wallo region in northern Ethiopia following the 1985 famine. OLA vehemently denied the allegations and called for an immediate independent investigation to bring the culprits to justice. Given the records of Abiy's regime and the recent revelations by a parliamentarian Hangassa Ahmed Ibrahim, an elected official from the ruling party, we have no reason to doubt OLA's account of the killings. We would like to appeal to your team to consider these serious crimes during your investigation. An essential observation concerning this is that, according to media reports on this incidence, the killing rampage went on the whole day starting around 9:00 am to about 6:00 pm in the late afternoon. The incident location (Tole) is on the major highway, only 30 miles from a main military base (Dedessa). In addition, there are numerous military camps in the area at a much closer distance, including a small unit based near Dedessa river bridge, only a couple of miles from Tole. Given all these and the fact that the region is heavily militarized, it is inconceivable how the government failed to react to stop the rampage quickly enough to spare lives.

In a high-profile revelation, Mr. Hangassa Ahmed Ibrahim [5], a sitting Member of the Parliament came out public saying that the Ethiopian government forces carried out both the Tole, and Kellem killings under the direct order of the Oromia Regional State Government and the Regional Prosperity Party (the ruling party). According to Mr. Ibrahim, this was done to frame the OLA for the murders and garner the support of Amhara and the public at large for its latest campaign to "Eliminate" OLA. It must be noted that it was Mr. Ibrahim [3] who first exposed a similar massacre against Karrayyuu [4] Oromos in East Shewa as the work of the government. On December 1, 2021, Addis Standard [7, 8] and several other media platforms reported the killings of 14 local Abba Gada leaders of Karrayyuu Oromos after abducting 41 of them at a gunpoint while on a meeting with local community. The government was quick to blame the killings on OLA only for it to be refuted later by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, which confirmed that the government committed it exactly the way Mr. Ibrahim recounted.

Other gross human rights violations committed in Oromia for which the Ethiopian government blamed the OLA but OLA emphatically denied and requested independent investigation include:

- The cold-blooded murder of a celebrated artist Hacalu Hundessa – a politically motivated killing that took place on June 29, 2020, in the capital Finfinnee. Although the government rounded up thousands of innocent people following the killing, all were cleared and since released from prison, but innocent Oromos who poured into the street to express their feelings and the political leadership of the OLF still languish in prison.
- The Guliso Massacre – according to a BBC report of November 3, 2020, armed men in uniform killed at least 32 people and set fire to homes in a horrendous attack in western Oromia. The government alleged that the OLA and TPLF committed the crime to garner support for the planned war on the Tigray people.
- Oromo Massacre in Oromia Special Zone in Amhara Regional State – in December 2021, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reported, after a video [9] surfaced on social media, that more than 30 Oromo civilians were taken to a remote location in two trucks, then forced out of the trucks and summarily executed by a group of Amharic speaking armed men in uniform, wearing armbands marked “Zamacha Menelik” (Menelik Campaign). Some of the killers on the video have been identified by the public but no credible investigation has been carried out to our knowledge.
- Extrajudicial Killings in Gambela City, Gambella Regional State – on June 19, 2022, Reuters and several media outlets reported government security forces shot and killed at least 30 Oromo civilians in a house-to-house search [6] following a joint operation by the Gambela Liberation Front (GLF) and the OLA on a military installation in the city. A video showing a group of government forces and regional militias shooting a young boy at point-blank has been widely circulated. Several bodies were seen lying on the streets with hands of some of the victims tied behind their back.
- As part of the government campaign to “Eliminate” OLA, in central Oromia alone, hundreds of civilian homes were burned to ashes, thousands of livestock looted or burned alive, and food crops both in the field and in stores were set ablaze for allegedly supporting OLA. These incidents have left hundreds of families homeless and destitute. This has been happening for a long time in various districts of West Wollega, Kellem Wollega, East Wollega, Horro Guduru Wollega and in multiple districts in southern Oromia.

- On May 11, 2021, government forces brutally murdered 17-year-old boy Amanuel Wondimu at a public square in Dambi Dolo in front of his family members. Similar public executions of Oromo youths continued throughout Oromia without accountability.

In summary, slandering the Oromo people and their struggle is as old as the modern Ethiopian state itself. It is the ideology upon which the empire was founded. Throughout the history of the Ethiopian state, successive Ethiopian regimes have used the “Slaughter and Slander” tactic to enslave the Oromos. For instance, in October 1966, Emperor H/Selassie ordered the burning of a cinema house in Finfinnee and blamed on the Matcha-Tulama Self Help Association, a scheme later used to ban the organization, jail most of the officers, and hung some of its leaders in public. Today, Abiy Ahmed singlehandedly authorized and oversaw the Tole and Kellem massacres and numerous other mass killings to smear the Oromo Liberation Front and OLA. We believe the violations and murders committed in Ethiopia over the last few years deserve a thorough and independent investigation to hold the perpetrators accountable. Anything short of that will lead to a total chaos and lawlessness in the country and the region. Therefore, we sincerely hope the UN will continue to handle this as a matter of priority and use everything in its power to stop mass killings and the destruction of properties.

CC: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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1. <https://oromiasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Press-Release-Slaughter-and-Slander-of-OLA-5-July-2022.pdf>
2. <https://oromiasupport.org/human-rights-2/>
3. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/ethiopia-rape-extrajudicial-executions-homes-set-alight-in-security-operations-in-amhara-and-oromia/>
4. <https://oromiasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/Statement-to-UN-Human-Rights-Council-14-December-2021-1.pdf>
5. <https://youtu.be/ap2bBMP4nqA>
6. <https://addisstandard.com/news-security-forces-shoot-civilians-in-gambella-city-two-days-after-regional-govt-vows-to-totally-eradicate-remaining-members-of-oromo-gambella-armed-groups/>

7. <https://addisstandard.com/news-members-of-karrayu-gadaa-leadership-killed-several-others-missing-amid-conflicting-narratives-in-east-showa-zone-oromia/>
8. <https://addisstandard.com/news-killing-detention-of-karrayyu-gadaa-leaders-extrajudicial-killing-ehrc/>
9. <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/#inbox/FMfcgzGpGwkJFnnBjllqQVmDWBWHTpMM?projector=1>

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