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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Human Rights League of Horn of Africa, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[14 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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How Many Should die before the International Community intervenes to save lives?

1. The Ethiopian government has targeted the Oromo people, especially the youth since the beginning of 2015 following the mass uprising of the Oromo people demanding their freedom and enjoyment of their fundamental rights. The response from the government was mass arrests, torture, disappearances and summary executions of the civilian population. Despite all this, the protest has continued for over a year now. Unable to control the uprising, the government declared a State of Emergency on 8th October, 2016.
2. The government also targeted prominent political leaders of Oromo parties that are registered and legally operating in Ethiopia. Deputy Chairman of the Oromo Federalist Congress, Mr. Bekele Gerba- has been in jail for some years now, with his case still pending in the court of justice. The number of Oromo political prisoners has reached an unbearable level and so disproportionate to the extent that, “Afaan Oromo (the language of the Oromos) has now unofficially become the official language of Ethiopian prisons”.
3. Political prisoners are reported to be tortured, over congested space, hence deprived of proper sleeping places, kept in darkness, denied family visits and meeting with their respective legal counsels. The level of torture, is reported to be unbearable. The government continue denying access to UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs and the ICRC, whose report could have shed more light on the situations in the prisons.
4. The government arrested Dr. Merera Guddina, chairman of the Oromo Federalist Congress, on November 30, 2016 upon his return from Europe where he met with the EU officials, at their invitation, to discuss situation in Ethiopia, allegedly for meeting with another opposition leader, Prof. Berhanu Nega, chairman of the outlawed political party, Ginbot – 7. According to reliable sources, Dr. Merera was taken to the infamous Maikelawi interrogation center, with two other friends, Taye Negera and Kumala, both of whom were in his house during the arrest.
5. Following the declaration of state of emergency, the two major regions of Ethiopia, populated by the two most populous nations – the Oromos and Amharas - where the resistance movement was stronger and coordinated, were put under strict military rule. Civilian authorities were removed from the scene rendering free and unlimited power to the military and paramilitary forces to detain, torture or summarily execute every single citizen they considered to be harboring anti-government sentiment. Although there has been no single sector of the society that the government spared in the past one year, the Oromo youth in particular has become the primary target of the killing squad since the declaration of the state of emergency.
6. As a result, several Oromo youth from universities, colleges and high schools have been arrested and taken to unknown locations or summarily executed right in their houses and in front of their own family members. The violation of the rights of the peaceful youth reached an unbearable level forcing many of them to leave the country seeking sanctuary elsewhere. As a result, Oromia is losing many brilliant young men and women not only in the hands of government but also because they are perishing in the Sahara or the Mediterranean.
7. Despite the fact that it remains difficult to obtain regular information from Ethiopia due to the government’s suspension and its blocking of access to all information and media outlets including Facebook, Viber, Messenger and Internet, the HRLHA’s carefully selected and fact- based authentic documentation provides fresh evidence that large scale extermination of Oromos and Amharas- presumed to be protected from the government’s human rights abuses- are taking place at night in Oromia and Amhara regions.
8. According to the reliable information available to us from Oromia regional state, over 1000 Oromos, mostly youth, have been summarily executed and close to 40,000 detained in different military training camps far away from the reach of relatives, since the beginning of the uprising. In Southern Oromia alone (Western and Arsi Zones) according to the information available to HRLHA, from 8th October – 30th October, 2016, a total number of 248 civilian Oromos were killed and 3706 were kept in detention being denied visits by relatives and friends. There are reports that

the detainees were severely tortured, starved and deprived of their fundamental human rights of access to due process of law applicable during a state of emergency.

9. In another incident, for example, on 6th November, 2016 at around 5:00 am, Agazi forces entered the house of Mr. Jamnalo Hussein located in Shirka district of the Eastern Arsi Zone and summarily executed three of his sons, namely, 1) Marabu Jamalo, 2) Abdissa Jamalo; and, 3) Tola Jamalo. In the interview done with the father, Mr. Jamalo Hussein was seen saying *"my children have been killed by the killing squad of the fascist government, not because they stole or did something wrong, or violated the law but only because they are Oromos"*. Such crimes are widespread all over Oromia and Amhara regional states, especially at night, and continue to be perpetrated on an ever-increasing scale and as part of the State of Emergency policy to terrorize the civilian population who are persistently demanding the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights. There is also evidence of the government's deliberate targeting of special social groups such as the youth and educated citizens including journalists.

10. Notwithstanding all the above gross violations of the human rights of citizens and despite the continuous reporting and the subsequent pleas by the HRLHA, and other international human rights agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, the International community to a large extent has failed to show its concerns by taking action against this gross violation of the fundamental rights of Ethiopian citizens- violations imposed by the very government that boasts of being elected. The United Nations Human Rights Council, despite the fact that High Commissioner himself raised alarms in the past, has fallen short of any full systematic appraisal of the human rights situation in Ethiopia, let alone taking appropriate action to rectify the wrongs.

11. What had happened in Darfur in 2003 -2004 where the government waged an undeclared war on its own defenseless civilians citizens should have served as a lesson. What is happening in Oromia and Amhara regional states of Ethiopia today resembles more or less what happened at the embryonic stage of the Darfur genocide in the Sudan? The Responsibility to Protect (R2P), coined in 2001 under the leadership of the Canadian government and adopted by 150 heads of states and governments in 2005, could have served as simple justification for the international community to intervene, at least through engaging the Ethiopian government by reminding it of its duty to live up to the expectations of the international community and fulfilling what it is committed to by being a party to the UN Human Rights Conventions.

12. As a matter of principle, a State shoulders the primary responsibility to protect its own citizens from their rights being violated, but *"when a state is unable or unwilling to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, the international community has the responsibility to intervene"* it is incumbent on the international community in general and the Human Rights Council in particular to bring the perpetrator government to the world of accountability.

13. HRLHA further requests that members of the UN Human Rights Council urge the Ethiopian government to allow the UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs to visit the country to assess the human rights situations of political prisoners and others in detention centers all over the country. It also requests that the Council apply pressure on the Ethiopian government to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the permanent and makeshift detention centers and permanent correctional facilities to assess the living conditions of the political prisoners with a view to securing guarantees from the government for regular family visits and access to their respective defense counsels.