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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, 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.

[21 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Human Rights Situation in Ethiopia

Introduction:

Ethiopia has gone through many challenges on various levels that deeply affected the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the Ethiopian society. millions of people in Ethiopia are still suffering from different crises and need humanitarian aid. Many human rights in Ethiopia are violated and massive numbers of Ethiopian people are deprived of their most basic human needs.

In this context, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights highlights some of the grave human rights violations in Ethiopia, focusing on the violations that were caused by the recent armed conflict between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (NDF) and the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF)(1). In addition, Maat concludes with a set of recommendations aiming at improving the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia.

Updating Human Rights Violations in Ethiopia:

Humanitarian situation in Ethiopia has been deteriorating for a few years now since the conflict between the Ethiopian NDF and the Tigray Defense Forces TDF. However, armed conflicts are not the only reason for the worsening situation of human rights in Ethiopia since the country has not yet recovered from the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and has been struggling with natural disasters.

Impacts of Climate Change on Human Rights in Ethiopia:

Climate change has also impacted many people negatively and deprived them of enjoying their basic humanitarian right, such as severe drought which has been hitting Ethiopia since 2020, that is affecting around 13 million people, whom the government is planning to provide humanitarian aid for(2).

Droughts affect pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities in the eastern and southern parts of the country(3). They also deepen the food insecurity problem, increase malnutrition rates, causing a direct threat to accessing water, worsen the general health condition and increase diseases outbreaks(4).

Food insecurity is aggravating due to the surge in food prices in the markets, which restricts people's purchasing power of food-stuff whether to consume or to plant(5).

Droughts have also forced more than 516,000 people to displace their homes in search for food and water(6), disrupted the education of over 1.1 million children and forced over 480,000 others to drop out school in regions like Afar, Oromia, Sidama, SNNP, Somali(7). Furthermore, over 1,700 schools have been shut down as a result of the drought and migration of many families in search for water and food(8), making it harder for other children to continue learning.

Oromia, Somali and Afar regions also suffered from heavy rains and flash floods in 2023. These regions have been seriously impacted; citizens have lost their cattle, which are an extremely important source of living, shelters of internally displaced people were destroyed, and cholera spread among people(9).

Continued Obstruction to Freedom of Expression:

The National Dialogue Commission which replaced the Ethiopian Reconciliation Commission remains to be uncredible and untrustworthy. Stakeholders' role has been missing in the process of selecting and appointing the Commission; thus, they lack credibility and legitimacy and fail to build public trust. Moreover, the continued obstruction to freedom of expression through the shutdown of foreign media outlets makes the achievement of transitional justice unattainable.

During the second half of January 2023, 15 foreign media outlets were shut down due to allegedly operating without a license. However, the real intention behind this decision is believed to be retaliation against media reports on existing corruption(10).

Journalists continue to face arbitrary arrest in Ethiopia till 2023. Around 8 journalists have been arrested since April 3rd, 2023, alone. Some of the reporters had recently criticized a government decision before their arrest which proves that the right to freedom of expression is not practiced in Ethiopia. Moreover, Ethiopia is ranked 114th out of 180 when it comes to freedom of the press in 2023, which is 13 places lower than its rank in 2021(11).

Poor Healthcare Services in Tigray:

Since the date of signing an agreement on the cessation of hostilities between the Government of Ethiopia and the TPLF, healthcare services in the region have been severely impacted, affecting people access to healthcare services. Some have even lost their lives simply because they cannot access medical aid. In terms of numbers, 72% of health centers and 80% of hospitals have been destroyed over the last two years. Restoring some services is not enough, the infrastructure as a whole needs to be rebuilt as soon as possible(12).

Recommendations:

1. Maat call on the Ministry of Health in Ethiopia to launch a disease-combating strategy to prevent the further spreading of diseases such as cholera, which can be a threat to the entire nation, and provide health services like vaccinations, to protect people's health, especially in Tigray;
2. Maat for Peace ask the Ethiopian government to allow all foreign media outlets to fully operate and to ensure a fair process that guarantees an inclusive and representative National Dialogue Commission so that it can proactively collaborate with the ICHREE to achieve all forms of transitional justice;
3. Maat for Peace urges the Ethiopian government to focus its resources on rebuilding the necessary infrastructure including medical and educational facilities;
4. Maat recommends the Ethiopian parliament to formulate media-related laws while ensuring that they include specific definitions and are free of any loose terms so they cannot be misinterpreted by authoritative bodies. The formulation process of these laws should be inclusive so that it includes journalists, lawyers, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders.

(1) "Ethiopia," Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, May 2023. Retrieved from: <https://t.ly/gyetQ>

(2) "Ethiopia Humanitarian Crisis," the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, August 2023. Retrieved from: <https://shorturl.at/dmIUY>

(3) Ibid.

(4) "Ethiopia: Humanitarian Response Plan 2023", ReliefWeb, February 2023. Retrieved from: <https://shorturl.at/doAR7>

(5) Ibid.

(6) "Key drought developments to watch in Afar, SNNP, Somali, and southern and eastern Oromia regions," ACAPS, April 2023. Retrieved from: <https://t.ly/RsJ0t>

(7) Ibid.

(8) Ibid.

(9) "Ethiopia Humanitarian Crisis," the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, August 2023. Retrieved from: <https://shorturl.at/dmIUY>

(10) Ibid.

(11) Addisstandard, Commentary: Ethiopian National Dialogue Proclamation: A camouflage for monologue? <http://bitly.ws/SgiS>

(12) news24, Ethiopia journalist arrests condemned, 15 April 2023, <http://bitly.ws/SgnV>

(13) english.ahram, The state of play: Six months after Tigray peace deal, 1 May 2023,
<http://bitly.ws/SgjN>