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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Human Rights League of the 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.

[23 August 2023]

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



## **Ethiopia: Rampant Extrajudicial Killings and Targeted Attacks on Civilians in Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia**

### **Executive Summary**

In February 2018, upon the resignation of former Prime Minister Hialemeriam Desalegn, the Ethiopian people hoped for a democratic transition. The hope took root with the appointment of Dr. Abiy Ahmed as prime Minister. Prime Minister Abiy's government took some important steps in the early months of his administration, including releasing thousands of political prisoners who were suffering in prison for years due to their political views. Some repressive legislations including the Anti-terrorism and Civil Society Organizations proclamations were revised.

Based on the agreement reached with the Oromo Liberation Front in Asemera, Eritrea the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) returned to Ethiopia in September 2018 to continue a peaceful struggle. Nevertheless, the Asmara agreement did not last long and fueled the war between the government and the Oromo Liberation Front military wing, which is ongoing to date. The Oromia Liberation Front faced a series of crackdowns during the periods leading to the July 2021 election that eventually forced it to boycott the election.

This statement highlights gross human rights violations and abuses specifically extrajudicial killings, mass executions, and indiscriminate drone attacks perpetrated against civilians in the Oromia region state. It further calls upon the international community to urge the government of Ethiopia to submit to a peaceful settlement of the ongoing violent conflict in Oromia and facilitate an independent investigation into the human rights violations unfolded in the region thereby ensuring accountability and justice.

### **Background**

The Asmara agreement between Prime Minister Abiy's government and the Oromo Liberation Front failed mainly because the government mistreated Oromo Liberation Front fighters who laid down their arms in compliance with the agreement. Apart from that, the Asmara deal failed due to harassment, killings, arbitrary arrests, and enforced disappearances committed against the organization's supporters, members, and senior officials. Due to this and other factors, on May 2019, the Oromo Liberation Army declared its split from its mother organization, Oromo Liberation Front, and vowed to continue an armed struggle to fully realize the right to self-determination of the Oromo people.

In May 2021, the government designated Oromo Liberation Army as a “terrorist” organization, which led to a massive crackdown against civilians particularly youth and activists who are alleged to have been affiliated with the armed group. Since then, the government has been waging a full-scale offensive against the Oromo Liberation Army that includes the usage of drones in addition to its ground forces. In this context, the civilians are suffering a lot. Tens of thousands were detained unlawfully, millions were displaced, and many were subjected to enforced disappearance. Thousands are also extra-judicially killed under the pretext of supporting the Oromo Liberation Army.

### **Indiscriminate Airstrikes/Drone Attacks**

HRLHA documented dozens of indiscriminate air strikes and drone attacks by the government that claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians in Central, Southern, Wollo, and Western Oromia zones. Some of the most atrocious air strikes worth mentioning include:

- On November 04, 2021, at least 38 were killed and over 40 were injured in Chafa-Robit town of Oromia Special zone in the Amhara region.
- On April 22, 2022, 20 were killed in the Abuna-Gindabarat district of West Shewa zone, Goti-Kibbi village.

- On October 20, 60 were killed and many others were wounded in the Meta-Walkitie district of West Shewa zone, Minare town.
- On October 23 & 24, 2022, at least 68 people were killed and 100 wounded in a public event at a school in the Chobi district of West Shewa zone, Ofu-Bakke village.
- On November 02, 2022, at least 80 were killed in the Boji-Birmaji district of West Wallaga zone, Bila town.
- On November 09, 2022, at least 100 were killed in the Mana-Sibu district of West Wallaga zone, Mandi town.

We also received credible reports of drone strikes carried out early this year in the Dera district North Shewa zone, the Wamagalo district of the East Wallaga zone, and the Fantalle district of the East Shawa zone inflicting death, injury, and destruction of property.

Apart from the Oromia region, the government repeatedly conducted an indiscriminate drone attack during two years of bloody war in Tigray. In relation to the ongoing conflict in the Amhara region, on August 13, 2023, the government waged a drone strike in 'Finote-Selam' town, East Gojjam zone killing at least 30 and injuring more than 50 people.

### **Extrajudicial Executions and Summary Killings**

Apart from indiscriminate air strikes, the government security forces committed rampant extrajudicial executions and mass killings in Oromia across all corners of the Oromia region. In an Urgent Appeal released on May 15, 2022, HRLHA reported about 180 Extrajudicial Executions and Mass Killings committed by government security forces in Oromia between January 01 and May 05, 2022. The most egregious summary killing worth bringing to the international community's attention is the killings of '14 Karrayu Oromo Gada Leaders and Elders' committed on December 02, 2021, in Fantalle District of East Shawa Zone at a specific place called 'Meti'.

The mass killings of about 46 civilians including children, women, and elders were recorded in two localities of Ada'a-Barga district West Shawa zone on April 28, 2022. In Gambella city, a number of civilians mostly Oromos were executed in broad daylight by regional security forces on broad daylight following an attack on the city by a joint operation of the Oromo Liberation Army and Gambella Liberation Army on June 14, 2022.

The first round of peace talks between the government and the Oromo Liberation Army that took place in the United Republic of Tanzania, Zanzibar from April 27 to May 02 ended without a significant outcome. As such, fighting escalated leading to the worsening of human rights and humanitarian situation in the region. Since the peace talk, Extra-judicial killings of civilians were recorded in several parts of Oromia. A case in point is the summary execution of 12 civilians and the injury of four others in villages called 'Qoricha-Koticha' and 'Hofu-Bake' located in the Chobi district of the West Shawa zone. The victims include an 11-year-old child and a 70-year-old elderly man.

### **Non-State Armed Groups Attack**

The Amhara armed group named "Fanno" has been continuously attacking civilians in the Oromia Special Zone of Wallo, in the Bosat district of East Shawa zone, Eastern Wallagga, and Horo-Guduru Wallaga zones. The Fannos cross into the Oromia zones adjacent to the Amhara region and repeatedly killed villagers and burned down their properties including homes and stolen cattle. Back from March 19 to 21, 2021, at least 53 civilians were killed in Shewa-Robit and Hartuma Furse District of Oromo Special Zone. From October 10-15, 2021, Amhara militias in the Haro, Kiramu, and Guto-Gidda districts of the East Wallaga zone murdered at least 40 Oromo civilians. Similar armed groups have perpetrated a massacre of 60 civilians in Agamsa town- Amuru district and at least 30 in Abuna (Bune Abuna and Gudina Abuna) villages of Horro-Bulluk district of Horro-Guduru Wallaga zone on August 30, 2022, and September 03, 2022, respectively.

Currently, the situation in Horro-Guduru Wallaga and East Wallaga zones is the worst of all. Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons are found in the two zones. The government has not officially declared the displacement crises in the zones to date. Consequently, internally displaced persons are undergoing the worst humanitarian crises and human rights violations contrary to the safeguards guaranteed under ‘the 2009 Kampala Convention of AU’ to which Ethiopia is a State party. It is still very alarming to see the continued threat of attacks by Amhara Fanno groups in these two zones.

## Recommendations

HRLHA is highly concerned about the alarming number of extrajudicial executions and targeted attacks unfolding in Oromia, and calls on the UN Human Rights Council member states to consider this issue under “Item 4: Human rights situations that require the Council’s attention” and urge the Government of Ethiopia to:

- To resume immediately the second round of peace talks with the Oromo Liberation Army that has been started in Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania.
- To stop politically motivated arrests, killings, forceful disappearance and pillage of civilians and political dissents with a pretext of supporting the Oromo Liberation Army
- To devise an all-inclusive political dialogue followed by the transitional government that paves the room for a comprehensive transitional justice process across the country in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation.
- To allow media and an independent body of international experts to conduct an investigation into violations and abuses by government security forces.

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UNHRC, ‘Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia’, A/HRC/51/46 (October 05, 2022) pp.6-13, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/515/29/PDF/G2251529.pdf?OpenElement>

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Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, ‘Investigation Report on Human Rights Violations Committed by the Regional Security Forces, Oromo Liberation Army and Gambella Liberation Front Militants in Gambella City [translated from Amharic]’ (September 28, 2022)