

Systematic repression and rampant human rights abuses against the Oromo People in Ethiopia

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Abstract

From the time of colonization of Oromia at the end of 19th century, the Oromo people were faced with discrimination and marginalisation. Their egalitarian democratic institution of governance the Gada system¹; their cultural traditions and language were banned; their means of subsistence, land was confiscated and as a result forced to slavery and servitude². The policy of successive regimes in Ethiopia including the current regime has been implementing similar tactics of furthering their subjugation and repression be it under the guise of democracy or socialism. The current TPLF/ PRDF dominated regime is a political, economic and social powerhouse³ for nearly past two decades after ousting the Amhara hegemony in 1991. In contrast to the Tigrayans which constitute about 5% of the total population, the Oromo people encounter rampant human rights abuses, absurd relocation and eviction from their lands, experimented with unplanned resettlement schemes in hostile environments, face abysmal poverty and contamination of epidemic diseases.

Since this regime came to power in 1991, serious systematic repression and pervasive human rights abuses against the Oromo people⁴ has been reported by international human rights organisations. So far, these abuses have been largely ignored by the international community⁵, probably far from the eyes and ears of the international observers in Finfinne (Addis Ababa). Residents of the Oromia are particularly vulnerable to targeted atrocities due to their remote geography, lack of quick transport and communication infrastructure for rapid exchange of information, absence of human rights monitoring groups and lack of independent media coverage. Knowing this, EPRDF is acting with impunity⁶. The government routinely subjects its critics to harassment, extrajudicial killings, imprisonment and torture⁷. Police and military officials often imprison such people on charges of involvement with "anti-peace" or even "anti-people" groups⁸, but convictions and even trials are rare.

In general, people are being terrorized by federal police working-hand-in glove with local officials and militias⁹. Such crackdown on citizens from all walks of life is a day to day

¹ Legesse, Asmerom Gada: Three approaches 1976

² Darkawah , Kofi Shewa, Menilik and the Ethiopia Empire 1975

³ See Indian Ocean Newsletter *N^o 1188* and http://www.ethiomarket.com/effort/effort_companies.htm

⁴ See annual reports, press releases, urgent action letters from Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Society for Threatened Peoples International (gfbV) and other human rights organisations

⁵ HRW: Ethiopia: Political Dissent Quashed Election Observers Should Not Fail to Recognize Effects of Systematic Repression (Nairobi, May 10, 2005)

⁶ IDMC ETHIOPIA: Government recognition of conflict IDPs crucial to addressing their plight A profile of the internal displacement situation 26 April, 2006

⁷ Compiled reports on killings, injuries and torture and arrests from 2000-2006 are selected and attached as an appendix

⁸ Chris Albin-Lackey Why turn a blind eye to tyranny? The International Herald Tribune July 4,2005

⁹ Human Rights Watch: Ethiopia: Hidden Crackdown in Rural Areas, Independent Inquiry should investigate Rural Violence , New York , January 13, 2006

activity in Oromia, including children as young as 11¹⁰ . According to a renowned international human and peoples rights organisation, gfbV “If intellectuals, students, teachers, journalists, aid agency workers, artists, human rights activists and peasant farmers are subjected to human rights abuses solely on the basis of their origin, then Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker believes that the Ethiopian authorities are guilty of racism”¹¹ .

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Written statement by gfbV, 56th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Item 6 , Violation of Human Rights in Ethiopia, January 01, 2000

I. Introduction

Numerically, the Oromo people is the single largest national group in Ethiopia, accounting for about 35 million (40%)¹² of 75 million population. The Oromo people are one of the indigenous peoples inhabiting the Horn of Africa since time immemorial, belong to the Cushitic origin. The Oromo people are the majority, but in a minority like situation. Their political, economical social and cultural life in the Ethiopian empire assert , discrimination and marginalisation due to colonization¹³ of their country, Oromia ,by the Abyssinians at the end of 19th century. Millions decimated in the war against colonization in between 1868 -1900 through different means. Their egalitarian democratic institution of governance the Gada system¹⁴; their cultural traditions and language were banned; their means of subsistence, land was confiscated and as a result forced to slavery and servitude ¹⁵.

From that time then, successive regimes in Ethiopia including the current regime has been implementing similar tactics of furthering their subjugation and repression be it under the guise of democracy or socialism. The current TPLF /EPRDF dominated regime is a political, economic and social powerhouse ¹⁶ for nearly past two decades after ousting the Amhara hegemony in 1991. In contrast to the Tigrayans which constitute about 5% of the total population, the Oromo people encounter rampant human rights abuses, absurd relocation and eviction from their lands, experimented with unplanned resettlement schemes in hostile environments, face abysmal poverty and contamination of epidemic diseases.

II. Rampant Human Rights Abuses

Since this regime came to power in 1991, serious systematic repression and pervasive human rights abuses against the Oromo people¹⁷ has been reported by international human rights organisations. So far, these abuses have been largely ignored by the international community¹⁸, probably far from the eyes and ears of the international observers in Finfinne (Addis Ababa). Residents of the Oromia are particularly vulnerable to targeted atrocities due to their remote geography, lack of quick transport and communication infrastructure for rapid exchange of information, absence of human rights monitoring groups and lack of independent media coverage. Knowing this, EPRDF is acting with impunity¹⁹. The government routinely subjects its critics to harassment, extrajudicial killings, imprisonment and torture²⁰. Police and military officials often imprison such people on charges of involvement with "anti-peace" or even "anti-people" groups²¹, but convictions and even trials are rare.

¹² World Almanac 2006 <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107505.html>

¹³ Lytton, The Earl The stolen desert , 1966

¹⁴ Legesse, Asmerom Gada: Three approaches 1976

¹⁵ Darkawah , Kofi Shewa, Menilik and the Ethiopia Empire 1975

¹⁶ See Indian Ocean Newsletter *N^o 1188* and http://www.ethiomarket.com/effort/effort_companies.htm

¹⁷ See annual reports, press releases, urgent action letters from Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Society for Threatened Peoples International (gfbV) and other human rights organisations

¹⁸ HRW: Ethiopia: Political Dissent Quashed Election Observers Should Not Fail to Recognize Effects of Systematic Repression (Nairobi, May 10, 2005)

¹⁹ IDMC ETHIOPIA: Government recognition of conflict IDPs crucial to addressing their plight A profile of the internal displacement situation 26 April, 2006

²⁰ Compiled reports on killings, injuries and torture and arrests from 2000-2006 are selected and attached as an appendix

²¹ Chris Albin-Lackey Why turn a blind eye to tyranny? The International Herald Tribune July 4,2005

In general, people are being terrorized by federal police working-hand-in glove with local officials and militias²². Such crackdown on citizens from all walks of life is a day to day activity in Oromia, including children as young as 11²³. According to a renowned international human and peoples rights organisation, gfbV “If intellectuals, students, teachers, journalists, aid agency workers, artists, human rights activists and peasant farmers are subjected to human rights abuses solely on the basis of their origin, then Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker believes that the Ethiopian authorities are guilty of racism”²⁴. Similarly the human rights report 2008²⁵ discusses the unabated human rights abuses as follows.

“ In Oromia, Ethiopia’s most populous state, government authorities have used the fact of a long-standing insurgency by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) to imprison, harass, and physically abuse critics, including school children. Victims are informally accused of supporting the OLF... , but supporters of the Oromo National Congress (ONC) and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), registered opposition political parties, suffer similar treatment. “

II. a. Extrajudicial killings and massacres

Testimonies of extrajudicial killings and massacre in Oromia were reported by different international human rights organisations, media outlets like Voice of America (VOA) ²⁶ services and internet resources; besides the ones reported by the political parties. In this paper only few of the recent massacres will be presented.

According to the same human rights watch report ²⁷, “ more than thirty students were arrested and at least one, a tenth-grader, died as a result of police beatings in Dembi Dollo, western Oromia. Other students were severely injured and hospitalized. Also in January 2007, local police and militia members in Ghimbi shot two high school students dead, one as he and others were walking peacefully along, the other as he covered the body of the first with his own in order to protect him from further harm”

At the beginning of 2007, security officials massacred indiscriminately 19 men and a 14-year-old girl in a government sponsored and politically motivated heinous crime against humanity, a massacre in Eastern Oromia, at a place called Gaara Suufii, and their dead bodies were fed to hyenas.

VOA ²⁸ Afan Oromo reporters interviewed a mother of a victim, fourteen years old teenager, Ayisha Ali and a relative of seventy year old elderly victim farmer Ahmed Mohamed Kuree on February 21, 2007 verifies how harshly the Ethiopian government is involved in the crime against humanity. Detailed VOA interview translated from Afan Oromo to English can be accessed from the website <http://oromoaffairs.blogspot.com>. According to the interview to victim’s mother

²² Human Rights Watch: Ethiopia: Hidden Crackdown in Rural Areas, Independent Inquiry should investigate Rural Violence , New York , January 13, 2006

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Written statement by gfbV, 56th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Item 6 , Violation of Human Rights in Ethiopia, January 01, 2000

²⁵ Human rights Watch report 2008

²⁶ Voice of America (VOA) Afan Oromo service

²⁷ Ibid Human rights Watch report 2008

²⁸ Voice of America (VOA) Afan Oromo service February 21,2007

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“..she was taken by security forces at night in February, wearing only her nightgown. Local police denied knowledge of her whereabouts until government officials announced that dissidents would be killed on nearby Mount Sufi ”. She further explained that “ ... found some of her hair, clothes and body parts among the remains of 19 people who had been taken to Mt Sufi and shot. Their bodies had been left for consumption by hyenas, leaving few remains for grieving relatives to bury”. Even after remains of the body of victims were found at Gaara sufii “ .. mourners were interrogated and funerals interrupted by security forces challenging relatives for collected remains ‘without authorisation ”.

In May 2008, the Ethiopian government trained and fully armed Gumuz militia had massacred Oromo civilians killing mothers, burning children alive in locked houses, amputating those they catch alive and destroyed properties, in several districts of Eastern part of Wollega, Western Oromia. While the Oromos were not allowed to bear arms and those who possessed firearms in the past were forced to disarm prior to the staged incident. In over two weeks of attack against the civilians after May 17, 2008 more than 400 people were killed, thousands of houses burnt down, hundreds of elders, children and women were amputated and over 20,000 forced to flee their homes.

In another incident on February 5, 2008, in the Puntland’s Bosasso city of Somalia , over 65 Oromo refugees were bombed to death and over 100 wounded from two explosions on two restaurants frequented by Oromo refugees. Local residents accuse that it was sponsored by no one other than Ethiopian government.

II. b. Arrests and detentions, banning civic associations and students

The Macca Tulama self-help Association (MTA) board members, teachers & students, journalists, businessmen, farmers, members of the Oromo opposition parties Oromo National Congress (ONC), Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement were highly targeted for arrests and detentions in the recent years on baseless allegations of involvement with the OLF. As an active part of the Oromo society, the Oromo students were protesting against the Ethiopian government policies such as deforestation, levied taxes and rise in the price of fertilizers, educational policies, change of the capital city of Oromia from Finfinne to Adama etc. starting from 2000. In January 2004, the MTA leaders called protest against the move the capital city of Oromia from Finfinne to Adama. The Oromo journalists who reported the reality of the protests were implicated and labelled. Finally, those peaceful protests targeted with killings, injuries with live bullets, torture, imprisonment, expulsion from schools and flee the country.

Several hundreds of Oromo students and teachers from different parts of Oromia and Finfinne (Addis Ababa) were arrested, severely beaten and tortured after January 4, 2004 peaceful demonstration called by the Mecha Tulema association (MTA) against the move the capital city of Oromia from Finfinne to Adama. On the same day, hundreds of Oromos severely beaten and taken to custody²⁹. This act of the Ethiopian government is against the UDHR Articles 9 and convention against torture.

On January 21, 2004, 350 Addis Ababa University Oromo students were rounded up from the front of the President’s office while requesting the release of their eight colleagues arrested on 18 January 2004 accused of damaging the university property³⁰. The students were ill-treated

²⁹ Amnesty International (AI) UA 30/04, AFR 25/001/2004, 6 January 2004

³⁰ Amnesty International (AI) UA 30/04, AFR 25/003/2004, 23 January 2004

and forced to walk on the gravel for long hours without food at Kolfe police training and later released on January 24,2004³¹. The ID cards of the students were registered and ordered not to go to the university. On their release, the police authorities could not produce any criminal charge against them. Their suspension was announced on the government mass media the next day. Such act diametrically opposes the UDHR Article 26(1) and shows the Ethiopian government discriminatory policies against the Oromo people. They have nowhere to go, had no subsistence and accommodation as most of them are from the rural areas and far from family. They were unable to go to their family as they were hunted and arrested by the local authorities at their birth place. The Oromo elders requested the university president and the prime minister to readmit the students. They did not get response to this date to peacefully end this crisis. The Macha Tulema association later appealed to the citizens and co-ordinated financial support to earn minimal living for suspended students, for which the government accused and arrested its leadership³².

The Ethiopian government arrested the leaders of indigenous MTA association, banned and confiscated the properties of the association contravening the UDHR Articles 20(1) and 17 (1,2). On July 2,2004, it issued the letter with reference number 11/7469/07-04 from the registration office of associations for the closure and confiscation of MTA's property quoting the peaceful demonstration staged on 4 January 2004 was illegal. The leaders of MTA Dirribi Demissie (President), Gemechu Feyera, Sintayehu Workneh and Ayelu Ittisa and more than a dozen of Oromo university students and journalists Shiferaw Insarmu and Dhabasa Wakjira were in custody until early 2007 even though different benches of court ordered their release on several occasions. Amnesty International and other human rights organisations consider them as prisoners of conscience and appealed for their release since 2004³³. Still some of the association leaders are languishing in prison.

Again starting from November 9, 2005 , the Oromo students from all over Oromia and different higher educational institutions launched a protest call with popular demands. Some of the demands of the students are an immediate stop to the killing of Oromo students, respect and implementation for the right to self-determination of the Oromo people, release of members and leadership of the Macca Tulama Self-help Association, the unconditional re-opening of the Macca Tulama Association office, unconditional release of thousands of Oromo political prisoners- students, journalists, civic organisation leaders etc. , self-administration of Oromia by the Oromos, restoration of all Oromian cities to their proper names and the administrations of Finfinne and Dirre Dhawa to be under the jurisdiction of Oromia state.

These peaceful demands of students continued in the high schools and universities across Oromia and most of the schools left closed after protests were turned violent by the

³¹ Human rights watch (HRW), letter to the Minister of Federal affairs, 23 January 2004

³² see AI UA 180/04, AFR 25/006/2004, 21 May 2004

³³ see AI urgent actions (AFR 25/005/2005 20 April 2005 , Further Information on UA 180/04 (AFR 25/006/2004, 21 May 2004) and follow-up (AFR 25/008/2004, 19 July 2004; AFR 25/011/2004, 28 September 2004; AFR 25/012/2004, 23 November 2004)); gfbV(Arbeitsbericht 2004/ 2005 Äthiopien: Repression gegen Oroma dauert an , Göttingen June 03, 2005, Äthiopiens Staatspräsident besucht Deutschland (10./11.11.) Systematische Verfolgung von Nationalitäten stoppen Göttingen, November 09, 2004); International Press Institute (IPI) (Letter to PM Meles Zenawi IPI expresses concern for safety of two journalists held by authorities, Vienna, February 10,2005); Reporters without Borders (RSF) (Chirac asked to use Ethiopian leader's visit to press for release of two Oromo journalists, Paris April 9,2005)

involvement of the government security forces. As a result, dozens of students were killed and wounded from live bullet from security forces, several thousands of Oromo nationals were detained in different prisons in Oromia state and Finfinne (Addis Ababa) since November 2005. Most of the detainees were under torture and severe beatings, held incommunicado and were not brought to court. Credible reports indicate three detained students Alemayehu Gerba, Morkata Iddosa and Gaddissa Hirphasa were killed from torture and injuries from live bullet while held imprisoned. Those reportedly alleged for torture were not brought to court. In the recent years seven Oromo detainees had been tortured to death and others had died after being shot or being denied medical care in Maikalawi and Kalitti prisons alone.

Even though few of the MTA leaders and students were released on bail in the early months of 2007, there are tens of thousands still languish in jail including the MTA board members Mengistu Desta, (MTA General Secretary), Tsegaye W/Yohannes, Kumsa Gire (both aged over 80), Solomon Bekele, Taddesse Dagafa, Dechasa Benti, Legesse W/Selassie and others. Most of them were detained without charges for over eight years. After these years, some of the detainees were sentenced to death, life imprisonment. Only few got a sentence term of 10 years from the partisan and unqualified judges affiliated with or members of the ruling party TPLF/EPRDF.

In all these years since this regime came to power, in different parts of Oromia, the unparalleled huge force from the government were mobilised to quell peaceful dissent and protests. They are terrorizing the local population and affecting peaceful life of the residents and students; kill, torture and rape citizens. Prisons are full of the Oromos from all walks of life. Mr. Siye Abraha who had been the minister of defense under the same regime and had once been very brutal against the Oromo people described the constituency of the Oromo in the prison cells as “the prison speaks Afan Oromo”. He had been imprisoned for 6 years of after he led the dissident faction in the TPLF. The paramilitary and the security forces are terrorizing the local population and affecting peaceful life of the residents and students; kill, torture and rape citizens. Sound learning teaching processes were obstructed by the provocations of these forces. Contamination of epidemic diseases like HIV/AIDS is also feared from huge presence of mobilized federal forces and militias.

III. Evictions and relocations

Government actions may have led to forced displacement of thousands of people during 2005³⁴ and prior³⁵. Report confirm that the EPRDF government has unleashed on the people its special troops, supported by its paramilitary forces and armed local government officials. In what increasingly bears genocidal characteristics, numerous ordinary people are being indiscriminately killed and wounded. Many are being tortured and intimidated. According to the same report, repression includes the burning of houses and property, and the confiscation of land and farm animals.

The Ethiopian government is evicting Oromo farmers in the name of investment at a very unprecedented rate and hundreds of thousands of farmers around the cities in Oromia were turned destitute as a result. So far according to government sources, between May 1992 and March 2005, over 900 agricultural projects were handed 149,126.1hectraes of land in the form

³⁴ Ibid IDMC report

³⁵ Voice of America (VOA) Afaan Oromo program interview with local residents of Miesso town and surroundings

of lease from 10 to 99 years with no or lowest compensation (a maximum of ETB 20,000 equivalent to USD 2000) to the indigenous land owners³⁶. Though further research is needed, this figure had been quadrupled in the last three years with dire consequences on the ground to the farmers. In these years, the Ethiopian government had been working hard for its geopolitical leverage by providing agricultural lands to the countries like Saudi Arabia³⁷ , Djibouti ³⁸ and more countries are still under negotiation. In his interview with Arab news, Meles Zenawi, the prime minister of Ethiopia, said recently its government was “very eager” to provide hundreds of thousands of hectares of agricultural land for investment.

According to recent reports of UN specialized agencies , Middle Eastern and North African countries, which import most of their food, are leading the race to invest overseas in countries like Ethiopia. Jacques Diouf³⁹, director-general of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warned the race by food-importing countries to secure farmland overseas to improve their food security risks creating a “neo-colonial” system. In addition the same paper noted concern over the land rights and the question of how much food would be left for the host country. At this stage there are about 6.4 million people are starving in Ethiopia. The greenest and surplus food producing areas of Oromia and Southern States are the ones highly vulnerable.

Uncompensated evictions of Oromo farmers from around the cities in Oromia especially Finfinne (Addis Ababa) in the name of investment is at worrying level for the reason families do not have any means of subsistence other than their ancestral plots of land. In the name of investment today Oromo farmers from the vicinity of Finfinne (Addis Ababa) and other major cities and towns were turned to be landless and forced to be victims of ecological degradation and hazardous health problems. Cut flower and the bio-fuel production are also the top ranking investments of massive land holding to affect the life of millions of farmers and their dependents in the years to come.

Until the middle of 2006, out of 65 cut flower plantations operating in Ethiopia, 63 of them are found in Oromia, specifically in the radius of 13-50km at the outskirts of Finfinne, on a total of 2400 ha of land. About 20,000 labourers (90% women) are working on these farms with a daily income of an average of 0.5 USD compared to 1USD in Kenya and 2 USD in Colombia. They are underpaid and their working conditions is comparable to slavery; and unable to organise their union to bargain collectively. Even though the government propagate it benefits rural women in terms employment, un-repairable damages to their health and environmental problems associated with them outweighs. Rather, the Ethiopian government has given due attention to the flower industry because of growing revenue it collects from export taxes to finance its expanding military expenditure. Currently, Ethiopia exports more than 80 million stems a month to 40 countries (\$166 million of revenue) at the expense of evicted and vulnerable Oromian farmers disposed their lands. Seventy percent go to the Netherlands, from where they are sent around the world. It also exports to Germany, Britain, Russia and, in smaller amounts, to the United States and the Middle East. Tamiru L. Obole of Jimma Times summarized that the industry has brought with it much controversy: allegations of environmental mismanagement, labour abuse and unfair land holding⁴⁰.

According to sources close to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Ethiopia

³⁶ http://www.oduu.com/news/index.php?news_id=297

³⁷ K.S. Ramkumar, Arab News *Ethiopia offers huge land for Saudis to grow cereals* Thursday 7 August 2008 (06 Sha'ban 1429

³⁸ Reuters, *Ethiopia gives Djibouti's Guelleh farmland-officials*, July 22, 2008

³⁹ Javier Blas, Financial Times *UN warns of food 'neo-colonialism'* August 20th, 2008

⁴⁰ Tamiru L. Obole <http://jimmatimes.com/article.cfm?articleID=17680>

there are around 120 chemicals and pesticides⁴¹ enter into the country for the use in floriculture industry are registered to the World Health Organizations' negative pesticide list for their carcinogenic potential. These highly hazardous chemicals include Flucythrinate, Chlorothalonil, Cyproconazole, FOLPET and MANCOZEB including 15 other chemicals are used in the flower farming sector in Ethiopia.

If precautions are not taken, pesticides and sprays for handling of flowers, disposal of waste water, low temperatures for preservation in cold rooms, muscular-skeletal disorders due to poorly designed work stations, long - standing hours cause such disorders or diseases as congenital defect legs and hands, cerebral palsy, brain cancer, toxic dermatitis, hydrocephalous, lymph tumour. They are carcinogens, endocrine disruptors and cholinesterase inhibitors. Pregnant or breast – feeding women into contact with pesticides may have high chance of their off-spring or children encounter one of the above mentioned disorders. Pollution and depletion of water resources due to intensive use of water and air pollution due to spray drifts, burning of plastics roofing materials or containers are also major concerns for the communities living in the vicinity of these farms. Chemists further explain the long term effect of these chemicals could cause miscarriages, low immunity and even deteriorate brain cells over time with symptoms of fainting spells, nausea or extreme vomiting. According to local sources every pregnant woman involved in the production encountered the death of their offspring in the first few days of birth.

Biofuel the other source of concern for amassing millions of hectares of land is underway in Oromia. According to reliable sources, about 24 millions of hectares in Ethiopia have been identified as suitable for biofuel production, and many foreign companies have already been allocated land from farmland, forests and wilderness areas. Even protected areas are not safe from the spread of biofuels. For example, German company Flora Eco Power for the last few years had been investing 671 million birr (€57/US\$77 million) for biofuel production on 13,000 hectares (enough land to cover over 16,000 soccer fields) of land in Oromia state; 87% of which is the Babile Elephant Sanctuary, a home to rare and endangered elephants⁴².

The move for the production of biofuels- “green gold rush⁴³” with appropriation large mass of land was protested from different angles: from NGOs, churches, scientists to the UN specialized agencies for driving the rural communities into destitution and starvation⁴⁴ from more food insecurity and rocketing food prices. 30 African NGOs petitioned against the production of Biofuels in Africa as follows.

"It is geared to replace millions of hectares of local agricultural systems, and the rural communities working in them, with large plantations. It is oriented to substitute biodiversity-based indigenous cropping, grazing and pasture farming systems by monocultures and genetically engineered agrofuel crops." In agreement with several new scientific analyses, they hold that "the current push for agrofuels exacerbate, rather than solve, the problem of climate change."

⁴¹ <http://www.geocities.com/akababi/flower.htm>

⁴² Fortune newspaper *Ethiopia: German Co Invests Half Bln Birr Plus on Bio-Fuel* - April 9, 2007

⁴³ Horand Knaup (*from the German by Christopher Sultan*), *Green Gold Rush: Africa Becoming a Biofuel Battleground* Spiegel Septmeber 5, 2008

⁴⁴ Rainer Chr. Hennig *African Future, - African NGOs call for moratorium on biofuels* (<http://www.afrol.com/articles/28075>), February 20,2008

The Gallagher report: biofuels are driving people into hunger of 08 July 2008⁴⁵ published by ActionAid says that while most types of biofuels will not help to reduce climate change, they will make life harder for millions of poor people around the world. Adding to that Dr Claire Melamed, ActionAid head of policy said: “Grain and vegetable oil are being diverted to biofuels, leading to scarcity and rocketing food prices. In the developing world, land on which farmers and pastoralists depend is being converted into biofuel monocultures”. The same concern was also echoed by the main UN agencies involved in agriculture and food aid, WFP and FAO, also warn that the increased acreage used for biofuels is already contributing to higher food prices and may lead to more hunger in the world .

As evidences suggest, from point of view the mentality of the current regime in Ethiopia, the industry would have moved to the highlands of Tigray had there have been no adverse effects to the environment and health. Independent investigations on the effect of these farms on the indigenous population need to be carried out by concerned international organisations.

IV. Government Borne Conflicts and Internally Displaced Persons

The Ethiopian government had been calling for referendum over the Oromo localities in the regions of Borana, Bale, East and west Hararge of Oromia at the end of 2004. The results of referendum on these areas were culminated in favour of Oromia. However, the government instigated conflicts after the decisions were made. Deliberate incitement of conflicts among the Oromo clans – Borena, Gabra and Guji- and national groups neighbouring Oromia (between Karrayyu Oromo and Afar, Somali and Ittu Oromo) by the government officials and security forces are the major cause of internal displacement for over 170,000 people in Borena, West Hararge, Bale zones of Oromia over the last three years. According to reliable local sources, government forces are either arm/ disarm one of the rival clan against the other or side on the battleground with one of them. For example, in the case of karrayyu and Afar the government armed the later against the former and appeared as a mediators of peace-making. The local Somali (region 5) government militia sided against the Oromo civilians Cheraro Doba district in Hararge zone of Oromia.

Several thousands of Somali returnees and settlers were issued with the ID cards to make them eligible for voting and also provided with armaments in those areas of Oromia from the government. In several places the referendum favoured the rule under Oromia. These armed Somali militias supported by Ethiopian security forces started attacking civilians in the respective villages. In 2005, Over 100 civilians killed, hundreds of houses burnt, up to over 100,000 people internally displaced without support in Cheraro Doba, Miesso and other districts of West Hararge region. On January 19,2005, these militias engulfed the villages in the Cheraro Doba district in western Harerge. They opened fire killing 11 Oromo civilians, wounding 18 others and some 12,000 displaced and over 500 houses were burnt, crop-fields and depots of the residents of thirty farmers associations were put under fire. Similarly, in August 2004⁴⁶, 73 people were killed and more than 85,000 flee their homes from villages in Miesso.

According to reports by humanitarian organisations, conflict between the Gabra and the Guji, and between the Gabra and the Borena displaced over 40,000 people in 2005. Many remain displaced, and local authorities do not consider them eligible for emergency food distribution and other basic services and protection. This makes their situation very precarious,

⁴⁵ www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/216723/060c52299ad38e1f706adef0dc8cbc37.htm

⁴⁶ *IRIN news* August 26, 2004

particularly in the context of the current drought⁴⁷. In the middle of 2006, more than 100 people died and 90,000 displaced in fierce clashes between the Borena and the Guji Oromo clans . Most of these IDPs are living in deplorable conditions with no food, water and shelter and receiving very limited assistance. In the recent years, the conflicts were exacerbated by the government forces to include more clans or nation groups like Gedeo, Burji, Guji, Amaro and Sidama, Gumuz and Afar one against the other to elongate their stay in power.

Such calculated instigation of violence among the neighbouring communities by the Ethiopian government should be condemned, the perpetrators of such crimes should be brought into justice and vulnerable displaced peoples need to get enough attention from the humanitarian organisations. In these conflicts the government agents are the both players and the referees. For the peacemaking and management of their affairs, these groups need their conflict resolution mechanisms traditions that existed for centuries be harnessed without the intervention of the government.

V. Agricultural input for political gain

Surprisingly, the basic agricultural commodities for the farmers in Oromia is allocated based on the affiliation to the ruling party in power. Farmers and low-income town residents in Oromia who fail to support the governing political party are denied fertilizer, other agricultural aids and food items provided to the affiliates at subsidized prices. The others are fired from their work for not sympathizing with the EPRDF ruling party. In the rural areas of Oromia where about 87% live on agriculture, local and regional officials generally have great power and influence over the population and over the distribution of goods and services. Good relations with the local officials are crucial for obtaining land, farming aid, access to health care and education, and identity cards. In the meantime, control over some agricultural input goes far beyond their authority. Control over fertilizer and agricultural inputs in general have given Meles's government a remarkably effective tool for quashing dissent in rural parts of Oromia⁴⁸ . A TPLF owned company in charge of importing fertilizers often regulates on the price.

In case, fertilizer price is so expensive that farmers often find it difficult to repay their debts, local officials routinely throw them into prison for days or weeks at a time if they fail. According to Human Rights Watch farmers were forced to auction off livestock or household goods to get out of prison. Farmers who openly criticize the government or its policies often find themselves denounced in public meetings as “troublemakers,” “anti-development” saboteurs or even as members of dangerous “anti-people” organizations.

VI. Conclusions

The paper tried to shed light on the systematic repression and worst human rights records of the Ethiopian government in its heavy-handed policy against the Oromo people. Criticisms and reports from international human rights organisations were also cited. Despite all the crime it commits against humanity, this government is the largest beneficiary of US military and development aid and one of the top recipients of European aid in the sub-Saharan Africa.

⁴⁷ Daily Monitor, 19 July 2005; UN OCHA, 3 January 2006

⁴⁸ Chris Albin-Lackey The Dark Side of Ethiopia's “Green Revolution” New York, September 5, 2005

These major powers along with China and Russia have increased their trade partnership in such it further give economic boost to the regime so as to further suppress the subjugated peoples in Ethiopia.

It is high time that the governments of the US and EU countries press the Ethiopian government for its worst records of human rights record and account for the suffering of millions of Oromo and other peoples from eviction, internal displacement and hunger that partly resulted from its policy.