

## **Ethiopia**

### **Introduction**

The Ogaden Women Relief Association (OWRA) is Non-governmental, Non-profit organization found and working to help women in the endeavour to be free from all forms of oppression, promote and empower women in all spheres of life, including education and general living standards, encourage women to participate in the building of society free from oppression where democracy and equality is respected, and maintain and promote Somali Ogaden culture and tradition.

OWRA also promotes human rights issues and communities' cooperation.

Unfortunately gross human rights violations that are on-going in Ogaden is totally contrary to our expectations and to the human rights principles. The women and children in Ogaden have endured over decades of devastating grave human rights violations under severe isolation from the rest of the world. As it is known Ogaden is cut off from their life line trade with Somalia for nearly seven years and due to this blockade many people most of them children starved to death.

It is not possible for OWRA, like other indigenous NGOs and international human rights organizations, to visit Ogaden and see the facts on the ground and the widespread systematic human rights abuses taking place in Ogaden due to the restrictions. Therefore, this document is prepared on the basis of testimonies of human rights violations recently collected from the Ogaden refugees in Kenya, Somalia and IDPs in Ogaden and reports on human rights status of women and children made by the international organizations, like HRW and AI. As well the media and local human rights organizations monitoring human rights conditions in Ogaden, like Ogaden Human Rights Committee.

Based on these reports and the testimonies, OWRA voices deep concern in the continued human rights violations against Somali people in Ogaden committed by the Ethiopian regime as well the recent reports from Ogaden about vital aid is not reaching the most vulnerable civilians and as a result the malnutrition level in children under five in Ogaden will reach a level which has never been seen before in this planet. Yet until recently, the serious human rights violations against women and children and an on-going humanitarian crisis in Ogaden receives little attention or action from the international community.

### **Background**

Despite the human rights principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter to save the innocent civilians from the scourge of war, Ethiopia, one of the signatories of all the important international human rights declarations and treaties did not observe and respect the tenets of these agreements. Since the current Ethiopian government came to power in 1991, thousands of Somali people in Ogaden, including women, children, elderly people, politicians and religious scholars, have been killed, raped, disappeared, tortured or held in communicado detention without charges or trial.

The Ogaden region is an isolated territory where Ethiopian government is

represented by its military which continually commits crimes against humanity as reported by Human Rights Watch<sup>1</sup>. In the name of crackdown of Ogaden rebels Ethiopian army staged acts of tantamount to genocide and unprecedented collective punishments where the whole people are held responsible for the liberation struggle waged by Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). This widespread systematic human rights violation and indiscriminate massacre have negative psychological impacts on women and children as many of the crimes are committed in front of them, parents are abused or killed in front of their children. Men are killed or taken in the presence of their wives and children.

The majority of Ogaden children, whether they live urban area or countryside, have no opportunity of going to school. In Ogaden, health services are inadequate and limited to one or two main towns. The rest of the country has been deliberately denied any health services at all. Children and women are the most affected by the lack of health services.

The Ethiopian government has acceded to several international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Convention on the Right of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Political Rights of Women, Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Thus Ethiopian government has an obligation, also mentioned in the constitution, to observe and respect women's and children's rights.

However, In spite of these international agreements, as many international organizations reported including the Human Rights Watch confirms the gross violation of women's basic human rights is persistent and widespread in the Ogaden region. As long as Ethiopian government does not observe and respect the agreed principles its accession to these conventions is to mislead the inter- national community and avoid their censure over its bad human rights record, and get more aid from donor countries.

## Human Rights Violations Against Women and Children

The Somali people in Ogaden are constantly denied any basic human rights and face act of genocide as well absolute alienation in their historical homeland. Gross human rights violations, such as torture, rape, arbitrary detention, confiscations of property, disappearance and extrajudicial killings are common practice in Ogaden. The Ogaden region is under emergency rule from dusk to dawn and an undeclared curfew is imposed on most of the towns. The new Anti-terror law is indiscriminately used in the Ogaden. Humanitarian organizations and independent press have no access to Ogaden. This is tactics of Ethiopian regime to hide its war crimes and the crimes against humanity it is carrying out in Ogaden. Such gross violations of human rights should have warranted international investigation and intervention; unfortunately it is not even reported and not given necessary priority to draw world

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<sup>1</sup> Ethiopia's 'own Darfur' As villagers flee Government Violence, Steve Bloomfield , the independent Oct 17, 2007

attention to the plight of the Somali people in Ogaden.

The rejection of 32 recommendation some related to Ogaden issue by Ethiopian government during the UPR three years ago indicates that this government is not ready to conform with the basic international human rights standard.

In Ogaden, the Ethiopian security and armed forces have been given a carte blanche and blanket with impunity to kill whoever they suspect as supporter of ONLF, including women and children as young as eight years old. A killing of innocent people is violation of fundamental human rights. Extrajudicial killings is commonplace in Ogaden and frequently occur in conjunction with other human rights abuses including sexual assault, torture, arbitrary arrest, forced relocation and forced labour.

"A former Ethiopian soldier who defected from the army said how he had been ordered to burn villages and kill all their inhabitants. He said the Ethiopian air force would bomb a village before the ground troop fire indiscriminately at civilians. 'Men, women, children we killed them all,' he said." "We were told we were fighting guerrillas – the ONLF," he said. "But we were killing farmers – they were not ONLF." By Steve Bloomfield<sup>2</sup>. The international criminal jurisprudence has recognized that wilful killing in conflict situations may amount to a war crime, and murder, a crime against humanity.

Crimes of Rape and Sexual Violence: "Rape is a violation of a woman's power that degrades and seeks to destroy her" (Copelon, 1995). In Ogaden, there is no protection from rape and sexual assault of women and girls. The cruelty with which the sexual violence is committed by Ethiopian army in Ogaden defies all description. The Ethiopian regime uses rape as a weapon of war and the Ethiopian security forces are using systematic rape of Ogaden women and girls as young as eight to subjugate the Ogaden population and many relatives of political opponents were raped by the Ethiopian security forces as a form of revenge. The widespread use of rape in Ogaden has been a horrific reality. The rape of women during detention with a bayonet, gun aimed at destroying one of the most intimate and vulnerable aspects of the individual's dignity and torture with breasts cut off before being murdered by the Ethiopian army and security forces is a common practice. The victims of these crimes are stripped of every shred of their humanity. Those who survived the crime still suffer profound trauma as a result of this aggression, and the communities themselves are deeply offended by this practice. For example, "*Anab, a 40-year-old camel herder who was too frightened, like many others, to give her last name, said soldiers took her to a police station, put her in a cell and twisted her nipples with pliers. She said government security forces*

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<sup>2</sup> Ethiopia's 'own Darfur' As villagers flee Government Violence, Steve Bloomfield, the independent Oct 17, 2007

*routinely rounded up young women under the pretext that they were rebel supporters so they could bring them to jail and rape them”. “Me, I am old,” she said, “but they raped me, too.”<sup>3</sup>*

In some cases the Ethiopian army and security forces have raped women in public, in front of their husbands, relatives or the wider community; as well after raping they killed them by shooting into their genitals or putting some objects into their genitals after killing them. Pregnant women, even those in the late stages of pregnancy, and breast feeding mothers are also raped. Many women have reported miscarriages as a result of gang rape. Britta Radike interviewed refugee in Kenyan camps who witnessed the horrors in Ogaden and one of their responses was “ *Pretty girls are separated from the rest and taken away. If a man happens to be standing nearby, he’ll be asked if she’s his wife. If he says “yes,” he’ll be shackled on the spot and the woman raped right in front of him. They have no pity and no shame. It doesn’t even matter if she’s pregnant. They’ll rape her anyway* “.<sup>4</sup>

These women and girls are being attacked not only to dehumanize them, but also to humiliate, punish, control, inflict fear upon, displace and persecute the innocent civilians in Ogaden. The number of HIV/AIDS virus infected women and young girls due to rape by Ethiopian soldiers are countless. There are many women and girls who became pregnant due to rape and could not live within the society as this is stigma that remains in rest of their life.

As some human Rights organizations, such as HRW, reported the number of un-reported rapes is much more greater than those reported due to fear of reprisals of Ethiopian soldiers and the taboo connected to the act of rape. Many women hide the fact of being raped in the prison or outside prison for the above mentioned reason. Despite the extensive reports of evidence of rape and sexual violence and other serious human rights violations committed by the Ethiopian regime the United Nations has undertaken no investigations to bring the perpetrators to justice.

In Ogaden, there is neither arrest nor interrogation without torture. Arbitrary detentions without charges or trial and torture of detainees to death with impunity are common. The Ethiopian regime held thousands of Ogaden people in overcrowded and filthy military barracks. The detainees are civilians, including children and women. They are detained for years or many months without charges or trial. According to the testimonies by the former detainees’ conditions in detention camps are very desperate and inhumane. Thousands of inmates were tortured to death or disappeared. The Ethiopian armed and security forces periodically round up as many innocent civilians as possible for ransom and sometimes even after the extortion money is paid, the detainee may not be released. Ifraah, interviewed by Brigit Radika said “*In prison they don’t give you anything to eat. You get your food from relatives. If you don’t have anyone nearby, your relatives send money to people who live there*

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<sup>3</sup> In Ethiopia, Fear and Cries of Army Brutality- by Jeffrey Gettleman  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/18/world/africa/18ethiopia.html> June 18, 2007

<sup>4</sup> A Place To Call Home: images and interviews of refugees from Ogaden by Britta Radike with Tobe Levin  
<http://www.transitionmagazine.com/articles/ogaden.htm> Sunday, 23 August 2009 15:58

*so they can buy you food. If that doesn't work, other inmates give you what they can. What's worse is the torture and rape. At night you hear the girls screaming when soldiers take them from their cells.*<sup>5</sup>

Women and girls constitute the majority of the detainees for sexual reasons. Many of torture survivors in refugee camps in Kenya have been examined some of them were disabled, while others bore scars of torture on their bodies and the evidence are widely available to any body who wants to research it. Despite all this cases perpetrated by the Ethiopian regime, their independent investigation which has been recommended by the UN fact finding commission in 2007, was never undertaken.

Disappearance, Forced Labour and Burning of Villages: A large number of women and girls have disappeared after being abducted or detained by Ethiopian armed and security forces, while others disappeared from notorious military detention camps, or were transferred to secret detention centers. The victims of these disappearances were women, peasants, students, political leaders and NGOs that fell under suspicion of collaborating with the rebel movement. The Ogaden Human Rights Committee wrote that *"In Boodhley, Ethiopian armed forces detained illegally, Abdi Ibrahim, Jefad Farah Abdi, Mohamed Abdi Dahir, Siraje Abdi Shafe'a and Yusuf Mohamed, January 17th 2005. They were transferred to Shaygoosh military barracks, and have never been seen again."*<sup>6</sup>

The Ethiopian victims are taken against their will from their homes and villages, and forced to carry supplies or munitions for the Ethiopian troops, often for many weeks. They are forced to march with the Ethiopian troops by days, carrying heavy loads without adequate food and water. Some cases they precede ahead of the troops in order to clear the landmines with their lives. In the night they sleep without shelter from the rain or cold. The psychological terror is extreme and those who return home, often as landmine or rape victims, struggle to reintegrate into village life. For many there is not even a village to return to just the ashes of burned hamlets.

The burning of villages and widespread looting has driven hundreds of thousands of innocent people off their homes and into squalid refugee camps in Yemen, Somalia, Djibouti and Kenya. As Ethiopian officials stated repeatedly they want the land not the people. So they have to evict the Somali people in Ogaden from their ancestral land by using all means of implementing ethnic cleansing.

According to the facts on the ground in Ogaden almost all the people have no access to acceptable health services women and children constitute the majority. The lack of maternal health care services, lack of access to family planning services, high fertility, low reproductive health and emergency obstetric services, and poor nutritional status and infectious diseases all contributed to high maternal mortality in Ogaden.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> MASS KILLINGS IN THE OGADEN : A Report prepared by OHRC  
[http://www.ogadenrights.org/MASS\\_KILLINGS\\_ogaden.pdf](http://www.ogadenrights.org/MASS_KILLINGS_ogaden.pdf), February 20, 2006

*Since the current Ethiopian government came to power in 1991, it has taken many steps and measures in order to starve out the civilian population in Ogaden. As a part of the Ethiopian government's policy of starving out the civilian population the Ethiopian army imposed an economic blockade on the entire Ogaden region and closed the border between the Ogaden and Somalia, which caused an enormous human suffering. The Ethiopian armed forces indiscriminately mined areas, particularly around water wells and caravan routes, which lead to neighbouring countries, in order to stop trade movements. The Ethiopian armed forces looted at gunpoint and burned down civilian food store houses and confiscated Lorries carrying food supplies to the starving civilian population. The Ethiopian armed forces depopulated and razed entirely to the ground many villages and hamlets. in 2008 Human Rights Watch stated in its report on the Ogaden that*

*For years the Ethiopian government has intermittently tried to regulate livestock trade from the region. However, following the ONLF attack on Obole in April 2007, the Ethiopian government imposed a total commercial trade embargo on the war-affected area of Somali Region (Fiiq, Dhagahbur, Gode, Korahe, and Wardheer—the Ogaadeeni inhabited zones), prohibiting all commercial truck movement in the region and across the border into Somalia, as well as the free movement of livestock by foot. In meetings with UN officials, the Ethiopian authorities claimed that this embargo was necessary to impede the flow of arms and other supplies to the ONLF.<sup>171</sup> The trade embargo effectively shut down the vital trade route between Somaliland and Somalia and thewar-affected areas of Somali Region, and further prevented the mostly pastoralist population from bringing livestock to markets for sale.<sup>7</sup>*

As a result of these acts by the Ethiopian regime there is unprecedented man-made famine in Ogaden and the local population is living in great fear and many villagers fled to neighbouring countries and to the surrounding forest areas for safety and those Ogaden people are facing a critical shortage of food and water.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS To the Ethiopian Government:

- Stop all forms of sexual violence and all other forms of human rights abuses against Ogaden people, in particular the women and children.
- Immediately implement a nation wide cease-fire agreement ,end militarization and withdraw all troops from the Ogaden region.
- Immediately begin tripartite dialogue with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in order to establish a meaningful and genuine process of democratic restoration in Ogaden.
- Ensure that survivors of rape and sexual violence get access to adequate health and psycho-social support.

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<sup>7</sup> Ethiopia's 'own Darfur' As villagers flee Government Violence, Steve Bloomfield , the independent Oct 17, 2007

- Allow access to all humanitarian organizations to operate freely in Ogaden.
- Accept the recommendations proposed during the UPR in 2008, specifically those related to the Ogaden issue

To the International community:

- Call for the UN Security Council to keep Ethiopia on their agenda and to pass a binding resolution, which demands that the Ethiopian regime immediately implements a ceasefire, and starts meaningful dialogue with Ogaden opposition.
- Provide immediate emergency relief and humanitarian assistance for the internally displaced persons in Ogaden.
- Ensure the safety and security of humanitarian organizations providing services to Ogaden civilian population.