

Alternative report to the Committee of the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

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Section A: Introduction to the Report

This alternative report was compiled and submitted by UNPO on the occasion of the 72nd Pre-Sessional Working Group of the CEDAW. UNPO is an international membership organisation devoted to the promotion of democracy, non-violence, human rights, tolerance and environmental protection among indigenous peoples, oppressed communities and minority groups worldwide.

This report evaluates the compliance by Ethiopia with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (henceforth, “the Convention”) and the implementation of its provisions, with specific regard to the case of the Ogadeni and Oromo communities.

Ethiopia submitted their 8th periodic report under article 18 of the Convention in November 2017, two years after it was due. Previously the Committee highlighted the human rights issues in the country particularly concerning the rural population and marginalised communities, among which are the Ogadeni and Oromo. In their state party report Ethiopia points to the steps they are taking to address these issues. UNPO is concerned that these steps are not being implemented adequately and the absence of a mention of the Ogadeni and Oromo communities, as well as of most other minorities, and the way in which issues of marginalised and underprivileged interact with those of gender equality altogether.

Following a brief introduction to the Ogadeni and Oromo communities, this report will address specific provisions of the Convention, commenting on their implementation by the government and on the effect that they have had on the human rights of women. The final section of the report summarises these allegations through recommendations for the Ethiopian Government on how to rectify and prevent further discrimination, in order to offer a synthesis that can be useful during the discussions between the Committee and the delegation of Ethiopia at the 72nd Session.

Section B: Introduction to the Ogaden region and the Oromo people

Ogaden, also known as the Somali Region or Ogadenia, is the eastern most region of Ethiopia’s nine ethnic divisions and borders Djibouti to the north, Kenya to the south west and Somalia to the north, east and south. The capital of the region has been Jijiga since 1994. Demographically the region is dominated by ethnic Somalis who constitute around 95% of the entire population. They have long sought cooperation with the rest of Somalia and suffered from the Ethiopian occupation and exploitation. According to the Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia, the region has an estimated population of around 4,439,147 people, with nearly 98% of the population being Muslim. Due to years of war and neglect at the hands of the Ethiopian government, the quality of life in the Ogaden region has significantly deteriorated. Only 38% of the population has access to safe drinking water and that is mainly limited to the urban areas. Education access is limited with literacy rates of 22% for men and 9.8% for women and an infant mortality rate of 57/1000. The region is largely dependent on agriculture as its main source of economic

stimulus. Land rights issues have been the cause of much tension between the people and the local and national governments.

The country of the Oromo is called Biyya-Oromo or Oromia. Oromia was one of the free nations in the Horn of Africa until its colonisation and occupation by Abyssinia at the end of the nineteenth century. The Oromo people is one of the most numerous in Africa. Census data is not reliable but there are probably twenty million people whose first language is Oromo and who recognise themselves as Oromo. Except for a relatively small number of arid land pastoralists who live in Kenya, all their homelands lie in modern-day Ethiopia, where they probably make up around 40 percent of the total population. Around 90% of the population is employed in the agricultural sector.

Section C: Compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

- *Article 3: “States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.”*

In a context of open conflict in the Ogaden, women are amongst the most vulnerable to abuse and violence in the region due to the double discrimination they face: based on their ethnicity but also on their gender. Many women were detained, torture, raped and mistreated for being members of the Ogaden Women’s Democratic Association or relatives of members of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), as reported by numerous international human rights organisations including Human Rights Watch¹. Most recently in May 2018, protests erupted in Kebri Dahar, Ogaden after the Liyu Police executed a young woman, Ms Taysir Omar Food, allegedly after some of her relatives filed a complaint against Mr Abdi Iley to the State². This situation is in clear violation of Ogadeni women’s freedom of association but also of their right to life, health and right to a fair trial. This not only occurs in Ogaden and Oromia, but also in the region of Gambella³.

Ethiopian government forces have also perpetrated systematic rape and sexual violence in their continued suppression of the Ogaden people, as journalists have abundantly documented for years⁴. The scale and pattern of the cases of rape have led the Ogaden Women Relief Association to label sexual violence as “a weapon of war⁵” in the region.

¹ Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia – Events of 2017”, 2018, accessible here: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/ethiopia>.

² Ogaden Online, “Protests erupted after Ethiopian Security hanged a young woman in Kebri Dahar”, 11 May 2018, accessible here: <https://www.ogaden.com/protests-erupted-after-ethiopian-security-hanged-a-young-woman-in-kebri-dahar/>.

³ Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: Army Commits Torture, Rape – Gambella Atrocities Follow Attack on Commercial Farm; New ‘Villagization’ Abuses”, 28 August 2012, accessible here: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/28/ethiopia-army-commits-torture-rape>.

⁴ Graham Peebles, “Ogaden: Ethiopia’s Hidden Shame”, 22 June 2016, accessible here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuqr_LJdt5k.

⁵ Oromia Times, “Ethiopia: Shocking Sexual Violence Against Women in Ogaden”, 16 June 2014, accessible here: <https://oromiatimes.org/2014/06/16/%EF%BB%BFethiopia-shocking-sexual-violence-against-women-in-ogaden/>.

In the wake of extra-judicial killings and rape cases, local authorities loyal to the Ethiopian government also employ strategies of fear mongering among the local population in order to prevent news spreading to the outside world. An example of this was reported in October 2014 when the rotting bones of two women, suspected of being kidnapped and held by the authorities, were found near Gari-Go'an. The two women had been repeatedly raped by militia loyal to the Ethiopian State. The militia then threatened the women's community with severe punishment if the news of the rape and killing reached the outside world.

Following the recent protests that occurred in Oromia, several women having participated in the demonstrations and consequently been arrested and detained have reported having been subjected to sexual violence. While one woman told Human Rights Watch she was raped during an interrogation, most said it occurred while they were held in solitary confinement. Two cases documented by the NGO involved several soldiers. Mona, a 22-year-old woman, told the NGO that after have been arrested the night of a protest in late December 2015, she was raped three times in her cell by unidentified men⁶. Meti, another woman in her 20s, was arrested for selling traditional Oromo clothes. While in solitary confinement, she was forced to take off her clothes and parade in front of the officers as she was questioned on her link with the Oromo Liberation Front. She was also told that her business symbolises the pride of being an Oromo⁷.

- *Article 14.1: "States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas."*
- *Article 14.2: "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right: (...)*
 - o *(c) To benefit directly from social security programmes*
 - o *(g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes"*

According to the state report filed by Ethiopia to the Convention, a national Micro and Small Enterprises Strategy was issued to address the challenges facing women regarding access to finance, market networking and training on entrepreneurship. While the report claims this strategy was helpful in closing this gap, a report released by UN Women reveals that this strategy "usually caters to the needs of male farmers" because "women generally have limited access to assets that make them eligible" for the rural savings and credit cooperatives that are part of the strategy. The report found that "women's illiteracy and inability to meet the initial payment required to qualify for agricultural credit has limited their access to credit facilities...6

⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Such a Brutal Crackdown" – Killings and Arrests in Response to Ethiopia's Oromo Protests", 15 June 2016, accessible here: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/15/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-romo-protests>.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Such a Brutal Crackdown" – Killings and Arrests in Response to Ethiopia's Oromo Protests", 15 June 2016, accessible here: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/15/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-romo-protests>.

per cent of rural women have access to credit and 1 per cent have vocational skills training⁸. Indeed, the wealthiest households in Ethiopia are concentrated in urban areas (89%) while approximately half of the rural population (46%) falls in the lowest two wealth quintiles⁹. This stark contrast in wealth between the urban and rural population can be attributed directly to the lack of opportunities that promote the social mobility of the rural population, compounded for females by the intersectionality of this lack of opportunity and long-standing gender norms. The unavailability of such assets to rural women perpetuates the cycle of inequality that they face in their struggle for economic mobility.

- *Article 10: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:*
 - o *(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training”*

In 2016, 49% of females and 35% of males have never attended school, while 24% of females age 6 and older in urban areas have no education, as compared with 54% of females in rural areas. The corresponding proportions among males are 14% and 39%¹⁰. This shows an incredible gap between the education of men and women and the urban and rural population, a situation that particularly affects the inhabitants of the Ogaden, most of whom are agro-pastoralists and therefore do not live in urban centers. In 2011, 52% percent of females and 38% of males had never attended school while 28% of females and 15% of males in urban areas had no education, compared with 58% of females and 44% of males in rural areas¹¹. The comparison of this data shows that while there is a slight increase in the education of both males and females, the gap between the urban and rural population remains large.

Dozens of primary, secondary and university students were also killed or injured and hundreds were arrested, during the government’s crackdown on protests in Ethiopia. Many of these victims were Oromo. As reported by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, during the evenings after the protests, government security forces arrested students and raided their homes, interrogating them about the organising students¹². The youngest student detained was a 6-year-old girl¹³. On 10 December 2015, security forces also shot and injured a 19-year-old woman in the 8th grade in Babich, Oromia¹⁴.

⁸ UN Women, “Ethiopia – Leave no women behind”, *Advancing gender equality: promising practices – Case studies from the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund*, 2013, accessible here: http://www.unwomen.org/mdgf/B/Ethiopia_B.html.

⁹ Central Statistic Agency of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, “Ethiopia – Demographic and Health Survey”, 2016, accessible here: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR328/FR328.pdf>.

¹⁰ Central Statistic Agency of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, “Ethiopia – Demographic and Health Survey”, 2016, accessible here: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR328/FR328.pdf>.

¹¹ Central Statistic Agency of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, “Ethiopia – Demographic and Health Survey”, 2011, accessible here: https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/ET_2011_EDHS.pdf.

¹² Human Rights Watch, “Such a Brutal Crackdown” – Killings and Arrests in Response to Ethiopia’s Oromo Protests”, 15 June 2016, accessible here: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/15/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-oromo-protests>.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, “Such a Brutal Crackdown” – Killings and Arrests in Response to Ethiopia’s Oromo Protests”, 15 June 2016, accessible here: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/15/such-brutal-crackdown/killings-and-arrests-response-ethiopias-oromo-protests>.

¹⁴ Human Rights Council Ethiopia, “140th Special Report”, 14 March 2016, accessible here: <https://www.ehrco.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/140-Special-Report-English-scanned.pdf>.

- *Article 5: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:*
 - o *(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women”*

In the state party report submitted to the Convention, the government of Ethiopia points to the establishment of child and women protection units in police stations throughout the country that would handle cases of violence against women along with investigation and prosecution teams. It claims that “Child and Women Protection Units have expanded significantly in number and coverage through the country¹⁵”. However, the 2016 DHS Report found that 23% of women age 15-49 have experienced physical violence since age 15 and 15% have experienced physical violence in the past 12 months, but only 23% of women age 15-49 who have ever experienced any type of physical or sexual violence by anyone have sought help. 66% have never sought help nor told anyone about the violence. These appalling statistics make it clear that the steps Ethiopia is taking to curb violence against women are not effective, at least for the reporting stage. Although the government claims these special police units have been established for this purpose, there is either mistrust or fear from the female population and especially among minority or indigenous women who are systematically discriminated against and/or violently persecuted by those entities, that is preventing them from reporting crimes to these units.

- *Article 8: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.”*

In 2009 the government of Ethiopia released the Charities and Societies Proclamation which allowed the Charities and Societies Agency to renew and cancel licenses for NGOs and civil society organisations. Amnesty International and other human rights organisations have found this Proclamation to be devastating to the human rights situation in Ethiopia for the “practical obstacles it creates for human rights defenders, and in exacerbating the climate of fear in which they operate¹⁶”. Particularly concerning is the impact this proclamation had on the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association in forcing this organisation, the only one to focus on women’s rights advocacy at the national level, to cease its work on human rights.

Section D: Conclusion

Due to their ethnicities and gender, Ogadeni and Oromo women face a double-discrimination in Ethiopia. In addition to these discriminations, for most Ogadeni women the issue is three-fold

¹⁵ CEDAW, “Eighth period report submitted by Ethiopia under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2015”, 18 December 2017, accessible here:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fETH%2f8&Lang=en.

¹⁶ Amnesty International, “Ethiopia: The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation as a serious obstacle to the promotion and protection of human rights in Ethiopia – Amnesty International’s written statement to the 20th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (18 June-6 July 2012)”, 11 June 2012, accessible here:

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/16000/afr250072012en.pdf>.

as they are rural women as well, often times with limited access to basic services including justice.

In addition to the widespread sexual violence and rape these unrepresented women face due to internal conflicts, they also lack access to social security services, as well as loans and credits which would allow their financial emancipation. Access to education is also difficult, also due to the violent crackdown of the authorities on students and attacks on schools, mainly in Oromia, over the past years. Violence against women is still a widespread issue in the country as well, and for these women in particular whenever they are seen as having ties to organisations such as the ONLF or the OLF. All of these issues will remain difficult to solve as long as these women will not be able to really play a part in civic life – both by having representatives at the national level but also simply being able to get involved and launch local initiatives via grassroots associations.

Ethiopia, often quoted as an example of social and economic development in the African region, fails to provide its population with a safe environment that would “leave no one behind”, as stipulated by the SDGs. An immediate end needs to be put to State-organised violence against indigenous and minority women, and considerable improvements need to be made to foster their social inclusion and full participation in the life of the country.

Section E: Recommendations

1. UNPO urges for the Ethiopian government to recognise the double discrimination Somali, Oromo and other minority women face in a context of internal conflicts and social exclusion of their communities;
2. UNPO calls for an immediate end to the use of sexual violence and rape as weapons of war, especially in the Ogaden region – a practice which not only violates the CEDAW but is also in contradiction with a number of other human rights obligations by which Ethiopia is bound;
3. UNPO encourages the Ethiopian government to remedy women’s, and especially rural women’s, lack of access to social security and allow them to get easier access to loans and credits;
4. UNPO encourages the Ethiopian government to work on a better inclusion of the country’s minority and indigenous women and girls in education, whether it be primary, secondary or higher;
5. UNPO urges security forces to put an end to violent crackdowns on peaceful protests, which have already caused a great number of casualties in the recent years, in respect for the freedom of expression and association, as well as to put an end to reprisals toward protesters, sometimes including violent attacks on schools;
6. UNPO recommends that minority and indigenous women be given the right to freely associate, including in the framework of human or women’s rights organisations, and that unrepresented women be given the space to participate in the country’s political life – which implies a shift to a democratic and politically-inclusive Ethiopia.