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The Council on Human Rights

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Concrete measures guaranteeing women's and minority rights

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Due to the failure to respect the most fundamental human rights, for decades the Somali people of Ogaden, and especially women, have suffered repression and exploitation under all successive imperial and military regimes in Ethiopia, and still continue to suffer under the current government of Meles Zenawi.

Ogaden is one of nine regions of Ethiopia, located to the very east of the country. It borders Djibouti in the North, Kenya in the South-West, and Somalia in the North, East and South. The war carried out behind the closed doors by the Ethiopian army against the Ogaden National Liberation Front, has led to an increased violence against women. The government set up a system of collective punishment in which everything that was previously illegal became allowed.

Several international women's rights watchdog institutions and some media have sent out alarm signals, confirming that rape is still being used as a war weapon by the army forces. In fact, the number of women victims of rape in this region keeps growing, especially since 2007 when the army sealed off the region and intensified military operations.

The Government's refusal to let in NGOs, including the ICRC, and the international media, as well as a limited or nonexistent access to health care, family planning services and education, have resulted in a situation where women in the region cannot enjoy their rights as described in international conventions.

During the 49th session of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in which Ethiopia also took part, the Convention raised concerns about numerous and coherent signals on crimes against women and girls, including rapes, tortures, extrajudicial executions and forced expulsions committed by the members of the Ethiopian army forces and the private militia groups financed by the State during armed conflicts, especially in Ogaden, as well as about the impunity of those who presumably have committed these crimes.

Ms Chair,

The African Rights Monitor recommends the following:

1. The Ethiopian State must withdraw immediately and unconditionally the blockage of the Ogaden cities and villages and allow immediately and unconditionally all NGOs to work freely and unhindered in the region.

2. The Ethiopian Government must conform to the recommendations issued by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
3. The UN should introduce a system that strengthens the women's autonomy in the field of education as well as their financial independence.
4. Finally, an international investigation commission should be established in order to shed light on all the committed abuses, as it was suggested by the UN team visiting Ogaden in 2007.

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