

Statement for Fourth Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues

ORGANIZATION: Resolve Ogaden Coalition

AGENDA ITEM: Minority women and effective participation in economic, social and cultural life

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Madame Chairwomen, Ladies and Gentlemen

Minority women in conflict face all the challenges that minority women in peacetime face. In cases where their own government is a party to the conflict that involves the minority community, minority women face special challenges.

The conflict situation in the Ogaden creates significant challenges to women's ability to make gains in their economic stability. The Ethiopian government has enacted an economic blockade to the entire Ogaden region. Furthermore, Ethiopia is enforcing a subtle Aid embargo whereby international Aid agencies and NGO's are disbouraged, restricted or outright banned from assisting the Ogaden people. This has a particular effect on Ogaden women and children, who are in dire need of the health and nutrition services that provided by such programs.

Ogaden women are systematically targeted for violence within the conflict, preventing them from fully participating in social and economic activities. For example, many women who were involved in trading have become targets for rape and torture, thus restricting women's movement and engagement in productive endeavors. This violence also has a negative psychological impact on women, which in turn makes women less likely to enter the labor force.

Thirdly, 'even at best of times Ogaden women often experience discrimination and lack of access to education, health services and other inalienable rights that results in limiting their opportunities for economic survival.

Fourth, Ogaden women especially face both gender-based discrimination from their own culture as well as ethnic and religious based prejudice from the ethnic ruling party of the government. In general, women have no say save cosmetic and honorary roles, while experiencing the worst of the consequences of decisions they did not take part in. While most of the women live in rural communities, there are no particular institutions that target the rural areas.

The UN urgently needs to establish new mechanisms that take into account the needs of women in conflict and women in rural areas in order to ensure the rights of minority women who are politically and economically marginalized that based on their ethnicity,

specifically in conflict situations: Most of the services currently available in Ethiopia, specially the Ogaden, cater only to the needs of communities that live in urban, peaceful areas.

In light of these issues, Ogaden Resolve Coalition recommends that the following provision to be included in the draft resolution of the UN minority forum:

1. The UN establish a special mechanisms to encourage governments to allow full access to all regions, especially those where minority women are affected by violence, for Independent international NGOs, human rights monitors, diplomats, journalists and humanitarian organizations. Such mechanisms should aim to provide adequate protection, assistance and justice to minority women who have been victims of state-sponsored violence in conflict situations
2. The UN establishes a Special Rapporteur to monitor and recommend to the UNHRC action to enforce and provide protection, assistance and justice to minority women who have been victims of large-scale state-sponsored violence.

Finally, Ogaden resolve requests that the UN special procedures, including the Independent Expert on Minority Issues,. extend their support to minority women suffering from state-sponsored violence such as those in the Ogaden.

Thank you.