

## 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, 24 to 25 November 2016

### Protecting minority rights during humanitarian crises.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ethiopian government has created a constitution that accepted the right of self-determination of nations, in theory including the setting up of regional states. However, when the Somali people in Ogaden set up their own self-rule and attempted to exercise the rights foreseen in the constitution, the Ethiopian government refused to respect the autonomy, dignity and the right of the Somali people to participate in decision-making that affects them. It also blocked them from exercising their constitutional and democratic right to hold free elections and instead used the Ethiopian army in Ogaden to select for them their representatives in both the parliament and the administration. This resulted in a violent conflict, which the Ethiopian government used as a pretext to abrogate all the rights of the Somali people and institute an undeclared martial law in Ogaden. The Ethiopian government even banned the ICRC and shot and detained two Swedish journalists who attempted to report from the Ogaden.

What is unusual in our case is how the international community has ignored the conflict and the plight of the people of Ogaden. The disagreement in Ogaden is similar to that of other conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. However, in this case no effort has been made to address these issues and stop gross human rights violations, despite overwhelming evidence. This deliberate side-lining is attributed to the geo-political interests of key stakeholders in the Horn of Africa, which take precedence over human rights abuses. In addition, Ethiopia gets further leverage from hosting the AU headquarters. Even attempts by the conflicting parties to negotiate, were not supported or even acknowledged and the conflict is still ongoing. To complicate the situation further, the conflict has now spread to other parts of Ethiopia and the whole situation is bleak.

The Ogaden People's Rights Organisation believes that most of the recommendations proposed are positive. However, they are based on a model of governments that are led by people with a minimum of morality, respect of the rule of law and have a sense of humanity. When leaders of governments openly flaunt international laws and act with impunity, minorities are victimised with no recourse to justice. Therefore, OPRO recommends that this forum explore more the issue of non-compliance with international human rights and humanitarian laws:

- Once a minority or community complains about human rights abuses, the right of UN and Humanitarian organisations to conduct or facilitate impartial investigations become mandatory and that
- if a government refuses such an impartial investigation, it shall be subject to immediate sanctions.

Thank You