

Vedvarende og skjulte Menneskerettighedskrænkelser og etnisk udrensning i Ogaden-regionen (Etiopien)

Vi, medlemmerne i Ogaden foreningen, vil udtrykke vores sorg og bekymringer over den skjulte rædsel, mishandling og undertrykkelse mod uskyldige civile i Ogaden-regionen (Etiopien) udført af det etiopiske militær.

Vi vil derfor bede den danske regering og verdenssamfundet om at gribe ind og stoppe det etiopiske regimes terrorhandlinger og overgreb mod befolkning i Ogaden-regionen.

Etniske udrensninger og forbrydelser mod menneskeheden har plaget Ogaden i de seneste 100 år. Sult og fejlernæring gør katastrofen værre og værre.

De seneste dage er situationen forværret, hvor militæret har omringet og omskåret adgang til byerne. Lige nu er der ingen forsyninger i form af mad, medicin og andre livsnødvendigheder til byerne. Ydermere har militæret lukket vand- og elforsyningerne.

Det etiopiske regimes militær hærger og plager det civile samfund med massakrer, voldtægter, vilkårlige drab på kvinder og børn samt nedbrænding af hele landsbyer.

Mange skoler er nu lavet om til fængsler, hvor uskyldige civile holdes fanget under rystende forhold og tortureres uden sigtelser. Denne nye grusomme militære operationer inkluderer:

- **Massearrestation**
- **Voldtægt af kvinder**
- **Nedbrænding af hele landsbyer**
- **Fysisk og psykisk tortur**
- **Planløs luftbombing af landsbyer og hvad der hermed følger af drab og lemlæstelser på befolkningen.**
- **Konfiskering af ejendom, husdyr og biler tilhørende den civile befolkning.**
- **Tvang forflyttelse**

Også mange skolebørn er arresteret og andre er henrettet af militæret, hvorefter deres lige blev lagt i travle offentlige steder og de pårørende blev nægtet at begravede deres døde. Denne forbrydelse og umenneskelig handling er dokumenteret og finder sted i mange byer i Ogaden-regionen. Det er ikke kun skolebørn som bliver dræbt så elendigt måde men også mange andre uskyldige civile.

Tilsvarende er fængslerne i de største byer som *Jijiga, Dhagahbour, Qabridahare, Godey* og *Fiiq* overfyldt med uskyldige mænd og kvinder under usle forhold som vi ikke kan forstille os.

Sandsynlighed for at der opstår epidemier er nærliggende.

Til sammenligning med Darfur, er Ogaden-regionen meget nedprioriteret, forsømt og glemt af det etiopiske regime. Der er ingen uddannelsessystem, sundhedsvæsen, retssystem og mest og ikke mindst frihed og selvstændighed. Regionen styres af militæret og derfor er der ingen civile retssystem. Til forskel i Darfur, udføres dræb, voldtægt, massearrestation og nedbrænding af hele landsbyer af det etiopiske regimes soldater mod civile i Ogaden-regionen som bor indenfor landets grænser, uden at omverdenen har vist interesse i sagen

I mange år har Ogaden-regionen været lukket for omverden af militæret. Regimet og militæret nægter adgang for journalister til Ogaden-regionen. Ingen kunne derfor skrive og fortælle til omverden de forbrydelse der begås af militæret i regionen. For nylig, 18 juni 2007, har den anerkendt journalist Jeffrey Gettleman fra *New York Times* rejst til Ogaden og har sendt en video-reportage og skrevet en artikel om situationen I Ogaden. Men da militæret fik besked om ham fik de fængslet både ham og hans nyhedspersonale i fem dag i Dhagahbour.

Men meste alarmerende er det at militæret har øget sit tilstedeværelse med 20, 000 soldater: de har bygget tjek-points ved alle hovedvejene i regionen og har forhindret adgang til de store byer samt de nærliggende landsbyer. **Dette har allerede medført mangel på alle former for fødevarer. Dette vil højst sandsynlig snart fører til hungersnød. Med andre ord; den største humanitære katastrofe i verden udfolder sig i Ogaden-regionen i Etiopien.**

Verden må regere nu og hjælpe de hjælpeløse civile der udsættes for etnisk udrensning i Ogaden!!!! Vi appellerer til verdens samfundet om at iværksætte et initiativ, der omsider kan bane vejen for et normalt tilstand i regionen.

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HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Ethiopia: Crackdown in East Punishes Civilians

Warring Parties Must Respect Laws of War, Ensure Humanitarian Access

(New York, July 4, 2007) – The Ethiopian military has forcibly displaced thousands of civilians in the country's eastern Somali region in recent weeks while escalating its campaign against a separatist insurgency movement, Human Rights Watch said today. Both the government and rebel Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) must protect civilians and ensure their access to humanitarian relief.

In Ethiopia's eastern Somali region, also known as the Ogaden or Region 5, the Ethiopian military attacks on villages have displaced civilians in the Wardheer, Qorahey and Dhagahbur zones, even in areas where there is no known ONLF presence.

"Ethiopian troops are destroying villages and property, confiscating livestock and forcing civilians to relocate," said Peter Takirambudde, Africa director of Human Rights Watch. "Whatever the military strategy behind them, these abuses violate the laws of war."

Eyewitnesses told Human Rights Watch that Ethiopian troops burned or ordered civilians to vacate at least a dozen villages around the towns of Dhagahbur (Degehabur), Qabridahare (Kebre Dehar) and Wardheer. In Wardheer zone, many of the residents of villages located within a 100-kilometer radius of Wardheer town have been forced to relocate to other towns because of attacks on their villages, orders from the Ethiopian military or – less frequently – fighting between the Ethiopian army and the ONLF. Villages around Shilaabo, in Qorahey zone, and around Dhagahbur and Qabridahare towns have also been affected by the Ethiopian army campaign.

Witnesses described Ethiopian troops burning homes and property, including the recent harvest and other food stocks intended for the civilian population, confiscating livestock and, in a few cases, firing upon and killing fleeing civilians. Ethiopian security forces are also responsible for arbitrary detentions in the larger towns, particularly of family members of suspected ONLF members.

In Dhagahbur, at least 20 families who were suspected to have relatives in the ONLF had their camels confiscated. On June 18, in Labiga village, south of Dhagahbur town, Ethiopian forces allegedly killed 21 villagers who resisted when Ethiopian forces tried to take their livestock.

The Ethiopian authorities have also imposed a trade blockade on parts of the region since June, with few goods (including food) permitted into the area, which depends on commercial traffic from neighboring northern Somalia, particularly the coastal towns of Berbera and Bosaso. The attacks on villages and the economic blockade may be part of a strategy to force thousands of people from rural areas to larger towns and deny the ONLF a support base.

ONLF forces have also been responsible for serious abuses. An April attack on Obole, an oil field in northern Somali region, reportedly killed dozens of civilians, including nine Chinese oil workers, and at least 28 civilians working on a farm in nearby Sandhore village.

On May 28, ONLF fighters allegedly targeted two large gatherings in Jigjiga and Dhagahbur with hand grenades. The blasts, and the crowd stampedes that followed, killed 17 people and wounded dozens, including the regional president of Somali region. Most of those who died in these two simultaneous

attacks were civilians, including a 17 year-old school boy and a number of women. The ONLF denied responsibility for the attacks, but have a record of targeting civilian officials and clan leaders who refuse to support the insurgency.

“Civilians in Somali region are trapped between the warring parties,” said Takirambudde. “The Ethiopian government appears to be pursuing an illegal strategy of collective punishment of the civilian population, and the ONLF has targeted civilians for attack.”

Human Rights Watch called on both the Ethiopian government and the ONLF to ensure that civilians and civilian property are protected from targeted or indiscriminate attacks and independent international aid agencies have full, unhindered access to civilians in need of humanitarian assistance.

International humanitarian law, or the laws of war, requires that all warring parties distinguish between military and civilians, protect civilians and their property and take all feasible steps to minimize the harm of military operations on civilians.

Collective punishments – or the punishment of one or more individuals for the acts of others – is also prohibited by international humanitarian law. Hostage taking, which is the holding or use of a person to compel a third party to act or refrain from acting, is also prohibited. Detaining the family member of a combatant to compel the combatant to surrender would thus be unlawful.

Moreover, starvation as a method of warfare is prohibited. It is thus unlawful to destroy or otherwise render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Parties to an internal armed conflict must allow humanitarian relief to reach civilian populations suffering undue hardship owing to a lack of foodstuffs and medical supplies essential for their survival.

International humanitarian law also prohibits the forced displacement of the civilian population for reasons connected to the conflict – except when done for the “security of the civilians involved” or for “imperative military reasons.” These prohibitions are applicable to both governments and insurgents.

Background

Ethiopia’s eastern Somali region, known as Region 5 or the Ogaden, is the site of a long-running, low-intensity armed conflict between the Ethiopian government and the ONLF.

The ONLF fought against the Derg, the military dictatorship of Menghistu Haile Mariam, but was not allied to the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), the guerrilla movement led by Ethiopia’s current prime minister, Meles Zenawi. In 1992, the ONLF won control of the government of Ethiopia’s newly formed Somali region, becoming the only party not allied to the TPLF to score such a success. However, the ONLF’s open advocacy of secession for Somali region and its frosty relations with the ruling party led to its ouster from government in 1994.

The ONLF then reverted to waging armed attacks against the Ethiopian government, which has continued in the intervening years. For more than a decade, a heavy Ethiopian military presence in the region has been accompanied by widespread reports of human rights abuses committed by both sides. Those reports have generally been difficult to confirm because of the Ethiopian military’s effective closure of the region to independent research and reporting.

The escalating Ethiopian military campaign is likely catalyzed by several recent high-profile ONLF attacks in the region, including the April attack on the Chinese oil site at Obole and the May attacks on Jigjiga and Dhagahbur. In a June 9 news conference, Meles stated that the Ethiopian military was

launching a “political and military operation to try to contain the activities of the ONLF.”

The current campaign in Somali region is also linked to Ethiopian military operations in south-central Somalia. One motive for Ethiopia’s ouster of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in December 2006 may have been to cut the links between the ONLF, the ruling Islamic Courts and Eritrea, including arms and logistical supply lines from Eritrea and Somalia to the ONLF in Ethiopia’s eastern region.

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Welcome to Ogaden Human Rights Committee Tuesday, July 10, 2007

Date: 11th June 2007

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PRESS RELEASE

OGADEN: TERROR, EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS AND MASS ARRESTS

In the last two months (April and May 2007), the Ethiopian security and armed forces rounded up and detained hundreds of civilians in all main towns in the Ogaden. The detainees were massed in military detention camps. Extrajudicial executions, torture, rape and widespread looting by the government forces were reported and confirmed by adequate witnesses (survivors of the killings, released detainees and/or relatives as well as Ogaden Human Rights Committee's researchers throughout the Ogaden).

In retaliation to Ogaden National Liberation Front's attack, which resulted in the killing of 65 Ethiopian soldiers, 28 civilian Ogaden Somalis, 9 Chinese workers and the abduction of 7 Chinese workers, in **Cobolle** oil exploration field, on 24th April 2007. The Ethiopian government forces stepped up its human rights violations in the Ogaden by committing unspeakable atrocities against the civilian population.

On May 28th 2007, two terrorist hand grenade attacks took place in **Dhagaxbuur** and **Jigjiga**, killing and wounding a number of defenceless civilians, who were attending two gatherings sponsored by the Ethiopian Government.

According to eyewitness accounts most of the victims died as a result of stampede and indiscriminate firing into the crowd by the Ethiopian security forces, after the explosion of the grenades. Among the dead in the two terrorist explosions were: **Ahmed Mohamed Aftag, Abdi-Wali Muhumed Tuluh, Bashir Gadyare, Astur Mohamed Balul, Leyla Sharif Hassan, Abdi Kamil Awale, Aw Gambadh and Khalid Nur.**

It was the first time such a terrorist act claims the lives of innocent civilians in **Dhagaxbuur**. But it was not a new phenomenon in **Jigjiga**, which witnessed more than five terrorist attacks since 2005.

In the past terrorist attacks in Jigjiga were carried out by Amhara settlers or Tigrean settlers against each other's properties such as: hotels, restaurants, bars and nightclubs.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee extends its sincere condolences to the families and relatives of the victims who lost their loved ones in those despicable terror attacks in Dhagaxbuur and Jigjiga. And reiterates its condemnation and disapproval of all terrorist acts against the civilians regardless of their ethnic, religion and clan affiliation.

After the terrorist attacks in **Dhagaxbuur** and Jigjiga, Ethiopian security and armed forces rounded up and detained hundreds of civilians in **Dhagaxbuur, Jigjiga, Qabridaharre** and other localities in the Ogaden. The detainees are being held in incommunicado in police stations, central jails and military barracks.

Civilians are periodically rounded up, detained and held in detention without charges for months in order to extort money. Some detainees in **Dhagaxbuur** and **Jigjiga** were released after paying the extortion money.

On May 30th 2007, four dead bodies belonging to young students, who were detained on May 28th 2007, were thrown out of the military barracks in Dhagaxbuur. The bodies were carrying marks of torture. They were killed by strangulation. Their death was a terrible shock to their families and the whole public. According to their families and friends they were innocent

civilians with no political affiliation. No reason was given for their murder.

Ethiopian Authorities who do not like the outside world to know the real situation in the Ogaden, arrested three foreign journalists who were on a legitimate newsgathering mission, in **Dhagaxbuur**. They were threatened, kicked, interrogated at gunpoint, their equipment confiscated and moved to different jails. They were released after five days of illegal imprisonment without charges or trial, on 22nd May 2007.

Article 54 -Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population -of the protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 states that "Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited. It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motives."

However, in an attempt to restrict people's movements, terrorize the civilian population and stop trade movements, the Ethiopian government has blocked up all commercial roads leading to **Fiiq, Qabridaharre** and **Wardheer**. And confiscated lorries carrying food supplies in order to starve out the civilian population. It also depopulated and razed entirely to the ground many villages and hamlets.

The town of **Fiiq** is virtually under siege. Caravans and commercial convoys intended to supply basic necessities to the civilian population are stranded in **Dhagaxbuur** and **Baabili**. They are accused of sympathizing with Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).

On June 02nd 2007, the Ethiopian army razed to the ground the village of Daratoole, which is located in the northeast of Wardheer, killing many defenceless civilians.

Furthermore, Ethiopian armed forces destroyed the village of Laasoole by torching the residences after looting personal properties, on May 16th 2007. They killed a number of civilians. Among them were: Duale **Guled Arab, Adan Mohamed Anshur** and **Ja'ur Fatah**, all civilians. No reason was given for their murder.

The Ogaden Human Rights Committee fears for the safety and well-being of hundreds of civilians detained and massed in military detention camps throughout the Ogaden by the Ethiopian government forces. The detainees are being held in incommunicado without charges or trials.

The OHRC's fear is heightened by constant reports of executions, disappearances, rape, torture or/and ill-treatment of the detainees to extract confessions from them.

The OHRC, calls for them to be either charged with recognizable criminal offence and given fair trial or released unconditionally, and calls upon the Ethiopian government to lift the unconstitutional restrictions imposed on him.

Since its foundation, on 13 June 1995, the Ogaden Human Rights Committee, has carried out extensive investigation of the human rights situation throughout the Ogaden, and has documented gross violations, including illegal imprisonments, mass arrests without charges or trials, enforced disappearances, torture, rape, extrajudicial killings, abduction, forced labour, hostage-taking, systematic religious and racial persecution, dispossession and widespread looting by the current Ethiopian government security and armed forces.

The international community should take note that the human rights violations presented in detail in this Press Release and the previous reports are flagrant violations of rights and freedoms guaranteed by International Human Rights Treaties, acceded to or ratified by Ethiopia. There is no doubt that the human rights situation will continue to deteriorate dramatically in the Ogaden unless the international community steps in to stop the inhuman policies of the Ethiopian government in the Ogaden.

The Ogaden conflict is not different from other conflicts in the world, which the international community is involved and committed to resolving as a mediator or facilitator. The last conflict in Africa, which was resolved through negotiation with the help of the international community, was the war in the Southern Sudan. The conflict in the Ogaden deserves the attention and the positive intervention of the international community.

Although prestigious international and national human rights organizations, have issued several reports about well-documented human rights violations in the Ogaden and elsewhere in Ethiopia by the current Ethiopian government, the international community has remained tight-lipped about those violations for the last sixteen years. Nevertheless, the Ogaden Human Rights Committee has not given up hope of the international community's help to force Ethiopia to honour its commitments to internationally accepted human rights principles. Hence, the OHRC requests and recommends the following:

RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPEALS:

To: international community, United Nations, Ethiopian Government and Ogaden National Liberation Front:

- The Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front, declare immediate, comprehensive and unconditional cease-fire in the Ogaden.
- The international community exert more pressure on all the parties to the conflict in the Ogaden in order to reach a peaceful negotiated settlement, which guarantees the Ogaden people's inalienable right to self-determination through a fair and free referendum.
- Since there is no confidence between the warring sides the Ogaden Human Rights Committee urges the United States and European Union to act as mediators and facilitators in order to put an end the senseless carnage in the Ogaden.
- The Ogaden Human Rights Committee reiterates its condemnation and disapproval of imposing restrictions on humanitarian organisations' movements, intimidation and abduction of aid workers as well as targeting civilian population in the Ogaden.
- The Ogaden Human Rights Committee urges the Ethiopian government, the Ogaden National Liberation Front and other parties to the conflict to allow all humanitarian and relief organisations to operate freely in the Ogaden as well as international and local human rights organisations and the international press.
- The international community publicly censure Ethiopia over its human rights record in the Ogaden, its illegal occupation of Somalia and massacring many defenceless civilians in Mogadishu and elsewhere.
- Perpetrators of war crimes and other atrocities in the Ogaden should be brought before an international tribunal.
- The Ethiopian government should be held responsible for infamous mass killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.
- The United Nations appoint a Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Ogaden.
- The Ethiopian government and Ogaden National Liberation Front give ICRC free access to all detainees in their custodies.
- The Ogaden Human Rights Committee asks for all political prisoners in Ethiopia immediately and unconditionally released or charged with recognized criminal offences,

and given fair trials; and be given unrestricted and regular access to their family members and to representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

- The international community refrain from aiding and supporting the Ethiopian government as long as it violates human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Ogaden as well as other parts of the empire-state of Ethiopia.

For more information, see Human Rights violations in the Ogaden by Ethiopia, 1991 to 1996 ref: OHRC/01/96, Deterioration of Human Rights Situation in the Ogaden unabated ref: OHRC/07/96, Mass Killings, Torture and Disappearances in the Ogaden ref: OHRC/08/96, Ogaden: NO Rights, No Democracy ref: OHRC/08/97, Ogaden: An Endless Human Tragedy ref: OHRC/12/98, Ogaden: Graveyard of Rights ref: OHRC/10/99 and Ogaden: Downtrodden and Disenfranchised People ref: OHRC/D15/04, Mass Killings in the Ogaden: Daily Atrocities against Civilians by the Ethiopian Armed Forces ref: OHRC/AR/06 and other OHRC Reports and Press Releases. Visit www.ogadenrights.org

SPECIAL SECTIONS : ARTICLE ON ONLF REBELLION

ONLF rebellion.

Article by Jonathan Alpeyrie.

Ogadenia is a forgotten land wrecked by war and very harsh living conditions. The region, which is still today at the center of the volatile Horn of Africa, has seen little economic progress since its first taste of brief independence in the first Ogaden war of 1977/78. In 1991, the Meles government came into power. The region remains to this day a barren land with only two main roads a few large towns like Kabri Dahar, Jijiga and Quabribayah, which are controlled by government forces trying to tame the rebellion led by the ONLF (Ogaden National Liberation Front). However, to fully understand the war of today's Ogadenia, one needs to go back further in history and take a look at the European influence in the region.

With the defeat of the Somali forces and Ogaden rebels in 1978 in the hands of the Russian backed Ethiopian army, Ogadenia was reconquered entirely. Many of the militia survivors retreated to fight another day. Three years later, the ONLF was created to continue the fighting to force the Ethiopian government into giving Ogadenia its long due independence. The ONLF, which was Founded in 1984 by Abdirahman Mahdi, the Chairman of the, Western Somali Liberation Movement Youth Union, systematically recruited their own kin and replaced WSLF in the Ogaden as the WSLF support from Somalia dwindled and finally dried up in the late eighties. By 1993, the ONLF fully consolidated its support among all of the Ogaden Somalis in Somalian territory under Ethiopian rule. In 1994, the ONLF was a fully functional military force and Chairman Admiral Mohammed Omar Osman was reelected for a second term in 2004.

The ONLF announced elections in December 1992 for the five Ogaden districts, and won 80% of the seats of the local parliament. When Ethiopia tried to force ONLF to accept a new constitution and the ONLF refused: the Meles government declared war on them. The rebel faction continues to operate in the Ogaden as of 2006 and is the target of full-scale military operations by the Ethiopian army after ONLF stated that it would not allow Malaysian oil company Petronas to extract oil from the Ogaden, let alone give them independence.

In 2005, Ethiopia proposed peace talks with ONLF, which the rebel group accepted on the condition that talks be held in a neutral country and with the presence of a neutral mediator from the international community. The talks broke down due to Ethiopia's insistence that the two parties meet without an arbitrator and held in countries closely allied in the Horn of Africa. ONLF became a part of the Alliance for freedom and democracy on May 21st 2006, fighting occurred alongside OLF and smaller rebel groups operating in the North like TPDM.

Again in 2006, the Meles government, with the full support of US and UK governments, has vowed to crush the ONLF rebellion once and for all, reinforcing the 15 thousand permanent men garrisoned in Ogadenia with a further: 25 thousand troops, jet fighters, armored cars and some helicopters. Between February and July 2006, the army tried to destroy the rebellion, but failed completely, losing thousands of troops in the process. The ONLF remained undefeated. Why did the government, with such an overwhelming force managed to fail in its plan? They didn't face more than 5 to 7 thousand ONLF troops through out the region. The answer to this is complex. Above all the ONLF's strong support base with the local civilian population is key. The systematic brutalization of Ogaden civilians, and the lack of military discipline and cohesion within government troops is another reason they weren't defeated. Lastly, there were totally inadequate strategies and tactics employed against the rebels.

Indeed, the government has found itself in a sticky spot. Its 250 thousand men army is ill equipped to fight a war on many fronts: against the five active rebel groups operating within Ethiopia's border, the perpetual tensions on the Eritrean border, and now the rise of Islam in

Somalia. Furthermore, its ranks are racked with desertion, and lack of discipline due to the internal ethnic strife, which reigns from within its units.

Meles has given key positions to his own ethnic kin, the Tigray, both in the government, and in the army, making his policies unpopular among lesser Ethnic groups fighting alongside the Tigrays. The officer corps is overwhelmingly from Tigray "terroir", leaving other ethnic groups less attractive positions within the army. Therefore, blocking any possibilities for them to go up the ladder, the officer corps often uses same ethnic groups to fight each other, pitting Oromos against Oromos, or Sidamas against Sidamas. The poorly led Oromo, Amhara soldier is sometimes forced to desert, finding it unbearable to kill his own kin. As a consequence, a non-negligible amount of government soldiers desert their unit to escape the grueling reality of the Ogaden front.

This is the case of Thomas Gin Ernest an ethnic Hadiyan from Southern Ethiopia, drafted by force into Meles's army, who decided after serving for six years to desert with a few others to the ONLF. "During our walk to ONLF lines, half of our party changed their minds and returned to the military camp. They were shot for treason soon after" He says this happy to have made the right choice. When captured, Mr. Gin Ernest was given some money so he can go home to his family and be reunited. By treating the prisoners with respect and dignity, the rebels attract more allies to their cause.

More importantly, government forces have created their own monster by using terror tactics against the local population. The government's military forces are known to use violence and killings against locals Ogadens. These procedures show how Meles's forces underestimate their enemy. Soldiers will usually enter a village to look for potential ONLF rebels, helpers and sympathizers pick people randomly. In essence, Ogadens sympathize with the struggle and contribute to it, either by joining the fighting units, or supplying them with food, water, and guns, making them all traitors to an angry eye.

Also, many civilians have experienced repeated violence, either personally, or a relative. Alimo Ahment, a 24-year-old Ogaden woman, has a common story to tell. She joined up like so many before her, because her relatives were accused of helping the ONLF, her father was put to jail and tortured for three months. These kinds of terror tactics has had the exact opposite results than those expected by the government: Thus, it has increased the number of Ogadens wanting to join up with the ONLF in ranks, and hatred against the government persists within the Ogaden population--creating an entire new generation of freedom fighters in the region.

The widespread tortures, imprisonment, and killings in the region, has seen thousands of students and locals put in jail. It is said that in the main town of Jijiga where 20 thousand souls reside, 10% are currently in military camps or local jails. Most of them are accused of helping the ONLF. Many are put in confinement without trial for a minimum of three months, which is the regular torture period, unless the prisoner is rich enough to pay a bribe. Tortures are a daily reality and a well-orchestrated practice. It starts at 6AM when guards grab the prisoner into a small room, or sometimes an unusable bathroom. There, the interrogation begins, with the simple question. If the prisoner is part of the ONLF organization, and each time the answer is no, he or she is beaten, electrocuted, or raped if the prisoner is a woman. This torture is repeated twice a day for four hours each time. Survivors have recorded extreme examples of pregnant women being tortured.

Shamaad Wali, a 29 year ONLF female fighter recalls: "During my time in prison, I remember the guards throwing in an eight month pregnant woman. They repeatedly beat her until she gave birth, but the baby was already dead. They just threw it away like garbage". She says with tears in her eyes. The government of course denies such claims, but in each village such stories of tortures and killings are quite common and widespread.

Thirdly, and lastly, government forces have failed to contain the rebellion, which has gained in strength and confidence. On the ground, the heavily burdened Ethiopian soldiers are not able to catch or kill large numbers of ONLF troopers, who operate in small bands using hit and run tactics; a pretty common problem for a conventional force. The ONLF has been able to keep the initiative, attacking on their terms, ambushing reinforcing convoys, infantry columns, and villages held by enemy forces. Ethiopian forces lose thousands of troops each year due to desertions and ONLF attacks. To be sent to Ogadenia is considered by soldiers as a punishment. Prisoners all agree that fighting the Ogadens is the worst enemy they can encounter in Ethiopia. Known for their warlike behavior and fighting skills, they are waging an efficient insurgency in Ogadenia.

Governmental troops do not control the land or the local population.

For ONLF cadre, victory is now within reach. From the rebel's point of view, the situation in Addis is quickly becoming unsustainable, suggesting a partition within the country, due to the rise of ethnic separatism. To put it in one of the commander's words: "We started in 1994 with less than one hundred soldiers, and now look at us with seven thousand freedom fighters willing to fight and die for the liberation of our people," says proudly the 50-year-old veteran commander. As it is true that Mr. Meles's government is fighting on many fronts, and his army cannot defeat these various rebellions throughout the country. Powerful Western allies, such as the United Kingdom, provide him with weapons and money to sustain the war effort, back him; while US funding also contribute to fight against terrorism in Ethiopia and contain Somalia's Islamic rise. However, it is well established that no terrorist operates in Ethiopia, but for many of his allies in the West, Ethiopia is seen as a Christian state with common values. This can block the spread of Islam in East Africa. This kind of Western strategies and political thought will surely continue to block any attempts by rebels to challenge the government, and its military institutions leading to their replacement.

http://www.winne.com/specialsections/2007/jonathan_alpeyrie/index.php

In Ethiopian Desert, Fear and Cries of Army Brutality

June 18, 2007

By **JEFFREY GETTLEMAN**

IN THE OGA DEN DESERT, Ethiopia — The rebels march 300 strong across the crunchy earth, young men with dreadlocks and AK-47s slung over their shoulders.

Often when they pass through a village, the entire village lines up, one sunken cheekbone to the next, to squint at them.

"May God bring you victory," one woman whispered.

This is the Ogaden, a spindle-legged corner of Ethiopia that the urbane officials in Addis Ababa, the capital, would rather outsiders never see. It is the epicenter of a separatist war pitting impoverished nomads against one of the biggest armies in Africa.

What goes on here seems to be starkly different from the carefully constructed up-and-coming image that Ethiopia — a country that the United States increasingly relies on to fight militant Islam in the Horn of Africa — tries to project.

In village after village, people said they had been brutalized by government troops. They described a widespread and longstanding reign of terror, with Ethiopian soldiers gang-raping women, burning down huts and killing civilians at will.

It is the same military that the American government helps train and equip — and provides with prized intelligence. The two nations have been allies for years, but recently they have grown especially close, teaming up last winter to oust an Islamic movement that controlled much of Somalia and rid the region of a potential terrorist threat.

The Bush administration, particularly the military, considers Ethiopia its best bet in the volatile Horn — which, with Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea, is fast becoming intensely violent, virulently anti-American and an incubator for terrorism.

But an emerging concern for American officials is the way that the Ethiopian military operates inside its own borders, especially in war zones like the Ogaden.

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 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."

Moualin, a rheumy-eyed elder, said Ethiopian troops stormed his village, Sasabene, in January looking for rebels and burned much of it down. "They hit us in the face with the hardest part of their guns," he said.

The villagers said the abuses had intensified since April, when the rebels attacked a Chinese-run oil field, killing nine Chinese workers and more than 60 Ethiopian soldiers and employees. The Ethiopian government has vowed to crush the rebels but rejects all claims that it abuses civilians.

"Our soldiers are not allowed to do these kinds of things," said Nur Abdi Mohammed, a government spokesman. "This is only propaganda and cannot be justified. If a government

soldier did this type of thing they would be brought before the courts.”

Even so, the State Department, the European Parliament and many human rights groups, mostly outside Ethiopia, have cited thousands of cases of torture, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killings — enough to raise questions in Congress about American support of the Ethiopian government.

“This is a country that is abusing its own people and has no respect for democracy,” said Representative Donald M. Payne, Democrat of New Jersey and chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa and global health.

“We’ve not only looked the other way but we’ve pushed them to intrude in other sovereign nations,” he added, referring to the satellite images and other strategic help the American military gave Ethiopia in December, when thousands of Ethiopian troops poured into Somalia and overthrew the Islamist leadership.

According to Georgette Gagnon, deputy director for the Africa division of Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia is one of the most repressive countries in Africa.

“What the Ethiopian security forces are doing,” she said, “may amount to crimes against humanity.”

Human Rights Watch issued a report in 2005 that documented a rampage by government troops against members of the Anuak, a minority tribe in western Ethiopia, in which soldiers ransacked homes, beat villagers to death with iron bars and in one case, according to a witness, tied up a prisoner and ran over him with a military truck.

After the report came out, the researcher who wrote it was banned by the Ethiopian government from returning to the country. Similarly, three New York Times journalists who visited the Ogaden to cover this story were imprisoned for five days and had all their equipment confiscated before being released without charges.

Ethiopia’s Tiananmen Square

In many ways, Ethiopia has a lot going for it these days: new buildings, new roads, low crime and a booming trade in cut flowers and coffee. It is the second most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa, behind Nigeria, with 77 million people.

Its leaders, many whom were once rebels themselves, from a neglected patch of northern Ethiopia, are widely known as some of the savviest officials on the continent. They had promised to let some air into a very stultified political system during the national elections of 2005, which were billed as a milestone on the road to democracy.

Instead, they turned into Ethiopia’s version of Tiananmen Square. With the opposition poised to win a record number of seats in Parliament, the government cracked down brutally, opening fire on demonstrators, rounding up tens of thousands of opposition supporters and students and leveling charges of treason and even attempted to kill top opposition leaders, including the man elected mayor of Addis Ababa.

Many opposition members are now in jail or in exile. The rest seem demoralized.

“There are no real steps toward democracy,” said Merera Gudina, vice president of the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces, a leading opposition party. “No real steps toward opening up space, no real steps toward ending repression.”

Ethiopian officials have routinely dismissed such complaints, accusing political protesters of stoking civil unrest and poking their finger into a well-known sore spot. Ethiopia has always had an authoritarian streak. This is a country, after all, where until the 1970s rulers claimed to be direct descendants of King Solomon. It is big, poor, famine-stricken, about half-Christian and half-Muslim, surrounded by hostile enemies and full of heavily armed separatist factions. As one high-ranking Ethiopian official put it, "This country has never been easy to rule."

That has certainly been true for the Ogaden desert, a huge, dagger-shaped chunk of territory between the highlands of Ethiopia and the border of Somalia. The people here are mostly ethnic Somalis, and they have been chafing against Ethiopian rule since 1897, when the British ceded their claims to the area.

The colonial officials did not think the Ogaden was worth much. They saw thorny hills and thirsty people. Even today, it is still like that. What passes for a town is a huddle of bubble-shaped huts, the movable homes of camel-thwacking nomads who somehow survive out here. For roads, picture Tonka truck tracks running through a sandbox. The primary elements in this world are skin and bone and sun and rock. And guns. Loads of them.

Camel herders carry rifles to protect their animals. Young women carry pistols to protect their bodies. And then there is the Ogaden National Liberation Front, the machine-gun-toting rebels fighting for control of this desiccated wasteland.

Rebels Live Off the Land

Lion. Radio. Fearless. Peacock. Most of the men have nicknames that conceal their real identities. Peacock, who spoke some English, served as a guide. He shared the bitter little plums the soldiers pick from thorn bushes — "Ogaden chocolate," he called them. He showed the way to gently skim water from the top of a mud puddle to minimize the amount of dirt that ends up in your stomach — even in the rainy season this is all there is to drink.

He pointed out the anthills, the coming storm clouds, the especially ruthless thorn trees and even a graveyard that stood incongruously in the middle of the desert. The graves — crude pyramids of stones — were from the war in 1977-78, when Somalia tried, disastrously, to pry the Ogaden out of Ethiopia's hands and lost thousands of men. "It's up to us now," Peacock said.

Peacock was typical of the rebels. He was driven by anger. He said Ethiopian soldiers hanged his mother, raped his sister and beat his father. "I know, it's hard to believe," he said. "But it's true."

He had the hunch of a broken man and a voice that seemed far too tired for his 28 years. "It's not that I like living in the bush," he said. "But I have nowhere else to go."

The armed resistance began in 1994, after the Ogaden National Liberation Front, then a political organization, broached the idea of splitting off from Ethiopia. The central government responded by imprisoning Ogadeni leaders, and according to academics and human rights groups, assassinating others. The Ogaden is part of the Somali National Regional State, one of nine ethnic-based states within Ethiopia's unusual ethnic-based federal system. On paper, all states have the right to secede, if they follow the proper procedures. But it seemed that the government feared that if the Somalis broke away, so too would the Oromos, the Afar and many other ethnic groups pining for a country of their own.

The Ethiopian government calls the Ogaden rebels terrorists and says they are armed and

trained by Eritrea, Ethiopia's neighbor and bitter enemy. One of the reasons Ethiopia decided to invade Somalia was to prevent the rebels from using it as a base.

The government blames them for a string of recent bombings and assassinations and says they often single out rival clan members. Ethiopian officials have been pressuring the State Department to add the Ogaden National Liberation Front to its list of designated foreign terrorist organizations. Until recently, American officials refused, saying the rebels had not threatened civilians or American interests.

"But after the oil field attack in April," said one American official who spoke on the condition of anonymity, "we are reassessing that."

American policy toward Ethiopia seems to be in flux. Administration officials are trying to increase the amount of non humanitarian aid to Ethiopia to \$481 million next year, from \$284 million this year. But key Democrats in Congress, including Mr. Payne, are questioning this, saying that because of Ethiopia's human rights record, it is time to stop writing the country a blank check.

In April, European Commission officials began investigating Ethiopia for war crimes in connection to hundreds of Somali civilians killed by Ethiopian troops during heavy fighting in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital.

Women Are Suffering the Most

In the Ogaden, it is not clear how many people are dying. The vast area is essentially a no-go zone for most human rights workers and journalists and where the Ethiopian military, by its own admission, is waging an intense counterinsurgency campaign.

The violence has been particularly acute against women, villagers said, and many have recently fled.

Asma, 19, who now lives in neighboring Somaliland, said she was stuck in an underground cell for more than six months last year, raped and tortured. "They beat me on the feet and breasts," she said. She was freed only after her father paid the soldiers ransom, she said, though she did not know how much.

Ambaro, 25, now living in Addis Ababa, said she was gang-raped by five Ethiopian soldiers in January near the town of Fik. She said troops came to her village every night to pluck another young woman.

"I'm in pain now, all over my body," she said. "I'm worried that I'll become crazy because of what happened."

Many Ogaden villagers said that when they tried to bring up abuses with clan chiefs or local authorities, they were told it was better to keep quiet.

The rebels said that's precisely why they attacked the Chinese oil field: to get publicity for their cause and the plight of their region (and to discourage foreign companies from exploiting local resources). According to them, they strike freely in the Ogaden all the time, ambushing military convoys and raiding police stations.

Mr. Mohammed, the government spokesman, denied that, saying the rebels "will not confront Ethiopian military forces because they are not well trained."

Expert or not, they are determined. They march for hours powered by a few handfuls of rice. They travel extremely light, carrying only their guns, two clips of bullets, a grenade and a tarp. They brag about how many Ethiopians they have killed, and every piece of their camouflage, they say, is pulled off dead soldiers. They joke about slaughtering Ethiopian troops the same way they slaughter goats.

Their morale seems high, especially for men who sleep in the dirt every night. Their throats are constantly dry, but they like to sing.

"A camel is delivering a baby today and the milk of the camel is coming," goes one campfire song. "Who is the owner of this land?"

Will Connors contributed reporting from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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