



Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council
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Ethiopia

**Written statement submitted by The Advocates for Human Rights,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status
pursuant to HRC resolution 5/1 of 18 June 2007**

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Advocates for Human Rights (AHR) is a volunteer-based non-governmental organization committed to the impartial promotion and protection of international human rights standards and the rule of law. AHR conducts a range of programs to promote human rights in the United States and around the world, including monitoring and fact finding, direct legal representation, education and training, and publications. AHR holds special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

AHR has worked extensively with members of the Ethiopian diaspora, both in the context of asylum and other immigration proceedings, and for purposes of documenting human rights conditions in Ethiopia. Since 2004, AHR has documented reports from members of the Oromo ethnic group living in diaspora in the United States of human rights abuses they and their friends and family experienced in Ethiopia.¹ AHR conducted over 70 interviews of Ethiopians, including Oromo and other ethnic group members; scholars; immigration attorneys; medical professionals; and other service providers working with Ethiopians in the United States. In addition, AHR monitors news and human rights reporting on events in Ethiopia.

Based on this information, AHR is gravely concerned about the continued human rights violations against the Oromo people committed by the Government of Ethiopia, as reported by Ethiopian nationals living in diaspora in the United States and by news media and human rights organizations monitoring conditions in Ethiopia. Despite credible, sustained reports of human rights abuses committed by the Ethiopian Government since coming to power in 1991, and a change in the elected prime minister in 2012, the Government of Ethiopia continues practices that violate its international human rights obligations and, in the view of many in the diaspora community, conditions have deteriorated since Ethiopia's initial UPR.

II. PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE GROUND

A. Implementation of international human rights obligations

1. Equality and non-discrimination

In practice, the Government of Ethiopia directly and indirectly discriminates against several disadvantaged ethnic groups, including but not limited to, the Oromo and the Annuak. This discrimination is often related to discrimination on the basis of real or perceived political opinion. Despite constituting a large portion of the Ethiopian population, the Oromo people face discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. While Ethiopia's Common Core Document contends that "[t]he Ethiopian legal system unequivocally guarantees equality before the law and the equal

protection of the law”, in practice there is pervasive discrimination on the basis of ethnicity with respect to rights under Ethiopia’s international obligations.²

2. Right to life, liberty and security of the person

Sustained persecution of Oromo people: Members of the Oromo ethnic group continue to report violations of human rights by the government. AHR received credible reports of continued arbitrary arrest, detention without charge, and torture of Oromos by the Government of Ethiopia. The perception of members of the diaspora community is that arrests have increased and conditions have worsened since the so-called “Arab Spring.”³

Members of the Oromo ethnic group report beatings, painful physical exercises, punishment, whipping of the feet, prolonged hanging by the arms or legs, and mock executions. Both men and women reported sexual violence including rape, assault with foreign objects, and electric shock to the genitals. Men reported having heavy weights hung from the genitals. Other gender-specific torture while in the detention centers was reported.⁴

Reports of mass arrests occur on a regular basis. These arrests are often arbitrary and for a prolonged basis without charge. By way of example, in March 2011, Ethiopian authorities carried out several waves of apparently politically motivated mass arrests of more than 200 ethnic Oromo Ethiopians. On March 30, 2011, the government confirmed that 121 were in detention without charge, alleging that they were members of the Oromo Liberation Front.⁵ Again, in 2012, hundreds of Oromo were arrested, accused of supporting the OLF.⁶ Over 100 people were reportedly arrested during the Oromo festival of Irreechaa in September 2012.⁷ Recently, many of these arrests are targeted to suppress peaceful Muslim protests, a sectarian divide introduced in a country that long was without divisions based on religious belief.⁸ Moreover, tens of thousands of Oromos continue to be held in prison without being charged or due process.⁹ One woman interviewed by AHR reported a history that is emblematic of thousands: her father has been periodically held for ransom by government officials and her aunt was badly beaten by government officials and left by the side of the road for three days without medical assistance when she was unable to produce her two sons (who had fled the country) when the government demanded them.¹⁰ Fear is rampant and widespread in the Oromo community.¹¹

Villagization: Numerous reports of human rights violations concern the Ethiopian Government’s “Villagization Program”. The Government is forcibly moving thousands of indigenous people throughout the country, including the Oromo people, from their homes. Reports indicate that the fertile farm lands on which these people have lived for generations are being sold to foreign and domestic investors.¹² The indigenous people are moved to areas where land is not suitable for agricultural use.¹³ Those who have resisted relocation have been subject to arrest, assault, rape and threats of violence.¹⁴ While, as part of the villagization program, the Government has promised to supply food and agricultural assistance as well as access to health facilities and educational institutions, numerous reports indicate that no such support is provided to many of those who are forced to relocate.¹⁵ Without access to proper infrastructure or basic necessities such as clean water, the relocated population has been subject to high rates of infant mortality as well as respiratory infections and diarrhea.¹⁶ There are numerous reports of hunger and starvation due to the lack of Government provided aid or land on which to farm. One woman reported that many indigenous families have become homeless as a result of villagization and are now left begging for food and money as a means for survival.¹⁷

3. Right to privacy, marriage and family life

Reports of violations of the right to privacy include surveillance, monitoring of telephone conversations, and interference with mail and e-mail. Regardless of the level of surveillance engaged in by the Government of Ethiopia, there continues to be a widespread belief among members of the Oromo diaspora that communications are monitored.¹⁸ There are reports of delays in receiving e-mail communications from Ethiopia and interception of e-mail communications into Ethiopia. As a result of these concerns, e-mail addresses are changed frequently. One interviewee reported that he never sends an e-mail to the same address more than one or twice if it contains information that might be private.¹⁹

4. Freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and right to participate in public and political life

Ethiopia's parliament passed a **Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies** in January 2009. Since that time, the law has led to an overwhelming reduction in the amount of human rights work undertaken within Ethiopia.²⁰ The law prohibits foreign agencies from working in the areas of human rights, equality, conflict resolution, and the rights of children.²¹ Local civil society organizations that receive more than ten percent of their funding from abroad, including from the Ethiopian diaspora, are also banned from working in these areas. As a result of the law, several organizations traditionally involved in human rights work altered their mandate away from human rights in order to continue receiving foreign funding.²² The few organizations that have maintained a human rights focus have been forced to substantially reduce their annual budget, in some cases by more than ninety percent.²³ Reports indicate that donors are increasingly fearful of aiding human rights organizations as the law prohibits organizations from keeping donor information confidential.²⁴ Moreover, the law has impeded civil society submissions to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other U.N. Treaty Bodies. And by erecting barriers to cooperation between Ethiopians in Ethiopia and those in the diaspora, the Proclamation interferes with the development of international cultural contacts and cooperation.²⁵

The parliament also passed the **Anti-Terrorism Proclamation** in 2009. The law is broad in application, as it uses vague language to define acts of terrorism. Reports indicate that the law has been used as a means to target government opposition.²⁶ Numerous journalists, opposing party members and political activists have been detained by the government under the law, and more than thirty have been convicted on vague charges of terrorism with prison sentences as long as 18 years.²⁷ Members of the Oromo community have reported that due to the implementation and enforcement of this law, a great sense of fear exists within Ethiopia and freedom of expression has become extremely limited.²⁸

The Anti-Terrorism Proclamation is widely viewed as a pretext to suppress opposition in a way that may be more palatable to the outside world.²⁹ The Ethiopian Government has attempted to stifle dissent by targeting civil society organizations that are perceived not to support the ruling party. In many situations, Oromos are assumed to support the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) unless they actively express support for the ruling party. Both individual Oromos and Oromo non-governmental organizations are subject to this pretextual targeting. For example, the Government shut down the Mecha Tulema Self-Help Association, an organization formed to promote Oromo culture, based on assertions that the organization was affiliated with the OLF. The Human Rights League, another Oromo human rights organization, faced similar treatment. One Oromo woman who runs a non-governmental organization reported to AHR that she has been subject to constant covert government monitoring and interference.³⁰

With only a handful of private radio stations in Ethiopia, the Government controls most broadcasting outlets and owns the internet ISP, allowing censorship by the government. According to Reporters Without Borders, the Ethiopian government has instituted a “legislative arsenal” that has eroded the democratic space and freedom of expression in Ethiopia.³¹

5. Right to work and to just and favorable conditions of work

Oromos report ongoing discrimination in exercising their right to work. These reports indicate that Oromos are arbitrarily denied business licenses on a frequent basis, and are subject to constant harassment by the police.³² Substantial discrimination in government and academic employment have been reported. The U.S. Department of State notes that “[i]nnumerable anecdotal reports suggest that non-EPRDF members were reportedly more likely to be transferred to undesirable posts and to be bypassed for promotions” and that there was “a lack of transparency in academic staffing decisions, with numerous complaints from individuals in the academic community of bias based on party membership, ethnicity, or religion.”³³ Students entering the workforce are heavily pressured, and in some instances have been required, to pledge allegiance to the EPRDF before employment is secured.³⁴ In interviews, members of the Oromo diaspora described a constant system of discrimination in obtaining employment. These members reported that often those in the Oromo community have to use alternate names on applications in order to remain competitive for government employment.³⁵

Through the villagization program, many of the displaced families are left without an avenue to pursue employment and are without the ability to maintain a livelihood. Villagers who rely on farming as means of survival have been sent to areas consisting of unfertile lands. These areas also lack adequate infrastructure for those displaced to obtain other employment. Additionally, as part of the program those displaced to new locations were forced to build new homes under the supervision of the army.³⁶ Reports indicate that army supervision included intimidation and the beating of villagers.³⁷ The villagers were not compensated for this work.³⁸

6. Right to education and to participate in the cultural life of the community

The U.S. Department of State reported that, although primary education in Ethiopia was universal, tuition free, and compulsory in policy, “there were not enough schools to accommodate the country’s youth, particularly in rural areas.”³⁹ The lack of access to education in rural areas has been felt even more so by the disadvantaged ethnic groups subject to villagization programs. Human Rights Watch reports that ethnic groups subject to villagization have been moved from villages where schools existed and were operational to villages where schools and other infra-structure are non-existent.⁴⁰ Diaspora Oromos reported particular concern about **restrictions on speaking Oromiffa, the Oromo language** and widespread discrimination against the Oromos.⁴¹

7. Minorities and indigenous peoples

Oromos face widespread hostility from members of other ethnic groups. Discrimination based on ethnicity is often related to discrimination on the basis of real or perceived political opinion with ethnic groups that are perceived to be politically unsupportive of the Government more likely to receive unfavorable treatment. Government appointed local administrative councils control access to food assistance and other state-distributed resources and are reported to use access as a “carrot and stick” to coerce allegiance and punish dissent.⁴² Suspected membership in the Oromo Liberation Front and the Counter Terrorism Law is used as a pretext for expulsion from school or arrest.⁴³ Oromos do not feel free to speak Oromiffa in public or use distinctively Oromo names

for fear of being targets of formal and informal discrimination.⁴⁴ The Government has also targeted prominent Oromo cultural figures for persecution.⁴⁵

¹ See The Advocates for Human Rights, *Human Rights in Ethiopia: Through the Eyes of the Oromo Diaspora* (December 2009), available at http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/oromo_report_2009_color.pdf.

² See The Advocates for Human Rights, *Ethiopia: Violations of the rights of the disadvantaged ethnic groups protected by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 48th session of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 30 April – 19 May 2012, Statement submitted by The Advocates for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with ECOSOC*, available at http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/the_advocates_for_human_rights_ethiopia_icescr_report.pdf (referred to as ICESCR Submission).

³ Interviews with Oromo diaspora members on September 4, 2013 and September 6, 2013.

⁴ The Advocates for Human Rights, *Human Rights in Ethiopia: Through the Eyes of the Oromo Diaspora*, *supra* note 1, at 27.

⁵ *Ethiopia: Free Opposition Members*, Human Rights Watch, April 6, 2011.

⁶ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Annual Report 2013 - Ethiopia*, 23 May 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/519f51a018.html>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Ethiopian Government Continue to Target Peaceful Muslim Protest Movement*, Amnesty International, February 2, 2012; See also Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2013; Briefing: Ethiopia's Muslim Protest*, IRIN November 15, 2012; *Ethiopia: Extreme Brutality against Civilians: Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa Appeal and Urgent Action*, August 10, 2013; *Ethiopia: Rights-Related Demands Risking Terrorism*, Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa, Press Release, July 27, 2012.

⁹ Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee*, 30 June 2011, AFR 25/003/2011, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4e1717452.html>; See also *Human Rights Violations against the Oromo Continues: Change without Improvement*, Garoma Wakessa, Director of International Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa, paper presented at Oromo Studies Association 2013 Annual Conference Program, Howard University, August 3 and 4, 2013.

¹⁰ Interview with Oromo diaspora member on September 6, 2013.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Human Rights Watch, “*Waiting Here for Death*”: *Forced Displacement and Villagization in Ethiopia's Gambella Region* (January 2012), available at http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia0112webwcover_0.pdf.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ ICESCR Submission, *supra* note 2, at paragraphs 42 through 60.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Interview with Oromo diaspora member on September 6, 2013.

¹⁸ Interview with Oromo diaspora member on September 4, 2013.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Amnesty International, *Stifling Human Rights Work, The Impact of Civil Society Legislation in Ethiopia*, (March 2012), available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/002/2012/en/3b0adc69-f0fd-4b43-9ff8-635073d60f44/afr250022012en.pdf>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ UPR Info, *Ethiopia Mid-term Implementation Assessment: Ethiopia*, July 2012, at 27.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2013: Ethiopia*.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Interviews with Oromo diaspora members on September 4, 2013 and September 6, 2013.

²⁹ Aljazeera: *The Oromo and the War on Terror in the Horn of Africa*, July 16, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/2013/07/20137143394329934.html>.

³⁰ UPR Info, *Ethiopia Mid-term Implementation Assessment: Ethiopia*, *supra* note 25, at 11.

³¹ BBC New Africa: Ethiopia profile, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13349498> (last visited June 19, 2013).

³² ICESCR Submission, *supra* note 2, at paragraphs 25 through 37.

³³ U.S. Dept. of State, Human Rights Reports, *Ethiopia* (2010), at 25, available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160121.pdf> (last visited September 6, 2013).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Interviews with Oromo diaspora members on September 4, 2013 and September 6, 2013; The Advocates for Human Rights, *Human Rights in Ethiopia: Through the Eyes of the Oromo Diaspora*, *supra* note 1, at 54.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, “*Waiting Here for Death*”, *supra* note 12.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ U.S. Dept. of State, Human Rights Reports, *Ethiopia*, *supra* note 33, at 45.

⁴⁰ UPR Info, *Ethiopia Mid-term Implementation Assessment: Ethiopia*, *supra* note 25, at 19, 24 and 25.

⁴¹ ICESCR Submission, *supra* note 2, at paragraphs 75 through 77.

⁴² IRIN, *Ethiopia Government Denies Food Aid Manipulated for Political Gain*, June 7, 2010,

<http://www.irinnews.org/report/89382/ethiopia-government-denies-food-aid-manipulated-for-political-gain>

⁴³ ICESCR Submission, *supra* note 2, at paragraph 72.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, at paragraph 76.

⁴⁵ *Id.*, at paragraph 77.