



Oromo Studies Association

OSA Appeal On the Repeated Killings of Oromo immigrants in Bassaso, Puntland.

To: Mr. António Guterres,

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Case Postale 2500
CH-1211 Genève 2 Dépôt

Re: Massacre of Oromo Refugees in Bassaso, Puntland (Somalia)

Dear Commissioner Guterres,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA), a scholarly, multi-disciplinary, nonprofit organization, established to promote studies on and relevant to the Oromo people. The Executive Committee of OSA is deeply concerned about the repeated and orchestrated killings of innocent Oromo immigrants in Bassaso, Puntland, a breakaway region of Somalia, in which a total of at least 67 Oromos lost their lives and hundreds others severely wounded and left with out any medical attention.

The killings occurred on two separate occasions. The recent killing was on Tuesday, December 01, 2009, reportedly committed when assailants in a small car threw a hand grenade at a cinema in the city center where people mostly from Oromo community were watching films. While the reported number of casualties vary, OSA has [received](#) credible information that at least two of the three people reported dead are Oromo immigrants and some 18 Oromos have been severely wounded. Many of the wounded are reportedly left with out medical treatment and currently appealing to Oromo communities abroad through different media outlets. An earlier killing which occurred some two years ago, on 02/05/2009, was rather a massacre. The incident took place when two grenades were thrown at innocent Oromo refugees who were watching video in Afan Oromo language at two hotels owned by two Oromo refugees in the same city of Bassaso. According to reports gathered from several unrelated sources such as [Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa](#) (HRLHA), an independent human rights group, Radio Voice of America

Afan Oromo service, radio Voice of Oromo Liberation (VOL), and several websites, [65 Oromos were brutally murdered and more than 100 others](#) were injured in this incident. Among international news outlets, Reuters reported that *at least 20* were killed and over 100 were injured. Some other sources have also reported that about 250 homes have been burned to the ground leaving several other Oromo refugees without shelter. Many of those injured are reported to have been left without any medical attention. HRLHA has also published the names of [59 Oromos](#) who are among the injured on its website.

Dear Mr. Commissioner,

Many Oromos are forced to flee to neighboring countries because they are unable to live in peace in their own homeland. The current government of Ethiopia, led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has a [well-documented record](#) of gross human right violations. Particularly, many Oromos are subjected to [widespread imprisonment, torture, and arbitrary killing](#) due to alleged support of Oromo political groups opposed to the government, mainly the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Many local and international humanitarian and governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, [Human Rights Watch](#), the [US States Department](#) have consistently reported on their respective yearly reports, the extensive human right violations perpetrated on the Oromos by the current regime in Ethiopia.

Even school children are not spared from gross human right abuses. Just to mention few, according to [Human Rights Watch](#), in January, 2007 more than thirty students were rounded up and arrested, and at least one died as a result of police beatings in Dembi Dollo, Western Oromia, about 700 kilometers west of the capital, Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). The others are severely injured and hospitalized. During the same time, local police and militia members in Ghimbi town shot two high school students dead, one as he and others were walking peacefully along, the other as he covered the body of the first with his own to protect him from further harm. In February, 2007, Ethiopian security officials are reported to have secretly killed 19 men prisoners and a 14-year-old girl prisoner in Miesso, northeastern Oromia, and thrown their body into a jungle known as [Gaara Suufii](#). Several days later the news of their killing leaked out and the local people were able to search for the bodies, the remaining bones of which have been eaten by wild animals, and buried them. The list of [atrocities and killings goes on and on](#).

Massive arrests have been a day to day experience in Oromia, especially since the current regime came to power in 1991. Tens of thousands of Oromos are reported to have been regularly rounded up and sent to jail. Many of them face torture and many others are executed, according to

several credible reports. A reliable testimony to such atrocities committed on the Oromos is that, Mr. Seye Abraha, the founder, former political bureau member of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and a former Defense Minister of the regime now ruling Ethiopia, who got out of 'Qaliti' prison (One of known huge detention and torture centre in Ethiopia) after six years spoke out to Ethiopian in Diaspora on January 5, 2008 at Virginia, (USA) by saying "The Prison Speaks Oromiffa" (Oromo language). Mr. Seye added saying "about 99% of the prisoners in 'Qaliti' are Oromos".

A large number of Oromos are forced to leave their home and take refugee in Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, Sudan, Eritrea and Yemen due to fear of such massive arrest, harassment, torture, disappearance and arbitrary executions. Unfortunately, they have not been safe even after they flee to neighboring countries. The current Bassaso killing and the 2008 Bassaso massacre are just few of such examples. Just to mention a few reported cases, in 2003, a well respected Boorana Oromo, Mr. Halakhee Diidoo was [reported to have been killed by Ethiopian security forces](#) in the town of Moyale, Kenya. In 2004, Mr. Areeroo Galgaloo was reported to have been gunned down in the same town. On September 4, 2007, the Ethiopian government security forces are reported to have crossed to a neighboring Kenyan town of Moyale and murdered Mr. Gaaromsaa Abdisaa, a resident of Moyale town, Kenya, for alleged ties with the OLF. On the same day, the body of an Oromo woman believed to have been murdered by the same "killing-squad" was found in the same town. What is more disturbing is that these Oromos are reported to have been murdered in broad day light, right in front of the Kenyan Government office, and the killers are reported to have been returned to the Ethiopian side of the border, full of Military track, without any question from the Kenyan authorities. On November 06, 2007, 10 Oromo refugees were reported to have been executed in their apartment in Nairobi Kenya. There are reports that the suspected killers are likely the Ethiopian security agents, many Oromos believe that there is no other entity that would kill these Oromos other than the Ethiopian hidden intelligence forces and known by many as "killing-squads".

Dear Mr. Commissioner,

We fear that the reported massacres in Bassaso, Puntland are very likely an extension of the systematical killings of Oromo refugees committed by the current regime in Ethiopia and its allies in neighboring countries over the years. The current authorities in Puntland, Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti, and Sudan have always been allied with the Ethiopian authorities in targeting Oromo refugees resulting in arrest, torture, disappearance, killing, and most commonly forcefully deporting and handing the refugees back to the Ethiopian authorities. Frustrated by

their situation in Puntland and Somalia, many Oromos catch a boat across the Gulf of Aden and risk the treacherous crossing every year [and hundreds die when overloaded boats](#) capsize or sink.

The Oromo Studies Association, OSA, therefore, appeal to the UNHCR, all UN member nations, humanitarian, governmental and non-governmental organizations to put necessary pressure on the Puntland and Somalian authorities to protect the life of refugees in their respective territories. We demand that the perpetrators of the Bassaso massacres be hunted down and brought to justice. We call upon all governmental and non-governmental organizations to put pressure on the Ethiopian authorities to stop harassing, torturing, and killing Oromos and respect their basic human rights at home and in neighboring countries.

Sincerely,

Haile Hirpa, Ph.D.

President, Oromo Studies Association

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USA

CC:

1. His Excellency Mr. Ban K-Moon

Secretary-General, United Nations

Office of the Secretary General

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2. Madam Secretary, Hilary Clinton

U.S. Department of State

2201 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20520

3. Honourable Prime Minister

Mr Gordon Brown
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4. Amnesty International USA

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5. Human Rights Watch

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