

June 24, 2008

The Honorable Dr. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Massacre in Western Oromia, Ethiopia

Honorable Secretary,

I am writing this letter to you on behalf of the Oromo Community Organization (OCO) of Washington Metropolitan Area, a nonprofit organization established to help its members become productive citizens in America as well as to promote the historical and cultural heritage of the Oromo people.

Our community is deeply shocked by the massacre of innocent Oromo farmers in Western Oromia (Ethiopia) that erupted on May 17, 2008. The specific target of the massacre are Oromos living in valleys of two major tributaries of the Blue Nile within Diga, Sasiga, and Limu districts of Eastern Wallaga, Western Oromia. While there have been varying estimates on the number of casualties, there is no question that many innocent civilians have lost their lives and many more have been displaced:

- Oromo based organizations such as the International Oromo Youth Association (IOYA), and the Oromo Parliamentarians Council have estimated the number of fatalities at around 400 and the number of those internally displaced at around 15,000 people.
- Sudan Tribune, an independent news outlet, in its report on May 24, 2008, has reported that “over 130 people died and about 8,000 people have been internally displaced”, “that the conflict is still going on and people are dying, houses and properties are being burned down daily and, further noted that “the Ethiopian government officials have declined giving the official number of the victims of the conflict so far”.
- The Ethiopian government, after a long period of denial, has most recently admitted that 25 people were killed in this incident, a gross under reporting of the number of deaths and displacement that have occurred.

The massacre is reported to have started when a well trained and armed neighboring Gumuz militia crossed over from their regional state of Benishangul Gumuz state to Oromia state and attacked villages before day break. Many of the reports also indicate that the massacre was shockingly and incredibly heinous. Reports have noted that¹the attackers’ actions included:

¹ See for instance an appeal from the Oromo Parliamentarians Council to the UN General Secretary May 28, 2008.

- mutilation of body parts (arms, legs, other organs of children, breasts of women, male genitals), slaughtering by throat cutting;
- raping of women and children, snatching of infant babies from mothers' backs and killing them,
- burning down of houses and other properties, looting of properties including animals; and,
- burning of dead bodies in masses, to make access to information impossible.

According to sources close to the districts where the massacre took place, there are several wounded victims of the attack that are in need of intensive medical care. The displaced people have lost their entire property through destruction and looting by the attackers. Some of the displaced are in makeshift camps in Nekemte, the regional capital, while some others are staying in village schools that are known to have no basic facilities for living. There is no information whether the government or charitable groups have been able to provide basic means of subsistence for the displaced people.

Many Oromos know in their hearts that this massacre – as several others before it – has been the work of the Ethiopian regime. The Gumuz militia that is deployed to attack the neighboring Oromo villages – like all other regional militias – are organized and led by the local chapter of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's ruling party. The underlying motive is to take control of the land. As noted by the [Sudan Tribune](#), “the local Oromo residents suspect both the regional state of Benishangul Gumuz and central government have role in arming and mobilizing the Gumuz to attack them”.

We fear that as these incidents go unchallenged, and the systematical killings and human rights abuses of the Oromo continue on a massive scale, the making of a national genocide against the Oromo is taking root in Ethiopia.

Dear Dr. Rice,

This incident in East Wallaga is only a continuation of the long-held practice of massive human rights abuses and political repressions against the Oromo people by the current Ethiopian regime led by Prime Minister Zenawi's ruling party. Reputable international human right groups, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have registered pervasive violations of human right committed against the Oromo people. Based on reliably attested Communications received from multiple sources, UN agencies responsible for enforcement of international treaties and covenants on human rights have undertaken review process regarding the situation in Oromia, including the following:

- In September 2004 the UN Commission on Human Rights, based on a reliably attested Communication regarding egregious violations of human rights committed against the Oromos, informed the Ethiopian government that the matter was under review.

- In March 2006 when the situation in Oromia and Anyak was “Under Review Procedure” of UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, it was noted that the current Ethiopian regime had not submitted periodic report from the time it came to power through 2005 and that “there was no core document on Ethiopia”, thus denying the treaty body one of the principal mechanisms by which it monitors the government’s compliance with its obligations under the treaty.
- Refugees International reported in 12/29/04 that, in an area known as Nachsar in Southern Oromia, 1,025 Guji Oromo pastoral families (- a total of about 10,000 people and their livestock –) were evicted by the government from their ancestral land on which they depended for their livelihood.

As repeatedly confirmed by reports from reputed human rights groups, the violation continues unabated. Evidently, the pressures from the UN agencies and from advocacy groups have not proved sufficient to change the current Ethiopian government’s policy of repression against the Oromo people, unless the international community honors its responsibility to intervene and protect all segments of the Oromo people against mass murder and ethnic cleansing.

Dear Honorable Madam Secretary,

The Oromo Community Organization, therefore, appeals to your esteemed office to use the international stature and leverage of the US Government to:

- a. prevent the violence from spreading and causing widespread loss of life and humanitarian disaster,
- b. provide humanitarian relief for those in immediate need of food, shelter, and medical attention,
- c. immediately initiate investigation and identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice before evidence is lost or tampered with.

We thank you very much for initiatives you may take to achieve timely and effective actions to prevent mass murder and ethnic cleansing being committed against the Oromo people.

Respectfully,

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CC:

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