

Unconditionally Stop Violence against Peacefully Protesting Oromo Civilians in Ethiopia

Press Release

By Sidama National Liberation Front (SNLF)

Since end of November 2015, the Oromo high school and university students and wider Oromo civilians across the Oromia region have staged peaceful protests against the Finfinnee “Master Plan” that will incorporate the city and the surrounding areas in the Oromia region inhabited by the Oromo farmers. The students, the Oromo people, and local Oromo opposition political parties condemn the “Master Plan” as a plan for a land grab that will lead to displacement of millions of the Oromo farmers plunging them into poverty and destitution. The Oromo people claim that hundreds of farmers have already been displaced by the scrupulous development plans that have no regard to the indigenous Oromo inhabitants surrounding the city.

Peaceful protests by high school and university students and wider Oromo civilians in the Oromia region who are echoing legitimate grievances against the illegal evictions of the Oromo farmers are being met with extraordinary violence and brutality by the Ethiopian federal police, military and security forces. According to the latest reports over 45 peacefully protesting high school and university students and civilians have been killed across the Oromia region so far. Several hundreds have been wounded and thousands have been extra-judiciary arrested. Article 30 sub article (1) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states that “Everyone has the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed, and to petition.” In a clear contravention to the supreme law of the land, the security forces continue to unleash massive violence against peaceful and unarmed civilians expressing their democratic right to denounce unfair treatments of the most vulnerable sections of their society. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the massacre of over 45 peaceful Oromo students and civilians protesting against the illegal eviction of their farmers and any future use of force against the civilians.

The Oromo nation is the single largest nation in Ethiopia constituting nearly 40% of the total population of 96 million people in 2014. Nonetheless, it has endured unbearable political and economic marginalization since the Oromo and other oppressed peoples were incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire at the end of the 19th century. What we are witnessing today is further intensification of the violations of the basic human and democratic rights of the Oromo nation and other oppressed nations of the south.

The plan to expand garrison cities such as Finfinnee and Hawassa at the expense of the indigenous inhabitants living on the adjacent lands reflect an absolute lack of concern for the survival and livelihood securities of the local people. In Sidama the Federal government is said to have finalized a plan to confiscate 15 kms of land from the Sidama farmers to expand the Hawassa city in all four directions. Over 42 Sidama farmers who have recently resisted

eviction are currently languishing in prisons in Hawassa town. Over 80% of the indigenous Ethiopian peoples in rural areas sharing similar fate. In the same manner the Oromo people living adjacent to Finfinnee are being displaced in the name of “development projects” the Sidama farmers on the lands adjacent to Hawassa city are being displaced to give way to the so-called Industrial parks, Hotels, Airports, and resorts from which have never and will never benefit. We are not opposed to modernization and economic development. We are of the view that development should benefit the people living on the land first. The obsession about the expansion of the garrison cities in Oromia and Sidama is not born out of a genuine concern for economic development. These are well crafted policies to erode the nominal regional autonomy granted to the various oppressed nations in the country.

The Oromo civilians are echoing the causes of all oppressed peoples in the country. They are echoing the grievances not only of the Oromo people but also of the Sidama people and farmers who are undergoing the same agonizing experiences as the Oromo farmers. Therefore, we call up on all Sidama University and high school students and the wider Sidama community to join the peaceful protest by the Oromo people as a matter of urgency. We understand that universities in Sidama have been locked down by security forces since the Oromo student protests began three weeks ago. Nonetheless, this are trying times for both Oromo and Sidama nations and we should persevere. We shall not have been locked down and barred from exercising our democratic rights peacefully.

We also call up on the United Nations, United States, UK, Germany, China, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the European Union, and the African Union to exert pressure on the Ethiopian government to immediately halt the use of violence against peaceful Oromo civilians echoing legitimate grievances about the livelihood securities of their people of Oromia.

Finally, on behalf of the Sidama people, the Sidama National Liberation Front expresses deepest condolences for the tragic losses of the lives of peaceful students in Oromia in the past weeks and today.

Sidama National Liberation Front

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