

The Sidama Owned Small Businesses on Fire in Hawassa

Press Statement by United Sidama Parties for Freedom and Justice

February 24, 2015

It's with deepest sadness that the United Sidama Parties for Freedom and Justice (USPFJ) express its heart felt condolences for the Sidama small scale business owners in Hawassa city New market place ' Addis Gebeya' for loss of lives and property. The source of the fire has not yet been confirmed.

The incident took place on 21 February 2015 at 7 pm local time. The Fire has been left on to burn for over 2 hours. The Sidama business community who have set up these new businesses in this particular place over a decade ago had registered their plots of lands as they have been pushed away far from the city centre to give room for investors from other parts of the country.

We also condemn the slow response from the fire brigade in the region. The response of the fire brigade was awfully inadequate. The inept Fire Brigade only arrived 105 minutes after the fire has engulfed the entire shopping areas, shops and residential homes attached to these. The Fire Brigade has been delayed for a lengthy period of time to arrive at a place less than 4 kilometres away. Moreover, peoples from the neighbouring villages and neighbourhoods have been denied access to the area by police officers who have been seen blocking the entrances from all corners until all shops and attached houses have been totally burned down to ashes.

To date, the number of dead Sidama people has exceeded a dozen by the time we've published this press release; and the bodies of dead Sidama have been kept in the Hawassa municipality morgue and the identification process of the bodies is also difficult as they have been burnt beyond recognition. The material cost of this accident is estimated to be over hundreds of millions of Birr. Ironically the burnt out empty place is being guarded by the federal police to confirm that the previous owners are unlikely to be allowed to their places. As a result there is a suspicion among the Sidama people that the fire might have been deliberately ignited to destroy the properties to allocate the plots to other "investors."

The fire began burning an entire market place mainly owned by the Sidama small scale traders who have been as mentioned above pushed out of Hawassa city centre which became a hot cake for the central rulers who have all considered Hawassa, a resort town for their personal entertainment. In Hawassa, the rulers spend their honeymoon, spare times and hold a special national and international conferences; with very little or nothing trickling down to the real stake holders, the Sidama people. Instead, the Sidama people are pushed away and punished by this very regime time and again

including the May 24, 2002 massacre of over 70 confirmed Sidama civilians who demanded their constitutional rights to regional self-determination; at the exact place where the Sidama market has been burnt out on the aforementioned date. The regimes federal as well as regional anti-Sidama cadres work day and night to deny the Sidama nation their rights to regional self-administration. The destruction of the livelihood of the Sidama People might have been planned behind the scene to remove them from their ancestral land of Hawassa step by step; although this will never happen as the Sidama people will never give up an inch from their land.

About a week ago the Sidama farmer known as 'Hussein Kadir', who is the father of numerous children has been ordered by the Hawassa investment office cadres both Dehidin and SPDO's to vacate his land for an investor. The land he has been asked to leave was the one on which his ancestors have lived and inherited to him. His livelihood depends on these plots of land as are his numerous children and family members. As he has been ordered, to leave his land for investors, he decides to climb onto a tree near his house and told the cadres that he would rather commits suicide than allowing his land to be taken by strangers. He vowed that unless the regime stops ordering him to leave his ancestors land, he never climbs down. After spending few days on the top of the tree (see bottom picture), the regime persuaded him through customary elders negotiations by promising to give him a place to live in, in Hawassa's city administration owned place. It came to our attention that he has been indeed managed to get something for his family members and moved to a new place. This isn't a separate incident; but it's a daily phenomenon the Sidama farmers around the outskirts of Hawassa and all over the region are subjected to.

It's the saddest era for the Sidama nation as it is for the other subjugated nations in a number of ways. The Sidama people for their first time in their history become beggars in their own soil as their main livelihood security around Hawassa, their land, has been taken away from them little by little to serve the interests of those who are enslaving the nation. Nevertheless, the Sidama nation never rests until its quest for freedom, justice, equality and self-governances are fully respected.

The USPFJ send its deepest and heartfelt condolences to the Sidama families and others (if any), who lost their properties and lives in Hawassa's Addis Gebeya Market fire. We emphatically condemn the manner in which the local and regional governments managed the fire incident. Those who have planned, ordered, masterminded and implemented such abhorring crimes against humanity can't escape

from justice sooner or later in a free Sidama land. The Sidama nation must remain extra



vigilant and united at this trying times.

May the souls of unlawfully burnt Sidama martyrs rest in peace!!

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