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Written statement* submitted by Elizka Relief Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Indigenous People's Rights in Ethiopia

Background:

Indigenous people have been suffering from discrimination and racism for so long, and they have not been able to enjoy all their basic human rights due to multiple reasons, including climate change, armed conflicts, and developmental projects that are being established on their lands without their consent.

The Ethiopian government does not prioritize indigenous people and does little to nothing to improve their situation. Furthermore, they violate their rights in many ways and subject them to oppression and marginalization.

In this context, Elizka Relief Foundation highlights some of the key violations that were committed against indigenous people in Ethiopia, particularly after signing the 2022 Peace Agreement between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to end the war that broke out in 2020 and resulted in catastrophic losses.

The Contribution concludes with a set of recommendations that we believe are necessary to improve the situation of indigenous people in Ethiopia. These recommendations are presented within the framework of strengthening cooperation between African and UN regional bodies.

Violations of Indigenous People's Rights in Ethiopia

1. Security and Increasing Violence

Throughout the recent armed conflict in Ethiopia, indigenous populations were suffering from lack of security and various attacks by armed groups that threatened their lives and well-being; many people have been killed, severely injured, or displaced in search of peace, food, and water.

In the Amhara region, the security situation has worsened, especially after the government's announcement to reintegrate regional special forces into regular security forces in April 2023. Following this announcement, at least five civilians were killed in Shoa Robit and Rasa, Northern Shoa Zone, on May 23, 2023. Kobo town and other areas also faced violent acts recently as a result of the Ethiopian National Defense Force's operation against Fano fighters to force them out of the town.⁽³⁾ There have been constant confrontations between the two sides, and in some cases, clashes were armed and fire was exchanged.⁽⁴⁾ Many people sustained injuries, including ones caused by heavy weapons and gunshots.⁽⁵⁾ On their part, Fano fighters participated in violent protests and caused damages.⁽⁶⁾

2. Arbitrary Arrests and Forced Disappearances

Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in November 2022 between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (NDF) and the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF), many cases of arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances have been reported, particularly in the Oromia and Amhara regions. These arrests and disappearances were justified by the Ethiopian government as a temporary yet necessary step caused by the deteriorating security situation.

In Amhara, the NDF has often taken people from their homes or workplaces with no court orders or arrest warrants, and kept them in unknown locations for prolonged periods that may extend to months. Some of them appeared later and were sent to regular places of detention, and others remained forcibly disappeared. In many cases, the detainees were held in unofficial places of detention, such as military camps, and they were denied their rights to know the charges against them or receive visits. The majority of people who face arbitrary detention or forced disappearance are media personnel, members of opposition political parties, members of civil society groups and activists.

In Oromia, people were subjected to similar violations. Many people, especially from opposition political parties such as the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), were forcibly disappeared and detained by regional security forces.

3. Violations Committed by Eritrean Forces:

Eritrean troops were a main participant in the Tigray war, and they still play a major role in preventing Tigray people from enjoying their basic human rights.

After the cessation of hostilities due to the Peace Agreement signed between the Ethiopian government and forces of Tigray, foreign troops represented in Eritrean forces were expected to withdraw from all regions they were in. However, Eritrean troops still occupy some Ethiopian areas, mainly in Irob, which is located in the Tigray region.(12) People from Irob and Golomkeda, which is located next to Irob, are being subjected to kidnapping, forced disappearance, and looting by the Eritrean troops.(13)

The Eritrean troops also violated the right of movement(14) by blocking the roads and restricting movement, which prevented international aid from reaching the people in need and forced many schools and hospitals to shut down. In addition, farmers are unable to buy their agricultural fertilizers and equipment necessary for new planting seasons, which aggravates the suffering of Irob people in terms of securing their sources of food and livelihood. (15)

The occupation of Eritrean forces is considered an act of ethnic cleansing; it is believed that its purpose is to force the people of Irob outside their own place so that they are forced to stop using their language and eliminate their culture.(16) The same scenario was reiterated with the Tigrayan people, as local authorities and Amhara forces have been forcing them out of the western Tigray zone, despite the November 2022 truce agreement that was meant to cease the war and all violations.(17)

4. Torture of Detained Persons

Detainees in regions like Addis Ababa, Oromia, and Amhara face severe torture in detention; many of them sustained grave injuries like loss of teeth or loss of hearing, and others were subjected to physical beatings during interrogations.

Militia groups, alongside the police and the regional special forces in towns like Bahir Dar, Gondar, Debre Tabor, Woreta, also detained people and subjected them to physical torture during interrogations.

Recommendations

1. Elizka Relief Foundation recommends the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous people to collaborate and join efforts to address the situation of indigenous people in Ethiopia, especially in light of the recent armed conflict between the Ethiopian federal government and Eritrea on one side and TPLF on the other. In addition, the Foc reform the laws and policies that protect the rights of indigenous people in Ethiopia is a highly recommended matter.
2. Elizka Relief Foundation recommends the Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities in Africa and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to exchange information on the culture of indigenous people in Ethiopia and the challenges they face, in order to generate ideas and recommendations to preserve, support and promote their culture.

3. Elizka Relief Foundation recommends that all international and regional organizations that provide humanitarian aid for people who are suffering due to the war in Ethiopia, collaborate by delivering aid through the organizations or the individuals that can get into the restricted areas, to be able to reach all impacted regions, particularly the ones that are being blocked and prevented from receiving any aid.
4. Elizka Relief Foundation suggests the development of an economic plan that prioritizes indigenous people and their development, with collaboration between the African committee and the United Nations High-level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs, and to be proposed to the government of Ethiopia, in order to include indigenous people in the economic process and give them more space to participate in important fields in the country, which we believe will eventually lead to more harmony and understanding between different groups in the Ethiopian society.

3- Endeshaw, Dawit “Ethiopian military clashes with militia in Amhara, injuries reported”, Reuters, August 2023. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/ed6xkjjes>

4- Ibid.

5- Ibid.

6- Ibid.

12- “‘People are under siege’: why Ethiopia’s war in Tigray isn’t over”, The Guardian, August 2023. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p85w8nw>

13- Ibid.

14- “Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 13” United Nations. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/ynus9am6>

15- “‘People are under siege’: why Ethiopia’s war in Tigray isn’t over”, The Guardian, August 2023. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/2p85w8nw>

16- Ibid.

17- U. Ochab, Ewelina “Tigrayans Continue To Be Targeted In Ethiopia Despite The Ceasefire”, Forbes, June 2023. Retrieved from: <https://tinyurl.com/4ytjmdsw>