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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, 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.

[29 August 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The disastrous impact of the European Union's Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative on human rights

EU Governments are favoring the use of political and economic incentives for states in the Horn of Africa to prevent migration from that area to Europe. Regarding the humanitarian disaster in the Mediterranean it's certainly urgent to find a solution to the refugee and migration crisis. The EU – Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative, better known as the “Khartoum Process”, was officially launched in November 2014. The process intends to effectively tackle human smuggling and trafficking by providing more resources to states in the Horn of Africa to protect their frontiers, to support refugee accommodation and professional training and to launch campaigns against human trafficking.

Internal papers of the EU have documented that EU's special interest is not focusing on human rights but on “stable” political conditions in the Horn of Africa and in the prevention of the arrival of more refugees and migrants in Europe. Society for Threatened Peoples is deeply concerned about this cooperation with Governments of Ethiopia, Sudan and Eritrea because it will legitimize these governments which systematically are denying basic human rights to their own citizens and to refugees. We are doubting that this approach will lead to significantly reduce the number of refugees in the EU, because the new “partners” in Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea are a major factor causing the refugee crisis with their deliberate denial of human rights. Sudan and Ethiopia have been presented by the EU as countries of transit for refugees. But in reality thousands of Ethiopian and Sudanese refugees are leaving their country every month due to continued fighting in the Darfur provinces, South Kordofan and Blue Nile in Sudan and due to the harsh crackdown of peaceful protesters in the provinces of Oromia and Amhara in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia and Sudan are not the solution to the refugee crisis, but directly responsible for a massive increase in refugee and Internal Displaced People's (IDP) figures in the region. Since January 2016 some 200,000 Darfuris especially in the Jebel Mara Mountains had to leave their homes due to aerial bombings by Sudanese Air Force, intimidation and massive human rights violations by Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Most of these IDP's don't have the financial means to seek for protection in Europe. Therefore they are mostly staying as IDP in Central Sudan, waiting for an opportunity to leave this country which denies their basic human rights and encourages more armed conflict in Darfur.

The RSF militia has been created in 2014 and regroups many leading former Janjaweed militias which were responsible for crimes against humanity in Darfur since the beginning of armed conflict in the year 2003. Today RSF is operating not only with state approval, but officially is part of the National State Security Services (NISS). Every week during this summer 2016, new rapes or other attacks on civilians, committed by the RSF-militia, have been registered in Darfur and South Kordofan. The EU keeps quiet regarding the massive human rights violations by the Sudanese Army and the RSF, even than there are increasing risks that refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea will be deported to their home country, facing torture, long prison terms or the death penalty. That's an obvious reaction to the partnership deal with the Sudan and encourages Sudanese security officials to commit more human rights violations.

Some 1,000 members of RSF have been sent to the Libyan frontier in order to ensure better protection of the frontier and an effective fight against human trafficking. Several times in July and August, leading RSF commanders have been reporting to the Sudanese media at press conferences in the capital Khartoum that they have arrested more than 1.000 refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea and other countries. Many arrested were Oromo people fleeing from massive persecution after the crackdown on peaceful protesters in Ethiopia.

The EU's approach to the Horn of Africa is cynical: Instead of fighting against the root causes of the refugee crisis and urging regional governments to respect good governance and basic human rights, the EU cooperates with the perpetrators of massive human rights violations. This policy violates basic principles of EU Foreign Policy and its commitment to human rights, it's not only shameful, but also misleading because it's denying the real roots of the refugee crisis in the Horn of Africa.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to urge the European Union:

- To abandon its ill-conceived EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative,
 - To ensure that the Government of Sudan respects the non-refoulement principle of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention,
 - To appeal to the Sudanese Government to immediately dissolve the RSF militia,
 - To ensure that no European funds could be abused by Ethiopia and Sudan to terrorize the civilian population,
 - To guarantee protection for political asylum seekers from Ethiopia and Sudan.
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