



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX February 2017

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-four session

Agenda item 5

Human rights bodies and mechanisms

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.

[13 February 2017]

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

Minority rights denied in Ethiopia

The systematic denial of participation rights, democracy and basic human rights for ethnic nationalities in Ethiopia has provoked public protests since November 2015, which were brutally crushed by regular security forces. Especially in the Oromia region, the human rights situation has deteriorated massively, after the government announced in 2014 that it wanted to extend the capital Addis Ababa into the neighboring Oromia region. Fearing an additional loss of land, livelihood and identity, Oromo people who blamed the government since decades for ethnic discrimination, denial of their cultural rights and systematic persecution of their leading representatives in society and politics, started broad based public protests. The security authorities reacted with massive repression. In a demonstration in Ambo in April 2014 some 72 people were killed by the security forces. After new negotiations failed in autumn 2015, the crisis escalated with a brutal crackdown of new public protests by high school and university students in November 2015. Some 102 Oromo protesters have died in 2015 due to the excessive use of violence by security forces.

In the year 2016, the already tense situation in Oromia turned for the worse. Until August 2016, most protests were peaceful, but the reaction of the security forces even became more violent. Between January and November 2016 some 1,855 Oromo people died due to the excessive use of violence, torture and inhuman treatment by official security forces. Some 50,000 regular and special army staff was deployed in the region to control the population, harass supposed opponents and to stop the public protests. Despite this massive deployment of security forces the protests have spread all over Oromia region. On August 6, 2016, there were public protests in more than 200 cities across Oromia. Even the major roads between the capital and towns in rural areas became blocked. Protests and blockades had a heavy impact on public transport and the commerce, many Oromo farmers refused to deliver products to the Non-Oromo population in the bigger cities.

The situation further escalated after at least 678 Oromo died in the Irreecha massacre at Hora Arsadi near Bishoftu town on October 2, 2016. It's a traditional Oromo religious and cultural festival, in which some 2 to 3 million people regularly participate. But in the year 2016, the pilgrimage ended in a catastrophe because the authorities were insisting to use the ceremony for political purposes despite former commitments to avoid political statements. The abuse of the religious ceremony incited protests of the two million participants. Ethiopia's security forces fired tear gas and bullets in the crowd and provoked a panic which has led to the violent death of hundreds of people. The tragedy has caused much frustration and anger among Oromo people. Their protests sometimes became violent. The government declared a state of emergency prohibiting public protests, free speech on the background of the crisis and any exchange of critical information by social media. Mass arrests of young Oromo followed, in the first week after the state of emergency was declared some 283 Oromos have died in brutal crackdown. Leading political Oromo representatives as Prof. Merera Gudina were arrested in December 2016 after returning from a visit to the European Parliament in Brussels.

Public protests were not restricted to Oromia. In the Amhara region, some 233 people have died between January and November 2016 due to excessive use of violence by security forces. In

Gambela region were 309 fatalities, in the Southern Nation and Nationalities and Peoples state some 62 people have died, in the Somali region there were 222 registered fatalities. The authorities admitted the arrest of 25,000 people, other estimates calculated that up to 50,000 people were arrested due to the protests. Since then, some 2,000 arrested were freed.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to urge his member state Ethiopia to:

- Respect the basic human rights of Oromo, Amhara and other nationalities, especially their right to freely express their opinion,
- Release all political prisoners and young Oromo, arrested since the crisis in Oromia escalated in November 2015,
- End the excessive use of violence by security forces and to end their impunity for security,
- Stop the discrimination of Oromo people and other nationalities.
