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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.

[19 August 2020]

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

Political Unrest and persecution in Ethiopia

The murder of the Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa in Addis Ababa on June 29, 2020, has caused political unrest, arbitrary arrests, violence and death in the Ethiopian capital and the surrounding Oromia Region. Official sources declared, that 170 people were killed during the unrest, other sources are claiming that up to 239 persons died. According to Ethiopia's Attorney General, ethnic Oromos number the highest among the dead. The Oromo victims mostly died in conflicts with the security forces. Some of the protests degenerated into inter-communal violence, then ethnic minority people living in Oromia were attacked by non-state actors.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission declared that more than 9,000 persons have been arrested during and following the protests. The Regional Government in Oromia reported that more than 500 lower and middle-level government officials have been arrested for their role in the deadly violence. Another 1,200 government officials on local-level have been given administrative punishment for failing to uphold their legal responsibilities during the unrest. All the whereabouts of the arrested have to be clarified. Many detainees are being held incommunicado.

For 23 days the internet was shut down by the authorities. Human rights organizations have expressed massive criticism that once again the authorities were limiting the freedom of speech and other basic human rights.

We are very much concerned about the arrest of leading representatives of Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Balderas for True Democracy Party and several journalists (among them Collins Juma Osemo and employees of the Oromo Media Network: Melese Direbssa, Guyo Wariyo, Mohammed Siraj). The arrests of Jawar Mohamed, Bekele Gerba and Eskinder Nega considerably have contributed to the escalation of unrest and violence. Instead of de-escalation, the authorities have chosen escalation and persecution to stop the protests. The arrest of leading Oromo critics of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the postponement of scheduled elections will not contribute to strengthen the respect of rule of law and democracy.

On August 9, 2020, once again a brutal crackdown on protests in the Wolaita Zone of Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State (SNNPR) has caused the death of at least 16 people. Among the victims of the protest in Wolaita-Soddo City on August 9, 2020, were a young homeless boy as the security forces violently cleared persons off the streets. The next day, seven more people were killed during protests in Bodditi, including an adolescent and a woman with a mental disability. Another woman was shot by security officials two days later. At least 18 people were injured during the brutal crackdown on protests in SNNPR.

We are deeply concerned about the huge number of Internal Displaced People (IDP) who fled following conflict and violence. Some 1,414,000 people have been registered as IDPs at the end of the year 2019. Since that time the number has further increased due to massive intercommunal tensions. Only in the last year at least one million people have fled their homes due to violent conflicts. The Government of Ethiopia seems to be unable and unwilling to develop and implement sustainable strategies in conflict prevention despite the increasing inter-ethnic tensions all over Ethiopia. But without the implementation of new strategies of conflict prevention on all levels of the security forces there will be no peace, democratic reforms or respect of basic human rights in Ethiopia.

Society for Threatened Peoples International calls on the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of Ethiopia:

- to clarify the whereabouts of all political prisoners and to release them,
- to end the persecution of Oromo politicians or journalists,
- to ensure the freedom of expression and demonstration,
- to guarantee the safety of ethnic minorities and the civilian population,
- to develop and implement strategies of conflict prevention on all levels of the security forces and the authorities.

