

# **Genocide in the making in Oromia**

## **Brief account on the Oromo protest from Nov. 2015 – Nov. 2016**

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### **Background**

The Oromo people constitute over 40% of the total population and a single largest national group in Ethiopia. Since the date of colonization by the Abyssinians at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, their political, economic, social and cultural life was undermined. Historians noted that after more than three decades of fierce wars of resistance their demographics were reduced from 10 million to 5 million. They were faced with cruel subjugation, exploitation, discrimination and marginalization; forced to slavery and servitude. Their egalitarian and democratic system of governance known as Gadaa was abolished. Successive regimes in Ethiopia had been furthering their subjugation and repression through heavy-handed cruel, inhumane policies (be it under the guise of democracy or socialism). The current Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led totalitarian regime is the worst the Oromo people witnessed.

The TPLF dominated authoritarian regime ruled for a quarter of century with complete control on political, economic and social life in Ethiopia after toppling over a century old Amhara hegemony in 1991. Currently, it controls 80% of the economy through its conglomerate the Endowment Fund For the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), 98% of the military and security leadership controlled by the TPLF membership, 100% of the parliament controlled by the TPLF and its puppet People's Democratic Organisation (PDO)s remotely operated. As a result, the TPLF elites and PDO operatives amassed billions of dollars from trading on the natural resources under their control; restricting the ownership of businesses and industries, sprawling real estates and mansions in big cities; foreign direct investment, aid and leasing millions of hectares of lands to foreign investors. The TPLF operatives benefitted from the illicitly maintained economic, political and security power without observance of the rule of law.

On the other hand, the Oromo people were faced with rampant human rights abuses and systematic repressions that were repeatedly reported by international human rights organizations and yet largely ignored. Untold sufferings and systematic repressions in the last 25 years include extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, raping and torture. However, the Ethiopian government champions itself for being the fastest growing economy and key ally in the fight against terrorism to hide its genocidal character against the Oromo people. The reality on the ground shows that the Oromo people are targeted on the basis of their racial origin. As a result, over 95% of the prison cells in Ethiopia are filled with the Oromos and Afan Oromo has become the official language in prisons.

## **Land grabbing as a trigger to peaceful protest in Oromia**

Land grabbing negatively affected the livelihood of millions of farmers and forcibly evicted from small subsistence farming, pastoral and grazing areas. Forced eviction and relocation in the name of investment that was orchestrated by internal and foreign actors, has evicted over 1.5 million Oromo farmers without their consent and compensation from around Finfinne (Addis Ababa) in the past ten years. Millions of hectares of arable land was confiscated mainly by agribusinesses from foreign multinational companies and the ruling regime (TPLF) cadres and their operatives resulted in the uprooting and destitution of the millions that led in part to further the starvation of the ten millions of peoples in Ethiopia. Such unethical and inequitable investment had been observed to yield abysmal poverty, food insecurity, broken communities, loss of identity and culture and aggravated environmental degradation. Above all the Oromo people in and around Finfinne (Addis Ababa) became the epicenter of the episode and in a way it reflects the way the Oromo people were conquered, robbed off their land and properties, reduced to serfs and slaves, and kept under inhumane subjugation.

The dynamics of the land grabbing that was aimed to expand Finfinne (Addis Ababa) by ~2000% from the current 54,000 ha to 1.1 million ha started with the horticulture industry, mainly the cut flower plantations. In less than a decade, several dozens of cut flower investments from within and abroad mushroomed within the radius of 80km surrounding Finfinne (Addis Ababa) to takeover the land from subsistence farmers that fed millions before the change of ownership. The establishment of these plantations and the expansion of real estate within the peripheries were the stepping stone to establish the boundary of Finfinne Special Zone of Oromia which later to be incorporated into the infamous “Addis Ababa and the Surrounding Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Plan” or shortly “Master Plan”, in 2014. Similarly, Midroc’s and Karturi’s farms were meant to benefit and export crop produces into their countries of origin; jatropha, castor oil and sugar cane plantations were not established on non-arable *terra nullis* land, but on small subsistence farms whose owners were forcibly evicted without (with small) compensation and the security to their livelihood deprived. In general, the Oromo people are deprived of their livelihood by the Ethiopian successive regimes. As a result of deep historical and current grievances, suffering from oppression, exploitation and persecution for years, the students staged peaceful protests over Oromia for years and the response were being quelled heavy-handedly by the security forces of the Ethiopian government. The announcement of the infamous “master plan” further triggered the already deep-rooted grievances to explode. The plan was opposed by the Oromos from all walks of life: Oromo political parties, civic organisations, students, farmers, etc. for several reasons as it was unconstitutional, not inclusive and without the consent of the people. Moreover, it was deliberated to destroy the identity, livelihood, culture and language of the Oromo people.

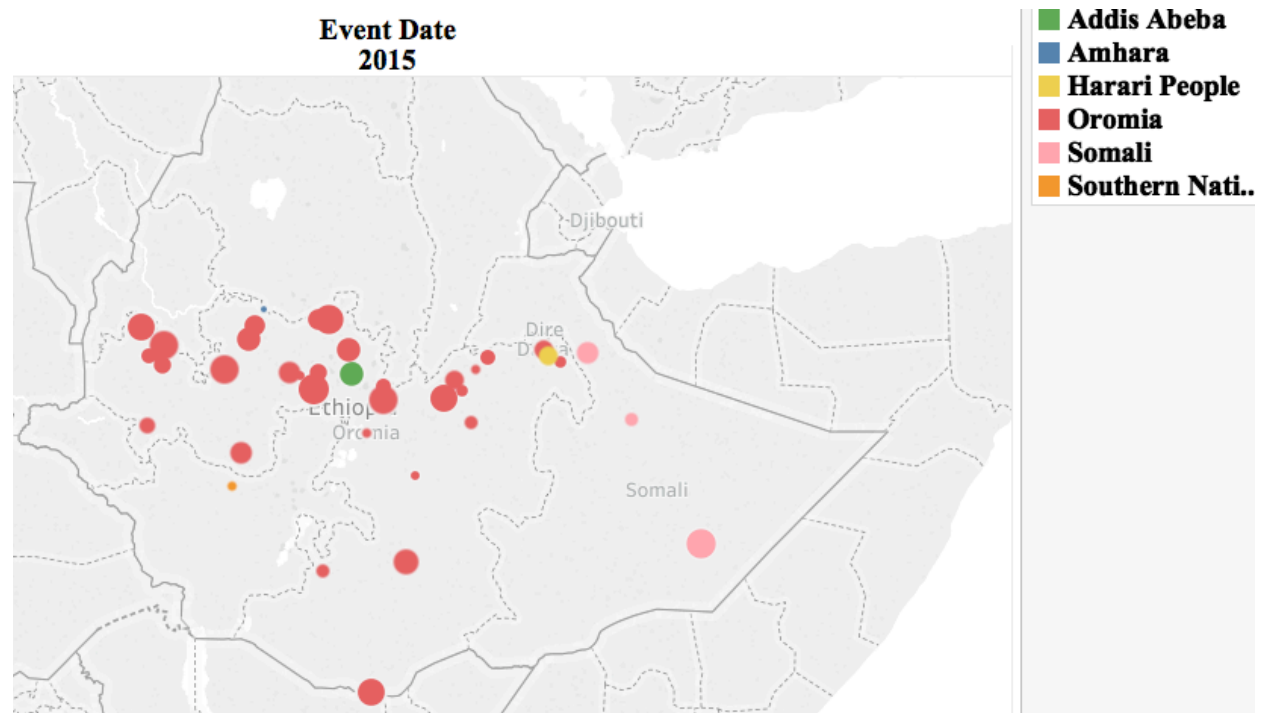
## **War on Unarmed Oromo Protesters**

In May 2014, the Oromo students from different universities, secondary schools and the general public from all over Oromia engaged the Ethiopian government in a peaceful protest in tens of thousands to denounce the “master plan” and voice their

legitimate concerns. In the demonstration that started at Ambo, 100km from the capital, more than 50 civilians were shot and killed by the Ethiopian government security forces. In total over 80 unarmed civilians were killed in different parts of Oromia the same month. Several hundreds of unarmed civilians were injured and thousands were arrested. The Ethiopian government shelved the implementation for a while until it issued final version of its master plan in the last quarter of 2015.

On November 12, 2015, peaceful student protest broke at the town of Ginchi, 80km from the capital to the West of Addis Ababa, against the sale of Ginchi stadium to an investor and the clearing of Chilimo forest. The government security forces killed two students and the population were angered. As a result, peaceful protests engulfed all parts of Oromia within two weeks. In order to legitimize its discriminatory policies, the Ethiopian Government issued a decree for Oromia to be ruled under martial law from the end of December 2015. Over 50,000 regular and special army was deployed under the command post led by the Prime Minister, Head of Army, Police and Security Chief to stop the protest mercilessly.

In Figure 1, the maps in the years 2015 (*upper*) and 2016 (*bottom*) show the distribution of protests from November 2015 – November 2016. In the last one year, peaceful demonstrations were staged mainly by the students and farmers across almost all Oromia districts at least once. They were all peaceful until turned violent by the heavy-handed measures of the Ethiopian security forces. As shown in Figure 1, 2015 (*upper*) in the last quarter of 2015, there were sporadic protests in Oromia that matured to cover all parts of Oromia intensively, some parts of Amhara and other southern regional states after July 2016.



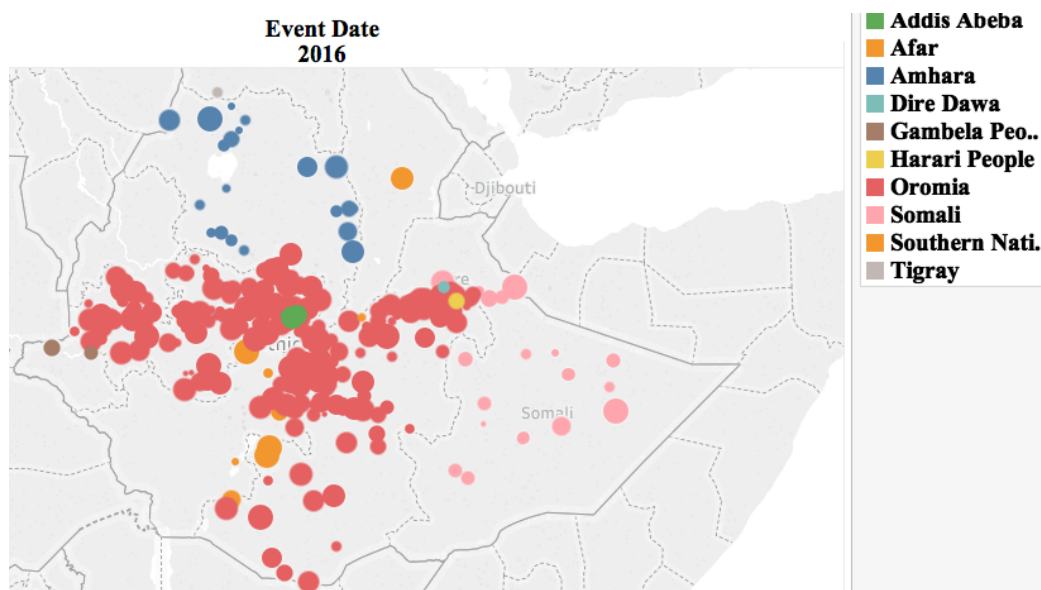
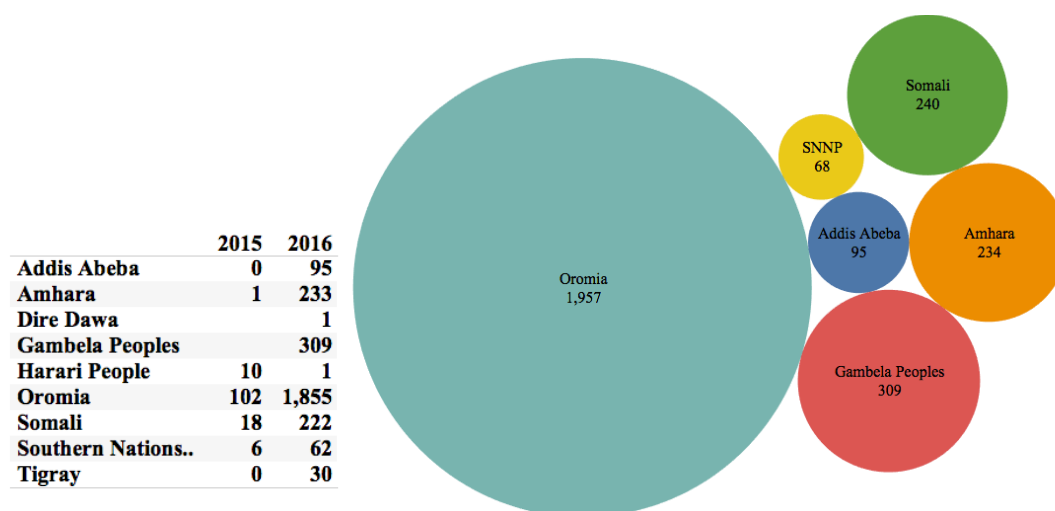


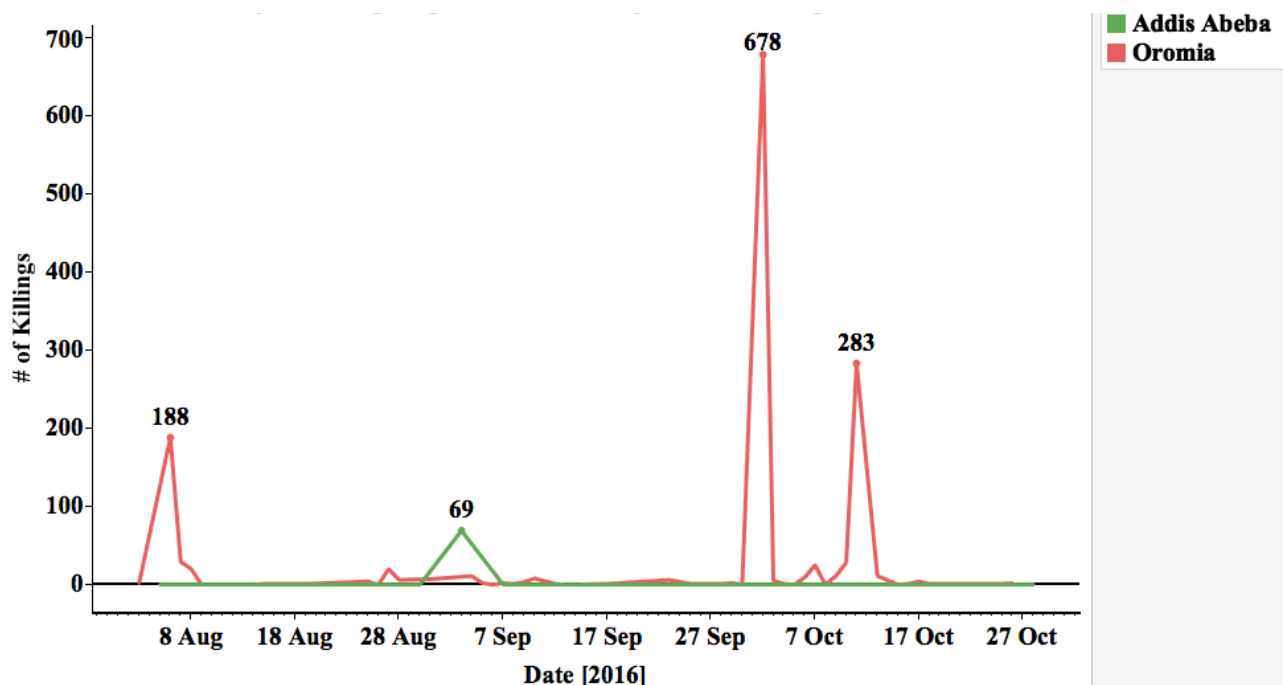
Figure 1: the maps of the distribution of protests in 2015 (upper) and 2016 (bottom)

Table1 below shows the scale of fatalities over one year period across the states in Ethiopia. The total number of fatalities from November 12, 2015 to December 31, 2015 was 137 in total, with Oromia at 102. In the year 2016, violent crackdown from the Ethiopian security forces spread all over Oromia and a total of 1855 persons were killed in the last ten months. The security forces also reacted violently against protesters in Finfinne (Addis Ababa), Amhara, Dire Dawa, Somali and Southern Nations and Nationalities (SNNP). In the Amhara state, the protests that started in July 2016, in Gondar, was triggered by the opposition of the inclusion of Welkait district into the Tigray state. Over 233 persons were killed in this state in the last five months in Gondar, Bahir Dar etc in relation to peaceful protests. Similarly, in Konso and Gedeo districts of the Southern Nation and Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) state dozens of protesters were killed. The data shows the cause of fatalities in the Gambela, Somali, Harari and Tigray different from peaceful protests. In general, the scale and distribution of the protests and fatalities in Oromia over the other states indicate the degree of harshness and discriminatory measures carried out by the Ethiopian government and the genocide is in the making against the Oromo people.

Table1: the scale of killings over one year period (Nov.12, 2015 – Oct. 29, 2016)



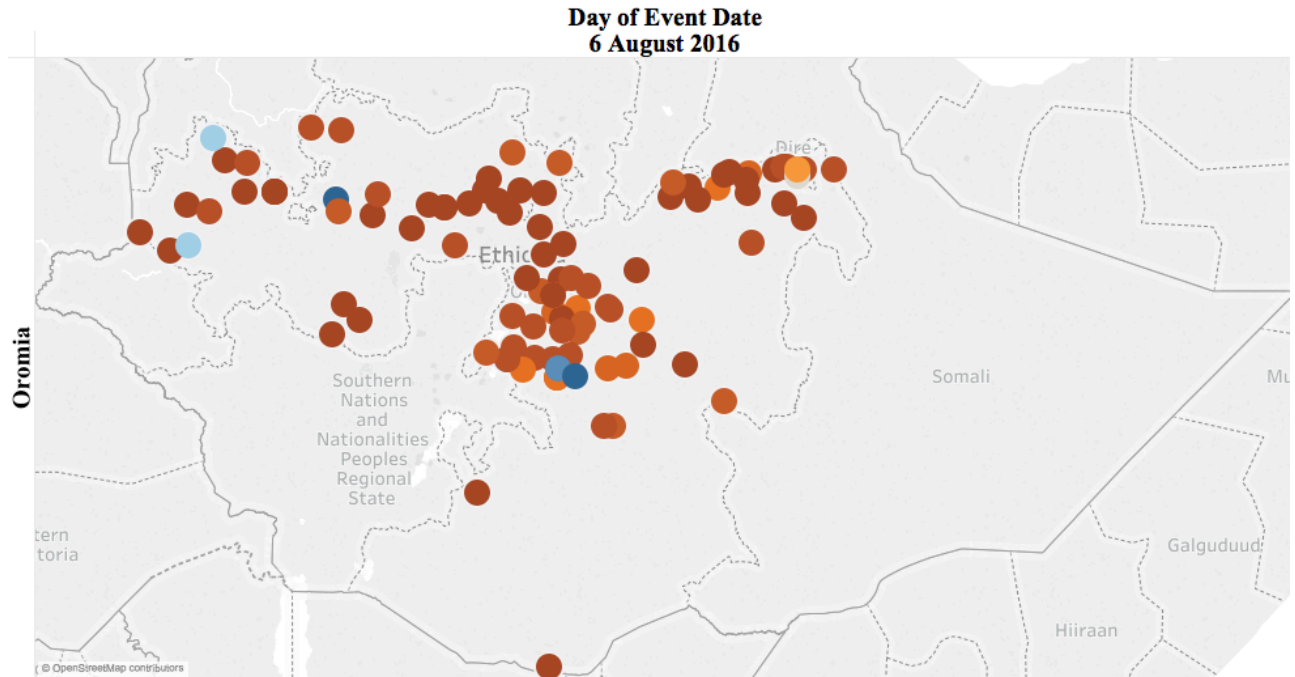
By definition the killings of over 1000 people from the same social group in a year qualifies the term “genocide” and killings of unarmed civilians in mass also refers to “massacre”. The graph in figure 2 shown below covers the daily fatalities across Oromia and Finfinne (Addis Ababa) where those killed are from the Oromo national group. In the graph the killing from the beginning of August 2016 to the end of October 2016 was covered. The first peak corresponds to the killings on the Oromia grand protest staged all over Oromia on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2016 and over 188 people were killed by the Ethiopian security forces. On this particular day, peaceful protests were held in over 200 towns and cities across Oromia and Finfinne (Addis Ababa) (see figure 3) and tens of thousands were arrested from all over Oromia and Finfinne in inhospitable remote malaria infested Tolay, Awash Arba, Huriso and Dhedhessa military camps.



*Figure 2: the scale of killings by the security forces in Oromia and Finfinne (Aug. – Oct. 2016)*

The second peak corresponds to the killings at Qilinto maximum-security prison located in the southern part of Finfinne (Addis Ababa) on September 3, 2016. A local newspaper Addis Fortune reported that the government security forces indiscriminately shot at the prisoners after fire broke on the premises. The government sources report 23 prisoners died of suffocation from fire. However, the Ethiopian Human Rights Project (EHRP) put the figure to 67 and the Oromia Media Network also reported additional two killings. Local sources alleged the Ethiopian government sources for starting the fire and indiscriminately shooting the prisoners.

### Oromia wide grand protests took place across 200 cities and towns



*Figure 3: the map showing the geographical coverage of protests in Oromia on August 6, 2016*

The third peak in Figure 2 corresponds to the Irreechaa massacre at Hora Arsadi of Bishoftu town, 40km to the East of the capital that occurred on October 2, 2016. On the Irreechaa annual thanksgiving festival, over 2 million Oromos from all over Oromia were gathered to celebrate. The Ethiopian government agitated and provoked the festival by installing its close operatives and cadres to takeover the stage from the legitimate leader of Gadaa (Abba Gadaa) who is in charge of the event. The celebrants were angered and started chanting slogans and crossing wrists above head – the popular sign of Oromo protest. The security forces deliberately started roaring Humvee in the crowd, hovering helicopter in the sky, firing the tear gas and bullets to suffocate the people on a narrow space. Most of the people perished in the ditch and the lake. Some sources put the death toll at 55 and above citing the cause of death simply as a deadly stampede. However, local and opposition sources put the figure of the death toll to at least 678. It is the responsibility of the government to protect the people away from the ditch through fencing and/or soil filling; avoiding any provocative acts, unblocking the safe exit and panicking the population on narrow space unless it deliberated and planned to cause massacre.

After the Irreechaa massacre, the Oromo people reacted with deep sorrow and responded through difference means of peaceful resistance against the Ethiopian government. The roads to different parts of the Oromia and Ethiopia were blocked, the economic boom of the TPLF elites was devastated. In a week to Irreechaa massacre, the Ethiopian government declared state of emergency that applies to the other states as well. The security forces reportedly killed more that 283 people (see figure 2, the fourth peak) in one week of the state of emergency.

## Summary

The Ethiopian security forces continued their unparalleled genocidal crimes of torturing, raping and killings, largely hidden from the eyes and ears of the international observers, embassies and the media. Records show that over two thousand Oromo civilians (students, farmers, teachers, civil servants, elders, leaders and members of the Oromo opposition party) were killed in the last one year from live bullets of the Ethiopian security forces. Witnesses out of Oromia show exceptional heinous crimes of killing that includes children from age 1 to the old men to the age of 80, pregnant women and mothers, a mother killed with her two sons, three siblings from the same parent. There are evidences of mothers and siblings ordered to sit on the dead body of their loved ones after being killed by the security forces. Wives and daughters were gang raped in front their husbands, loved ones and parents. Moreover, every independent Oromo person is routinely subjected to harassment, extrajudicial killings, imprisonment, rape and torture. Several thousands were wounded from live bullets and estimated over 50,000 were arrested in different detention camps in remote areas labeled as “terrorists” without convictions and/or rare trials.

The TPLF/EPRDF is still acting with impunity despite continued call for investigation into the genocidal crimes it commit by the renowned international human rights organizations, the UN Human Rights Council, African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights in the last several months. The western governments such as US, UK, Canada, Australia and others issued the statements of concern and travel warnings which may not be enough to curb the looming dangerous situation. The Ethiopian government had been major recipient of direct investment and economic aid earnings mainly from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the US, UK and the EU used to further human sufferings. Western governments are requested to sanction, use their diplomatic leverage to pressure the Ethiopian government to allow an independent UN and African Commission investigations over the massacres, completely halt the state of emergency and remove command posts from the villages, unconditional release of Oromo politicians and civilians from detention camps. Furthermore, the perpetrators of the massacres must be brought before international tribunal to curb the genocide in the making in Oromia.

## References

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