

***22 March 2017***

## **“Women’s Inferno in Ethiopia”**

### **Opening remarks**

Honourable Members of the European Parliament, Friends,

I am honoured to welcome you, on behalf of the UNPO, to today’s conference. We will discuss the human rights situation in Ethiopia, and in particular the plight of those women living in Oromia, Ogaden, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Sidama.

First of all, I wish to thank MEP Liliana Rodrigues for her support in convening this event, the People’s Alliance for Freedom and Democracy for their partnership, and our guest speakers and participants who have come to partake in today’s event.

UNPO is an international, democratic and non-violent organization founded at the Peace Palace in The Hague in 1991.

UNPO works to give a platform to different minorities, indigenous peoples, de facto states and unrecognized or occupied territories across the world.

Among them are the Oromo and the Ogaden in Ethiopia, who amount to half of the State’s population.

Ethiopia is often seen as a successful young democracy, showing encouraging levels of economic growth and established as a pillar for stability in the Horn of Africa and beyond.

Yet international key players generally fail to acknowledge that the majority of the population endures systematic human rights violations at the hands of the authorities and violent repression when they dare express dissent.

In fact, the Ethiopian government is essentially blackmailing the international community, most notably the USA and the European Union, by outwardly



showing stability and security – and covering up their dramatic humanitarian crisis. The EU and the USA combined cover more than 50% of Ethiopia's budget.

Furthermore, every election since the early 2000s has seen a result with an extremely high percentage of seats being won by the ruling coalition, with EU election observation missions underlining significant flaws, including intimidation and exclusion of candidates from the opposition.

This reached its apex with the 2015 elections, which we also discussed here at a UNPO event at the European Parliament – and which the EU decided not to observe. During those so-called elections, the ruling coalition won 100% of the available seats.

Since April 2014 and up to this day, the protests occurring in Oromia have been violently repressed by the Ethiopian government. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2016, at least 300 Oromo protesters fell victim to an Ethiopia-sponsored killing squad during their traditional Irrecha Festival.

Oromia is currently living its sixth month under a state of emergency that was declared by the Ethiopian authorities, one which has led to the restriction of people's rights and to violent arrests among the population.

In the Ogaden region, people live in fear of severe military crackdowns, which include **extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, rape and torture**. 300 people have died from **famine and cholera**, because of the government's restrictions.

Severe limitation of movement prevents people from accessing healthcare facilities and trade embargoes cause **critical food shortages**.

Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and Sidama are also affected by the Ethiopian State's **authoritarianism and institutionalized violence**.

**Land grabbing, eviction**, deprivation of a decent livelihood, massacres, marginalization, segregation and **poverty** are a daily reality for the people living in these regions.

As is always the case in contexts of violence and injustice for unrepresented groups, **women are disproportionately affected**.



Their gender, added to their ethnicity, makes them not only subject to a double discrimination – but also particularly vulnerable to the atrocities committed by the **Ethiopian authorities, the army, and local police.**

The most powerful weapon of the military and police forces against the women of these regions – is **sexual violence.**

In Bosnia, the mass atrocities against women caused outrage across Europe. In Ethiopia, the violence against women is an **even larger scale**, but it is **nowhere near as well-known.**

**Rape is a powerful weapon**, causing severe physical and psychological damage to those who are subjected to it. By using it, the perpetrators intend to hurt, to harm the victim’s dignity and to terrorise them.

And the damage goes beyond the individual, as rape affects families and communities in their entirety. Creating stigma and destabilizing societies, rape is also an **institutionalized war crime** in Ethiopia, one for which the military forces are specifically trained.

In other words, sexual violence is a **full-fledged tool for war** and intimidation and an integral part of war strategies that are often drafted in the highest spheres.

The behavior of the Ethiopian government should be **cause for an investigation** inside the International Criminal Court.

UNPO is calling upon the European Parliament, the UN, and other international institutions to act in order to stop such **heinous organized criminal activity by the state.**

We should act to claim human rights and more specifically **women’s rights** as a fundamental protection for any individual.

**Enough is enough.**