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The Forum on Minorities and Effective Participation in Economic Life

Statement To the Committee

Introduction

The Ogaden territory, also known as the Somali Region, makes up one-third of the state of Ethiopia. It is home to the Ogaden people, an ethnic-Somali population, which is mainly agro-pastoralist.

The economy of the Ogaden territory has been savaged by war and famine. It is the least developed territory in Ethiopia even though it is the richest in natural resources. People in the Ogaden live a virtual stone-age existence and they are denied their basic human rights. Trade and aid are prevented from entering the Ogaden territory in violation of the economic rights of the people.

Economic Rights

Ethiopia’s federal model, based on ethnic and linguistic distinctions, promised to respect the country’s cultural diversity and give meaningful political and economic autonomy to its different ethnic groups. For Ethiopian Somalis, it was the first time that they were officially recognized as one of the country’s peoples rather than as on the periphery of the Ethiopian economic, political, cultural, and social centre.

Despite these attempts to develop the Somali Region, regional governments have frequently failed to absorb and spend available funds. The regional government does not have the capacity to adequately and appropriately distribute these funds for the development of the Ogaden people. Corruption is also a major issue, with the already poor and marginalized Ogaden most affected; they do not have the economic power to buy into corrupt systems, or the political power to fight it.

The securitization of the Somali region is another major barrier to the economic participation of its people. The conflict has been used as a reason to bar international aid from reaching the region, and to block all trade in and out of the region. This is economically devastating for the Ogaden people.

The discovery of natural resources in the area, most notably natural gas, has added further tension to the rights of land and its contents. Despite being one of the richest regions in
terms of natural resources, Ogaden remains the poorest and most underdeveloped. Ethiopian Somalis are prevented from taking part in decisions related to the development of their region. They have no say in deals with foreign companies to exploit their rich natural resources. They are also prevented from claiming a share of the benefits of this development. As a result, many Ethiopian Somalis share a sense of marginalization from their rightful national share of services and development.

The Ogaden people have no political way to address these problems. Elections are constantly postponed or rigged, and those who speak out are often silenced by force. It is impossible for certain minority groups, including the people of Ogaden to pursue economic, social and cultural development when basic rights are being violated.

For a minority to enjoy the freedom the constitution gives them, and to be economically empowered, they need to free and complete control of their destiny. This is not possible in the Ogaden region. The Somali people in Ethiopia are economically marginalized, and politically pushed aside.

**Recommendations**

- The Ethiopian government must immediately allow aid agencies and humanitarian missions to all regions and treat all ethnic groups equally. Governments must not deny aid to regions for national security regions.

- Governments must adhere to the international laws and their own Constitution to protect and defend the civilian population in all regions.

- Autonomy must not be in name only. Real power must be given to the people to choose their government, and real power must be given to elected regional representatives. The capacity of these governments must be developed, and corruption within these governments should be rooted out.

- Private sector businesses, including Multinational and National Corporations, who want to exploit the resource potential of the Ogaden region must first gain the consent of its people. Dealing only with the Ethiopian government about the Ogaden Oil is tantamount to taking part in disowning the Ogaden people of their god given land and resources.