

Hunger and Human Rights Abuses Escalate in Sidama, Ethiopia.

From Our Correspondent; Awassa, Sidama

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A. 134 Ethnic Sidamas imprisoned in Awassa and Yirgalem

According to our internal sources from Awassa, the decadent TPLF regime and its bandit representatives in Sidama are said to be involved in a yet another massive human rights abuses and deliberate starvation of the Sidama people to subdue them and silence their struggle for freedom. Accordingly, during the last week of December 2004, 134 ethnic Sidamas were imprisoned in Awassa and Yirgalem towns. They are now being tortured and abused in various prison cells in these towns. The reason given for the imprisonment and brutal torture of these people is as pathetic as the actual imprisonment. It was learnt that the bandit Sidama representatives for the TPLF regime such as Harka Haroye, Melese Marimo, Galalcha Janje and Kebede Kanchula have listed these civilians as “dangerous people”. It is not known what kind of danger these people were capable of inflicting on any party. The sources indicated that the people imprisoned were drawn from various sections of the Sidama society. They are civil servants, farmers and businessmen. According to our correspondent from Awassa, the TPLF regime is intensifying the human rights abuses in Sidama for the following reasons:

I. Silencing the people before the May 2005 Elections.

The people in Sidama region have completely rejected the TPLF regime and its bandit representatives in the area. Given the approaching election in May 2005, the TPLF regime is sure that it will never obtain any support from the Sidama area. Thus it wants to silence the people whom it thinks can organize such massive underground opposition to its brutal rule. Although the TPLF regime is not worried about being elected by the people or not as it was never elected by any one in the first place, it does not want the international community to witness a massive opposition it is going to face in Sidama during the so called elections in May 2005. A regime that took power by the barrel of gun and that claims to have carried out three previous fraudulent elections in which it garnered a fake 90% votes can easily rig the May 2005 elections and continue the one party dictatorial rule for 20 years until 2010. This evil plan of the regime is being boosted by the international situations like the war on terror, which is providing a safe heaven to the dictators.

II. Ethnic cleansing of the Sidama people:

The TPLF regime is implementing ethnic cleansing policy on the Sidama people that it started two years ago. At present the ethnic Sidamas are being removed from their land in Awassa and in various other areas in Sidama and ethnic Wolayitas are being settled in these lands by the order of the president of the so-called Southern region, Hailemariam Desalegn. The TPLF regime knows very well that the Sidama people have never

tolerated oppression and injustice in their history. Both TPLF and the Sidama people waged armed struggle against the military regime. But when TPLF monopolized the political power in 1991, it began to use even more brutal and savage methods of silencing people from expressing their opposition to injustice and oppression. There is no more brutal way than using ethnic cleansing to silence political opposition.

B. Hunger as a Weapon of Mass Destruction: The Boricha Ordeal.

It was made to the international community clear time and again that the TPLF/EPRDF regime uses hunger as a weapon of mass destruction against any people that opposes its brutal rule. By dismantling donor supported development activities in Sidama, and by deliberately eliminating all development efforts in the area, the TPLF regime have ensured that the Sidama people can not survive the recent continued drought and famine in the area. As the rural population lacked any kind of support from the previous development organizations that are now dismantled, and since the TPLF regime has never supported genuine development activities in the Sidama region for the past 14 years of its rule, hundreds of thousands of the rural people in Sidama became victims of the recent drought and famine.

The following table shows the number of starving people and emergency food aid required in all the 10 districts in the Sidama region.

Table 1: Starving Population and Emergency Food Requirement in the Sidama region for the year 2005.

Woreda (District)	RU_POP _2005	Estimated Beneficiary			Emergency Food requirement in mt For emergency beneficiary		
		Best-	Middle-	Worst	Best	Middle	Worst
SHFRFDINO	552,153	12,000	30,000	42,000	1,556.10	3,890.25	5,446.35
AWASA	367,593	600	3,600	8,600	77.81	466.83	1,115.21
ARBE GONA	178,193	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	0.00
DALE	379,686	8,750	28,750	38,750	1,134.66	3,728.16	5,024.91
ALETA WENDO	343,885	4,630	21,130	28,130	600.40	2,740.03	3,647.76
DARA	134,660	670	7,170	13,170	86.88	929.77	1,707.82
HULLA	234,097	5,000	11,000	15,000	648.38	1,426.43	1,945.13
BENSA	242,828	0	1,560	3,560	0.00	202.29	461.64
ARORESA	125,502	0	1,090	2,340	0.00	141.35	303.44
BORICHA	259,905	11,600	41,600	71,600	1,504.23	5,394.48	9,284.73

Source: Compiled by donor agencies.

Note: best means when there is adequate rainfall with good crop production.

Although the population figure for all the ten districts is grossly underestimated, making the total population of the Sidama region about 3 million while the true size of the population is estimated to be 5 million for end 2004, the table is indicative of how once prosperous and self sufficient society which was able to cope natural disasters, is

deliberately turned into a destitute society by the current regime. The Sidama people were able to feed themselves and never received any food aid even during the worst drought and famine of 1984/85 that killed millions in the rest of Ethiopia. Then what went wrong at present? The answer is obvious. The TPLF/EPRDF regime was busy building the Tigray region and looting the Sidama resources with the blessings of the international community for the past 14 years. Second, it dismantled the independent Sidama development efforts and the entire Sidama support structures directly and using its bandit Sidama representatives indirectly there by ensuring that the Sidama people could not survive any minor natural calamities. Natural calamities have been there in Sidama before. However, the society was able to cope with them then. It is a policy of deliberate underdevelopment and starvation of the society by the TPLF regime that has to be blamed for the current disaster in Sidama.

Apart from this, people in certain districts in Sidama that are believed to be a stronghold of the Sidama opposition groups and districts that have historically waged a bitter struggle against the past oppressive regimes are being deliberately left out to starve and die. The Boricha district is the case in this point. The Boricha district carried out a bitter armed struggle against the military regime in the late 1970s. Furthermore, 99% of the people massacred on the May 24, 2002 peaceful demonstration against the illegal decisions of the TPLF regime to take control of the Awassa town were from Boricha and Awassa Zuria district. Therefore, the TPLF regime and the Sidama bandits deliberately left out the Boricha district even from getting whatever little assistance the regime provided to other districts. As a result thousands of children and the elderly died of famine in the Boricha district in 2004. This was never disclosed until the American senator visited the Boricha district and expressed his disappointment about the deliberate neglect by the government while thousands of people died in such a scale in the district.

The scale of the disaster in Sidama is increasing by the day. As shown in the table above, for a nearly 100,000 people expected to starve in Boricha alone in the year 2005, over 9000 metric tons of food aid is required for this year. This represents about 45% of the total population that is reported to be affected by famine this year. Neighbouring districts such as Shebedino and Dale also have the highest number of starving people that indicates the catastrophic nature of the problem. Although the actual magnitude of the people affected is far greater than this, the picture is quite clear. The TPLF regime and the Sidama bandits are using famine as a weapon of mass destruction in Sidama and particularly in places like Boricha.

Thanks to the TPLF regime the Sidama people begun to die of hunger and famine for the first time in their history since mid 1990s. However, the scale of the disaster then was small as various organizations intervened to mitigate the problem. Since 2002, however, the regime succeeded in eliminating any organization or structure that can support the Sidama society. As a result of this, at present the Sidama people are dying of hunger and famine every day.

C. Call to the International Community

According to our correspondent the people of Sidama are crying for international intervention. We want the international community to appreciate the fact that the outcome of the 14 years of the TPLF/EPRDF rule in Sidama is a massive hunger and famine in the scale unknown in the history of the Sidama society and a massive abuse of human rights that goes on unabated. Therefore, we call up on the international community to (1) make sure that the international food donations reach all the needy Sidama people regardless of their loyalty to the ruling party, (2) put pressure on the TPLF regime to stop its deliberate policy of underdevelopment in Sidama, (3) put pressure on the TPLF government to stop ethnic cleansing of the Sidama people, (4) put pressure on the regime to stop imprisonment and torture of innocent civilians.

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