

Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions of Civil Servants in Sidama, South Ethiopia

January 29, 2012, by Kambata Xoola

An Overview

Since Sidama was incorporated into the Ethiopian empire by Menelik's invading army in 1891, it continued to languish under successive tyrannical rules. The current regime which took over political power in 1991, exactly 100 years after the incorporation of Sidama into the empire continued systematic political suppression and economic marginalization in Sidamaland. The glimmer of hope that followed the establishment of all inclusive transitional government immediately after the downfall of the military-cum-socialist dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam that brutalized the country for 17 years, was dashed when opposition political parties were systematically expelled from the government and subsequently outlawed in early 1990s.

The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)' whose core power broker is the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) henceforth monopolized the political power and continued to deny basic human rights and democratic freedom to the majority of the citizens of the country in general and to the Sidama people in particular. The Loqqe Massacre of May 24, 2002 of unarmed Sidama elders and students who attempted to express their views through a peaceful gathering and demonstration was a typical example of the brutality of the current regime. Thousands of Sidama civilians have been detained, tortured and forced to flee the country following this incidence.

In spite of the reduced intensity, systematic harassment, suppression of freedom of expression, abuse of other basic human rights continued in Sidamaland. The peoples' quest for regional autonomy has been squashed and they have been effectively silenced from voicing their concerns on matters pertaining to political participation, and economic and social development. Poverty has escalated and many rural people have become dependent on food aid for the first time in the history of Sidama.

To make matters worse the government has recently intensified its decade long campaign against the Sidama people by unlawfully and selectively detaining and imprisoning the Sidama civil servants in Hawassa town, extrajudicial killings of those in rural villages surrounding Hawassa town.

Countless Sidama civilians are unlawfully imprisoned, made to disappear and tortured for their views. Such a practice of intimidation, harassment is continuing with sever intensity at present. The acts are committed by the police and government officials with an absolute impunity. The lame reason provided for such politically motivated detentions are corruption or sale of plots of Sidamaland acquired in Hawassa town. The basic constitutional right of any human being in a civilized society of being presumed

“innocent before proven guilty” is an alien concept in Sidama. The general practice is to the contrary, if one is a Sidama, one is presumed guilty before proven innocent!!

Based on such arbitrary decisions, several hundreds of Sidama people are systematically forced to sell their properties and plots of lands they acquired in their capital city ‘Hawassa’ in order to force them to move out of their capital to vacate the town for settlers, the ultimate objective of which is to permanently erase Sidama’s demand for regional autonomy. Around the outskirts of Hawassa city, Sidama farmers are continually uprooted while the regime is expanding the city for its economic and political gains, by leaving Sidama farmers destitute. See last part from the link -- <http://www.sidama.org/documents/2011-05-23-sidama-loqee-massacre-9-years-on.pdf> .

Talking in ‘Sidamu affo-(Sidama language) which during the early years of this regime was officially used as a working language for the Sidama region is proving to be a serious risk to the speakers as the Sidama people were systematically ridiculed for speaking their own language & often considered narrow nationalists. Such fear is so pervasive in entire Sidama capital where Sidamas are often praised and encouraged to speak the rulers’ national working language –Amharic and undermine theirs.

Sidama people are required to be ‘TPLF/EPRDF’ (the sole party) sympathizers to receive foreign donated food aid. Otherwise, no one dreams to receive any aid even if he/she deserves it. The economy is dominated by TPLF owned companies and their supporters, as are employment opportunities. To be able to access anything that is taken for granted in the Western world for daily lives, party membership and strict adherence to its rules is mandatory in Ethiopia.

Unable to respond in a democratic and a civilized manner to the Sidama nation’s growing quest for regional and political autonomy, the regime’s security forces massacred several dozens of civilians who were peacefully and non-violently claiming their very constitutional rights (http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Ethiopian_Constitution.html); the regime continues to suppress the demand for 21 years; and continues its campaign of terror and intimidation today.

Killings of Sidama civilians and uprooting them from their lands

Recently, the regime instigated unnecessary conflict between two subjugated nations (Oromo and Sidama) where the regime deliberately armed the Oromo side where the armed agents caused the losses of innocent lives unnecessarily by killing at least 5 Sidamas and wounding another 6. The killed Sidamas from Rima-Biiyo sub district (about 10-12km from Hawassa city) about three weeks ago include

1. Ayele Walana (Saama Ejerssa Farmers Association)
2. Munxasha Hiiyyo (Suuqe Rukessa Farmers Association)
3. Gawaancha Gandaala (Maqbassa-Qorke Farmers Association)

4. Yohanes Tuqo (Suuqe Rukessa Farmers Association)
5. Nugussie Adata (Suuqe rukessa Farmers Association)

And the wounded Sidama civilians at the same time who are currently in Hawassa Referral hospital include:

1. Macho Worassa (Maqbassa-Qorke Farmers Association)
2. Lukas Ermias (Suuqe rukessa Farmers Association)
3. Tsegaye Filate (Saama Ejerssa Farmers Association)
4. Saxe Safaco (Suuqe Rukessa Farmers Association)
5. Zekiwos Badhiso (Suuqe Rukessa Farmers Association)
6. Ejesso Enarro (Suuqe Rukessa Farmers Association)

Others Sidama civilians unnecessarily arrested by the regime involve a renowned Sidama personality named 'Kiyamo Qunassa' from Suuqe-Rukessa farmers association in Hawassa district simply because Mr Qunassa opposed to the policies of the regime that targets the Sidama people and uproots them continually from their lands. Regardless of this, the regime has already given the Sidama land from all corners to the neighboring nations that involved from north and north east of the Sidamaland to Oromia, from West Sidamaland to Wolayita, from South and South West of the Sidamaland to Oromia- covering over 70miles. The Sidamaland is systematically partitioned to make it smaller and with further goal of causing lingering conflicts between the nations involved whilst the regime implements the policy of destabilization in the entire Sidamaland.

A new wave of Imprisonment and the releases of the Previous Arrestees

In the last 4 weeks alone, between 60-65 Sidama civilians were arrested with alleged corruption. Although most of the arrestees are former political appointees, the over all campaign is all about intimidating, harassing and depersonalizing the Sidama nation.

Doing so is seriously jeopardizing the future of the Sidama nation's integrity & risking the over all viability of the nation whose culture & ways of life is entirely distinct in the south including its New Year Fichchee- see from the link :-

(<http://www.sidama.org/calendrical/sidama-new-year-fichchee-2011.pdf>.)

As a part of such continued state sponsored terrorism against Sidama civilians, the regime also releases Sidama peoples when & if it wishes & re-arrests them without any justification. The regime also hand picks very few people from among the intimidated & harassed Sidama individuals to appointee those to do its hideous jobs.

From among over 65 Sidama civilians currently arrested by the regime, the following are the lists:-

1. Ganale Hidana (Former Sidama Zone President)

2. Kebede Fokora (Former Sidama Liberation Movement –SLM Veteran who consistently opposes the way the regime treats Sidama people)
3. Ayele Tulu (Former Teacher who opposes to the harsh treatments the Sidama nation is exposed to)
4. Endrias Fulassa (Former Hawassa city Municipality employee)
5. Mr Endria's wife [Mestawot]
6. Fikiru Tesfaye
7. Kebede Kayamo
8. Shibqu Magane (Previous Hawassa City Councilor)
9. Arega Tsegaye (Previous Mayor of Hawassa City)
10. Gudeta Gumbbie (Renown Sidama intellectual)
11. Shimelis Eshetu (Sidama business mad)
12. Daniel Ugamo
13. Gezahegn Girma (From Cirre district)
14. Kebede Taffo
15. Yimer Endale
16. Desta Daniel (Previous Hawassa Mayor)
17. Agegnehu Duguna
18. Alemayehu Dembie
19. Yohanes Getachew
20. Tamirat Tariku
21. Eyasu Teklu
22. Beyenu Bukula (Female)
23. Qiyare qixessa (Female)
24. Tsion Shiferaw (Female)
25. Mirtnesh Tefera (Female)
26. Yemisrach Alemu (Female)
27. Adanech Argaw (Female)
28. Zewuditu Gebremeskel (Female)
29. Mekdes Solomon (Female)
30. Hana Yohanes (Female)
31. Haimanot Alemu (Female)
32. Betelihem Atinafu (Female)
33. Tamene Lemba
34. Desta Dawit
35. Muxata Hessembo
36. Tesfaye Ersido
37. Elias Shemba
38. Paulos Morka
39. Solomon Shibeshi
40. Woldeyohanes Lemmora
41. Kidane Legesse
42. Filagot Bedane (Female)

43. Demissie Dangiso
44. Getnet Berhanu
45. Abebe Anchaw
46. Behailu Mohammed
47. Sebsibe Mengistu and several others were detained without court order and any charges.

These being less than 80% of those who are currently imprisoned; there are other Sidamas who were arrested for the last two & a half years yet recently released without charges and justification for their detention for nearly 3 years.

From those who are currently released without charge few of them were sentenced to life imprisonment and others to 17 years by the regime's Kangaroo court. Some of the released personalities included Abera Doba, Beyene Bulcha, Tarekegn Tekule, Belay Balguda, Markos Biitaa, Manseetto Toyyora, and Mr Eyob (link when imprisoned in 2009) http://www.sidama.org/documents/Sidama_june_2009.pdf.

The situation in Sidamaland is grave & humanitarian condition is deteriorating from day to day. People are treated in undignified and degrading manner. The Sidama nation therefore, appeals to the international humanitarian institutions and organizations such Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others to stand with the Sidama people and other Ethiopian nations and nationalities to denounce the suppressive and dictatorial regime and request immediate release of all Sidama civilians who are detained without charge and for the respect of the rule of law in Ethiopia. The Sidama people also appeal to all Western powers to intervene to stop the mass arrest of innocent Sidama civilians in Hawassa and realization of political and economic autonomy for the Sidama people.

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(For Sidama Nation Online and SNLO)