

Ethiopia

Chapter 1: Historic Violence and Contemporary Resistance in the Ogaden-Somali Region: A Youth Perspective

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Background

The Ogaden, also known as the Somali Region, is the easternmost region of Ethiopia's nine ethnic divisions. It borders Djibouti to the north, Kenya to the southwest, and Somalia to the north, east and south. Indigenous ethnic Somalis inhabit this region.

In 1884, using the arms and expertise provided by the colonialists, the Abyssinians captured Harar, a key strategic geographical point, and began raiding Ogaden Somali villages. From 1896 to 1948, Abyssinia (renaming itself Ethiopia) waged a constant war of conquest against the Somalis. Italy invaded Abyssinia in 1935 and captured it along with the Ogaden and the territories of neighboring nations. In 1941, the British defeated Italy in the Horn of Africa, and administered the Ogaden for eight years until it transferred part of the Ogaden to Ethiopia. The other parts of the region were transferred in 1954 and 1956 to Ethiopia.¹

¹ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, "Member Profile, Ogaden: Ogaden National Liberation

Ethiopia gained control over the Ogaden without the knowledge or the consent of the Indigenous Peoples. This occupation of the region by Ethiopia has led to the continued confiscation of lands, crackdowns on resistance efforts, and persecution based on ethnicity. From then onwards, successive Ethiopian administrations ruthlessly oppressed the Ogaden people and whenever liberation movements seriously threatened the status-quo, a foreign power intervened to re-establish colonial rule over the Ogaden.² The Indigenous Peoples of the Ogaden have long sought cooperation with the rest of Somalia as a means of ending the illegal Ethiopian occupation, which provided much of the antagonism for the Ogaden war in 1977, when Somalia invaded Ethiopia in support of the liberation movements inside the region. In 1984, the Ogaden National Liberation Front was established to seek the self-determination of the Somali people living under Ethiopian rule; this was formed as a national liberation movement driven by the local people, which constituted a departure from Somalia's previous involvement in the liberation of the Ogaden.

Front (ONLF),” *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*, last modified October 2018, <http://unpo.org/members/10714>.

² Abdurahman Mahdi, “29th Anniversary of Ogaden National Liberation Front (Past and Present History Of Ogaden),” *Ogaden News Agency*, August 15, 2013, <http://www.ogadennet.com/?p=24578>.

Both the current political and humanitarian climate inside the Ogaden is dire. Access to safe drinking water, education and basic healthcare is extremely limited. The region is largely dependent on agriculture as its main source of economic stimulus, but land rights issues have been the cause of much tension between the people and the local and national governments. Under Ethiopian rule, the population of the Ogaden region has been subjected to economic and political discrimination, leading to an appalling standard of living in the region, and a lack of direct political representation. The military forces continue to commit grave human rights abuses, and the state perpetuates crimes that violate the “laws of war,” according to Human Rights Watch.³ Moreover, the discovery of natural resources in the Ogaden, most notably natural gas, has subjected communities living near exploration sites to continuous displacement and violence.

Control over traditional territory and the right to land are two one of the most fundamental issues faced by Indigenous Peoples globally. Forces of colonialism, neo-colonialism and capitalism have constituted a deep-seated threat against the lives and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples, their histories, languages, cultures, religions and their overall ways of life. One of the biggest challenges for Indigenous

³ Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: Probe Years of Abuse in Somali Region,” *Human Rights Watch*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/20/ethiopia-probe-years-abuse-somali-region>.

Peoples globally is the modern state-system/governing systems—most notably, their forceful integration of diverse nations and peoples in the creation of a single unified national identity, in pursuit of a coherent national image in the international arena. Cultural uniformity and state-sponsored assimilation policies, such as the promotion of a single national language by suppressing linguistic differences, is a common strategy employed by nation-states around the world.

Ethiopia is home to diverse nations and peoples, and its modern configuration was a result of military conquests and occupations under Menelik II, who was responsible for increasing the territories controlled by historic Abyssinia by almost threefold.⁴ The forceful integration of various territories under an overarching Ethiopian governing system was supported by an equally aggressive promotion of an Ethiopian identity championed by the ruling elite. Dominant ruling groups have been described as the “the carriers of the historical civilization of semitized Ethiopia” and the “distinguishable Abyssinian type,”⁵ with their legitimacy derived from their biblical and ancestral

⁴ G. Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power & Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1996).

⁵ E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

connections to King Solomon and Queen Sheba. This sense of antiquity and mythical allure equipped ruling groups with the legitimacy to subjugate diverse nations and peoples, in an attempt to protect the divine and ancient character of the monarchy from any outside hostilities.

Human rights violations

Ethiopian state-sponsored violence against the Ogaden civilians is institutionalized through state policies and entrenched within the country's military doctrine. Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, passed in 2009, is used to silence political dissidents, opposition party members, journalists and others in civil society—and it is the Indigenous youth who are systematically targeted.⁶ The Charities and Societies Proclamation Law places excessive restrictions on the work of human rights organizations. Human Rights groups argue that the law itself infringes on fundamental human rights and restricts civil society groups from accomplishing their work.⁷

⁶ Lewis Gordon, Sean Sullivan, Sonal Mittal, Kate Stone, *Ethiopia's Anti-terrorism Law a Tool to Stifle Dissent* (Oakland: The Oakland Institute and Environmental Law Center, 2015), https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI_Ethiopia_Legal_Brief_final_web.pdf.

⁷ “Ethiopia Bans More NGOs Over ‘Illegal Acts’,” *Sudan Tribune*, February 20, 2013, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article45592>.

In addition, the Ethiopian government uses tactics such as institutionalized rape and gender-based violence. Defected military officials have testified to being trained on how to use rape as a tool of intimidation.⁸ Many of the human rights violations in the Ogaden were committed in places such as the notorious Jail Ogaden and other detention centers, including underground holding facilities and military barracks.⁹ Since 1994, when the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) embarked upon an armed struggle, the region has been under a state of emergency.¹⁰ Essentially, there are individuals who have been missing (and presumed dead) for as long as I have been alive. For 24 years and beyond, the Ethiopian military has acted with complete impunity, causing large-scale destruction in this heavily militarized region.

In a 2018 report released by Human Rights Watch, prisoners described regular beatings by

⁸ Human Rights Watch, “‘We are Like the Dead’: Torture and other Human Rights Abuses in Jail Ogaden, Somali Regional State, Ethiopia,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 4, 2018 <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/04/we-are-dead/torture-and-other-human-rights-abuses-jail-ogaden-somali-regional>.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: Torture in Somali Region Prison,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 4, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/04/ethiopia-torture-somali-region-prison#>.

¹⁰ Tobias Hagmann, *Talking Peace in the Ogaden: The search for an end to conflict in the Somali Regional State in Ethiopia* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2014).

prison officials, either with hands, boots, gun butts, metal sticks or plastic wires. Abdusalem, a prisoner in Jail Ogaden, told Human Rights Watch, “I was kept in solitary confinement in complete darkness for most of my [three-year] detention. I was only taken out at night for torture. They [prison officials] did many things to me—they electrocuted [applied electric shocks to] my testicles, they tied wire around them, and they put a plastic bag with chili powder over my head. I often had a gag tied in my mouth so I wouldn’t scream too much. During the day, I was given very little food—one [piece of] bread and occasionally a bit of stew. They also raped my wife [who was also in Jail Ogaden]. She gave birth to a child that was not mine there.”¹¹ This account is just one of many stories of the Indigenous Peoples of the Ogaden. The Ethiopian administration in the Ogaden treats the Somalis in the Ogaden as second-class citizens in their own homeland; exploits the region for economic gains in collaboration with large corporations; and deprives the Somali people of their fundamental human rights.

Child soldiers

One of the dire consequences of violence in the Ogaden has been the creation of a para-military force known as the Liyu Police. The Liyu Police were established in 2007 in response to an attack against Chinese oil exploration carried out by the

¹¹ *Supra* note 8.

ONLF. Seventy-four Chinese and Ethiopian workers were killed in the attack.¹² The Ethiopian federal government created the Liyu Police following the oil attack as a counter-insurgency force to patrol and incite fear among the civilian populations. Many of the Liyu Police members are young Indigenous boys and men from the region. Many of them were removed from their homes, forcefully ordered to join the Liyu Police and faced severe punishment if they refused. These young men are trained, armed, and instructed to carry out violence against their own Indigenous Peoples.¹³

Sexual exploitation

In the Ogaden, sexual violence and rape is not just a consequence of conflict, but rather a deliberate military strategy employed by the Ethiopian regime. It is used to psychologically and emotionally humiliate women and men in the region. It is coordinated and used as a systematic combat tool of terror to dismantle the family unit and displace Indigenous youth and civilian populations. In addition, military personnel, or paramilitary groups such as the Liyu Police, commit sexual violence against women with impunity. The Liyu Police along with prison officials oftentimes rape multiple women at a time, in front of each

¹² Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: No Justice in Somali Region Killings,” *Human Rights Watch*, April 5, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/05/ethiopia-no-justice-somali-region-killings#>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

other. This is another tool used to physiologically demean women in Jail Ogaden. Based on interviews, Human Rights Watch has documented that, “Women who said they were raped in Jail Ogaden by either Liyu Police or prison guards were either taken to a room located near the guards’ quarters or outside of their cells but within the prison complex.” Many women reported being raped multiple times over the course of their sentences. Senior officials facilitated the rape of prisoners.¹⁴ One former Liyu police officer described going to Jail Ogaden to “get some ladies” for Abdirahman Labagole, the head of the Liyu Police. “He told me to bring him some ladies that were in the jail. Just any ladies. We are just free to enter and take people; there is no process for us.”¹⁵ The rape of women in the Ogaden has resulted in social alienation of the victims, wherein they have difficulty integrating back into their communities due to the stigma attached to sexual violence. The negative stigma associated with being the victim of rape must be addressed within the Ogaden community. This alienation has led to displacement on a mass scale. Women from the region have fled to neighboring countries precisely due to this stigma, but also for their own safety. Not a single officer has ever been held accountable for acts of rape or any form of gendered sexual violence in general in this region.

¹⁴ *Supra* note 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Lack of access to healthcare, education, and employment

Segregation and discrimination against Indigenous Somalis, in terms of education, healthcare, employment and economic development, is institutionalized. In terms of education, there is no policy of inclusion or outreach, particularly towards pastoralists who have a distinct way of life. The state-regulated education system excludes the history of the Ogaden and the ancestral cultures of the Indigenous communities there, while also excluding Ogaden youth from accessing education systems and institutions entirely. This form of alienation and marginalization has a corrosive and long-lasting impact on young people.

The United Nations has adopted several international instruments aimed to protect the rights of minorities globally. In 1960, the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) introduced the Convention against Discrimination in Education. This Convention recognizes the right of minority groups within states to carry out their own educational activities; for instance, this includes the right to establish schools and teach in Indigenous languages.¹⁶ The Ethiopian government has chosen not to ratify this Convention, further

¹⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), *Convention Against Discrimination in Education* (14 December 1960), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3880.html>.

highlighting their disregard in protecting disenfranchised groups. While Somali youth are victims of the same structural abuses suffered by the wider population in the Ogaden region under Ethiopian rule, there are particular sufferings unique to young people within their status as a minority. Another instrument to secure the rights of minority groups is the prominent 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly without a vote in December 1992.¹⁷ It is as if these rights and conventions were non-existent in the Ogaden region.

Moreover, Indigenous youth have no access to the increasingly limited healthcare facilities in the region and therefore experience fatalities from highly preventable illnesses. For instance, the alarming number of maternal deaths after childbirth, as well as the worrying infant mortality rate inside the Ogaden region, are both causes for concern. These issues are exacerbated by recurrent famines in the Horn of Africa, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people, including young children, in 2017 alone.¹⁸ The spread of the 2017

¹⁷ United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, A/RES/47/135 (3 February 1992),

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38d0.html>.

¹⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Ethiopia: New drought puts

cholera epidemic inside the region also viciously hit the agro-pastoralist community.¹⁹ Humanitarian organizations operate in the region on a very limited basis; the little humanitarian support the population may receive does not typically reach communities in remote areas, away from major cities and towns. Consequently, the people living in these communities tend to suffer disproportionately from neglect and marginalization at the hands of the state.

Activism and advocacy

Indigenous youth have always been at the forefront of fighting for and advocating for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Ogaden region. Unfortunately, centuries of institutionalized state-sponsored violence by the Ethiopian government have led to the mass migration and displacement of thousands of Indigenous Somalis throughout the diaspora. These mass migrations have led to the mobilization of youth on local, regional, national, and international levels. Most recently, the Ogaden

recovery and neighbouring countries at risk, *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, January 30, 2017,

<https://www.unocha.org/story/ethiopia-new-drought-puts-recovery-and-neighbouring-countries-risk>.

¹⁹ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, "Ogaden: Restrictions by Ethiopian Government Exacerbate Humanitarian Crisis," *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*, March 15, 2017, <https://unpo.org/article/19947?id=19947>.

Youth & Student Union (OYSU) was established in June 27, 2010, in Copenhagen, Denmark, as a way of unifying all Ogaden youth-led social justice organizations from around the world and bringing together all young people interested in and passionate about the Somali cause in the Ogaden.

OYSU is an international youth organization that advocates for the rights of the Somali people in the Ogaden region under Ethiopian occupation. It is the only youth advocacy body currently monitoring, reporting on and educating individuals and agencies on the violations and abuses committed by the Ethiopian government against Somalis living in the Ogaden region.²⁰

OYSU focuses on organizing and mobilizing the potential of Ogaden youth both in their native region and in the diaspora. Indigenous youth from the Ogaden have strategically worked on providing a single united voice for a marginalized group within a marginalized group—the Indigenous youth. Advocacy is at the core of OYSU activities; their aim is to be present and engaged in the conversations around human rights in Ethiopia, whilst bringing the dire human rights situation in the Ogaden to a global audience.

On a local level, OYSU members raise awareness by holding lectures and workshops at

²⁰ “Ogaden Youth and Student Union: Youth Led Movement for Change,” *OYSU*, last modified 2017, <https://www.oysu.org/>.

universities, aiming to engage university students, both those of allied liberation organizations and those studying the humanities who will progress to be tomorrow's leaders. OYSU educates them on the little-known humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden. OYSU also raises awareness in the wider community outside of educational institutions, holding occasional public talks. OYSU members also actively partner with local organizations to participate in local events such as Genocide Awareness Walks, parades, local festivals and other initiatives.

On the world stage, OYSU members have taken part in many conferences and hearings held at both the United Nations and the European Union. Following the success of the 2015 conference entitled “Cartoon Democracy: Authoritarian Rule and Elections in Ethiopia” which offered a platform for dialogue in which existing challenges in Ethiopia were openly addressed and possible opportunities for democratic changes were explored, youth were able to co-organize a hearing at the European Parliament called “Minority Women’s Rights: An Ethiopian Inferno?” In 2017, one of the OYSU members presented at this EU conference, highlighting the psychological traumas associated with sexual violations and how these hinder the democratic participation of women. Furthermore, in July 2017, OYSU members took part in the “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS): A Progress Study” to document

young people's positive contributions to peace processes and conflict resolution and to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels.²¹ Conciliation Resources, a peace-building organization based in London, facilitated focus groups with OYSU members for the purpose of this study and have recently published their findings.²²

Challenges of activism

Following the 2007 government-sponsored counter-insurgency campaign against rebel groups in the Ogaden region, an economic and media embargo was imposed by the Ethiopian government on the region and international organizations were also banned from the area. This made it extremely difficult to report on the extent of the atrocities committed by the Liyu Police and the Ethiopian federal forces. To restrict any awareness of the atrocities committed in the Ogaden region, former President Abdi Iley ran a sophisticated intelligence service that documented the activities of any human rights activists tracking this evolving situation around the world—specifically those whose

²¹ “Youth Aspirations for Peace and Security,” *Ogaden Youth and Student Union*, last modified April 10, 2018, <https://www.oysu.org/single-post/2018/04/10/Youth-Aspirations-for-Peace-Security>.

²² *Youth Aspirations for Peace and Security*, ed. Claudia Seymour (Conciliation Resources, January 2018), https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c5d032_2921dc0ce824435591edc431c35bfdc3.pdf.

families still lived in the region.²³ Abdi Iley, the former President of the Ogaden region, delivered both threats and bribes through his most trusted staff, some of whom would personally visit youth activists.²⁴ Although many youth activists received direct threats from the office of the former President via email and post regularly, and their family members living inside the harshest parts of the Ogaden region were harassed daily, this did not deter them from continuing their advocacy work.

Moreover, activists and their families are often harassed even outside the Ogaden region. Over the years, men sent by President Abdi Iley with the purpose of intimidating youth activists have approached families living in the United States and throughout Europe. This is a common practice used by Ethiopian officials to further silence youth.²⁵ In the past, they have extorted money; bullied elderly parents into denouncing the human rights work carried out by their children; and forcefully recorded family members on video under

²³ Human Rights Watch, “Ethiopia: Torture in Somali Region Prison,” 4:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlvuRq9CJzs&t=5s>.

²⁴ Source needs to be protected.

²⁵ Kedir Assefa Tessema, “Aspiring and Doing Activism Under Repressive Systems: A Narrative Inquiry of Former Student Activists,” PhD Diss., University of San Diego, 2015, <https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1011&context=dissertations>.

duress. Such acts of humiliation, extortion and threatening the livelihoods of families of activists is widespread.²⁶ This systematic policy of reprisals against human rights defenders is what has driven many young people to work in collaboration with human rights advocacy organizations as well as law firms to put together a case against President Abdi Iley for these acts of reprisals against citizens of the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. OYSU members have coordinated with fellow youth organizations and various human rights groups in London and organized for victims of reprisals to be interviewed by several law firms; so far, numerous interviews have been conducted and more are still underway.

One of the other key challenges faced in defending human rights in the Ogaden region is that many young people become citizens-in-exile due to their advocacy work, and they remain separated from their parents and close family members for years, unable to visit them. Not only are they not able to visit them, but they are unable to speak with them frankly on the telephone as intelligence services systematically listen in on phone calls made between human rights defenders and their

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Collective Punishment: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region*, *Human Rights Watch*, June 12, 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/06/12/collective-punishment/war-crimes-and-crimes-against-humanity-ogaden-area-ethiopia#>.

family members.²⁷ Young people frequently use fake names in order to spare their family and prevent them from being harmed more than they already have because of their work.

Understandably, one of the other key challenges faced is the lack of access to information on the ground; this is due to the strict media blockade that prevents any type of accurate reporting on the human rights situation of the region from being shared. This has been worsened by the regional president's use of a single media outlet to shape the news that emerges from the Ogaden; it is state-sponsored and effectively obscures any notion of reality on the ground. Thus, young people have been faced with the challenge of actually collecting reliable information from the ground. They often have to rely on local friends of theirs whose lives are put in danger each time they share information of abuses with the outside world and challenge the state-sponsored narratives used by official media outlets. Despite the serious challenges these activists face, including the loss of family members due to their human rights work, Somali youth from the Ogaden have taken it upon themselves to continue raising awareness of the concerning human rights situation in the Ogaden region.

²⁷ Horne, Felix, “How US Surveillance Helps Repressive Regimes—the Ethiopia Case,” *Just Security*, October 3, 2017, <https://www.justsecurity.org/45558/surveillance-helps-repressive-regimes-the-ethiopia-case/>.

Resiliency and hope

The lessons we have learned from Indigenous youth in the Ogaden are remarkable. Their resilience in the face of exploitation, poverty and injustice despite decades of oppression, is something we can all learn from. Their hope and aspirations for a better tomorrow have assisted them in this quest for freedom. This resilience was proven on August 27, 2018, when a major crackdown on a known perpetrator of human rights violations and crimes took place. Abdi Iley, the regional President of the Ogaden and an autocratic ruler in the region for over seven years, was taken into custody by the Ethiopian government on that day. Iley is known for years of assaults, crimes, looting, bribery, blackmail, and injustice against the population in the Ogaden. Following Iley's detention, many shifts have occurred in the region and things continue to change. On August 22, 2018, Mustafa Omer was appointed the interim regional President of the Ogaden. A staunch critic of Iley's harsh policies and procedures, Omer openly spoke out against the human rights violations in the region, which resulted in Iley murdering Omer's brother, an Indigenous young professional from the region.²⁸ The appointment of Mustafa Omer has been welcomed as a win due to Mustafa's active human rights work and open advocacy for improving the quality of life in the Ogaden. For

²⁸ Mustafa Omer, Facebook, October 29, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1325131310844648&set=a.534770799880707&type=3&theater>.

over ten years, Omer has been working for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. He recently vacated this post after taking office to lead the Somali Regional Administration. The international community, as well as the Indigenous civilian populations in the region, are hopeful that Mustafa will bring much-needed changes to the region. For many years, Indigenous youth have resisted the injustices faced in the Ogaden, despite having endured trauma, rape, torture, and forceful indoctrination intended to force them to lose their Indigenous identity. From this, we learn about the resiliency of the Indigenous youth who have stood against injustice for years. Despite the immense consequences suffered, Indigenous youth have never given up their struggle for freedom and are still hopeful for a future of well-being and dignity.

The role of the youth in rebuilding the Ogaden

Indigenous youth are at the forefront of rebuilding the Ogaden. Youth in the region are actively working on a reconciliation process that plans to heal and socially integrate displaced communities in the region. On August 14, 2018, OYSU delegates headed by OYSU Chairman Shaafi Sheekh Abdi, travelled to the Ogaden region for the first time since the organization was formed in 2010. This was made possible following Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed's call for increased

inclusivity and greater freedoms throughout Ethiopia.

Many youth activists around the world have been unable to travel freely to the region due to the nature of the advocacy work they are involved in, and many of them have been personal victims of reprisals during the reign of Abdi Iley and earlier Ethiopian administrations. For this reason, this trip was an opportunity for the delegates to meet and collaborate with Indigenous youth who have been operating secretly inside the region. Such youth are the cornerstone of this movement, and have consistently upheld the values of justice, peace, and freedom under extremely difficult circumstances.

The youth delegates are currently in the process of engaging the local Indigenous community and gathering support and information. They are in the process of implementing a needs assessment to better identify local needs and gaps in order to strategically align resources and strengthen partnerships. Youth delegates are traveling throughout the region, even to the most remote towns and villages, to truly capture the needs and wants of the people. Youth activists plan on using the information to create initiatives that call for *midnimo* (“unity”), reconciliation, so the region can move forward, and the Indigenous Peoples of the Ogaden can continue to seek the fulfilment of their fundamental rights. The next generation of decision-makers and leaders emerging from the Ogaden region must be afforded the same

opportunities that other young people are given. Only the direct involvement of young people in political processes today will equip tomorrow's leaders to make sound decisions on behalf of their people. The journey has been long but the Indigenous youth in Ogaden are hopeful. With their continued ambition, resilience, and overall aim of freedom, we are confident of better days to come in the Ogaden.