

Statement by the Ethiopian Embassy in London on the latest report by

Human Rights Watch

February 23 2016

Human Rights Watch has once again come out with a report on Ethiopia with particular emphasis on the disturbances which took place in some parts of Oromia region. As usual, the report was neither a result of thorough research nor does it make a convincing effort to substantiate the allegations it contains. Instead, for the most part, it turns out to be a validation of the propaganda statements of disgruntled opposition groups. The Ethiopian Embassy in London has therefore found it necessary to set the record straight by highlighting the facts surrounding the steps taken by the government to resolve the problem.

In the past few months, some parts of Oromia Region haven been a scene of unrest and the undesirable consequence of violent confrontation resulting in the unfortunate loss of life and property.

Since the onset of the unrest, the authorities both at the federal and regional levels tried to avoid confrontation with the protesters while at the same time discharging their fundamental responsibilities of stabilizing the situation, maintaining law and order as well as, protecting innocent lives and property.

It has to be noted at the outset that there were two kinds of protesters during the unrest. There were peaceful demonstrators with legitimate grievances and there were others who hijacked these legitimate demands and used them as a means of igniting violent confrontation aimed at creating chaos and instability. In the case of the former, police largely looked on and allowed the demonstrations to go ahead peacefully. It was the latter group of protesters whose actions could not be allowed under the law. The HRW report deliberately plays down the scale of the violence meted out by these aggressive protesters, but the evidence shows otherwise.

In order to stabilize the situation, the preferred option adopted by the government was to take a peaceful and people-centred approach. Accordingly, extensive public consultations have been held throughout Oromia region. These consultations enabled the people to air their grievances and put forward their demands without any restriction.

As the result of the public consultations the following measures were taken.

- The Integrated Masterplan was totally scrapped.
- An investigation has been launched to establish the identity of the culprits behind corrupt land acquisition practices with a view to making them legally accountable. Furthermore, the investigation aims at identifying those who are responsible for the loss of innocent lives. The extensive damage and destruction inflicted on private and public property is also being investigated with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice. The investigations have so far led to a number of arrests.

The peaceful and inclusive measures taken by the government have resulted in a return to normalcy and the maintenance of law and order. Indeed, it is worth noting at this juncture that the active participation of the people and their cooperation with the authorities was a decisive factor, without which the restoration of peace and stability in those parts of Oromia region would have been unthinkable.

The above description of events correctly reflects the facts on the ground. However, in keeping with its established *modus operandi*, the HRW report remains totally oblivious of such facts and has instead chosen to borrow malicious statements, false accusations and unsubstantiated allegations from opposition propaganda materials. The report makes ludicrous claims, such as ... “a security officer threw hand grenades at a bus carrying university students”, ...” security forces have shot randomly into crowds, summarily killed people”... and so on. The list of crimes it blames on the authorities is endless. However, when it comes to corroborating evidence, it falls abysmally short and quotes the usual anonymous sources like “eyewitnesses”, or “people who cannot be named for safety reasons”. The fact of the matter is that HRW cannot produce a credible report by relying on opposition propaganda and hearsay.

In closing, the Ethiopian Embassy in London wishes to make it clear that the Ethiopian Government is always ready to consult and engage in constructive dialogue aimed at advancing the cause of human rights protection. However, the Embassy regrets that HRW has chosen to continue producing biased reports with unsubstantiated allegations. The Embassy therefore believes that of the latest HRW report is just as unhelpful as the previous ones.

Embassy of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia , London

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