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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Slaughter and Slander of Oromo intensifies with ‘Tole Massacre’**

Mass executions of civilians by government forces in their campaign to defame and destroy the Oromo Liberation Army and its population base

Following a well-established pattern of abuse and disinformation, Ethiopian government forces have continued a campaign of 1) slaughter and burning civilian properties in Western Oromia in order to destroy the support base of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) there and 2) blaming the violence on the OLA.

The tactic of committing atrocities in Oromia and falsely blaming the OLA has succeeded in diverting international attention away from mass killings of Oromo that took place in Gambella to the west<sup>i</sup> and Wollo to the north<sup>ii</sup> of Oromia.

Although pro-government and Amhara nationalist media together with some uncritical international outlets were quick to point the finger of blame at OLA, the mass killing of civilians in Tole, in Gimbi district, W. Oromia, was conducted by government forces masquerading as OLA fighters.

*OSG condemns the indiscriminate killings of members of the Oromo, Argoba and Amhara communities by government forces in Tole during the weekend of 18-19 June.*

A dramatic upsurge in mass killings of civilians and burning of villages began in April after a government announcement in March of a planned offensive against OLA and its supporters.<sup>iii</sup> There was already a publicly-announced government intent to eradicate OLA and members of the Qeerroo non-violent movement. It was the Qeerroo whose peaceful demonstrations enabled Abiy’s assumption of power in 2018 and who were seen by him, once he became premier, as his greatest threat.<sup>iv</sup>

The ‘Tole massacre’ of June 18 quickly became part of a massive disinformation campaign whose purpose is to besmirch OLA and to sow discord between Oromo and other communities. It is being used as an excuse for a declaration of war on Oromia.

In the case of Tole, an eye-witness account reveals a technique of ‘slaughter and slander’.<sup>v</sup> Innocent villagers, mostly women and children, were mown down with automatic weapons by forces organized by the government to impersonate OLA fighters. A government official admitted to this subterfuge when interviewed.<sup>vi</sup> Listeners who know Amharic heard that the confession was mistranslated on Amhara media, clearly a deliberate attempt to disinform. Translators actually flipped the story to indicate collusion between government administrators and OLA.<sup>vii</sup>

The Tole incident mirrors the killing of Amhara settlers in Guliso, West Wallega, on 3 November 2020. Local troop movements were reported during the night before that massacre

and resident Oromia Special Forces were removed, allowing the killers, again impersonating OLA fighters, free rein. Just as now following the Tole massacre,<sup>viii</sup> OLA then called for independent investigation, but to no avail.

The ‘slaughter and slander’ technique is fast becoming this Prime Minister’s signature pattern of rule. The assassination of Oromo nationalist singer Haacaaluu Hundeessaa on 29 June 2020 is a case in point. It was aimed to demoralise and weaken the Oromo movement. The Attorney General tried to blame that killing on Oromo forces. He was never taken seriously. However, most media were fooled when the disturbances that followed the assassination were blamed on Qeerroo. Even then, analysis of published information showed that most victims were Oromo. Outside forces had been imported and had been led to destroy targeted properties by local government officials.<sup>ix</sup> Hundreds of Oromo demonstrators died.

The killing of Karrayyu spiritual and social leaders in East Showa, central Oromia, in December 2021 was another body blow to morale.<sup>x</sup> The sixteen Karrayyu leaders represented what is held sacred by Oromo people, their ancient Gadaa system. They were executed in cold blood. The slander came when the killings were initially attributed to OLA. This falsehood stood until a Member of Parliament exposed that the crimes were committed by government forces.<sup>xi</sup>

A tidal wave of killings of Oromo villagers by government forces has swept through central and western Oromia with increasing ferocity since April of this year, especially after military engagements with OLA.<sup>xii</sup> Amhara region militia and Fano brigades have also unleashed unprecedented violence in areas adjacent to Amhara Region.<sup>xiii</sup>

The slaughter of innocent and peaceful Oromo civilians is now greatly intensified under the guise of ‘eliminating OLA’. National and international media do not acknowledge the level of persecution of Oromo and, more importantly, are complicit in amplifying and broadcasting misinformation to denigrate OLA.

These deliberate distortions are used as a smokescreen to hide the Ethiopian government’s oppression of the Oromo population: oppression which encourages and opens the door for the territorial invasion of Oromia by Amhara regional forces along their mutual borders, to confiscate land. These perversions of truth are being used to excuse a declaration of war on Oromia and to justify the exclusion of OLA from any peace-talks.

The Oromia Support Group in concert with all Oromo advocacy and human rights groups calls for independent investigation of human rights abuses throughout Ethiopia and for those responsible to be held to account.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> [Addis Standard 16 June](#)

<sup>ii</sup> A video clip circulated widely on social media recently, is of about 30 Oromo youth being executed in Wollo in December 2021. This was one of many executions reported by [Addis Standard 15 July 2020](#).

<sup>iii</sup> *Counter-insurgency Operation Plan against 'Anti-peace' forces*, leaked to Oromia Media Network and [broadcast on YouTube](#) on 28 March. Translation by Oromia Global Forum members in USA, Canada, Belgium and Switzerland.

<sup>iv</sup> Milkessa Midega Gemechu, [How Abiy Ahmed Betrayed Oromia and Endangered Ethiopia](#). Foreign Policy, 25 January 2022.

<sup>v</sup> Ethio 360 “Zare Min Ale” program, 24 June 2022, 7m 35s to 8m 17s. [Ethio 360 Zare Min Ale "ሰንጠረዥ ... ወቅቱን የሞገሰ ጥሪ!" Friday June 24, 2022 - YouTube](#). ‘Tole’s Massacre is the regime’s work and the government is responsible.’ Negatu Umata, Head of Tole kebele militia, said he was ordered to cooperate by the Gimbi District Administrator with whom he ‘had to watch the massacre just like a movie.’

<sup>vi</sup> Interview by Konjit Sitotaw, 24 June, [Mereja.com – Ethiopian Amharic News](#).

<sup>vii</sup> For example, translation by Dr Assefa Negash at <https://borkena.com/2022/06/25/amhara-genocide-in-the-tole-locality-of-wellega-western-ethiopia/> or EthioNews journalist, [Belay Manaye](#).

<sup>viii</sup> <https://olacommunique.com/2022/06/20/the-abiy-regimes-militia-are-responsible-for-the-tole-massacre-of-west-wollega/>

<sup>ix</sup> *In-depth Analysis: Spate of targeted attacks, excessive use of force by security in Oromia leave death trails, destruction*. Addis Standard 15 July 2020.

<sup>x</sup> [OSG Report 59](#), p.15-18

<sup>xi</sup> See the [video exposé by Hangaasaa Ibraahim](#), Oromia Region MP, admitting government responsibility and accusing Oromia Region Police Commissioner Ararsa Merdasa of ordering the execution (subtitles in English by Anley E. Tefera, “Tisho”).

<sup>xii</sup> Group-killings: 60 in four separate incidents in Ginberet district, West Showa, 1 January and 10 in Iluu Galan district, West Showa, 19 February ([OSG Report 59](#), p.9); 15+ in Ada’aa Bargaa, W. Showa, 28 April, 22 in W. Guji, 22 April, and 11 in Fantalle, E. Showa, last week of April ([OFC Statement 1 May](#)); 4 in W. Showa, 6 May, 8 in W. Showa, 12 May, 14 in Horo Guduru, 24 May and 5 in W. Showa 30 May (reported directly to members of the [Coalition of Oromo Advocacy and Human Rights Groups](#)).

Isolated killings, between 3 May and 7 June reported to the coalition, in ones, twos and occasionally threes include 9 (W. Showa), 4 (E. Showa), 1 (N. Showa), 4 (W. Wallega), 8 (Horo Guduru), 2 (Qellem), 4 (E. Wallega), 3 (W. Arsi), 1 (W. Guji) and 1 (Metekel, Benishangul-Gumuz Region).

<sup>xiii</sup> For example, 47 were killed by Amhara forces in KIRAMU district, East Wallega, on 10 October 2021 ([OSG Report 58](#), p.21-22), and 29 were murdered in Abe Dengoro district, Horo Guduru, on 12 February 2022 ([Addis Standard 22 February](#)). The slaughter intensified in April. In its [1 May, 2022 statement](#), the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) party reported 115 more killed in KIRAMU, East Wallega, on 16 April and, in the last week of April alone, 21 burnt to death in their homes by Fano in Nono and another 31 killed by Fano in Deno, West Showa, 11 killed by Fano in Jardega Jarte, East Wallega and at least 15 killed by Amhara region militia and Fano in Benishangul-Gumuz Region. According to our own sources, another 15 Oromo were killed by Fano in Biftuu Nuuf Batee, Hababo district, Horo Guduru, on 25 May 2022. Sometimes, as with the killing of ten youth in a recreation hall in Fantalle district, East Showa, by armed militia on 17 March, 2022, it is not known whether the killers were government or Amhara troops ([Addis Standard 19 March](#)).

Abuses were until recently often performed by government forces operating in conjunction with Amhara region militia and Fano. In December, when Tigray Defence Forces and OLA withdrew from Wollo in Amhara Region to allow ceasefire and aid access, at least 148 were killed in six mass executions by these forces in reprisal for cooperation with Tigrayan and Oromo forces ([Addis Standard 15 February](#)). The killing and burning of eleven Gumuz and Tegaruu civilians in Aysid, Metekel Zone, Benishangul-Gumuz Region, on 3 March 2022 was a joint operation by government forces, Amhara regional militia and Fano in retaliation for an attack on a military convoy the previous day ([Al Jazeera 14 March](#)).