



PRESS RELEASE

Joint HRLHA-UNPO Side-Event to the UN Human Rights Council to Assess Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration in Ethiopia

On 23 June 2016, the Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) will convene a side-event entitled “Violations of Freedom of Assembly and Demonstration: Brutal Crackdown on Peaceful Oromo Protests”. The side-event, taking place on the occasion of the 32nd Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council, seeks to assess the human right situation in Ethiopia, while giving special attention to the recent crackdown in Oromia, where the Ethiopian security forces responded to largely peaceful protests with excessive and lethal force.

23 June 2016 | 15.00-16.00 | Palais des Nations, Geneva | Room XI

In April 2014, protests broke out across Oromia, Ethiopia’s largest region. The protesters’ anger was mainly directed at the so-called ‘Integrated Master Plan’, the central government’s intention to expand Addis Ababa’s municipal boundary into Oromia regional territory. Initiated and led by Oromo students, people from all walks of life soon joined the protests, only to be met by the brutal and swift response of the Ethiopian government. Reports quickly emerged of armed forces shooting into the crowd, wounding hundreds and killing at least several dozen protesters and bystanders. Thousands were arrested, and an unknown number of Oromo students remain in detention, many of them without charge.

Notwithstanding the army’s brutal crackdown, Oromos were determined to stand their ground and continued their public display of discontent with state-sponsored suppression and marginalisation. Sadly, this did not push the government forces to change their modus operandi. Since November 2015 alone, 400 Oromos participating in protests have been killed. While the protests started as an opposition to the ‘Integrated Master Plan’, they gradually evolved into a wider Oromo movement levelled against the central authorities, whose continuing and systematic perpetration of human rights violations against the Oromo population has led to the disenfranchisement of the latter.

Against this background, this timely side-event seeks to shed light not only on the violent crackdown of Ethiopian security forces on peaceful protesters in Oromia, but also the overall human rights situation in the region and the country writ large. It will also look at possible ways forward for Ethiopia’s marginalized groups to address these blatant human rights violations and analyse the effectiveness of the international community’s response to the situation.