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Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law

PRESS STATEMENT

THE CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS RELEASES A SECOND PRESS STATEMENT CALLING ON ETHIOPIA, THE AFRICAN UNION AND THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING MECHANISMS TO TAKE STEPS REGARDING THE GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN ETHIOPIA

30 August 2016

The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, is deeply alarmed by the deteriorating human rights situation in Ethiopia, and especially, the arbitrary killing, arrest and detention of protesters.

According to reports, the Ethiopian government forces have killed more than 500 protesters since November 2015, and have arrested and detained thousands.

We recall that on the eve of calls for protests, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Haile-Mariam has warned that measures will be taken against protesters. Eventually, when protests took place in the Amhara and Oromia regions in August 2016, nearly a hundred protesters were killed. The public statements of warning by the senior government officials stirred the suspicion that the ongoing human rights abuses by government forces are happening by the approval of the Ethiopian government.

The Ethiopian government has rejected the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (UNOHCHR) request that the government allow international observers to assess the human rights violation in Ethiopia. The government has stated that it would establish a domestic body to investigate the matter.

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However, the findings of the commissions of inquiry established in the past by the Ethiopian Parliament (House of Peoples' Representatives) have generated mistrust by stakeholders, human rights organisations and other bodies. In the past, instead of the main perpetrators of the violence that actually committed the arbitrary killings and detentions, individuals who took part in the protests have been held accountable on charges like incitement and terrorism. The commissions of inquiry have not implicated members of government forces and senior government officials, and as a result, they have not been held accountable. These commissions of inquiry have also lacked adequate participation of stakeholders and transparency.

Moreover, the fact that senior government officials have been, and continue to make statements threatening protesters from making peaceful protests amounts to approving the human rights violations. Such statements send a signal to the Ethiopian security and military forces to assume that the ongoing arbitrary killings, arrests and detentions are legitimate.

With a view to addressing these problems, making a credible, independent, impartial, effective and transparent inquiry is imperative. To this end, the Centre is convinced that international or regional inquiry mechanisms are better suited than domestic commission of inquiry in Ethiopia.

Therefore, the Centre for Human Rights makes the following requests:

- The United Nations Human Rights Council should put the serious human rights violations in Ethiopia in its agenda on the 33rd regular session in September 2016. It should be noted that Ethiopia is currently a member of the Human Rights Council. The Council should consider whether to suspend Ethiopia's membership of the Council for having committed "gross and systematic violations of human rights" (as provided for under A/RES/60/251 paragraph 8).
- The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Killings should make an urgent appeal to the Ethiopian government, and undertake a visit to Ethiopia with a view to gather first-hand information of the arbitrary killings according to its mandate, and to release its reports.
- The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions should investigate the arrests and detentions of protesters in Ethiopia.
- While we take note of the letter expressing grave concern about the violations by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, we urge the Commission to undertake a visit into the country and in order to assess the human rights violations.

- The Chairperson of the African Union, with its seat located in Addis Ababa, should denounce the human rights violation in Ethiopia
 - The Ethiopian government should consent to fully cooperate with international and regional inquiry mechanisms to undertake their investigation; it should release political detainees; it should respect the right to peaceful demonstration, which is protected in art 30(1) of the Ethiopian Constitution and various human rights treaties to which Ethiopia is a party; it should note that the limitations of this right are to be construed narrowly; and it should desist from further using excessive force and violence to disperse peaceful protests.
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