

Afar forum



Press Release

Afar forum is deeply concerned about the intensified clashes between Afars and Issa-Somalis in the Afar region of Ethiopia.

Intensified armed incursion and sustained act of terror by the Issa-Somalis towards Afar civilians has gone beyond its limit. The latest waves of attack started by killing a praying elderly man in his 70s that followed by slaughtering of two teenage boys in Buuri, May 2012. The act of terror by Issa-Somali has continued since then and from June 3, 2012; it has mobilized a well-armed and well trained military which killed and injured many civilians in different places in Afar regional state. Paradoxically enough, most of these killings take place in front of the Ethiopian Army which remains indifferent and failed to protect the Afars from the aggression. The army also thwarts the Afar from defending themselves.

The current escalation of the Issa-Somali invasion is a continuation of the past eight decade long terror attacks, which is planned to evict Afars from their indigenous land. The Afars have been evicted by force from places such as Mulu, Erer, Afdem, and part of the Halaydagi plain, Gadmaytu, Undafoo, Adaytu, where myriad lives have been lost in various aggressive and coordinated military attacks. Furthermore, the land grabbing policy of Ethiopian government and environmental degradation has further ensued in squeezing the Afar pastoralists from different directions. Hence, the safety and security of the Afar people is under constant threat and the Afars are currently struggling for their existence.

The increasing west-ward expansion of Issa Somalis has become highly politicized, particularly since the 1970s. It is a well known fact that the Ziad Barre regime that agitated for territorial expansion to form "the Great Somalia," was the main cause of war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977/78. This pan-Somali sentiment of the Barre regime that supported Issa-Somalis helped to evict the Afars from Afdem, Erer and Mulu areas. Consequently, it is a well-documented fact that Issa-Somalis has uttered determination to secede from the current Somali Regional State and therewith create a new state called Shinille Regional State, that is equivalent to that of Afars and Oromos. To implement this political objective Issa has intensified its claim to incorporate large areas of the Afar and Oromia regions.

It's evident that the nature of the conflict between Afar and Issa-Somalis has changed its character. Previously, there was a presumed conception among pundit that the prolonged conflict emanates from shrinking pastoral resource. However, the current assessment clearly indicates that there is a conscious and refined politico-economic dimension to this conflict, mixed with fabricated and unsubstantiated territorial claim.

The economic aspects are attributed to smuggling of goods from Djibouti to the Ethiopian hinterland which controlled by Issa-Somalis. The forcibly and unjustified occupied towns of Gadmaytu, undafoo and Adaytu are solely used as distribution points of illegally imported goods. Moreover, the ambition of Issa Somalis to cultivate the Awash Valley has been articulated in different conflict resolution meeting that were hosted by Ethiopian government. The cattle raiding is also part of economic interest where the raided Afar livestock are sold both in domestic market and exported to different gulf-states through Djibouti.

The ambition of expansion and economic interest is underpinned and orchestrated by authorities of Shinille Zone, Somali regional state. Many eye-witnesses confirm that the ongoing war is going between pastoralist Afars and a well trained Somali regional state militia.

The EPRDF government seems to be fueling the conflict rather than working to settle conflict among these two neighboring people. EPRDF seem to reaffirm the imperial mind set of keeping the population in peripheries in conflict with each other to have peace in central part of the country. It is astounding to observe that these two ethnic groups are engaged in killing each other in front of the federal army. The role of Afar regional state to find solution to the conflict and maintain the safety and security of its citizens remains nonexistent and it is absolutely unacceptable.

Afar Forum believes and encourages a peaceful co-existence between neighbours but strongly denounce aggression, forced displacement and killings. Hence, Afar Forum appeals to:

1. Shinille Zone to stop the war of aggression and the territorial claim of Afar land
2. To Djibouti Government to stop both military and financial support to the war of terror and expansion
3. The Ethiopian government and Afar regional state officials to find viable solution to the conflict, which is a clear border demarcation between Afar and Issa
4. The international community to help and facilitate meaningful solution that can stop the bloodshed and further escalation of this conflict.

Afar Forum
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