

# AFAR DIASPORA NETWORK

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## PRESS RELEASE

**Concerning the Afar Issa-Somali Conflict:  
It is not about disputed land but about occupied land  
as part of realization of the dream of Greater Somalia**

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**Sub:** Afar-Issa-Somali conflict

The Issa tribes of Somali militia forces, trained and armed by their regional sponsors have over several years systematically occupied large areas of Afar land killing and displacing thousands of Afar civilians from their ancestral homeland in the process. The same forces have also occupied vast territories belonging to the neighbouring Oromo Region in a similar manner. The Government of Somali under Mohammed Ziad Barre called both the Afars and the Oromos as their junior kin brothers in blood and faith. Hence, they identified them as Somalis, by calling them "*Somali Ayka*" and "*Somali Abbo*" respectively. They established Liberation Fronts in their names that were supposed to liberate and annex themselves to be part of Greater Somalia (Soomaaliweyn). This project failed and the unifying centre in Mogadishu disbanded, but the irredentist vision based on the idea of Greater Somalia never died. It is only to be implemented in a different manner.

During recent years, Somali-Issa militia forces have expanded their control into the heart of the Afar land reaching to the banks of the Awash River and the strategic highway linking Addis Ababa to the port cities of Assab and Djibouti. Taking control of these important areas, as we have stressed several times, has remained one of the major objectives of the Republic of Somalia since its birth in 1960. The independence of Issa Somali dominated Republic of Djibouti in 1977, reinforced such a dream, intensifying the conflict further due to its proximity to the Afar land in Ethiopia.

We, the Afar Diaspora Network, have on different occasions expressed our deep concern about the Issa-Somali occupation of the Afar lands exposing the intentions behind such unprovoked aggression and systematic territorial expansion. We have also exposed the Ethiopian Government's biased approach to the conflict and too often its officials' complicity ranging from direct attacks on the Afars in the conflict areas, to disarming those who tried to defend themselves against the invading Issa-Somali forces. We have, recently, noted two new developments regarding this conflict. While the systematic occupation of the Afar land continues uninterrupted, the Ethiopian Federal Government has indicated that it might consider taking some concrete steps to halt the rapid expansion spearheaded by the Issa-Somali militia forces. The Ethiopian Government's resolve to address this bloody conflict remains to be seen though its track-record so far is discouraging.

The second new development is the fact that the Somali diaspora communities around the world including representatives of the *Ogaden National Liberation Front* (ONLF), have lately opted to engage themselves directly in this conflict. These communities have been sending out mixed signals. Agitating and calling upon Somalis everywhere to mobilize against the Afars in the Somali language on Somali Radio programs and websites, on one hand, and a more conciliatory approach through press releases in English urging the Afars to avoid escalation of the conflict between the two brotherly peoples on the other. The Somali Diaspora's direct involvement in this conflict has confirmed once again what the Afars in general and the Afar Diaspora in particular has been arguing all along or the old dream of Greater Somalia bordering the Awash River.

While, we welcome the call for reconciliation to work together to avoid further escalation of this conflict between the two brotherly people, we demand that the Somali Regional State and the Somali Diaspora in general to stop war agitations and a call for mobilization against the Afar people, a campaign communicated through different media in Somali language.

We further call upon the Issa-Somalis in particular and the Somali community in general to work together with the Afar community for reconciliation and for bringing lasting peace between the two brotherly people. The Afar Diaspora is willing and ready to contribute to and participate in such dialogue.

The Afar Diaspora Network demands that the Ethiopian Federal Government respect and safeguard the Afar people's right to their ancestral land or territories by dismantling immediately and unconditionally all illegal Somali settlements on the occupied Afar areas; to demarcate and enforce the boundary between the Somali and the Afar Regions marking the Erer River as a border line.

The Afar Diaspora Network calls on Ethiopian communities, political parties and civil society organizations and the Ethiopian People in general to study closely the intentions behind the Somali invading forces and take a firm stand on the issue, before it is too late. This systematic expansion is directly against the Ethiopian People's vital interests, mainly security and territorial integrity, political independence and the sovereignty of Ethiopia.

We, the Afar Diaspora, urge the Afar Regional State to assume its responsibility to defend and safeguard the Afar People's rights and their territory and to be accountable to the Afar people by consulting them with and communicating what is going on regarding this crucial issue.

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