

Ethiopian government massacres ethnic minorities in Oromia region

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Over one hundred people were killed during a stampede provoked by Ethiopian security forces in the East African nation's Oromia region last Sunday, October 2. The deaths came after government forces fired live ammunition at civilians, along with tear gas and rubber bullets, during a protest in Bishoftu city.

The death toll from the incident may be as high as 600, according to Oromia media sources. Overall, at least 400 Oromo have been killed by the government since the protests began last November, according to Amnesty International's figures.

The incident, essentially a massacre of unarmed protesters, has only succeeded in pouring fuel on the fire of anti-government protests. It comes on the heels of the massacre of more than 100 civilians by the Ethiopian government in August in Oromia and Amhara, killings that were carried out by government forces in the course of clashes in Ambo, Dembi Dolo, Nekempt, Bahir Dar, and a handful of other towns.

Local authorities have characterized the scale of anti-government agitation in Oromo as an "uprising," with a local police commissioner denouncing "continued and sporadic efforts to block streets, disturb the peace and burn administrative buildings."

The protests have been ongoing since November 2015, in response to the launch of the Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Plan, which includes the seizure of farms from Oromia families and their sale to international finance capital. Some among the demonstrators demanded an independent regional government, calling for autonomy for the ethnic minority under the umbrella of the Oromo Federalist Congress.

The anti-government protesters have destroyed a textile factory and a mine, and attacked other foreign investments. Ethiopian media reported attacks on at

least 11 firms, including flower, textile, and plastics producers, impacting facilities that employ over 40,000 workers, Reuters reported.

The government and Ethiopia's state-linked media are claiming that the attacks against foreign-owned businesses are intended to undermine the regime in Addis Ababa led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The EPRDF blames the attacks on "dissidents based abroad" and "anti-peace forces," responsible for "pre-planned mayhem."

Nonetheless, the ongoing protests in Oromo region have deep objective causes, having erupted in response to confiscations of agricultural land by the EPRDF-controlled central government.

Social conflict has intensified in Ethiopia during the past year as a decade of relatively rapid economic growth, which earned Ethiopia the status of "Africa's rising economic star" in the bourgeois press, has given way to crisis. Ethiopia's growth rate fell by half during 2015-2016. Unemployment stands at over 24 percent in the capital city, and social turmoil is rippling across key regions. Ethiopia's Amhara region has been rocked by a similar protest movement since July.

The East African nation has long been an important partner of American imperialism's operations in Africa. Addis Ababa has played a leading role in US and European-backed multinational forces in the Horn of Africa, spearheading repeated invasions of Somalia on behalf of Washington. Ethiopia's ruling establishment is currently organizing a coalition of regional powers for military intervention in South Sudan under the banner of a "Force Intervention Brigade."

During his summer 2015 visit to Addis Ababa, US President Barack Obama praised the Ethiopian military

as “tough fighters,” who relieved Washington of having to “send our own Marines in to do the fighting.”

These cozy US-Ethiopia relations are being shaken, however, as Addis Ababa is courted as a potential economic partner by China. Beijing invested over \$20 billion in Ethiopian projects between 2005 and 2015. During the past decade, China’s Export-Import Bank financed 70 percent of a new Ethiopian railway connecting Addis Ababa to the interior of the continent and the Indian Sea coastline, including railway linkages to Kenya, Sudan, and South Sudan, aimed at integrating Ethiopia into the LAPSSET transportation corridor.

The clashes in Oromo highlight the predominant features of the explosive and contradictory social and political struggles developing across the continent. However brutal the government’s repression against the Oromo and other ethnic minorities, the demands of various self-styled “community leaders” for the creation of independent mini-states are backward and reactionary. They are aimed at enhancing the position of the provincial elites against that of their rivals in the capital, through the establishment of direct relations with the imperialist powers, over which the EPRDF currently maintains a stranglehold, via its control of the ruling political organs in Addis Ababa.

Coming against the backdrop of rising imperialist violence and social struggle across the continent, from Central African Republic to Zimbabwe, the ruthless massacring of Ethiopian minorities by the national government is a stark warning to the entire African and international working class.



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