

ADDA BILISUMMAA OROMOO (ABO-WBO)

OROMO LIBERATION FRONT



جبهة تحرير أورومو

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Statement on the Botched Reporting of the Tole Massacre and the Urgent Need for Independent Human Rights Investigations

We have observed that several false claims that have been made against the OLF-OLA continue to be disseminated by the regime, its affiliates, and the media in regards to the horrendous Tole massacre. Unless the record is straightened, this will have several grave implications for seeking accountability and justice for the victims. There are multiple important points to clarify regarding accusations being directed towards OLF-OLA.

There have also been attempts to link the OLF-OLA's recent offensive in Gimbi to this massacre. The operation in Gimbi was conducted on Tuesday, June 14th. The objective of this operation was to liberate political prisoners, capture weaponry, and degrade the regime's capacity to wage war in the area. To this end, we targeted a prison holding political prisoners, and two compounds: one which served as a military camp and another which served as a camp for Oromia state's "Gaachana Sirna" militia. All of these structures lay within the city proper. Following a day-long shootout, the regime's forces vacated both of these compounds and withdrew from the city in the evening. These forces escaped westward on the A4 highway towards Nekemte. By Wednesday morning (June 15th), our forces had withdrawn from Gimbi, taking with them the captured weaponry and freeing political prisoners. This is in line with both our statements during the operation and reporting by various news outlets. The massacre in Abasina, Tole and other surrounding villages took place 3 days after our operations concluded.

We would like to draw attention to the following:

1. On the day of the alleged massacre, the entirety of the A4 highway between Gimbi and Nekemte was under the control of the regime's forces. The area in which the massacre took place lies on the A4 highway between these two cities - approximately 50km from Gimbi and 63km from Naqamte. It wasn't clear at the time what led the regime's forces to engage in a killing spree against civilians. In other areas, we have seen many times that the regime's forces tend to target civilian communities following a military defeat and so our initial assumption was that this was the same situation. What is certain, however, is that our troops were nowhere in the area on June 20th when the alleged killings occurred.
2. Contrary to media reports, we are learning that both Amharic speaking folks from Wollo and Oromos were killed indiscriminately in the massacre. Despite these facts, the international media went on to make unfounded accusations against the OLF-OLA based only on the coordinated statements of regime officials and unsubstantiated witness testimonies, who wrongly identified the perpetrators as OLA fighters for merely having spoken Afaan Oromo, the language spoken in the regime's military as well and since some try to impersonate members of the OLA by wearing wigs. Therefore, we believe the media have played right into the hands of the regime by amplifying its self-serving narrative without a reasonably sufficient evidence from the ground. We believe the intended political goal of the regime in designing such

scheme of atrocity is to support its narrative to justify its aggressive military crackdown and its refusal to engage in a comprehensive peace process. Moreover, they have enabled the regime to escape accountability.

3. This alleged atrocity occurred in an area in which the regime has kept tight control of the flow of information by shutting down the internet and phone service. This allowed for the news of this massacre to be immediately reframed and reported along the lines of the concocted narrative that the OLF-OLA targets Amhara civilians. Even the regime-sponsored Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (the EHRC), which previously stated it would no longer report on events in western Oromia despite the regular occurrence of human rights violations in the area, issued a report parroting the regime's narrative. As in many cases before, the EHRC made this claim less than 24 hours after the massacre took place and before conducting any reasonable investigation. Had a thorough investigation taken place, the EHRC would have known that at least half of the victims were Oromos. It is the same pattern we have seen in Gulliso, Babo Gambal, and other areas where heinous attacks against civilians have been committed by the regime's forces and its allies. In all these cases, the regime used its monopoly on information to project the narrative that the OLA targets Amhara civilians. In the case of the Guliso massacre, the regime even pointed fingers at the Tigray government - situated over 1000km away - and used the massacre as part of the justification to launch a military offensive on Tigray two days later.

4. Importantly, we found it troubling that no media made an effort to obtain real evidence of atrocity regarding an alleged killing of 300 outside of a statement given remotely on the phone from two witnesses, whose credibility is yet to be established.

5. Absent any clear and convincing evidence that OLA has any involvement, regrettably, major news media with supposedly reputable journalism ethics, who reported on the atrocity, are at risk of inadvertently misleading and/or misinforming the world. We don't believe such inaccurate reporting will contribute towards conflict resolution in the region; it would rather brew further social conflict.

These types of heinous acts have become much too common in this country. We are cognisant of the fact that, for far too long, calls for justice have been drowned out by the unending series of accusations and counter-accusations. That is why we maintain that our demand for independent investigations are met forthwith. Until an impartial third-party is permitted to enter the country and conduct a full investigation of these atrocities without hindrance, it will be futile to expect to see any form of justice for the victims or accountability from the regime. We reiterate our call for an internationally mandated fact-finding mission on this and other atrocities reported in the country.

OLF-OLA High Command

June 22, 2022