



Institute for Horn of Africa Studies and Affairs

Barack Obama
The President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of IHASA, let me seize this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for your moral and political leadership in support of advocates for change in Egypt and Tunisia as well as other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. Brave people in these countries stood up against dictatorships and corruption.

In the spirit of the historic changes that we are witnessing, IHASA would like to bring to your attention to the deteriorating situation in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The conflict in this region has cost the lives of thousands of innocent lives and continues to be one of the unresolved colonial era conflicts.

Background:

The Ogaden region (also known as Somali Regional State) is located in southeastern Ethiopia bordering Somalia and Kenya. Although geographically within Ethiopia, the ethnic Somali population has weak links to Addis Ababa. The region has been historically marginalized and underdeveloped. From 1935-1941, the Ogaden was administered as part of Italian Somaliland from Mogadishu. In 1941, the British established rule in the Ogaden after the defeat of Italy in WWII. In 1954, without the knowledge or the consent of the Somali inhabitants, the territory was transferred (in three stages) to Ethiopia without any regard to the basic human right of the populations to decide their future. Negotiations began that year between Italy and Ethiopia over the boundary between Somalia and Ethiopia. Italy's position, being the main colonial power, was that the Ogaden should be included in the future state of Somalia. In 1957, Italy and Ethiopia reported to the UN General Assembly that direct negotiations were not successful. The United Nations and Italy were extremely troubled as to the long-term regional consequences of a Somali region being occupied by Ethiopia. The General Assembly then asked the King of Norway to nominate an adviser to assist in resolving the dispute. Trygve Lie, the former UN Secretary General was appointed in August 1959, but he failed to secure an agreement on the status of the Ogaden. In 1959, Italian, Ethiopian and Somali representatives agreed that a provisional line should remain in force until a final settlement was reached on the Ogaden. The problem is the international community never bothered again to get involved and disengaged it self from this conflict.

The Ogaden as a Source of Regional Instability:

In 1960, the US State Department made the correct assessment that

'Peace in the Horn of Africa depends in large measure on the stabilization, if not the ultimate solution of the Ogaden Province of Ethiopia.' (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Brubeck Series, Somalia. Confidential. Drafted by Newsom on August, 24. A handwritten notation on the source text reads: ``Sent to Mr. Bundy for info. Aug. 26. S.B)

Regrettably, the Ogaden region still remains as a source of regional instability and one of the most violent political conflicts in postcolonial Africa. Somalia and Ethiopia carried out a full scale conventional war in 1964 and 1977 to solidify their claims of the Ogaden region. Both of these wars have caused two of the poorest countries in the world to expend much of their resources. Since 1994, clashes between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the Ogaden National Liberation Front have been taking place with civilians caught in the middle. The conflict intensified in April 2007 after the Ogaden National Liberation Front attacked a Chinese-run oil exploration facility in the Ogaden.

We firmly believe that the Ogaden conflict can never be resolved without the full engagement of the United States. More than any other country, the United States continues to have a greater influence on Ethiopia. We are urging your administration to take active and principled stand on this conflict by taking the following steps:

- Spearhead an international effort aimed at ending the conflict
- To urge all sides to commit an immediate ceasefire and respect the rule of law and human rights.
- To urge the government of Ethiopia to allow the media, humanitarian and human rights organizations full access of the Ogaden region.

Institute for Horn of Africa Studies and Affairs (IHASA) is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to document, research, analyze, publish and disseminate information on the political and socio-economic justice issues affecting the people in the Horn of Africa and in the Diaspora community. IHASA promotes peace, justice, equality, development and supports policies and actions that contribute to the advancement of good governance and the elimination of conflicts in the Horn of Africa.

Thank you again for your support. We look forward to hearing your response soon.

Sincerely,

Hamse Warfa
President,
Institute for Horn of Africa Studies and Affairs