

PRESS RELEASE

Ethiopians Break their Silence against Government Repression and Forced Displacement

New Landmark Testimony: “We Say the Land is Not Yours”

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Oakland, CA – *We Say the Land is Not Yours: Breaking the Silence against Forced Displacement in Ethiopia*, a landmark report from the Oakland Institute documents testimony from members of several ethnic groups from different areas of the country,¹ bringing forward the voices of those most directly impacted by land grabs and villagization. The Ethiopian government’s villagization program aims to resettle up to 1.5 million Ethiopians, mainly pastoralist and indigenous communities, from areas targeted for industrial plantations. These resettlements have happened without free, prior, and informed consent; and when communities resist, they have been forcibly removed by means of violence, imprisonment, intimidation, political coercion, and the denial of humanitarian assistance.

“The Oakland Institute has released reports based on meticulous fieldwork and years of research, exposing the human rights abuses against indigenous and pastoralist communities in Ethiopia,” said Anuradha Mittal, the Oakland Institute’s Executive Director. “As the country now prepares for the national election in May 2015, it is an important time to provide a platform for community voices that have been shut out and locked up, to tell their stories in their own words.”

Over the past few years, free speech in Ethiopia has been systemically withdrawn. International media and NGOs have documented the threats, arrests, and disappearances of those critical of government’s policies. Particularly poor is its lack of media freedom: Ethiopia is the second biggest jailer of journalists after its neighbor, Eritrea. Its broadcasting and telecommunications sectors are controlled by the state, and the minimal private media sector is heavily regulated and frequently censored.

“The context in which we release this report is one of torture, oppression, and silencing,” said Mittal. “A development strategy without ensuring its citizens freedom of speech and expression is not a development strategy but a scheme to benefit the ruling elites. Those basic human rights are not being upheld in Ethiopia. It is therefore urgent to make voices of those impacted heard.”

The report includes the voices of Ethiopians, some who remain in Ethiopia, and others who have fled to neighboring countries and have sought political asylum.

With the impending national elections, the government has escalated its crackdown on political opposition and dissent. This report brings forth the voices that are being silenced, to bring this oppressive situation to the attention of the members of the African Union, international community, and donor countries. The time is now to take decisive action.

¹ Representatives of affected communities from Gambella, Benishangul, Hammer and Nyangatom in the Omo Valley, and refugees in Kenya, came forward to share their experiences.