



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**OLLAA EXPRESSES ALARM AT REPORTS THAT ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT IS FORCING IDPS TO RETURN TO CONFLICT ZONE**

*Falls Church, Virginia (02/24/2022)* – According to reports from witnesses on the ground, in November 2021, armed Amhara militias launched a series of attacks against Oromo civilians in Sibru Sire district, East Wollega zone. As part of these attacks, they burned down homes, stole cattle, and killed an unknown number of individuals. Most disturbingly, witnesses reported that some militia members deliberately burned down homes with children inside. These militias claimed that they were carrying out the attacks because “Shane” (a term frequently employed by the Ethiopian government to refer to the OLA) were living in the area. This claim has been disputed by our sources, who claim that OLA was not operating in the district. Although these events occurred in November, reports of the attacks were unable to be immediately shared with media sources due to an internet blackout. Addis Standard has recently published a [report](#) corroborating these accounts, and estimating that more than 14,000 people were displaced from Sibru Sire.

Those persons who were displaced were initially provided humanitarian assistance by the Red Cross and were allowed to remain in a nearby village. However, reports allege that government officials soon began pressuring them to return to their homes in Sibru Sire, despite the fact that Amhara militias are still attacking civilians in the area. Various IDPs have reported that they requested that the government provide military forces to protect them if they returned, but their requests were refused. They also reported that government officials then began forcing them to return, including by beating them with sticks and guns to force them to board buses back to Sibru Sire. When one IDP informed the Red Cross about the pressure they were facing from the government, he was arrested. Some IDPs managed to flee the area and seek shelter in Adama or Finfinnee, which is when word of their plight began to spread.

OLLAA is deeply concerned about these reports, first of attacks against Oromo civilians by Amhara militias, resulting in mass displacement, and then of the reports that the Ethiopian government is forcing IDPs to return to an area of active conflict. As the primary duty bearer under international law, the Ethiopian government has the responsibility to protect its citizens from human rights violations committed by non-state actors, including by launching effective and independent investigations into these attacks. They also have the duty to protect those who have been internally displaced from further suffering. The UN [Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement](#) clearly set out that IDPs have the right “to be protected against forcible return to or resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty and/or health would be at risk”. We call on the Ethiopian government to fulfill its duties in these regards. We also call on the international community to condemn these attacks, as well as attempts by

the Ethiopian government to force IDPs to return to an area of active conflict. Finally, we encourage all relevant bodies to consider launching independent investigations into these allegations of human rights abuses, or include them in other investigations into human rights abuses throughout Ethiopia.

*OLLAA is an umbrella organization that represents dozens of Oromo communities around the world.*