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Dear High Commissioner,

I am writing with extreme concern over the tragic death of dozens of Oromo-Ethiopian refugees on Sunday, March 7, in Sanaa, Yemen. At least 44 refugees died in a horrific fire at a migrant detention facility, where Houthi authorities were wrongfully detaining nearly 1000 refugees. In reality, eyewitnesses report the death toll is much higher, with some sources claiming that over 500 refugees actually died.

While the Houthi authorities say the fire's cause is unknown, eyewitnesses say that the Houthis themselves set the facility ablaze during a physical altercation with refugees.

The majority of refugees who died or sustained injuries were ethnic Oromos from Ethiopia. The Oromo have suffered a decades-long campaign of political repression by the Ethiopian government. A year years ago, this repression evolved into a full-blown conflict between government security forces and the Oromo population.

Background

Ethiopia is waging a regional conflict against the Oromo population within the Western Oromia, Guji, and Borana regions. According to a [monitoring report](#) by the Oromia Support Group (OSG), state security forces have extrajudicially killed at least 1,342 civilians since October 2018. Human rights observers estimate that Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government has imprisoned at least 50,000 people for political motivations, while his security forces engage in extrajudicial killings along with torture, rape, and house burning.

Yemen Atrocity

Thousands of Oromos flee Ethiopia each year for these reasons, crossing literal war zones in order to escape. Tragically, the journey to asylum for many Oromos cost them their lives last weekend in Sanaa.

Many international media outlets, including the BBC and Al Jazeera, have grossly undercounted the death toll and have failed to report eyewitness claims that the fire was intentional.

The Oromo diaspora community is in contact with families on the ground in Sanaa. We have evidence of an intentional mass killing by Houthi authorities, including video evidence.

In light of this evidence, I urge UN OHCHR to undertake the following actions:

1. Immediately address the suffering of the surviving detainees and their families by providing them humanitarian assistance.
2. Ensure that victims' families are granted a proper burial for their loved ones, according to their beliefs and customs.
3. Facilitate third-country resettlement for detainees with appropriate legal documents.
4. Facilitate appropriate care and improved conditions for detainees with no legal documentation.
5. Oversee the transfer of all detainees into a different, safer facility with improved conditions.
6. Incorporate the documented atrocities against Oromos in Ethiopia within refugee status determinations and grant detainees *non-refoulement* protection.

Sincerely,
[NAME]