



Press Release

Washington, DC, November 11, 2013

SMNE Calls on the Saudi government to stop this brutal and inhumane treatment of the Ethiopian migrant workers immediately And on the TPLF/ERPDF regime to Protect Ethiopian Citizens in Saudi Arabia

The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), a non-political and non-violent social justice movement of diverse people that advocates for freedom, justice, good governance and upholding the civil, human and economic rights of the people of Ethiopia, without regard to ethnicity, religion, political affiliation or other differences, *is highly disturbed by reports, pictures and video footage of the violence being perpetrated against Ethiopian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia.* Please take a look at the video links below <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfvyNtCS7UU#t=23>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahWRxoFaWBs&desktop_uri=%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DahWRxoFaWBs&app=desktop
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=567965026592382&comment_id=14889867&offset=0&total_comments=10¬if_t=video_comment_tagged



Since the November 3, 2013 deadline in Saudi Arabia, which marked the end of the amnesty period during which all undocumented foreign workers were required to legalize their status or face deportation, *Ethiopians working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have faced beatings, torture, rape, and serious injury.*

Please take a look at the pictures links below <http://www.ethiopianreview.us/49822> Although many of the over 16,000 migrants who have been arrested are Ethiopians, workers from other countries, such as the Philippines, are also represented.

Graphic pictures of blood, injury and death are circulating on websites and in the social media. We in the SMNE have received countless phone calls, emails, pictures, videos and messages telling about and showing Ethiopians who have been victims of these crimes. One was a heartbreaking picture of a young Ethiopian man who was shot dead on the street, the blood from his wounded body flowing onto the pavement. Eyewitnesses to his murder report that this man was shot in the head as he tried to run away. He may have feared arrest or the brutal treatment at the hands of Saudi police. In one reported case, a handcuffed man, already contained, was still beaten by the police. In another video clip, Saudi civilians can be seen beating up other men. *According to reports to the SMNE from Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia, a total of 7 Ethiopians have been killed, 218 have been injured and over 368 are missing. This brutality is outrageous.*



We call on the Saudi government to stop this brutal and inhumane treatment of these migrant workers immediately and to hold those who have committed these crimes accountable, including those in uniform as well as civilians. If the KSA seeks to deport undocumented workers, it is your right to carry out your laws; however let it be done in a civilized and respectful manner. These people, most of whom entered the country legally with visas, should not be treated as criminals, beaten up and tortured for not having papers or not having the right papers.

A number of the injured have not received any medical care. Those arrested are taken by authorities without leaving any information of their whereabouts with family or friends. ***One young girl told of how she was raped on the street by a civilian mob of Saudi men who attacked and gang-raped her.***

Another young girl reported being inside a house where she was staying with two other women and two men. She reports: *“Saudi police in uniform broke down the door to our house and rushed in. They ordered all of us to lay flat on the floor and to give them our papers. We obeyed immediately. One of the other girls told the police that we were not illegal, saying, ‘We have papers.’ In response, one of the police kicked her in the head and demanded that she hand over the papers. When she gave them to him, he took them and tore them apart. She asked why and the police started beating everyone. Two police officers took the men in our group to some unknown place and left us girls with the five remaining police officers. Immediately, they started touching us inappropriately. We started screaming and then they forced us to do what they wanted to do with us.”*

At this point in the story, she broke into tears and said she did not want to say any more, finally saying, *“These people are treating us like animals. Even now, I don’t know where these men have been taken. One of them is my husband. The girl, whose papers were destroyed, was taken away by the police and I don’t know what has happened to her. They [the authorities] are saying that the law was put into place for those who do not have papers [undocumented workers] but we had all the proper papers and they are still treating us like this.”*



In another report, an Ethiopian man spoke of how he was providing safe shelter for nine women because it was so dangerous for young women to go outside. He stated that due to the absence of any law and order and civilian mobs prowling the streets for migrant workers, the possibility of these women being raped was extremely high. He had been in the country for over ten years and was running a business.

Men are also at risk for being beaten or tortured, which has happened in cases where they were not even asked to produce documentation of their status. Instead, it appears that non-Saudis are attacked at will for simply not being native-born. Compliance with the law does not seem to make a difference.

One man reported, *“Several days ago, a mob of Arab men came to the place where we were staying and began to beat us. We started fighting back because whether you obey the law or not, you can still be beaten, tortured or killed. It leaves us no option but to take the law into our own hands to protect ourselves since no one here will protect us. Those in uniform are no different than the mobs in this respect. If they attack, we will fight back.”* This is what is happening on the ground according to reports we have received from eyewitnesses.

One man said, *“These same brutal attackers may be eating food grown in Ethiopia. Not only that, but some of the Ethiopians who have been beaten up like this may be here in Saudi Arabia seeking opportunity because they have been evicted from their land and their land has been given to Saudi investors.”* This is very, very disturbing. Saudi Arabian investors have been leasing large sections of fertile, well-watered land in Ethiopia to grow food on mega-farms for export to Saudi Arabia while they are mistreating Ethiopians here. This should be exposed.

After receiving many desperate calls from Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia and in the Diaspora, starting on Tuesday, November 5, we in the SMNE called the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva on Friday, November 9 to ask for help in addressing this mounting manmade crisis. They told us that it was not part of their mandate because these people were not refugees, but instead were migrant workers. When they were asked who would be the right organization to help, they suggested calling the International Labor Organization (ILO) or the International Organization for Migration (IOM), both of which are part of the United Nations.

We called IOM first and were told there was not much they could do about it because again, it was not part of their mandate because Saudi Arabia, as a sovereign country who had passed a law requiring undocumented workers to leave their country, it was considered an internal national issue.

Contact was then made with ILO. They said they were aware of the problem and did document such things but that there was not much they could do about it. They said the best group to deal with this would be the government of the country where the immigrants had originated—Ethiopia.



The next call was to the Ethiopian Embassy in Saudi Arabia where an Ethiopian official there answered the phone. He was not helpful, nor was he particularly sympathetic to the plight of the migrant workers, but instead he put the blame on the workers saying that they were given seven months to get papers and should have done so a long time ago. He was then told that there were numerous cases where these Ethiopian workers had the right paperwork, but that the papers were destroyed or ignored by the authorities or civilian groups. This embassy official was told that what has been done to “your own citizens” was wrong and that it was the responsibility of the embassy to take care of these Ethiopians like other countries are doing. It was also emphasized that the Ethiopian embassy should not just sit by, doing nothing, instead of trying to do more when Ethiopians were suffering like this. He became very irritated with this suggestion; saying he had nothing more to say and abruptly hung up the phone.

We call on the international community, human rights organizations and the international media to expose the mistreatment and human rights abuses of these migrant workers in the KSA and take whatever action they can to protect these vulnerable people, including helping them to leave the country.

We call on Ethiopians, wherever they are, to make appointments at Saudi Arabian Embassies throughout the world to tell them to stop the torture, rape and brutality being waged against these migrant workers and to hold those who have committed the crimes accountable. As they have already made it clear, they do not want these migrant workers in their country and want to deport them, but at the very least they should still treat them with civility. This advocacy work is something Ethiopians should do in multiple places. Also, if Ethiopians have family or friends in Saudi Arabia who have been affected by these actions, get accurate details and give the information to the media.

These evil deeds thrive best in the darkness, so let the light shine on what happened. We commend those who have already done a remarkable job of exposing the truth through their eyewitness accounts, pictures and videos. Let the world know. However, the root solution to the plight of these migrant workers is for Ethiopians to have a government that cares for the welfare of all Ethiopians. Instead, many Ethiopians run to other countries for opportunities denied to them in their own country.

In the early eighties, the regime under Mengistu Hailemariam was known for the starvation of its people, but today the current regime under the TPLF/ERPDF is known for the constant flood of Ethiopians to other places in the world. Many do not ever make it and others suffer tragedy in other countries like they now are experiencing in Saudi Arabia.

Are Ethiopians people without a country? When will the government of Ethiopia be a government that cares about its people? Why should Ethiopians have to go in every direction for help except to their own government?

The heart of Ethiopia cries for its lost children who are dying abroad because their own country has become so inhospitable to life that they take huge risks that often end badly. No wonder they are the fifth largest group of people in the world subjected to human slavery.

Great numbers are also subjected to mistreatment, hardship and death as they fall into the open and greedy hands of human and sexual traffickers; dying in places like the Red Sea, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, South Africa, Central America, and in a shipwreck offshore from the Italian island of Lampedusa. All of this is happening because of the lack of a government who cares for its citizens.

We call on all Ethiopians to find solutions to this urgent crisis in Saudi Arabia, but we cannot simply go from crisis to crisis. We must demand long term solutions. It is clear now that the only way Ethiopians can be respected as a people is to establish a government in their own country that sees all of them as precious human beings, putting humanity before ethnicity rather than the unhealthy system of the TPLF/ERPFD based on ethnic favoritism at the expense of everyone else. Ethiopians deserve a home where they can live freely and flourish, where people do not undertake horrendous risks for basic opportunities that should be theirs from the start.

We in the SMNE will continue to monitor the situation, but believe the TPLF/ERPFD regime should take immediate responsibility to resolve this current crisis by sending airplanes to bring their own citizens back home and to make the Saudis accountable for those who have been killed or injured. If the Saudis do not respond, Ethiopia should close down their embassy in KSA as a sign of strong condemnation for the barbaric mistreatment committed against the Ethiopian people. Furthermore, the TPLF/ERPFD should seek a moral solution to the longstanding problems within Ethiopia. How can the problem of mass migration be sustainably solved without deep and meaningful reforms, the restoration of justice and reconciliation? None of us will be free until all of us are free.

May God protect these Ethiopian brothers and sisters in Saudi Arabia and give our diverse and beautiful people the strength and humility to come together as we struggle to create a more just, united, reconciled and hospitable Ethiopia for all. =====

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