

News: Bench Sheko Zone Council calls for regional, federal intervention amid recurring violence

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The 8th annual, 4th round, 3rd emergency meeting of the Bench Sheko Zonal Council
Credit: Bench Sheko Zone communications

By Siyanne Mekonnen @Siyaanne

Addis Ababa, May 25/2021 – The zonal council of Bench Sheko Zone held the 3rd emergency meeting of its Fourth round, Eighth year conference. The conference took place in Mizan Aman town. The current state of peace and security situation in the zone and the construction of the Mizan Aman Airport were discussed at the conference. The council concluded its meeting by releasing a 9 point statement expressing the stance of the council regarding the security situation of the zone.

Bench-Shako Zone is one of the Five zones that was integrated into one new regional state in SNNPRS in September last year. The councils of Bench-Shako Zone, Kaffa Zone, Dawro Zone, Sheka Zone, West Omo Zone and Konta Special Woreda approved the administrative restructuring, which was also approved by the House of Federation (HoF). The decision opened the door for a referendum to take place for the new regional state called "South-West Ethiopia."



The zone witnessed recurring violence that claimed the lives of security forces as well. According to the statement released by the zonal council, a total of 151 people have died and 28 security forces lost their lives. Moreover, 29 security forces were rendered disabled in the attacks as stated by the council. About 21, 938 people were displaced while more than 732 houses were destroyed in Sheko, Guraferda and South Bench woredas, the council said. Citing the disruption of trade, agriculture and other social interactions in and around the zone, the council said, "There's no guarantee that the issue won't lead to ethnic violence if its not resolved soon."

In its 9 point statement, the council acknowledged the cause of the conflict in the zone as being, demands related to administrative structures and the restructuring thereof. The council noted that an unnamed 'criminal group' is using these demands as a cover to entice violence, indicating that the group doesn't represent the people. The council condemned the killing of civilians and destruction of property. It also acknowledged the participation of security forces and vowed on behalf of religious leaders, elders and the community.

The members of the council vowed to rehabilitate and provide donations to the families who were displaced and lost their livelihoods in the conflicts. The council called on the leadership to maintain a common ground and play its role in resolving the issue. Regarding the reporting of the conflict, the council warned against reports and social media posts that might aggravate the conflict. The council, on behalf of the people of the zone, requested coordinated and consistent security assistance on pre-identified issues that require intervention.

The statement concluded by addressing the issue related to the prolonging of the construction of Mizan Aman airport as well as the relocation of the residents in the area designated for the construction of the airport. AS

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