



Politics - Oromia-Somali crisis continues rocking federal gov't

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By Yonas Abiye January 6, 2018



- Government blamed for slow response
- Half a billion birr allocated to help IDPs

Reporting its findings Thursday before parliament, a team investigating deadly border clashes along parts of the border straddling Oromia and the Ethiopian Somali Region revealed that tensions have not yet been fully defused. The violence has left thousands dead, and led to the displacement of more than half a million people.

The 16-page report, as presented by a 13-member team led by Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen, notes that the situation has aggravated from being a mere two-region affair to one that has already rocked the federal government.

Reversing his decision to resign from the speakership the previous week, Abadulla Gameda presided over the session marked by expressions of frustration by lawmakers against the incumbent government.

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Members of the team were drawn from five parliamentary standing committees, and conducted their fact-finding mission from November 5 to 11, 2017 in 16 weredas of both regional states.

Team members Demeke Mekonnen, Minister of Federal and Pastoralist Affairs Kebede Chanie, Minister of Defense Siraj Fegessa, Federal Police Commissioner Assefa Abiyu and Disaster Risk and Management Commissioner Mitiku Kassa were in attendance as team coordinator Chanie Shimeka, who is deputy chair of the Democracy, Human Rights and Administration Affairs Standing Committee, presented the report.

Shocking accounts of sexual violence are included in the report that details a worsening in the plight of the internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Given the magnitude of the conflict, failure to deploy security forces in a timely fashion has also aggravated the situation, according to Chanie.

The findings revealed that the IDPs were not getting adequate educational and health care services.

Concluding its report, the team urged the government to bring all responsible parties to a court of law, and to scale up ongoing efforts to give succor to victims. The team praised regional states and local communities for the support they have been providing to the people sheltered in their respective areas.

The team also called for more support to the ongoing peace conference to restore peace and normalize relations between the brotherly peoples affected by the conflict.

Based on interviews with survivors sheltered at temporary camps, the team noted that the violence was caused by the *Leyou Hayl* (special police force), militias and some elements of the youth.

The vast expanse of the geographic area under consideration has made determining the exact number of the deceased or IDPs difficult, the report also concludes.

Meanwhile, many MPs castigated the team over the delay of the report, which they argued was supposed to have been made public a month earlier, wondering, "What else is an urgent a national crisis as the death of thousands of citizens and displacement of over 700,000 peoples?"

Responding to the question about the delay in presenting the report, Chanie noted that senior government officials had already been informed about the findings but most people in leadership positions were pretty busy with meetings and forums over the past month.

Some observers opined that it should not have been lost on MPs who had themselves boycotted regular sessions for weeks demanding appearance by the PM.

Regarding who really is behind the conflict and who should be held accountable, the report did not give much detail even though arrests were being made of some suspects and investigation is going on.

Federal Police Commissioner Assefa Abiyu told MPs that some 107 individuals suspected of violating human rights are under investigation, and government agents are after 96 individuals suspected of involvement in the conflict. He also spoke of attempts at protecting wanted individuals by officials of both regions.

Suspects already under investigation and those who are still at large include residents of the conflict areas, officials, members of the *Leyou* police, militias and the youth (otherwise referred to as *qerro*).

On the issue regarding delay to take action by members of the security forces, Minister of Defense Siraj Fegessa blamed it on the small number of uniformed personnel at hand during the first two days when the violence was at its worst.

He, however, argued that had his forces not been deployed, the causality would have even been worse.

Speaking of hurdles with the provision of emergency assistance to the IDPs, National Disaster Risk Management Commissioner Mitiku Kassa told MPs that, "We are discussing ways of delivering unhindered assistance with leaders of both regions."

Meantime, MPs stressed that suspected perpetrators who violated human rights and caused loss of lives should quickly be made to face justice.

Calling the violence "a historical mistake," Tigray MP Mulu Gebre-Egziabher, urged the government to disclose the identity and role of all perpetrators behind the conflict "irrespective of who they are".

Seconding Mulu, MP Tsehay Demissie underlined that the government should no longer hide information from the public, and noted that the people know everything already. She further said that we cannot blame the unfolding saddening crisis on rent-seekers and contrabandists, who might have had lesser roles. "If justice is to prevail and if we really have to heal the wounds of survivors, accountability should begin from top regional and federal government levels," Tsehay said.

Hordoffa Bekele an emotionally-charged Oromia MP, questioned the government's commitment to deal with the sorry plight of women and children.

Another MP, Akilu Getachw, on his part, vented his anger thus, "This is neither merely about controlling illegal practices nor an ordinary criminal activity...All this criminal activity has not been committed without the knowledge of higher-ups. Hence, we should not continue beating around the bush. It is high time that we uncovered everything that our people demand to know."

He also asked, "Where was our army, a defense force that has been lauded for peace-keeping missions in other African countries. It is so ironic to see the army fail to safeguard its fellow citizens."

Responding to comments, Deputy Premier Demeke Mekonnen said that the government is trying to enlist religious leaders and *Aba Gadas* to help in efforts aimed at defusing tensions in some localities.

However, he admitted that measures taken so far by the federal government to calm down the situation were insufficient.

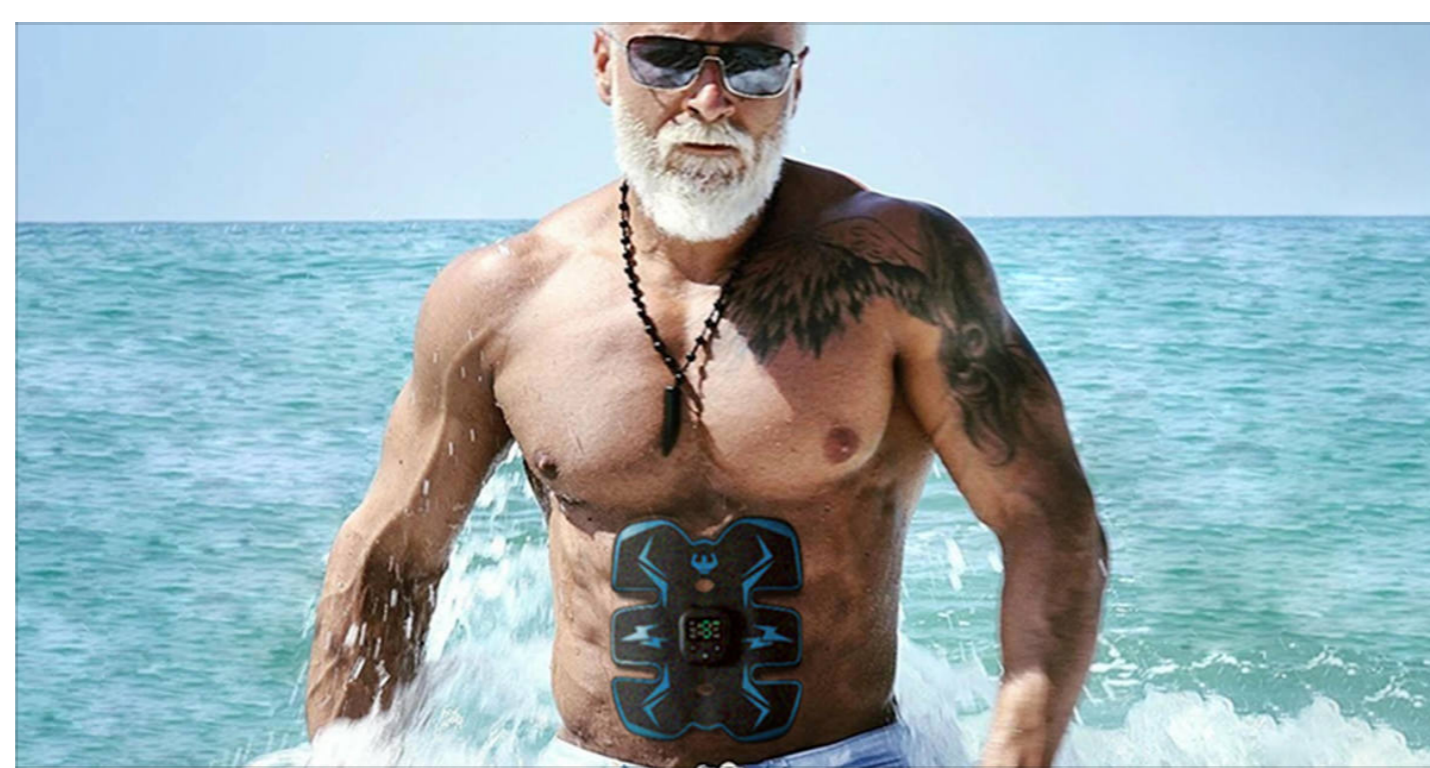
Demeke also said that the government has been working to prevent crime, provide support for IDPs and to return them to their original places of residence. He also noted that 500 million birr has been earmarked to rehabilitate IDPs.

The fact-finding team concluded that the instability in the two regions remains a great concern and it would take a while before IDPs were resettled. However, many fear that the impact of the recent conflict will endure with complexity among the government structure while it is still uncertain as regards who should take blame at higher echelons of power. Finally, the session ended with lawmakers voting on a-12-point resolution proposed by the fact-finding team.

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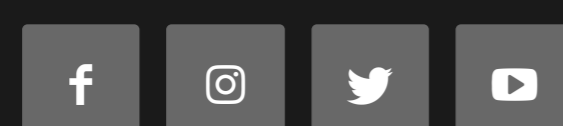
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