

ETHIOPIA: A wave of atrocities against villages in Ogaden

Johan Ripås

Somaliland Press

September 26, 2012

Refugee women and children in Somaliland who fled their homes in Ethiopia as a result of a "Liyu police" operation, April 2012.

ADDIS ABABA – “No proper evidence has reached the world until now” The task force that arrested and wounded the Swedish journalists Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson in Ethiopia are now accused of widespread abuses in the Ogaden province.

Swedish Television’s Africa correspondent Johan Ripås has become privy to further documentation, smuggled out of Ethiopia. The video evidence shows that whole villages have been emptied of inhabitants through executions and mass flight from terror.

–These atrocities are well known in Ogaden. But no proper evidence has reached the world until now, says Abdullahi Hussein, a defected Ethiopian civil servant who smuggled out the material.

The task force accused of these atrocities is called the Liyu Police or Special Police. The unit was formed three years ago to combat the separatist rebel group ONLF. According to information obtained by Swedish Television, the Liyu Police has since spread terror in the Ogaden province by mass executions of civilians.

–They have deliberately recruited unemployed youths from the streets to the Liyu Police. These have then been drilled in carrying out executions, says Abdullahi Hussein.

On May 16th 2010 ONLF reportedly carried out a major attack against a Liyu Polices camp in southern Ogaden. Retaliation followed the next day. Early on the morning of May 17th the Liyu Police came to the village of Malqaqa in the same region. The locals were accused of having helped ONLF, and the task force opened fire on the unarmed villagers.

Swedish Television has met an eye witness to the event. Bashir Ali managed to escape the bullets.

–They split up into smaller groups, advanced methodically and gunned down everybody in sight. I counted 73 dead, says Bashir Ali.

The Liyu Police are headed by the president of the Ogaden region, Abdi Muhammed Omar. In the video footage that was smuggled out you can see the president visit the neighbouring village of Malqaqa. Several representatives of the village talk to the president and thank him for coming. An elderly man suddenly grabs the microphone and speaks his mind about the attack on his village.

–Since the Liyu Police came, lots of people in our villages Galaashe and Malqaqa have been murdered. People have fled and many are missing. Old people as well as young.

Abdullahi Hussein was present on this occasion and can be seen next to the president in the video footage.

–The old man was immediately arrested by the Liyu Police, on the orders of the president. I don’t know what happened to him. I just saw how they led him away.

Abdullahi Hussein says, that at least one hundred people were executed in the village of Malqaqa during a couple of days in May 2010. There were probably many more. On the video footage that was smuggled out you can see that the houses in Malqaqa now stands empty and abandoned.

You can also hear members of the Liyu Police desecrate a civilian they have just killed. They stomp on his head and poke his face with a stick.

–They gathered several people in the monastery of Malqaqa and stoned them to death, says Bashir Ali who escaped the attack.

The human rights organization Human Rights Watch has recently received witness accounts of similar events.

–We have evidence that three villages were attacked by the Liyu Police in March 2012. Many men were executed, and several men were arrested and detained arbitrarily, says Laetitia Bader of Human Rights Watch.

Abdullahi Hussein now lives in exile under constant death threats after having smuggled the evidence out of Ethiopia.

–The world must know. I did what every person would have done after seeing what I have seen, says Abdullahi Hussein.

Copyright Somaliland Press