

## Human Rights Watch “Becoming More Catholic than the Pope”

By Ermias Mekasha

The allegation made last week by Human Rights Watch (HRW), whose excellence in fabricating lies is unsurpassed, that **“the Ethiopian government is forcibly moving tens of thousands of ... people...in Gambella region to new villages under the villagization program”** was totally deceitful intended to undermine the otherwise noble scheme aimed at bringing socio-economic and cultural transformation of the people in the region who had been deprived of development by past successive regimes.

The report HRW issued under a topic” Waiting Here for Death” is nothing but a pack of lies bent on distracting Ethiopians from achieving fast development out of its devilish wish to see Ethiopian continue languishing in poverty and live on foreign alms as they did in the past.

HRW, whose executives are acting to be more Ethiopians than Ethiopians themselves, is telling us to sit idle and count on aids that are coming from the developed world rather than embarking up on development and getting prosperous by their own. What a sham.

Contrary to the truth, Human Rights Watch, master of manipulating facts, has accused the government of **“forcibly moving”** the people in the region, an accusation that was untrue.

First of all, the words **“forcibly moving”** were totally groundless since the people in the region are being resettled at their own will (**voluntarily**), a fact that was confirmed by independent bodies, including western donor organizations.

HRW’s own report indicated that **“donors such as the World Bank, European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) involved in the program who have undertaken assessments into resettlement program in Gambella and Benishangul Gumuz states**

**have confirmed that the resettlement was voluntary**”, a fact which couldn’t be swallowed by Human Rights Watch.

It in its report, HRW has also accused the government of “transferring the people in the region with no meaningful consultation or compensation,” an allegation which was misleading.

The allegation has indeed emanated from HRW’s mischievous trick bent on detracting Ethiopians in general the people in the region in particular from enjoying benefits from this grand scheme (the development of uninhabited and underutilized lands and the resettlement scheme) launched by the government.

Ethiopians have been tricked, exploited and undermined for far too long and by now they have figured out what Human Rights Watch mean when it says human rights in Ethiopia compared to that of its favorite countries like...

Secondly, contrary to HRW’s report, the relocation of the people in the stated region is intended to bring them into villages so that they can get an easy access to infrastructure, an opportunity they couldn’t get before, since they live in dispersed places. For example, the relocated people in Gambella have got access to road transport, education and health facilities, among others.

According to the Ministry of Federal Affairs, 22 health posts, 19 schools, 18 veterinary clinics, roads covering 128 kms and 30 flourmills were built in 43 new sites alone in Gambella Region

The Ethiopian government is committed to bring in speedy economic development and make the people in the country beneficiary of socio-economic achievements.

The more than double digit growth Ethiopian achieved in the last eight years that has elevated the country to join the ranks of the fastest economies in the world could be singled out as the manifestation of the commitment of the government to bring tangible change in the country, which was quite an achievement that won an international acclaim.

Above all, with primary objective of making those people living in the country's relatively backward regions who had been deprived of development by past successive regimes, the government has launched a massive effort to enable them enjoy social and economic benefits by giving the vast underutilized and uninhibited lands to potential investors for development.

The worst and shameful lies of the HRW was the statement that says "...**some of the relocated people faced hunger and even starvation,**" when in fact the resettlers hadn't faced any hunger at all since the government is providing every assistance they need in its capacity during the transfer of the people to new villages.

If the relocated people have indeed faced "hunger" or "starvation", as HRW claims, HRW, which claimed to have interviewed 100 villagers in Gambella region, wouldn't refrain to display photographs or footage of victims along its report as evidence for its unfounded allegation. Because an organization as such as HRW, which leaves no stone unturned to discredit the Ethiopian government in the past four years, wouldn't have missed this golden opportunity. Would it? I don't think so.

Human Rights Watch has also accused the government of leasing out "**3.6 million hectares of land nationally**" and claimed that "**In Gambella, 42 per cent the total land area of the region is either being marketed for foreign and local investors.**"

The truth, according to the Ministry of Federal Affairs, is that out of the 3.4 million hectares of arable land the country has, only 435,000 hectares has been leased out so far. Of this, only 42,000 hectares has so far been developed by investors. According to the

Ministry, this (the land so far developed) accounted for only 1.2 per cent of the total area of arable land existing in the country.

It is in the face of this reality in which 1.2 per cent of the total area of land existing in the country has so far been utilized that HRW has issued its libelous report as if a significant portion of the country's land has been leased out.

As Human Rights Watch grossly and shamefully lies, it has also attempted that the relocation of the people as unlawful/unconstitutional when in indeed the government is implementing the scheme, which is part of the five-year Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), after it was endorsed with unanimous vote by the country's federal parliament (the House of the Peoples Representatives).

It is based on this plan (the GTP) approved by the parliament that the government is executing the lease of uninhabited and under-utilized lands in Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz and South Ethiopia Peoples' states to local and foreign investors and the voluntary resettlement schemes.

The report by HRW also claims that villagers are “**often go**” to the new villages “**without**” the provision of infrastructure while alleging that soldiers would force villagers to build their own tukuls (traditional huts), a terrible lie totally fabricated by HRW. Because it would be impossible for the government to transfer people to new areas without building at least basic infrastructure such as housing and water facilities, if not all. Even if the re-settlers were considered as prisoners, there must be at least some housings to keep them there until new ones are built.

Besides, as mentioned in the above, the government has built all the necessary infrastructures including health and education facilities, though Human Rights Watch deliberately fail to recognize the existence of the facilities at all in the region.

Ever since Ethiopia has openly said no to foreign political prescription, Human Rights Watch has launched a series of condemnation campaign against its government.

What is really surprising about this report is the fact that it clearly presents the method deployed by the anti-Ethiopian elements to undermine the country and its progress. Some three decades ago, this same tactic was also deployed unsuccessfully to undermine China and I am sure it will never work in Ethiopia anymore as well.

This was not the first but one of the dozens of premeditated attacks in which Human Rights Watch launched against the Ethiopian government out of its sheer intention to isolate it from the international political fora

Some four years (in 2009), Human Rights Watch had issued a report on issues related to Ogaden based on fabricated lies while it released similar report pertaining the country's anti-terror law a year after (in 2010).

Moreover, some couple of months ago (in late 2011), Human Rights Watch claimed that the Ethiopian government was **“using long-term development aid for political purposes”**, a claim that was disproved by independent bodies later (the government of the United Kingdom).

But the Human Rights Watch's allegations have never been substantiated by proven facts, and that Ethiopia has never been isolated by the international community as HRW wishes to be.

It can't be helped because Human Rights Watch is a kind of organization that can readily conclude: **“The Earth is flat and the sky is red too”**, as it did on this case. **Otherwise, it should have accepted the confirmation of the donors for they are independent bodies, and should have refrained from coming with this mendacious report.**

If Human Rights Watch doesn't trust independent bodies as such as the World Bank, the EU who confirmed the resettlement was “**Voluntary**”, who else it would trust, except itself. This very circumstance clearly shows how Human Rights Watch is a mean partisan organization, which is not governed by the universally accepted principles of impartiality and neutrality to which human right groups are established around the world.

One thing in which Human Rights Watch should know is that Ethiopians have already recognized that it is irresponsible and unethical organization as it always disseminates unverified and politically motivated allegations against their government whom it regards unfavorable to it. So stop your pompous statements and stop becoming more catholic than the pope by pretending to feel our pain, thirst, hunger, etc more than ourselves.