

The unresolved clash between Mesqan and Mareqo woredas (districts) over territory has been negatively affecting the stability and peace of innocent civilians and their livelihoods.

Located in the Gurage zone in southern Ethiopia, there **erupted conflict between the Mesqan and Mareqo woredas near Butajira City, leading to the death of many, and displacement of thousands.**

The dispute began after the Mareqo woreda (district) claimed nine kebeles (areas) to be included within its administrative jurisdictions. Previously the kebeles were under Mesqan woreda.

Gulilat Yirdaw, head of the Butajira City Revenue Branch Office, stated that he even personally lost his brother because of the clashes between the two woredas. He indicated that **the dispute between Mareqo and Mesqan didn't get a lasting solution by the regional or federal government and needs serious attention.**

As a result of the conflict, over 35,000 civilians are still displaced and haven't returned to their original living areas, according to Gulilat. "These people need [the] support of government agencies and other non-governmental organizations to be returned to their previous normal lives and become productive and contribute to the growth of our city," he said.

This violence is a continuous problem that has harmed Gurages and other civilians in the zone for years, but has gotten especially worse in the past few weeks and months. **There is little awareness on the plight of the people.**

For example, in May 2020, it was reported that a conflict broke out in the Meskan woreda of the Gurage zone that has caused the death of several people, the displacement of thousands of inhabitants, and the destruction of material property.

Source of Conflict (Effects of Ethnic Federalism)

According to residents of the area, the conflict is the latest instance of a 20+ year long dispute between the neighboring woredas of Meskan and Mareqo over the ownership of nine kebeles.

These two woredas used to be part of one woreda known as "Mesqan and Mareqo woreda" with a population mainly composed of two tribes, the Gurage and the Mareqo. About 20 years ago, the woreda was divided into two smaller woredas forming today's, Mesqan and Mareqo woredas.

It was then that a dispute arose between the two woredas over the nine kebeles. The populations in the nine kebeles are composed of both Gurages (Mesqan) and Mareqos. Due to the mixed nature of their populations, they were claimed by the Mareqo, although they had been included in Mesqan woreda. **Ever since, the dispute over land ownership turned into conflicts which took human lives and caused the destruction of property.**

The Big Picture

The case of everlasting ethnic violence and mass displacement of innocent civilians, in the case of Gurages and what is consistent with other cases of violence in the country, is ultimately due to the **forced division of people stemming from the implementation of Ethnic Federalism by TPLF**. This systemic problem requires systemic changes. **It is requested by residents that the federal government resolve this issue in a way most preferable to the demands of the people.**

In addition to the plight of Gurages in this zone, **they have also been targets of ethnic cleansing, and victims of displacement and destroyed property by extremists in the Oromo region**. This was evident in July 2020, in which extremists in the Oromo region, particularly in Shashemene--a multi-ethnic city--and Arsi for example, killed Gurage civilians and burned down their homes and properties.

JP4E demands that the federal government, together with local leaders, address the humanitarian crisis affecting Gurages and other innocent victims in these woredas and throughout the Oromo region, providing security and humanitarian aid for civilians.

Sources: Minority Rights Group, Borkena, New Business Ethiopia

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