

Ethiopian premier downplays Ogaden rebels' threat on oil exploration

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Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on Thursday [27 April] dismissed the Ogaden National Liberation Front's (ONLF) [a rebel group] warning to disrupt gas development project in the Ogaden Basin in the Somali Regional State [in eastern Ethiopia].

ONLF, a Somali rebel group, on Monday [24 April] had issued a warning to companies that are looking towards developing national gas fields in the Calub and Hilala localities.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told The Reporter that the ONLF was not a threat.

"ONLF has been there for the past many years and has always been threatening. But it cannot stop companies which are interested in prospecting and development oil and gas reserves," Meles said.

Meles said that he had talks with elders of the Ogaden Basin.

"The leaders told me that they would peacefully resolve the problem with ONLF. But the results so far are not encouraging," he added.

Alemayehu Tegenu, the minister of mines and energy (MME), told The Reporter that ONLF's warning was meaningless. Alemayehu said that the government was responsible for the security of the companies.

"We ensure the well-being of all companies engaged in development in this country, and the rebel group cannot stop oil and gas exploration and development activity in the Ogaden basin," Alemayehu said.

Nineteen petroleum companies presented an expression of interest on developing the Calub and Hilala gas fields. The Ministry of Mines and Energy short listed seven companies for the tender.