

Ethiopia's Ogaden at risk of "man-made famine," says rebel group

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

July 23, 2007

Nairobi/Addis Ababa

An Ethiopian separatist rebel group on Monday called for a United Nations fact-finding mission to the remote eastern Ogaden region where, it says, the government has been committing war crimes at "alarming levels."

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) said Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's government has been diverting humanitarian assistance, burning villages and terrorizing civilians, echoing a statement by advocacy group Human Rights Watch released earlier this month. The group said the government has been diverting humanitarian assistance, burning villages and terrorizing civilians, echoing a statement by advocacy group Human Rights Watch released earlier this month.

"The war crimes being committed in Ogaden by the current Ethiopian government have now reached alarming levels warranting international intervention in the form of a UN-mandated fact-finding mission," the group said in a statement.

The ONLF, an ethnic-Somali group which has been staging an escalating insurgency against the government since its creation in 1984, said a "man-made famine" will occur unless the international community steps in.

After two attacks in the region earlier this year - one on a Chinese-owned firm that saw up to 74 people killed and another Chinese-owned firm that saw up to 74 people killed and another smaller one during national holiday celebrations - the government began to crack down on the impoverished region.

A report in the New York Times Sunday said food aid delivered by the UN's World Food Program was being diverted by the Ethiopian government away from the vast desert region, threatening its residents with starvation.

The Horn of Africa nation has been lambasted for its human rights record, from post-election violence that saw thousands of opposition members rounded up and detained to a trial of opposition supporters labeled as a sham that saw them pardoned last week.